

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

METAL

P O P E . L

B E T W E E N A  
F I G U R E A N D A  
L E T T E R



As early as the 1970s, *Pope.L* (Chicago-based visual and performance- theatre artist and educator who makes culture out of contraries) drew attention to the brutality of social decline in a country with little to no basic social security in his legendary *Crawls* through the streets of American cities on his knees and elbows. His interdisciplinary practice moves between performance, text, painting, installation, video, and sculpture.

For the *Between a Figure and a Letter* exhibition at the flagship of Berlin's culture *Schinkel Pavillon*, (which was on view until July 31st) Pope.L creates a new, space-filling as well as a site-specific installation. This is presented in artistic and contextual dialogue with the *Skin Set Drawings* (1997-2011) from his earlier creative period and the video work *Small Cup* (2008), exhibited in the basement.

At the centre is a giant, terrifying machine that is regularly fed by a performer with abstract wooden sculptures that recall, among other things, the neighbouring architectures of the Berliner Schloss (Berlin Palace) as well as the Alte Wache.

Playing with multifaceted references, the artist's installation continues his years-long preoccupation with representations of racist violence and social inequality. Mercilessly, he shows the destructive power of these structures, which permeate all layers and areas of our social lives. We get to ask him some questions that, again, leave us with even more doubts about the world we are in.

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**Why in *Contraption* the one who destroys the structures of power is a worker? If so, according to the logic of the dominant system, they should do it in an act of rebellion and not mechanically, as if following an order of the same system that clearly does not want to destroy itself but to reproduce itself.**

Destroying the structures of power? How do we know that this is what the worker is doing? The worker is also a performer. I did not know this, hmm... Rebellion? Mechanisation? What is the difference?

**It may be an expression of your desire for the worker to destroy it?**

I like workers. Most of the people I know works for a living.

**Could it be a meta-message, the very reason why you are exhibiting at the Schinkel Pavillon?**

Ah, meta! I have heard of this but it goes a bit over my head.

**What do you try to provoke in the viewer with the discomfort felt when trying to observe the drawings?**

People should not always get what they want. A little lack goes a long way.

**What is the relationship between the artist's control over the viewer's effect and the freedom that each spectator holds?**

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I don't know the answer to this question but if I did know it it would probably sound something like this: if the artist has any control over their work at all it's only happenstance and fragile. I prefer to make works within and intentional ignorance in which I try to control everything! But I also build into the structure of the work the very failure of this intent. I do this, I do this, I do this because intent and control are merely mirage. They are not what is in front of me.

**Attachment, the constructed, the established, repetition and the rotten play important roles in your Schinkel Pavilion show. however, boredom is not a reaction that the regular viewer experiences. how do you explain the voyeur experience of human miseries?**

People are more interesting than objects. Is it true? I don't know but it is interesting.

**Is violence a condition for transformation? What is the role they play in your work?**

Someone asked me this question previously and I did not know what to answer. Maybe I have an answer now. Maybe. Maybe. Violence is a form of exchange. When something rots there is also a kind of exchange except it is not a theatrical. Ultimately violence in arts is always about dramatisation of conflict. Can I get an amen?

**How did you arrive at the title of the exhibition? What do the figures and letters represent?**

The figure is the idea. The letter is the flesh. Or the letter is the flesh and the figure is the idea. I am not sure. The show in many ways is about the vagaries of representation. I fuck around with the buttons of volume on this relationship.



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Words

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Portrait

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Pope.L, Contraption, 2022, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin

Performer

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Photos

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