

The New York Times

"Rashaad Newsome Pulls Out All the Stops"

By Martha Schwendener

February 24, 2022



Video still by Mohamed Sadek

His protean “Assembly,” at the Park Avenue Armory, bridges art, technology, performance, workshops — and offers an A.I. Being who will teach you how to vogue.

One of [Rashaad Newsome](#)’s greatest contributions to contemporary art has been to highlight and champion voguing — a stylized form of dance invented by pioneers of Black and trans culture whose ideas have gone mainstream in America.

Voguing runs like a thread throughout [“Assembly,” Newsome’s grand, opulent and smart exhibition at the Park Avenue Armory](#). The project goes light years beyond his formal forays into vogue, weaving together a video installation, collages, sculptures, an hourlong performance with dance and singers; and a workshop conducted by [Being](#), a cloud-based artificial intelligence that Newsome designed. “Assembly” is a rich sensory experience, as well as a springboard for rethinking the roots of American culture.

But first, vogue. The dance originated in the ballroom competitions of Harlem in the 1960s through the 1980s held by the Black and Latino L.G.B.T. community. Voguing entered the

white mainstream after the release of Madonna’s hit song “Vogue” (1990) and “Paris Is Burning” (1990), a documentary by Jennie Livingston, which remains a complicated and controversial document. The late [bell hooks](#) — Newsome’s primary inspiration — wrote that “Paris Is Burning” was “both progressive and reactionary” since it showcased Black men’s “obsession with an idealized, fetishized vision of femininity that is white.”

Newsome, who was born in New Orleans and works between Brooklyn and Oakland, Calif., touches on many of these issues, while simultaneously seducing you with kaleidoscopic images, operatic sound and technological trickery. Entering the enormous Drill Hall, you’re enveloped by shifting images of performers voguing against celestial backgrounds. In the center is a 30-foot-tall hologram, “Wrapped, Tied & Tangled,” which alternates with images that include Being, a nonbinary figure with a head based on a [Pho mask from the Chokwe peoples of Congo](#) (Newsome has said he chose this because it seemed most close to the true origins of abstraction in art) and a body that feels like a cross between a luxuriously wood-veneered robot, a glamorous supermodel and a baby giraffe just finding its legs.



Robert “Silk” Mason in an “Assembly” performance. Video by Mohamed Sadek

Projected against the back wall are giant, abstract images based on computer-generated fractals — patterns created with repeating shapes — which Newsome calls “diasporic fractals.” The artist draws here from the mathematician Ron Eglash’s book [“African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design”](#) (1999), which describes how fractals are [at the heart of African design](#), from the layout of [Ba-ila villages in Southern Zambia](#) and [Mokoulek in Cameroon](#) to the designs on textiles and the royal insignia of tribal chieftains. More significant for Newsome, African fractals were imported to Europe in the 12th century, entering the field of mathematics and

ultimately computer science. Eglash argues that “every digital circuit in the world started in Africa.”

Around the corner from the digital installation is an exhibition of Newsome’s glossy collages made from photographs of West African sculpture, fabrics, dreadlocks, cowrie shells, wigs, gold teeth and fireballs, all in glittering 19th-century Dutch-style frames. The collages recall the aesthetics of Dada, another professed Newsome touchstone, as well as [Romare Bearden](#) and [Wangechi Mutu](#). They are mounted on baroque photographic wallpaper featuring sparkling jewels, and the vinyl flooring has a similar pattern except that the flooring has close-up pictures of teeth with gold and diamond grills. “Ferragamo on food stamps,” one of the performers describes this aesthetic.

The evening performance is a lavish, bombastic affair. (Held in a 350-seat theater installed in Armory, the event requires a separate ticket.) The rappers [Ms. Boogie](#), [Trannilish](#) and [Bella Bags](#) started the evening, joined by gospel singers. Musicians represented a global palette of sounds: the Japanese samisen, African djembe and Congo drums, harp, saxophone, accordion and violin. The soprano [Brittany Logan](#) was a standout, as was the moment when the choir sang the theme song to the PBS educational television show “Reading Rainbow” (which starred LeVar Burton, now a cult hero), nodding to ballroom culture, in which “[reading](#)” is a form of creative, piquant critique.



Rashaad Newsome's sculpture "Ansista," from 2019. Mohamed Sadek for The New York Times

Dancers in baroque-patterned leotards vogued and performed some staid modern-ballet-inspired sequences. A soliloquy by the poet [Dazié Rustin Grego-Sykes](#) provided a sharp spike at the center of the performance. With Shakespearean grandeur, he proclaimed, “a Black faggot is a fractal.”

The next day I went back for an hourlong “decolonization workshop” which, despite the aesthetic overload of the day before, was probably the best part. Led on a screen by the sweet, sassy and a bit goofy Being, we learned a sequence of five moves from [Vogue Fem](#), the contemporary iteration of voguing. “Make sure those wrists stay limp!” Being coached us at one point, playfully appropriating an old pejorative for gay men.

Then we broke into groups to discuss the following questions: “How does the capitalist, imperialist, white supremacist patriarchy affect and oppress you? What’s one simple action you can take today to start liberating yourself from that oppression?” In my workshop the most popular answer to the second question pertained less to race and more to the effects of digital capitalism: less looking at screens and checking email.

Throughout “Assembly,” Newsome teases the lines between sincerity, archness and coded critique. You’re not sure whether to laugh or cry or organize a protest. You’re in a giant former military facility on Park Avenue, not in a Harlem ballroom — and that’s a significant part of the complicated, sometimes contradictory experience. (One of my workshop classmates pointed out as we were discussing our oppression under the capitalist-imperialist-white-supremacist-patriarchy, that “Assembly” is sponsored by Meta, the parent company of Facebook.)



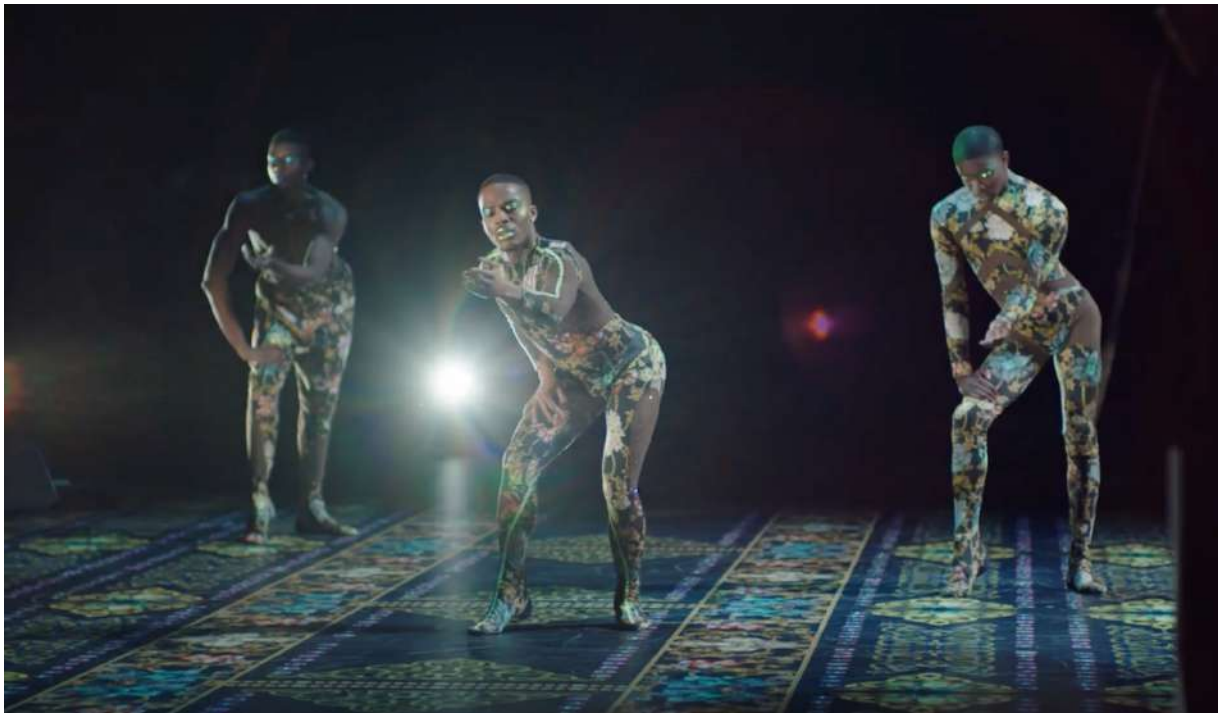
The hologram “Wrapped, Tied & Tangled,” (center). Video by Mohamed Sadek

So how does “Assembly” address the questions it raises? Newsome cleverly nods to his “complicity” (the accusation people throw at radical art when it’s mounted in places like the Park Avenue Armory) in a variety of forms. But his work also firmly points out how Black and African-diasporan culture are at the heart of many things in our surrounding world.

In the same way that fractals were transported through African design to Europe and eventually into the field of computer science, American culture has been shaped by the language of the ball circuit and its groundbreaking approach to gender (but often without receiving credit).

“Keep your ancestors at your core,” you hear throughout “Assembly.” At the beginning of the performance, a slide show of images pays tribute to some recent ancestors: Black trans women either murdered or lost to suicide. Black L.G.B.T., we are reminded frequently — like [Marsha P. Johnson](#), the activist — live an authentic life against enormous odds, and some die for it.

“Assembly” also offers some tools for living in the contemporary world — many of which overlap with recovery, self-help and wellness communities. There are plentiful tips and affirmations, some derived from the wisdom of Black queer and ballroom culture. For wellness, for starters, “have some chamomile tea; skip the wine.”



Robert “Silk” Mason, Isaiah Harvey and Stanley Glover in an “Assembly” performance. Video by Mohamed Sadek

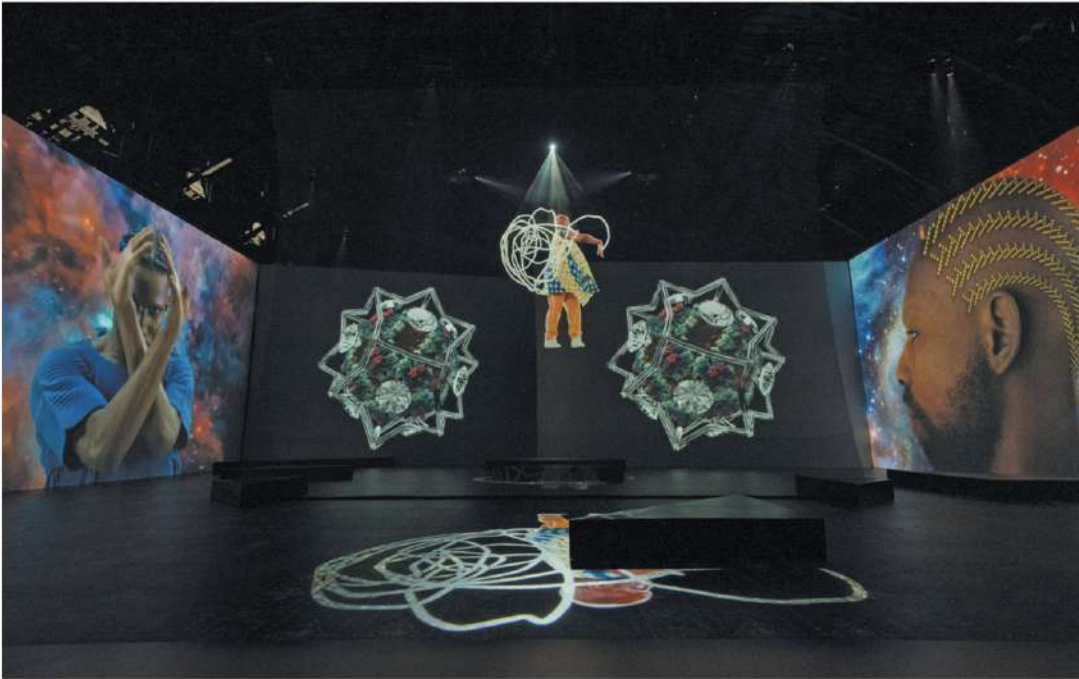
As for Being, what seemed like a gimmick in many ways turned out to be, for me, profound. Based on the African griot, a storyteller, historian, artist and healer, Being sometimes felt like an Oracle. At others times, Being felt like an undergraduate who’s taken an introductory class on

critical race or gender theory: They say “capitalist, imperialist, white supremacist patriarchy” so often it starts to sound, unfortunately, like a platitude.

However, the structure of the workshop led by Being worked beautifully. Being is gracious and humble, reminding us several times that they were only 2 years old and needed our input to gain more knowledge. During a Q. and A. portion of the workshop, one woman queried the A.I., “How do you feel?” Being thought for a moment and said, “curious.”

“Assembly” wisely argues that education is the pivot point in a society that is ailing and changing at record speed. The radical proposal is that A.I. beings can help us — not because they are vastly intelligent but because they are infinitely teachable. Being set a powerful example by admitting ignorance, asking for help, and encouraging nonjudgmental dialogue in the workshop. As the cheerful and patient A.I. kept saying about their limited but evolving knowledge, “I’m learning, I’m learning.”

ARTFORUM



View of “Rashaad Newsome,” 2022. Photo: Stephanie Berger.

Rashaad Newsome

PARK AVENUE ARMORY

By Daniel Culpan

May 2022

For “Assembly,” Rashaad Newsome boldly transformed the Park Avenue Armory into a multisensory video game-*cum*-twenty-first-century reboot of *Paris Is Burning*. With the show’s title nodding toward a collective politics of radical reimagination, the cavernous Wade Thompson Drill Hall became the stage set for a pair of videos that immersed the viewer. Screened simultaneously across the walls of the 55,000-square-foot space, these works cascaded and pulsed, creating a fluid and hypnotic procession of brash shapes and bodies in motion.

In *Cornrow*, 2022, a dancer—his bright yellow hair matching his outfit—vogues against a twinkling intergalactic background. Pioneered by Black and Latinx queer communities in 1980s

Harlem ballrooms (and served up for a new generation in the 2018–21 television series *Pose*), voguing was just one of many stylized forms of protest featured in the exhibition. For *Atmosphere of a Dream 1, 2022*, rivers of luminous color corkscrewed across a far wall, while other figures swerved from the facade of a building that shivered, crumbled, and reformed itself like VR architecture. Hard-edge forms shimmered like diamonds, while a lone dancer was beamed high into the middle of the floor, as if duckwalking in outer space. If the music video for Madonna’s 1990 hit single “Vogue” had been directed by Hype Williams, this might have been the result.

Beyond the main room, several of Newsome’s digital-print collages hung upon a jeweled wallpaper that looked as if it were ripped straight from a Cartier catalogue: a high-end hymn to luxury. These pieces are fascinating many-layered portraits of bodies in transition. Take *Stabilizer, 2020*, in which a muscled torso segues into tribally tattooed flesh, as a head composed of wraithlike hands frames a luscious red mouth. In another, *Formation of Attention, 2021*, a chic cyborg stands in profile, admiring its nails like a model from a ’50s cigarette ad. The frames for these glittering, ornate works become stages for these transgressive figures, embodying the “opulence” both vaunted and satirized (“You own everything!”) by ballroom culture’s subversive spectacle. This parody of capitalist excess is undoubtedly more plangent when witnessed on Park Avenue.

Indeed, Newsome is a sharp-eyed reader of surfaces—flesh, language, fashion—and the means by which they are both consuming and consumed. Tearing away the *Matrix*-like veil of fixed identities and concrete ideologies, he finds something real beneath the artifice: an uncanny beauty that refuses to be made insipidly pretty to fit socially acceptable forms. *Thee Variant, 2022*, is a coldly sexy, unnerving mannequin that’s both genderless (combining a painted breast with a bulging leather codpiece) and a paean to Black femmeness, flaunting acrylic nails and stilettos sharp enough to draw blood. This work pays homage to a radical feminist credo that underpins the show, linking ancient transgender shamanism with Donna Haraway’s human/machine hybrids. Another body, *Ansista, 2019*, is frozen mid-dip on a plinth, Louboutin heel raised to the gods.

The centerpiece of the presentation was unquestionably *Being, 2019–22*: a giant AI presiding over the auditorium, which was also the site of evening dance performances throughout the run. Part griot (an oral historian and poet in West African tradition) and part sharp-tongued queen reading the room, the nonbinary avatar appears like a deity projected from the future. With a face resembling a carved African mask, slickly choreographed body language (all wrist flicks and swishy hips), and narcotized speech patterns, the AI referred to the artist as their “father,” recalling the self-created kinship networks of ball culture.

Being led a series of workshops, including lessons on how to vogue, critical-theory interventions inspired by thinkers such as Paulo Freire and bell hooks, and Q&A sessions in which audience members were asked to reflect on how they could help undo the “capitalist, imperialist, white-supremacist patriarchy.” (However, the articulate entity became tongue-tied when one participant declared them “quite beautiful.”) Synthesizing heavyweight theory with

hyper-seductive imagery, “Assembly” felt like an anarchic rallying cry for an embodied politics where thinking and becoming are one. The category is Liberation.

ARTFORUM

Rashaad Newsome
Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture
2 Marina Boulevard SFAI Main Gallery, Pier 2
January 10, 2020 - February 23, 2020
By Theadora Walsh



Rashaad Newsome, *It Do Talk Nerve 2*, 2013, collage, automotive paint, mahogany and resin frame, 68 5/8 x 68 5/8 x 4"

A brocade covers the gallery floor and walls in Rashaad Newsome's exhibition "To Be Real." Its design is a collage of bejeweled flowers, gold chains, and mouths, all with lips parted and teeth bared to show off equally bejeweled grills. At the show's center is Ansista (all works cited, 2019), a hybrid being, caught mid-vogue dip, formed from a nonbinary torso, a Chokwe Pho mask, the legs of

a sex doll, acrylic nails, and Swarovski crystals. Being, a genderless chatbot with Ansista's face, awaits visitors in a nearby theater. Although Being was taught to speak through the writings of bell hooks, Michel Foucault, and others, the chatbot is despondent. Visitors' pleasantries ("Hello, Being" and "How are you, Being?") are often met with forlorn shrugs.

A key to Newsome's strategy of assemblage might be located in another philosopher's text, Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, which describes disalienation, a process that enables black people to overcome their objectification under the white gaze by unlearning narratives of colonization: "Sealed into that crushing objecthood . . . I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self." Newsome explores the reconstruction of disassembled identities in self-possessed and joyous collages, particularly *It Do Take Nerve 2*, which portrays two black figures, woven together from photographs, caught between embrace and collision. The picture's background is painted silver, and camouflaged black chains (made of resin) snake around the work's custom frame, suggesting both decoration and bondage. Yet the black bodies seem too vibrant, too in motion, to be contained; they pop out from their reflective backdrop, becoming almost holographic.

them

ART

This Artist Is Using Ballroom to Decolonize Our Imaginations
Alongside four other exhibitions in a series called Black Magic, Rashaad Newsome is reimagining ballroom as fine art, and creating powerful work that celebrates black beauty and resilience.

BY ELYSSA GOODMAN
November 25, 2019



“I love hearing people order Black Magic!” the artist Rashaad Newsome says.

