

The Racial Imaginary Institute: *On Whiteness*

June 27–August 3, 2018

The Kitchen

512 W 19th Street New York, NY 10011
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Summer 2018

Symposium

June 30, 10am–6pm

The Kitchen in collaboration with The Racial Imaginary Institute presents a day-long interactive symposium on the phenomenology, distortions and diagnostics of white dominated space, featuring keynote addresses, panel discussions, and a musical performance.

The proceedings will include speeches by *The Future of Whiteness* author Linda Alcoff, historian and artist Nell Painter, and legal scholar and *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* author Patricia Williams. Chris Chen will moderate a morning panel on cultural representation and appropriation with Jeff Chang, Aruna D'Souza, Daniel Borzutzky, Sarah Lewis, and Doreen St. Felix. In the afternoon, Rizvana Bradley will moderate a panel focusing on the empathy and likeability in the context of white dominance with Lauren Berlant, Sadhana Bery, Jane Caflisch, Lori Gruen, and Saidiya Hartman. Vijay Iyer will also perform as the conclusion of his residency *The What of the World*, which will be followed by a discussion with Claudia Rankine and Patricia Williams.

Vijay Iyer

June 25–29

The Kitchen presents Vijay Iyer's residency, *The What of the World*, for which he has assembled artists across musical disciplines to explore what he calls the "affective archaeology" of systemic racism. This multifaceted residency is an exploration, from many perspectives, of how racial oppression feels. Iyer's residency features a series of evening performances, as well as Iyer's new sound installation—titled *How the Spotlight Sounds*, with texts by Garnette Cadogan, author of "Walking While Black"—playing throughout the week.

Marguerite Hemmings

July 2, 7pm

Marguerite Hemmings looks at relationships that are in need of examining, i.e. audience/performer; institution/artist; whiteness/everything else? Audience members will be asked to join the circle and participate in guided and unguided improv exercises with sound and movement facilitators.

Jackie Sibblies-Drury

July 9–13

Jackie Sibblies-Drury will use her time in the space to begin a new project, experimenting with text and developing a movement vocabulary in collaboration with other artists that explores how physical comedy and violence are written onto and interact with the black body. She will open her process to the public through in-process showings and casual feedback sessions.

Dark Noise Collective

July 16–20

Dark Noise Collective will use their time together as a retreat, focusing on internal writing workshops, artist talks, and discussions around race and the ways that their work disrupts white dominance. They will also host a public performance at The Kitchen, consisting of poems that have been generated during the residency and other work.

Seung-Min Lee

July 23, 8pm

Seung-Min Lee's performance takes on the conflicted symbolic power of milk; as the once-booming dairy industry in New York state suffers with the steady decline of milk consumption, a new generation of Neo-Nazis takes pride in lactose tolerance, instrumentalizing the optical purity of milk as a emblem of white supremacy.

Angie Pittman

July 27, 7pm

Choreographer Angie Pittman will perform two pieces, *Sequined Kisses* and *Vaseline Love*, constructed as a diptych to propose a journey towards what Donnell Alexander calls "finding the essential soul while being essentially lost."

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Josh Begley, Paul Chan, Mel Chin, Ja'Tovia Gary, Ken Gonzales-Day, Titus Kaphar, Baseera Khan, Charlotte Lagarde, Glenn Ligon, Mores McWreath, Sandeep Mukherjee, Native Art Department International, Toyin Ojih Odutola, Tim Rollins and K.O.S., Cindy Sherman, Rodrigo Valenzuela, Anicka Yi

The Kitchen presents a special program with The Racial Imaginary Institute (TRII) that expands upon the Institute's first year of research on whiteness, what Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda have described as "a source of unquestioned power that, as a 'bloc,' feels itself to be endangered even as it retains its hold on power." Seeking to create a collaborative space to question and mark whiteness—challenging its dominance as it operates through default positions in cultural behavior—the project features a group exhibition with a day-long symposium on June 30; three week-long artist residencies with Vijay Iyer, Jackie Sibbles Drury, and the Dark Noise Collective; newly commissioned performances from Marguerite Hemmings, Seung-Min Lee, and Angie Pittman; and a network of parallel programs at partner organizations throughout the city.

