

- **Exhibition:** “Jessica Diamond. Wall Paintings”
 - **Artist:** Inmaculada salinas.
 - **Inauguration:** 31 March, 20:00 h.
 - **Date:** From 31 March 2011.
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The Memo on the Wall

Lydia Dona

Jessica Diamond’s wall drawings, text fragments, objects, and items for pleasure and contemplation deal with (rather than deny) sadness, self-awareness, and the “funny” through an almost Aristophanic, accusatory tragicomedy. As some of her objects have, in addition to their powerful semiotic flow, an associative hint of the functional/utilitarian commonplace, they carry the double meaning of the literal and the connotative through her chosen phenotexts. Through them we witness an American Dream, “the” American Dream, as a culture falling apart into a pathetic generic mode in which superpowers are reduced to pea-brains drawn as shadows reflected onto Japanese rice paper (a motif which reappears in *Collapsing Super Power Scrolls with Rising Sun*, 1990). They are drawn in lines that fade away, as thin as the paper itself, in texts broken down into short, angry notes.

Jessica Diamond leaves a memo on the wall, an angry one, in which abandonment and self-protection assert themselves in personal but non-nostalgic, unsentimental codes. Her memo, a quickly written message rooted in the tactics of corporate America, is always a strong, direct statement in which individuality is reconstructed despite the generic qualities of the world we inhabit.

I Hate Business is a huge, written statement in black, bold, authoritative letters, but personal, handwritten (that is, hand-painted) on the wall or on paper. It is in the sound evacuating the object, the text, and the intertextuality reconstructed within the

environment she creates as a total installation, that desire, the speaker, the addressee, and their reconnection to the self recur. Diamond creates a subjection in which the subject is positioned as both audience and performer, both aggressor and attacked.

It is in the fear of abandonment and emptiness, and where the “emptiness it opens up is nevertheless also a barely covered abyss where our identities, images, and words run the risk of being engulfed,”¹ that vulnerability is positioned, a vacuum in the narcissism of *Sex, Power, Money, and Business* through which Diamond “casually” but “carefully” repeats her message in gold, in the high look of desire and the substitutes for desire. Like slogans or commercials scattered into our urban pragmatism, they are at once concrete and hallucinatory, behaving like the deceptiveness of wishes. *Buy a Condo or Die, Elvis Alive* – certainties are subverted through this aggressive fragility. She points a finger at the big, almost epic concepts in a Kafkaesque *Amerika*, but without engaging in text-as-rhetoric, discourse-as-rhetoric, or image-as-apparatus for closed, one-dimensional sign systems.

A complex dynamic is hidden beneath the various manners and representational modes of her declarations. She is “an author, a reader, a spectator, and a voyeur,” as Roland Barthes wrote when identifying his subject of representation.² On the other hand, all these distinctions eventually collapse in the role reversals they are led to play. A teapot or gold bar may be juxtaposed with a wall drawing in which gold is a fragment of a broken image/text. Gold is applied to the surface of materials to reinforce them with an aura of “glamour” or a jewelry-like aspect, while major structures are transformed into collapsing chaotic lines on walls that barely support the gravity of the statement. With fragile means she reverses light/heavy relationships of image/code/material/sound and amalgamates them into the context of installation.

However, to read this work only through the apparatus of advertising slogans, media, and low culture as coercive powers would be a misleadingly direct take denying complexities, subtleties, and contemplative aspects. Such terms identified with consumer society permit only one kind of accessibility. But Diamond’s obsession with the syndrome of the kid growing up in America witnessing its emblems of authority reduced to entertainment brings her to an opening to ethics. Rather than addressing “You” the viewer as an oppressive male gaze à la Barbara Kruger, she is closer to the “Me” of Vito Acconci’s claustrophobia-suffocated self or Bruce Nauman’s highly charged emotional “intensities/insanities.” Her moral angle transforms her project into a

visionary and experimental, rather than didactic, form of conceptualism, where the repression of systems allows for freedom of speech. Jessica Diamond gives me, you, us a direct statement about where she is and who she says yes (and no) to: *Yes Bruce Nauman!* read one earlier piece, while a new one, *New Economic Shorthand: What Money?, No Money. Totally Unequal* (1990), says no to a land of opportunities that are not necessarily so equal.

In *Money Having Sex* (1988), where dollars are used for fake regeneration, or in the recent installation, *Money as Barbed Wire* (1990), dollar signs perform, split themselves, multiply in various forms of movement and entanglement, forming a gate, a mural, a menacing trap with globally overwhelming political implications. In 1990 Jessica Diamond's anger is stronger than ever. Under an almost chaotic mixture of handwritings, the gallery space is broken into distinct zones of perception, manipulated through multiple tactics into revealing itself as sculptural space in which the main pictorial images serve as body traps. Through this environment Diamond readdresses the personal, or rather reconstructs a worldview that has collapsed under the territorial invasion of disappointment. What makes Diamond's discourse a poetic language despite its semaphoric disjunctions is that it maintains its signifying function even through its dislocations of signification. Her objects never become fetishistic mechanisms: they are gracefully incorporated and subverted in "her" environment. She gazes toward and experiences a social body that gives her a power of renewal over her own identity and autonomy, negating the authority of the Model. She can leave the room, slamming the door and saying, "I can see the writing on the wall." In Diamond's work, the long sad night of the American Dream ends in the clear light of the morning after.

Originally published in *Arts Magazine*, October 1990, pp. 62-63.

1. Julia Kristeva, "Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents," in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 238.
2. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, tr. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, New York: Hill & Wang, 1968.