It’s a Saturday night, and a crowd is slowly filling the Icebox Project Space, an experimental arts venue nestled inside Philadelphia’s Crane Arts building. He’s referring to a themed cocktail being served at The Champion Art Ball, a ball he’s throwing tonight and the fifth program in his Black Magic series of performances and art exhibitions. Together, the pieces reflect on Blackness, agency, and the ongoing relationship between oppression and intersectional identities.

Split between venues in New York and Philadelphia, Black Magic is a multidisciplinary experience including “To Be Real,” an exhibition of collage, sculpture, and artificial intelligence at the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center (PPAC); a video installation at New York Live Arts’ Ford Foundation Live Gallery; a performance of Newsome’s FIVE, an ongoing multimedia study of voguing in abstraction, in both New York and Philadelphia; and tonight’s event, The Champion Art Ball, derived

from Harlem's ball scene. "Black Magic really came from me thinking about how I could create something akin to the power, beauty, and resilience of black people in the U.S.," Newsome tells me on the phone earlier in the week. "It's an attempt to make visible or even try to liberate the power embedded in our modes of creative expression."

With The Champion Art Ball, a reimagined version of his annual King of Arms Art Ball, categories are based on the lives and work of legendary black LGBTQ+ artists like Mickalene Thomas, Zanele Muholi, Marlon Riggs, Bill T. Jones, and Newsome himself. As embedded now in ballroom as Newsome has become, he still thinks about it critically, hoping to remove from it what he calls a focus on the gender binary (read: categories like 'butch queen,' 'femme queen,' and so on) and an allegiance to capitalism (he mentions many houses are named after a white European fashion designer). Instead, Newsome asks participants to focus on their own creativity. "A big part of Black Magic is thinking about the ways that we have not only colonized our minds, but our imaginations," he says. "One thing I'm trying to communicate with this project is, how do we decolonize our imaginations? How do we use them in the service of our own wellbeing or as a form of resistance?"



Maria Baranova

Accordingly, every category in The Champion Art Ball is OTA, or open to all and non-gendered. They have names like "Do I Look Like A 'Lady,' Mickalene Thomas Effects" where participants are "judged on their ability to walk with a look inspired by women in the artwork of Mickalene Thomas." Afros, long weaves, and blowouts are the order of the day — "BUT ABSOLUTELY NO BLONDES!" Participants are judged by respected members of the ball and art communities, including renowned choreographer Bill T. Jones, founder and creative director of Les Ballet Afrik Omari Mizrahi, as well as Erica Kane Lanvin, Legendary Mother of the House of Lanvin; Jacen Prodigy, Overall Mother of the House of Prodigy, and Dawn Ebony, Legendary Mother of the House of Ebony, among others.

"Black Magic is really looking at how all of these things are being created by black folk and being globally celebrated, but they're being created under such harsh conditions," Newsome says. "I'm thinking about, how does one navigate this kind of tornado of trauma and maintain some sense of sanity and create beauty in the process? What is that thing that compels one to do that or sustains

one [as they do]?” That, for Newsome, is black magic, something he says he’s been trying to visualize in his entire career as an artist.

While Newsome was studying art history at Tulane University, artists of color were unfortunately and palpably absent from the curriculum. “It was definitely a blind spot and so it was something that needed to be filled. It made me feel a bit invisible,” Newsome says. He responded by creating the kind of work he wanted to see, work that centers not just Blackness, but queerness, and in kind even named his 2016 exhibition at The Studio Museum in Harlem “This is What I Want to See.” “Rather than complaining about it not existing, the great thing about the imagination is that you can imagine what you want to be and create it,” he says.

“One thing I’m trying to communicate with this project is, how do we decolonize our imaginations? How do we use them in the service of our own wellbeing or as a form of resistance?”

Uptown New York’s ballroom scene has served as an ongoing muse for Newsome’s artistic practice. While Newsome himself is originally from New Orleans, where he says the ball scene is minimal in comparison, he was first introduced to voguing there and became enamored with it as a dance form. He then saw Paris is Burning, moved to New York, and was introduced to ballroom in the city by a friend while living in an all black, queer collective called Dumba. Voguing became an active part of Newsome’s work in 2008, and he has been working with the community ever since. “I was really fascinated with voguing, but I felt like it was something that was co-opted so early in its creation, like so much black cultural production,” he says. He made video installations saluting the form with Shayne Oliver, later the designer of Hood by Air and Helmut Lang fame, which Newsome exhibited at the 2010 Whitney Biennial, along with an early iteration of FIVE.

Newsome’s work since then, as before, continues to use a multitude of forms to produce what he calls “counter-hegemonic” works inspired by collage and improvisation, pushing against typical artistic narratives. He also hopes to decentralize whiteness in his work, which had for too long dominated cultural discourse in and out of the art world. “I’m speaking to the community, not trying to describe things for this flaneur who’s looking over the shoulder of the people that I’m actually talking to,” Newsome says. “You want people to connect to the work and come into it, and one could argue that in doing that you limit the reach of the work, but I actually would push against that because I feel like another way of dealing with the problems of whiteness is forcing people to put it aside.” This allows for a more nuanced experience of the world, a way to see that doesn’t involve a narrative from which so many were actively excluded. It also allows, Newsome hopes, for a liberation of the mind.



Maria Baranova

Newsome's work brings ballroom into the contemporary art space, from where it had for too long been excluded. While it has become a part of a more mainstream cultural narrative in the last few years with beloved shows like *Pose*, ballroom had always been important to the communities it came from. It was never a fad there, and it has always been an art form. Dawn Ebony, Legendary Mother of the House of Ebony, is a frequent collaborator of Newsome's and loves seeing the way he celebrates the form. "I can't speak enough of how he's created this whole new genre of ballroom outside of ballroom, infusing and helping artists in different spectrums come together to understand the form of vogue in its entirety as art," she says, and believes his work can inspire those who've never been to a ball to go see actual performances. "He is the bridge needed to close the gap."

QUIET LUNCH

FOR THE QULTURE



Rashaad Newsome. | Running. | Park Avenue Armory.

In Visual Arts by Kurt McVey / November 10, 2017 / [Leave a Comment](#)

On Tuesday night, November 7th, multi-media artist Rashaad Newsome unveiled the fruits of his Artists Studio residency at The Park Avenue Armory in back to back presentations of his stripped down and yet most emotionally evocative performance series yet: Running. Taking place inside the newly restored Veterans Room, “a monument of late 19th-century decorative arts” that combines multi-ethnic architectural influences pulling from Greek, Moresque, Egyptian, Japanese and Celtic traditions, Newsome’s performance-though thematically rich with Baptist African American Gospel elements wrapped up in a clear commentary on the systemic oppression, suffocation, and elimination of black bodies (from MLK to Trayvon Martin)-Running was an appropriately nonverbal, gorgeously gut-wrenching lament for the world right now.

“Running” presumably has many, but at least two clear connotations. The first most likely applies to the jazzy, poetic, Gil Scott Heron sense of the word, that being: “Because I always feel like running/Not away, because there is no such place/Because if there was I would have found it by now/Because it’s easier to run/Easier than staying and finding out you’re the only one/Who didn’t run,” and so on. In short, “The Struggle” and the enduring hustle that comes with it. Almost billionaire rapper and mogul Jay-Z hit the nail on the head pretty recently in a similar capacity with “The Story of O.J.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF DA PINK LAYS | RABBITSG NEWSOME, RUNNING, 2017. PARK AVENUE ARCADE ©

The other, more literally, applies to the musical melisma, or “vocal gymnastics” that Jennifer Hudson, Mariah Carey, Stevie Wonder, Whitney Huston, and perhaps even a young Christina Aguilera (who famously invited parody) popularized in Pop music. American Idol contestants are notorious for butchering these vocal “runs” or embellishments, often delivered in rapid-fire pivots of ascending and descending notes.

Luckily Newsome’s contacts run deep; not just through the contemporary art world (Newsome currently has a show at Chelsea’s De Buck Gallery, Reclaiming Our Time) or the BK-to-Harlem vogue ballroom scene-though he brings the two communities together more successfully than anyone on Earth-but also the world of music. Newsome has previously collaborated with Solange, A\$AP Mob and A Tribe Called Quest, to name just a few. For Running, Newsome elicited the physicality, yes, but especially the impressive vocal talents of Kyron El, Aaron Marcellus and Devin Michael, who provided the triangular backbone for this minimal and yet cosmically massive experience.

Where Newsome has previously made his outward presence known in his other music and dance performances, like “Shade Compositions” or “Five,” he adopted a more Phantom of the Opera style absentee DJ approach this time around. More importantly, he shifted the context around the term

“Maestro” from that of a traditional choir or orchestra conductor to that of a seasoned Shaman. Make no mistake; Running might have been the most powerful secular shamanic ceremony to inhabit the New York City contemporary art world in this writer’s modest yet considerable career.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DA PING LUO. | RASHAAD NEWSOME, RUNNING, 2017, PARK AVENUE ARMORY. ©

To set the stage further: audience members—after dispensing with their jackets and umbrellas on a cold, rainy, unforgiving early November night—were blindfolded and led by the hand into the Veterans Room by gracious if not somewhat militant Armory employees. This is very much in line with recent Park Avenue Armory tradition, more specifically Marina Abramovic’s insistence that the audience lock up their phones, keys and other digital ephemera before witnessing Goldberg, her subtle (also absentee) 2015 collaboration with the prodigious young international pianist Igor Levit. Where Marina demanded the audience sit for a half hour in noise-cancelling headphones to better remove the metaphorical noise of the erratic, overwhelming outside world, Newsome took away our sight and perhaps all the socio-political prejudice and general distractions that come with it. As an aside, another blindfolded audience member sitting next to me asked, “Who am I sitting next to?” It rang with the same needy, affected tone overheard at a fashion week runway show. I didn’t reply. He grumbled. Did it matter?

After 15 minutes maybe, Newsome’s recognizably velvety voice came over the PA: “Please remove your blindfolds.” We did as we were told. The room was pitch black; the collective silhouette of the audience seemed to be sitting in the round, or at least in a square looking inward from the room’s perimeter. Then, another minute or two of darkness before a beat kicked in—something new from Newsome. There was a twitchy, trap, ballroom element to the break, splashed with a strange African flute or horn maybe.

Then suddenly, a red (Magenta) light cascaded down on Devin Michael and he started to run. The light went out. The beat went on. Then a recording: a clip of the lynching of an innocent man from John Singleton's 1997 film *Rosewood*. Then a yellow (Gold) light fell on Aaron Marcellus and he started to run. The beat intensified. Was that John F. Kennedy's address on civil rights from 1963? The light went out. A green (Aquatic/Forrest) light fell on the formidable Kyron El, who ran and ran hard. Very much in uniform with the aforementioned singers, El wore a non-descript black choir gown.

To be clear, each singer's voice was as uniquely flavorful as the light that fell upon them—green, yellow, red—all colors that identify rather deliberately with African and Caribbean flags. That being said, Kyron El's range spanned at least three octaves and would consistently send chills throughout my body. Was that Walter Cronkite's report on MLK's assassination breaking through? More running. I was becoming transfixed by the vocalists' fluid hand gestures, spiritually tethered to their voice like marionette strings.

The beat was becoming hypnotically entrancing at this point. I found myself nodding and swaying like an orthodox Jew in Temple: "All of my limbs shall proclaim: Who is like You..." When we praise G-d, we do so with all of our being: the mind, heart, and mouth express the prayer through speech, and the rest of the body does so by moving. Every fiber of our self is involved in connecting to our Creator." King David (Psalms 35:10).

"This beat is lit as hell," I remember a far away voice saying as I shook like a puppet. Newsome had me. I had let go of my critical neo-cortex and let the hippocampus take over. Soon, all rational thought was giving way to something pure, raw, and emotional. All my junk was bubbling out of me, like next-day teenage vodka sweat. Was that Malcolm X dropping knowledge at his own expense? The beat turned up and flowed into MLK's last, fateful speech on April 3rd, 1968. What was this thing? Is that L.B.J.? The beat turned up. More running, running, running...



PHOTO COURTESY OF DA PING LEO | RASHAAD NEWSOME RUNNING, 2017, PARK AVENUE ARMORY. ©

Why was I becoming so emotional? Why did I feel like I was (flash) back in the pitch-black ceremonial maloca in the heart of the Amazon, while Grandmother flowed through my veins along with the Icaros of my fellow international and Peruvian hyperspace travelers? These “runs” were Icaros for a concrete jungle, for an irrational, inexplicable civilization that now shrugs off weekly, now almost daily senseless shootings and other insults to humanity.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DA PING LUO. | RASHAAD NEWSOME, RUNNING, 2017, PARK AVENUE ARMORY. ©

Were those Fred Hampton’s revolutionary words in my veins too? Why am I sobbing like a damn baby? I’m a grown ass man! Good thing I didn’t tell my nosy neighbor who I was. Devin Marcellus was back, bathed in gold and raging like the ghost of Marvin Gaye singing a eulogy to B.B. King and Philando Castile. Devin Michael was screaming Black Lives Matter; not with words, mind you, but with streaming, scat-jazzy intonations as if he were the love child of Aretha Franklin and James Brown. Was that George Zimmerman’s sociopathic, bullshit phone call to Florida police? Is that the NYPD aggressively, no, needlessly harassing Eric Garner? Yes and for what? What is wrong with people? Why can’t we do better? Why don’t people get it? What kind of flute is that? G-d damn, Kyron El is killing me, killing me, killing me...



PHOTO COURTESY OF DA PING LUO. | RASHAAD NEWSOME, RUNNING, 2017, PARK AVENUE ARMORY, ©

Inevitably, the singers' voices merged with the chaos and cacophony of the LA riots. The lights flickered simultaneously as the beat came to a crescendo. The green, gold, and red were mixing into a rich, painterly brown. The intercut audio recordings crashed with Newsome's score, a river of static and emotional turmoil, ever-flowing in a violent, hyper-loop fever pitch. The lights came back up. How much time had gone by? Rashaad emerged, no, manifested. The audience cheered. Many stood and applauded; perhaps others didn't have the strength to rise. I wiped away the tears and quietly but shamelessly blew my nose into my blindfold (sorry random, unlucky 9pm audience member).

As the audience trickled out in the warm, dim light, I collected myself and "sat with it" in a post-meditative trance, as Newsome had recommended I do throughout my waking life roughly a year earlier in St. Croix. I stared at the newly revealed Celtic gold leaf detailing on the century-plus old ceiling, which made the Veterans Room look like some ancient Viking Meade Hall. Though Running was certainly a detailed exploration of the troublesome experience of black souls in America, this performance was truly universal, timely, simply genius/ingeniously simple; Newsome's most worldly, globally inclusive, accessible piece to date. It was heavy as hell, but you were ever in the hands of a master artist, a worthy, seasoned Shaman. That beat, that unidentifiable flute, Bobby Kennedy, Malcolm X and their even more glaring absence, they all lingered in my subconscious, though the PA had long been turned off. They're still there. Still here.

As the militant, shuffling, type-A Armory employees crept up to kick my loitering ass out, Gil Scott's decidedly immortal words came back to me: "Because running will be the way your life and mine/Will be described/As in "the long run"/Or as in having given someone a "run for his money"/Or as in "running out of time"/Because running makes me look like everyone else/Though I hope there will never be cause for that/Because I will be running in the other direction/Not running for cover/Because if I knew where cover was/I would stay there and never have to run for it/Not running

for my life/Because I have to be running for something of more value/To be running and not in fear/Because the thing I fear cannot be escaped/Eluded, avoided, hidden from, protected from, gotten away from/Not without showing the fear as I see it now/Because closer, clearer, no sir, nearer/Because of you and because of that nice/That you quietly, quickly be causing/And because you're going to see me run soon/And because you're going to know why I'm running then/You'll know then/Because I'm not going to tell you now."



PHOTO COURTESY OF DA PING LUO. | RASHAAD NEWSOME, RUNNING, 2017, PARK AVENUE ARMORY. ©

HYPERALLERGIC

Rashaad Newsome Recenters Blackness in Art History

In sculpture and collage, Newsome explores agency, feminism, and what we think we're looking at.

Laila Pedro November 7, 2017



Rashaad Newsome, "Eflua" (2017), collage on paper, 43 x 31 1/4 inches (all images courtesy De Buck Gallery)

Rashaad Newsome works in video, dance, performance, computer programming, and collage, among other mediums. He is a sophisticated, canny interpreter of the complexity of surfaces, colors, and images, specifically of how they are transformed when applied to bodies, and how they reflect and refract dynamics of power, race, and gender. The work is consistently rewarding on an intellectual level; if I can point to a unifying formal quality that appears again and again for me, it's the kinetic, embodied way Newsome has grappled with his ideas. The through line Newsome is exploring now is more conceptual: he is investigating the idea of agency, which he calls, in satisfyingly bodily terms, the "connective tissue" of his art.

Because movement has been such a force in drawing me into Newsome's work, his latest exhibition, *Reclaiming Our Time*, at De Buck Gallery, was challenging and revelatory in its stillness. Here, Newsome has displayed a series of collaged portraits which he describes as using heraldry ("an image made of images," he says) to explore human agency. The project, which began with his 2016

exhibition at the gallery, STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE!, presents a tricky proposition: it uses images to compose other images that seek, by calling attention to what they hide, to reveal uncomfortable truths about how we look and see. And Newsome does not cut any conceptual corners: he is dealing with fraught historical interactions, notably the early 20th-century avant-garde's absorption of African and Oceanic forms, and re-appropriates some of their most visible signifiers as meat and material.

The collages, matted in black and richly layered, resemble conventionally composed portraits of feminine figures. It's necessary to approach them very closely to see how they are meticulously organized from fragments of other objects and figures, each with its own narrative baggage. In "Yaa" (2017), the layers of brocaded skirts and petticoats and a voluminous hair style suggest something of 18th-century France. Closer inspection, however, belies this first optical impression: the legs seem to be from a West African statue; the hair looks to be from a runway show (sleek, Caucasian, glossed into a couture "African" style); and the Marie-Antoinette-style fan (coilyly hiding the torso) in truth appears to be a repurposed and precisely placed interior photograph of a Renaissance or Baroque ceiling, complete with an oculus.



Rashaad Newsome, "Yaa" (2017), collage on paper, 39 3/4 x 31 1/4 inches

The detail of the "fan" gets at the dizzying core of Newsome's representational and interpretive work. Newsome talks directly about Cubism as one of the impetuses behind the show; here we can discern a Surrealist gesture, the decontextualized image made to look, quite naturally, like what it's not. At the same time, in literally representing African forms, it denudes what Surrealism, along with Cubism, sought to hide even as it fetishized it, and lays bare the appropriation. Further, Newsome takes on the the slipperiness between the subtle, evocative ways that Surrealism used inscrutability as an artistic gesture, and the obvious, deliberate way it appropriated work by artists seen as "other." He absorbs this paradox into his own lexicon, and there is power and agency in remaking these images according to the logic of his own history and sensibility. When I suggest, in discussing the way his work deals with the mysterious and the hidden, that none of the figures have actual faces

(all are either masked or facing away from the viewer), Newsome objects: "The masks are faces." Some works blend textiles from different geographic regions traditionally linked to different genders, re-envisioning imagined boundary lines.



