

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

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Protest Art in the Era of Trump

By M.H. Miller

Six boundary-pushing artists talk about protesting current events through their work. The intention is to galvanize and educate, but reactions to the art can be as thorny as the issues the work addresses.



"Sunny Day White Power," 2016, acrylic, cellophane tape, charcoal, collage, gel medium, ink. Latex mask, oil paint, oil stick, painter's tape, push pins and rope on newspaper on shower curtain in artist's frame, 90 3/4" x 74" x 24".
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Pope.L

The Chicago-based artist Pope.L began making his series of paintings called “Skin Set” two decades ago. In the beginning, they examined the absurdity of racial stereotypes through the use of crude, occasionally inscrutable slogans like “Black People Are Cropped” or “White People Are Angles on Fire.” This painting, “**Sunny Day White Power**,” an entry in that series, was started during the administration of George H. W. Bush, and returned to shortly before the time Trump announced his candidacy.

“I was excited about Obama, but at the same time I was wondering how the machine of conventional politics would nullify his impact. You could say I was suspicious. I’m the kind of person who sees clouds on the horizon. Or smoke. There’s always this sense that there’s more to do. And we became complacent. Otherwise I don’t think what happened on Nov. 8 would have happened. It’s almost as if we thought black people — or President Obama — could solve everything. It’s about some fantasy we had — this Caramel Camelot. And so now we are where we are.

“When George W. Bush was re-elected, that really threw people. It galvanized them. In some ways we’re in the same place with Trump. His election might not be the worst thing in the world in that it will cause people to stop being so lazy, myself included. It’s a choice to be energized, because the other choice is a depressing, pointless way of looking at it. I choose to think we can actually do something with this material called failure.” The Chicago-based artist Pope.L began making his series of paintings called “Skin Set” two decades ago. In the beginning, they examined the absurdity of racial stereotypes through the use of crude, occasionally inscrutable slogans like “Black People Are Cropped” or “White People Are Angles on Fire.” This painting, “Sunny Day White Power,” an entry in that series, was started during the administration of George H.W. Bush, and returned to shortly before the time Trump announced his candidacy.