Institute of Contemporary Art
University of Pennsylvania

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NEWS RELEASE

Exhibition Exploring Experimental Black Poetry
Opens this September at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania

New and Recent Works from Emerging Visual Artists Jibade-Khalil Huffman, Steffani Jemison, Tony Lewis, Tiona Nekkia McClodden, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, and Martine Syms

Exhibition to Feature Special Programs and Reading Room Spotlighting Work of Poets Claudia Rankine, Morgan Parker, and Simone White, among others

Kameelah Janan Rasheed, *And Black?*, 2017, Silkscreen on paper, 23 × 19 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Speech/Acts

SEPTEMBER 13–DECEMBER 23, 2017

PHILADELPHIA, PA

This fall, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA) will present *Speech/Acts*, a group exhibition bringing together the work of a new generation of artists exploring how the social and cultural constructs of language have shaped black American experiences. Drawing from black experimental poetry, as well as popular texts produced for films, magazines, TV, and books, the works on view deconstruct the structural elements of language to rupture its intended purpose through collage, drawing, text-based installation, and video.

On view from September 13 through December 23, 2017, *Speech/Acts* brings together recent work and new commissions by six artists: Jibade-Khalil Huffman, Steffani Jemison, Tony Lewis, Tiona Nekkia McClodden, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, and Martine Syms, who reflect upon experiences growing up through the social upheavals of the 1990s and draw on the current sociopolitical climate and the preceding Black Arts Movement in their work. A feature component of the exhibition is a reading room and dynamic series of programs that enable visitors to experience and explore the poetry that inspired *Speech/Acts*. The exhibition features texts

Martine Syms, *Lessons I-XXX*, 2014-Present, Installation View. Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue.

Jibade-Khalil Huffman, *Gradient*, 2015, 3-channel video, silent, 2-min. loop. Courtesy of the artist and Anat Ebgi.

Tiona Nekkia McClodden, *Essex + Audre*, 2015, TRT: 2.17 minute. Courtesy of the artist.

by Claudia Rankine and Fred Moten; newly commissioned poetry by Simone White; and a satellite outpost for *The Racial Imaginary Institute (TRII)*, founded by poet Claudia Rankine. The exhibition's immersive and interactive environment will invite participation and response, challenge how social realities are manipulated and formed, and illuminate the slippages between speech and noise.

"The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania is committed to providing a platform to discuss and celebrate the nuanced experiences of individuals in our time and society. This exhibition faces critical issues of race head-on, exploring and engaging issues of identity for black Americans as explored by an emerging generation of innovative artists," said Amy Sadao, Director of ICA. "In her first exhibition at ICA, Meg Onli has assembled a thought-provoking array of artworks and programs, inviting our visitors to reflect, challenge, and question their own experiences and preconceptions through the deconstruction and manipulation of everyday text and images."

The exhibition brings together an array of new and recent works from the included artists, many of which relate to one another and are inspired by similar texts, themes, and experiences.

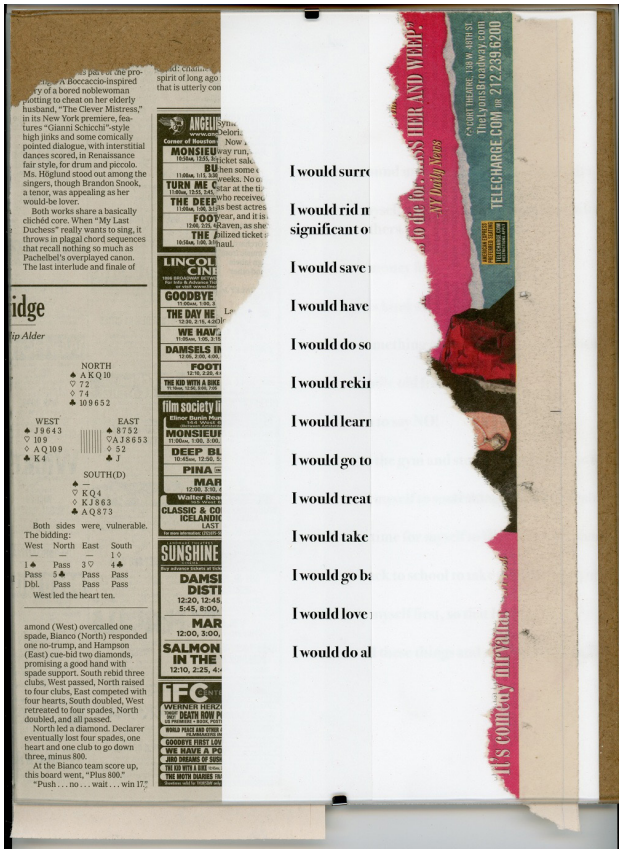
Select highlights of the exhibition include:

- Martine Syms' *Lessons* (2014-present) is a series of thirty-second commercials structured as a longform poem about the black radical tradition;
- A new video installation by Tiona Nekkia McClodden will use the late Philadelphia-based poet Bradley Johnson's poetry to trace links between queer practices impacted by the HIV epidemic of the 1980s and today;
- Kameelah Janan Rasheed will stage an installation that examines the traditions of black experimental writing;
- Working within the tradition of other text-based conceptual artists such as Glenn Ligon, Tony Lewis will exhibit abstracted text works made with graphite on paper;
- Jibade-Khalil Huffman's *Untitled (Citizen)* (2015) uses portions of poet Claudia Rankine's Citizen as a script for a multichannel video exploring race and microaggressions. In addition, Huffman will be making a new multi-channel video in response to the themes of *Speech/Acts*, and;
- *Untitled (Affirmations for Living)* (2011-ongoing) was created by Steffani Jemison in response to the murder of Derrion Albert, a Chicago high school student. Jemison uses the poem "Affirmations for Living" that hung above Albert's desk as a central focus in this ongoing series of collages.

