PRESS RELEASE Art|42|Basel - Art Statements (Hall 1.0 / S01)

JIMMY RASKIN
The Burden of Display (The Return of the Drunken Boat)

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to present Jimmy Raskin's *The Burden of Display (The Return of the Drunken Boat)* for Art Statements at Art|42|Basel.

In Raskin's dualistic universe, the world of the poetic sublime is staged in contrast with critical distance. Raskin's work is organized around the affirmation of two fundamental events: the death of the formal poem described in Arthur Rimbaud's epic *Le Bateau Ivre (The Drunken Boat)*, and the failure of the free-spirited "poet pure" embodied by the fallen tightrope-walker in Friedrich Nietzsche's prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Raskin posits that one must acknowledge these two crucial events of cultural history in order to strive toward the new artwork, and the new artist; a poetic spirit seeking to trumpet the sublime. At the same time, another inescapable force is at play for Raskin; that of the documentarian, the diagram, the contemporary drive toward critical distance. These two modes of expression, the poet and the documentarian, comprise the knot around which each work is articulated. The two need each other, and oppose each other; both must be present in every work of art.

Rimbaud wrote *Le Bateau Ivre* in the voice of a boat lost in a tumultuous sea. The vessel describes a series of feverish, ecstatic visions, and ultimately wishes for its own death. In the course of the narrative, Rimbaud makes clear that the boat's demise is a metaphor for the death of formal poetic methodologies, which he had once believed were capable of illuminating divine universal truths. Raskin conjures this key poem precisely because it was written just prior to the breakthrough of free-form prose poetry, the propagation of which was attributed to Rimbaud himself. Around this time, Nietzsche wrote his prologue, in which Zarathustra preaches to a crowd assembled to watch a tightrope walker, who falls to his death. After vowing to give him a proper burial because he made "danger his vocation", Zarathustra instead carries the corpse to the wilderness and abandons it in a hollow tree. From this doomed figure, Raskin created Pinn. Originally a hybrid between the tightrope walker, for whom fatal danger was a medium, and the wandering, mischievous character of Pinocchio (whose restless spirit came from a tree), Pinn evolved into a cartoonish figure with a cone-shaped nose, a vehicle of pure potential.

In *The Burden of Display (The Return of the Drunken Boat)*, Raskin presents a system of sculptures and a series of posters and C-prints that incorporate elements of both stories, reimagined as set pieces in a contemporary narrative of redemptive artistic breakthrough. Here, the repeated image of the cone becomes the central diagram of potential creativity and humiliation. *The Burden of Display* is a collapsed display case held up on one end by the passed-out drunken figure of Pinn; in *The Return of the Drunken Boat,* Rimbaud's title character has risen from its own wreckage and sails haphazardly into the present-tense with Pinn at the helm; *The Annunciation* is a cone-shaped plinth towards which Pinn's boat sails – but which appears to be empty. Throughout the installation, Raskin demonstrates an essential conflict in his sculptural production, between structure and spontaneity, diagram and cartoon, fundamentality and frivolity. Further, as suggested by the subtitle of the show, Raskin sees preoccupation with the display object as the latest formal limitation that deserves reckoning. Yet in the exhibition format, display is unavoidable. This paradox creates an internal conflict in Raskin's works, which teeter between their ideal realizations as contemporary apparatus for expression, while suffering from self-ridicule, and stains of romantic hope. The result is an inevitable aesthetics of failure, toward which the artist is both drawn and cautious. In *Cone Diagram II,* Raskin illustrates the funnel-shaped trajectory from inclusive, openly available contemporary artwork, to a purified, personal, obsessive, and essentially closed mode of expression. What is missing from the platform at the tip of *The Annunciation* cone? Perhaps the beacon sought by Pinn is intentionally hidden from view. In these works, Raskin endows a Romantic ideology with renewed urgency: the insistence that in art, modes of being, rather than modes of seeing, must be the issue at stake.

Jimmy Raskin's work was recently featured in For the blind man in the dark room that is looking for the black cat who isn't there, *curated by Anthony Huberman, a group exhibition that traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit; the de Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam; and Culturgest, Lisbon. In late 2011, David Colosi will release* On Becoming an Ass: Jimmy Raskin's Poetics of the Misfire.