

# York Chang

## Zero Sum Games

Private View: 6-8pm, 19 January 2017  
Exhibition Dates: 20 January - 18 February 2017  
Open Tuesday to Saturday 11 - 6pm or by appointment

*Never argue with a man who buys ink by the barrel and paper by the ton.*

The old American adage recalls an era in which newspapers and their owners wielded overwhelming power and influence over public opinion. Since the advent of the internet, the last two decades have witnessed a steady decline in the readership of printed newspapers, instigating a thinning of staff and editorial content to increase profit margins. York Chang's work *cmyk* consists of four 55 gallon barrels filled with printer ink, watered down to the specific ratio corresponding to the percentage loss of density in editorial content at the four leading American newspapers over the past four decades.

York Chang's exhibition *Zero Sum Games* evaluates the status of language against a contemporary backdrop characterised by an abundance of information and disinformation; in which belief defies fact and is readily substituted for data, and language and images serve as malleable currency on an ideological battleground. *Zero Sum Games* opens a window onto several landscapes of communication where institutional power is expressed. Unpacking contemporary systems of language that operate as much to obfuscate meaning as to proliferate it, Chang exposes their potential for fostering counter-narratives or alternate histories.

*Summary of Evidence* is composed of an expansive grid of 500 legal documents. The set of documents are a readymade, products of the U.S. legal system gone awry: they consist of declassified charging papers used by the United States at the Combatant Status Review Tribunal from 2004 onwards, which form the sole legal justification for holding 500 Guantanamo Bay detainees without trial, in violation of international law. As a set of documents, they are remarkable in the uniformity of format and the extent to which the repetitious "form" allegations are devoid of substantiating evidence. The documents suggest a superficial system of law that relies upon a combination of volume and complexity for its authoritative claims of veracity. To this large grid of documents, Chang makes a single intervention, fabricating his own facts in a charging paper for a combatant, and inserting the document surreptitiously back into the grid. By not revealing which document contains the artist's fictional edits, Chang quietly calls into question every document in the grid, and the reliability of the entire government archive.

The language of the law is also the focal point of *self-portrait*: a cease and desist letter written by Chang in his concurrent role as civic defense lawyer in California, on behalf of an artist against a landlord who sought to evict her. The artist had been occupying a foreclosed home as an artistic action, seeking to create use value from a residence that had been allowed by the bank to remain unoccupied for years. Most of the written content has been stricken out to reveal a hidden message within the existing language, neatly capturing the intersection and tension between law and art making in Chang's practice.

New works on paper are exhibited alongside, constructed out of fragments of captions and headlines gathered by Chang daily. The works excavate the poetic, open-ended potential of language embedded in the spectacle journalism that drives modern news production.

Finally, a monitor plays grainy archive footage of an anonymous performance, in which a hand holding a scalpel methodically sifts through a pile of assorted letters, gradually arranged to reveal the phrase: *language is the first conspiracy*.

York Chang lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. He received both his J.D. and B.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles. In 2014, Chang was awarded a California Community Foundation Getty Fellowship for Visual Art. Recent solo exhibitions include Commonwealth & Council (Los Angeles, CA), Greene Exhibitions (Los Angeles, CA) and 18th Street Arts Center (Los Angeles). He has exhibited with the Fellows for Contemporary Art (FOCA) (Los Angeles, CA), the Guggenheim Gallery at Chapman University (Orange, CA), MASS MoCA (North Adams, MA), Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) (Los Angeles, CA), the Armory Center for the Arts (Los Angeles, CA) and the Torrance Art Museum (Torrance, CA).

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