

Irradiation:
Mary Ann Aitken, Olga Balema, Will Benedict and Pope.L
at What Pipeline

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January 12, 2024



Installation view

The current exhibition at What Pipeline features the work of four artists from varying backgrounds and generations, emphasizing their continued effort to explore the breadth of art history, locate critical points of reference and present them as outlets to prompt contemporary conversations. The works in this show oscillate around each other like satellites, offering hints here and there to guide interpretation. Perhaps the first point to take away would be the realization that a work of art is never truly complete, as its meaning is infinitely malleable based on corresponding elements and spaces. The history of these works and the artists who made them inform analysis while also benefiting from taking a humble bow to promote a more holistic translation of the show.



Mary Ann Aitken, *Untitled*, c. 2008



Mary Ann Aitken *Untitled*, c. 2008

The edges are where these connections begin and the exhibition text underlines this sentiment through a focus on the visual relationship between foreground and background as well as the conceptual relationship between the body and its environment. The levels of complexity mount with investment in consideration for detail, starting with the immediacy of visual parallels. The colors of the fruits in Mary Ann Aitken's *Untitled* still lifes bounce to the frames of Pope.L's archival pigment prints. The fragmentation of both *Picnic (Transitive Version)* and *Fisherman aka Flossboy* by Pope.L can be found in the *Loop* sculptures by Olga Balema, and their collaging technique is reflected in Will Benedict's photographs hung on the opposite wall. There is an encompassing sense of structure generated by the recurring rectangular shapes framed by the four white walls. Of course, this element has been a fixture of the white cube since the white cube was invented but is essential in its ability to spotlight anything *other*.



Pope.L, *Picnic (Transitive Version)*, 2005-2018



Installation view

Meditations on the facade of certainty and the casualties of domination extend out of art history text books and into the current media stream, reporting artists' ongoing concern with supremacy. It shows up here too. Pope.L's "Sup" peeking through the folds of his amorphous characters evokes the brand Supreme, for one. But much of this expression exists in the subtleties that speak to a radical acceptance of transience, particularly in the polycarbonate works which achieve visibility *only* through the distorted reflections of the surrounding environment onto their clear and contorted surfaces. There is a sweetness to the process of observing the light bounce off of, play on, dance, swoop, then fall, changing with each slight movement of the viewer. Like a Rorschach test or visions in the clouds, there are boundless possibilities to the read. Materiality seems to be the primary interest of Olga Balema, and Mary Ann Aitken, each of whom demonstrate a reverence of simplicity and tactility in their form-focused works that somehow also draws attention to the materiality of our own mortal bodies.



Pope.L, *Fisherman a.k.a. Floss Cowboy*, 2002-2018



Olga Balema, *Loop 64*, 2023



Olga Balema, *Loop 92*, 2023



Installation view

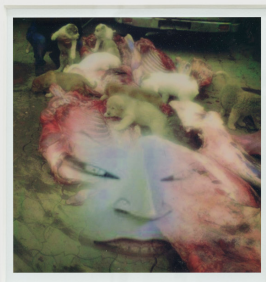
It would be common for a critical eye to apply a filter of socio-political discourse on top, and the ambiguity leaves a lot of room for that, but what I find is a deep dive into ancient spirituality. This point of reference is secured through Will Benedict's Polaroids that bring the pendulum of speculation from sweet to sinister. The darkness creeps in quietly through a slow approach to the tiny photographs matted and framed with precision. They are montages with intention; a pink lily in yogurt is like an early part of a dream that makes some sort of sense before the haunting scenes of tongues in gas tanks show up followed by ominous ghost-like faces that unveil puppies playing on a carcass. Then we are met with a pig, personified through a face-forward theatrically lit portrait. Benedict pays attention to the subconscious here to elicit a surreal yet visceral experience in our waking life. He tends to unearth our animistic tendencies and bring them into the modern world through a pursuit of the shadow and the welcoming of anthropomorphic forms.



Will Benedict, *Polaroid XII*, 2023



Will Benedict, *Polaroid XIV*, 2023



Will Benedict, *Polaroid XIII*, 2023



Will Benedict, *Polaroid XI*, 2023

The expansive timeline represented through the selection of works in the show underscores both a message of endurance and one of surrender. Aitken's 2008 gouaches and Pope.L's collaged compositions that were started in the early 2000s and completed in 2018 join Balema and Benedict now. Like ingredients of scientific observation, there is a formlessness within and amongst the clean rectangles that produce a feeling of weightlessness. It's like they are suspended mid-air, vibrating as they engage in conversation with each other. The mutuality attained from piece to piece seems to be an acknowledgment and appreciation for the immaterial realms of thought that employ thin sheets of truth. Each artist, in their own way, holds stock in their examination of this truth that populates our imagination and then melts away, dissolving into a new state of being as quickly as an icicle in the sun.

The exhibition will be on view through Saturday, January 13, 2024.

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<https://whatpipeline.com/>

Images courtesy the artists; What Pipeline, Detroit; Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York; Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles. Photos: Alivia Zivich.

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