

The cliché goes that art exists to ask questions. Galerie Lars Friedrich is happy to report that its forthcoming exhibition, *for sure*, by the artist Sam Pulitzer offers its audience 34 yes-no questions. Each question is a counterfactual proposition whose rhetorical structure connects each question to the next. The terms found in each question are captioned and illustrated in a play of denotation and connotation that expands their closed-ended structure to open-ended possibility.

The presentation of the questions joins together two dated cultural forms. First, it assumes the structure found in 16th- and 17th-century emblem books. Following the tripartite logic of Andrea Alciati's *Emblemata* (1531)—motto (*inscriptio*), image (*pictura*), caption (*subscriptio*)—the exhibition presents the sequence of propositions (If X were Y, would there have been any need for Z?) alongside an illustration and an explanatory text for each term. Each concluding term begins the next proposition (each Z becomes the following X). The final proposition loops back to the first, a *ricorso* that realizes the *emblemata* in its second antique form, the panorama.

The ambition to join one outmoded form with another is made possible thanks to a chance meeting, like that of an umbrella and sewing machine on a dissecting table, with the aesthetics of administration. While no publicly notarized documents will be found in the exhibition, as concerning their probable use, neither the book nor the panorama need be made. The 'edutainment' of the emblem and the spectacle of the panorama are only inferred. The experience of both forms has been reduced to the familiar task of interpreting information, potentially limiting the interest of this exhibition to those willing to entertain its *Langeweile*. If a purely deterministic code were to instruct contemporary fancy, if the recombination of existing images were to minimize the need for imagination, if *this way brouwn* were an evolutionary key to open-source intelligence, it is not inconceivable for contemporary art to offer an experience that permits the mind of the viewer to do what is otherwise allocated to a server farm.

The interest in joining these cultural novelties is that both sought to perfect the same subject through profane sensation. The emblem book was a *utile dulci* to transmit the forbidden knowledge of Renaissance humanism to children and the illiterate. While, later, the panorama gave Ptolemaic emphasis to the standpoint of the human in an age of revolutions. An enormous peep show became a way to familiarize a being with limited horizons to the dizzying sensation of omniscient standing. This being is 'the happy mistake': the human being; 'man' as such; as it was; a ruin in thought whose conceptual innovation and moral validity as a universal subject persist as a foil to the vices of the present—whatever tribute it still pays them.

A being that has yet to be discovered, as Ernst Bloch once put it, this exhibition poses the human in a scene that is both an idealist realm of total possibility (the worldview of Faust) and a realist survey of decision and practice (the worldview of Mephistopheles). As an idea, the human being grounds the globalized world and makes international law the promise of everything and the practice of nothing. *for sure* provisionally gathers a number of the symbols, allegories and inventions of this everything-and-nothing figure under the nearly century-old imperative to organize pessimism. The organization of pessimism was defined by Walter Benjamin in 1929, after Pierre Naville, as the following: "the mistrust in the fate of literature, mistrust in the fate of freedom, mistrust in the fate of European humanity, but three times mistrust in all reconciliation: between classes, between nations, between individuals. And unlimited trust only in I. G. Farben and the peaceful perfection of the air force."