



PUN VALUE

4 WORKS BY LEE LOZANO

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“THE ULTIMATE METAPHOR IS A MIRROR.
OR A PUN! A MIRROR IS PERHAPS AS CLOSE AS
YOU CAN GET TO THE IDEA OF SOMETHING BEING
SOMETHING ELSE, YET DIFFERENT.”

—Lee Lozano

PUN VALUE

The painter and conceptual artist Lee Lozano loved puns: “AS I’VE BEEN SAYING FOR YEARS,” she wrote in her memo pad. “THE GREAT PUNS ARE METAPHOR IN ITS PUREST FORM.” A pun is a rhetorical device that exploits the flexibility of language, and whether it acts as a metaphor or as a mirror—as Lozano insinuates—it changes agreed-upon meaning through a process of deflection. A pun reveals the mutability of words. Similarly, Lozano is an artist who constantly averts any one characterization. She was a prolific artist in the 1960s who hung out with artists such as Richard Serra and Yvonne Rainer and she influenced

the work of her once-lover, Dan Graham, while declaring, “GIVE AWAY ALL YOUR IDEAS.” She showed conceptual work at Virginia Dwan’s groundbreaking *Language III* exhibition in 1969 and held a solo exhibition of paintings at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970. Yet, just as she threw herself into her work, she threw herself out of it. “SEEK THE EXTREMES, THAT’S WHERE ALL THE ACTION IS” she is known for saying. Lozano left New York in 1973 and mostly stopped showing her art.

The four works by Lee Lozano in the Blanton Museum of Art’s collection display Lozano’s varied interests in art making from the 1960s until her departure from the art world. All the works share suggestive verb titles: *Ream*, *Stroke*, & *General Strike Piece*. Two are paintings, one is a study for a painting, and another is an art-life piece that exhibits Lozano’s practice in conceptual and performance art in the

early 1970s. While Lozano the artist is difficult to discern, here too are works that deflect any one reading. If we were to take these four works as case studies, we would find a constantly moving network of ideas from paint to drawing to words as directives; a small collection of the best output by an artist who refused to be any one thing.



Lee Lozano

Ream, 1964

Oil on canvas

198.1 cm x 243.8 cm (78 in x 96 in)

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Gift of Mari and James A. Michener, 1968

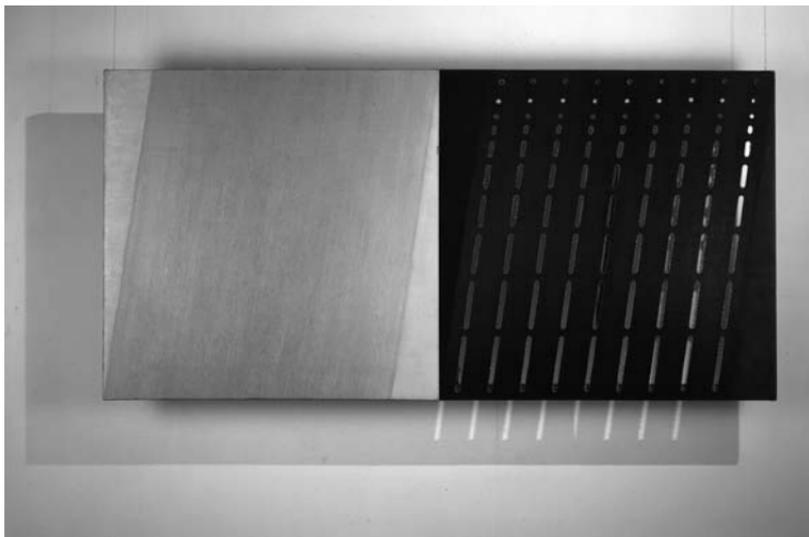
REAM

Ream is a serious painting. At 78 by 96 inches, it is one of the most accomplished paintings within a body of work that examines the forms of everyday tools through various values of grey. Completed in 1964, it was sold that year to James Michener for \$1,100 on the advisement of art dealer Richard Bellamy. Michener gifted the painting to the University of Texas in 1968, and it has been exhibited regularly since. Alex Codlin, a former UT student, remarked, “When I would go to the Huntington Art Gallery, UT’s main art museum before The Blanton, it was always the painting I remembered most. It just seemed like the iconic work of the collection.”

