Too often, theoretical approaches to looking at art interfere with the viewer’s ability simply to see; theoreticians go looking for objects sympathetic with their framework of choice. Alexandra Grant’s text-based paintings, sculptures, and installations complicate this procedure a little. On one hand, her work is so theory laden that it would be disingenuous to ignore the relationship. On the other hand, the debt to theory is so patent that it challenges the viewer to think beyond one-to-one text-image correspondences and to consider instead how visual art extrapolates or perhaps even departs from textual theory. Grant’s understanding of how reader and text interrelate is indebted to the poststructuralist theorist Hélène Cixous, and specifically to Cixous's contention that amorphous concepts like sexual identity can be formed and re-formed through language. Identity, for Cixous, becomes manifest in the variable space between a concept and the language employed to describe it. Similarly, Grant imagines language not as a static system of signification but as a shape-shifting concept available for modification through abstraction and recombination. In paintings like let’s (after Michael Joyce’s “ladders,” 2004), 2005, the playful, Technicolor constellation of words that compose the work—each written backward and inscribed within a cartoonlike bubble—require such close looking (not just reading) and are so trenchantly resistant to narrative that the viewer slowly and somewhat laboriously discovers each word as an image. This protracted act of “reading as looking” means that one processes words more slowly, thoughtfully, and associatively—no mean feat. Grant’s visual strategies—her images of language—activate the space between sign and signified, making words more slippery, malleable, and richly suggestive.

— Christopher Bedford