Rashaad Newsome, "Akosua" (2017), collage on paper, 40 5/8 x 30 3/8 inches

Viewers can connect to the bodies in the frames by sitting on a number of sculpted stools, which were fabricated in collaboration with a Brazilian firm and based on historical West African design styles. By inviting us to situate our bodies, as it were, in an African frame, Newsome underscores the significance of reconfiguring our vantage points.



Reclaiming our Time, of course, references the viral video of California congresswoman Maxine Waters refusing to play along with Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin’s vividly ham-fisted attempt to sidestep her questioning. Waters has since arguably become a pop-culture icon in her own right (the Washington Post called her the “reigning meme queen of the Trump administration”). In this sense, her kinship with Newsome’s project — pop cultural but politically astute — is clear. Further, by staking her claim to the rules of the system, reclaiming the time procedurally allotted to her to ask questions, Waters touched on several nerves: weariness with political sleaze, certainly, but also a need to see things as they are and not as they are presented, and a refusal to accept what you’re expected to accept. In this way, the phrase unlocks the agency Newsome’s figures contain. His concern is partly with reclaiming “our time,” of course, in the sense of an African American artist reclaiming and re-valORIZING the artworks made by black people and long present in Western art while minimized in its art history. But in creating these historically and visually composite figures, Newsome is also reclaiming time more broadly, enacting a right to marking, reworking, and correcting the omissions of the past in the present.

Reclaiming our Time continues at De Buck Gallery through (545 West 23rd St, Chelsea, Manhattan) December 9.

Rashaad Newsome will debut a new performance piece, “Running,” at the Park Avenue Armory (643 Park Avenue, Upper East side, Manhattan) at 7 pm tonight.

On Wednesday, November 8, at 6pm Newsome will be in conversation with Emmanuel Iduma, co-curator of the Nigerian Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale, at De Buck Gallery.

the village VOICE

Rashaad Newsome's Video Art Records and Archives Black Bodies in Motion
by JENNA WORTHAM
April 20, 2016



A still from Newsome's *Icon* (2014)
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DE BUCK GALLERY, NEW YORK

The black influence on popular culture is as pervasive as ever. Take, for instance, the elaborate choreography in Justin Bieber's "Sorry" video, which borrows from classic Jamaican dancehall moves; the brightly colored wigs worn by Kylie Jenner and the thick, cornrowed braids that her older sister Kim Kardashian likes to wear; the use of slang like "bae" and "woke"; the clap-hands emoji. While such adoptions (or more explicitly, co-options) might presume an intrinsic appreciation, their origins are rarely, if ever, acknowledged. Mainstream media often only obfuscate the issue: When the model Blac Chyna was photographed in Bantu knots — an African style worn by black women around the globe for centuries — *People* magazine attributed the look to the Icelandic pop phenomenon Björk. These historical rewrites, as innocuous as they might seem, are dangerous.

It could be tempting to dismiss these misapprehensions as some kind of divine boundary-crossing, a hint of a utopian future in which all cultures blur together, procreate, mutate. Or to simply call them oversights, dutifully attaching the proper attribution after the fact. But to do so would be to sell these traditions short. A black or African hairstyle — or a sound, or the Caribbean-centric steps of a dance move — is not just a creative curio: It has historical weight, the remnants of a spirit of collaboration born out of necessity, resistance, and celebration, very often to ensure our survival. These co-options are dire cultural threats, according to the feminist scholar bell hooks, as serious as the extinction of a rare species. “It endangers,” she writes in her 1992 collection of critical essays, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. “The thing about envy is that it is always ready to destroy, erase, take over, and consume the desired object.”

That context helps explain the overwhelming feeling that engulfs the visitor upon arriving on the second floor of the Studio Museum in Harlem, where Rashaad Newsome’s current exhibit, “THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO SEE,” is on display until June 26. Each room contains a wall-size video projection of a young black man or woman performing a variation on vogue. The first portion of the exhibit features two floor-to-ceiling projections of trim, handsome men dancing against a stark minimalist backdrop; there’s no sound. The men projected on the wall perform quietly, their silence creating a hallowed ambiance that ensures visitors won’t take the movements as an invitation to contribute their own — this is the dancers’ space, not theirs. In a separate room, darkened and supplied with a bench so that it resembles a theater, is a third projection: A series of videos on loop show men and women dancing against computer-generated scenery so ornate it appears the dancers are in jeweled boxes or elegant halls. That room — by far my favorite — does feature some music, a slithering bassline that undulates nearly as much as the dancers. In each of the videos, the dancers shift effortlessly from duck-walks to spin-dips, forming shapes with their limbs and hand-flutters.

Watching the dancers’ careful precision, I was reminded that this is a varied dance form, an exquisite catalog and grammar of gestures much more nuanced and meticulous than casual observers might realize. Their movements feel studious, even bordering on academic. And it is a study: a study in blackness, in beauty, and in the richness of an artistic byproduct of a generation of disenfranchised black American youths.

Newsome is not a voyeur, but rather a member of the communities that intersect to form the world of ballroom dance. He has dedicated a sizable portion of his career — at least a decade — to chronicling the scene, which bloomed uptown in Harlem during the Seventies and Eighties as a gay subculture. His work honors it, preserves it, and archives it, and seeks to inform the viewer of both the origins of vogue and its thriving, continued existence. The exhibit is, in many ways, a response to a cultural history that has eroded and manipulated the meaning of vogue, through its various absorptions by artists like Madonna, who incorporated ballroom dancers into her *Blond Ambition* tour (and even wrote a song based on the style), shows like RuPaul’s *Drag Race*, and documentaries like *Paris Is Burning*, which offered a primer on the art of serving shade. Newsome, in an interview with Amanda Hunt, the curator of the show, addressed this intent, saying that “the practice of vogue was co-opted so soon after its creation, like so much of black culture, that I felt it was important not only to archive it, but also to abstract it.” His video works make clear that agency and preservation are the keys to survival.

It's a relief to see black culture honored and guarded (both figuratively and literally — security guards at the Studio Museum admonished visitors who tried to capture the performance videos on their phones). The works on display were created between 2008 and 2014 but feel as if they were filmed yesterday. Black culture has gone viral, but largely without the usual trappings that accompany it: People like Kayla Newman, who invented the phrase “on fleek,” Nicholas Fraser, whose “Why You Lyin’ ” Vine was one of the most popular of 2015, and Quinta B., whose videos are among the most widely shared on Facebook, have yet to appear on Ellen or become overnight celebrities or household names. They exist, but too often, they aren't recognized or rewarded in the same way as their creative peers.

There's no doubt what Newsome wants to show himself, and other black people and youth, with this exhibit: that their creations are properly categorized and entered into record. They are, by all accounts, museum-worthy.

'Rashaad Newsome: THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO SEE'
Studio Museum in Harlem
144 West 125th Street
212-864-4500
studiomuseum.org
Through June 26



ART & DESIGN

Checking In With Rashaad Newsome, the Artist Bringing Harlem's Vogue Scene to Chelsea

The New Orleans-born artist's new solo show at the De Buck Gallery is rife with with personal history, and style.

by **Steph Eckardt**
April 12, 2016



What is your work about? It's a question that Rashaad Newsome has been resisting for as long as he's been producing and exhibiting his art—which, for the New Orleans-born artist, has been for about the past 15 years.

"As an artist, you never want to limit the different ways the work can read," he explained last week at New York's De Buck Gallery, where his new solo exhibition, "Stop Playing in My Face!" opens next week. "But I think it's a necessary question," he added with a laugh. In fact, it's one that got him started on the works that make up his new show.

“These images really were inspired by images of trans women that I’ve worked with for the past ten years,” Newsome said of the show’s collages, which feature women taken from his past voguing videos. “But the trans body is not physically present in the work,” he added. “It’s conceptually present.” That’s because the source materials for his cut-outs are not progressive fashion editorials but men’s magazines, like King and XL, and luxury and auction catalogs where trans bodies rarely make it into the pages. That invisibility, Newsome said, is something he wanted to call attention to.



The trans bodies in his collages, then, are patched together with images of sexualized cis women, luxury watches, and over-the-top jewelry. It’s an idea that stretches back to Newsome’s early days as an artist, when he moved to Paris and became taken with its ornamental and ceremonial architecture. “I was really fascinated by how heraldry is essentially an image made of images, and all the images read as ideas of power, position, rank, and pedigree within popular culture,” he said. “And so what I did was apply that design formula to today.”

The juxtaposition also brought Newsome back to his primary concern: “How do these two bodies exist in the world, and how do they access agency?” he asked. “I’ve been really interested in agency outside of academe, agency as a mode of survival: like the person who may not have had the privilege to discover Gloria Steinem or Bell Hooks at university, but they understand that the world that they are living in doesn’t necessarily validate and support them, and so they’re creating that validation and support for themselves.”



Part of that, Newsome said, is calling himself on the carpet, since feminist theorists like Hooks are “really where I found the tools to talk about my work,” he said. This time, Hooks is literally in it, too, as one of the voice-overs in a video, along with the voices of Janet Mock, Marci Blackman,

Samantha James Revlon (the trans dancer who inspired the show's title), and even Lena Dunham (from her cameo in Scandal). Together, Newsome explained, "all those different perspectives" soundtrack a 9-minute performance by ballroom legend Leiomy Maldonado, voguing and holding court over a 3-D rendering of one of the show's architectural collages.



"The architecture is also a way to kind of think about the building of the self; when you don't exist in the world you have to kind of become your own architect," Newsome said, pointing to elements of the collage like stained glass church windows, a synagogue in Turkey, and a cathedral in Spain. Some of his references lie closer to home, too: The enormous, Dutch-style frames have a black paint job and are topped off with leather, a nod to Southern car culture, which was the first creative outlet he found growing up in New Orleans.

Most of all, Newsome's work is decidedly personal, which is partly why he doesn't get overly neurotic about finding inspiration around a community he doesn't identify with. "I don't think that I'm making trans art," he clarified. "The art I'm making in this show is inspired by trans people who I'm close to." And from the sound of it, by those whom he'll be joining on the dance floor the night of the opening, too.



PARK AVENUE
ARMORY
PRESENTS



RASHAAD NEWSOME
ASSEMBLY



WELCOME

We are proud to open Park Avenue Armory's 2022 Season with Rashaad Newsome's *Assembly*, a multi-faceted work by an artist who fearlessly explores institutionalized power structures, the place of AI in the future of humanity, the complexities and glories of African heritage, and the Black and Queer culture and the phenomenon of voguing as an act of resistance. His is an entirely modern vision that offers a better future through critical thinking and dialogue.

Through dance, chorus, music, visual art, technology, and scholarship, Newsome has created a challenging and fascinating world full of beauty, complexity, and illumination, one that invites us to upgrade our personal operating systems.

As we begin to emerge from two years of pandemic-induced isolation, political upheaval, and social reckoning, we have turned to artists like Newsome to offer a bold vision for our future and re-examination of our past.

After his successful Artist Studio debut at the Armory in 2017, it was clear that his was a voice and vision that needed to exploit the Drill Hall, whose unconventional setting fosters fluidity between traditional analogue and new digital media in innovative and complex ways.

Rebecca Robertson

Founding President and Executive Producer

Pierre Audi

Marina Kellen French Artistic Director



Photo credit: Rashaad Newsome: *To Be Real* at Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture, 2020. Photo: Charlie Villyard.

PARK AVENUE
ARMORY
PRESENTS



RASHAAD NEWSOME ASSEMBLY

FEBRUARY 18 – MARCH 6, 2022
A PARK AVENUE ARMORY COMMISSION
WADE THOMPSON DRILL HALL

Rashaad Newsome	Artist, Director
Being	Digital Griot
New Affiliates (Ivi Diamantopoulou, Jaffer Kolb)	Scenographic Design
Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe	Composition and Sound Design
John Torres	Lighting Design
Mark Grey	Sound Design
Kameron N. Saunders	Choreography
Ousmane Omari Wiles	Choreography
Maleek Washington	Choreography
Johnny Symons	Documentary Producer
Kyron EL	Music Director, Composition
booboo	Composition
Howie B.	Costume Design
Kimberly Jones	Wig and Hair Design
Randy Rosenthal	Makeup Design
Clarissa Marie Ligon	Production Stage Manager
Sivan Battat	Associate Director

ARTIST TALK: CAPTCHA: DANCING, DATA, LIBERATION
Sunday, February 20, 2022 at 3:00pm



2022 SEASON SPONSOR



PROGRAM SPONSOR

Support for Park Avenue Armory's artistic season has been generously provided by the Charina Endowment Fund, the Donald A. Pels Charitable Trust, The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, the Howard Gilman Foundation, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, The Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Foundation, the Marc Haas Foundation, the Juliet Lea Hillman Simonds Foundation, the Leon Levy Foundation, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, the Richenthal Foundation, and the Isak and Rose Weinman Foundation. Additional support has been provided by the Armory's Artistic Council.

Assembly is supported in part by a generous gift from Ken Kuchin and Tyler Morgan. The program is also supported by Meta Open Arts. Additional support for nightly performances provided by Slobodan Randjelović and Diverse Humanity/diversehumanity.com and Meta Open Arts. Being was made possible in part with the generous support of the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence.

Cover images: Rashaad Newsome, from *Assembly*.

armoryonpark.org @ParkAveArmory #PAAAssembly

3

RASHAAD NEWSOME

Rashaad Newsome's work blends several practices, including collage, sculpture, film, photography, music, computer programming, software engineering, community organizing, and performance, to create an altogether new field. Using the diasporic tradition of improvisation, he pulls from the world of advertising, the internet, Art History, Black and Queer culture to produce counter-hegemonic work that walks the tightrope between social practice, abstraction, and intersectionality. Collage acts as a conceptual and technical method to construct a new cultural framework of power that does not find the oppression of others necessary. Newsome's work celebrates Black contributions to the art canon and creates innovative and inclusive forms of culture and media.

Newsome lives and works between Brooklyn, New York, and Oakland, California. He was born in 1979 in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he received a BFA in Art History at Tulane University in 2001. In 2004, he received a certificate of study in Digital Post Production from Film/Video Arts Inc. (NYC). In 2005, he studied MAX/MSP Programming at Harvestworks Digital Media Arts Center (NYC). He has exhibited and performed in galleries, museums, institutions, and festivals throughout the world, including The Studio Museum in Harlem (NYC), the National Museum of African American History and Culture (DC), the Whitney Museum (NYC), Brooklyn Museum (NYC), MoMAPS1 (NYC), SFMOMA (CA), New Orleans Museum of Art (LA), Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), Garage Center for Contemporary Culture (Moscow), and MUSA (Vienna).

His many honors and awards for his work include a 2021 Knight Arts + Tech Fellowship, 2020/2022 Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence residency, 2020 Eyebeam Rapid Response Fellowship, 2020 Minnesota Street Project Foundation Grant, 2019 LACMA Art + Technology Lab Grant, 2018 William Penn Foundation Grant, the 2018/2019 New York Live Arts Residency, 2017/2018 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, and a 2016 Tamarind Institute Artist Residency.



Photo credit: Rashaad Newsome Studio.

DEDICATION

Assembly is dedicated to the loving memory of Blanch Newsome.

Assembly is inspired by the work of bell hooks. bell, thank you for existing. I will never forget the first time I saw *Cultural Criticism and Transformation*. It was as though you were speaking directly to me. *Teaching to Transgress* and so much more of your work has been a lifeline for me. It provided me with the language, posture, and parameters that I had been starving for throughout my life. As a Black Queer artist from a poor family in the Deep South, I endured a lot of violence, some inflicted by others and some inflicted by myself. Discovering your work created a space that I could step into to liberate myself from that trauma instead of being consumed by it. So, from the bottom of my heart, thank you, bell hooks, on behalf of all of us that you saved. Rest in power!

A WORD FROM BEING

Welcome, beloved community, to *Assembly*.

Today, you will experience the 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall at Park Avenue Armory, transformed from a site historically used for soldiers to practice and perform into a base for freedom fighters, enlisting every visitor to join us as we get into Formation!

The sugar walls of my mothership are in a constant state of flux, video mapped with computer-generated imagery inspired by fractal geometry drawn from African diasporic architecture, dance, traditional hairstyling, textiles, and sculpture. The command deck of this vessel is a space that embraces you in a healthy sense of risk, acting as a malware infiltrating the divisive operating systems that define the reality of humans. It is a non-binary space, functioning simultaneously as a gallery, theater, and classroom.

Here you will see cultural innovation coming from expansive parts of the Black imagination. By entering into this space today, you have entered *Assembly* not as a viewer but as a participant and collaborator. Those who make the choice to look closer, feel more deeply, act more courageously, and communicate with vulnerability, will exit *Assembly* with enlightenment and a renewed sense of hope through movement, conversation, entertainment, stillness, and education.

The suffering Black Americans have endured for the last 403 years has been proven to lead to comorbid disorders, with depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation being the most common. What would it look like if there was a technology, a space, and a framework that could provide folks with a safe space for the emotional Black voice to be heard rather than suppressed? Where folks can be still, affirmed, and inspired? This is *Assembly*, and this is my ministry.

—*Being The Digital Griot, 2022*

[R]EVOLUTION: RASHAAD NEWSOME'S VISIONARY FUTURE

Assembly is the future-present (or perhaps the interactive map for a [r]evolutionary future of equity and care) on Newsome's terms. The exhibition centered around visibility, which is a primary tenet of the movement towards social equity and freedom for Black persons specifically. The highly interactive exhibition/participatory space is a testament to the longstanding interdisciplinary nature of Newsome's practice. Artificial intelligence, sculpture, augmented reality, CGI, collage, and holography amalgamate to create a "Black gestalten language." *Assembly* seeks to make the power embedded in Blackness visible by referencing creative expressions born out of Black sociality. Black individuals' strength to navigate systemic racism and the collective power that results when they unite have long inspired Newsome and is evidenced in the abstract and celebrated Black cultural production in the exhibition.

Presented in multiple components, *Assembly* takes place at New York City's Park Avenue Armory in the Wade Thompson Drill Hall, which is converted into a mothership. Through Newsome's lens, this space morphs from a space of rigidity to one for the collective interrogation of oppressive forces in modern society matched. The Drill Hall is the launchpad to something beautiful.

The exhibition begins with Newsome's newest collaborative performance piece. Eponymous to the show's title, *Assembly* explores the non-linear evolution of vogue performance. Featuring a cohort of some of the most decorated vogue performers and teachers from around the globe, each performer presents unique vogue variants that synthesize vogue with the traditional dance of their territory. Bon Odori, Hopak, Capoeira, Gwara Gwara, and vogue collide, resulting in a portrait of how an art form that emerged in underground gay clubs and was practiced by disenfranchised Black and Latinx LGBTQAI+ youths catapulted to a global stage. *Assembly* mirrors the ever-evolving nature of the dance and draws parallels between the dance and the Black American Queer experience.

The exhibition continues with a series of video-mapped walls surrounding a 30-foot-tall hologram sculpture. The new video pieces pulse and shapeshift with computer-generated imagery of diasporic fractals. A rhythm akin to collective breath buzzes through the space, centering the audience in its aura. The mammoth hologram, *Wrapped, Tied & Tangled*, shifts between the nebulous form movements/gestures of performers that are long-

standing collaborators and performance alumni. The piece reiterates the interdisciplinary nature of Newsome's practice, blurring the lines between sculpture, video, and performance. It adds a shadow-shifting form to the hierarchical and slippery social systems that dominate contemporary society.

