

Simeen Farhat: The Shapes and Colors of Sense

By Brett Bourbon

I once wrote a poem called “The Fate of Seeming”. Simeen Farhat, for her new exhibition, has turned it into two sculptures, two word bubbles, one called “Word-Bug”, and the other “Poetic Muse”. My poem found itself as two new kinds of wonder. This is what Farhat does—she turns words into wonders of geometry and grace, puzzles of form, shadows of sense. It is as if someone took your breath and made it into a gesture.

The challenge of Farhat’s work is also the source of its power, because it produces two reactions in counter-point. The first is a visceral and powerful attractiveness—the seductive charm of words mazed into patterns of promise and suggestiveness. The second is a confusion about where and how we stand towards our own attraction to such charms. These two reactions prompt questions. What is offered by turning words into shape and curvilinear filigree? How can I take up this art? How can anyone? And I want to take it up. I am both held and resisted by what I see.

Farhat’s new work steps beyond what she has done before/ she has incorporated into her word-bubbles a dynamic of color, built from a restricted palette and exploiting the translucence of the resin she uses to create her word forms. She creates shadows of color, and diffusions of color tones within the patterns of words. She constructs degrees of translucence. This effect is heightened, in other sculptures, by the way words and phrases are stacked slightly displaced one after the other fan-like in patterns of three or four. This produces not only shadows of color and line, but turns shadows into echoes within space, producing a kind of depth that both recedes from us and billows towards us.

Imagine speaking some sentences—let’s say, the following few sentences:

The Fate of Seeming

You don’t want God. Nor do I. Want God. Yet love seems; Belief seems; X seems. And fear, whatever fear, we fear. And all—I am not wanting all, But there seems an all Unhurt, unhurt, and fierce.

As you speak these sentences you begin to modify the sounds of the words. You find and develop patterns, encouraging further distortions, but all derived from the original sounds of these words. You repeat this procedure until you produce a melody, a song out of the original word-sounds. In doing this, you would not be setting the poem to music. Instead, the music you made would emerge out of the very sounds of the original sentence—a music from within the sounds of the language. This is what Simeen Farhat has done visually, orthographically, kinetically—making out of a poem, out of its natural orthographic forms, a visual melody that is not an illustration of the poem but a new form of art.