

EQUINOX GALLERY  
3642 Commercial Street  
Vancouver, BC V5N 4G2

604.736.2405 t  
info@equinoxgallery.com e  
www.equinoxgallery.com w

## ***The Shape of Language***

Works by Sonny Assu, Gwenessa Lam, Shawn Hunt, Hamed Rashtian, Neil Wedman

On view until August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
Equinox Gallery, Vancouver

\* \* \* \* \*

Before words are read, they are shapes; before they are interpreted, they are marks, objects, sounds, and material traces. The artists in this exhibition explore what happens when language is transformed into architecture, pattern, archaeological trace, visual form, and recorded object. In doing so, they reveal meaning not as something fixed within language itself, but as something continually produced through acts of looking, listening, recognition, and interpretation. Each of the participating artists investigates the ways meaning is encoded, not always through words themselves, but through symbols, abstraction, material, and gesture. In doing so, they create works that mimic or invoke language without relying on the viewer's ability to read them. Rather than asking viewers simply to decode what they encounter, the works gathered here reveal that meaning is rarely fixed or universal.

For **Shawn Hunt**, Northwest Coast formline functions as a visual language. Working with his unique neo-formline approach and stylized animal imagery derived from Northwest Coast design traditions, Hunt deliberately shifts familiar forms away from their conventional readability. Wolves, ravens, and formline elements become increasingly abstract until they operate less as representations than as a visual language in their own right. Existing between recognition and abstraction, the work asks how cultural knowledge is transmitted, inherited, and interpreted by different audiences.

**Sonny Assu's** copper record offers a meditation on language as something that can be materially present yet remain inaccessible. Inspired by recordings of the artist's great-great-grandfather, Chief Billy Assu, made by ethnomusicologist Dr. Ida Halpern during the final years of the potlatch ban, the work carries both personal and cultural histories. Copper, a material of immense significance within Laich-kwil-tach culture, replaces vinyl, transforming the record into both sculpture and cultural object. Like any LP, it physically contains language, song, and memory, yet these remain silent and unreadable until activated through technology. The work suggests that language and history can reside within an object before it becomes perceptible.

EQUINOX GALLERY  
3642 Commercial Street  
Vancouver, BC V5N 4G2

604.736.2405 t  
info@equinoxgallery.com e  
www.equinoxgallery.com w

Beginning with individual Farsi words taken from contemporary Persian poetry, **Hamed Rashtian** transforms language into sculptural form. Removed from their poetic context and abstracted into architectural volumes, the works cannot be translated in a straightforward fashion. Instead, they invite viewers to engage with language through its physical qualities, where meaning arises not only from what the words signify, but from the experience of moving around and inhabiting them as sculptural objects. Cast in bronze, the sculptures acquire a permanence and monumentality far removed from their origins as individual words.

**Neil Wedman's** *Newspaper Drawings* initially appear to be painted reproductions of classified advertisements. Rendered in black ink, their illegibility only becomes apparent upon closer inspection, revealing them instead as carefully constructed abstractions. By reducing language to its formal qualities, Wedman's works evoke the recognition of language before it is read. These works occupy a space between image and text, suggesting that language can communicate through its visual structure as much as through its content. In doing so, they expose the habitual ways we navigate printed information, drawing attention to pattern, rhythm, and composition over meaning.

Questions of communication and interpretation are further complicated in **Gwenessa Lam's** investigations of oracle bones. Used during the Shang Dynasty for divination, these objects are among the earliest surviving examples of Chinese writing, preserving both language and the traces of attempts to communicate with forces beyond the visible world. Drawing from examples held in museum collections, Lam embosses their surfaces into paper before meticulously rubbing metallic pastel across each sheet. As the pigment gradually reveals the embossed forms, the works seem to emerge from the paper itself. Their shimmering surfaces evoke both the physical history of the bones and the uncertainty that surrounds their interpretation. Although many of the inscriptions can now be read, hundreds of the characters they contain remain undeciphered allowing the oracle bones to exist simultaneously as historical documents and enduring mysteries. Lam's works embrace this tension, suggesting that language is not simply a vehicle for certainty but also a repository for ambiguity, belief, and speculation.

Taken together, these works challenge the idea that communication is ever entirely transparent or complete. Instead, they show how uncertainty can open new ways of seeing and understanding. What we understand is shaped by what we recognize, what we know, and the histories and contexts we bring with us. Interpretation is not a single, definitive act, but an ongoing process that includes looking, questioning, and making connections.

EQUINOX GALLERY  
3642 Commercial Street  
Vancouver, BC V5N 4G2

604.736.2405 t  
info@equinoxgallery.com e  
www.equinoxgallery.com w