A foundational text for the project is philosopher Sara Ahmed's "The Phenomenology of Whiteness" where she describes whiteness as an "ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space, and what they 'can do.'" Ahmed also asks us to consider "institutions as orientation devices, which take the shape of 'what' resides within them." Because institutions have the power to shape social meaning—and the potential to disorient bodies habituated to spheres of white dominance—The Kitchen and The Racial Imaginary Institute stage their intervention in existing cultural spaces, seeking to extend programming and outreach toward a deliberate consideration of race.

Certain works in the exhibition implicate entities—including the government and military, the criminal justice system, corporations, artistic canons, and museums—in the inherent racialized violence such institutions promote. Rodrigo Valenzuela's *Tertiary* considers the racial biases literally built into technology that brings white bodies into sharper focus than others. These terms of visibility are in conversation with Ken Gonzales-Day's potent photograph in which a lynched body is erased from an archival image, leaving the white spectators to be seen as a focus of attention—perhaps for the first time. The landscape for this violent history finds unsettling echoes in Sandeep Mukherjee's tree "skins," in the archival educational film underlying Ja'Tovia Gary's *On Punishment*, as well as in Paul Chan's perpetually animated Klan family. Baseera Khan's installation as well as Mel Chin's piercing bust of serial killer Aileen Wournus further underscore the embedded violence of whiteness, and embody the ubiquity of guns within American culture.

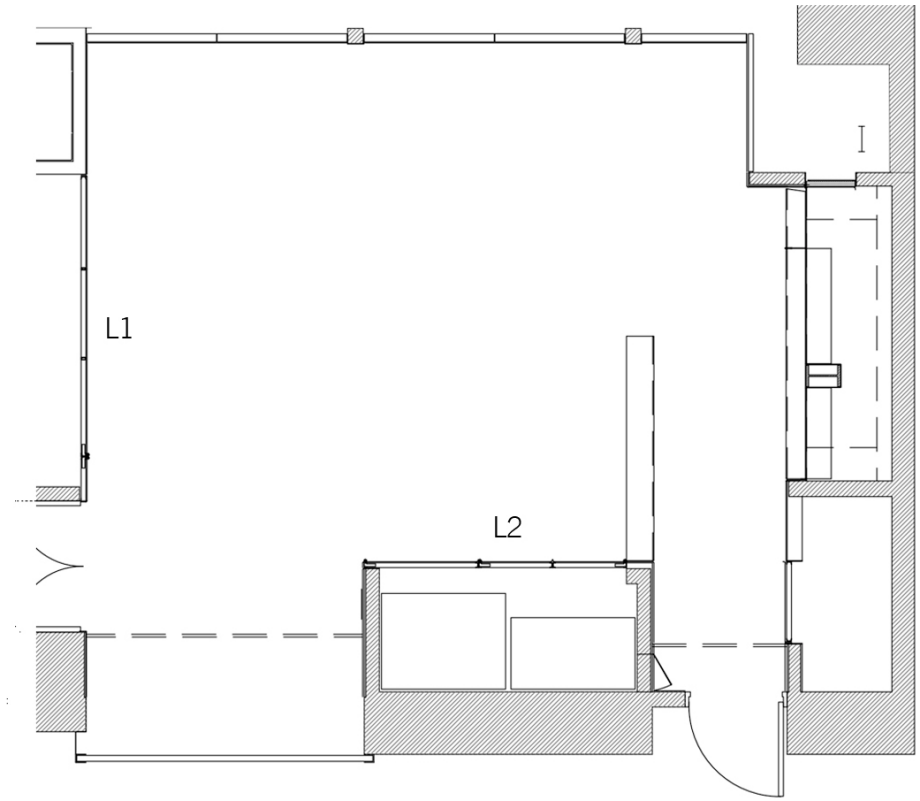
Other artworks engage and excavate colonialism: through the idea of monuments in Titus Kaphar's *A Pillow for Fragile Fictions*; in the reorientation of museological displays, as in a work from Gonzales-Day's *Profiles* series; and via the literary canon in Tim Rollins and K.O.S.'s *The Great White Whale*. An ongoing project that invites interaction, Charlotte Lagarde's *Colonial White* makes visible the participatory structuring of colonialism. The historical role of territories and borders in defining race are seen concretely in Josh Begley's video and, far more abstractly, in Anicka Yi's custom scent of Asian-American women and carpenter ants. The Native Art Department International's video portrait of Dennis Redmoon Darkeem calls into question how the media has represented indigenous Native Americans as white. Glenn Ligon's obstructed depiction of James Baldwin's essay *Stranger in a Village* embodies how whiteness is constructed in opposition to others, while Kate Greenstreet's short film *color comes from outside* examines whiteness as a matter of familial intimacy. Toyin Ojih Odutula's barely perceptible white drawings sharply contrast with Cindy Sherman's exaggerated embodiments of white femininity. Seung Min-Lee's installation and video offers a satirical take on the racial implications around milk consumption, and Mores McWreath's video installation caricatures the banality of white aspirations.

