

ArtSlant
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Signing “I”

— By HONG-AN TRUONG

Upon walking into Robert Beck’s installation at CRG Gallery, one is confronted with the vast open space of the gallery, its stark illumination, and its cement floors covered in a maze-like text pattern scrawled in white chalk. The repeating statements on the floor include the title of the exhibition, How am I to sign myself as well as variations on the question, and the rhythm and sounds of words like, “saw myself signing,” “hollow am I two signs,” and “how low am I signing.” Appropriately, the words are slowly being erased as viewers shuffle through the exhibit, effectively effacing both the text and the artist.



Beck’s installation includes forty-four intimately sized “diagnostic” drawings, created based on drawings from patients of psychoanalyst John Buck in his book, *The Tree-House-Person-Technique*. Each drawing includes a typed excerpt of Buck’s evaluation and interpretation of the patient’s representation of a tree, house, or person, and sometimes, a dream. Evaluations are rife with allusions to the doubt-riddled process of art-making itself, and to the tenuous relationship between the Artist’s id, ego, and external world in statements such as, “The tree is finished and he likes what he has drawn,” and “She hated the scribble because the things she saw in it were not ‘pretty,’ and ‘beauty,’ she told him, is all she cares about.” Beck’s drawings themselves are quietly rendered, and in frame after frame after frame, one remembers that it is already Beck’s interpretation of another’s drawings that we are now interpreting ourselves, compelling us to question the relationship between artist, art object, and viewer: who is the artist? who is the interpreter? who is the analyst and who is the analysand? In the cacophony of questions, much like the words on the floor being unwittingly rubbed out, the “I” disappears, lost in the identification of oneself in others.