

HYPERALLERGIC

Pope.L Wants You to Crawl Across New York With Him

The renowned performance artist is seeking more than 100 volunteers to participate in his largest performance yet, “Conquest.”

Zachary Small July 24, 2019



Pope.L, “The Great White Way” (2009–09), 22 miles. 9 years, 1 street, performance (© Pope.L Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York)

In a little less than two months, you may see a squadron of New Yorkers slithering through the triumphal arch of Washington Square Park on their hands and knees. Prepare yourself, because William Pope.L is coming to town.

The legendary performance artist will be showing in major museums in New York come fall (like the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art). Alongside those exhibitions, the 64-year-old artist is planning his largest group performance yet. He’s asking for more than 100 volunteers to participate in “Conquest,” a crawl across the city that begins in the West Village and travel east toward Washington Square Park before turning north for a finish at Union Square. Situated in some of Manhattan’s most historic

neighborhoods, the route draws attention to power dynamics, privilege, and cultural representation in the city.

Public Art Fund, a local nonprofit, will present the performance on Saturday, September 21. “The crawl is an absurd journey to an uncertain goal,” Pope.L said in a statement. “The raw physical struggle of the journey suggests homelessness and a loss of hope and status but takes place in a tree-lined upscale environment where wealth, speed, and verticality are king

For nearly five decades, the New Jersey native has been synonymous with endurance-based performances that comment on the socioeconomic distinctions that classifying Americans, especially when it comes to living while Black. Over the years, his “crawls” have distinguished themselves by length and theme. “Tompkins Square Crawl” (1991) featured the artist dressed in a business suit crawling through the park’s gutters. Arguably his most important piece, “The Great White Way,” involved a Superman outfit, a skateboard, and a 22-mile stretch along Broadway from the Statue of Liberty to the Bronx.

“Working at the margins of the mainstream art world for decades, Pope.L has created a profound and compelling body of work unlike that of any of his contemporaries,” said Public Art Fund’s director and chief curator Nicholas Baume. “As an epic group undertaking, *Conquest* promises to extend the richly layered metaphors around race, power and vulnerability in his solo crawls to further explore diversity, collectivity, struggle and achievement.”

The open call for participants will be made later this month; volunteers will be selected by Pope.L to reflect the city’s diversity with regards to age, race, and ability, and to include people from different professions and socioeconomic backgrounds, from all five boroughs and. Precise details for the unpaid volunteer opportunity will be released later this week. The performance will be free to viewers.

“What sort of progress is this performance?” asks Pope.L in the announcement. “Is it a comedy of errors or business as usual or a critical mirror held up to a great American past-time called success?”