The multiplicity of viewpoints within the exhibition—and the *On Whiteness* project as a whole—refutes any dominating narrative or blanket condemnation, meaning instead to offer an initial strike against the “bloc” of whiteness.

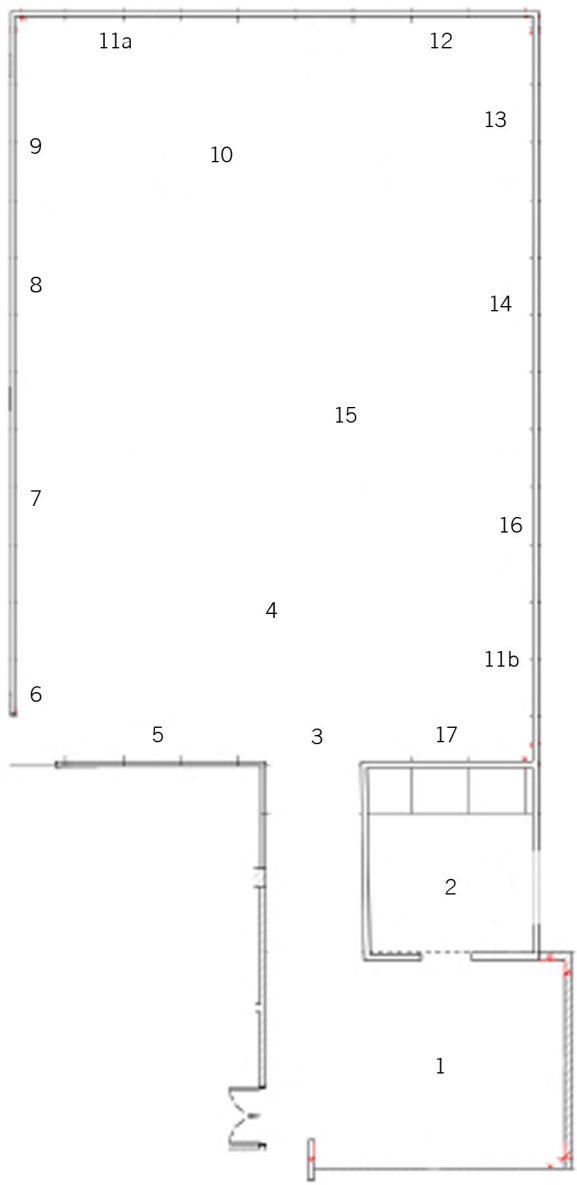
The artists in the exhibition were asked:

**How does your artistic practice disrupt perceptual or phenomenological habits of
whiteness?**

FIRST FLOOR LOBBY



SECOND FLOOR GALLERY



LOBBY (CLOCKWISE)

L1. CHARLOTTE LAGARDE

Colonial White, 2018

Digital print photo and text collage

Courtesy of the Artist

In *Colonial White*, I look into the myth surrounding the Declaration of Independence, asking who were/are the colonizers. Have we moved beyond a colonial system?

