

INE PERFORMA MAGAZINE F





Pope.L. *Conquest*, 2019. A group crawl featuring 140 participants, 5-hour duration. Commissioned by Public Art Fund and presented on September 21, 2019 in Downtown Manhattan, New York City © Pope.L Photo by Timothy Schenck. Courtesy of the artist and Public Art Fund, NY.

PERFORMA REPORTS

Pope.L

Conquest

Public Art Fund
September 21, 2019

On a hot Saturday morning in September, the venerable Pope.L, AKA "[the Friendliest Black Artist in America \(https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/william-pope.l\)](https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/william-pope.l)," staged *Conquest*, a large-scale public performance in New York City and the latest iteration of the artist's "crawls" beginning with 1978's *Times Square Crawl*. The crawls have historically been grounded in the differential politics circumscribing lived experiences of Blackness in America as well as their iconographic legibility within visual culture.





Pope.L, *Conquest*, 2019. A group crawl featuring 140 participants, 5-hour duration. Commissioned by Public Art Fund and presented on September 21, 2019 in Downtown Manhattan, New York City © Pope.L Photo by Nicholas Knight. Courtesy of the artist and Public Art Fund, NY.

Conquest returned to the collective ethos at the heart of the crawl-works while generously enlarging the works' scope. One hundred and forty-odd volunteers across the spectrum of age, race, gender, and ability crawled, in discrete sections, through Chelsea, the West Village, and on to Union Square—locations once the countercultural and creative centers of New York City. Watching the participants crawl along blindfolded, flashlight in hand, one foot shoe-less, one noted the contrast between the figures of sheer diversity and voluntary labor (as much a matter of differing bodies as of differing styles of movement) against their thoroughly gentrified ground. In its temporary disruption of social everydayness and the varying reactions of spectators ranging from mild curiosity to impatient dismissal, *Conquest* recalled past responses to Pope.L's crawls: in 1978 a police officer interrupted the artist as he made his way along the sidewalk. During *Tompkins Square Crawl* (1991), one black spectator angrily (mis)read Pope.L's performance of abjection—the artist was attired in a black suit and white shirt—as a denigration of Black middle-class life writ large. Despite the presence of New York's artworld elite in the audience that Saturday, the uncanny ability of the crawl-works to implicate onlookers' complicity in the prostration displayed seemed mostly intact.

Swagato Chakravorty

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