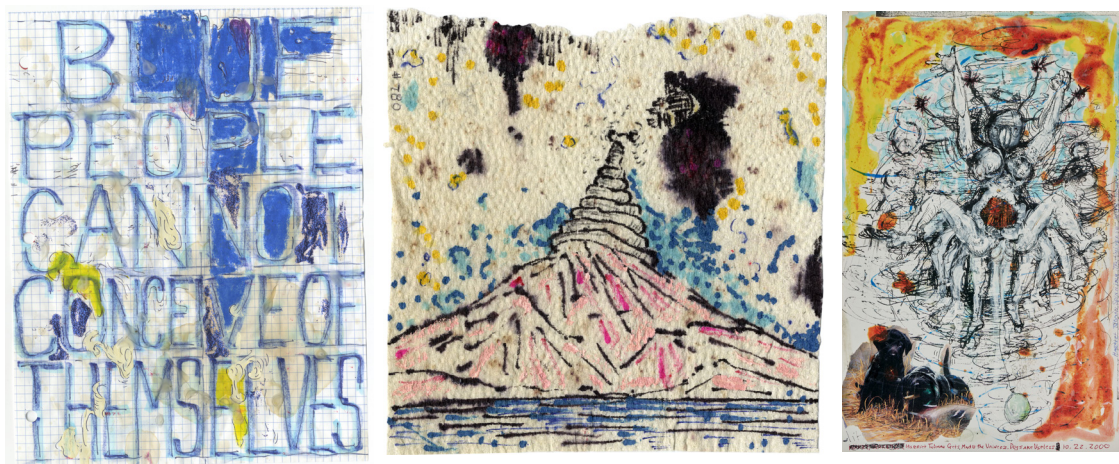


Certainly an Act: Works on Paper by Pope.L June 26 –September 27, 2026

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Free Admission
Wednesday-Sunday: 12–6pm



New York, NY. . . This summer, The Drawing Center will present a comprehensive survey of works on paper by Pope.L (1955–2023). *Certainly an Act* brings together more than two-hundred works—many never before publicly exhibited—ranging from the early 1980s to the artist’s final years. Drawn primarily from the artist’s estate, the exhibition also encompasses drawing-based films, writings, archival materials, and audio drawings. Together, these works argue for a practice in which drawing was neither preparatory nor peripheral, but was a central, expansive and generative aspect of Pope.L’s work.

A visionary artist, teacher, and performer, Pope.L transformed drawing into a space of humorous critique, challenging audiences to see and think differently about the systems that dominate how we interpret the world around us. Known primarily for his performance, installation, and text-based art, drawing remained a throughline in his practice: a testing ground for ideas and a site for play and contradiction. For Pope.L, drawing was a medium in which ideas about the body, language, and American identity took their most distilled and vulnerable form.

Certainly an Act illuminates the artist’s engagement with drawing as both a formal and conceptual tool, featuring key bodies of work such as *Failure Drawings*, *Skin Sets*, and a rarely exhibited installation work titled *Relational Painting a.k.a If Black Is Beautiful....* Presented across the entirety of The Drawing Center’s galleries, the exhibition will be organized thematically and semi-chronologically, tracing the evolution of Pope.L’s larger practice as translated through his unique and expansive definition of drawing.

Certainly an Act: Works on Paper by Pope.L is organized by Assistant Curator Rebecca DiGiovanna, Executive Director Laura Hoptman, and Assistant Curator of Research Isabella Kapur, with Curatorial Consultant Hamza Walker, Director of The Brick, Los Angeles.

Artist Biography

Pope.L (1955–2023) was a groundbreaking interdisciplinary artist whose provocative, conceptually driven work spanned performance, installation, painting, sculpture, and drawing. Born in Newark, NJ, Pope.L trained as a playwright before earning his MFA at Rutgers University. This background brought a narrative and theatrical sensibility to a practice rooted in absurdity, endurance, and confrontation. Best known for his grueling crawl performances—such as *The Great White Way* (2001–2009)—and his biting text-based works, including the long-running *Skin Set* series, Pope.L exposed the contradictions of race, language, and class in American life. As a professor at Bates College and later at the University of Chicago, he mentored generations of artists who were inspired by his interventionist critique and an engagement with public spaces.

His legacy is one of radical inquiry—an unrelenting interrogation of language, power, failure, identity, and the absurdity of contemporary society.

Publication

Certainly an Act: Works on Paper by Pope.L will be accompanied by an illustrated publication, published through The Drawing Center's Drawing Papers imprint, featuring contributions by Rebecca DiGiovanna, writer Simone White, artist Aria Dean, and an interview with Hamza Walker by Laura Hoptman.

Credits

Lead support for *Certainly an Act: Works on Paper by Pope.L* is provided by Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis. Generous funding is provided by Jill and Peter Kraus, Sarah Arison, and Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg. Additional support is provided by Gladstone, Hilary and Peter Hatch, Bernard Lumpkin and Carmine Boccuzzi, Modern Art, London, Adam Pendleton and Karsten Ch'ien, Vielmetter Los Angeles, Timur Galen and Linda Genereux, and Ann and Mel Schaffer.

Special thanks to the Estate of Pope.L and Mitchell-Innes & Nash.

Images

Pope.L, *Blue People Cannot Conceive of Themselves*, 2008. Ballpoint pen, coffee, correction fluid, oil stick, glitter, hair, marker, white glue on graph paper, 11 × 8 1/2 inches (27.9 × 21.6 cm). Courtesy the Estate of Pope.L and Gladstone. © The Estate of Pope.L

Pope.L, *Failure Drawing #780, 2.13.04, Worm Ziggurat on Napkin*, 2004. Acrylic, color marker, and ink on paper towel, 5 1/2 × 5 1/2 inches (14 × 14 cm). Courtesy the Estate of Pope.L and Gladstone. Photo: Daniel Terna © The Estate of Pope.L

Pope.L, Title unknown, 2000. Collage, photocopy, pen, and paint on paper, 17 × 11 inches (43.2 × 27.9 cm). Collection of Jill & Peter Kraus. Photo: Kunning Huang © The Estate of Pope.L