By asking participants to visually merge the Colonial White paint chip with a place/object/situation that embodies colonial white to them, I am hoping to reframe the term colonial in its historical and present context amid a collective reflection and conversation about structural racism.

L2. KATE GREENSTREET

color comes from outside, 2018

Single channel video with sound; 8:30 min

Courtesy of the Artist

I read that Jericho Brown said, "I really just wish white people would talk to one another more often." I could only laugh and say yeah. Without realizing it, I'd avoided conversation with other white people about whiteness. My video *color comes from outside* grew partly out of the desire to change that.

SECOND FLOOR GALLERY ENTRY (CLOCKWISE)

1. BASEERA KHAN

[Feat.] with lowered ceiling, 2018

Speaker material, reflective plexi, disco motor, wearable chain, sound
Courtesy of the Artists and OSMOS, New York

On Seasons

I see nationality, race, pigmentation, and diaspora as *seasons*. Sometimes the *season* makes you sick. Tis the *season* on *whiteness* and it empties me out, like vomit attempts to empty out a virus. *Seasons* define what you wear, where go, and whom you let into your inner sanctum. White heritage is a consumerist history whose legacy has created a media driven engine to consolidate Africa and Asia into one *seasonal goodie bag* for whiteness pleasure.

What makes us all human on this earth is the idea of *the other*. There must always be someone who represents what you can be, or rise up from, what at times you choose to quarantine. In any given room, someone is always seen as doing better, or worse, than *the other*. The essential human quality of control, competition, *otherness* disrupts this engine. Whiteness, caught up in seasonal formulas to own black and brown bodies, forgot this essential human trait.

If you can create an engine that claims ownership over an *untouchable*, or a *slave*, and use the government to perpetuate the engine—if you are saying I am not human enough to own my body—if you are mocking me by saying laws and policies are made to protect us all—then isn't it a powerful idea to think of what to do with that kind of freedom? So far it created a powerful unified pan-African front, and it fragmented Asia into dissociative regimes of power, culture, and politics. Whiteness claims we are currently in the darkest of times, but I know that not to be true. Whiteness is now experiencing the reaction to its oversight, this darkness is now bestowed upon its own kind—emptying us all out at the same time.

When you come from the *seasons of unhuman*, you live your life in suspicion of your success. The topic of whiteness traps me into a defensive mechanism of forgetfulness, sleepiness, at times madness. My struggle is not the same as many diasporic agents of slavery and labor in this country—your struggle is not the same either. Many people in critical fields of racial imaginaries conflate histories and drop me into a pocket of *not knowing enough*. I am an abstraction of thought glossed over by the most radical. The unknowing of where I come from is due to the *seasonal goodie bag* of pogroms, military conflicts, slave-labor, mimicry, and colonization by European and American military/corporations and its history: it happened, it was distinct, and is happening no more. American radical thinkers forget the engine is still happening in South Asia, a forgotten punctum of darkness in this world. I am a *glock* stop away of only being seen as relevant to American politics

if I contextualize myself as Muslim, or if I can speak to anti-terrorism. The advancement and radical thought of the *subaltern* affords no further understanding about the origins of forced migrations to the Americas by capitalist ventures shoving waves of people into hulls of ships, into a specter of slavery that still forms our laws and policies, forcing one to empty out, hold their hands in the air, and ultimately surrender their dignity against the backdrop of progressive words like *poc*, *neutrality*, *diversity*, and *inclusivity*.

Forgetting can be seen as a weakness, but, in my instance, though I don't like being put in this position of not knowing, a temporary case of forgetting allows my body to cope with matrilineal and patrilineal incursions of history and personal trauma, pinned up against the fight for personal sovereignty. I sleep a lot. In sleep, my mind undoes the daily microaggressions I take in: apologizing for my success, making myself small so that my male counterparts, or whiteness, do not slit my tongue. In sleep, I dream of the important work I do when I wake. And in times where softness is not an option, no family support, no institution, no clan, I swing toward madness as a form of resistance, my gift and legacy, historical pain and displacement. In madness I cover myself in silence perpetually ducking for cover.

