



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, March 4, 2015

THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES (MOCA) PRESENTS

WILLIAM POPE.L: TRINKET

March 20–June 28, 2015
The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA



LOS ANGELES—The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles presents *William Pope.L: Trinket*, an exhibition of new and recent work by Chicago-based artist William Pope.L, an essential figure in the development of performance and installation art since the 1970s. Installed in the soaring spaces of The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA, the exhibition explores the impact of American history and politics on the social and psychological body in an ensemble grouping of large-scale installations, videos, paintings, photography, and performance works, including a new performance and sculpture work made especially for the exhibition.

“MOCA is thrilled to present this exhibition by William Pope.L,” says Director Philippe Vergne. “In his work, difficult and beautiful questions about politics, history, art, and the self arrive in forms we do not expect. His vision is democratic, radically experimental, and always provocative and original.”

The centerpiece and title work of the show is *Trinket* (2008/2015), a monumental installation consisting of a custom-made 45 x 16 foot American flag. During the museum’s public hours, the flag is blown continuously by four industrial-grade special effects fans—the type that are used on film sets to simulate rain storms. Over time the forced air will cause the whipping flag to fray, its stripes becoming an unpredictable hydra. *Trinket* was first realized in 2008, in a moment rived by war, appeals to “enduring freedom,” and news of torture. Today, against discrepancies of justice in Ferguson, New York, and elsewhere, the work issues a

potent metaphor for the challenge and change democracy must endure if it is to prove its resilience.

“This project is a chance for people to feel the flag,” Pope.L has said. “People need to feel their democracy, not just hear words about it. For me, democracy is active, not passive. With *Trinket*, I am showing something that’s always been true. The American flag is not a toy. It’s not tame. It’s bright, loud, bristling and alive.”

Other works in the exhibition include *Polis or the Garden or Human Nature in Action* (2008/2015), an installation that features thousands of hand-painted onions piled across a grid of large tables. Over time the multi-colored vegetables will sprout green shoots through the nationalistic hues of their skins. A metaphor of growth and natural decay, the work holds up to question the assumption of durability and permanence often attached to the idea of nations.

Some of Pope.L’s best-known works are what he calls “crawls,” durational performances in which the artist, often in costume, traverses public space on his hands and knees. Ritualistic and unnerving—crawling is what babies or the injured do—the works have been hailed for their disruptive reframing of bodily and social propriety. Two such works are included in the exhibition. *Migrant* (2015), a work presented for the first time at MOCA, features a multi-tiered shelf structure resembling a house sliced in half, on which outlandishly dressed figures periodically emerge and crawl. The video installation *Snow Crawl* (1992—2001/2015) documents a performance in a quiet, winter neighborhood in Maine, where Pope.L lived for over twenty years. With his large adult frame wrapped into a Superman costume, the artist is seen scuttling, burrowing, and haltingly making his way, on his belly, across snowy fields and yards.

“In Pope.L’s work,” writes Senior Curator Bennett Simpson, “questions ricochet, cohere, and dissipate in the wind. What does it mean to belong to a nation? What does this feel like in one’s body? Is America’s history a substance to be moved through or metabolized? How does this history burden? Pope.L’s exhibition suggests a theater of competing claims, born of fast air, noise, and flux.”

The four-and-a-half hour long video *Reenactor* (2009/2015), projected in multiple locations throughout the Geffen, takes as a starting point the contemporary phenomenon of Civil War reenactment—a hobby pursued with bewildering attention to detail by a growing community of Americans. But the video does not depict battle scenes or treaty signings in the conventional sense. Instead, it shows a cast of actors, all dressed in Robert E. Lee uniforms, complete with long white beard, pursuing the mundane activities of their actual everyday lives. Pope.L shot parts of *Reenactor* on the campus of Tennessee State University, a historically black college in Nashville. The vision of the students dressed as Confederate generals, one hundred and fifty years after Emancipation, is haunting—an acknowledgment of this country’s long-running internalization of racial and political strife.

William Pope.L: Trinket is organized by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Senior Curator Bennett Simpson.

