

# ARTFORUM

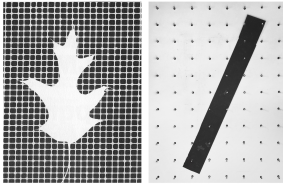
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## Shannon Ebner

ALTMAN SIEGEL

49 Geary Street, 4th Floor

January 7–February 13



Shannon Ebner  
*Leaf and Strike*, 2009  
chromogenic print,  
8 x 12 3/8"

Shannon Ebner's latest exhibition, "Signal Hill," continues her semiotic adventures through photography. Here, Ebner transposes her willfully oblique hermeneutics to immaterial spaces, via a series of disparate gestures and ambiguous indices: her stark large-scale photographs, cement-block sculpture, and, most notably, photo-based wallpaper printed with the repeating phrase THE ECSTATICAL ALPHABET. Through these, she advances some familiar preoccupations, ostensibly the constructedness of language, its ephemeral materiality, and the slippage of meaning. Less overtly political than previous projects (such as the "Dead Democracy Letters" series, 2003–2005), this body of work initially unfolds as "poststructuralism for the virtual," revisiting the sort of things one would have found in an 1980s critical-studies syllabus, jam-packed with '70s tomes like *S/Z* (1970) and *The Prison-House of Language* (1975). But, of course, Ebner's work requires a slow read, and her subtle games capitalize on the letter missing its mark.

A second look teases out a more personal dimension: a formal meditation on the legacy of conceptual photography, which, given the title, signals out Robert Adams, to be sure, but also the Bechers and the New Topographics. In this sense, rather than returning to slightly outmoded critical ground, the show engages an aesthetic legacy that's propagated through certain lingering strategies, namely a theory-heavy criticality advanced through austerity and Soviet-era impassivity (with its echoes of *Alphaville* [1965]). Not quite a critique, Ebner's is more an exploration of artistic genealogy, if also a somewhat melancholic acknowledgement of the possibilities foreclosed by her predecessors. Her approach is particularly evident in *Leaf and Strike*, 2009, a rather diminutive work tucked away unassumingly on the alphabet-covered wall. The piece pairs a photogram of an oak leaf with the icon for *strike* ( / ). Given the context, this simple juxtaposition can't help but evoke the lost romance of the photographic landscape, once held as the pinnacle of the medium. The wistful gesture also provides an uncharacteristic break in Ebner's otherwise deadpan iterations.

– Franklin Melendez