

POPE.L
BETWEEN A FIGURE AND A LETTER

April 8 (opening) – July 31, 2021

Thu + Fr: 2 pm – 7 pm

Sa + Sun: 11 am – 7 pm

Schinkel Pavillon, Oberwallstraße 32, 10117 Berlin

For his first solo exhibition in Berlin, American artist Pope.L (b. 1955 in Newark, NJ) has devised a new site-specific installation for the Schinkel Pavilion's spectacular first-floor space, presented alongside a selection of works excerpted from his ongoing *Skin Set Drawings* project and the video *Small Cup* (2008), shown inside the pavilion's cavernous basement room. Filmed inside a former textile mill in Maine at a time of what now seems, falsely perhaps, greater political innocence, *Small Cup* shows a couple of goats and a handful of chickens trampling and noisily eating their way through a seed-coated architectural model of what looks like the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C. – instantly recognizable thanks to its titular "small cup" or cupola. Upstairs, a new installation explicitly alludes to another cupola-crowned building, which likewise acts as a lightning rod for a wide range of hot-button political issues debates: the equally recognizable circular dome that sits atop the newly opened Humboldtforum across the Kupfergraben. A prominent quasi-robotic feature of this installation is a contraption resembling a woodchipper, brought to life thanks to the periodic feeding of a wooden model which incorporates architectural elements of both the Humboldtforum (a tawdry remake of the old Prussian royal palace) and the Schinkel Pavilion (a late sixties, Bauhaus-inspired GDR-era reimagining of a prewar original), as well as the nearby Schinkel-designed Neue Wache. The wooden model's bizarre crystalline shape conjures the delirious blurring of "natural" and political histories, indeed of geology and history proper, that is such a troubling hallmark of our hypercharged contemporary moment. The visitor may make what he or she will of the cathartic ritual of the models' violent undoing – rest assured, however, that the resulting woodchips will be put to good, i.e. environmentally sound use. The *Skin Set Drawings* scattered around the Schinkel Pavilion's warren of ground floor backrooms are taken from a subgroup of works – shown here encased in new, custom-made frames that render them only half-visible, at times even completely inaccessible – zeroing in on the unsettling void between the letters of the writing which customarily occupies such a central place in the artist's practice: the gaping chasms of un-meaning between the titular "letter and figure".

Pope.L (b. 1955 in Newark, NJ), who has referred to himself as "a fisherman of social absurdity," is a Chicago-based visual artist and educator whose multidisciplinary practice uses binaries, contraries, and preconceived notions embedded within contemporary culture to create artworks in a wide variety of formats such as installation, painting, performance, sculpture, video, and writing. Building upon a long history of arduous, provocative performances and interventions in public spaces, Pope.L applies the same social, formal, and performative strategies to his interests in community, gender, language, and race. The goals for his work are several: joy, money, and uncertainty—though not necessarily in that order.

Pope.L studied at the Pratt Institute in New York and later received his BA from Montclair State College in 1978. He also attended the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art before earning his MFA from Rutgers University in 1981. His first performances took place in the streets of New York, culminating in the emblematic performance *The Great White Way*, 2001–09, in which he crawled the length of Manhattan's Broadway dressed as Superman. They have since been staged in many leading art venues and historical sites around the world. Recent

exhibitions, performances, and projects include *My Kingdom for a Title* at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society at the University of Chicago (likewise curated by Dieter Roelstraete); *Instigation, Aspiration, Perspiration*, a trio of complementary exhibitions organized by the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Public Art Fund in New York in 2019; *Flint Water Project* at What Pipeline in Detroit in 2019; *Brown People Are the Wrens in the Parking Lot* at the University of Chicago's Logan Center for the Arts in 2018; *The Escape* at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2018; *Whispering Campaign* at documenta 14 in Athens, Greece, and Kassel, Germany, in 2017; the 78th Whitney Biennial in New York in 2017; the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo in 2016; *The Freedom Principle* at the Museum Contemporary Art Chicago in 2015; *Trinket* at The Geffen Contemporary, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles in 2015; *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, CAM Houston, and Studio Museum in New York in 2014; and *Forlesen* at the Renaissance Society in Chicago in 2013. In the summer of 2021, Portikus Frankfurt presented *Misconceptions*, for which Pope.L conceived a new video installation based on the TV game show format. His work was recently also included in group exhibitions at Kunst/Werke and Galerie Max Hetzler in Berlin.