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Walead Beshty: 'Profit & Loss'  
A Visually and Conceptually Rich Presentation  
Regen Projects  
November 7 – December 21, 2024  
by Jody Zellen



Walead Beshty's current exhibition at Regen Projects is tight, sophisticated and thoughtful. *Profit & Loss* is a visually and conceptually rich presentation. On view are small-scale black and white photographs, modestly-sized oil pastels and small concrete sculptures with radio antennas. It also features large-scale mixed media pieces: collages of actual newspaper pages, textual reproductions from found signs and commercially printed billboards.

Beshty is an extremely prolific artist who has created an unusually diverse body of work over the last fifteen years. His choice of media is often specific to the content of the project, be it a series of abstract and colorful photograms based on work by Moholy-Nagy, or glass and copper boxes packaged and shipped via FedEx and displayed together with the shipping containers as pedestals. Beshty often draws from art history for the conceptual and theoretical framework of his projects. Unusually, this particular exhibition also includes significant references to other artists' works. His drawings of large, chunky mangled cigarettes recall the work of Philip Guston, as well as Irving Penn. The newspapers overlaid with stenciled type share an affinity with Rirkrit Tiravanija's recent installations, in addition to carved paper text pieces by Mark Bradford. The draped billboards recall both the Zipper works by Karen Carson and some of Robert Morris' felt sculptures.

That said, Beshty's art is not derivative and his exhibition, while perhaps paying homage to the works of others, is a thoughtful investigation of value, exchange and the ways we communicate. On the front desk sits *Smart Object (Radio): 2035 Achilles Drive, Los Angeles, California* (all works 2024), a table top sculpture combining a piece of found concrete with a radio antenna. A selection of these dysfunctional devices — antennae combined with concrete, brick, mortar or ceramic tiles — are also presented in a side room. At once familiar and other-worldly, these humorous sculptures might be futuristic or relics from a sci-fi inspired past. They are placed on white pedestals and share the space with a series of framed works on newspaper juxtaposed with drawn text from "bandit signs."

Bandit signs are small advertisements hung without approval. Beshty began collecting them in 2007 during the global financial crisis and in this series of works, he uses oil pastels to stencil the crude and cryptic verbiage from the signs over actual pages from newspapers including the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. *IMMIGRATION Services 323.582.9871 2407 Randolph st., HP [The New York Times, Sunday 16 April 2017; Los Angeles, California]* is a spread from the front and back pages of the *New York Times* from April 16, 2017. In it, Beshty juxtaposes the word IMMIGRATION with headlines that announce atrocities and a full-page advertisement for Starbucks' cold brew. Here, world events and

consumer culture are presented alongside the needs of immigrants. Other works from this series include *WE BUY HOUSES 626-765-5726* [*The New York Times, Friday 14 April 2017; Los Angeles, California*] where the phrase *WE BUY HOUSES* covers the front and back pages of the *New York Times* from April 14, 2017 and *CREDIT REPAIR (323) 535.7289* [*The New York Times, Wednesday 15 November 2017; Los Angeles, California*]. Again, Beshty calls attention to the discrepancies between advertising, news and the services aimed at the urban poor.

While the smaller works that use text from bandit signs invite viewers in to read and look closely, the larger mixed media pieces are more aggressive and bombastic. In these, Beshty combines multiple newspaper pages so they create a backdrop spanning over ten feet across. On this layer, he collages found signage (like those seen on or attached to telephone poles with contact information tabs), as well as laser prints of explosions and miscellaneous paper fragments above and below words appropriated from the bandit signs. In *Bandit Sign Painting [DIVORCE & CUSTODY 909-485-9282* (*Los Angeles Times, Sunday 23 June 2024; Los Angeles, California*)], the words *DIVORCE & CUSTODY* and a phone number are painted in black oil paint and oil pastel, dominating the composition.

The *Bandit Sign Paintings* are presented in conjunction with a series of large-scale works titled *What Goes Around Comes Around*. For these pieces, Beshty enlarges and then cuts words from bandit signs out of found vinyl printed billboards. He layers them with expanses of canvas, glassine and paper that give the pieces a structural support for the cut letters to hang and drape over. Across the center of *What Goes Around Comes Around [DIVORCE & CUSTODY 909-485-9282]*, individual letters have been excised from the layers of material and these fragments cascade toward the floor, exposing the supports for the construction and the wall behind it. These works are minimal and maximal, obtuse and straightforward, abstract and representational simultaneously.

In the outer hallway, Beshty includes a series of small, framed black and white photographs of RVs lined up on the street near his studio. Surrounded by detritus these images of RV's are presented adjacent to pieces where Beshty has cut and collaged U.S. currency in various denominations with added gold leaf to emphasize the geometric shapes. There is a lot to take in as well as take away in Beshty's challenging installation. To ponder the terms "Profit" and "Loss" and think about commodities, advertising, homelessness, newspapers, and modes of communication or exchange, all within a commercial art gallery where the works themselves are also for sale, creates an obvious paradox. For better or for worse, Beshty is complicit. He engages in the system he critiques and while the works do not cry out *BUY ME*, they illustrate the complexities in "the construction of value and the meaning of worth."

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