

ARTLOG



'Rebels Are Reasonable' at Essex Street

'Rebels Are Reasonable,' the latest Peter Fend exhibition that was recently held at Essex Street, continues to engage with the eco-activist/public policy and socio-economic and -political themes that have dominated the subject matter of the artist's work for more than 30 years, since the 70s. What arguably sets 'Rebels' apart from other recent work by Fend, is its more overt, direct engagement with politics - manifested mainly through his production of a series of 'flags,' actually heavily manipulated 'renditions' of the archetypal symbols or images we associate or identify with nation states (or more colloquially, countries), among other things, and that made up a major part of the exhibition.

The way in which Fend's renditions of a select number of national flags were made is provocative enough, let alone the ways in which they were manipulated. Using small aluminum panels, Fend had overlapped UV inkjet print abstractions of the maps of countries, with their respective flags. Whether by means of production, the size in which the flags were produced and presented to the viewer, or in the willful distortion of the authority assumed to be inherent to flags, the works amount to a questioning or perhaps more specifically, a contestation of the power of these very symbols, particularly of their claim to represent nation states, territories, populations, and environments.

Across the gallery space from the wall of flags, a series of contiguous panels had been installed, each containing a provocative but somewhat ambiguous social or political message of its own, in large, all-capital letters. Some of the messages read: "LET THE MARKETS DECIDE!," "DO WHAT MUST BE DONE SO THAT WE SURVIVE," "IT MAY LOOK GOOD BUT DOES IT WORK?," "SAVE YOUR SOIL," and "EXERCISE THE CONSTITUTION...USE IT DAILY." Between the walls of flags and text, respectively, an installed flatscreen monitor displayed video of a shore on loop, water constantly approaching, then receding, and back again. The ocean, taken specifically as an issue of concern among other environmental issues, has long been on Fend's mind, and something is to be said of its placement as a subject - as real-time video footage nonetheless - between two walls filled with standardized symbols and abstractions. By utilizing various media, and, interestingly so in this concise and potent exhibition, specifically relatively standard mediums of art such as abstraction, text, and video, Fend has arguably produced some of his most pointedly critical - if not accessible - work in recent memory. '

'Rebels Are Reasonable' was on display at Essex Street at 114 Eldridge Street, New York, NY 10002 from September 7th until October 26th, 2014.

- Arthur Ivan Bravo