2. PAUL CHAN

Madonna with Childs, 2016

Nylon, fans

Courtesy of the Artist

I'm not aware that it does. But I did edit and publish this:

Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts by Aruna D'Souza

Pub date: May, 2018

ISBN: 9781943263141

160 pages, 6 x 9 in

With illustrations by Parker Bright and Pastiche Lumumba

Published by Badlands Unlimited

Distributed by D.A.P and Koenig Books.

Available at all fine bookshops.

SECOND FLOOR GALLERY MAIN SPACE (CLOCKWISE)

3. MEL CHIN

Aileen, 2015

Concrete, Hi-Standard .22 revolver

Courtesy of the Artist

My insistence to make most objects without a branding or signature style keeps a marginalizing (hence controlling) “ethnic artist” categorization at bay. This portrait of serial murderer, Aileen Wuornos, imbeds within it the same pistol type she used to gun down seven men. This may not be about whiteness, but the darkness of guns cemented within the fearful side of the American psyche. The death-dealing hollow barrel of her eye, staring with the accumulated anger and madness of her abuse toward the white men that represent her torment, is not a common visage. More often it is the pathology of toxic masculinity with a gun guiding the homicide of women.

4. NATIVE ART DEPARTMENT INTERNATIONAL

There is No Then and Now, Only Is and Is Not, 2018

Single channel video with sound; 5:17 min

Courtesy of the Artist

As artists who are Indigenous to this continent the presence of our bodies literally opposes white colonialism in North America. We recognize the violent authority settler colonialism and white entitlement claim over past and current indigenous communities in seeking to silence, erase and deny our existence, and how by extension whiteness, privilege, and passing function to do the same. For this project we have chosen to present in the most visible way possible how whiteness uses race to restrict and place limits that negatively impact our communities by drawing attention to the existence of Native Americans with black bodies.

Featured in the video is Dennis Redmoon Darkeem. Dennis is an artist and an active member of the Wind Clan within the Yamassee Yat'siminoli tribe; he lives and works in the South Bronx.

This video was completed during our residency at Fourth Arts Block in the Lower East Side, utilizing their theater.

5. SEUNG-MIN LEE

Intolerable Whiteness, 2018

Water cooler, milk, video with sound; 15:29 min.

Courtesy of the Artist

Every project I begin starts with thoroughly trying to find the sources of a feeling of alienation I experience in my daily, mundane experience of being in the world. Rage, disappointment, resignation, submission: these are the internal phase changes that alert me to a rift in my acclimatization to the “best-fit” diagram of a world that assumes a white body as its subject/customer/end-user. Having this “double consciousness” is how we cope, but it is not how we heal. In my work, it is my habit, in these instances, to try to inhabit this other, white, space fully until I can almost empathize with the oppressor, to hold inside my body the monstrous and allow myself to be fully consumed by its seductive power; and by allowing my body to be vulnerable and open to this possession in public space, I seek to create a meaningful tension that can disrupt the supposedly natural order of things.

6. MORES MCWREATH

Spots, 2016–2018

Video tablets, thermoplastic, acrylic

Courtesy of the Artist

These videos are self-portraits that make visible my own unbearable whiteness through self-parody. I also send up the fears and insecurities of whiteness across the political spectrum, from liberal “snowflakes” to alt-right Trump supporters, often using stock corporate backdrops. By taking the banality of whiteness to absurd extremes, I hope to expose the structures of power underneath its invisible ubiquity.

7. CINDY SHERMAN

Untitled #352, 2000

Chromogenic color print

Courtesy of Metro Pictures

Untitled #353, 2000

Chromogenic color print

Courtesy of the Artist and Metro Pictures

8. RODRIGO VALENZUELA

Tertiary, 2018

Single-channel video with sound; TBC

Courtesy of the Artist

Tertiary is a meditation on the presence of minorities in cinema and the implicit biases of technology (face detection, auto focus and artificial intelligence) in its relationship with brown and black bodies.

