WILLIAM POPE L.
SAMSÖN - BOSTON

"Color Isn't Matter," the title for William Pope L.'s recent exhibition of tightly scattered works at Samsön in Boston, seems at first pretty self-explanatory. Viewers must walk through a blue tarp to enter the show and are met by an aquarium filled with red liquid, a large cactus (and an adjacent wall) covered in splattered paint and several small pops of color throughout the room. Even the mound of rich, brown dirt in the center of the gallery is marked by pools of green-tinted soil, leaked from a mug of ink held by a mannequin-like performer in baggy blue scrubs and an Obama mask. Closer inspection of the exhibition (and of the artist's other motive here) reveals that the color in question is, in fact, race. It's a coy trick, and the show is full of them.

Square-shaped vinyl pieces, scattered throughout the gallery and mixed in with found/altered works on paper, feature phrases like "Negro Idea #38" and "By any means necessary Dec. 20, 1964," taken from a speech by Malcolm X on that date, nearly invisible in white letters on white material. The installation is raw, down to the details (including the gallery's ladder leaning on a wall), and a smattering of wooden boards from crates are exhibited alongside original works. Peanut butter covers two stuffed animals mounted to wooden trophy bases, installed flush against the walls. Even Obama's clothes, which are largely proportioned, are a euphemism, in this case for "the clothes are too big for the man." Everything feels both remarkable and remarkably unfinished, effectively placing Pope L.'s confrontational wit on view here instead of the work itself. And surprisingly, it works. The installation is a perfunctory affair, and the messy nature of the show ultimately takes a back seat to the investigation of color, in both racial and tonal conditions.

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