Gordon Matta-Clark & Pope.L:
Impossible Failures

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52 Walker Street, New York

Pope.L studio, 2022. © Pope.L. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

52 Walker is pleased to announce its sixth exhibition, *Impossible Failures*, which will pair work by Gordon Matta-Clark (1943–1978) and Pope.L (b. 1955). The exhibition will focus on their shared fixation regarding the problematics of architecture, language, institutions, scale, and value.

Matta-Clark and Pope.L are known for their respective interdisciplinary practices that examine the value and paradoxes of urban life as well as the risk inherent in art making. Through performance, film, drawing, and various multimedia projects, the two artists often opened up interstitial spaces by realizing sweeping gestures that take into account shifting, decentralized zones. Embracing the wide-ranging opportunities afforded by concepts around failure—and in their expression a consideration for hope—the two artists employed existing languages and systems to envision wholly original ideas that seemed absurd or unfathomable in order to expose standards and structures, and more importantly how playing with and within those systems considers what is newly possible.

This dual presentation juxtaposes a group of Pope.L's *Failure Drawings* (initiated in 2003), which the artist creates on found materials when he is in transit, with conceptual sketches by Matta-Clark that conceive of and illustrate seemingly impossible ideas. Projected across the expansive walls of the space, Matta-Clark's iconic *Conical Intersect* (1975) will be shown with *Bingo X Ninths* (1974) and *The Wall* (1976/2007), in addition to a never-before-seen film by Pope.L that similarly suggests the act of destruction while

obliterating it. In the center of the gallery, Pope.L will also mount a new site-specific installation, *Vigilance a.k.a Dust Room* (2023). Together, the works on view suggest affinities in the two artists' deliberate choice to visualize failure and the ample possibilities that result from welcoming the unknown.

Since the 1970s, Pope.L has pursued a dynamic multidisciplinary practice that has since shifted the paradigm of performance and installation art. As an MFA student at Rutgers University, he became known for his work *Times Square Crawl* (1978), which involved the artist dragging his body while on his hands and knees on West 42nd Street in Manhattan. Pope.L's performance and subsequent "crawls" brought attention to those who were often made invisible in public spaces. Throughout his career as an artist and educator, he has continued to evaluate the limits of the body, identity, language, and personhood by irreverently manipulating form and content as well as revealing how these constructs are established and reified. The artist has been the subject of recent institutional solo presentations including *Pope.L: Between a Figure and a Letter* at Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2022); *Pope.L: Misconceptions* at Portikus, Frankfurt (2021); and *Instigation, Aspiration, Perspiration*, three complementary exhibitions of his work in New York organized by The Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and Public Art Fund (2019). He has also presented solo exhibitions at La Panacée, Montpellier, France (2018); The Geffen Contemporary, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2015); and the Renaissance Society, University of Chicago (2013). Pope.L is represented by Mitchell-Innes & Nash, and his work is held in numerous collections worldwide.

A central figure of the downtown New York art scene in the 1970s, Gordon Matta-Clark pioneered a radical approach to art making that directly engaged the urban environment and the communities within it. Through his many projects—including large-scale architectural interventions in which he physically cut through buildings slated for demolition—Matta-Clark developed a singular and prodigious oeuvre that critically examined the structures of the built environment. With actions and experimentations across a wide range of media, his work transcended the genres of performance, conceptual, process, and land art, making him one of the most innovative and influential artists of his generation. The artist's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent

institutions worldwide, including *Gordon Matta-Clark: "You Are The Measure*," a retrospective held at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, which traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2007-2008). In 2017-2020, Matta-Clark's work was the focus of a critically acclaimed traveling exhibition, *Gordon Matta-Clark: Anarchitect*, that was on view at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; Jeu de Paume, Paris; Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn, Estonia; and the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts. Recent institutional solo exhibitions were presented at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Austria (2021-2022), and MAMCO Genève, Switzerland (2022-2023). The Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark has been represented by David Zwirner since 1998, and his work is held in numerous international collections.

Gordon Matta-Clark & Pope.L: Impossible Failures is curated by Ebony L. Haynes and presented by 52 Walker. The work of Pope.L is presented in cooperation with Mitchell-Innes & Nash.

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