Throughout narration, dialogues, and particular camera moves, *Tertiary* offers linkage between semantic and visual self-consciousness of the video piece. The camera travels around a group of people having monologues on power, agency and privilege while the camera on autofocus has its own agency privileging lighter skin color and keeping people of color as background characters within their own discourse.

9. TOYIN OJIH ODUTOLA

They, 2015

Charcoal on paper

Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

Weight, 2015

Charcoal on paper

Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

Through my drawings, I attempt to tackle systems that impose upon and pit both blackness, whiteness—and every construct in-between—against one another as inventions, rendering them dichotomous entities, predicated on principles rooted in a lie. These principles have real-life consequences, affecting all aspects of daily life, and it's incredibly difficult to break free from their influence. To sum it up with a metaphor, I call it, "An Evening Show at the Amphitheater": where the systems in place, and all members and groups presented, are illustrated in the relationship and placement between a center stage play and the seating arrangements bearing witness. This metaphor can be a measure for and a microcosm of how our societal concerns and interests orbit, and it can be utilized to see how these principles bind us.

10. TITUS KAPHAR

A Pillow for Fragile Fictions, 2016

Mixed media including rum, tamarind, lime, molasses poured in corked blown glass with marble base

Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

11. KEN GONZALES-DAY

11a. *The Wonder Gaze (St James Park)*, 2006–2013

Lightjet print on aluminum

Courtesy of the Artist and Luis DeJesus Gallery

11b. *Untitled III (Antico [Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi], Bust of a Young Man and Francis Harwood, Bust of a Man, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles)*, 2010

Lightjet print on aluminum

Courtesy of the Artist and Luis DeJesus Gallery

No artwork can address the horror of lynching in the United States or the lasting trauma of lynching on African-American communities and families across this nation. *The Wonder Gaze (Saint James Park)*, first exhibited in 2006, sought to address the perception that lynching was only about race, and not part of the phenomenology of whiteness. My related book, *Lynching in the West: 1850–1935* (Duke, 2006) documented over 350 cases of lynching in California and revealed that African-Americans, Chinese, Latinas/os, Native Americans, and whites were all lynched in the American West. Sparked by the anti-immigration rhetoric that led to the brutal killing of Mexicans along the U.S/Mexican border in the early 2000s, the discovery that hundreds of Mexicans had been lynched in America is still shocking because Mexicans and Mexican Americans continue to be villainized, to have their families divided, and remain “unseen” in the current political landscape. The series continued to grow, in solidarity with African-Americans, to consider many regions of the nation.

Removing the bodies of the lynching victims sought to avoid re-victimizing those killed and; to resist reinforcing assumptions of race and; to address the erasure of Latinos from this history and; to make “whiteness” visible, not just by showing the crowd, but by revealing the mechanisms of whiteness that made such killings possible. The perpetrators, when present, remain fully visible, jeering, laughing, or pulling at the air in what can only be described as a deadly pantomime of whiteness, born of intolerance and racist assumptions of human difference.

In the second image, two male figures, Antico (Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi), *Bust of a Young Man*, and Francis Hardwood’s *Bust of a Man*, both in the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, gaze at one another, as part of my *Profiled* series. The series considers depictions of race and “whiteness” in museum collections. This project sought to examine how such objects have been, and continue to be, instrumental in teaching whiteness to museum-goers across the nation and beyond.

12. SANDEEP MUKERJEE

TREE SKIN, 2018

Acrylic, acrylic ink on hand molded aluminum

Courtesy of the Artist

My recent work has been investigating image as a slice of flowing matter that emphasizes a particular aspect of that flow. For this exhibition, my process involves imaging an oak tree outside my studio using sheets of aluminum, my body and paint. All three are instances of flowing matter, although they are flowing at very different rates. My attempt is to image the physical encounter of my body with the tree by physically forming, pressing and molding the aluminum sheet/slice on the surface of the tree trunk. The recorded dimensional encounter captured on a human sized aluminum sheet is then painted with acrylic from spray bottles. The painting action mimics rain or mist as it erupts from the spray bottle projectile and falls on to the molded topography of the tree skin. Gravity, surface tension, evaporation speed and chemistry of the paint all play an important part in how the paint lands on the surface but also how it moves across the dimensional surface creating images and patterns. The process is continued on both sides until the surface is layered and transformed from aluminum to a kind of skin. The convex side of these skins is painted the colors of the earth, while the concave side takes on the color of skin and flesh. Four such skins map the tree trunk around its circumference.

