

Bright Ideas: Clever Neon Signs by Olivia Steele



"Cleverness and satire are two quite unexpected concepts to come across in neon signs; there really isn't a way to make "OPEN 24 HOURS" or "VACANCY" sound more intelligently entertaining when you're a business owner on a budget. Thankfully, these works by Olivia Steele are not attempting to lure customers into an establishment that might have roaches and bad plumbing. Instead, she creates fascinating works of art by utilizing the flashy form of writing in ironic, and intriguing ways. Born in Nashville, Steele now lives between London and Berlin, where she displays her work and participates in exhibitions such as London's Frieze Art Fair. On her website, Steele's work is described as "short stories" that are visually stunning with sharp expressions in neon handwriting against differing backgrounds that range from cityscapes to vintage photographs. "The juxtaposition of the neon statement and the environment it is placed in challenges conventional semiotics and evokes a wide range of interpretation." With wit that borders on the likes of humorists such as Woody Allen, Steele's works hold a mirror up to society – albeit a funky, fun-house mirror. Steele herself characterizes art as something that is relative to each of the many different individuals who come across her work, and she enjoys seeing their reactions to the off-beat productions she generates."