

# Theta

## **Nancy Dwyer**

How About Never?

May 18 - June 24, 2023

Theta is proud to present Nancy Dwyer's first solo exhibition in New York in eight years.

*How About Never?* compiles painting, sculpture and animation from 1997 to now, highlighting capsules of the artist's longstanding dedication to the production of words as images. Dwyer rose to prominence in the late 1970s alongside a group of artists who became known as the Pictures Generation. After a brief stint as a commercial sign maker, however, her practice evolved uniquely from the canon reinforced by her peers. Using everyday language as her central subject matter, Dwyer established her own path through deconstruction. Four decades on, her dynamic manipulations of aphorisms, buzzwords, and thought-terminating clichés function as visual springboards in the physical realm for a kind of resonant subjective play.

The big, bold graphics of Dwyer's one-to-three word paintings, multimedia, and sculptures evoke familiar things like title cards, ads, or domestic objects. They're easily enterable, touting a kind of darkly humorous accessibility in the vernacular of our media-fueled mass culture. They are slick things, handmade with imperfect precision, as though produced for a trade show with vague sales ambitions. The implication of mechanical reproduction begs comparison to the models of her Pop forebears, but Dwyer's repros have no "originals"—they're hypostatization of a textual imaginary, buzzing thoughts rendered concrete.

At the center of the gallery hangs the 2013 sculpture *Everybody's Angry*, a floating cluster of fifteen pastel papier-mâché balls spelling out their title. The spheres range in scale and placement as though caught in the act of tumbling, their form and ensuant sentiment inspired by a lottery advertisement she came across. Recognizing the specific source and subtext of each piece is not essential for interpretation here, however. Dwyer's heterogeneous work plays with the location of meaning, prompting viewers to explore the periphery of what's being said—or just to enjoy things as they simply appear.

Dwyer's interest in specific words is in opening them up to association or negotiation. She's as much concerned with their cultural contexts as she is with their formal capacities. In the 1998 painting *Uhuh*, some semblance of a wafting sheet of film in a deep green ether is punched through along its border with an endless chain of letters: U and H, forming a graphic embodiment of suspended thought, or perhaps lazy affirmation—or wait, is that negation? Nearby, the minute-long digital animation *Hasbeen Wannabe*, 2002, plays on loop: seven congruent letters transforming from one word to the other and back again. Dwyer began teaching herself 3D animation in the late '90s, seeking further realms to push her thoughts into form. Time, here, is the crucial element, collapsing the often neglected notion of "now" into a garbled ambiguity between desperate aspiration and faded glory.

*How About Never?*, an answer posed as a question, could refer to many things. It might allude to the way effective planning can feel like an insurmountable challenge. It might be deployed as a cynical front, a hostile rejection of engagement. It could be the assumption of a late career artist who moves across the

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country to deal with the harsh realities of life that disappointment is to be expected. Dwyer's latest body of work is a set of paintings on curving wood panels that seem to dance off the wall on TV swivel mounts. The show's titular phrase and others that have been absorbed into our pores via prolonged media exposure bend across their color field "screens". In perhaps the most overt tribute yet to the source of so many of her ideas, Dwyer explores new channels for expressing the universal and personal.

**Nancy Dwyer** (b. 1954, New York) lives and works in Santa Fe, NM. Dwyer has exhibited internationally since the early 1980s. Known as a core member of the Pictures Generation, coined after the seminal 'Pictures' exhibition in 1977 at Artists Space, Dwyer has refined a conceptual practice utilizing text in her sculptures, paintings, public commissions, and multimedia installations. Dwyer was a co-founder of Hallwalls, the non-profit organization created as a cooperative for artists in Buffalo, NY in 1974. Dwyer has exhibited in major museums, among them notably: a solo retrospective at the Fisher Landau Center for Art in New York in 2013; 'The Pictures Generation' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2009; and 'Bad Girls' at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in 1994. She has participated in exhibitions and biennials at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; MOCA, Los Angeles; the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston; The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Kunstverein Frankfurt, Germany; and National Museum of Art, Osaka, among others. Her work is held in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Burchfield Penney Art Center, The Art Institute of Chicago, DESTE Foundation in Athens, among others.