

# ARTFORUM

By Emily Hall

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## Daniel Lefcourt

TAXTER & SPENGMANN

A lot can happen in the gap between an artist's initial inspiration and a project's eventual outcome, and the objects in Daniel Lefcourt's recent show dwell precisely, if opaquely, in that space. In his recent exhibition at Taxter & Spengemann, Lefcourt presented an array of Minimal-ish constructions, most of them assemblages of narrow strips of wood mounted on the wall. Many of these strips are covered in solid black acrylic, but narrow unpainted bands divide the surfaces of some into squares, while slanted lines crisscross others.

The differences between the works lie, for the most part, in the spaces between these narrow boards, or the lack thereof; sometimes they're laid flush against each other and sometimes they're regularly spaced, with various amounts of wall visible between them like the page visible between lines of text. And lines of text are what these works most resemble. Although Lefcourt has arranged them in an uncanny simulation of a Minimalist investigation of variations on a constant form, they also clearly suggest paragraphs justified left, right, or center, single- or double-spaced, laid out, in some cases, with room left to accommodate an image (or, in the case of one work, a gallery door).

In a statement, Lefcourt reveals that this series is the result of a double-barreled obfuscation that began when he discovered an online trove of photographs. The photographs depicted the layout—on pre-digital pasteup boards—of a newspaper page containing an article about a scandal involving diverted funds and a cultural institution. However, these images were later, without explanation, removed and replaced with a generic error symbol (a blank square with an x in the corner). As a result of these two murky events—the scandal itself and the removal of the images—the artist's opacity begins to feel more purposely mimetic, as well as hinging on a pun: Each "line" represented by a painted strip represents text that described a cover-up but was itself eventually covered up. Lefcourt mines this allusion to censored documents in the exhibition's invitation card, which depicts a paragraph with each line covered in black tape.

The works' titles are tied to fragments that Lefcourt was able to gather before the archive's mysterious disappearance, and they rather playfully suggest a mechanism for "reading" the work. *Concision* (all



works 2006) is made up of tightly spaced lines; in *Reiteration/Obstruction*, the lines creep up on each other and overlap. The larger-scale *Breach of Contract (Total Nonperformance) & Clarification* has a tiny "paragraph" set off to the right-hand side that could represent either the breach or the clarification, while the slant lines in *Procurement Apparatus* hint at the undermining of a straightforward process, and the slender, painted boards simply leaning against the wall like a collection of walking sticks in *Separate Inquiry* could be an oblique commentary on the creative possibilities of recontextualization.

The work doesn't appear to direct any criticism at the putative scandal (although, when Lefcourt writes, "Perhaps what I have stumbled upon is a useful methodology—answers are provided to the wrong questions, statements are issued as a type of evasion, and sudden changes in position are conspicuously combined with incessant repetition," the political allusion is clear). Rather, it has the air of something taken apart, reassembled with patient curiosity, investigated to see what might appear at the limits of its meaning, in its negative spaces, between its very lines. This is text given a visual structure that reflects an absolute value of content without having to reveal the content itself, showing language to be, as Wittgenstein would have it, both picture and game.

—Emily Hall