Generous support is provided by Galerie Catherine Bastide, Karyn Kohl, and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

In-kind media support is provided by  KOET | 50 YEARS

Image credit: William Pope.L, *Trinket*, 2008, mixed media, dimensions variable, approx. 38 x 16 ft., courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, installation in the Exhibition Hall of the Municipal Auditorium, Kansas City, MO, hosted by Grand Arts, photo by E.G. Shempf

ARTIST BIO:



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William Pope.L (b. 1955, Newark, New Jersey) lives and works in Chicago. His work poses challenges to easy categorization, but his emphasis on performance, politics, bodies, and words places him in a tradition that includes FLUXUS, Allan Kaprow, Dieter Roth, and David Hammons, among other artists. He studied at Montclair State College and the Whitney Museum Independent Studio Program, New York, and received his MFA from the Mason Gross School at Rutgers University in 1981. For a significant stretch of the 1980s he was deeply involved in theater as a director, writer, and actor, and participated in the Mabou Mines Theater Intensive. From 1990–2010 he taught theater, performance, and philosophy at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine. Since 2010 he has been a professor at the University of Chicago. William Pope.L's work is in the collection of many major museums including The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Studio Museum of Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; and the Fogg Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge. His work has been widely exhibited, with one-artist shows at The Art Institute of Chicago; the Renaissance Society, Chicago; The Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, Maine; Artist's Space, New York; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria; the Carpenter Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; and the Santa Monica Museum of Art, among other museums. Significant group exhibitions to feature Pope.L's work include the 2002 Whitney Biennial; *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; and the Prospect 3 Triennial, New Orleans. In 1998, Pope.L was featured in the MOCA exhibition *Out of Actions*, and in 2012 a group of the artist's Skin Set Drawings was included in the MOCA exhibition *Blues For Smoke*, curated by Bennett Simpson.

RELATED PROGRAMS

MEMBERS' OPENING

Saturday, March 21, 7–10pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

The Board of Trustees and Philippe Vergne, Director invite you to a members' preview of *William Pope.L: Trinket*. Please present your membership card for admission. Parking is available in surrounding lots. DJ, cash bar, and food trucks!

FREE for MOCA members; no reservations necessary

INFO 213/621-1794 or membership1@moca.org

ART TALK: WILLIAM POPE.L AND BENNETT SIMPSON

Sunday, March 22, 3pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

Artist William Pope.L and MOCA Senior Curator Bennett Simpson discuss Pope.L's *Trinket* at the Geffen.

FREE with museum admission; RSVP at moca.org

ART TALK: BENNETT SIMPSON

Thursday, April 2, 7pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

MOCA Senior Curator Bennett Simpson discusses the works, ideas, and influences of *William Pope.L: Trinket*.

FREE; RSVP at moca.org

CURATORS LECTURE SERIES: STUART COMER ON WILLIAM POPE.L.

Thursday, April 9, 7pm

MOCA Grand Avenue, Ahmanson Auditorium

Stuart Comer will discuss the work and career of William Pope.L. Comer is Chief Curator of the Department of Media and Performance Art at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. He was one of three curators for the 2014 Whitney Biennial and is a frequent contributor to *Artforum*, *Frieze*, *Afterall*, *Mousse*, *Parkett*, and *Art Review*. This lecture is part of MOCA's new series focusing on the work of contemporary curators as well



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as the USC Roski School of Art and Design's Graduate Lecture Series which engages in critical, open, rigorous conversations with graduate students and the general public.
FREE; RSVP at moca.org

MESS PROJECTIONS: A POETRY READING WITH DOUGLAS KEARNEY

Thursday, May 28, 7pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

L.A.-based poet, performer, librettist, and teacher Douglas Kearney reads selected works in conjunction with *William Pope.L: Trinket*. The author of three books, including *The Black Automaton* (Fence Books, 2009) and *Patter* (Red Hen Press, 2014), Kearney is known for his "performative typography" on the page and dynamic live readings.