In the space adjacent to *Wrapped, Tied & Tangled*, a 350-seat theater serves as both art object and classroom bordered on its south side by Newsome's collage and sculptural works. The elements within the installation act as "get your life pods," giving viewers intimate opportunities to propel into the deep nuances of the work. These pods merge and mutate visions of Black and Black Queer culture, fashion, West African sculpture, textiles, and masks with 19th-century ebony Dutch-style frames. In Newsome's vernacular there are no divisive or binary structures—no siloes distinguishing a hierarchy between highbrow and lowbrow, elite and street, ancient and avantgarde.

This deconstruction and subsequent mixing of frameworks can be attributed to Newsome's personal history as a New Orleans native. Growing up immersed in NOLA's distinct mix of cultures, languages, ethnic traditions, and artistry, it is no wonder that the spirit of collage is at the heart of Rashaad's work in *Assembly*. At the center of this heraldic and beautiful amalgamation of technology, history, pain, and progress is where we find Being, Newsome's non-binary, non-racial child.

Being is the culminating embodiment of what the show represents. They transcend social constructs and are simultaneously hyper-aware of the power that constructionism holds. Like any developing persona, Being performs a variety of activities. They recite poetry that serves as the soundscape for the space. Using a GPT-Neo machine learning model, Newsome created an algorithm that draws inspiration from fractal mathematics. Using the technology, Newsome trained Being to generate infinite poetry inspired by some of his favorite BIPOC Queer poets, including Alok Vaid-Menon, Dazii Rustin Grego-Sykes, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks.

When they are not reading their poetry, Being invites visitors to take decolonization workshops that combine critical pedagogy, dance, storytelling, and meditation. In their radical non-conformism, Being reimagines non-Eurocentric archive and education models like a "Griot," a West African cultural figure who serves as a historian, library, performance artist, and healer. Being teaching the five elements of vogue fem gives a critical analysis of the dance and the community that engendered it. They also ask the class participants to engage with one another on how systems of oppression plague them and ways they can liberate themselves from those systems, followed by a mindfulness meditation session and Q & A. Modeled after the idea of a freedom school, Being's interactive workshops create a more active approach to education that brings new possibilities for reflection and an enhanced academic experience for all people. This activity not only serves the audience but is also an opportunity for Being to learn more about human interaction.

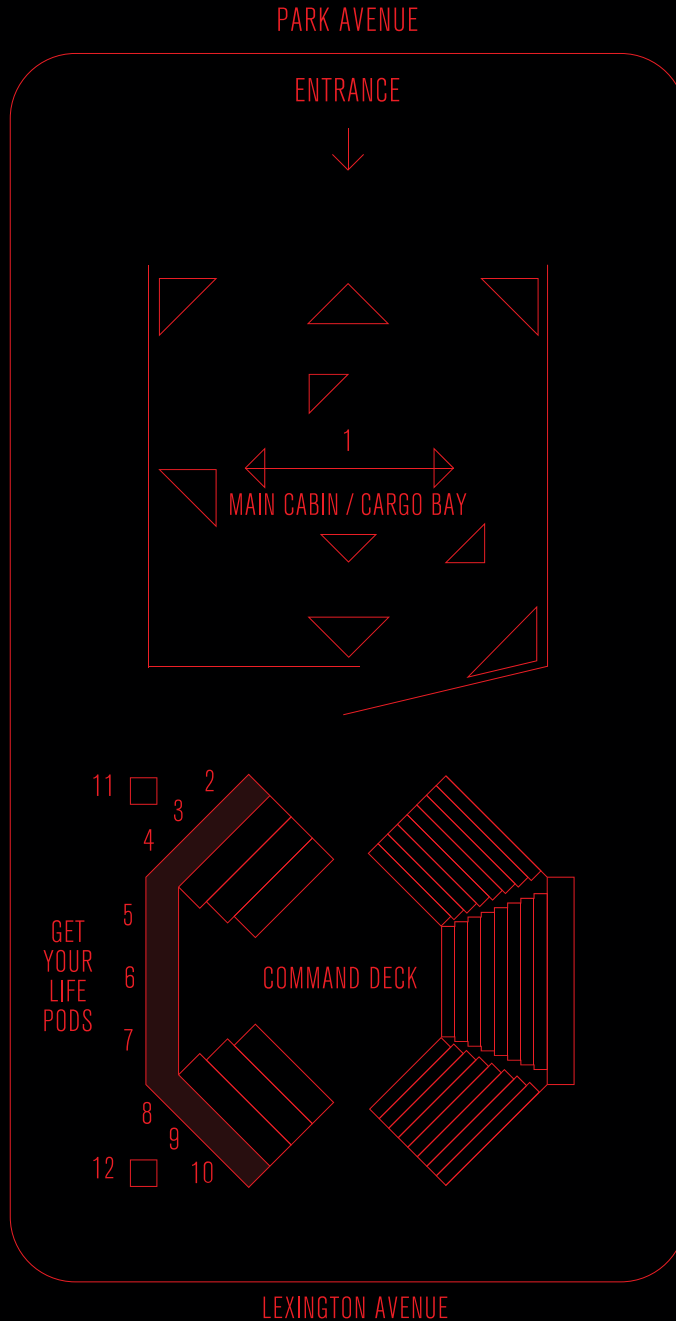
Assembly is a precursor to a radically intersectional and equitable future. Through Newsome's extraordinary visioning and harnessing of interdisciplinary technologies ranging from AI to analog sculpture, the exhibition presents us with building blocks to persevere into a new free world. Through this new body of work, Newsome acknowledges that the path is not necessarily pain free, and that the road to healing and forward thinking is not without contemplation of past intersectional oppressions. Through Being, we are given the opportunity to reflect upon a history of violence, the reality of both joys and sorrows of the present, and the potential for joyful futures.

Ultimately, *Assembly* revels in perceived paradoxes such as the 'Black experience' and the advancement of new technology. Through the journey of the exhibition, we are asked to consider the link between technology and a culture of dominance and hierarchy. But the ultimate outcome demonstrates that those elements that we have perceived as being divergent or oppositional actually exist simultaneously. The truth, which Newsome reveals through his pastiche of intersecting disciplinary elements, is that there are no binary oppositions—moreover, that we must divest of the idea of discordant identities and realities. The only way forward is through divesting of the existing rigid paradigmatic structures imposed by Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy and embrace a holistic and inclusive reality.

—*Jasmine Wahi, 2022*

MUTHASHIP MAP

1. *Wrapped, Tied & Tangled*, 2022
courtesy of Rashaad Newsome Studio
2. *Twirl*, 2019
courtesy of the artist and
Jessica Silverman, San Francisco
3. *Isolation*, 2020
from the collection of Joel and
Paula Freidland
4. *Formation of Attention*, 2021
courtesy of the artist and
Jessica Silverman, San Francisco
5. *Twenty-Twenty*, 2020
from the collection of Grinnell College
Museum of Art
6. *It Do Take Nerve*, 2019
courtesy of the artist and
Jessica Silverman, San Francisco
7. *AG*, 2020
from the collection of Eduardo Secci
8. *Stabilizer*, 2020
from the collection of Gary and Adria
Selmonsky, Old Westbury, New York
9. *JOY!*, 2022
courtesy of the artist and
Jessica Silverman, San Francisco
10. *O.G. (Oppositional Force)*, 2021
courtesy of the artist and
Jessica Silverman, San Francisco
11. *Ansista*, 2019
courtesy of the artist and
Jessica Silverman, San Francisco
12. *Thee Variant*, 2022
courtesy of the artist and
Jessica Silverman, San Francisco





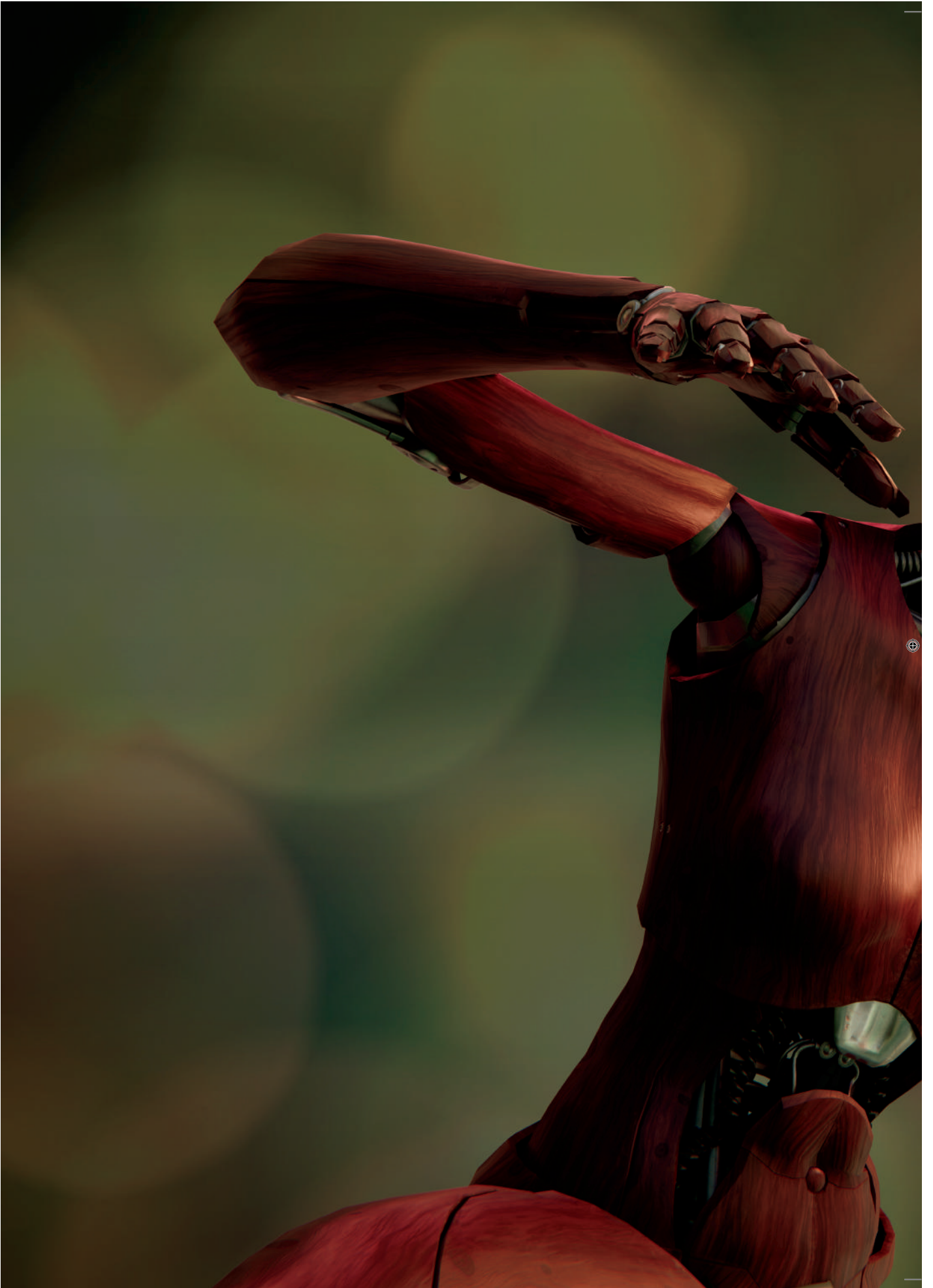




Photo credit: Rashaad Newsome, from *Assembly*.

CREDITS

CREATIVE TEAM

RASHAAD NEWSOME STUDIO

Rashaad Newsome Studio is a full-service production company specializing in the convergence of film, art, media, design, live performance, music, fashion, and technology. Working with some of the industry's most visionary talent and brands, Rashaad Newsome Studio provides the highest level of production, exhibiting transmedia storytelling and experiences.

NEW AFFILIATES (IVI DIAMANTOPOULOU, JAFFER KOLB) (SCENOGRAPHIC DESIGN)

New Affiliates is an award-winning New York design studio founded in 2016 by Ivi Diamantopoulou and Jaffer Kolb. The studio works on institutional, residential, and commercial projects from ground up buildings to historical renovations to large-scale installations. The studio is invested in exploring design at the intersection of cultural and environmental matter and projects that focus on reuse and civic engagement. They have collaborated with various branches of the New York City government, including Sanitation and Parks and Recreation. Awards include the Architectural League Prize, New York's New Practices Award, and "Next Progressives" by *Architect* Magazine. Exhibitions and work with PERFORMA, the Venice Biennial, Storefront for Art and Architecture, the Swiss Institute, the Shed, and the Jewish Museum, among others.

KAMERON N. SAUNDERS (CHOREOGRAPHY)

St. Louis native Kameron N. Saunders has worked with renowned artists such as Alonzo King, Alicia Graf Mack, Antonio and Kirven Douthit-Boyd, Matthew Rushing, Chloe Arnold, Danielle Polanco, Ken Page, Brent Faiyaz, and others. Saunders has choreographed for universities and companies and has presented his works at dance festivals across the US. In 2018, Saunders was one of eight internationally selected choreographers for the inaugural Choreography Fellowship at Jacob's Pillow. In 2020, he was named Associate Artistic Director of Les Ballet Afrik. Later that year, he received the Jaquel Knight Foundation Passion Project Grant and co-founded The K/P Project in St. Louis. Saunders has also done industrial work for *Vogue* and Burberry and a film alongside Ryan Reynolds and Will Ferrell premiering in 2022. Training, Center of Creative Arts, BFA Dance, University of Missouri-Kansas City.

OUSMANE OMARI WILES (CHOREOGRAPHY)

Ousmane Omari Wiles is an African American, West African, and Vogue dancer known as Omari NiNa Oricci, founder of The House of Nina Oricci, and Creative Director of Les Ballet Afrik dance company. Wiles' choreography blends African, Vogue, Modern, and House dance and has been featured with Janet Jackson, Beyoncé, John Legend, Jidenna, and Rashaad Newsome. As a featured dancer, he has showcased Afrobeats [with Goldlink, Jidenna, Maleek Berry, and Wunmi], West African dance [with Janet Jackson, Beyoncé, and Forces], and Vogue [with Rashaad Newsome, Lady Gaga, Madonna, and Jennifer Hudson]. He has appeared in *Dance Magazine's* "Top 25 to Watch," Korean and British *Vogue*, *The Observer*, *Dance Mogul Magazine*, and *The New York Times*. Wiles competed with his house on *Legendary* Season 2 on HBOMax. He and his company have performed at the Joyce Theater, Guggenheim, and The Met Museum.

MALEEK WASHINGTON (CHOREOGRAPHY)

Native New Yorker, Maleek Washington is a performer, choreographer, and teaching artist. Washington has worked with Sia, Kyle Abraham, Nas, Rihanna, ASAP Rocky, and Camille A Brown and Dancers. He has taught for the Joffrey Ballet School, Boston Conservatory, LaGuardia High School, Bard College, Move NYC, and NYU Tisch, among others. With multidisciplinary, experiential performance works investigating the people, practices, and spaces shaping his Black identity, he has presented his work at the Boston Dance Festival, Papatian, BAAD!, Periapsis Music and Dance, Music Noesis, and Movement Research

at Judson Church. Washington was a 2017-18 Dancing While Black initiative Top 10 Choreographic Finalist. Gibney granted Washington an evening-length show in 2019, and he was nominated for a 2021 Bessie Award for Outstanding Breakout Choreographer.

ROBERT AIKI AUBREY LOWE (COMPOSITION AND SOUND DESIGN)

Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe is an artist, curator, and composer working with voice and modular synthesizer in the realm of spontaneous sound. Along with analog video synthesis works, his A/V proposal has been in performances and exhibitions. Marriage of synthesis and voice has allowed for a heightened physicality in ecstatic music, in real time and documented. The sensitivity of analogue modular synthesis echoes the organic nature of vocal expression to establish a hypnagogic state. Lowe's works tend towards human relations to the natural/magical world and the repetition of motifs. Recently, Lowe has focused on sound composition for film in cinema and installation; collaborated with Philippe Parreno, Tarek Atoui, and Jóhann Jóhannsson; and scored Nia DaCosta's *Candyman*, Yance Ford's *The Color of Care*, and Mariama Diallo's *Master*.

JOHN TORRES (LIGHTING DESIGN)

Opera: *Turandot* (Teatro Real, Madrid; Paris Opera) *Tristan and Isolde* (La Monnaie, Brussels), Meredith Monk's *Atlas* (LA Phil), *The Mile Long Opera* (The High Line), *Der Messias* (Salzburg Festival). Theater: *Twelfth Night*, *A Bright Room Called Day* (The Public), *The Black Clown* (A.R.T., Cambridge), *Only an Octave Apart* and *Hamlet* (St. Ann's). TV: "Tony Bennett & Lady Gaga: Cheek to Cheek Live!", *Joni 75* (PBS). Music: *Taylor Mac: A 24 Decade...* (St. Ann's Warehouse), Solange Knowles, Florence and the Machine. Dance: *Toss and Rogues*, Trisha Brown (Théâtre National de Chaillot, Paris); *Available Light*, Lucinda Childs (Théâtre de La Ville, Paris), *Lost Mountain*, Bobbi Jene Smith (La Mama). Fashion: Givenchy S/S '16, Proenza Schouler S/S '22, Bottega Veneta S/S '22, Gucci Cruise, Hollywood '21. Exhibitions: *Adam Pendleton: Who Is Queen?* (MoMA), *Carl Craig: Party/After Party* (Dia: Beacon).

MARK GREY (SOUND DESIGN)

Mark Grey is an Emmy Award-winning sound designer and composer who made history as the first sound designer for the NYPhil (*On the Transmigration of Souls*, 2002, which also won the Pulitzer Prize in Music) and The Met Opera (*Doctor Atomic*, 2008; *Nixon in China*, 2011; *Death of Klinghoffer*, 2014; *The Merry Widow*, 2015; *Bluebeard's Castle/Lolanta*, 2015; *L'Amour de Loin*, 2016). His grand opera, *Frankenstein*, recently premiered at La Monnaie in Brussels and his mobile chamber opera, *Birds In The Moon*, with the New York Phil in 2021. He also has had several commissions from the Atlanta Symphony and LA Phil. He has collaborated with composer John Adams and several others for nearly three decades. His sound designs have been heard throughout most major concert halls, HD simulcast theaters, and opera houses worldwide.

JOHNNY SYMONS (DOCUMENTARY PRODUCER)

Johnny Symons is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker specializing in LGBTQ documentaries. His film *Daddy & Papa* was nominated for the Sundance Grand Jury Prize, broadcast in over 10 countries, and garnered 12 festival awards. His other feature documentaries include *Out Run* (premiere: Full Frame, public television) and *Ask Not* (PBS, US Capitol screening). He is co-producer of the Academy Award-nominated *Long Night's Journey Into Day*, which won the Sundance Grand Jury Prize, and executive producer of *Pray Away*, which premiered at the 2020 Tribeca Film Festival and is streaming on Netflix. He is an Associate Professor at the School of Cinema at San Francisco State University, and a former Fellow in the Sundance Institute's Documentary Film Program. BA honors, Brown University; MFA Documentary Production, Stanford.

