



DOMINIC MCGILL
NEW YORK

It's significant that Dominic McGill chose the exhibition title *FuturePerfect* simply to refer to the verb tense we use to discuss the past in the future, rather than to allude to the term's inherent willfully poetic misinterpretation [Derek Eller Gallery; April 2—May 15, 2010]. Language, McGill knows, is a two-edged sword, and the power of words—to narrate, persuade, report, and distort—is among his dominant motifs. The works on view here represent a heroic effort to use that power to make sense of an unsettling world that includes war, strife, religious conflict, and the general malaise of the avid CNN-watcher. McGill tackles global politics and economic developments, viewing them through the interpretive lens of various philosophies and creating dense, graphite-on-paper compositions that often incorporate collaged elements. They also include thousands of words—words that dominate, surround, and curtail the images on the page.

Not that those images are insignificant. An excellent draughtsman and an accomplished caricaturist, McGill selects the images he collages with an art director's eye. But the words, in a bewildering variety of hand-drawn fonts and scripts, are the focus of his most fervent labor. The words "manic" and "obsessive" come to mind, and the intricate compositions give the work a passing resemblance to the visionary art of the late Howard Finster and such.

Upon closer inspection, however, the resemblance proves trivial. Where religion was Finster's coping mechanism for the sorrows of this earthly realm, McGill's is philosophy—preferably the dense, post-structuralist variety. And where Finster embraced simplicity and folksiness, McGill refuses to shy away from complexity. Scrutiny reveals his penitentiary: marks of erasure, the evidence of a myriad of choices involving tiny millimeters of white space and dark lines—choices the artist thought and re-thought.

And again, there are the words: quotations from sources too numerous to recognize or cite, which run

the gamut from the untrustworthy (political speeches and propaganda), to the canonical (heavy hitters like Marx and Lacan) and the obscure (Louis Althusser). There are enough words here to fill at least a thick volume or two. Standing in front of *When the Last Tree Falls*, 2008, in the reception area, we quickly realize that we will need to commit at least thirty minutes to read every word on the twenty-two-by-thirty-two-inch paper—and that's just the first work in the show. There are four other such large-format works and two even larger sculptural pieces—also covered with words written in graphite. The second sculpture, in the back room, is inspired by Plato's cave and was created in collaboration with an expert in the history of the Middle East. *Muqaddimah*, 2009-2010, a linen curtain eighty inches high and twenty-one feet long, is a very big surface to cover with words and images. If that's not an earnest struggle to make sense of things, then what is?

How to process all this information? The images point you in the right direction: here's a caricature of Reagan; there's a fat pig in a business suit, making off with a suitcase full of profits. Even the choice of fonts helps tell the story. But the overwhelmed feeling is part of the point. We are meant to struggle. Rather than rely on the inward-turning eye and false certainty of the visionaries his work recalls, McGill reaches outward, casting his net ever wider in a search for meaning that is frantic, perhaps doomed, but nothing if not serious and committed.

—Lara Kristin Herndon