

## A Q&A with Pope.L, the artist behind the latest Aspen Art Museum 'takeover' in The Aspen Times

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By Andrew Travers



Pope.L, "Aspen Times Artist Takeover," 2020  
Will Sardinsky

The artist Pope.L has collaborated with Aspen area locals to make text-based self-portraits and share some of their gut feelings during this historic and unsettled moment. The 16-piece series is the second entry in the Aspen Art Museum's Aspen Times Artist Takeover series.

The photos aim to create a group portrait of today's Aspen. For each portrait, the subject responded to Pope.L's prompt: "At this moment, what is in your mind now?"

Pope.L has worked in painting, performance, installation. An incisive cultural observer and artist of intervention, he may best be known for his performance pieces with people crawling on sidewalks and streets. His recent solo exhibitions include "member: Pope.: 1978-2001" at the Museum of Modern Art (2019), "Conquest" with the Public Art Fund in New York (2019), and "Choir" at the Whitney Museum of American Art (2019-20).

“This moment, our now, is scary,” Pope.L said. “No doubt. And we avoid, treat each other like strangers to deal with it. But what else are we avoiding?”

Pope.L recently did an email interview with The Aspen Times from Chicago. He asked The Times to retain some of the non-standard formatting in his responses and some quirks readers may not be used to seeing in the Times. As he put it, the artist aimed “to keep the text as much like it is as possible — like I am an old man yelling across a room, which in a way is true.”

AT: How did you hook up with the Aspen Art Museum for this project?

POPE.L: WELL, HOW DO YOU HOOK UP WITH WONDERFUL PEOPLE? SERENDIPITY. FOR THIS PROJECT, THEY SIMPLY REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED ME.

AT: How did you find or choose your subjects here in Aspen?

POPE.L: CAREFULLY. YET NOT TOO CAREFULLY. THE THING WAS TO GET AT, TO TRY TO GET AT WHAT PEOPLE SIMPLY THINK ABOUT EACH DAY, SOME OF WHICH MAYBE, MAYBE, THEY CAN NOT SHARE EASILY.

AT: How would you answer the prompt? At this moment, what is in your mind now?

POPE.L: SPAGHETTI.

AT: What do you hope these 16 portraits of Aspenites with their texts communicate to the public?

POPE.L: I HOPE FOLKS WILL BE PUZZLED, TAKEN ABACK A BIT ABT. NOT JUST BY WHAT IS ‘INSIDE’ THEIR FELLOW ASPENITES, I MEAN THE WORDS THEY USE, BUT ALSO WHO MIGHT BE THE PERSON BEHIND THAT PIECE OF CARDBOARD, WHO MIGHT THAT BE? DO WE TRULY KNOW THE INTIMATE WORLD OF THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO US? SOMETIMES THE PERSON WE SEE MOST OFTEN IS THE PERSON WHO MAKES OUR COFFEE AT THE COFFEE SHOP. DOES THIS TIME OF COVID MAKE CONNECTION MORE OR LESS POSSIBLE?

AT: What surprised you, if anything, about the texts or the overall results of this project?

POPE.L: THAT THE PEOPLE WHO DID IT, DID IT, I THINK THAT IS F\*\*\*ING SUPER GREAT. JUDOS, I MEAN KUDOS TO THEM.

AT: Most viewers will interact with this project in the newspaper. How do you feel about using print media to reach viewers? Versus the gallery/museum/public spaces where viewers are more accustomed to interacting with artworks?

POPE.L: WELL, ART IS LIKE ANYTHING ELSE.

AT: What is the role of public art in this moment?

POPE.L: WELL, FOR ME, THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ART IS TO BE OPPORTUNISTIC AND IN THE SH\*T — THIS IS A VERY SPECIAL VULNERABLE TIME, IT IS REVEALING THINGS ABT. OURSELVES IN A SPECIAL WAY THAT IS VERY NAKED, WE NEED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE TRUTH HERE. FOR ME, MUSEUM ART IS! PUBLIC ART, THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE. WE NEED TO SEE THE OPPORTUNITY OF OUR NOW AND BE IT AS DEEPLY AS POSSIBLE.

AT: How do you think museums can best serve their publics in this moment?

# MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

POPE.L: DO THINGS 'DIFFERNTLY.' DO THINGS OPPOSITE. KEEP THEIR WORKERS ON PAYROLL, FILL THE ATRIUM WITH BEDS FOR THE HOMELESS, INVITE ARTISTS IN TO SERVE THEIR TRUE CONSTITUENCY.

AT: What has your day-to-day art practice been during the pandemic?

POPE.L: MY DAY-TO-DAY, JUST BY ITSELF, SEPARATE FROM ART, HAS BEEN HIGGELY PIGGELY. WITH THINGS CONSTANTLY SHIFTING, SOME DAYS CAN BE A BEAR BUT THEN I AM IN CHICAGO, YES? NOT BEIRUT, NO? OR EVEN FLINT, MICHIGAN. IMAGINE GOING THROUGH SOMETHING LIKE THIS AND NOT HAVING ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER YOU CAN RELY ON?