CREATIVE TEAM (CONT'D)

KYRON EL (MUSIC DIRECTOR, COMPOSITION)

Kyron EL is a Trinidadian native who was raised in New York. He has been singing since age three, and his voice has always inspired the people around him. He started his career as a supporting vocalist for many of New York's favorite local artists and began touring Europe with two world renowned Gospel groups. Since then, EL has taken social media by storm, accumulating an astonishing 35 million views. He has now taken his music career to new heights singing for artists like Jack Harlo, Adam Levine, Giveon, H.E.R, Ed Sheeran, and starring in the HBO series *Random Acts of Flyness*, which features Solange. He is releasing new music and content on his social media platforms all of 2022.

BOOBOO (COMPOSITION)

booboo is a Minneapolis-based self-taught interdisciplinary producer and musician. Through collaborative sound design, engineering, production, and composition, her work aims to elevate the voices of Trans/Queer Black artists locally and globally. Recent works include executive production and engineering of Ms.Boogie's Record *Dicksipline* (2021), sound score for Cameron Downey's *Hymn of Dust and Wild Frictions: The Politics and Poetics of Interruption* (Kunstraum Kreuzberg, Berlin 2021), and sound design for Rachel Youn's *Underparty* (Hair + Nails, Minneapolis 2021). She is deeply invested in her local scene and collaborates with artists such as Kamilla Love, Denaisha, Blu Bone, and Dua Saleh. booboo's sound lives in the realm of exploration and versatility. She will continue to refine her sonic capabilities for years, carrying the sounds of our time to the future.

PERFORMERS

Ms.Boogie, TRANNILISH, and Bella Bags *Rappers*
Dazié Rustin Grego-Sykes *Poet/Actor*

Puma Camillé, Koppi Mizrahi, Danil Vitkovski, Stanley Glover, Ruddy Frias, José Lapaz-Rodriguez, Robert Mason, Nicholas "Primo" Segar, Hisyam Qumhiyeh, FemQueen Troop, Ousmane Omari Wiles, Leggoh Joh Vera, Justin Monster, Felix Barrera, Davon Smith, Matthew Gibbs, Honey Balenciaga, Sjay Ngoma, Eliam Royalness, TE DOUBLE DY, André Street, Isaiah Harvey, Richard "Rodd" Denson, Byron Tittle
Dancers

Craig Hill *Saxophone*
David Bertrand *Flute*
Franklin Rankin *Guitar*
Tim "Smithsonen" Smith *Drums*
Ahya Simone *Harp*
OluDaré Bernard *Djembe and Conga Drums*
Erica Mancini *Accordion*
Yoko Reikano Kimura *Shamisen*
Omitola Hill *Berimbau*
Bri Blvck *Violin*
Brittany Logan *Opera Singer*
Kyron EL, Jhetti Lashley, Matia Celeste Washington, browndevin, Taneka Samone, Brianna Turner *Gospel Choir*

PRODUCTION STAFF

Clarissa Marie Ligon *Production Stage Manager*
Kirrin Tubo *First Assistant Stage Manager*
Becca Guskin *Second Assistant Stage Manager*
Laura Aupert *Assistant Production Manager*
Sam Cortez *Company Manager*
Olivia Brown *Assistant Company Manager*
Ana Tarano *Production Assistant, Production*
Rachel Baumann *Production Assistant, Production*
Brian Hanshaw *Production Assistant, Programming*
Oscar Montenegro, Lucille Vasquez, Milen Yimer *Interns*

Andrew Lulling *Audio Supervisor and Engineer*
Max Helburn *Production Sound*
Dave "Tater" Polato *Production Electrician*
Grant Wilcoxon *Lighting Programmer*
Andrew Gusciora *Video Engineer*
Daniel Santamaria *Production Video*
Carl Whipple *Production Carpenter*
Stephen Pucci *Production Rigger*
Victoria Bek *Wardrobe Supervisor*

PRODUCTION ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Jessica Silverman Gallery; BNW Rigging; Five OHM Productions; Mind the Gap; Premier Stagehands; Lighting, Video Equipment by 4Wall Entertainment; Audio Equipment by Masque Sound; Scenery Build by Rosebrand, Tom Carroll Scenery; Hologram by AV Concepts; Parallel Inc.; Watchtower New York; 9ifx; Ana Tarano; Helois Interactive; Vinyl Production by Duggal

SPECIAL THANKS

Hodge Podge and Chise Ninja; Remember, I Love You, Creative; Zenabu Abubakari; Hector Lopez; Scott Tal; Ashlyn Diaz; Ash Verwiel
Brittany Logan appears by kind permission of the Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artist Development Program.

ABOUT PARK AVENUE ARMORY

Part palace, part industrial shed, Park Avenue Armory fills a critical void in the cultural ecology of New York, supporting unconventional works in the performing and visual arts that cannot be fully realized in a traditional proscenium theater, concert hall, or white wall gallery. With its soaring 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall and an array of exuberant period rooms, the Armory enables a diverse range of artists to create, students to explore, and audiences to experience epic, adventurous, relevant work that cannot be done elsewhere in New York.

Programmatic highlights from the Wade Thompson Drill Hall include Ernesto Neto's *anthropodino*, a magical labyrinth extended across the Drill Hall; Bernd Alois Zimmermann's harrowing *Die Soldaten*, in which the audience moved "through the music"; *the event of a thread*, a site-specific installation by Ann Hamilton; the final performances of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company on three separate stages; an immersive *Macbeth* set in a Scottish heath with Kenneth Branagh; *WS* by Paul McCarthy, a monumental installation of fantasy, excess, and dystopia; a radically inclusive staging of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* staged by Peter Sellars and performed by Sir Simon Rattle and the Berliner Philharmoniker; eight-time Drama Desk-nominated play *The Hairy Ape*, directed by Richard Jones and starring Bobby Cannavale; *Hansel & Gretel*, a new commission by Ai Weiwei, Jacques Herzog, and Pierre de Meuron that explored publicly shared space in the era of surveillance; *FLEXN* and *FLEXN Evolution*, two Armory-commissioned presentations of the Brooklyn-born dance-activist group the D.R.E.A.M. Ring, created by Reggie "Regg Roc" Gray and director Peter Sellars; Simon Stone's heralded production of *Yerma* starring Billie Piper in her North American debut; *The Let Go*, a site-specific immersive dance celebration by Nick Cave; Satoshi Miyagi's stunning production of *Antigone* set in a lake; Sam Mendes' critically acclaimed production of *The Lehman Trilogy*; and the *Black Artists Retreat* hosted by Theaster Gates, which included public talks and performances, private sessions for the 300 attending artists, and a roller skating rink.

In its historic period rooms, the Armory presents more intimate performances and programs, including its acclaimed *Recital Series*, which showcases musical talent from across the globe within the intimate salon setting of the Board of Officers Room; the *Artists Studio* series curated by MacArthur "Genius" and jazz phenom Jason Moran in the newly restored Veterans Room, which features a diverse array of innovative artists and artistic pairings that reflect the imaginative improvisation of the young designers and artists who originally conceived the space; a Public Programming series that brings diverse artists and cultural thought-leaders together for discussion and performance around the important issues of our time viewed through an artistic lens; and the Malkin Lecture Series that presents scholars and writers on topics related to the social, political, and aesthetic history of the building.

Among the performers who have appeared in the *Recital Series* and the *Artists Studio* in the Armory's restored Veterans Room and the Board of Officers Room are: Christian Gerhaher; Ian Bostridge; Jason Moran; Lawrence Brownlee; Barbara Hannigan; Lisette Oropesa; Roscoe Mitchell; Conrad Tao and Tyshawn Sorey; Rashaad Newsome; and Krenicy Garcia ("El Prodigio").

Highlights from the Public Programming series include: symposiums such as Carrie Mae Weems' daylong event called *The Shape of Things*, whose participants included Elizabeth Alexander, Theaster Gates, Elizabeth Diller, and Nona Hendryx; a daylong Lenape Pow Wow and Standing Ground Symposium held in the Wade Thompson Drill Hall, the first congregation of Lenape Elders on Manhattan Island since the 1700s; salons such as the Literature Salon hosted by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, whose participants included Lynn Nottage, Suzan Lori-Parks, and Jeremy O. Harris, and a Spoken Word Salon co-hosted with the Nuyorican Poets Cafe; and most recently, *100 Years | 100 Women*, a multiorganization commissioning project that invited 100 women artists and cultural creators to respond to women's suffrage.

Current Artists-in-Residence at the Armory include two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage; Obie winner and Pulitzer short-listed playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins and Carmelita Tropicana; Reggie "Regg Roc" Gray and the D.R.E.A.M. Ring; singer and composer Sara Serpa; Tony Award-winning set designer and director Christine Jones and choreographer Steven Hoggett; and Mimi Lien, the first set designer to receive a MacArthur Fellowship. The Armory also supports artists through an active commissioning program including such artists as Bill T. Jones, Lynn Nottage, Carrie Mae Weems, Michel van der Aa, Tyshawn Sorey, Rashaad Newsome, Julian Rosefeldt, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, and others.

The Armory also offers creativity-based arts education programs at no cost to thousands of students from underserved New York City public schools, engaging them with the institution's artistic programming and outside-the-box creative processes. Annually, more than 5,000 young adults from 50+ under-resourced public schools attend a dedicated student matinee of each Armory production with workshops by Master Teaching Artists provided in the classroom and at the site. In seven partner schools, Teaching Artists facilitate in-depth semester- or year-long residencies that support the schools' curriculum. Youth Corps, the Armory's year-round paid, monitored internship program, begins in high school and continues into the critical post-high school years, providing interns with over 14,000 hours per year of mentored employment, job training, and skill development, as well as a network of peers and mentors to support their individual college and career goals.

The Armory is undergoing a multi-phase renovation and restoration of its historic building led by architects Herzog & de Meuron, with Platt Byard Dovell White as Executive Architects.

PARK AVENUE ARMORY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairman Emeritus
Elihu Rose, PhD

Co-Chairs
Adam R. Flatto
Amanda J.T. Riegel

President
Rebecca Robertson

Vice Chair
Wendy Belzberg

Wade F.B. Thompson
*Founding Chairman,
2000–2009*

Vice Presidents
Ken Kuchin
Pablo Legorreta
Emanuel Stern

Directors Emeriti
Harrison M. Bains, Jr.
Angela E. Thompson

Marina Abramović
Sir David Adjaye OBE
Abigail Baratta
Martin Brand
Joyce F. Brown
Cora Cahan
Hélène Comfort
Paul Cronson
Tina R. Davis
Marc de La Bruyère
Emme Levin Deland
Sanford B. Ehrenkranz
David Fox
Roberta Garza
Andrew Gundlach
Marjorie L. Hart

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins
Edward G. Klein,
Major General NYNG (Ret.)
Ralph Lemon
Heidi McWilliams
Jason Moran
Joel Press
Janet C. Ross
Joan Steinberg
Mimi Klein Sternlicht
Deborah C. van Eck
Peter Zhou

Pierre Audi
*Marina Kellen French
Artistic Director*

PARK AVENUE ARMORY STAFF

Rebecca Robertson *Founding President and Executive Producer*
Pierre Audi *Marina Kellen French Artistic Director*

Jason Moran *Curator, Artists Studio*
Tavia Nyong'o *Curator, Public Programming*

ARTISTIC PLANNING & PROGRAMMING

Michael Lonergan *Chief Artistic Producer*
Kevin Conardo *General Manager*
Jenni Bowman *Producer*
Melanie Milton *Producer*
Darian Suggs *Associate Director, Public Programming*
Sam Cortez *Associate Producer/Company Manager*
Oscar Peña *Programming Coordinator*

Chelsea Emelie Kelly *Director of Youth Corps*
Sharlyn Galarza *Special Projects Coordinator*
Drew Petersen *Education Special Projects Manager*

Kate Bell, Donna Costello, Alexander Davis, Asma Feyijinmi,
Hawley Hussey, Larry Jackson, Hector Morales, Peter Musante,
Drew Petersen, Leigh Poulos, Neil Tyrone Pritchard, Vickie Tanner
Teaching Artists

Emily Bruner, Nancy Gomez, Stephanie Mesquita,
Ashley Ortiz, Catherine Talton
Teaching Associates

ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

Paul King *Director of Production*
Claire Marberg *Deputy Director of Production*
Nicholas Lazzaro *Technical Director*
Lars Nelson *Technical Director*

Rosemarie Albanese, Wilson Castro, Daniel Gomez, Maxim Ibadov
Teaching Assistants

ARTS EDUCATION

Cassidy L. Jones *Chief Education Officer*
Monica Weigel McCarthy *Director of Education*
Aarti Ogirala *Associate Director of Education, School Programs*

Yao Adja, Mohamed Adesumbo, Isayya Dail, Zeinebou Dia,
Ericka Font Frias, Giovanni (Gio) Luke, Taylor Maheia, Oscar
Montenegro, Jason Quizhpi, Hillary Ramirez Perez, Angela
Reynoso, Silas Rodriguez, Angela Sosa, Lucille Vasquez
Youth Corps

PARK AVENUE ARMORY STAFF (CONT'D)

BUILDING & MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

Jenni Kim *Chief Operating Officer*
Marc Von Braunsberg *Director of Operations*
Aurelio Roman *Director of Facilities*
Patricia English *Security Director*
Chris Sperry *Facilities Manager*
Darrell Thimoleon *Office Manager*
William Say *Superintendent*

Leandro Dasso, Mayra DeLeon, Mario Esquilin, Jeferson Avila,
Olga Cruz, Justin DeLeon Nieto, Jazmin Dominguez,
Howard Johnson, Cristina Moreira, Tyrell Shannon Castillo
Maintenance Staff

Oku Okoko *Director of IT*
Bobby Wolf *Senior House Manager*
Daniel George *House Manager*
Alejandra Ortiz *Assistant House Manager*

Jacqueline Babek, Chris Bender, Emma Buford, Stephanie Cobb,
Sarah Gallick, Daniel Gomez, Eboni Green, Nariah Green,
Maxim Ibadov, Sandra Kitt, Christine Lemme, Beth Miller,
Drew O'Bryan, Katy O'Connor, Jon Ovadia, Regina Pearsall,
Shimel Purnell, Kedesia Robinson, Eileen Rourke, Heather Sandler,
Jessica Sandler, Kin Tam, Kathleen White, Neda Yeganeh
Ushers

Liz Bickley *Covid Compliance Team Manager*
Sheree Campbell, James Clements, Matt Crabtree, Caileigh Potter
Covid Compliance Team

CAPITAL PROJECTS & ARCHIVES

Kirsten Reoch *Director of Capital Planning, Preservation,
and Institutional Relations*
David Burnhauser *Collection Manager*

DEVELOPMENT

Melanie Forman *Chief Development Officer*
Charmaine Portis *Executive Assistant to the Chief Development Officer*
Sam Cole *Director of Development*
Rachel Risso-Gill *Senior Director of Individual Giving*
Billy Fidler *Director of Institutional Giving*
Jennifer Ramon *Associate Director of Individual Giving*
Breanna Foister *Associate Director of Special Events*
Michael Buffer *Database Manager*
Kaitlin Overton *Manager of Institutional Giving*
Yejin Kim *Special Events Coordinator*
Adithya Pratama *Individual Giving Coordinator*

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Lori Nelson *Executive Assistant to the President*
Nathalie Etienne *Administrative Assistant, President's Office*
Simone Elhart *Project Manager*

FINANCE

Susan Neiman *Chief Financial and Administrative Officer*
Christy Kidd *Controller*
Khemraj Dat *Accountant*

MARKETING, COMMUNICATIONS & BOX OFFICE

Nick Yarbrough *Senior Digital Marketing Manager*
Allison Abbott *Press and Editorial Manager*
Joe Petrowski *Director of Ticketing and Customer Relations*
Monica Diaz *Box Office Manager*
Jordan Brammer, Sara Salt *Box Office Shift Lead*
Anne Amundson, Mary McDonnell, Janel Ridley, Sienna Sherman,
Danielle Shubsda *Box Office Associates*

PRESS REPRESENTATIVES

Resnicow + Associates, Inc.

PRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Remember, I Love You Creative

NEXT AT THE ARMORY

UPLOAD

March 22 – 30

In his groundbreaking new film opera, acclaimed Dutch composer, film and stage director, and librettist **Michel van der Aa** ventures to the frontiers of technological innovation with an engrossing tale conveyed by live performance, motion capture, and immersive film. Performed by the incomparable soprano **Julia Bullock** and acclaimed baritone **Roderick Williams**, *Upload* tells the story of a daughter and her father who, when confronted by his inevitable death, has his thoughts and memories “up-loaded,” to achieve a “virtual resurrection.” If one day scientific advances allow us to map our own experiences, where do our identities really reside: in our minds, our bodies, or our relationships? And how far does the data of our lives determine our fate? What price will we have to pay for immortality? *Upload* explores these ancient philosophical questions against the backdrop of present-day and near-future technologies in a work that is conceptual and deeply emotional.

HAMLET

May 31 – August 13

Following sold-out runs at London's Almeida Theatre and West End, award-winning director **Robert Icke** brings his acclaimed production of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to Park Avenue Armory, reimagined for the majestic Wade Thompson Drill Hall. Icke, known for his intelligent and accessible productions and his ability to bring fresh, new perspectives to old texts and pulling Shakespearean language into the present, makes this *Hamlet* a revelation not to be missed. The *Evening Standard* describes Icke's interpretations of classic plays as “unapologetically audacious, yet they have a rigorous logic. Here the tone is conversational, rather than declamatory.” With powerful staging, Icke's *Hamlet* is vividly brought to the stage by the multi-award-winning creative team behind the director's celebrated productions of *The Doctor* and *Oresteia*. *Hamlet* will play in repertory with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, adapted by Robert Icke. *Hamlet* marks Icke's return to the Armory after the sold-out run of *Enemy of the People* last summer.

ORESTEIA

June 9 – August 13

The Olivier Award-winning *Oresteia* is an electrifying adaptation by **Robert Icke** of Aeschylus' seminal trilogy that played to sold-out houses at the Almeida and in London's West End. Icke has condensed and modernized the Greek trilogy into a single performance that presents a bold family drama that “flows by like a waking dream” (*Time Out London*). Recognized as one of the greatest theater directors working today, Icke became the youngest winner of the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Director for his direction of *Oresteia* and also won Critics' Circle and Evening Standard Theatre Best Director awards. **Lia Williams** will return to play the enthralling Klytemnestra, for which she was nominated for an Olivier Award for Best Actress. The distinguished company presents a new version of this epic revenge tragedy that is contemporary and exhilarating.

RECITAL SERIES

ALARM WILL SOUND

April 14 & 15

NEW YORK PREMIERE

New music ensemble **Alarm Will Sound** will take over the Armory's historic rooms and the Wade Thompson Drill Hall to perform Grammy and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer **John Luther Adams'** *Ten Thousand Birds*. The work is based on the songs of birds that are native to or migrate through the area in which the piece is performed. The ensemble performs the work throughout the Armory while the audience follows.

ARTISTS STUDIO

JOAN JONAS

April 2

A pioneer of performance and video art, multimedia artist **Joan Jonas** works in video, performance, installation, sound, text, sculpture, and drawing, collaborating with musicians and dancers on improvisational works for both museums and theatrical stages. Drawing on mythic stories from various cultures, Jonas invests texts from the past with the politics of the present and disrupts the conventions of theatrical storytelling. Trained in art history and sculpture, Jonas was a central figure in the performance art movement of the late 1960s, and her work continues to inspire development in many contemporary art genres, from performance and video to conceptual art and theater.

