

PAUL P.

*Slim Volume*

11.7.19 – 12.14.19

On the occasion of his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1926, Stephen Tennant requested to be photographed by a young Cecil Beaton. The photographer set his model in front of a backdrop of silver foil, pivoted his naked torso in a way as sly and signaling as a wink, and took the picture. Tennant was already admired as a poet, having published a slim volume, yet nothing concrete would follow it. In a subsequent decade Cyril Connolly would explain, ‘whom the gods wish to destroy they first call promising.’

In Paul P.’s exhibition, *Slim Volume*, a photocopy of Tennant’s portrait is featured in a small collage on notepaper, which hangs alongside works from P.’s ongoing repertoire of oil paintings, drawings and sculptures. The premature brilliance of Tennant’s oeuvre failed to advance beyond an endless string of promises for poems that never appeared, or sketches for novels never written, and yet his indolence, pretense, and superficiality made him a human directory of queer gestures and inflections. Like the person of Tennant himself, P.’s collage offers a codex for the indirect modes of presentation and signification that inform the artist’s work, such as the relay of affinities across time, the filigree that encodes inclinations, and the oblique queer reasoning that doesn’t necessarily require the effable and the plastic to perform its seditious role. P.’s meticulous and enduring aesthetic project excavates forms of fantasy particular to eras of criminalized homosexuality, such as dandyism and the early gay erotic industry, which, although outdated, remain useful examples of resistance.

The ongoing body of painted portraits that define much of P.’s practice are appropriated from gay erotic magazines produced during the years bracketed by the beginning of gay liberation/Stonewall, and the advent of the AIDS crisis; a period of provisional freedoms. The models, Janus-like, look forwards and backwards from their original position in time; back to the transient wellspring of homosexual aesthetics and innuendo, and forward to AIDS and other future tragedies, wherein aesthetic energy may lose or regain its unruly value. The artist re-imagines their faces to contain both the foreknowledge of their potential destruction and ulterior, ancient queer motives. Despite the origin of P.’s images as explicit materials of desire, the transactional alliance between model and artist leaves behind an implicit history of negotiation, fragility, impermanence, and revolt from conventional narratives. Other oil paintings describe laundry hung to dry in the closed, colored stucco alleys of Venice neighborhoods, and a yellow monochrome painting describes an area of light itself; all roundabout analogies, devices for further picturing ephemerality. Bed sheets moving in the breeze in a city known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for unraveling the English and North American consciousness into permissiveness and violent sensualities, is today yet another symbolic echo.

P.’s sculptures, a folding screen and stool constructed from a transparent lattice of ash wood, similarly allude to the interface of the artist and model; not the click of the camera, but the societal forces precipitating their meeting, the cusp of the experience, and after, the traces left behind. The sculptures function allegorically, and their slender, rakish image belies the exacting precision of their construction. Like the ill-fated figure of the dandy, whose inverse logic exposed the hostility of a predominant moralism, P.’s sculptures suggest that withstanding perennial external pressure may sometimes yield a paradoxical fortitude.

Completing the exhibition are three ink drawings of the facial profile of a statue of Pan, drawn from life in the Musée d’Orsay; an erotic figure whose classical guise has granted safe passage through time. Reclining on his belly, goat legs splayed, he teases bear cubs with pieces of honeycomb. His hand raised before his lips, forefinger and thumb touching and pinkie extended, in a delicate and selective gesture that seems to display the delight of the eternal faggot.

Queer Thoughts is honored to present *Slim Volume*, a solo exhibition by Paul P. (b. 1977, Canada), the artist’s first with the gallery. P.’s work has been exhibited extensively at international venues including the 2014 Whitney Biennial, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Freud Museum, London, among others. Select solo and two person exhibitions include Maureen Paley, London; Cooper Cole, Toronto; Participant Inc., New York; Daniel Reich Gallery, New York; The Suburban, Oak Park; Massimo Minini, Brescia; and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg/Paris. P.’s work is included in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; among others.