With the re-emergence of interest in Lee Lozano since 1997, this painting has traveled the world, acting as a defining piece in a variety of retrospectives of her work.

A study in slick greys, it is a large and commanding work. The head of the tool suggestively juts out across the canvas, pointing to the right. During this period, Lozano was painting a variety of screws and hammers and nails in industrial greys and greens. There's a picture of her in her studio peering intently with her dark eyes over a table filled with these gleaming tools. A reamer, perhaps the namesake of this painting, is a tool for enlarging and finishing holes in wood. It cuts both on the instroke and the outstroke with its spiraled head. While Lozano's works just prior to this were overtly sexual in nature—thick brushy strokes piled on one another to form a gorging phallus—this work is more subtle and sumptuous in its approach to the sexual nature of tools.

To screw. Its point is assertive for sure as it fills the canvas, but the brushstrokes are thinned out, a lighter grey is added to create a gleam off the tool. The grooves of the object are articulated as they sensually wrap around the point. That a ream is both a noun and a verb is not lost on Lozano. She liked double entendre, a favorite mode of the pun. In her notebook dated 1964/1967 she wrote out a list and titled it *All Verbs*: Ream, Spin, Veer, Span, Cross, Ram, Peel, Charge, Pitch, Verge, Switch, Shoot, Slide, Cram, Goad, Clash, Cleave, Fetch, Clamp, Lean, Swap, Butt, Crook, Split, Jut, Hack, Breach, Stroke, Stop.



Lee Lozano

Stroke, 1967–1970

Oil on canvas

106.68 cm x 106.68 cm (42 in x 42 in)

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Purchased through the generosity of The Judith Rothschild
Foundation and the Michener Acquisitions Fund, 2001

STROKE

Stroke, second to last on the list, is a work that was acquired by The Blanton in 2001 with the help of a Judith Rothschild Foundation Grant. Annette Carlozzi, a curator at The Blanton during the acquisition, advised the purchase as she felt this work would complement *Ream*. The purchase was originally suggested by the painter David Reed, a long time fan of Lozano: “I loved the dedication on the back of the painting to Dan Graham, with whom Lozano was living at the time,” Reed wrote to me in an email. “I thought it tied together painting ideas and conceptual ideas.” And, “I view Lozano as one of the most important painters (artists) of the ’70s.”

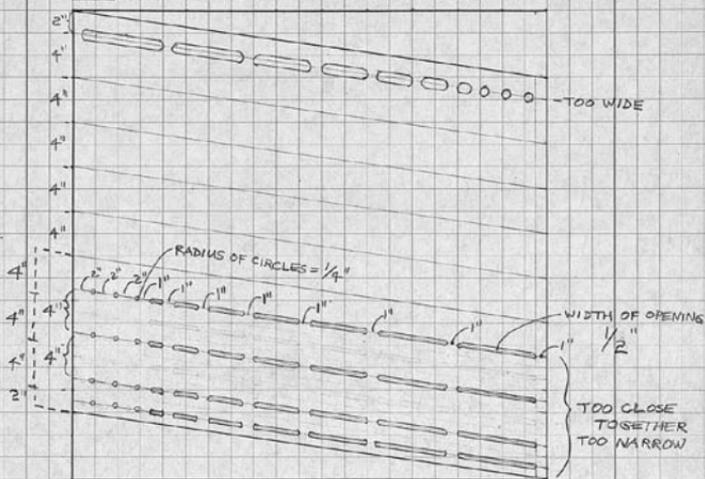
The work is dated 1967–70 and is something like a diptych in that two canvases are attached. On each canvas a slightly dark grey slant or stroke of paint falls across the canvases, like a shadow. On the right side, holes perforate the surface of the canvas going from small circles at the top to large stretched out ovals at the bottom. The holes are stippled on the inside, as if the tool painted in *Ream* helped to incise these sections. The stippled holes break the surface illusion of the painting, encouraging the work to act simultaneously as a sculpture and a painting.

