

ABATTOIR

World is a Word **Suzanne Silver and Luke Stettner**

World is a Word is taken from a 2009 Charles Bernstein lecture at the University of Chicago (parts of which would later find their way into his essay *The Truth in Pudding*). Bernstein's writing is wholly democratic, multiform, and chaotic, drawing on nearly everything in service of "the poetics of bewilderment." We liked this phrase because we found an affinity in its essence and its alliteration: how it uses language to trip over itself.

The primer for our work — shared and individually — is a dedication to language as a system of poetics and aesthetics; as a tool of intervention and ingenuity rather than a solution-machine. The project between us began long before this show took form, as we began to exchange our notebooks; both held lists full of words, each determined to conjure images. Our sources blended language on McCarthyism, manuals for learning language, idioms, sound and songs, lamentations, puns, light and shadow, time (numbers, calendars), things we overheard on the news from our cars or studios. Patterns surfaced as we both gravitated towards language that expressed patterns of distress, conflict, communication.

And we tripped all the time, in the spirit of Bernstein, not knowing where we were going and liked it that way. Suzanne's PAINT became PAIN+ in error; then it became an engine. It was an exercise in call-and-response, a game of telephone. We eschewed instruction in service of responsiveness and tumult in service of patience. And because we made this collaborative work during the pandemic, everything was done alone and apart (save the work in the darkroom, the last piece). Suzanne would walk a sloped mile to Luke's home and leave and pick up bagged artwork on the doorstep

Images and words can be one thing, inextricable. Nonrepresentation is not the same as abstraction. Reiteration and nonsense: these are methods of grasping for meaning and reorganizing knowledge, together.