

Mitchell-Innes & Nash is pleased to present *Proto-Skin Set*, an exhibition of early work by Pope.L from 1979 to 1994 that explores the use of materiality and language in his practice. On view for the first time is the artist's *Proto-Skin Sets*, a selection of mixed media collages and assemblages that deal with the social constructions of language, race, and gender. The exhibition also includes a five-part document from 1979 that is part of an open-ended set of written works titled *Communications Devices*. This is Pope.L's fourth exhibition with the gallery and is accompanied by a catalogue with a Q&A between Pope.L and Bennett Simpson, Senior Curator at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Pope.L began making *Proto-Skin Sets* and *Communication Devices* in the 1970s and 1980s while he was a student at Montclair State University in New Jersey and continued working with them throughout his teaching tenure at Bates College in Maine. Using language and writing as a starting point, these works anticipate his ongoing project "Skin Sets," text-based works that employ language to construct pointed, absurd, and layered messages about the vagaries of color.

The *Proto-Skin Sets* use found materials like local newspapers, commercial poster boards, and billboard advertisements as a point of departure to examine the possibilities of language. Pope.L interpolates the methods and uses of writing, both visually and literarily. Seeing language as image and image as language, Pope.L uses texture and mark-making to make these definitions concrete. He incorporates organic materials to speak about duration—for example peanut butter, semen, and human hair—in several of the works, something he has done subsequently throughout his practice.

Pope.L began creating *Communications Devices* in 1976 when he was navigating how to write language and text within his practice. *Communications Devices* are a wide-ranging enterprise composed primarily of written things—in the form of stories, novels, plays, song lyrics, documentation, and more—and is part of the larger *Proto-Skin Sets* series. Some of the stories in the *Communications Devices* set, for example, were published as fiction in small literary presses while others were kept in an accounting ledger (now lost) along with the majority of the oeuvre. The *Communications Device* on view at Mitchell-Innes & Nash is a project from the 1970s. For this project, Pope.L gathered gallery show postcards intended to promote contemporary exhibitions in SoHo, wrote on them, and mailed them out to galleries of which he was aware. In addition, he created an enlarged version of the same text, typing it out on 250 copies of standard photocopy paper before leaving small stacks in the same galleries. The total number of postcards or which particular ones were mailed for this four-part work is unknown. While a variety of postcards was originally mailed, the only one that remains is in photocopy form and advertises a group show at The Clocktower.

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