

Natalie Czech

Response / Response

20.1.24–9.3.24

“(..) the camera gives me the opportunity to create something that becomes not only readable but also visible. For me, a photograph always works when the depicted levels such as text, object, image, sign, or poem start speaking like voices and simultaneously engender their own stories.”

- Natalie Czech

In her conceptual photography, Natalie Czech (DE 1976) investigates the relationship between image and text and thus explores the possibilities of pictorial and linguistic symbols. In doing so, she engages in a tongue-in-cheek play with the “power of images” and the “meaning of texts”. In her works, she draws on aspects of pop- and conceptual art in order to place them in new dialogs with one another. She creates symbioses in which text and image penetrate, change and reinforce each other. Natalie Czech thus illuminates the potential of subjective forms of seeing, reading and speaking. In her new series Response / Response, Czech combines the non-verbal form of expression of the „shaped canvas“ of modern color field painting with her own conceptual approach. The starting point for the works is a collaboration with the artists and writers Charles Bernstein, Julien Bismuth, Natalie Häusler, David Horvitz, Rindon Johnson, Eugenia Lai, Hanne Lippard, Cia Rinne, and Kim Rosenfield. Czech has selected short poems from various writers to which the collaborators have responded with their own short texts or poems. Together with vintage pencils, of which both ends – the writing tip as well as the eraser – are visible, both texts are staged in large-format, almost hyper-realistic photographs. The first poem appears erased next to the pencil as a trace, while the response is written underneath in fresh, determined pencil lines.



A Response / Response by Langston Hughes / Julien Bismuth, 2024

total dimensions: 160 × 230 cm

Langston Hughes:

When you turn the corner / And you run into yourself / Then you know that you have turned / All the corners that are left.

Julien Bismuth:

no corners / no ends / only turns / that never close but loop

The image is divided into pieces according to the number of lines in the poem. As if they were attached to hinges, the individual parts of the polyptychs fold apart and, by fragmenting the picture, form new shapes on the wall: appearing almost alive, contorting, twisting and turning. In terms of content, the poems and sentences selected by Natalie Czech refer to the (im)possibility of assertions, to language and the spoken word itself. The same applies to most of the newly created “Responses”. The doubling in the title of the series Response / Response complicates the relationship between the two texts. In both cases, each is therefore a response. What is the relationship between the two texts, the pencils and the form of their presentation? The relationships between text, object and form are in a seemingly constant state of change and new connections can always be discovered and produced. Sometimes the form winds according to the content of the poem (“only turns / that never close but loop”), as in “Langston Hughes / Julien Bismuth”, sometimes the mark of the depicted pencil (‘Integrity’) seems to determine the texts assigned to it. In “Emily Dickinson / Natalie Häusler”, the pencil tip and eraser form a self-biting circle similar to an Ouroboros snake, emphasizing the cyclical nature of the works.

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Everything is connected. As Natalie Czech herself puts it,

“the gesture of erasing and responding [...] acts like a multi-layered echo that connects past and present.”

The text, written in pencil, not only contains the uncertainty of the moment, but also the potential for constant renewal. The series „Response / Response“ deals with the necessity of self-expression and a desire to communicate, the wish for an individual point of view in the midst of constant change, and calls for participation in the societal conversation. With the reference to integrity in „Muriel Rukeyser / Rindon Johnson“, Natalie Czech raises a contemporary concern: In uncertain times, everyone is required to take a stand. However, what can increasingly be observed (on social media) is a retreat behind the statements of others, which are reproduced again and again with little change. Most people seem to lack their own words or the courage to make a statement. Czech's works, however, refuse the gravity of any finality. Her pens are agile, because the discourse is in motion. Nothing is set in stone. Like photography, self-positioning is a snapshot, like a pencil mark it can be revised. Statements never stand alone, they build on what has preceded them and are expanded by what follows. In the end, there are only responses, because meaning is created together.

Biographical Note:

Natalie Czech's works are currently on view at the new presentation of the Victoria & Albert Museum's collection and from February 2024 onwards at the Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf in the group exhibition „Size Matters - Scale in Photography“, recently in „What are words worth?“ McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco, „Perspectives. Futurisms / Marcel Duchamp & Marcel Proust“, Mercedes Benz Contemporary Berlin, „Breath“, Hamburger Kunsthalle and „Is it true you said poems are made of words“, MAMCO, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain in Geneva. Her works are represented in numerous collections such as the Museum of Modern Art New York, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Pinakothek der Moderne Munich, Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, Fotomuseum Winterthur and the Brooklyn Museum New York.



A Response / Response by Charles Bernstein / Hanne Lippard, 2024

total dimensions: 288 × 37,4 cm

Charles Bernstein:
What I say is what I meant
& what I saw is what I said
But neither seen nor spoke
Is what I think I thought

Hanne Lippard:
What I see is what I sense
& speak is what I did
But neither seen nor spoke
Is what I sought

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**A Response / Response by Langston Hughes /
Julien Bismuth, 2023**

4 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
35,6 × 98,2 cm, 35,6 × 105,3 cm, 35,6 × 88,8 cm,
35,6 × 105,5 cm
total dimensions: 160 × 230 cm

When you turn the corner
And you run into yourself
Then you know that you have turned
All the corners that are left.

