

SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY

LONGFORMS

Greg Smith: VOID-AS-LANGUAGE

Becket Gourlay



Installation view at Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC | Photo: Adam Reich

When encountering the word 'void,' one considers its astronomical application, a black, all-encompassing nothingness in which matter ceases to be. You imagine total darkness, unfathomable cold, the absence of gravity or air. In *Every Void of dwmlc.net*, Greg Smith leans into nothingness literally, the gaps or spaces between. Here, the void is not a nonphysical space, but a quality of being, "void of." And in these voids, Smith sees much potential.



VOID-GRAMMAR-OATH, 2025

The inspiration for Smith's most recent exploration of language and systems of communication is the constructed legalese "QUANTUM-GRAMMAR," invented by pseudolegal theorist and former tool-and-die welder David Wynn Miller, or when stylized per QUANTUM-GRAMMAR's hyperspecific punctuation, :David-Wynn: Miller. After lengthy court proceedings involving a divorce and the ensuing child custody battle (a purported 67 hearings, according to Miller, in which he appeared pro se and lost every single one), Miller felt cheated by the existing American legal system and its deference to jargon and linguistics. The result is a nearly incomprehensible language that insists it is the opposite. Miller created QUANTUM-GRAMMAR to exclude any language that did not have an immutable

meaning. Nouns, safe in their singularity, abound, while adjectives and qualifiers are nowhere to be seen.

It should be mentioned that the language has direct ties to various fringe political movements, of which Miller was either a member of or acted as legal representation for before his passing in 2018. These include the sovereign citizen movement, anti-vaxxers, tax protestors, and others whose views or actions disregard consensus reality. It should also be mentioned that QUANTUM-GRAMMAR has never found success in a court of law, yet it is still used to this day.

What unites the exhibition and acts as Smith's entry point into realizing the opaque text as three-dimensional objects is Miller's commitment to "The Void." Anytime a concept that did not align with Miller's anti-subjective objective appears within QUANTUM-GRAMMAR, Miller voids it. Smith was intrigued by this approach and began to consider how this textual Gordian knot could manifest physically. Material considerations throughout the exhibition point to Smith's interest in doubling, creating tension between opposing ideas.



MODIFICATION-VOID-MEANING, 2025



NOW-TIME-FOREVER-VOID, 2025

Take *NOW-TIME-FOREVER-VOID*, for example. The work is a large-scale textile piece, one of three in the exhibition that is as much defined by the many seams and junctions of multicolored fabrics that compose the works as they are about the gaping holes in said fabric. A keen eye can discern that these gaps suggest text, each a letter or character, yet their absence makes them illegible. This specific work is visually bottom-heavy, a gauzy and delicate upper half contrasted by a piece of Smith's "VOID-WEAR" (more on that later) hooked into the fabric, pulling down and distorting the sheer fabric above. The other two works, *MODIFICATION-VOID-MEANING* and *VOID OF THE POSITIONAL*, are similarly riddled with letter-voids and overrun by loose threads that dangle from every visible seam and tattered edge. Not only does this create great textural diversity, but it also seems to be a physical manifestation of Smith's interests. Loose ends indicate where language falters and fumbles, literally trailing off, while seams represent the piecing together of ideas, where disparate things become one.

Tent-poles are used variously throughout, both as a method of structure, supporting and suspending fabrics and papers, and the opposite, rendered useless in amalgams of other materials that require no support at all. In *VOID-LODIAL*, they jut randomly from the assemblage, creating angles



VOID-LODIAL, 2025

and armature that bear no weight. Closer inspection of the work reminds one of a familiar shape, that of the continental U.S.A. The tent-poles also take the form of the familiar folding chair, seen in *VOID-DOUBLE*. Smits explains that the chairs are objects reminiscent of the bureaucratic trappings of the court systems in which QUANTUM-GRAMMAR is to be employed.



