

# WHITNEY

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# PRESS RELEASE



Pope.L, *Well (drawing version)*, 2015, La Panacée, Montpellier, France  
Courtesy of the Artist, © Pope.L

## **AS PART OF A TRIO OF EXHIBITIONS DEVOTED TO THE ARTIST, POPE. L: CHOIR TO OPEN AT THE WHITNEY**

**NEW YORK, August 19, 2019**—Pope.L brings his boundary-breaking practice to the Whitney with the debut of a newly commissioned installation, *Choir* (2019). For over four decades, Pope.L has used performance, painting, drawing, installation, video, sculpture, and theater to grapple with gender, race, and societal concerns. Expanding on his ongoing exploration of water, he investigates its physical properties and associations—ranging from life-giving to destructive—to find connections between this ubiquitous substance and complex social issues. Pope.L was the recipient of the 2017 Bucksbaum Award, which is presented to an artist in the Whitney Biennial. *Choir* opens in the Lobby Gallery on October 10, 2019 and runs through Winter 2020.

This exhibition is part of *Pope.L: Instigation, Aspiration, Perspiration*, a trio of complementary exhibitions organized by The Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and Public Art Fund. Utilizing both public and private spaces, the expansive presentation addresses many elements of the artist's oeuvre, from singular early works to a monumental new installation and a new large-scale performative work inspired

by the artist's iconic crawl series on the streets of New York City. The three exhibitions underscore Pope.L's innovative approach to the notion of duration, the flow from moment to moment, and the process of creation, which is often made apparent in the work itself.

"We're delighted to partner with our wonderful colleagues to present Pope.L's pioneering work across New York this fall," said Scott Rothkopf, Senior Deputy Director and Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator. "While MoMA will focus on his early career and the Public Art Fund will stage an outdoor performance, the Whitney will unveil a spectacular new installation that reveals Pope.L's ingenious capacity to embody a range of social, historical, and emotional associations within a singular artistic gesture."

*Choir* (2019) moves 800 gallons of water through pipes, tanks, pumps, and electromagnetic valves to create a murmuring, singing, crashing circulatory sonic landscape. The installation features a drinking fountain—an appliance often associated with Jim Crow segregation—that has been inverted and appears to instantly gush almost half a ton of water into a massive milky white water tank. The artist refers to *Choir* as an "experiment" consisting of a kinetic entity that seems to function on its own (for whom we are never told), producing an acoustical concert of filling and draining, drips and drops. Joining the unpredictable sounds of water are words and voices sourced from Library of Congress field recordings from the 1930s and African-themed Hollywood movies from the same period. *Choir* seeks to raise questions, compelling viewers to uncover the connections within an installation that is ever-changing physically and sonically.

*Choir* is accompanied by another sculptural work entitled *Well*, which features drinking glasses filled nearly to the brim and placed on shelves in various spaces in the Museum. While it differs in size and scale from *Choir*, both works address the basic human need for clean water and the resulting crisis when it is out of reach. As an artist who professes to use "lack" as material, Pope.L plays with absence and presence by creating reservoirs of varying scales that cannot be tapped and utilized.

"Water is critical to life," says Pope.L, "yet uncritical in its interactions in the world. Water is always performing. Water always seeks its own level and, given time, dissolves almost any material with which it comes into contact. In this sense, water is a fascinating model of sociality."

Pope.L's exploration of water is central to his recent project *Flint Water* (2017). Bringing attention to the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, he bottled contaminated tap water collected from one Flint home and sold the resulting works of art to raise funds to aid those living in the city. Presented as a kind of laboratory meets pop-up shop at the gallery What Pipeline in Detroit, Pope.L framed the project as a way for one distressed city to help another, connecting different localities through the universal need for access to safe water. Like *Flint Water*, *Choir* demonstrates his ongoing metaphorical, political, and material investigation of water.

Christopher Y. Lew, Nancy and Fred Poses Curator, says "*Choir* brings together so many of his ongoing concerns, including the materiality of water, a system that is in itself a kind of performance, as well as Pope.L's interests in noise, sound, and music. Additionally, the collaboration with MoMA and the Public Art Fund demonstrates Pope.L's important position within contemporary art."

On September 21, Public Art Fund will present *Conquest*, Pope.L's most ambitious group performance yet, inspired by his iconic urban crawls. The relay-style crawl will involve a group of over a hundred volunteer participants navigating Downtown Manhattan, from the West Village to Union Square. The Museum of Modern Art's presentation, *member: Pope.L, 1978–2001*, will feature a selection of the artist's most critical works that range across performance, painting, drawing, installation, theater, and video. The exhibition will run from October 21, 2019 to January 2020.

### **About the Artist**

Pope.L (Newark, NJ, b. 1955) is a Chicago-based multidisciplinary visual artist and educator. Pope.L began his career in the 1970s, training in performance and theater with Fluxus artist Geoffrey Hendricks and the avant-garde theatrical troupe Mabou Mines. He studied at Pratt Institute and later received his BA from Montclair State College in 1978; he also attended the Whitney Independent Study Program before earning his MFA from Rutgers University in 1981. Pope.L embarked on one of his most celebrated crawl performances, *The Great White Way, 22 Miles, 9 Years, 1 Street* (2001–2009), for the 2002 Whitney Biennial. He donned a cape-less Superman costume, strapped a skateboard to his back, and crawled up the entire length of Manhattan's Broadway—in his own words, a "public prostration in motion."

In addition to the Bucksbaum Award, Pope.L is the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, including the Joyce Foundation Award, the Tiffany Foundation Award, the United States Artists Rockefeller Fellowship, the Bellagio Center Residency, Solomon R. Guggenheim Fellowship, Andy Warhol Foundation grant, Creative Capital Foundation grant, Franklin Furnace/Jerome Foundation grant, National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, Artists Space grant, and more.

### Curatorial Credit

The Whitney presentation is organized by Christopher Y. Lew, Nancy and Fred Poses Curator, with Ambika Trasi, curatorial assistant.

### Exhibition Support

*Pope.L: Choir* is sponsored by

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### About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

### Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

2019 Whitney Biennial	May 17–September 22, 2019
The Whitney's Collection: Selections from 1900 to 1965	Ongoing
Jason Moran	September 20, 2019–January 5, 2020
Order and Ornament: Roy Lichtenstein's Entablatures	Opening September 27, 2019
Rachel Harrison Life Hack	October 25, 2019–January 12, 2020
Alan Michelson: Wolf Nation	October 25, 2019–January 12, 2020
Pope.L: Choir	Opens October 10, 2019
Making Knowing: Craft in Art 1950–2019	November 22, 2019–January 2021
Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945	February–May 2020
Agnes Pelton: Desert Transcendentalist	March 13–June 21, 2020
Julie Mehretu	June 26–September 20, 2020
David Hammons: Day's End	2020
Jasper Johns	Opens Fall 2020

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Museum hours are: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday from 10:30 am to 6 pm; Friday and Saturday from 10:30 am to 10 pm. Closed Tuesday except in July and August. Adults: \$25. Full-time students, visitors 65 & over, and visitors with disabilities: \$18. Visitors 18 years & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).

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