

that isn't there.

JIMMY RASKIN



The history of ideas can perhaps be described as a story of Poets and Philosophers. While the former places faith in pure expression and intuition, the latter prefers critical thought, foresight, and logic. Jimmy Raskin operates at the juncture between both, seeing The Poet as an inevitable transitional figure for the artist: does one lean toward a faith in expression and inevitable vanity, or favor a mode of expression based on critical-distance, so as to avoid the vulnerability of having “too much faith in meaning.” Raskin goes to places where The Poet is on trial, such as Nietzsche’s philosophical novel, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85). More specifically, Raskin grapples with the book’s prologue, where Zarathustra begins to understand how to move forward as the New Being, a merging of The Philosopher and The Poet. Raskin sees this passage as a moment when our pure faith in expression and poetic meaning becomes absorbed and dominated by our ability to strategically appropriate, critique, and subvert it. As the prologue comes to an end, Zarathustra spots an eagle with a serpent gripping its neck, a symbol of the New Being and the merged Philosopher-Poet, where foresight and cunning calculation is merged with the “grip” of expression. These creatures came to Zarathustra because he abandoned the Poet (symbolized by placing his first metaphor—a tightrope walker—in a hollow tree), which led him to a new sense of balance of knowing how to be a “Poet-in part.”

(Sept. 11, 2009 –Jan. 3, 2010)

Raskin's new installation—what he calls a fighting-sculpture—is based on an imaginary face-off between the wise eagle-serpent and a braying donkey. A symbol of the vulnerability of The Poet, the ass is borrowed from a pivotal poem by Arthur Rimbaud. This battle between The New Philosopher-Poet and The Poet Pure mimics the artist's own struggle with the question of how art can be a form of critical thought without extinguishing the often unruly and vulnerable poetic act. Raskin documents the scene of the battle with black vinyl silhouettes of the animals and of Zarathustra's hollow tree, an oversized speaking podium, and diagrams. His installation, while rational and sober, contains the ghost of the irrational poet: the podium has turned into a cartoon; the images are obstructed by a colorful mess of party-supplies; and an absurd video documenting Raskin jumping into a corner perpetually interrupts the proceedings.

Jimmy Raskin was born in Los Angeles in 1970, where he currently lives and works. He has presented solo and group exhibitions at institutions including Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris; Real Art Ways, Hartford; P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York; and KW, Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, among others.

Image:

*The Annunciation (study)*, 2009

Multi-media sculpture and video,  
dimensions vary

Courtesy of the artist and Miguel  
Abreu Gallery, New York

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