

NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

Alice Tippit

Surely Any S is Welcome

March 31 - April 29, 2023

Opening Friday, March 31, 6–8 PM

Recently I read that the poet Joseph Brodsky named his cat Mississippi because he was certain that cats preferred sibilants to fricatives. Of course a sibilant is a class of fricative and Brodsky surely knew this. Sucking is just a type of fucking.

“Surely any s is welcome” is a note Gertrude Stein left in the margins of a copy of the first edition of Tender Buttons. Her preference to insert “s” between “any” and “is” was clear, but less so as to whether “unwelcome” should be changed, thus in later editions it remains as originally published.

Setting the question of Stein’s intention aside, S is, without doubt, the most welcome of any letter in English. More words begin with it than any other letter. Personally I find that I favor S words more than others to such a degree that I often change titles when writing them up for exhibitions so as to temper its preponderance. Shapley, sinuous, sly S is certainly the most compliant and accommodating of letters. Plus, turn it on its side and, oops, we have sex. A dip and a hump.

— Alice Tippit, 2023

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery is pleased to present *Surely Any S is Welcome*, Alice Tippit’s fourth solo exhibition with the gallery.

Surely Any S is Welcome unfolds across three registers: oil on canvas paintings and ink paintings on paper; drawings of words; and, for the first time in New York, site-specific, monochromatic wall murals. As a writer might compose a sentence or a paragraph, here Tippit bands together visual elements across varying scales to form an overarching composition-as-exhibition.

Often employing imagery common to painting genres such as landscape, still life, and the portrait, Tippit makes small-scale, hard-edged paintings that evade definition, reveling in the space between this or that. In *Scout* (2022), for example, an inverted, cream pitcher becomes a leg as it spills into the sole of a red shoe. Similarly, in *Blade* (2023), the moon of a face in profile emerges from the brush of a coniferous tree. Tippit’s approach to image making is expressly poetic, and as such the artist exercises figures of speech (rhyme, metaphor, simile) as conceptual actors to spar with the frankness of silhouetted forms, like a lemon atop a knife in *Fleet* (2022) or the shadow of a swan in *Choke* (2021).

The breadth of association that accumulates is a tandem game of image and word. Applied a single-word title like *Saddle*, *Sweep*, or *Strand* (all 2022), Tippit’s individual paintings can produce an interpretive bluntness that winks rather than reveals, leaving the viewer as the ultimate translator of certain ambiguities. And when the paintings are considered in unison, further meaning cracks open.

Accompanying the paintings in a cactoid arrangement, drawings of words [*Single Finger* (2023), or, the *Scenic Desert* drawings) reflect Tippit’s interest in the relationship between word and image, or words as images. On found vintage note paper, pairs of two syllable words—*Mister Listen* or *Peasant Legend*—are drawn, their affects resonating (im)perfectly in unlikely combinations. The words are both hard and soft, rubbing together not in a rhyme but towards that feeling. Tippit hangs them together in the makings of a saguaro, a cipher when read in any which order. As the artist has explained, “words and our attachment to them are more challenging to work with when courting ambiguity because they have so much determinative power over our minds.”

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Alice Tippit (b. 1975, Independence, KS) graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago and lives and works in Chicago, Illinois. Solo exhibitions include Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels (2023); Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York (2021, 2018, 2016); Patron Gallery, Chicago (2020); Grice Bench, Los Angeles (2020); Kimmerich Gallery, Berlin (2019, 2017); Paris London Hong Kong, Chicago (2017); and KRETS, Malmö, Sweden (2017), among others. Select group exhibitions include Office Baroque, Antwerp (2023); *The Regional*, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati and Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (2022); Mrs. Gallery, Maspeth (2022); Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York (2020); Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago (2019); CHART, New York (2019); Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago (2018); Anton Kern Gallery, New York (2018); Peana Projects; Monterrey, MX (2018); Adams and Ollman, Portland (2017); and 47 Canal, New York (2015), among others. Tippit was a Finalist for the 2019 Artadia Award, Chicago.