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ART IN REVIEW

By KEN JOHNSON

'Versions: Perversions, Subversions and Verse'

Ubu Gallery

16 East 78th Street

Through Jan. 16

Richard Tipping, an artist and poet from Australia, operates along the blurry boundaries between the verbal and the visual, creating amusing, sometimes illuminating works of concrete poetry. In this extensive selection of works from three decades, words are embodied in stone, molded glass, carved wood and found objects.

Some pieces are primarily typographical compositions, like a wooden bowl bearing a circle of carved, gilded letters spelling "Hear the art," a phrase in which the words "heart," "earth" and "hearth" are embedded. But Mr. Tipping's most effective device is to alter familiar types of signs. A hexagonal red stop sign says "Go." Standard black-and-white one-way traffic signs turn out on closer examination to read "one day." A square white sign displays a red circle above the word "ozone," a mysteriously ambiguous warning.

Mr. Tipping also ingeniously manipulates familiar commercial signs, as in a re-creation of an old Kentucky Fried Chicken poster in which he substitutes the image of Sigmund Freud for Colonel Sanders and adds a profane, Oedipally suggestive slogan. Such creations may be more clever than profound, but at best Mr. Tipping's wordplay sneakily interrupts our everyday habits of perception and cognition to mentally tonic effect.

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