

the Institute

Pope.L *In Memoriam*

Dear Institute Community,

The Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, mourns the passing of Pope.L, acclaimed artist, beloved art teacher, and former member of our Board of Trustees. He died unexpectedly on December 23, 2023, at his home in Chicago at the age of 68.



Pope.L's artistic practice traversed disciplinary boundaries to embrace performance, photography, painting, sculpture, theatre, and writing. He is perhaps best known for his provocative "crawls" through the streets of New York and Lewiston, Maine in a business suit or Superman costume, enacting the precarious state of those who have been marginalized owing to race and economic

circumstances. A version of this performance series, ironically titled *Conquest*, took place in 2019, with 140 volunteers crawling through the Washington Square area blindfolded while holding a flashlight. This and other works were included in a trio of complementary exhibitions in 2019. The Whitney Museum of American Art presented *Choir*, the Museum of Modern Art staged *Member*, and the Public Art Fund organized *Conquest*. Other well-known works include *Eating the Wall Street Journal* of 1991, in which the artist slowly ate the pages of the *Journal* while sitting on a toilet and swallowing milk (an emblem of whiteness) and ketchup (emblem of blood), and the project *Black Factory* begun in 2003, for which he solicited objects that contributors believe represent blackness. The assembled objects constituted an archive that included personal mementos but also revealed racist stereotypes. Most of his works directly addressed issues of racism, prejudice, class, and injustice, with unflinching actions and texts that involved audience participation and startled us into thinking. According to Professor Darby English, one of Pope.L's colleagues at the University of Chicago, "he thought a lot about 'a lack worth having,' and then created unceasingly out of that thinking."

In a video accompanying a recent exhibition at South London Gallery, Pope.L states: "I want to make things that are porous, that people can wrestle with or denigrate or yell at or laugh at or whatever the case may be. I always make them with an eye on the not-myself. I make stuff where the visitor [has] a role here... You come and fill the holes with your experience."

Pope.L attended Brooklyn's Pratt Institute and earned a bachelor's degree at Montclair State College (now Montclair State University) in 1978. He also attended the Whitney Independent Study Program and then received an M.F.A. from Rutgers University in 1981. He taught at Bates College from 1990 to 2010, and then at the University of Chicago. Pope.L won the top prize at the Whitney Biennial in 2017.

The moniker "Pope.L" combines the artist's original surname with the first letter of his mother's surname, Lancaster—a name his students at Bates College came up with in the mid-1980s and that he adopted soon afterward.

We offer our sincere condolences to his partner, Mami Takahashi, an older brother, Eugene Pope, and his son, Desmond, and all of his friends and colleagues across the globe.

Sincerely,
Christine Poggi
Judy and Michael Steinhardt Director

Photo Credit: Grant Delin.