

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

Pope.L: You Are What You Eat

Co-Presented by Mitchell-Innes & Nash and 52 Walker, New York

The Salon by NADA & The Community

30 bis Rue de Paradis, 75010 Paris

Booth 0.02

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Mitchell-Innes & Nash and 52 Walker are pleased to announce *You Are What You Eat*, a presentation centered on the acclaimed artist Pope.L (1955–2023) that explores the theme of food as a racial and social epithet. The exhibition highlights significant works from Pope.L’s career, including his iconic *Broken Column* (1992–2001/2015–2021), an arrangement of mayonnaise jars—some damaged, some intact—encased in plywood. The presentation will also feature the video and photographs from his performance *Eating the Wall Street Journal (3rd Version)* (2000) and the banner *Race Becomes You* (2001), along with a selection of works on Pop-Tarts and Skin Set drawings created between the 1990s and 2010s.

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Since the 1970s, Pope.L incorporated cheap foods such as mayonnaise, as well as coffee grinds, peanut butter and alcohol, into his practice. With his distinct humorous, absurd, and poetic sensibilities, he engaged unconventional materials and techniques to challenge the limits of his subject matter. Each consumable has its own connotation within American culture. Pop-Tarts are a low-cost and sugary breakfast pastry associated with schoolchildren. Pope.L observed that mayonnaise possessed a “bogus whiteness” and considered it to be a sort of antithesis to peanut butter, another cheap food product that he incorporated into his work as an imprecise representation of Blackness.

The artist’s *Broken Column* appropriates the minimal and repetitious formal structure of Constantin Brâncuși’s *Endless Column* (1937–1938). A kind of durational work, Pope.L’s version uses mayonnaise jars as its primary material. Over time, mayonnaise separates into a transparent oil, which slowly seeps down the tower of jars. The condiment becomes a conduit that explores the social construction of “whiteness.” In an interview with artist Martha Wilson for BOMB magazine in 1996, Pope.L described mayonnaise as “a kind of make-up” with an “impressive coverage.” He stated, “the longer it remains, the more transparent it becomes. Not to mention the smell. I was interested in doing something futile.... Mayonnaise gave me a quirky material means to deal with issues black people claim they don’t value very much, e.g. whiteness.”

Broken Column will be presented alongside another work, a banner with bold text that reads “RACE BECOMES YOU.” The two works were first shown together in 2001 at The Project in New York. In an Artforum tribute to Pope.L in 2024, artist Clifford Owens recalled his encounter with the banner: “Pope.L reminds us that race is a social construct determining a social performance; ultimately, we perform race.”

Beginning in the late 1990s, Pope.L produced a series of drawings made directly onto Pop-Tarts. Across one or several adjoining tarts, Pope.L created portraits of racial caricatures using markers and pencils as well as existing surface elements such as frosting and scalloped edges. Crudely outlined, the stylized faces evoke graffiti or art made by children, as well as fading historical frescos. Due to their artificial preservatives, the Pop-Tarts appear in a state of suspended animation, an artifact of consumerism that draws attention to its associations with indulgence and waste, nourishment and junk.

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Eating the Wall Street Journal (3rd Version) took place at Sculpture Center, New York, in 2000 as part of the group exhibition *Soma, Soma, Soma*, and is an iteration of one of Pope.L's most important durational performances. The work was conceived as a response to an advertising campaign that claimed subscribing to the newspaper could significantly increase one's wealth. Taking this notion to an extreme, Pope.L provocatively questioned, "If a subscription can multiply your riches, then wouldn't actually consuming the paper boost your wealth even more?" The performance was documented on video and in photographs, both of which are shown here.

You Are What You Eat presents a spectrum of works by Pope.L that document his engagement with a wide range of artistic movements including Pop, Fluxus, Conceptual Art, and Minimalism. A selection of his well-known Skin Set drawings, begun in 1997, use a variety of materials to inscribe bold, absurd statements about "black, white, green, red, blue, purple people" across their compositions. A common thread in these works is an interest in illegibility; as Pope.L notes, these works "are meant to be read even if I sometimes make them very difficult to be read. I use shifting levels of legibility of language to trouble the process of reading.... Legibility can be articulated via physical, poetic or conceptual means."

Mitchell-Innes & Nash's co-presentation of *You Are What You Eat* at The Salon in Paris is the first in a series of collaborative exhibitions following the gallery's shift to a new model. Continuing its commitment to honoring the legacies of select artists and estates, Mitchell-Innes & Nash looks forward to announcing future innovative projects.

The Estate of Pope.L is represented by Mitchell-Innes & Nash. This collaboration follows Gordon Matta-Clark & Pope.L: *Impossible Failures*, an exhibition curated by 52 Walker senior director Ebony L. Haynes and presented by 52 Walker in cooperation with Mitchell-Innes & Nash in 2023.

Images:

POPE.L, *Race Becomes You*, 2001, signed and dated bottom left on reverse, vinyl banner, unique, 48 by 190 1/2 in. 121.9 by 483.9 cm.

POPE.L, *Broken Column*, 1992-2000/2015-2021, jars of mayonnaise, some broken, some intact, acrylic paint and tape with aluminum foil encased in five plywood and acrylic cases on foam and metal trays, site specific installation, dimensions vary

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