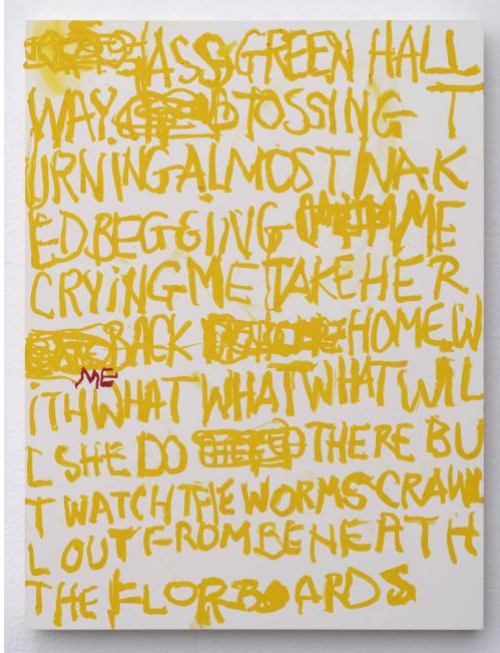


POPE.L: *Four Panels*

March 5 – April 10, 2021

534 West 26th Street, New York



NEW YORK, February 13, 2021 – Mitchell-Innes & Nash is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by American artist Pope.L. This will be the artist’s first solo show at the gallery since his critically acclaimed trio of exhibitions, *Instigation*, *Aspiration*, *Perspiration*, at The Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art and the Public Art Fund in New York in 2019, featuring landmark performances and related videos, objects and installations. On view at 534 West 26th Street, *Four Panels* provides a unique opportunity to experience Pope.L’s continued engagement with the mediums of language and painting.

The exhibition features works from 2020 that explore the relationship between writing, legibility, speech and autobiography. Hand-written words spell out a set of bold messages against bare surfaces at times indistinguishable from the surface itself. Individual

letters are variously emphasized using color, texture, transparency and erasure. Messy or inverted symbols and incorrect spelling make it challenging to decipher and the statements that ultimately transpire are fragmented, contradictory and rhythmical. These techniques create a sense of absence: the significance of the texts remain elusive and open-ended—something is missing—just as the title of the exhibition “Four Panels” leaves out that there are actually five panels on the walls of the gallery.

The works are a part of Pope.L’s ongoing *Skin Set* project of drawings, paintings and contraptions, started in 1997, where statements about “black, green, red, blue, white and purple people” draw attention to how we use color or color terms or racial epithets to create meaning. As in those works, here emphasis is placed simultaneously on the visual construction of language and the meaning of the texts themselves—letters are pulled apart to focus on the space between, just as inconsistent line breaks and crossed-out words highlight audibility, tone and discord. As Pope.L notes, writing itself becomes a “re-coded visual communication via a set of physical actions: scratches, scrawls, hacks, gouges, smears, globs and caesura where the space between one moment of utterance (for example, a mark or an artwork) is also a kind of writing.”¹

The five panels are each inscribed with a unique text written usually but unevenly in all caps. First-person prose suggests an autobiographical dimension, but the narratives are fragmented, incomplete and stunted. Some panels have been punctured with holes and globbed with glue.

Towards the back of the gallery, thirty paintings on paper have been grouped together in a large-scale grid titled *Calendar*, all seeming to feature the same text. Pope.L has deployed the format of

¹ The artist in correspondence with the gallery, February 2021.

the grid throughout his practice to juxtapose idiosyncratic assertions in a structured, pseudo-objective format. Any sense of order is disrupted by Pope.L's use dates yet to occur such as July 4, 2031 as well as the difficulty of reading the words depicted, some of which are at times almost completely obliterated. In sounding out the inscriptions, viewers are prompted to stutter, pause, rhyme and riddle.

