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Nathan Coley's first solo exhibition in South Korea includes a selection of important works emblematic of his practice: a series of signature large-scale illuminated text works; related small-scale lightbox works, and a group of sculptures representing buildings from different faiths. The exhibition's title is taken from a phrase by the Humanist playwright, critic and philosopher George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), who said that 'The Golden Rule is that there are no golden rules.'

Coley is interested in the idea of 'public' space, and his practice explores the ways in which architecture becomes invested – and reinvested – with meaning. Across a range of media Coley investigates what the built environment reveals about the people it surrounds and how the social and individual response to it is in turn culturally conditioned. Using the readymade to take from and resituate ideas and images in the world, Coley addresses the ritual forms we use to articulate our beliefs – from hand-held placards and public signage to sacred places and sanctuaries. Whether listing in illuminated letters the five 'Rights of Man' under Islam or rendering buildings from Giotto's frescoes as signs of protest, his work frequently turns the specific into the general, thereby testing its function as a form of social representation.

On entering the gallery, the visitor first encounters a group of Parade Sculptures (2015), scattered as if discarded by a passing protest march. This sense of something having just happens means that the exhibition space is immediately activated as a site of meaning. Yet as with all Coley's work, ambiguity is key. What might these protestors have been agitating against? Coley's sculptures bear small architectural models of buildings depicted in Giotto's frescoes from the Church of Francesco in Assisi (which are thronged by threatening demons).

Coley has said of the Parade Sculptures:

"I like to think of the [them] as what Joseph Beuys referred to as 'action objects'. I want them to look like they have just been used, then lent against the wall after having been on a march or street protest. Monuments to small public acts. They are extremely heavy and very beautiful. That contradiction is everything to their success."

The Parade Sculptures lie at the entrance to a space containing three monumental text works. Since 2006 Coley's text works have been exhibited widely in museums, galleries, biennials and public spaces around the world, including Tate Modern in London, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh and Auckland Art Gallery in New Zealand. Using words and phrases 'borrowed from the world' the works are richly ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations which might vary according to context and the viewer's disposition.

Placed in carefully chosen locations – including the heart of London's financial district, a former Nazi swimming pool in Germany or by the historic docks in Liverpool – both word and site are changed through their partnership. For Coley, this active relationship between text and site is both an opportunity for reflection and a provocation.

The text work triptych included here was first exhibited at the 19th Sydney Biennale in 2014. The source is an axiom in George Bernard Shaw's 1921 play *In the Beginning: B.C. 4004*, an allegorical tale set at the dawn of creation:

"Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last you create what you will."

In Coley's work, freed of their original allegorical context and divided so they can be read in any order, the three phrases become alternatively a celebration of individual free will and creativity, or an exhortation to positive action.

Camouflage Church, Mosque and Synagogue (2006) is one of a series of works inspired by a visit to Jerusalem, where the holy sites for three great world religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – exist in close proximity yet remain divided (and in a sense, invisible to each other) by faith.

Coley has often used the language of the architectural model in his work. He says:

"I'm fascinated by the idea of 'the architectural model' – the scaled down form made before actual construction. A hand-sized sculpture for presentation. An inexpensive quickly made object fabricated to secure massive funding. Models created with hope, which sail close to rejection that are waiting be chosen."

Here, Coley's model buildings are generic, stripped of details that might identify them with a specific building or location. Further, the 'dazzle' patterning is derived from camouflage developed in the Second World War yet also references the striped architecture of churches such as the Renaissance cathedrals in Siena or Orvieto.

Palace (2015), first exhibited in a city square in Bruges in 2015 as part of the architecture Triennale, seems at first to be a celebration of the values and goals that underpin Western Capitalist society. However, the five words are in fact the five key 'rights of man' according to some interpretations of Islam. By reducing these core beliefs to single words – Life, Mind, Belief, Land, Wealth – Coley provokes us to question their meaning and how they relate you each other.

Is the right to 'Wealth' for example about material possessions, experience or the basic access to food and water? Does 'Land' articulate a right to territory or a more abstract notion of 'home'?

Coley's decision to use Shaw's paradoxical phrase as his exhibition title suggests, as does all his work, the primacy of free will and stresses the importance that we make our own minds up in any given situation.

