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## Allen Ruppersberg's First Solo Show At Camden Arts Centre

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REVIEW



Reading Standing Up and The Book Circus, 2004-2008. © The artist, Photo: Damian Griffiths

*Exhibition Review – Freya McClelland visits Allen Ruppersberg's show at the Camden Arts Centre, until November 23 2008.*

Camden Arts Centre is hosting Allen Ruppertsberg's first solo show in a public gallery in the UK. His new project is based on 'Literatura de cordels'- 'stories on a string'- which are the short, cheaply produced and widely-read pamphlets made by traveling poets and artists in Brazil.

On entering Gallery 3 it feels as if you have walked onto a giant chessboard. The black and white checkered floor creates the sensation of an optical illusion, spreading out from high white walls and onto white ceilings. Stark bright sunlight floods through the large rectangular windows, throwing angular shadows on the patterned floor.

On the white tiles there are black words paired in opposites- us/them, left/right, text/margin and, more curiously, Italy/France. The occasional conjunction in red punctuates the piece, and the compulsion to read the words aloud builds a rhythm and energy of sound in the open space. The piece is called Reading Standing Up (2004).

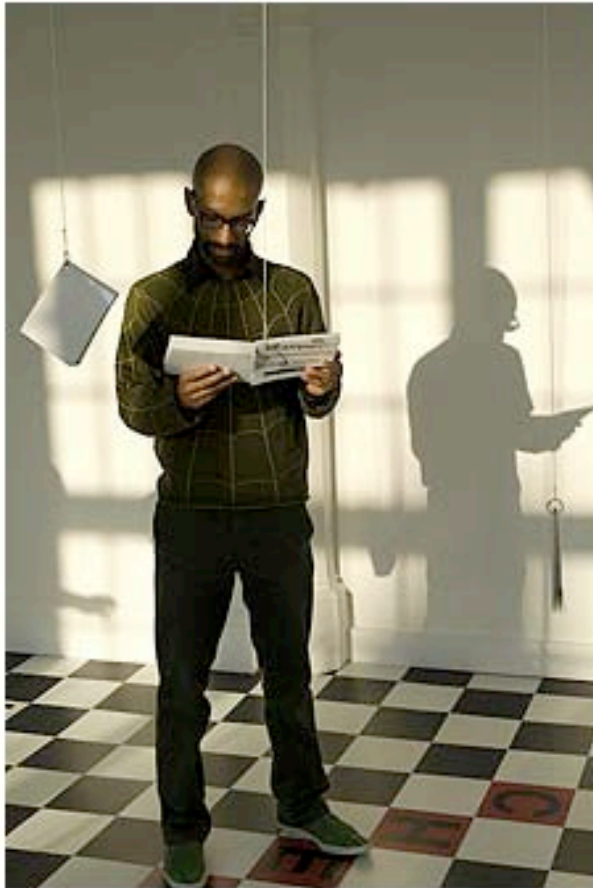
Reading Standing Up.  
© The artist, Photo:  
Damian Griffiths



Ruppertsberg's use of antithesis creates conflict – one word in the binary pair wields more power than the other: text over margin, us over them and so forth. The stark black and white adds emphasis to the resulting narrative tension, one that is familiar to us as readers but even more so as human beings.

Allen Ruppertsberg said 'My art is about what is common and particular to everyone.'

Hanging from a large circular installation in the centre of the room are Ruppertsberg's own versions of 'cordels' containing words and images from his own extensive collections. These include poems, magazines, postcards, posters, slides, film-stills and books.



Allen Ruppersberg's exhibition is a comment on popular culture of mid 20th Century America.

It was Ruppersberg's seemingly passive use of the commonplace as a 'material' to work with, that distinguished him in the LA art scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It has run through his long established career of 30 years.

The images in the 'cordels' depict empty landscapes, empty motel lobbies, empty restaurants, empty streets, or isolated, immobile monuments; these Hopper-esque scenes are, in Ruppersberg's view, pregnant with something about to appear, sites where stories are about to happen.

The books explore loneliness, self-discovery, alcohol, misogyny, throwaway culture, male friendship and transitory 'cowboy' lifestyles. These themes are still very much of the Beat era.

Ruppersberg's books explore many themes of the Beat era, including self-discovery, alcohol and throwaway culture.



Allen Ruppersberg's exhibition is a comment on popular culture of mid 20th Century America: an interesting amalgamation of cultural mythologies, narratives and the common truths of everyday life.

It coincides with an exhibition by Wallace Berman, the 'father' of the Californian movement. Berman was a huge influence of Ruppersberg as well as other artists and poets merging from the Beat legacy of the Beat Generation.