

Ken Lum

March 8 – April 25, 2008

The Nelson-Freeman Gallery is pleased to present the fourth exhibition of the Canadian artist Ken Lum. Ken Lum's work has been exhibited on the international scene since 1978. His warm and engaging paintings have been presented at many international events such as the Sydney Biennale (1992), the Sao Paul Biennale (1998), the Shanghai Biennale (2000), the Documenta XI (2002), the Liverpool Biennale (2006), and the Istanbul Biennale (2007). Ken Lum has also had a long career in teaching at the Fine Arts department of the University of British Columbia, and as a guest professor in France, Germany, and China.

Ken Lum freely uses a variety of techniques like sculptural installations, painting and photography, in which he seeks above all to maintain great proximity to today's world. His work focuses on the notion of identity and language. He often creates diptyches in which texts and images intersect, thus revealing the contradictions at work in society.

For this new exhibition, presented on the ground floor of the gallery, the artist has chosen to show works from his new series : the Rorschach Shopkeeper Works. Based on the previous series of Shopkeepers – signs common in North America in which a stereotyped advertising message is juxtaposed to message made up of removable letters – this new series presents shop signs divided into two parts in such a way that they look like Rorschach tests used in psychoanalysis. The signs are not necessarily divided in the middle, but at a place where the Rorschach effect is maximized. Ken Lum uses already existing signs and changes them to such a degree that their commercial message is lost and replaced by another meaning. By changing signs into an image used in psychoanalytical methods, Ken Lum questions the identity of the sign itself. Identity is a recurrent theme in his work, and is one of the major problems faced by individuals today.

Here Lum refers to the conflict between utility and desire, embodied in the visual presence of signs and in the message. His works challenge identity through the production of images – signs – in urban society. Faced with cultural and political assimilation, « by his emotional functioning, the individual is confronted with the capitalist logic of the system of advertising signs ».

For the artist, the point is to offer a critical vision of consumer society by leading us to a new perception of the codes of language of which we are no longer aware, but which nonetheless hide quite different realities. The use of different languages enhances the link to cultural identity.