My intention for the exhibition is to suspend these four skins as a column in the gallery space so that viewers can walk around them and experience them as uncanny aspects of flesh, skin, stone, leaf soil, etc. as interwoven between the dimensions of material and historical experience. As the skins move when viewers walk around them they rustle like leaves. The hybrid skin becomes an image of the nurturing and violent aspects of our relationship to ourselves and the nature we construct in the process.

13. JA'TOVIA GARY

On Punishment, 2017

Single-channel video with sound; TBC

Courtesy of the Artist

My creative practice centers the nuanced interior realms of Blackness and the intimate connections Black folks forge as a community. It is what Black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers defines as “The Intramural.” I position Blackness as the universal, contesting perceptions around subjecthood and the human, while advancing Black life and sociality as an imperative.

Blackness is presented as the default subject position signifying the human. Representations of whiteness are rarely present.

When whiteness is made visible it is implicated not valorized. It serves as a device. Its position and function in relation to power and violence are interrogated. It is neither benevolent nor benign.

14. TIM ROLLINS AND K.O.S.

The Whiteness of the Whale (after Melville), 2016

Matte acrylic, spray paint, and book pages on panel

Courtesy of Studio K.O.S. and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

The great American philosopher W.E.B. DuBois once wrote “I sit with Shakespeare, and he winces not.” This single quote exemplifies the subversive ethos of Studio KOS. The books that we choose to work with, canonical or otherwise, are not meant to languish in Ivy league libraries; they are not just to be read and dissected by graduate comparative literature students. These books do not discriminate based on skin color, socio-economic circumstances or sexual preference. Shakespeare wrote for us as much as he wrote for anyone else. —*written by Angel Abreu*

15. ANICKA YI

Immigrant Caucus, 2017

Powder-coated steel and powder-coated aluminum expanded mesh, stainless steel insecticide sprayer with brass fittings, ultrasonic diffuser, fragrance
Courtesy of the Artist and 47 Canal

Through my work with olfaction I have sought to emphasize the racializing effects of smell. My work attempts to rethink race and racism in ways that are no longer anthropocentric. Working with smell molecules I hope to underscore the atmosphere which forces a limitless mobile field. It is a force that is not visible or even palpable but one that remains vital and necessary to biological and social existence. Like the air we breathe, the racial atmosphere provides the very conditions of life and death.

16. JOSH BEGLEY

Naturalization, 2018

Single channel video with sound; 4:30 minutes
Courtesy of the Artist and Robert Koch Gallery

As Toni Morrison writes in *Playing in The Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, “the subject of the dream is the dreamer.” In other words, the whiteness of the dream is rarely apparent to its subject; the dream is reflexive—whiteness is always speaking its own name.

Most of my work attempts to map and make visual the presence of absence—specifically absences in data; absences in narrative. Beginning with the Naturalization Act of 1790, which marks “free white persons” as being eligible for citizenship, I am interested in the relationships and geographies that structure those absences.

If the American landscape is always marked by what Morrison calls “unspeakable things unspoken,” how might a visual practice attempt to register white supremacy as a material part of that unspeaking?

17. GLENN LIGON

Untitled, 2016

Archival pigment print

Courtesy of Beth Rudin DeWoody

I remember the very day that I became colored.

I am not tragically colored.

I do not always feel colored.

I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.

How It Feels to Be Colored Me

Zora Neale Hurston

The World Tomorrow, May 1928

Organized by Joeonna Bellorado-Samuels, Sara'o Bery, LeRonn P. Brooks, Steven Glavey, Cathy Park Hong, Casey Llewellyn, Claudia Rankine, Simon Wu, and Monica Youn of The Racial Imaginary Institute, and The Kitchen curatorial team.

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The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

