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SANTA MONICA

WILLIAM POPE.L

SANTA MONICA MUSEUM OF ART

In the aftermath of a disaster the world is often blanketed in an unsettling, apocalyptic whiteness: the quiet ash of a volcano, the powder of a snowdrift, the dust of an explosion. William Pope.L's three-part

installation *Art After White People: Trees, Time, & Celluloid*, features a grove of potted palm trees that have been sprayed with white paint. The paint, like whiteface, silences and suffocates the trees. One tree is lynched, hanging upside-down from the ceiling, dripping sap-like blood onto the floor below. The palm trees evoke a plurality of connotations: nature, the desert, exoticism, banana republics, the Middle East. The room of *The Grove* is dim except for a glow emanating from small portals in the walls where it is possible to peer into archives full of storage boxes. The labels on the boxes have been blacked out, and again, there is a puddle of blood on the floor.

Behind the grove there is a makeshift theater with couches and chairs in front of a large wooden projection screen. In the projected video, *APHOV (A Personal History of Videography)*, Pope.L directs the videotaping of a man who wears a Donald Rumsfeld mask while standing before a vault of familiar cardboard boxes. The ersatz Rumsfeld bleeds profusely from his eyes, the blood overflowing down his body and onto the floor. The video shows the artist directing, the cameraman recording, the actor rehearsing, and thus reveals the very mechanisms of the production and orchestration of the illusion, conjuring the age-old phrase "theater of war." In this exhibition Pope.L has broken the fourth wall, and the viewers are implicated players in the creation and obfuscation of personal and political histories.

In his first museum show on the West Coast, Pope.L is daringly critical as he layers imagery and signifiers that implicate man's hand in the forces of nature, culture, race, politics, history and representation, at a time when there is too much silence.

Micol Hebron



WILLIAM POPE.L, *Art After White People: Time, Trees, & Celluloid*, 2007. Mixed media installation at Santa Monica Museum of Art, dimensions variable. Photo: Bruce Morr.