Langston Hughes
(Final Curve)

no corners
no ends
only turns
that never close but loop

Julien Bismuth



**A Response / Response by Donna Haraway /
Kim Rosenfield, 2024**

2 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
35,7 × 94,6 cm, 35,7 × 91,4 cm
total dimensions: 190 × 99,5 cm

It matters what stories make worlds,
what worlds make stories

Donna Haraway

We are no longer of earth says the sun
Forget the drama and go to work

Kim Rosenfield



**A Response / Response by Gertrude Stein /
Cia Rinne, 2024**

3 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
35,7 × 65,9 cm, 35,7 × 89,9 cm, 35,7 × 85,6 cm
total dimensions: 230 × 154 cm

A language tires
A language tries to be
A language tries to be free

Gertrude Stein
(Photograph)

this word is tired
this word is desired
this word has expired

Cia Rinne



A Response / Response by Robert Creeley /
David Horvitz, 2024

3 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
35,7 × 83,7 cm, 35,7 × 90,4 cm, 35,7 × 67,9 cm
total dimensions: 248 × 123 cm

It's still
life. It
just ain't moving.

Robert Creeley
(Nature Morte)

it stole
life ev-
ery photo taken

David Horvitz



A Response / Response by Leonard Cohen /
Eugenia Lai, 2024

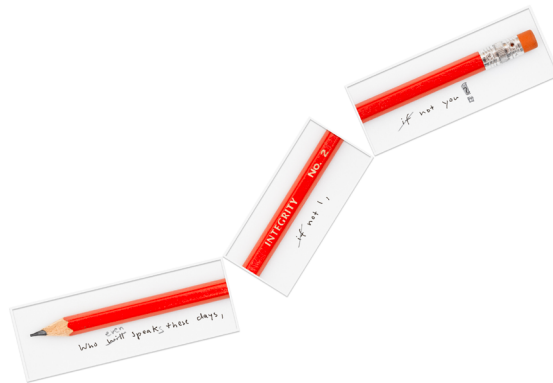
3 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
35,7 × 116,1 cm, 35,7 × 116,1 cm, 35,7 × 68,2 cm
total dimensions: 152 × 140 cm

So little to say
So urgent
To say it

Leonard Cohen
(My Career)

I stopped to listen
to the crack
in between

Eugenia Lai



A Response / Response by Muriel Rukeyser /
Rindon Johnson, 2024

3 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
35,1 × 100,8 cm, 35,1 × 75,7 cm, 35,1 × 93,3 cm
total dimensions: 254 × 174 cm

Who will speak these days,
if not I,
if not you?

Muriel Rukeyser
(The Speed of Darkness)

Who even speaks these days,
not I,
not you!

Rindon Johnson



**A Response / Response by Emily Dickinson /
 Natalie Häusler, 2024**

6 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
 35,7 x 62,1 cm, 35,7 x 62,1 cm, 35,7 x 62,1 cm,
 35,7 x 62,1 cm, 35,7 x 54,8 cm, 35,7 x 52,2 cm
 total dimensions: 176 x 194 cm

But are not
 all Facts Dreams
 as soon as
 we put
 them behind
 us—

Emily Dickinson
 (Envelope Poems)

Guess what?
 A Lemon fell
 into my lap
 during a
 fight last
 Night—

Natalie Häusler



**A Response / Response by Tomaž Šalamun /
 Charles Bernstein (Lines), 2024**

4 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
 107,1 x 35,8 cm, 107,1 x 35,8 cm, 107,1 x 35,8 cm,
 107,1 x 35,8 cm
 total dimensions: 144 x 300 cm

Between any two points in space
 You can draw a straight line
 But where is the way
 Between the same place

Tomaž Šalamun
 (Things)

~~Between any two points in space~~
~~You can draw a straight line~~
~~But where is the way~~
~~Between the same place~~

Charles Bernstein



**A Response / Response by Tomaž Šalamun /
 Charles Bernstein 2, 2024**

4 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
 each 35,8 x 99,1 cm
 total dimensions: 196,8 x 158 cm

A: Between any two points in space
 B: As you and me or me and they
 A: You can draw a straight line
 B: But not before it strays
 A: But where is the way
 B: Nearly near nor stay
 A: Between the same place
 B: As come again before

A: Tomaž Šalamun
 (Things)
 B: Charles Bernstein



**A Response / Response by Charles Bernstein /
Hanne Lippard, 2024**

4 archival pigment prints, framed behind museum glass
35,7 × 82,7 cm, 35,7 × 65,7 cm, 35,7 × 61,6 cm,
35,7 × 74,8 cm
total dimensions: 288 × 37,4 cm

What I say is what I meant
& what I saw is what I said
But neither seen nor spoke
Is what I think I thought

Charles Bernstein
(The Honor of Virtue)

What I see is what I sense
& speak is what I did
But neither seen nor spoke
Is what I sought

Hanne Lippard