

Pope.L Is Raising Funds to Bottle, Sell Flint Water

BY *Andrew Russeth* POSTED 08/08/17 4:19 PM



Pope.L discussing his *Flint Water Project* in a video.
COURTESY THE ARTIST

What a year Pope.L is having! In March, he presented one of the most impressive, and wonderfully bizarre, pieces in the Whitney Biennial: an installation lined with slices of rotting (or “curing”) bologna that obliquely examined the creation and quantification of identity. That won the artist the Whitney’s \$100,000 Bucksbaum Award. Then, at Documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel, Germany, he unveiled *Whispering Campaign* (2017), a remarkable endeavor that features performers reciting various monologues across the two cities and speakers broadcasting still more narrations, in places that included bathroom stalls, public squares, and parking lots.

Now Pope.L is headed to the What Pipeline gallery in Detroit, where he will do a show that involves selling 1,200 bottles of water from Flint, Michigan, the city of nearly 100,000 people whose water became undrinkable after authorities decided to fill its water system with resources from the Flint River instead of using Detroit’s network. To realize the exhibition, which is titled “Flint Water Project” and supported by the John L. and James S. Knight Foundation as well as the artist’s galleries (Mitchell-Innes & Nash in New York and Susanne Vielmetter Projects in Los Angeles), he is aiming to raise \$12,500 through a Kickstarter campaign.

“When Pope.L was asked by What Pipeline to do a commission for Detroit,” the Kickstarter proposal reads, “he felt that whatever he did it should not re-victimize the city as had been done too often in the past. What if Detroit could be the hero and come to the rescue of another midwest city in need?” It adds, at another point, “The goals for his work are several: joy, money, and uncertainty—not necessarily in that order.”

The fundraising drive runs through September 5, and there is quite an array of rewards on offer to donors, from “a hefty two-ply sticker depicting the infamous Flint City water tower” at the \$15 level to “all you can eat tacos at What Pipeline with Pope.L, his studio, and the What Pipeline team after the opening on September 7” (for \$999) to “dinner in Flint with Pope.L and the co-founders of What Pipeline” (that goes for \$2,500). Note well: one particularly generous patron can upgrade that last reward to “dinner on Pope.L’s lap” for the sum of \$9,999. (Being able to tell the story of that experience for the rest of your life, I assure you, is worth a great deal more.)

Proceeds from the sale of the water, which will be on offer at What Pipeline through October 21, will go to the United Way of Genesee County and Hydrate Detroit, which deals with water issues in the Motor City.

Flint now gets its water through Detroit’s system, and there are signs that its water has been improving. But “still today many Flint residents do not have access to reliable, safe water,” Pope.L says in a video about his plans, noting that the water he intends to sell “may contain lead, E. Coli, Legionella, and Listeria, among other goodies.”

“Today the EPA claims the water is safe,” Pope.L adds. “However, three years ago, the EPA claimed the same thing and tragedy ensued.”