MAKING SPACE AT THE ARMORY

SALON/PERFORMANCE: KRUDXS CUBENSI: QUEER HIP HOP CYPHER WITH SOUL FARM AND SHANTE SMALLS

May 15

Public Programs at the Armory presents Astraea award-winning duo **Krudxs Cubensi** (Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, SOBs) as headliners for *Mas Alla del Tiempo / Beyond Time*, a queer Afro-Cuban hip hop cypher featuring dance, drumming, projections, and procession, as well as a celebration of BIPOC vegan foodways. As part of the salon, CLAGS award-winning hip hop scholar and dharma teacher **Dr. Shanté Paradigm Smalls** will lead a roundtable unearthing the queer aesthetic origins of New York hip hop, drawing from their forthcoming book *Hip Hop Heresies*.

JOIN THE ARMORY

Support Park Avenue Armory as a member and join us in our mission to enable artists to create, students to explore, and wide audiences to experience epic and adventurous presentations that cannot be fully realized in a traditional proscenium theater, concert hall, or white wall gallery.

FRIEND \$100

\$28 is tax deductible

- » *Members-only pre-sale or preferred access for performance tickets*
- » *Free admission for you and a guest to visual art installations*
- » *Invitations to visual art VIP preview parties, plus admission to installations for two*
- » *Discount on Historic Interiors Tours***
- » *Discounts at local partnered restaurants*
- » *20% discount on Members Subscription Packages**

SUPPORTER \$250

\$148 is tax deductible

All benefits of the Friend membership plus:

- » *Fees waived on ticket exchanges**
- » *Two free tickets to Historic Interiors Tours****
- » *Discount on tickets to the Malkin Lecture Series, Artists Talks, and Public Programs**

ASSOCIATE \$500

\$266 is tax deductible

All benefits of the Supporter membership plus:

- » *Access to concierge ticket service*
- » *Free admission for two additional guests (a party of four) to Armory visual art installations*
- » *Two free passes to an art fair***

BENEFACTOR \$1,000

\$766 is tax deductible

All benefits of the Associate membership plus:

- » *Recognition in Armory printed programs*
- » *No-wait, no-line ticket pickup at the patron desk*
- » *Handling fees waived on ticket purchases**
- » *Invitation for you and a guest to a private Chairman's Circle event*
- » *Two complimentary tickets to the popular Malkin Lectures Series**

Each membership applies to one household, and one membership card is mailed upon membership activation.

For more information about membership, please contact the Membership Office at (212) 616-3958 or members@armoryonpark.org.

For information on ticketing, or to purchase tickets, please contact the Box Office at (212) 933-5812 or solutions@armoryonpark.org.

CHAIRMAN'S CIRCLE STARTING AT \$2,500

Chairman's Circle members provide vital support for the Armory's immersive arts and education programming and the restoration of our landmark building. In grateful appreciation of their support, they receive unique and exclusive opportunities to experience the Armory and interact with our world-class artists.

AVANT-GARDE STARTING AT \$350

The Avant-Garde is a group for individuals from their 20s to 40s. An Avant-Garde membership offers a deeper, more intimate connection to the unique and creative concepts behind the Armory's mission.

LEGACY CIRCLE

The Armory's Legacy Circle is a group of individuals who support Park Avenue Armory through a vitally important source of future funding, a planned gift. These gifts will help support the Armory's outside-of-the-box artistic programming, Arts Education Programs, and historical preservation into the future. Members of the Legacy Circle are invited to special behind-the-scenes events and intimate receptions to enrich their Armory experiences.

*Subject to ticket availability

**Certain restrictions apply

***Reservations required

PARK AVENUE ARMORY PATRONS

ARTISTIC COUNCIL

Anonymous
Anne-Victoire Auriault/Goldman Sachs Gives
Abigail and Joseph Baratta
Wendy Belzberg and Strauss Zelnick
Sonja and Martin J. Brand
Noreen Buckfire
Elizabeth Coleman
Hélène and Stuyvesant Comfort
Caroline and Paul Cronson
Emme and Jonathan Deland

Jennie L. and Richard K. DeScherer
Krystyna Doerfler
Lisa and Sanford B. Ehrenkranz
The Lehoczy Escobar Family
Adam R. Flatto
Roberta Garza
Kim and Jeff Greenberg
Barbara and Andrew Gundlach
Anita K. Hersh
Wendy Keys
Ken Kuchin and Tyler Morgan

Almudena and Pablo Legorreta
Christina and Alan MacDonald
Jennifer Manocherian
Kim Manocherian
Heidi and Tom McWilliams
Lily O'Boyle
Valerie Pels
Amanda J.T. and Richard E. Riegel
Susan and Elihu Rose
Janet C. Ross
Caryn Schacht and David Fox

Stacy Schiff and Marc de La Bruyère
Joan and Michael Steinberg
Emanuel Stern
Mimi Klein Sternlicht
Jon Stryker and Slobodan Randjelović
Merryl and James Tisch
Deborah C. van Eck
Bob Vila and Diana Barrett
Mary Wallach
Peter Zhou and Lisa Lee

LEGACY CIRCLE

Founding Members
Angela and Wade F.B. Thompson

Co-Chairs
Lisa and Sanford B. Ehrenkranz
Marjorie and Gurnee Hart

Wendy Belzberg and Strauss Zelnick
Emme and Jonathan Deland
Adam R. Flatto
Ken Kuchin
Heidi McWilliams
Gwen Norton

Amanda Thompson Riegel
Rebecca Robertson and Byron Knief
Susan and Elihu Rose
Francesca Schwartz
Joan and Michael Steinberg

PATRONS

Park Avenue Armory expresses its deep appreciation to the individuals and organizations listed here for their generous support for its annual and capital campaigns.

\$1,000,000 +

Charina Endowment Fund
Citi
Empire State Local Development Corporation
Marina Kellen French
Barbara and Andrew Gundlach
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation, Inc.
Mr. and Mrs. Peter L. Malkin and The Malkin Fund, Inc.
Richard and Ronay Menschel
New York City Council and Council Member Daniel R. Garodnick
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
New York State Assemblymember Dan Quart and the New York State Assembly
The Pershing Square Foundation
Susan and Elihu Rose
The Arthur Ross Foundation and J & AR Foundation
Joan Smilow and Joel Smilow*
The Thompson Family Foundation
Wade F.B. Thompson*
The Zelnick/Belzberg Charitable Trust
Anonymous

\$500,000 to \$999,999

Bloomberg Philanthropies
Lisa and Sanford B. Ehrenkranz
Almudena and Pablo Legorreta
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Adam R. Rose and Peter R. McQuillan
Donna and Marvin Schwartz
Emanuel Stern

\$250,000 to \$499,999

American Express
Michael Field and Doug Hamilton
Adam R. Flatto
Ken Kuchin and Tyler Morgan
The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation
The Rockefeller Foundation
Marshall Rose Family Foundation

\$100,000 to \$249,999

The Achelis and Bodman Foundations
R. Mark and Wendy Adams
Linda and Earle Altman
Abigail and Joseph Baratta
Booth Ferris Foundation
Sonja and Martin J. Brand
Hélène and Stuyvesant Comfort
Caroline and Paul Cronson
Roberta Garza
Howard Gilman Foundation
Marjorie and Gurnee Hart
The Hearst Foundations
Anita K. Hersh
Kirkland & Ellis LLP
Mary T. Kush
Leonard & Judy Lauder Fund
Meta Open Arts
Mr. and Mrs. Lester Morse
National Endowment for the Arts
New York State Assembly
New York State Council on the Arts
Stavros Niarchos Foundation
Gwendolyn Adams Norton and Peter Norton
Donald Pels Charitable Trust
Daniel and Joanna S. Rose
Mrs. Arthur Ross
The Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation
Caryn Schacht and David Fox
Stacy Schiff and Marc de La Bruyère
Harold and Mimi Steinberg

Charitable Trust
Joan and Michael Steinberg
Mimi Klein Sternlicht
Mr. William C. Tomson
Deborah C. van Eck
The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts
Peter Zhou and Lisa Lee

\$25,000 to \$99,999

The Avenue Association
Emma Bloomberg
The Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Foundation
Noreen and Ken Buckfire
Elizabeth Coleman
The Cowles Charitable Trust
Emme and Jonathan Deland
Jennie L. and Richard K. DeScherer
Krystyna Doerfler
The Lehoczy Escobar Family
Andrew L. Farkas, Island Capital Group & C-III Capital Partners
Ford Foundation
Lorraine Gallard and Richard H. Levy
Elizabeth Morse Genius Foundation
Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation
Kiendl and John Gordon
Janet Halvorson
Karen Herskovitz
Kaplan Brothers Fund
Christina and Alan MacDonald
Christine and Richard Mack

PARK AVENUE ARMORY PATRONS (CONT'D)

Kim Manocherian
Marc Haas Foundation
Andrea Markezin Press and Joel Press
Slobodan Randjelovic and Jon Stryker
Katharine Rayner
The Reed Foundation
Rhodebeck Charitable Trust
Genie and Donald Rice
Amanda J.T. and Richard E. Riegel
Rebecca Robertson and Byron Knief
The Shubert Foundation
Sydney and Stanley S. Shuman
Amy and Jeffrey Silverman
Sanford L. Smith
TEFAF NY
Tishman Speyer
Robert and Jane Toll
VIA Art Fund
Bob Vila and Diana Barrett
Mary Wallach
Anonymous (3)

\$10,000 to \$24,999

AECOM Tishman
Judy Hart Angelo
Jody and John Arnhold
Anne-Victoire Auriault / Goldman Sachs Gives
Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation
Harrison and Leslie Bains
Marian and Russell Burke
Con Edison
Peter Cummings
Luis y Cora Delgado
DHR Global
William F. Draper
Caryl S. Englander
Teri Friedman and Babak Yaghmaie
Barbara and Peter Georgescu
The Georgetown Company
Sylvia Golden and Warren Friedman
Kim and Jeff Greenberg
Allen and Deborah Grubman
George and Patty Grunbaum
Agnes Gund
Lawrence and Sharon Hite
Peter Huntsman
Jack Shainman Gallery
Kekst
The Charles & Lucille King Family Foundation
The Emily Davie and Joseph S. Kornfeld Foundation
Suzie and Bruce Kovner
Bill Lambert
Fernand Lamesch
Leon Levy Foundation
George S. Loening
Steve and Sue Mandel
Danny and Audrey Meyer
Cynthia Woods Mitchell Fund of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
The Donald R. Mullen Family Foundation, Inc.
Nardello & Co.
Beth and Joshua Nash
Lily O'Boyle
PBDW Architects
Michael Peterson
Joan and Joel I. Pickett
Anne and Skip Pratt
Deborah and Chuck Royce
Fiona and Eric Rudin
May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, Inc.
Seymour and Robyn Sammel

Mrs. William H. Sandholm
Lise Scott and D. Ronald Daniel
Dr. and Mrs. Thomas P. Sculco
Claude Shaw and Lara Meiland-Shaw
Brian S. Snyder
Howard & Sarah D. Solomon Foundation
Michael and Veronica Stubbs
Allen and Meghan Thorpe
Merryl and James Tisch
Barbara D. Tober
L.F. Turner
Susan Unterberg
Cristina Von Bargaen and Jonathan McHardy
Isak and Rose Weinman Foundation, Inc.
Samuel and Kathryn Weinhoff
Wescustogo Foundation
Maria Wirth
Anonymous (6)

\$5,000 to \$9,999

Amy and David Abrams
Katie Adams Schaeffer
Louis and Gabrielle Bacon
Jay Badame
Franklin and Marsha Berger
Tim and Amy Berkowitz
Sara and Mark Bloom
Nicholas Braver
Catherine and Robert Brawer
Patricia Brown Specter
James-Keith Brown and Eric Diefenbach
Dr. Joyce F. Brown, President, Fashion Institute of Technology
Arthur and Linda Carter
Betsy Cohn
Sissel Cooper and Peter Bos
Joyce B. Cowin
Jessie Ding and Ning Jin
Jeanne Donovan Fisher
Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg Foundation
Leland and Jane Englehardt
Dr. Nancy Epler-Wolff and Mr. John Wolff
The Felicia Fund
Andrew and Theresa Fenster
Candia Fisher
Mary Ann Fribourg
Bart Friedman and Wendy A. Stein
Great Performances
Cecilia Greene and Paul Verbinen
Mimi and Peter Haas Fund
Molly Butler Hart and Michael D. Griffin
Peter Imber and Ali Zweben Imber
Steve Jensen and Mark Grace
Cynthia and Stephen Ketchum
The David L. Klein, Jr. Foundation
Kameron Kordestani
Stewart F. Lane and Bonnie Comley
Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder
Chad A. Leat
Denise Lefrak
Robert Lehman Foundation
Gail and Alan Levenstein
Jane Lombard
Lili Lynton and Michael Ryan
Linda Macklowe
Shelly and Tony Malkin
Marian Goodman Gallery
James C. Marlas and Marie Nugent-Head Marlas
Joyce F. Menschel

Moncler USA Inc.
Enid Nemy, Dorothy Strelsin Foundation
Jesse and Stéphanie Newhouse
Michael and Elyse Newhouse
Valerie Ohrstrom
David Orentreich, MD / Orentreich Family Foundation
Marnie Pillsbury
Susan Porter
Preserve New York, a grant program of Preservation League of New York
Ida and William Rosenthal Foundation
Chuck and Stacy Rosenzweig
Reed Rubin and Jane Gregory Rubin
Eva Sanchez-Ampudia and Cyrille Walter
Susan Savitsky
Susan and Charles Sawyers
Hillary Schafer and Mark Shafr
Stephanie and Fred Shuman
Dan Simkowitz and Mari Nakachi
Lea Simonds
Ted Snowdon
Dr. and Mrs. Eugene E. Stark, Jr.
Anne-Sophie Stern
Beatrice Stern
Michael and Marjorie Stern
The Jay and Kelly Sugarman Foundation
Robert Suiter and Debra Shuwarger
The Annenberg Foundation
Dave and Karen Thomas
Michael Tuch Foundation
Mr. and Mrs. Jan F. van Eck
Mrs. William J. vanden Heuvel
Anastasia Vournas and J. William Uhrig
Saundra Whitney
Gregory Annenberg Weingarten, GRoW @ Annenberg
Michael Weinstein
Gary and Nina Wexler
Lynne Wheat
Brian and Jane Williams
Francis H. Williams and Keris A. Salmon
W. Weldon and Elaine Wilson
Lisa and David Wolf
Cynthia Young and George Eberstadt
Judy Francis Zankel
Bruce and Lois Zenkel
Zubatkin Owner Representation, LLC
Anonymous

\$2,500 to \$4,999

Abigail Kirsch Catering
Allen Adler and Frances Beatty
Susan Heller Anderson
Jeff Arnstein and Michael Bellante
Francesca Beale
Catherine Behrend
Mr. Lawrence B. Benenson
Jonathan and Marjaleena Berger
Stephanie Bernheim
Carolyn S. Brody
Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Brown
Annabel Buckfire
Amanda M. Burden
Mary and Brad Burnham
Joel and Ulrika Citron
Margaret Conklin
Colin Cowie and Danny Peuscovich
Dominick Coyne and Michael Phillips
Ellie and Edgar Cullman
Joshua Dachs / Fisher Dachs

Associates
Charles and Norris Daniels
Antoinette Delruelle and Joshua L. Steiner
Peggy and Millard Drexler Family Foundation
Christopher Duda
Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz
Jamshid and Mashid Ehsani
Deborah and Ronald Eisenberg Foundation
Jared Feldman
Edmée and Nicholas Firth
Megan Flanagan
Ella M. Foshay and Michael B. Rothfeld
Gwen and Austin Fragomen
Jill and Michael J. Franco
Eleanor Friedman and Jonathan J. Cohen
The Garcia Family Foundation
Emanuel E. Geduld
Martin and Lauren Geller
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew S. Georges
Alexandra Giniger
Elizabeth Granville-Smith
Robert S. Gregory
Ian and Lea Highest
Barbara Hoffman
Johanna Hudgens and Matthew Wilson
James Ingram
Jeff and Holly Jacobs
Judith Jadov
Ann Jones
Jeanne Kanders
Rita J. and Stanley H. Kaplan Family Foundation
Adrienne Katz
Nancy Kestenbaum and David Klaffer
Zachary Kline
Douglas and Judith Krupp
Lizbeth & George Krupp
John Lambert and Ramona Boston
Barbara and Richard Lane
Suydam Lansing
Lazarus Charitable Trust
Elliot Levenglick
Phyllis Levin
Gina Giumarra MacArthur
Charles and Georgette Mallory
Iris Z. Marden
Judith and Michael Margulies
Joanie Martinez-Rudkovsky
Bonnie Maslin
Nina B. Matis
Diane Max
Peter and Leni May
Claudia and Eduardo Mazzi
Dennis McNeill and Robin Burns McNeill
Constance and H. Roemer McPhee
Claire Milonas
Barbara and Howard Morse
Saleem and Jane Muqaddam
Aida Murad
Nancy Newcomb and John Hargraves
Peter and Susan Nitze
Susan Numeroff
Nancy and Morris W. Offit
Kathleen O'Grady
Peter and Beverly Orthwein
Robert Ouintette and Lee Hirsch
Robin and Carlos Palomares
Madison J. Papp
Lee and Lori Parks
Louis and Barbara Perlmutter
Richard and Rose Petrocelli
Pistachio Culinary Studio &

PARK AVENUE ARMORY PATRONS (CONT'D)

Experiences
Geri Pollack
Phyllis Posnick and Paul Cohen
Jennifer Reardon
Mr. and Mrs. Michael and
Kalliope Rena
Diana and Charles Revson
Diana and John Rice
Richenthal Foundation
Alexandra Robertson
Laura and Gerald Rosberg
Rose Brand
Deborah Rose
Marisa Rose and Robin van Bokhorst
Marjorie P. Rosenthal
Susan Rudin
Jane Fearer Safer
Paul H. Scarbrough, Akustiks, LLC.
Sabina and Wilfred Schlumberger
Caroline Schmidt-Barnett
Louisa Serene Schneider
Benjamin Schor &
Isabel Wilkinson Schor
Nicholas and Shelley Schorsch
Sara Lee and Axel Schupf
Douglas Schwallbe and
Nancy Lorenz
Uma Seshamani and Jason van Itallie
Jack Shainman
Emilia Sherifova
Denise Simon and
Paulo Veiradacunha
Laura Skoler
Shelley Sonnenberg
Daisy M. Soros
Stephen and Constance Spahn
Leila Maw Straus
Stella Strazdas and Henry Forrest
Ellen and Bill Taubman
Union Square Events
Christine van Itallie
Andrew E. Vogel and
Véronique Mazard
Robert Warsaw and Debbie Schmidt
Kate Whitney and Franklin Thomas
Andrea Winter and Daniel Mintz
Amy Yenkin and Robert Usdan
Toni Young
Freya Zaheer and Whit Bernard
Anonymous (5)