"*Speech/Acts* brings together a network of artists and poets united by their shared exploration of the rich complexities in which blackness is constructed, abstracted, and performed through language and poetics," said Meg Onli, Assistant Curator at ICA. "In linguistics, a speech act is defined as an expression that serves a performative function—it both describes and shapes reality. It has been an honor to work with this group of artists and poets who each unpack and reconstruct the creation and experience of blackness in America today through their work."

A fully illustrated catalogue co-published with Futurepoem will accompany the exhibition, featuring reprints of seminal texts from

Kameelah Janan Rasheed, *Touch*, 2017, archival inkjet print, 10 × 8 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Steffani Jemison, *Untitled (Affirmations for Living)*, 2011-ongoing, Mixed media and hardware, Unique 11 × 8.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Fred Moten and Harryette Mullen, newly commissioned poetry by Morgan Parker and Simone White, and an essay from the curator.

Support for *Speech/Acts* has been provided by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Edna W. Andrade Fund of The Philadelphia Foundation, and Nancy & Leonard Amoroso.

ABOUT MEG ONLI

Meg Onli is a curator and writer whose work attends to the intricacies of race and the production of space. Prior to joining Institute of Contemporary Art as assistant curator, Onli was the Program Coordinator at the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. While at the Graham Foundation she worked on the exhibitions *Architecture of Independence: African Modernism* and *Barbara Kasten: Stages*. In 2010 she created the website Black Visual Archive, for which she was awarded a 2012 Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. In 2014, she was the recipient of a research grant from the Graham Foundation for the collaborative project *Remaking the Black Metropolis: Contemporary Art, Urbanity, and Blackness in America* with curator Jamilee Polson Lacy. Onli holds a master's degree in art history from the Courtauld Institute of Art. Her writing has appeared in *Art21*, *Daily Serving*, and *Art Papers*.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania is a non-collecting institution presenting exhibitions at the forefront of contemporary practice and culture that challenge audiences to think in new ways. The ICA is free for all to engage and connect with the art of our time. Since its founding in 1963, ICA has served as a laboratory for the new, introducing and supporting the production of urgent and important contemporary art, beginning with ICA's inaugural show of paintings by Abstract Expressionist Clyfford Still, followed by the first museum show of works by Andy Warhol in 1965. Throughout its history, ICA has been instrumental in identifying and developing many promising artists before they attained prominence within the international art world, some of whom include—in addition to Warhol—Laurie Anderson, Richard Artschwager, Vija Celmins, Karen Kilimnik, Barry Le Va, Glenn Ligon, Robert Mapplethorpe, Agnes Martin, Pepón Osorio, Tavares Strachan, and Cy Twombly.

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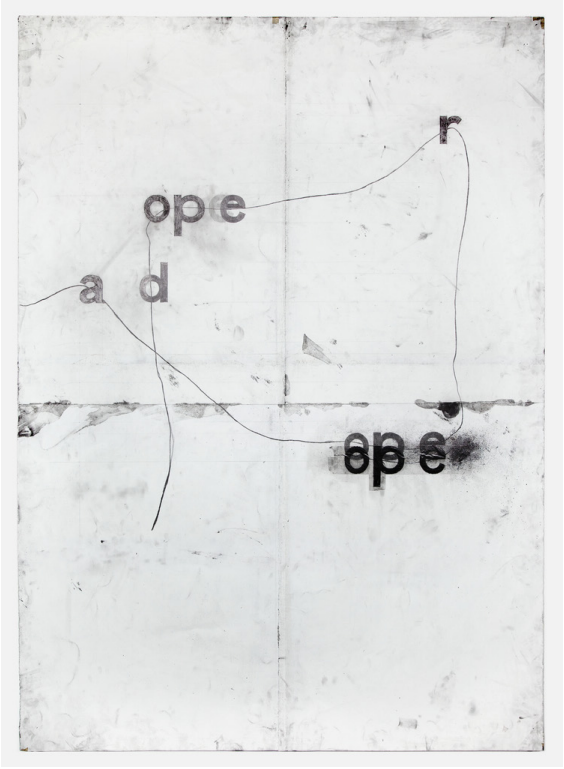

Tony Lewis, *dope repoa*, 2012, Pencil and graphite powder on paper, 84 × 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Shane Campbell Gallery.

Jibade Khalil-Huffman, *Untitled (Citizen)*, 2015, 3-channel video. Courtesy of the artist and Anat Ebgi.

GENERAL INFORMATION
ICA IS LOCATED AT:
118 SOUTH 36TH STREET AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
(215) 898-7108
WWW.ICAPHILA.ORG
FACEBOOK.COM/ICAPHILADELPHIA
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MUSEUM HOURS
WEDNESDAY, 11AM–8PM
THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, 11AM–6PM
SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, 11AM–5PM

ICA IS ALWAYS FREE.FOR ALL.

FREE ADMISSION IS COURTESY OF
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