However, to shore up the legibility in the work, Pope.L carefully inscribes the dates in ballpoint to create a sense of diaristic progression. This strategy recalls the use of the grid in conceptual art as a tool for the systematic recording of information—the title of this installation is a particular reference to German artist Hanne Darboven's momentous, serial inscriptions of calendar dates in the 1970s as a response to the traumas of representing recent history. For Pope.L, dichotomy is a mystery. For example, where is the line between legibility and illegibility, and by extension between form and content, figuration and abstraction? The work becomes a meditation on the fact that the very act of writing is invariably marked by lack. In the visual context of painting, attempting to decipher the artist's texts invites new layers of meaning or frustration. Misunderstanding becomes its own value. The works require that viewers slow down and detour the process of imbibing and allow open-endedness and uncertainty to become the content consumed.

“What is ‘significant’ writing? Why write? And if one insists, why write this rather than that? One has to make this decision over and over because writing is, by its very nature, discontinuous, intermittent and fragmented by circumstance, even by one’s own breath. Therefore, there is always a gap or space between any moment of writing or utterance and another. Writing is always rewriting. One is always beginning again with writing. Now writing autobiographically could be said to count as significant writing, at least to its author. But autobiography is also a format, a show and form of display. It has rules—requirements and limitations. To write autobiographically, one must act as though the chasm between the past and the present can somehow be transcended in communication or text or whatever. But how one writes is also key. For example, should one write the inevitable, unescapable absence? Does one have a choice?”²

—Pope.L, February 2021

Over the past four decades, Pope.L has probed the complexities of language, representation and identity in his work. With his humorous, absurd and poetic sensibility, he engages unconventional materials and techniques to engage his subject matter in a curious investigation of custom, history and cultural norms. Transcending a wide range of art movements, including Pop art, Fluxus and conceptual art, his work has come to embody its own genre of body politics. His multifaceted works—including public actions, performances, paintings, drawings, sculptures and photography—have involved selling aspirin on the street for a hundred dollars a pill; eating the *Wall Street Journal* while seated on the sidewalk on an American flag; burying himself up to his shoulders with a bowl of vanilla ice cream just out of reach; creating mass crawls around the world and selling contaminated drinking water as art works to help fund the rehabilitation of a community.

² Ibid.

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The exhibition, *Four Panels*, is complemented by a publication titled *My Kingdom for a Title*, which further considers the conceptual framework of writing, legibility and absence in Pope.L's practice. It includes texts by Pope.L with endnotes compiled by the artist Kandis Williams. At 276 pages and fully illustrated, it is the first book to bring together a considerable selection of his writings from 1977 to 2020. Pope.L's current exhibition, now on view at the Neubauer Collegium at the University of Chicago through May 21, bears the same title.

About Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Founded by Lucy Mitchell-Innes and David Nash, who previously headed the worldwide Contemporary and Impressionist & Modern Art divisions of Sotheby's, Mitchell-Innes & Nash places exemplary contemporary artists within a historical context, revealing a continuity of ideas and aesthetic virtuosity from the Modern era through the present day. Lucy Mitchell-Innes is also a member of the selection committee of Art Basel and a former president of the Art Dealers Association of America. Mitchell-Innes & Nash's renowned exhibition program fosters excellence within artistic practice, while forging an informed dialogue between emerging and established internationally recognized artists. From acclaimed surveys of 20th century masters, such as Jean Arp, Anthony Caro, Jay DeFeo, Willem de Kooning, Leon Kossoff, Kenneth Noland, Roy Lichtenstein, and Nicolas de Stael, to solo exhibitions of Sarah Braman, Keltie Ferris, Daniel Lefcourt, Eddie Martinez Pope.L, Martha Rosler, and Jessica Stockholder, Mitchell-Innes & Nash has proven expertise in both advancing the careers of emerging artists and maintaining the superior standard set by established artists.

Caption: Pope.L, [Visit to the Nursing Home](#), 2020, oil stick on panel, 24 by 18 by 1 1/5 in. 61 by 45.7 by 3 cm. © Pope.L. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

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