



Pope.L: 'Hospital'

Eddy Frankel | Tuesday 21 November 2023



Pope.L, Eating the Wall Street Journal (3rd version), 2000 performance. MoMA, New York, NY, USA.

Time Out says:



In 2000, American artist Pope.L created the world's most precarious toilet. It was a vast rickety wooden tower, topped with a porcelain throne upon which he sat, covered in flour, and ate The Wall Street Journal.

It was an absurd, obscene mockery of capitalism and whiteness, and it was signature Pope.L. The tower is reconstructed here in the main building, but it has toppled, its wooden beams have snapped, the bog hangs in mid-air, the whole thing is caked in dust and dirt. Is this the artifice of capitalism crumbling before you? The armour of whiteness failing? Bottles of cheap booze – Buckfast and Cactus Jack – are left dripping onto the floor, bowls of dust are there for you to sprinkle on the art, speakers play plopping and whooshing sounds. It lacks the essential performance element that makes Pope.L's work so vital, obviously, but as a post-9/11 scene of destruction, a tower of American dominance that has utterly failed, it's brilliant.

Over in the Fire Station, a video shows chickens pecking apart and destroying a model of the Capitol building. Upstairs, more Buckfast bottles drip, this time into empty hospital cups. This is art about precarity, about alcoholism and poverty in an unjust political system, one that favours the elite and punishes the vulnerable.

Not all of it works (nothing in the Fire Station does anything that's not being done better in the main building, it just feels like filler), but when Pope.L's art hits home, it hits very, very hard.