Performance: Pope.L, Conquest, with the Public Art Fund

As part of a three-venue tribute to Pope.L, the Public Art Fund produced Conquest, the latest installment of the artist’s long-running “Crawls” series, in which he dragged himself facedown through urban environments in a potent metaphor for struggle against a backdrop of homelessness. Pope.L made his first “Crawl” in 1978 and over the years did versions carrying a small potted flower or wearing a Superman costume.

One hot Saturday in September, more than 140 volunteers gathered in New York’s West Village and, in relay, traversed a mile-and-a-half course to Union Square Park, squirming on their bellies, crawling on all fours or shimmying on their derrieres along the sidewalks—while blindfolded and carrying flashlights. Each wore knee and elbow pads, but only one shoe. One woman also wore her baby in a carrier. There were old and young, able-bodied and disabled, and people of every race and from every borough, representing every stratum of the city. The grueling...
physicality and atypical unity among strangers were affecting, as was the route, which passed the AIDS Memorial and areas once farmed by Lenape Indians and inhabited by colonial-era slaves—now among the city’s most affluent addresses. That irony was not lost, nor was the collective reaction of random passersby, which ranged from bewildered and amused to shocked, even empathetic.