

## Ragen Moss: A Rregular Shaped Tool

by [David Bell](#) | Apr 1, 2016 | [Reviews](#) | [1 comment](#)



As a child, our shed always provided endless avenues of exploration. It wasn't really our shed though, it was a part of the property where we lived that my mother managed. This storage room was built on top of the native Luiseño people's land, who had lived there hundreds of years before. Rocks pock marked by holes surround the adobe structures, in which I was raised. Some of these pits are a foot deep, even to this day, I see these holes and think of a most basic tool that was used to create them, a stone, and then all I can think of is time. They are traces of women grinding acorns that fell from the same trees which stand there today; their depth a result of a repetitive, but completely necessary action. When I was young, the hills were littered with matates and other stone tools used by the indigenous people. These tools would often find their way into the shed among various other outmoded or overused instruments from the late 19th century Spanish colonizer's farming days. Old shovels without handles, bent sickles and rusted pitch forks, alongside new functional tools that continue the work of tending to and shaping the land, accentuating its curves and challenging the natural order, the same way the older tools, abandoned, and now reduced to objects, once did.

Ragen Moss's exhibition, *A Rregular Shaped Tool*, at LA><art combines writing and painting inside of bulbous lacquered plastic sculptures that merely hint at representation. Full of contained gestures, Moss's pieces occupy two identical rooms side by side. Some pieces hang from the ceiling, gently rotating from indoor atmospheric shifts, others are mounted on the wall, propped on pegs like prized weapons and a few sit entwined in a wire basket, slinking over the rim with their awkward aquatic-like bodies.



The tool is gone; these objects are corroded over, calloused with a protective scab, a surface built around something that has since deteriorated. What we are left with is a mummified object, ready for the afterlife, an exterior that mimics and outlasts the body that will forever define its interior.

All of the marks, color and compositional choices are contained within the interior space of the sculptures. Everything in the process of making must be considered in the opposite order of the methods used in traditional painting, for instance. Priming the canvas is essentially the last step for Moss. The words as she was creating them, needed to be written backwards, the artist considering them only in terms of shape and length as she began from the end. In the act of making them they were reduced to merely indexical marks, yet in the finished form they are transformed back into language for the viewer. Do they function like the painted arrows that jut out and point to different directions in the room that lead us nowhere? The word choices, when compared to one another, seem all over the place, but not scattered. The slowness, in which they must have been made, makes each part of them considered; a simple but highly rendered drawing. It is hard to tell if the words are meant to be read, or if are they just a part of the sculpture. Can you look at a word within the language you speak without reading it? Can one simply appreciate it as converging contours, a series of straight and rounded edge marks, or is language so tightly knitted to its written form that once understood, it cannot simply act as a part of the material make up of an object?



A piece shaped like a sweater reads, “from appearances you look dangerous” with the words “incompetent” and “uncommitted” crossed out above by a single line. Words are scattered all over these objects without direct associations ascribed to them. *Incompetent* and *uncommitted* are pivotal because they highlight the word *dangerous*; they are keys on our path to the truth, they reveal the artists insecurities, as well as her vulnerabilities. It reminds me of the numerous and hideous Trump supporters screaming, “He says what I can’t say” the translation of which could be “He says what I say all the time; I just can’t say it in front of the rest of you more progressive non-sexist/racist individuals.”

Political correctness, is important in that it allows language to be heard or seen as equal amongst individuals, yet one can speak politically correctly and not necessarily believe it. Like most things, it can be used as a tool by the enemy, to sublimate rage, anger, and biases. From appearances you look dangerous, I mean incompetent, I mean uncommitted.



The words that are inscribed elsewhere on other pieces don’t seem to have as much of a narrative. “Prose” is written on a small wall piece that hangs by its neck. The *p* is actually an *r*, but my mind autocorrects it to what I want it to be. It is a word, or at least a direction, not just a mark, but something that gives meaning to the sculpture, a name even.

I am not sure what it means to be “handmade” anymore. (Wo)man makes machine that makes computer that makes (wo)man. Everything must be intentional in sculpture, because there are

tools that can smooth out any edge or protrusion to any extent. A crack caused by a mishap, is deemed intentional when the artist decides to leave it. Moss highlights her seams with a single piece of electrical tape. A seam, in this case, is what unites and holds two separate pieces. A seam is not the pretty face that greets you, or places the food on your table and tells you to enjoy; it's the executioner of the cow you are ingesting, the butcher, or the cook in the back that puts the flesh on the fire. A seam is what makes the world go round but is meant to stay out of view. We acknowledge its importance only when it rips or fails, revealing the internal workings that it so desperately was meant to keep out of view. We quickly reinforce a ripped seam, or discard it and what it supported, altogether. If you can't do your job and protect what is sacred, you are no good to this society. By Moss accentuating the sutures, in her incredibly detailed and highly skilled pieces, she acknowledges the sacrifice of making work. Or more to the point, sacrifices idealizing the work, highlights the impossibility of perfection, and better understands that no matter what (it) (she)(we) present ourselves as, we are only as strong in the end as the bonds that hold us together.



<http://ragenmoss.com/>

<http://laxart.org/>

Images courtesy of LA><ART

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**Geoff** on April 1, 2016, at 8:36 am

My gosh this is good. The photos too are beautiful. To your question 'can one look at a word in the language one speaks without reading?' Yes, nice, that tension is there, another sort of tension (or something) arises when because of their strangeness and unlikelihood of location one first feels Moss's words. Moss's doubled r as you describe it and show it makes me feel the way i do reading Gertrude Stein, confused and pleased and aware, her use of the shapes that make 'liquid' make

my knees watery. Yay.

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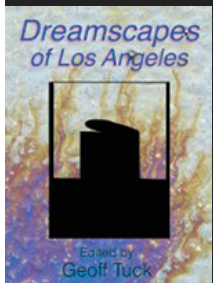
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