

ITAIN'THATDEEP, Pap Souleye Fall, 21 September - 27 October 2023

Press Release

Gratin is thrilled to present "It Ain't That Deep," an exhibition of new installations by multidisciplinary artist Pap Souleye Fall. Rooted in the desire to investigate how systems of power influence our perceptions of reality, Souleye's work invites viewers to explore the expressive potential within the world of speculative fiction and worldbuilding. Influenced by the theories of "Black Quantum Futurism," Souleye's installations fuse a variety of artistic mediums including video, sculpture, sound, and painting. Immersive landscapes offer viewers sensory experiences that explore the ways in which African diasporas navigate, reinterpret, and refigure their identities within the realms of digital media, comics, science fiction, and gaming culture. Souleye's dual identity as a Senegalese-American artist informs his creative process as his practice explores new possibilities for cross-cultural interaction.

"It Ain't That Deep" focuses on the film Black Panther, specifically the final exchange between the antagonistic characters T'Challa and Killmonger. This moment explores the complex tension of being part of the African diaspora while identifying as African American, and highlights that there is still a lot of emotional work to be done to find more common ground. Written on the wall at the beginning of the exhibition, the exchange between T'Challa and Killmonger is presented in a fictional language created by artist Justin Allen. Without a recognizable alphabet, the dialogue is unintelligible to the viewer, symbolizing the difficulty of transcultural communication, while creating an opportunity for new interactions within the factionalized world in which Black Panther lives. Through AI-generated imagery, Souleye envisions an alternate ending to the film that explores the potential for tenderness between the two characters, depicting them in a profound moment of intimacy and harmonious coexistence.

As a storytelling master, Souleye crafts his installations in the same way in which he creates comics. With the precision and sensitivity of an anthropologist, the artist builds his large-scale sculptures using found objects and repurposed materials, each carrying specific memories that he designates as 'knowledge spaces.' Carefully physically and conceptually combined, these sculptures are covered by blue screen paper creating a layering effect and the loss of their instant recognizability. Taking on a dual existence in both their tangible sculptural form and their intangible digital potential, Souleye's immersive installation creates worlds where references to technology and virtuality intertwine with the concreteness of his physical structures. This clever interplay blurs the boundaries of the fictional/truthful dichotomy, revealing the illusory nature of our perception of the world. The viewer is thus given the overwhelming possibility of entering a playful, multidimensional state of mental and emotional wonder.

If the blue screen represents the potential creation of fictional realities, it also alludes to a system crash in a computer. Constantly seeking alternative ways to complicate representation, Souleye created a character

called Dead Pixel, which represents the malfunction of a single pixel on a monitor screen producing a black dot. Structurally broken and impossible to repair, the dead pixel is a physical thing that happens to the computer and a visual representation of a lack of its potential. A testament to the multifaceted interplay between the physical and digital worlds, the black dot in Souleye's work takes on a spiritual dimension, symbolizing a non-being, an anti-space—a digestive system—that serves as a gateway to new possibilities of representation—a spiritual void.

Another recurring iconography in Souleye's work is the peanut. Interested in how trade has historically influenced and developed local communities, the artist references the history of the peanut in West Africa and the United States, a breakthrough crop for many African countries after slavery, making it a symbol to explore themes of colonialism and self-determination. Souleye's exploration of time challenges conventional notions, suggesting that it is more complex than a straight line, but rather can be seen as a mixture of different experiences and possibilities, like a web or a spiral. Inspired by the ubiquitous iconographies of the peanut in Senegal, the artist engages in a rediscovery of the peanut as an icon of the Senegalese working class, with the aim of elevating it to its own character within the canon of Afrofuturism.

Text by Camilla Giaccio

Pap Souleye Fall (b.1994 in Washington D.C.) grew up in Senegal and now lives and works in New York. Much of his works reflects his growing up within the Diaspora. Being of two worlds, Fall realized that through art he had the ability to construct his own worlds. As such, he became fascinated with the ways art could be embedded in everyday life, activating common materials and encounters to explore themes such as diaspora, post-apocalypse, Utopia, Africanisms, and Afro-Futurism. His work in "IT AIN'T THAT DEEP" was heavily influenced by his residency at RAIR in Philadelphia in 2023.

With Master's degree in Sculpture at Yale School of the Arts in 2022 and has received several awards, including the Black Rock Fellowship (2023), the Ilab Fellowship (2023), the Dedalus Foundation Emerging Artist Grant, and the Alike Kimball Grant (Yale, 2021). His art has been featured in exhibitions such as "We are They: Glitch Ecology and the Thickness of Now" in 2023, curated by C.C. McKee, as well as exhibitions in Philadelphia at Marginal Utility and ICEBOX PROJECT SPACE, and "Artists Prospering Really is Limitless" in New Haven, CT.