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The 20 Most Influential Artists of 2017

By Artsy Editors
Dec 15, 2017 5:51 pm



Pope.L, *Claim (Whitney Version)*, 2017. © Pope.L. Photo by Bill Orcutt. Courtest of the artist; Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



Pope.L, Installation view of *Trinket* at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA, Los Angeles, CA. © Pope.L. Photo by Brian Forrest. Courtesy of the artist; Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH



Pope.L, *Pedestal*, 2017. © Pope.L. Courtest of the artist; Martos Gallery, New York and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY.



Pope.L, *Blessed Be the Detergent*, 2017. © Pope.L Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY.

B. 1955, Newark, New Jersey. Lives and works in Chicago

The prevailing memory of the 2017 Whitney Biennial will likely be the outrage over Dana Schutz's painting of Emmett Till, but it would be a shame if that overshadowed Pope.L's strange, complicated, and typically irreverent 2017 work, *Claim (Whitney Version)*. A large, pink-colored cube,

the installation was festooned with pieces of bologna, as well as small photographic portraits of what the artist claimed were Jewish people. (“Fortified wine” was also used as a material.) The enigmatic work proves especially complex amidst the current resurgence of identity politics, and in June, it netted the artist the coveted Bucksbaum Award.

Since the 1970s, Pope.L has developed a layered practice that combines performance, video, painting, and sculpture. Some of his most iconic works were acts of endurance in which the artist donned various costumes and crawled for great lengths; at 62, he’s still making the same sort of sacrifices, and still taking risks. For Documenta 14, he unveiled *Whispering Campaign* (2016–17), a sound piece sited in both Kassel and Athens for which performers whispered lines from a script into mini headsets that were then broadcast via speakers placed in offbeat locales around the cities. Also in 2017, at the Detroit alternative exhibition space What Pipeline, the artist launched a simple but loaded project: He took lead-damaged water from Flint, Michigan, bottled it, and sold the results as a kind of unhealthy readymade. “Flint Water” turned the gallery into a sort of factory or store, with 100 percent of the proceeds going to a charity (a signed bottle of Flint’s chemical tap can still be yours for \$250).