

ART & MUSEUMS

AROUND THE
GALLERIES

It's a Strain to Hear Murmurs

SHARON MIZOTA

To say that Antonio Vega Macotela's first solo exhibition in the U.S. speaks softly is to miss the point.

The Mexican artist's spare installation at Steve Turner Contemporary highlights acts of communication that occur just below the surface of everyday life, in particular a distorted writing system used by Mexican drug traffickers, and the secret dreams of soldiers. The results are intriguing, but in the end, perhaps a little too quiet.



Macotela placed ads in Mexican newspapers using an anamorphic writing system: the letters in the ads can only be read from an extreme angle. In the exhibition, the papers are pinned to the wall, so reading the ads involves kneeling (cushions are provided), and pressing your body uncomfortably

against the vertical surface. Macotela succeeds in manipulating the viewer into a penitent posture, but the reward for our submission is slight. The messages, still rather difficult to read, are all versions of the same sentence in Spanish, translated: "Here, this way even, I murmur." There is no secret to be learned, only the recognition that another level of communication exists beneath the public babble of the news.

The show's sole video work is similarly frustrating: a series of closeups of lips mouthing inaudible words. We're told the speakers are soldiers in the Mexican military recounting their dreams, but why can't the dreams be spoken aloud? Are they too horrific? Too personal? Like the newspapers, the video draws us in, only to shut us out. On a certain level, this makes sense: exposing the underground means that it's no longer underground. But is it enough simply to know it's there?

-- Sharon Mizota