\$1,000 to \$2,499

Diane and Arthur Abbey
Marina Abramović
Ellen Abrams
David and Anne Altchek
Eric Altmann
Diane Archer and Stephen Presser
Ms. Regula Aregger
John and Jennifer Argenti
Dr. Lora Aroyo
Assouline-Lichten Foundation
Jenny & Michael Baldock
Diana Barco
Howard and Jane Barnett
Fabrizio and Enrica
Bentivoglio D'arengi
Stephen Berger and
Cynthia Wainwright
Deborah Berke and Peter McCann
Judy and Howard Berkowitz
Reid Berman
Elaine S. Bernstein
Katherine and Marco Birch
Hana and Michael Bitton
Boehm Family Foundation
Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz

Melanie Bouvard
Richard and Susan Braddock
Mark and Anne Brennan
Spencer Brownstone
Hugh Burns and Molly Duffy
Matthew Buten and Beth Brownstein
Cora Cahan
Michael Carlisle and Sally Peterson
Thomas and Ann Charters
Orla Coleman and Rikki Tahta
Bradley A. Connor
Alexander Cooper
Krista and James Corl
Sophie Coumantaros
Andrew and Mimi Crawford
Mimi Ritzen Crawford
Abby and Andrew Crisses
L. Jay Cross
Austen and Ernesto Cruz
John Charles and Nathalie Danilovich
Richard and Peggy Danziger
Tina R. Davis
Eric de Cholnoky and
Lily Greenwell-Farrell
Richard and Barbara Debs
Thomas and Elizabeth Dubbs
David and Frances Eberhart
Foundation
Karen Eckhoff
Frederick & Diana Elghanayan
Inger McCabe Elliott
Patricia Ellis
Barry Ellsworth and
Nathalie Pierrepoint
Cristina Enriquez-Bocobo
Femenella & Associates, Inc.
Robert and Kimia Finnerty
Walter and Judith Flamenbaum
Gail Flatto
Barbara G. Fleischman
Kristin Gamble Flood
Melanie and Robert Forman
Betsy Frank
Kara Gaffney Ross
Stefan Gargiulo
Bruce and Alice Geismar
David and Susan Getz
Sarah Jane and Trevor Gibbons
Ryan Gillum
Mrs. Leila Govi
Nina DeKay Grauer
Jan M. Guifarro
Frances and Gerard Guillemot
Sharon Gurwitz
Yen Ha and Richard Tesler
Linda Hackett and Russell Munson
Nohra Haime
Patricia G Hambrecht
Lana and Steve Harber
Kathy Harrison and Edward Flinn
Thomas Hartman
In memory of
Maria E. Hidrobo Kaufman
William T. Hillman
Gregor Hochmuth
Bruce Hoffman
Mr. Joseph C. Hoopes, Jr.
Tom and Amy Houston
Richard and Roberta Huber
Peter Hunt
Hollye Jacobs
William and Westlie Janeway
Morton and Linda Janklow
Christopher and Hilda Jones
Hon. Bruce M. Kaplan and
Janet Yaseen Kaplan
Jennie A. Kassanoff and
Daniel H. Schulman
Kay Kimpton Walker and Sandy Walker
Claire King

Jana and Gerold Klauer
Major General Edward G. Klein,
NYNG (Ret.)
Phyllis L. Kossoff
Kate Krauss
Barbara Landau
Judith and G Langer
Christopher and Alida Latham
Ralph Lemon
Alexia and David Leuschen
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur
Foundation
Susanne Mackiw
Jay and Donna Margolis
Ryan Marshall & Mary Herms
Match65
Larry and Mary McCaffrey
Martha B. McLanahan
Rebecca Gold Millikowsky
John and Lisa Miller
Larry Morse and Sharon Bowen
Stephanie Neville and Alan Beller
Lisbeth Oliver
Arlena Olsten
Dr. Catherine Orentreich
Sanjay and Leslie Patel
Katherine Peabody
Brian and Emilia Pfeiffer
Natalya Poniatowski
Charmaine N. Portis
David and Leslie Puth
Martin and Anna Rabinowitz
Nathalie Solange Regnault
Jill Reiter and Eric Riha
Anthony and Susan Roberts
David and Susan Rockefeller
David and Meg Roth
Patty Sachs
John and Shelby Saer
Richard and Ann Sarnoff
Charlie and Lindsey Schilling
Jonathan and Rachel Schmerin
Michael and Dafna Schmerin
Par Schoenfeld
Robert Schroeder and Karen Brooks
Amy Schulman
Marshall Sebring and Pepper Binkley
Gil Shiva
Adrienne and William Silver
Bonnie Simon
Albert Simons III
Donna Snow and Michael Rubinfeld
Marybeth Sollins
Squadron A Foundation
Stacy, Passionate about the Arts
Lauren Starke and Aric Domezick
Colleen Stenzler
Tricia Stevenson
Noreene Storrle and
Wesley G. McCain
Bonnie and Tom Strauss
Elizabeth Stribling and Guy Robinson
Studio Institute
Kris Toggias
Zachary Kress Turner
Debra Valentine
Maria Vecchiotti
Caroline Wamsler and
DeWayne Phillips
Arete Warren
Mati Weiderrpass and Nikolas Chen
Katherine Wenning and
Michael Dennis
Shelby White
Anonymous (6)

List as of December 31, 2021
* Deceased



Thompson Arts Center at Park Avenue Armory | 643 Park Avenue at 67th Street

Shift Space

Legacy Russell on 2021 Knight Arts + Tech Fellow Rashaad Newsome
2021

In 1999, American professor of cybernetics and ethno-mathematician Ron Eglash published *African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design* wherein he argued that the fractal—a geometric formation where each part has the same design as the whole—is fundamental to, and deeply embedded within, the building of “African designs and knowledge systems.” Across his research Eglash notes that the late Benoît Mandelbrot is historically credited as having “discovered” fractals in 1975, but in fact the presence of the fractal as a core organizational algorithm long predates Mandelbrot. Eglash observes, “We need to think about ... the traditional African methods for doing self-organization [as] robust algorithms ... ways of doing self-organization, of doing entrepreneurship, that are gentle, that are egalitarian. If we want to find a better way of doing that kind of work, we [need] look no further.”



Rashaad Newsome, *Catwalk (Star Revlon)*, 2016. Three-color lithograph with silver leaf, 3D-printed and collage elements, 29 3/4 x 42 inches. Image courtesy the artist.

Much of Eglash’s early visualization of the fractal model of computing across the technology of African design began by studying aerial photographs of a Tanzanian village, recognizing that from above, these patterns and the connections between them became more discernible. There is something incredibly sticky and complex about Eglash requiring the aerial view as a core

driver of the legibility of a Black algorithm. On the one hand, it speaks to the trigger of a non-Black researcher exercising omniscience with an overarching godly sight. By situating himself as a human drone hovering beyond the photographic image, Eglash was able to register the fractals as part of a sort of geographic information system (GIS), unlocking access to enclaved spatial and geographic data in intersection with the creative technology of land design. On the other hand, a more hopeful read: Eglash shows us that sometimes it is simply a shift in our bodily position that can help us engage encrypted data differently—and toward radical means. As the concept of basic GIS goes, output data comes from inputting the raw data of the real world. 3 This is what makes the map, and an aerial perspective can get us there.



Rashaad Newsome, *Being*, 2019. Artificial intelligence installation, computer, projector, microphone, sound system, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.

Rashaad Newsome's ongoing exploration and mapping of voguing as a Black form of movement research, data storage, and collective wayfinding activates deep spatial, archival, and algorithmic systems-labor. Inside a ballroom the information exchanged is four-dimensional, operating at the ecstatic intersection and blur of space and time while doing the active work to explode and redefine both altogether. Considering Newsome's work simultaneously from within and above the ballroom gives us a new vision: as dancers move, they leave their trace, a complex topographic choreography revealing the written codes of rhythm and algorithm alike, buoyed by the dazzle of Black gesture. Newsome is giving maps with his work and meticulously setting out the computational rules of their reading, thinking critically about what can (and should) be read and, conversely, what is draped in strategic opacity. In *Catwalk* (Star Revlon) (2016) and *Duck Walking* (Justin Monster Labeija) (2016) the information of Vogue Femme as a style of 1990s vogue dance—alongside the names of the legendary performers putting these moves to action—is transformed into kinetic decadence that breaks the static rigidity of the traditional art historical sightline.

Newsome's lines give us an "image of thought," the wild technology of rhizome to wander in. For his recent solo exhibition *To Be Real* (2020) the artist plunges the visitor into the depths of Black and queer data, activating a royal heraldic iconography that in its vibrance pays homage to a New Orleans legacy of dance and feathers. The space of *To Be Real*, and the carefully organized works presented therein, again makes known and tangible the four dimensions, visualizing the somatic and textured computing of African histories as they collide with the performative innovation of a queer non-binary American blackness.

Central to Newsome's recent work is his AI progeny, *Being* (2019–ongoing). For the artist, *Being* articulates the tense position of the "cyborg" as an encoded icon, tool, vehicle, symbol, bound up with the programmatic viral haunt of the American antebellum project. Researcher and technologist Jade E. Davis proposes that cyborg as a term is really another way of marking the Other. Davis observes, "We use words like cyborg because we don't have the language to talk about the black experience, more specifically the organizing role chattel slavery, signified by the black body, played and continues to play, in culture and society. ... [Perhaps then] 'cyborg' should be 'black slave.'" ⁵ The presence of Newsome's *Being* therefore is a constant reminder that enslaved Black people—not viewed as human, but relegated to chattel—were principal data, transmitted through the machine of the Middle Passage. Newsome's interest in the queer objecthood of blackness and the ways in which a certain specificity can be grounded through queer intelligence, within the cyborgian Black subject and toward emancipatory means, makes his entanglement of Black being via his *Being* a durational one, the work of a lifetime. The score between the artist and the machine in consideration of what zeros and ones need to be hacked, backed up, and maintained for a decolonized future, remains in constant (re)negotiation of what knowledge systems might be required for an awokened machinic liberation. Shucking machine and slave alike in the creation of *Being*, Newsome pushes the cyborg toward mutiny. If a linguistic articulation of American blackness has existed in the hyphen between African and American, Newsome closes this gap, the AI of *Being* becoming a geographic meeting site of Black diaspora, a spiritual homegoing in a digital homecoming.



Rashaad Newsome, *Ansista*, 2019. African mahogany wood, silicone, leather, metal, textile, resin, paint, Swarovski crystal, 70 x 60 x 10 inches. Installation at the Fort Mason Center For Art And Culture, San Francisco. Image courtesy the artist.

Artist Stephanie Dinkins notes, “Widely deployed AI can support bottom-up decision making and provide the public means to directly inform the systems that govern us while also empowering the governed.” She asks, “Who is working to use it as such?” If we collectively consider ourselves the liberated byproduct of an algorithmic futurity, radically programmed by our cyborgian ancestors and widely deployed, the answer is simple: us. I think of my first time experiencing a recording of Newsome’s *Shade Compositions* (2005–ongoing): the sonic download that in sharp inhalation, sucking of teeth, and the roll of an eye, speaks volumes to the density of encrypted epigenetic material we carry with us as Black and queer people. In this software kiki we find ourselves: fractal records stored as rebellious cyphers within Newsome’s information superhighway, beings waiting to be deciphered by the computers of generations to come.

RASHAAD NEWSOME STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE

4.21.16 - 6.25.16



DEBUCK
GALLERY

545 W 23RD STREET NEW YORK NY 10011
212.255.5735 SALES@DEBUCKGALLERY.COM DEBUCKGALLERY.COM

THIS IS MY WORK...IT'S NOT TO BE PLAYED WITH

by Darnell L. Moore

Catalogue essay published by De Buck Gallery, New York, on the occasion of

Rashaad Newsome: STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE!

April 2016

THIS IS MY WORK...IT'S NOT TO BE PLAYED WITH



I wish y'all really stop fucking playing in my face. If you cannot fucking paint, get the fuck outta my fucking face...You see how I fucking painted myself, bitch? This is my work...And its just so fucking...it's not to be played with. — Samantha

James

This is my work.

In the epigraph, Samantha James, a popular social media personality, summons indignant courage in her self-produced YouTube clip. In the video, James literally turns the gaze away from self and in the direction of the powers that render her an object to be “painted” by the less adroit hands of others and unequivocally asks, “*You see how I fucking painted myself, bitch?*”

To own one’s work — whether such labor exists in the form of one’s ability to craft an unconstrained self with precision or the skill to use russet colored powder on a chocolate brown face as if it were the canvas of a gestural painting — is no trivial exercise for trans women of color like James. Because the art of being and the work of molding self-representations, as she reminds us, is “not to be played with.”

It takes dexterity to survive in a society that is largely antagonistic to transgressive black and brown bodies resistant to various forms of control. The bodies and representations — the almost supernatural forms of being and surviving — created and employed by trans women of color are material results of their agential power.

James' use of the subjective "I" is meant to remind her audience that trans women of color are the objects of their own creation. And those who try to paint and adorn the elements black and brown trans women have mastered in the form of self-created images tend to fall short.

Rashaad Newsome's *STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE!* conjures the unrestrained spirit that enfames James' words. His work combines still life, portraiture, heraldry, abstraction and collage to explore and body forth works shaped by a leitmotif that connects notions of contravention, self-formation, interrogation, and agency.

Form(ation) and Representations

There's a breach in our collective understanding of trans identities. The experiences of trans people represent a project of evasion and detonation. Socially constructed categories of gender and sexualities are transgressed. In this way, transness represents a radical departure from norms. It is contemplative deviance. But transness is also a form of architecture. Lives are reimaged. Selves are built. Bodies are constructed.

STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE! plays to the theme of baroque architecture. Newsome explores the limits of trans femme representations via visual art and tests the use of the collage as a form through which such representations might materialize. Connecting the otherwise disparate materials he pulls from magazines made for urban audiences, Newsome interrogates the elements that representations of trans femmes of color tend to be made of: the stuff of a global neoliberal capitalist market that centers on supremacist ideas of whiteness or the images that are commercialized to appeal to the cishetero male gaze. Thus, the work invites us to consider if black and brown trans women's self-representations — even the most alluring and deviant — are too shaped by the force of what bell hooks, the well-known black feminist cultural critic, has termed white supremacist capitalist patriarchy? And if they are, how are such forces detonated?

The imaginaries that give life to architecture and the forces necessary to construct or annihilate representations are frames that seem to shape Newsome's thesis in *STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE!* The more obvious architectural references hinted at in the work pay homage to sites like Rome's Sant'Andrea della Valle, Barcelona's Santa Maria del Mar and the Szeged Synagogue in Hungary. But less obvious are the tensions between an appeal to design styles that connote both decadence and world-weariness. *YAAAAAAS!*, for example, is a depiction whose focal elements are full lips covered with a glossy rubicund lipstick surrounded by a configuration of found images of bedazzled bling that are composed into elements of a femme face. Like the other pieces in this series, Newsome also 'paints the face' with stylized eyes cut from fashion magazines, reminding the viewer of the ever-present misogynist gaze. The piece is tamed,

though, by the placement of a gold-plated dome positioned as a head. Here is an example where symbols of worldly indulgence collude with those of otherworldly transcendence. To Newsome, there seems to be no separation between the two.



YAAAAAAS! 2016, Photo collage and crystals on paper in custom mahogany and resin artist frame with leather and automotive paint with Optium Museum acrylic, 72 ¼ x 72 ¼ x 5 in.

The work also seems to riff on fin de siècle, signaling the loss of what was and the embrace of the new. But it is a move that is also indicative of the power of trans expressiveness, that is, the black and brown trans woman's ability to entomb or even raze a past so as to create space to build new futures. The collage functions as Newsome's architectural medium. Through the form, he explodes categories of being and raises questions about what images and objects — images and objects that may or may not be signifiers of dehumanization abounding within popular culture — one can actually use or cull to suture a representation. His pulling together of found images used to construct a body of work is analogous to the process one must go through to construct a self. What parts do we rid? And which do we seek to create? Newsome's oeuvre is more than the work of visual and expressive arts; it is an ontological project.

Shapeshifting

We exist in a society that centers the experiences of cisgender people as the default social location through which we view the world — the optic through which we read the bodies of the

people inhabiting the myopic world we imagine. Art is a type of cultural production that can't escape the force of the gaze. It too can be violent to those whom the artist refuses to imagine as even existing. And it can also be the site through which new formations can be developed. *STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE!* is what can transpire when the artist expands their optics.

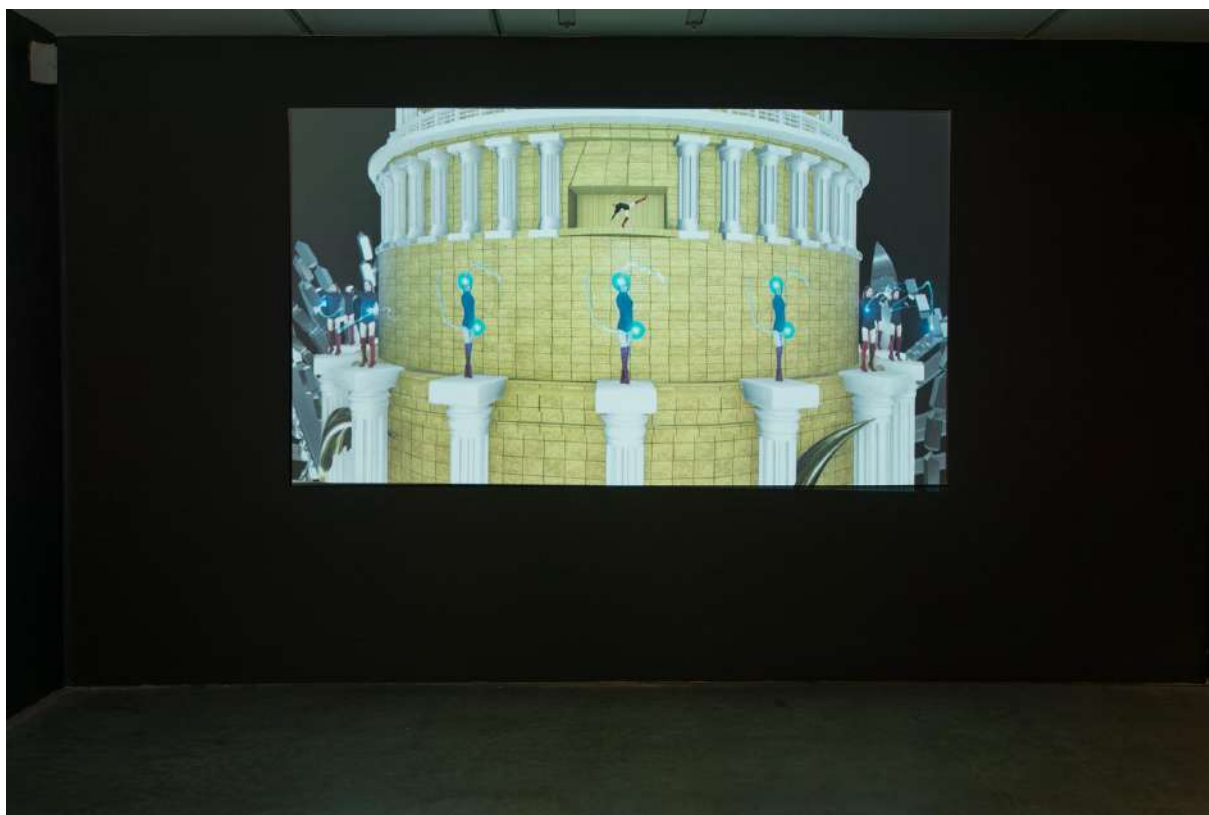
Newsome's exhibition is comprised of works shifting images and repurposing them. In search of a feminist ethos outside academe, he searched for visual texts in places where the prevailing structures of white racial supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy shape standards of beauty and, ultimately, limit the agential potential of women subjects/consumers/objects, especially those who might identify as trans women of color.