TITLE-AS-VOID, 2025

Another symbol of bureaucracy included in the exhibition is the suit jacket, indicative of the suggested dress code one follows when appearing in court. Dubbed "VOID-WEAR" by Smith, three of these jackets hang in the gallery, two at eye-level on coat hangers, and one draped far out of reach. *VOID OF ANY, ALL, OTHER* and *VOID-CLOSURES* are made from translucent textiles and materials, each with their own collection of letter-voids and loose threads, while *TITLE-AS-VOID* is constructed from aluminum and fiberglass mesh. Many pockets cover the blazer; each filled with rocks. Whether by weight, material discomfort, or lack of opacity, these items of "clothing" reject wearability, their form directly opposed to their function.

Other wall-mounted works *EURYDICE IS WITH THIS CLAIM OF A HUMANITY-VOID*, *VOID-GRAMMAR-OATH*, and *PARSE-SYNTAX-GRAMMAR WITH THE VOID* are censored and jumbled, the original meaning of their source text rendered near-incomprehensible, beyond the distinct preservation of words such as negative, void, contract, and isolation. Smith's statement about the exhibition, his *GRAMMAR-VOID-OATH*, receives its own redaction, further muddying meaning and intent.



VOID-BAIL VOID-MEANING, 2025

In *VOID-BAIL VOID-MEANING*, a silhouette of two people engaging in a playful piggyback ride is surrounded by patches of layered translucency, obscuring the color-and-ink work beneath. The use of collapsible frames for these wall-mounted works is almost jarringly traditional, as if these obscure and impassable concepts can be constrained conventionally, yet their ability to be folded up and stored indicates Smith's consideration of modularity and the impermanence of language.

Silhouettes reappear in *EURYDICE IS WITH THIS CLAIM OF A HUMANITY-VOID*, *VOID-GRAMMAR-OATH*, displaying two people in profile, seated and facing one another. Within their void-black forms is more verbiage: "The Person Divorcing Him" on the left, and "The Person Auditing Him" on the right. The mention of the mythological character Eurydice stands out, the only folkloric reference in the exhibition. Yet, when considering that the genesis of QUANTUM-GRAMMAR was a divorce proceeding, perhaps the story of a man losing his wife and being unable to get her back doesn't seem so out of place.



EURYDICE IS WITH THIS CLAIM OF A HUMANITY-VOID, 2025



MURMURS AND SOUNDS WITH A VOID, 2025

The centerpiece of the exhibition is the kinetic installation *MURMURS AND SOUNDS WITH A VOID*. Elements that appear throughout the exhibition, ranging from tent-poles, sheer garments, excised fabric, and printouts of the titular website, all assemble on a wooden armature that oscillates on the whim of a motor coded by Smith to go off every 8 or so minutes. The structure creaks and whirrs to life, slamming to one side then the other as its sundry attachments collide, tangle, and jostle, creating a symphony suggestive of near-collapse. The movements of the piece, in their repetitive and flailing nature, have an air of futility to them, nodding to the obvious shortcomings of QUANTUM-GRAMMAR, but also more broadly, the

ways communication can fail us. Yet Smith's choice of bright colors, nostalgic assemblage, and playful materials indicate an optimistic view of such failure and the lessons to be found within it.

The exhibition is summed up most succinctly by the words writ large on the wall that greets visitors upon entry: "Creator of QUANTUM-GRAMMAR, he fought the courts. Creator of 112 VOIDS, he sought certainty + made everything incomprehensible."



Installation view at Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC | Photo: Adam Reich



GREG SMITH (b. 1970), in addition to receiving his MFA from Hunter College in 2005, graduated with a PhD in Physics from Harvard University in 2000. The artist is well-qualified and known for staging exhibitions that consider the possibilities and problems presented by our current technological deluge. He builds installations using an amalgam of unlikely materials and processes that trace contemporary limits of language, ownership, and governance. Through his enigmatic work, the artist navigates how systems of communication are constructed, dispersed, and convoluted. Smith was awarded a Guggenheim Grant in 2013 and has had solo exhibitions at the Grinnell College Museum of Art, Grinnell; Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg; the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio; and White Columns, NYC. His work has been featured in exhibitions at The Margulies Collection at the Warehouse, Miami, FL; Zolla Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL; Marlborough, London, United Kingdom; and the Museum of Modern Art, NYC.