

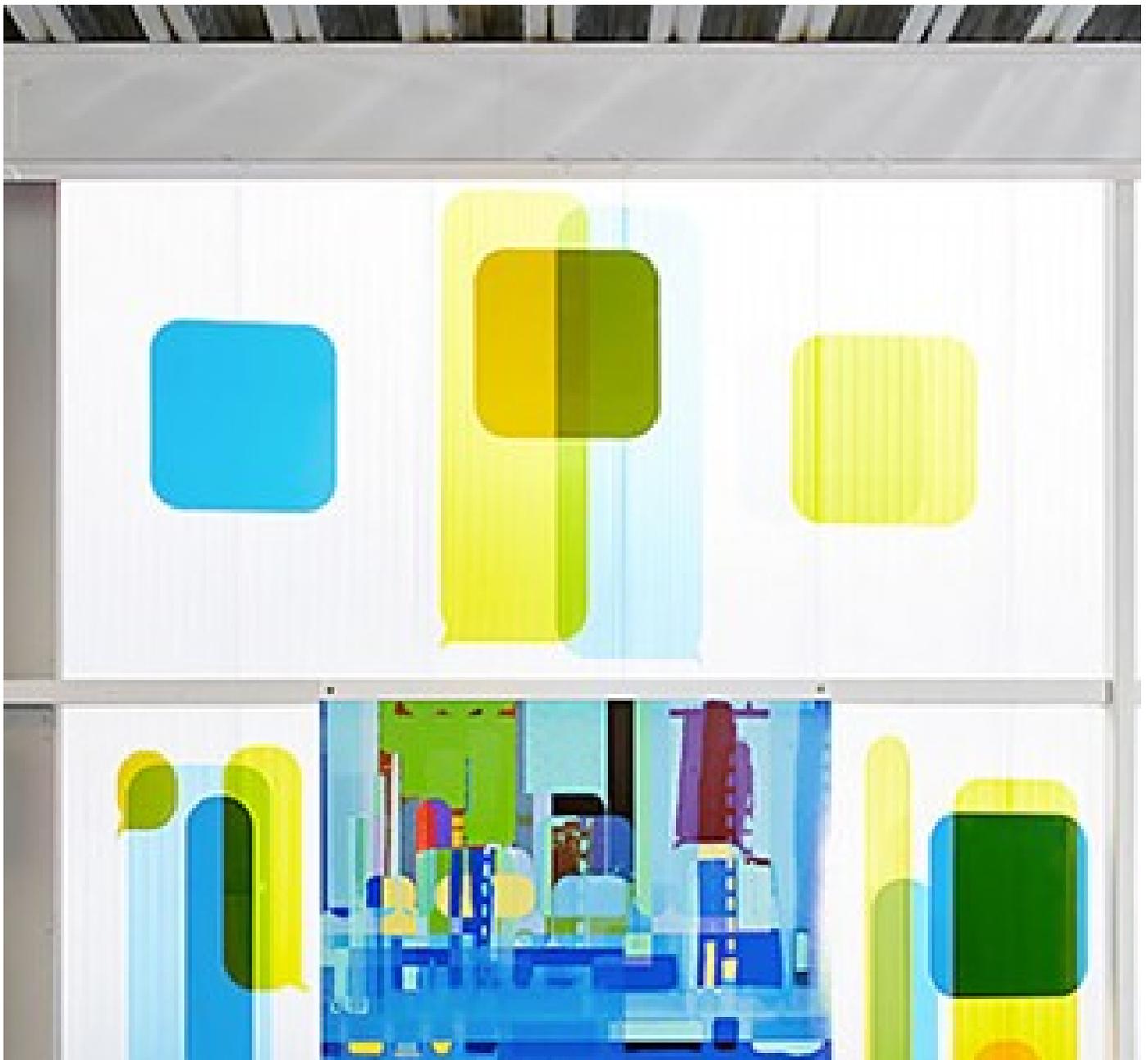


ARTS

"textscape: Susan Scafati and Sean Ripple"

Using text interface as a visual environment, this show is messy and clean, consistent and surprising, philosophical and entertaining

REVIEWED BY SAM ANDERSON-RAMOS, FRI., FEB. 24, 2017





Susan Scafati and Sean Ripple's "textscape" treats the ubiquitous text interface as a visual environment. The intangible is made tangible, something we can touch, not only with our fingers, but with our bodies. Scafati's *Scroll* is a massive piece placed near the ceiling and spanning two walls. It buckles in places, protruding in colorful humps, at times mimicking the perforations in a strip of film, at others a jumbled skyline. In fact, the piece is overflowing with subtle echoes of the rectangular speech bubbles I recognize from my iPhone screen. *Monolith* is perhaps the most dramatic. It is a massive wooden speech bubble coupled with audio of a droning male voice and some jarring music. The wood itself is left untreated, industrial, a different kind of technology.

The speech bubble persists. Scafati's *Relief* is a series of flat, white speech bubbles pressed close to the wall, clean and graphic as the ones in our phones, no doubt meticulously rendered by a team of design scientists in some sleek, faraway tech complex. *Relic* is a line of white marble stones carefully arranged by size on a yellow shelf. The yellow shelf is a speech bubble (clear acrylic), but the marble stones are like speech bubbles, too, growing ever softer to a whisper, and ever larger, like a SHOUT. This anything-goes approach interacts seamlessly with Ripple's, as he seems to have no boundaries whatsoever when it comes to medium. For instance, *status update* is a selection of dirt mounds scattered around the gallery floor, each framing a plain piece of paper with a written message. One features an eyeball and the words WE WATCHED THE DRIFT OF EACH GAZES INTERSECT, or something to that effect, and is arranged beneath a drip in the gallery ceiling, so that a small leaf has grown from the soil. Ripple combines the aura of nature with the aura of script – an odd, threatening scrawl like some psychotic ransom note – in a way that seems barely under control. Thank God for that. I can hardly stand art that is controlled to death. Ripple's piece, with its striving green leaf, is literally life. It is the kind of outrageous dare that made me want to make and look at art in the first place.

Ripple also has a series of pieces one can request by text. For *suburban dads ... their drone copters and their daughters*, the artist replies to the texted request with a recording of a man who describes flying his drone copter in a park on a beautiful day. *uh huh* is a panting, manipulated excerpt from a Pixies song. Ripple encourages participation by writing his phone number like bathroom graffiti all over the walls of the gallery. On one wall, the numbers are painted large and black. In many other places, the numbers are written in pencil, along with numerous floating eyeballs, a creepy nod to voyeurism and the surveillance state.

"textscape" is one of the stronger shows I've seen in a while, messy and clean, consistent and surprising, philosophical and entertaining. The DEMO Gallery itself is an exceptional space, and, unfortunately, a temporary one, which means there is only so much time to experience it before it's gone – much like texts themselves. In recent years, texting has become my preferred method of communication, easier than having to actually talk to a person. "textscape" somehow managed to make me feel both ashamed of this, and comforted. This is our world, it suggests. How silly! Now let us all embrace it.

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Co-Lab Projects DEMO Gallery, 721 Congress

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