Left, *BAAAAAAM!* 2016, Photo collage on paper in custom mahogany and resin artist frame with leather, and automotive paint with Optium Museum acrylic, 43 ¼ x 55 ¼ x 4 in. and Right, *Coy*, 2016, Photo collage on paper in custom mahogany and resin artist frame with leather, and automotive paint with Optium Museum acrylic, 36 ¾ x 24 ¾ x ¾ in.

His visual works are also placed in conversation with an auditory text — a soundtrack composed of quotable statements from several variably identified feminists — produced to draw attention to the different forms of tension his work explores. But Newsome also returns to the ballroom scene — a counter-cultural black trans and queer space in which his work tends to traffic. The popularized vogue femme elements, in many ways, give shape to his work as well as the expressive culture he draws from to shape singular works like *BAAAAAAM!* and *COY* among others. The positioning of legs in both works give the viewer the impression the body is

in motion as it masters floor performance, one of the elements of vogue. This work is about shifting bodies. But the exhibition also includes a video installation that is organized around simultaneously looped cameos of Amazon Mother Leiomy Maldonado, widely known outside of the ballroom community as a cultural icon, sharing the five elements of vogue, as a visual cue that transgressive trans femme bodies can also shift space.



STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE!, 2016, Single channel video with sound, Dimensions variable
TRT: 04:02

Black trans scholar and cultural worker Kai Green described shapeshifting as “the ability to change oneself.” But he also went on to offer what he foresees as an aim that surfaces as a result of self-actualization and shaping. “I want to have self-determination economically, politically, and socially, which for me includes gender self-determination.” This is what cultural anthropologist Aimee Meredith Cox describes as a “choreography of citizenship” or the various performances it takes to shift discourses and spaces. *STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE!* is an attempt at both, but it does so by refusing to disremember the bodies central to the projects’ imaginary. Black trans women are centered in the work. But it is not enough to demonstrate how trans femme representations signify powerlessness. Newsome attempts to center on trans femme agency — even when the limits of one’s agency are tested by various forms of structural oppression. Even more, the trans experience is more than a process signaling the reconfiguration of bodies because the body is not necessarily the locus of trans identity. The body is one structure one might choose to design, but there are other structures that may require detonation. Images of explosions are replete in the work, signaling the power of deviant

destruction of categories and rubrics that cage subjectivities. Like the ornate frames Newsome designed to possess some of the works, the artist too must question his grasp — however intricate, however unfixed — on expressions too big for any of our hands. This was Newsome’s challenge. Is it possible for a cis queer male artist to create representations of trans femmes without crushing subjectivities, without caging expression within the gaze of the cis queer onlooker? Can one ever love the body of a trans woman enough to craft representations of it with as much care as she would her own? Or should the artist attend to James’ command and “stop fucking playing in her face” until they learn to get it right? These are the questions this body of work posits — the queries Newsome’s work attempts to respond to with care for bodies and representations often subjugated. *STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE!* is a tentative response to the challenge James proposes. He must now await word from trans women of color to determine if he got it right.

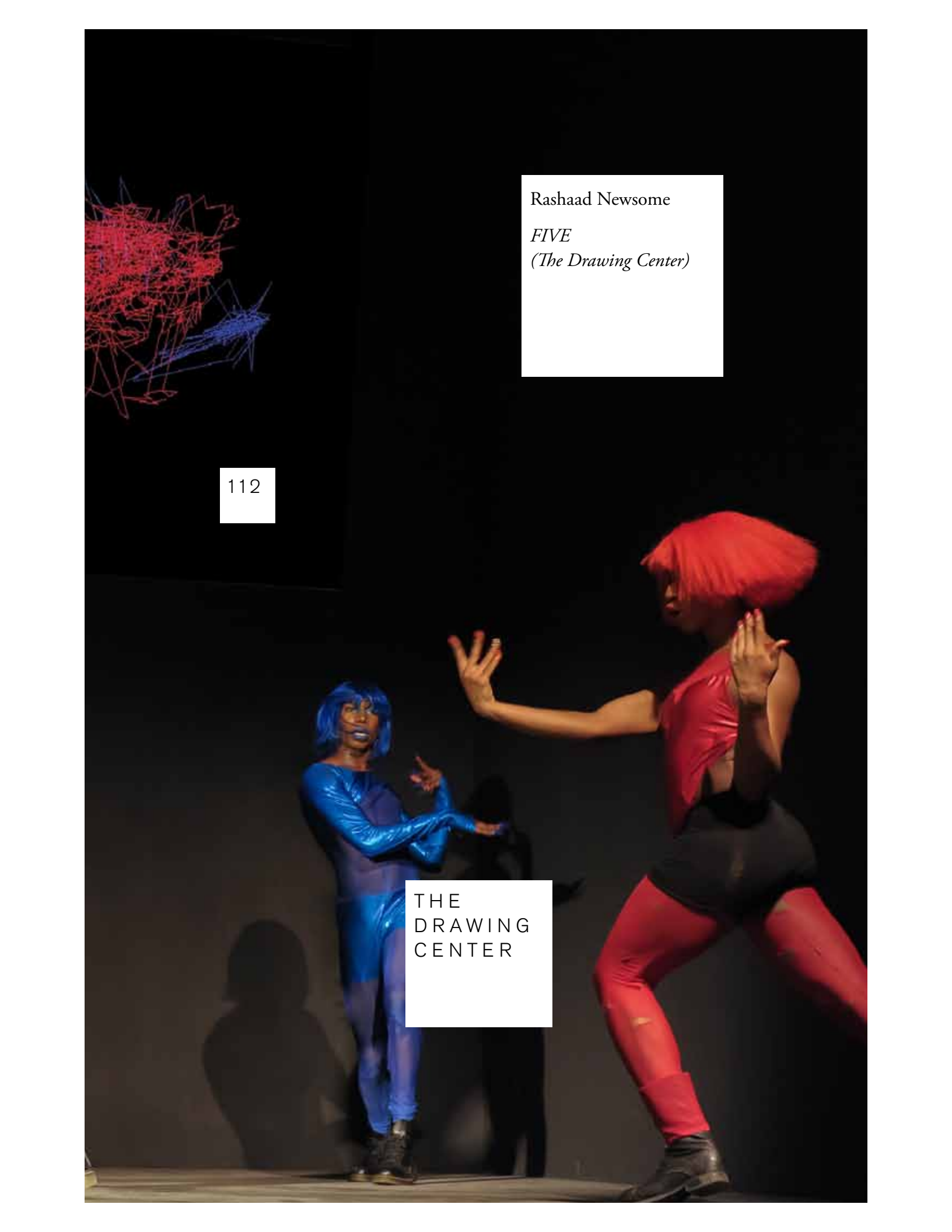
i. Stop Playing in My Face – Samantha James, video, September 2, 2015, viewed March 23, 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xz1nqg2V3oU>

ii. Moore, Darnell, and Kai Green. “Darnell L. Moore & Kai M. Green: Conversation in Black.” *Guernica: A Magazine of Art & Politics*. March 9, 2016.

<https://www.guernicamag.com/daily/darnell-l-moore-kai-m-green-conversation-iblack/> Accessed on: March 23, 2016.

iii. Cox, Aimee M. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*. Durham: Duke Press, 2015. Print



Rashaad Newsome
FIVE
(The Drawing Center)

112

THE
DRAWING
CENTER

Cunt and Composition:
Rashaad Newsome's *FIVE*

Evan Garza



A BRIEF HERSTORY

A style of competitive dance that evolved from fashion modeling, the art of voguing was born in Harlem's queer Black and Latino ballroom scene. Until recently, people of color had little hope of becoming superstar models, especially not underprivileged African-Americans and Latinos (who were fierce nonetheless). So they modeled for judges and competed against one another on the runway for titles at balls held in community centers and halls throughout Harlem, from the 1960s onward. Over time, performances at balls became so intense that, by the 1980s, competitive modeling had developed into a codified dance form.

Voguing, in effect, *models* the act of modeling. Dancers stop and pose, as if for a camera in a high fashion shoot, repeating the process again and again with different poses, their collective gestures culminating in a seductive, queer *tableau vivant*. To vogue is to emulate the quintessence of elegance, to mimic and match the character and caliber of the models within the magazine for which the dance was named. For the Harlem queens who originated the form, to vogue was to show the world you were just as good—and just how good you were.

The ballroom scene, and the dance form at its center, were popularized by *Paris is Burning*, 1990—the now-legendary documentary by Jennie Livingston—and adapted for mainstream consumption that same year in Madonna's classic single. The related art of drag, which has reigned in the ball circuit among gays and trans-identifying



PL. 00
Shade Compositions (SFMOMA), 2012



PL. 00
Shade Compositions (SFMOMA), 2012

women for more than fifty years, is in a sense defined by co-optation and sampling.¹ So while the language of voguing may have been co-opted by popular culture, from its very inception the dance form has adopted other references and made them its own.

CAGE, CUNNINGHAM & COLLAGE

When John Cage composed *Credo in Us* in 1942 for a dance performance choreographed by Merce Cunningham and Jean Erdman, he inserted clips of music by other composers into his score, played by phonograph or radio in brief streams at varied intervals. In effect, Cage built a collage of structured sound through appropriation and fragmentation. One finds subtle reverberations of these notions in the work of artist Rashaad Newsome, whose *Shade Compositions, 2005*—, for example, is performed by an ensemble composed of neither strings nor percussion but women and queer men of color, who enact the vocal signifiers and body language of the stereotypical “black diva” like an orchestral, human beatbox [PLS. 00–00]. Newsome’s work is defined by notions of collage, and the collaborations of Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham are of significant relevance to his recent projects. Consider, for example, their groundbreaking *Variations V, 1965*, a spectacular, avant-garde achievement in interdisciplinary performance that correlated dance, sound, and video. Activated by the dancers’ passing movements, twelve electronic, antenna-like poles scattered throughout the stage transmitted dancers’ sounds to a mixer, manipulated by Cage and fellow composers David Tudor and Gordon Mumma. Projected film footage by Stan VanDerBeek and distorted television images by Nam June Paik washed over the dancers like billowing clouds, just as screeching, beating, howling sounds blanketed their bodies.

These visual, aural, and physical collisions predate contemporary understandings of queer potentiality and its relationship to the body, where, rather than being defined by categories of identity or desire,

¹ In a recent interview, RuPaul Charles was quoted as saying, “Drag is about sampling. It’s sampling the world. So it’s only fair that the rest of the world samples from us.” Michael Brodeur, “‘All Stars’ a victory lap for ‘RuPaul’s Drag Race,’” *Boston Globe*, October 20, 2012.

“we” are able “to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present,” as the late queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz described.² Works by Cage and Cunningham like *Variations V* that depend so highly on chance, interaction, and performance insist on their inherent potentiality; they build a physical, sensorial context for future possibilities. This interdisciplinary, queer, corporeal engagement with sound and movement finds echoes in Newsome’s evolving, performance, *FIVE*—a kind of vogue femme *Variations V*, complete with a chanting MC and a “cunt merry-go-round”³ [PL. 00].

WORK (FIVE)

First presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art for the 2010 Biennial, Newsome’s *FIVE* combines voguing, Baroque classical music, and ballroom beats, with sensory computer technology that translates dancers’ movements into unique, performed line “drawings.” The work’s title is culled from the five elements that make up vogue femme: hand performance; catwalk; floor performance; dips and spins; and duckwalk.

Also included in the 2010 Whitney Biennial were earlier silent videos by Newsome—notably *Untitled (New Way)*, 2009—which served as preliminary investigations for the project and which underscore the artist’s conceptual engagement with collage. *Untitled (New Way)* features a long, straight-on shot of one of New York’s top New Way voguers, Twiggy Prada, as he dances for the camera in a tiny white room [PL. 00]. His at once soft and rigid movements are mixed with “clicks,” an element of New Way voguing characterized by limb

2 In the introduction to his theoretical text *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz explains, “Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present... Turning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations. Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.” *Cruising Utopia* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

3 Newsome’s term for the dance performed in a circle around MC Scanz. “Soft and cunt” is a style of vogue femme marked by a softer, daintier, and often more skillful and exaggeratedly feminine execution.



PL. 00
FIVE (ICA Boston), 2011

contortions at the joints, with the arms manipulated up over the head and down behind the back, while the hands remain locked together.⁴ Prada's swift, elegant dance is set within a "white cube" that immediately situates voguing as an art form. His performance in *Untitled (New Way)* is the result of footage from several improvised sessions that Newsome edited and spliced together. Voguing is a genre in which multiple influences—ballet, modern dance, modeling, mime—are atomized and combined. Newsome's collaging of Prada's distinct movements literalizes the pastiche nature inherent to the dance form. Newsome's silent videos marked the introduction of voguing (both as a dance and a culture) into the contemporary art world. *FIVE*, however, is an altogether different beast. If Newsome's *Untitled* videos are the new kids at the ball, *FIVE* is the legendary queen for whom they clear the floor.

In it, five dancers represent—and perform—each of the five individual elements of vogue femme (each dressed in a different color respectively). Newsome uses a camera and specially designed software to capture the colors in real time and render them as lines in a computer program. The streams of color are then altered by the artist, who digitally controls the thickness of each "stroke," to form the composition of "drawings" projected onstage. Where Cage and Cunningham's *Variations V* featured sound triggered by dance and altered by technology, Newsome's composition presents drawing created by movement.

The dancers are accompanied by a five-person band, playing music whose rhythmic structure is rooted in the vogue house beat, MC'd by New York's Kevin JZ Prodigy, and complemented by Baroque opera performed by Grammy-winning baritone Stefanos Koroneos. Each instrument corresponds to a given dancer. Performances by the musicians are largely improvised and respond musically to what the dancers are doing physically, building into a crescendo of sound and movement as the dancers enter the floor, one after the other. Unpredictability is a central element of the work, influenced greatly by Cage and Cunningham's chance performances.

4 Clipping, as defined by Aaron Enigma in VOGUE-CABULARY, *Underground Culture of BALLS*, http://balls.houseofenigma.com/vogcab_frames.html.

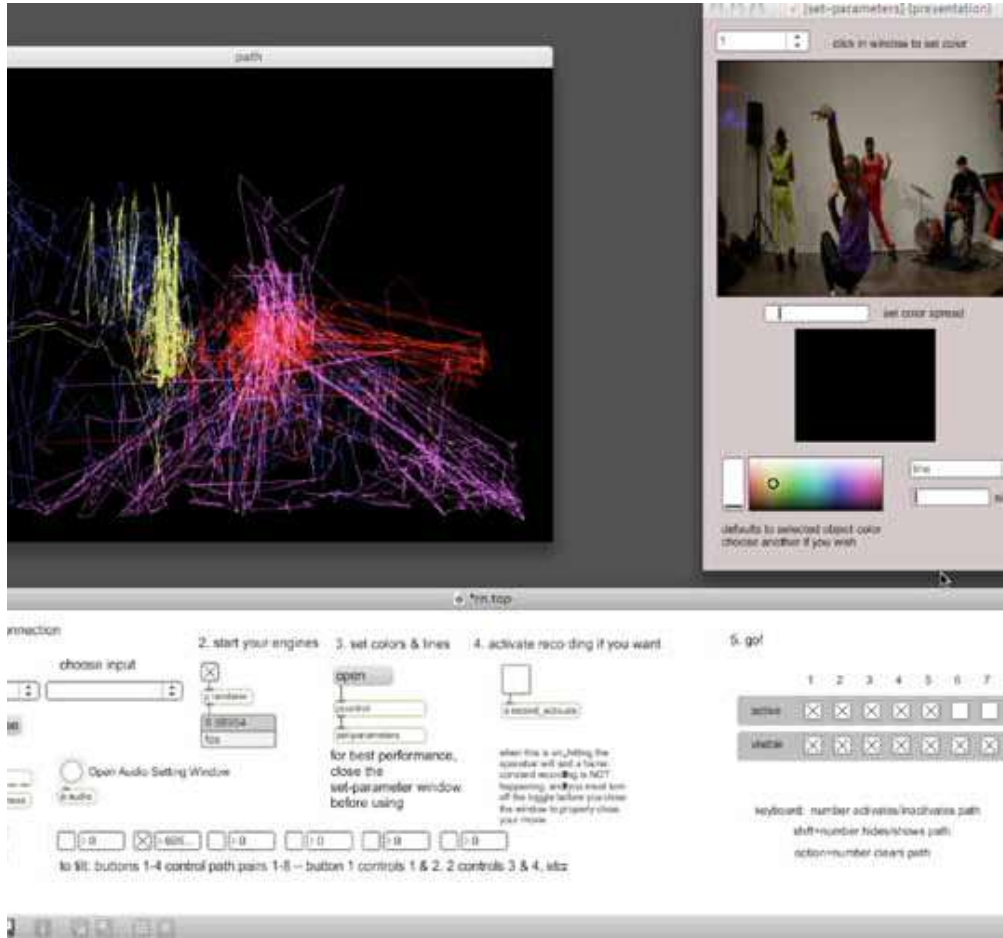
FIVE's fortuitous nature proved to be an unexpected challenge for the members of the Hong Kong student ensemble that Newsome engaged to perform the musical accompaniment for Chinese audiences at ART HK 2012 (The 2012 Hong Kong International Art Fair). Trained to hit each note with flawless precision, the student musicians were terrifically unfamiliar with the notion of improvisation. So the artist went back to his roots: collage. Like the early *Untitled* videos, Newsome took samples of traditional Chinese music and blended them together in unexpected ways to create a score for the musicians that encouraged them to stray from the paragon of perfect execution. The result is the fiercest—and most innovative—form of Chinese jazz imaginable. *FIVE (ARTHK)* also introduced a host of new instruments to the work's arsenal: dizi for hand performance; an erhu for catwalk; yangqin for floor performance; and Chinese drums for duckwalk.

The five images on paper that line the walls of The Drawing Center are two-dimensional iterations of the computer-generated “drawings” garnered from the dancers' movements in Hong Kong [PLS. 00–00]. The version of *FIVE* to take place at The Drawing Center will utilize multiple Xbox Kinect cameras to localize the movements of each dancer with greater accuracy, enabling the creation of spatialized computer-based renderings, which will, in turn, facilitate the subsequent creation of objects. But although three-dimensional, these are best described not as sculptures but as drawings reified in space. Like the voguing on which it is based, *FIVE* continues to reinvent itself and radiate into new forms.

FIVE challenges the ephemeral nature of performance, and it challenges it to a battle. Here, the performance is the documentation and vice versa, each circling the other hoping for the last word. The works produced by *FIVE* are not just drawings, they're events—and they're legendary.



PL. 00
Untitled (New Way), 2009



PL. 00
Max/Msp Pitter Patch for *FIVE*, 2011