FREE; RSVP at moca.org

ARTISTS ON ARTISTS: ANDREA FRASER ON *WILLIAM POPE.L: TRINKET*

Thursday, June 4, 7pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

FREE; RSVP at moca.org

POETRY READING: CLAUDIA RANKINE

Thursday, June 11, 7pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

William Pope.L calls Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf Press, 2014) "a courageous, tough, bighearted giant of a little book." *Citizen* is a National Book Award Finalist for Poetry, and the first book ever nominated in two categories (poetry and criticism) for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

FREE; RSVP at moca.org

ALSO OPENING AT MOCA

Sturtevant: Double Trouble

March 20–July 27, 2015

MOCA Grand Avenue

Sturtevant: Double Trouble is the first comprehensive survey in America of Sturtevant's (American, b. 1924, d. 2014) 50-year career and the only institutional presentation of her work organized in the United States since 1973. Sturtevant started making her own versions of the works of her contemporaries in 1964, using some of the most iconic artworks of her generation as a source and catalyst for the exploration of originality, authorship, and the interior structures of art and image culture. Beginning with her versions of works by Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol, Sturtevant initially turned the visual logic of Pop art back on itself, probing uncomfortably at the workings of art history in real time. Her chameleon-like embrace of other artists' art has also resulted in her being largely overlooked in the history of postwar American art. As a woman "repeating" the work of better-known male artists, she has passed almost unnoticed through the hierarchies of mid-century modernism and postmodernism. *Sturtevant: Double Trouble* is organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Kahlil Joseph: Double Conscience

March 20–August 16, 2015

MOCA Grand Avenue

Kahlil Joseph: Double Conscience is MOCA's presentation of Kahlil Joseph's *m.A.A.d* (2014), a double screen projection that is a lush portrait of contemporary Los Angeles. The camera sinuously glides through predominantly African American neighborhoods, pausing to capture quotidian moments—driving in a car, a marching band, the barbershop—that are suffused with creativity, joy, and sadness. The split screen divides the viewer's attention, and alludes to the history of auteur cinema, a form of filmmaking pioneered by

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French director Jean Luc Godard that sacrificed linear narrative for experimentation with the medium's formal and political possibilities. *m.A.A.d* extends this tradition by crossing the wires of music video, amateur film footage, and moments of magical realism. The two-part projection may also slyly evoke philosopher W.E.B. Du Bois's early twentieth century concept of "double consciousness," a psychological description of black life in America. The film's verbally dense and thick, booming soundtrack, provided by hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar, adds yet another layer to this prismatic account. Organized by MOCA Chief Curator Helen Molesworth.

THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES (MOCA)

About MOCA: Founded in 1979, MOCA's vision is to be the defining museum of contemporary art. In a relatively short period of time, MOCA has achieved astonishing growth with three Los Angeles locations of architectural renown; a world-class permanent collection of more than 6,800 objects international in scope and among the finest in the world; hallmark education programs that are widely emulated; award-winning publications that present original scholarship; groundbreaking monographic, touring, and thematic exhibitions of international repute that survey the art of our time; and cutting-edge engagement with modes of new media production. MOCA is a not-for-profit institution that relies on a variety of funding sources for its activities.

Hours: MOCA Grand Avenue (located at 250 South Grand Avenue in downtown Los Angeles) is open Monday and Friday from 11am to 5pm; Thursday from 11am to 8pm; Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 6pm; and closed on Tuesday and Wednesday. The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA (located at 152 North Central Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90012) has the same hours as MOCA Grand Avenue during exhibitions. Please call ahead or go to moca.org for the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA exhibition schedule. MOCA Pacific Design Center, located at 8687 Melrose Avenue; West Hollywood, CA 90069, is open Tuesday through Friday from 11am to 5pm; Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 6pm; and closed on Monday. The MOCA Store at 250 South Grand Avenue is open Monday through Wednesday and Friday from 10:30am to 5:30pm; Thursday from 10:30am to 8:30pm; and Saturday and Sunday from 10:30am to 6:30pm.

Museum Admission: General admission is free for all MOCA members. General admission is also free for everyone at MOCA Grand Avenue and The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA on Thursdays from 5pm to 8pm, courtesy of Wells Fargo. General admission is always free at MOCA Pacific Design Center. General admission at MOCA Grand Avenue and the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA is \$12 for adults; \$7 for students with I.D. and seniors (65+); and free for children under 12.

More Information: For 24-hour information on current exhibitions, education programs, and special events, call 213 626 6222 or access MOCA online at moca.org.

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