

ARTFORUM

William Pope.L

As told to Zachary Cahill

February 20, 2015



William Pope.L, *Trinket*, 2008, American flag, flagpole, finial, industrial fans, lighting system, dimensions variable. Installation view, Grand Arts, Kansas City, 2008. Photo: E.G. Shempf. © Pope.L

A mainstay of performance and installation art since the 1970s, William Pope.L will open the largest museum show of his work to date at the Geffen Contemporary at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, on March 20, 2015. Trinket, 2008, the centerpiece work, and also the title of the show, is a large-scale American flag that will be blown continuously during the museum's public hours by a bank of industrial fans. Here, Pope.L discusses the show, which runs until June 28, 2015.

AN EXHIBITION TITLE can function in various ways: a prompt, pr, or a means to point at something far or near. A broken horizon the sentence incompletus . . . An unused title I entertained was: "Polis or the Garden or Human Nature in Action" . . .

Trinket. TRINKET. It's the largest work in the show so . . . but the show ain't about a flag, it's about, about our mouse nature. How we blot out the sky with our paw and think we've vanquished the sun . . .

A Flag points a nation. A flag is an amulet—doo-rag symbol for national booty. Trinkets suggest a past time. The American flag suggests a past-time. It's what we do when we are not thinking . . .

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

It's an object that rifts. It's a division of—. It's a dissection of—. It cleaves desire into a design that masquerades as rationality. We call this symbolic capital . . .

A trinket is a bauble, a trifle, shiny and worthless to whom? The American flag is a kind of wampum into our favorite darkness . . .

An exhibition is a favorite darkness. A way of working out a set; an ensemble of effects, things, and circumstances. It's a hinged thing, always a staged thing (Alas + shit . . .). It's a perambulation where people witness, encounter, fabulate a world within a world. And that's the rub I love to negotiate. This drive we have to perform our exhibition-wanking. We go to exhibitions so we can make something of them, so we can make something of ourselves. Use determines meaning . . .

In the show, there are twenty-four paintings, part of a project called "Skin Set" begun in 1997 as mostly drawings. Now painting and film and sculpture and ether . . . The current work is a series which bleats the word *fuschia* in refrain. For example, "Fuschia Negro," "Fuschia Ebola," "Fuschia Abracadabra," etc etc. Writing is everywhere in my nerves, why not painting? Like performance, writing durates; an act of enduring; want to make it more physical, more ham-fisted lyrical—there are things to be done with words that have nothing to do with paint. It's like crawling when you can walk . . .

I was a bit overwhelmed by being chosen to appear on the cover of *Artforum* recently. I was humbled, surprised, flattered, devastated being juxtaposed in an article with Eric Garner, our shame, his death. Apparently *AF* doesn't disclose covers before they're hatched. I realize something. I—I—this sort of thing always seems to happen outside of me. It's as if someone is performing my blackness for me. All us Eric. Silly *AF*. It's funny about smart people—they know a lot and they don't know anything at all . . .