The *Study for Holes in Stroke (Dark Half)* allows for the viewer to better understand Lozano's thinking process in creating *Stroke*. At the bottom of this sketch Lozano wrote: "RETITLED AFTER HOLES CUT: STROKE & STREAK." And then further down the page, "THE SHADOW CAST BY STROKE & STREAK IS VERY IMPORTANT."

APRIL 28, 70

STUDY FOR HOLES IN STROKE† (DARK MALE)

SCALE: ONE SQUARE = 2" SQ.

† RETITLED AFTER HOLES CUT: STROKE & STREAK.

NOTE: THE SHADOW CAST BY STROKE & STREAK IS VERY IMPORTANT. SUSPEND CANVAS FROM CEILING, & SET $1\frac{1}{2}$ OR 2 FEET IN FRONT OF WALL.

In the sketch, Lozano indicates that the painting should hang slightly off the wall to allow the gallery lights to stream through the incised holes, casting a shadow on the wall behind. When placed in such a way, the painting becomes a visual pun. One shadow streaks across the painting in the guise of dark grey paint, another shadow is real, hitting the gallery wall. A negative reflection.

(previous)

Lee Lozano

Study for Holes in Stroke [dark half], 1970

Graphite and pen on graph paper

28 cm x 22.8 cm (11 in x 9 in)

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,

Gift of Jaap van Liere, 2001

STRIKE

Negation is one theme of Lee Lozano's *General Strike Piece* created in 1969 and gifted to The Blanton by Jaap van Lier in 2001. In the late 1960s, Lozano started creating art-life pieces, a conceptual practice of imposing directives on her daily life, recording them in a notebook, and transcribing them for exhibition. The directives included what to wear and eat (*Wear & Eat More-or-Less the Same Thing Everyday Piece*), how to price her works (*How to Price Drawings Piece*) and even when to masturbate (*Masturbation Piece*). *General Strike Piece* was originally read aloud at the School of Visual Arts during the Art Worker's Coalition Public Hearing

("quote"): sound of "daisy" fading in background followed by sound of "also sprach zarathustra" (r. strauss) followed by sound of "the blue danube" (j. strauss) - soundtrack, 2001 (s. kubrick)

GENERAL STRIKE PIECE (STARTED FEB. 8, 69)*

GRADUALLY BUT DETERMINEDLY AVOID BEING PRESENT AT OFFICIAL OR PUBLIC "UPTOWN" FUNCTIONS OR GATHERINGS[†] RELATED TO THE "ART WORLD" IN ORDER TO PURSUE INVESTIGATION OF TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION. EXHIBIT IN PUBLIC ONLY PIECES WHICH FURTHER SHARING OF IDEAS & INFORMATION RELATED TO TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION ✧

IN PROCESS AT LEAST THROUGH SUMMER, '69.

*withdrawal from 3-man show compiled by richard bellamy, goldowsky gallery, 1078 madison ave.

†date of last visit to uptown galleries for perusal of art - feb. 13 or 14, 69

" " " " " a museum - march 24, 69
" " " " " uptown gallery opening - march 15, 69
" " " " " a bar - april 5, 69
" " " attendance at a concert - april 18, 69
" " " " " film showing - april 4, 69
" " " " " an "event" - april 18, 69
" " " " " a big party - march 15, 69

◦terms of total personal & public revolution set forth in brief statement read at open public hearing, art workers coalition, school of visual arts, april 10, 69. further participation in art workers coalition or any other group declined as part of general strike piece, this includes artists against the expressway group & others.

