

Conceptual artist Pope.L has died

Josie Thaddeus-Johns | Jan 2, 2024 12:29PM



Portrait of Pope.L by Peyton Fulford. Courtesy of Modern Art.

Pope.L, the conceptual artist who worked in performance, sculpture, and installation, died unexpectedly last week at the age of 68. His provocative works, which often took place outside the gallery and museum context, confronted viewers with the artist's dark, yet affecting, commentary on race, language, and humanity.

The American artist, who was born in Newark, New Jersey, and based in Chicago, was best known for his "crawl pieces": performances in which he crossed the city on his hands and knees. In these, and other works, the artist used absurd, shocking setups to highlight unspoken assumptions about race. For example, his "Skin Set" drawings sketch out confronting and illogical pronouncements on race (such as "white people are negotiable") in block capitals on graph paper. Another notable work, *Flint Water* (2017), saw the artist bottle contaminated water from the Michigan city, making visible the infrastructural neglect that Black communities face.

Over the last decade, Pope.L had been receiving greater institutional acclaim: In 2017, he won the \$100,000 Bucksbaum Award for his participation in the Whitney Biennial, an installation of 2,755 slices of bologna meat that cured over the course of the exhibition appended with photos of New Yorkers. In 2019, he held a trio of complementary exhibitions in New York with the Museum of Modern Art, The Whitney, and Public Art Fund. His current show "Hospital" at South London Gallery (on view through February 11th) is a career survey of sorts: a set of installations that are reconfigurations of past works.

Pope L.'s death was announced by his representing galleries, Vielmetter Los Angeles, Modern Art, and Mitchell-Innes and Nash.