Henrik Olesen
LUDLOW 38

Although he has spent the past few years generating an Aby Warburg–type atlas of "faggy gestures" found throughout art history, Berlin-based, Danish artist Henrik Olesen took, for his first solo show in the United States, only one man as muse: mathematician Alan Turing (1912–1954). A cult figure to many, Turing is credited with both breaking Germany's World War II Enigma code and developing the first modern computer. He was also gay; charged as such under British law, he chose to accept state-administered "corrective" hormone therapy over incarceration. A few years after his trial, Turing, biting into a cyanide-coated apple, committed suicide.

This last detail has particular resonance in Olesen's installation, which, in embodying the complex circuitry of Turing's persona, seemed to project the figure as fabled character. Rendering the exhibition as a dispersed portrait, Olesen depicted Turing through digital Bertillonesque photographic composites and Picabian word drawings, the content for which was derived from popular biographies and Turing tribute websites. Structurally, like Turing's own work, the show operated by way of binaries. For instance, the space appeared to be anchored by two opposing sculptures: one narrow and vertical; the other faceless, even creatural, and low to the ground. There were also two groupings of flat works installed on opposite walls: on the north, a five-page biography of Turing, numbered one to thirty; on the south,

Henrik Olesen, *Portrait d'un imbecile* (detail), 2008, 103⅛ x 3½ x 1½", black marker on wood.

a loosely corresponding grid of thirty small black-and-white photographs. Within this matrix was an index of symbols—machines, cables, silver spoons, power switches, naked boys, half-eaten apples, images of Turing, and screws—annotated with words handwritten by Olesen: such Artaudian phrases as HOW DO I MAKE MYSELF A BODY? along with multiple 0s and 1s. The impulse was to carry information from one side of the room to the other, though ultimately the code was enigmatic and the space between these two circuit boards absurd.

Tacked above the gallery's entrance was the right half of a pair of men's black oxfords. Olesen often incorporates men's shoes into his installations as a stand-in for authoritarian presence, though here, suspended upside down, the object was surrealistic, and easy to miss. What moored the show were the two sculptures: an anomalous form wrapped in wool felt and secured with shipping twine, and a narrow lumber plank wedged at an angle between the floor and ceiling toward the rear. The latter, an allusion to a German colloquialism that can be translated as "narrow-minded," also bore the phrase PORTRAIT D'UN IMBECILE. One must keep in mind here that Turing's childhood coincided with the development of Dada and his adolescence with the transition to Surrealism, and that French Dadaist/Surrealist Philippe Soupault once titled a work *Portrait d'un imbécile*. These details gain additional traction when one considers that Olesen's felt-shrouded object is in fact a remake of *L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse*, produced by Man Ray in 1920 just prior to meeting Soupault, who would offer him his first solo European show.

In laying out in rotorelief the figure of Alan Turing, a homosexual forced to be heterosexual, who was acclaimed for inventing a binary language that gave way to a genderless space—a space from which Olesen drew the content of this show, through which information regarding this show was circulated, and in which it will be archived—the artist reconceived Turing as what Deleuze and Guattari might recognize as our natural extension into desiring machines: a fluid body with the "capacity for an unlimited number of connections, in every sense and in all directions."

—*Caroline Busta*