✧first piece exhibited at art/peace event, n.y. shakespeare festival, public theater, march 5, 69. grass piece & no-grass piece exhibited in number 7 show compiled by lucy lippard, paula sodper, may 18, 69. investment piece & cash piece exhibited in language III show, dwan gallery, may 24, 69.

in 1969. The piece was subsequently typed-up and printed in *0-9*, a journal edited by artist Vito Acconci and poet Bernadette Mayer.

General Strike Piece marks Lozano's gradual withdrawal from the art world as it describes her refusal to be "PRESENT AT OFFICIAL OR PUBLIC 'UPTOWN' FUNCTIONS OR GATHERINGS." Lozano makes a self-conscious decision to stop networking in the gallery system. Instead she states she will "PURSUE INVESTIGATION OF TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTIONS." A variety of asterisks appear at the end of the page and

(left)

Lee Lozano

General Strike Piece, 1969

Offset print

28 cm x 21.5 cm (11 in x 8 7/16 in)

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,

Gift of Jaap van Liere, 2001

expound on the statement. One describes her withdrawal from a 3-man show organized by Richard Bellamy and the dates of her final visits to uptown galleries. At the end of the body of the text is written “IN PROCESS AT LEAST THROUGH SUMMER ’69.”

To strike is to both hit and to discontinue an activity—to drop out. By performing and printing *General Strike Piece*, Lozano created a conceptual work of art that dealt with the refusal of the artist as worker. She went on strike: actively taking up a passive activity. Largely she began this withdrawal because she was tired of the art world. In 1968 she wrote in her memo pad, “ARTIST, CRITIC, DEALER, AND MUSEUM FRIENDS, IN FACT, ALMOST EVERYBODY: I CAN SMELL ON YOUR BAD BREATH THE OTHER PEOPLE’S RULES YOU SWALLOWED SO LONG AGO.” In another work entitled *Withdrawal Piece*, Lozano further

instigates her refusal while articulating her despondency, “PULL OUT OF SHOW AT DICK’S. I CAN’T ‘HANG’ WITH WORK THAT BRINGS ME DOWN.”

Whereas *Ream* and *Stroke* are more libidinal in their application of paint, the sheen off the oil, the thrust of the tool or the incision of the holes, *General Strike Piece* deals directly with Lozano’s interest in language. The play of words across the page. This work, as well as *Study for Strike*, derives from one of Lozano’s notebooks that she kept from 1967–1970. As a first year PhD student, I came across copies of the notebooks in The Blanton files and was immediately struck by the humor and urgency of Lozano’s writing, the thick letters in all caps placed neatly across the pages. In these notebooks, and as I would discover in New York two years later, in eleven memo pads, Lozano writes in an almost diaristic format, keeping track of her daily activities, conversations,

thoughts on art and life. In her memo pad she wrote, “I SEEM TO LOOK AT MY LIFE THE WAY A JUNKIE LOOKS AT HIS ARM” and “WHY NOT IMPOSE FORM ON ONE’S LIFE THE WAY ONE MAKES ART?”

While her engagement with the New York art scene was brief, the writing in these notebooks makes evident the fierce intelligence, vulnerability and biting wit of Lee Lozano.

Language and art could be played as a game for Lozano, a fooling around with intent, an opening up of the fixed nature of meaning. Lozano’s identity as an artist in the 1960s and early 1970s was of primary importance to her and it was also, always, shifting. She marks these shifts in her notebooks and memo pads—revelations about the communion of art and life. Poet Robert Duncan described a pun as, “an element that sets into motion more than one possibility of statement.” The flexibility of punning allowed

Lozano to access a multiplicity of meanings. What we are left with are four works that exemplify the open nature of Lee Lozano's self and art, from painting to drawing to conceptual practice—a mirror or a pun, a rhetorical strategy, a refusal to be fixed. The value of this art lies in its ability to change.

—Katie Geha, 2011

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curated by Katie Geha

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(cover)

Frampton, Hollis
Lee Lozano

1963
black-and-white photograph
8x10"

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
© Estate of Hollis Frampton

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The Blanton



