



The works of Larry Mullins signal a rare moment where the fragility of language is met with an equally rigorous and meticulous handling of painting. When presented with Mullins' pieces, a viewer cannot help but sense that she is seeing words that were once familiar for the very first time, as they are re-imagined, twisted, contorted, and fully realized anew. A true devil for detail, Mullins spent between two and three years

crafting his newest body of work, "New Baggage," which marks his first solo show in six years. While the works are handled with a calculated precision, the artist's hand seems invisible as the words run on an optical treadmill fading and returning to the forefront, which makes viewing the artist's work a beautiful game of optics.

Mullins writes with paint, thus his practice is deeply informed by the integration of his own narratives, which he refers to as "verses that also function as song lyrics, which I combine with guitar and harmonica." Mullins then manipulates those "verses"—which vary from 8, 12, or 16 lines—with a mixture of font types including Medieval, Victorian, and 3D. Mullins decided to use Medieval typography "for its authority, grace, and emotional range. The Victorian for its optimism and rhythm, and 3D font for its bulk and depth." The letters are then carefully rendered onto paper using a projector, which allows Mullins to sight, trace, and hand paint each word. Often painting over other words to create a visual tug of war, Mullins suggests that "the edited words underneath have a relationship with each other, while creating additional depth and history." Recalling signage from Barnum & Bailey, religious scripture, and graffiti tagging, Mullins uses rectangular pieces of large paper with oil, oil stick, spray paint, and alkyd resin, transforming flattened surfaces into illuminated manuscripts of the modern age.

Having lived in Los Angeles for nearly three years, Mullins considers himself a "hybrid." Over the years, he has lived in numerous cities and locations including Provincetown, Massachusetts, where he was awarded a Resident Fellowship at The Fine Arts Work Center in 1997; he went to Denmark after receiving a Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant in 1998. Mullins then moved on to work in Park Slope, Brooklyn and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Each city affected his aesthetic, as he explains, "Before moving to Santa Fe from New York City, the work was predominately vertical with subverted symmetry. There were lots of lateral movement and degrees of associations between forms." Now living in Los Angeles, Mullins describes the "pull" he feels in LA. "It has more to do with the story building and narratives, and I primarily work autobiographically. LA is a language town. From visual arts, to Hollywood, to rhetoric about the scorned and adorned. Words are a type of fuel. The backdrop to all this is a continuous sunny day."

*She's Banged Up*, one of the eight new works in "New Baggage," is just one instance of the playful relationship between words and the meaning they denote. Words are not haphazardly strewn about the paper, rather they are

carefully considered not only for their meaning or meanings, but also for their visual impact. For instance "bound" appears in bold 3D type, above "baggage" which is painted in Medieval lettering. The two words are coupled together and while they are presented in disparate styles, the notion of "bound baggage" resonates, perhaps speaking to the greater narrative of the show. Mullins says that the paintings are "like an arm or a hand, another extremity. Like a piece of myself." Toward the bottom of the piece the "90212" zip code appears, alluding to the artist's current residence in Beverly Hills. While his locale may presently exist in that zip code, *She's Banged Up* leaves us with the resounding message that "bags remain."

—A. MORET

Larry Mullins' solo show "New Baggage" was on view from October 30 – December 18, 2010, at Blythe Projects in Culver City, CA.

[www.blytheprojects.net](http://www.blytheprojects.net)

ABOVE LEFT:  
LARRY MULLINS IN HIS STUDIO

BELOW:  
"SHE'S BANGED UP"  
2009 - 2010  
OIL, SPRAY PAINT AND ALKYD RESIN ON PAPER ON PANEL  
47" x 41"  
PHOTO: COURTESY BLYTHE PROJECTS

