

EMPAC

AUG 21-SEP 06

OPEN 10 AM-5 PM



**AN EVENING
WITH QUEEN WHITE
MARTINE SYMS
INSTALLATION**

MARTINE SYMS

Martine Syms (b. 1988) is an artist based in Los Angeles. Her work has been exhibited extensively, including a recent solo exhibition at Museum of Modern Art, New York and presentations at the Berlin Biennale, Manifesta 11, ICA London, The Hammer Museum, the New Museum, The Studio Museum in Harlem, the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. An artist, performer, and designer, Syms also founded the imprint Dominica Publishing, which publishes artist books exploring Blackness as a topic, reference, marker, and audience in visual culture. Her book *Implication and Distinctions: Format, Content and Context in Contemporary Race Film* considers performances of blackness in mainstream cinema from 1990 to the present. Other work includes *The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*, which calls for the culture of the African diaspora to focus its energy on Earth rather than toward transcendence in the cosmos.

AN EVENING WITH QUEEN WHITE MARTINE SYMS

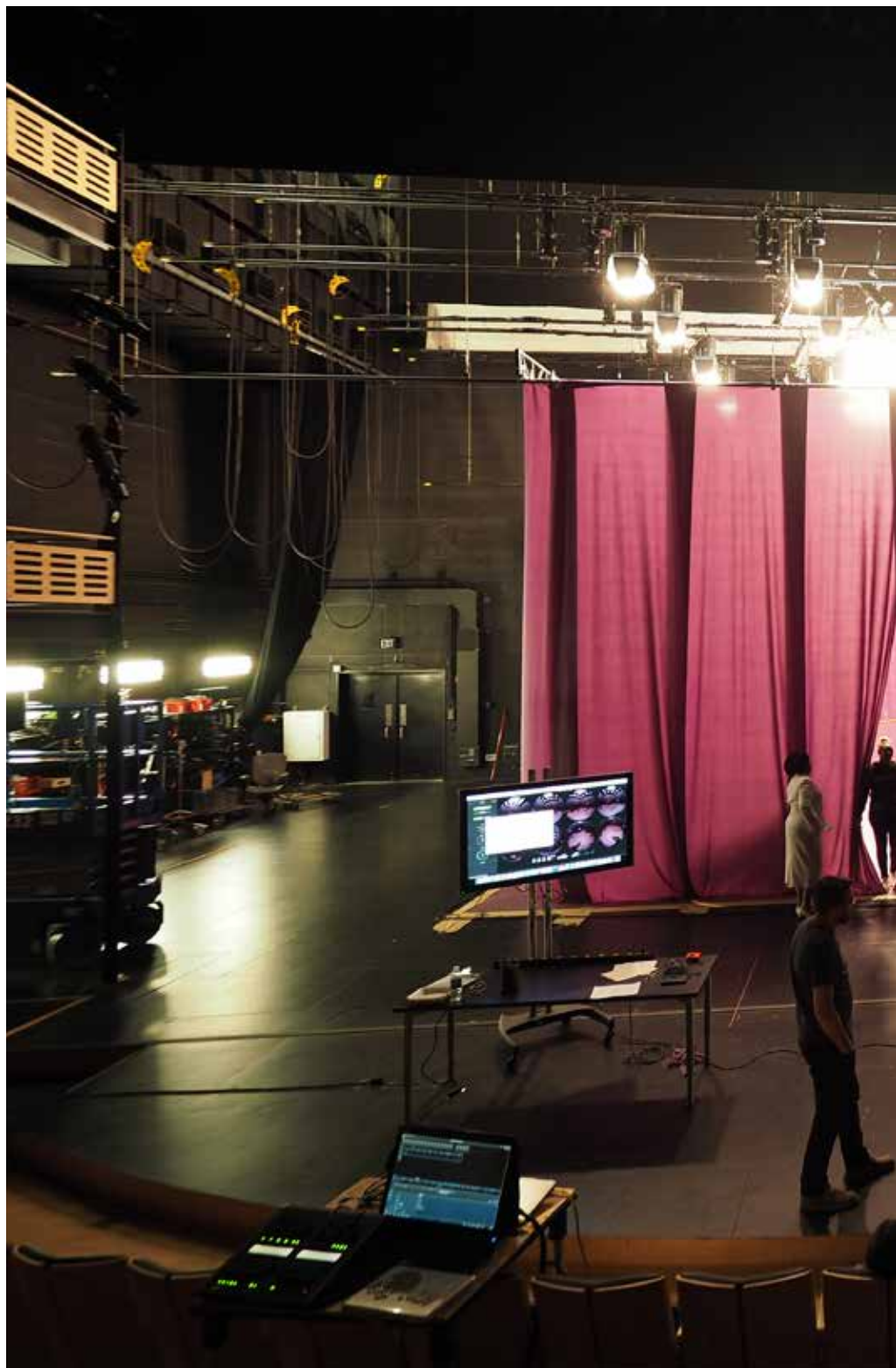
Martine Syms' installation *An Evening with Queen White* invites visitors to meet the virtual character Queen White.

An Evening with Queen White was produced at EMPAC with a 360° camera rig—originally manufactured to capture footage for virtual reality environments—placed at the center of a monochromatic purple set. Guitar amps, microphones, a piano, and acoustic panels that refer to the Motown recording studios of the 1960s decorate the set. Filmed in a single long-take, the performer Fay Victor (as Queen White) moved freely around the set and was continually captured by the camera.

Eschewing conventional VR, Syms explores how the audience can experience this kind of image environment without the use of a headset. The installation plays with the possibility that parts of the performance still remain out of frame or off-screen. Several screens are placed in different locations around the studio and each only shows a small part of the 360° video, exposing the limits of each screen's size and shape. A mobile tablet screen will allow the audience to explore the missing parts of the image for themselves.

An Evening with Queen White is exemplary of Syms' use of the monologue as a medium for exploring how voice, gesture, and persona are learned and performed. The script complicates the artist's own biography and points toward how strategies of performing oneself as a Black woman in America are transmitted and crystallized across generations through both familial teaching and societal conditioning.

EMPAC will screen Syms' new feature film, *Incense, Sweaters, and Ice*, on the last day of the installation (Sept. 6) as part of the film series *Other Uses*.





MARTINE SYMS. *AN EVENING WITH QUEEN WHITE* (2017)
PRODUCTION SHOT, EMPAC / RENSSELAER
PHOTO BY MICK BELLO / EMPAC

OTHER USES 01

FILM SERIES

INCENSE, SWEATERS, AND ICE MARTINE SYMS

MONDAY / SEP 06 / 7:00 PM

ON THE FINAL NIGHT OF HER INSTALLATION, LOS ANGELES-BASED ARTIST MARTINE SYMS WILL SCREEN HER NEW FEATURE-LENGTH VIDEO, *INCENSE, SWEATERS, AND ICE*.

Incense, Sweaters, and Ice follows three protagonists, Mrs. Queen Esther Bernetta White, Girl, and WB (“whiteboy”). Through Hollywood film tropes as well as the visual language of social media video platforms like Vine and Instagram, Syms follows in a long cinematic history of using camera motion to create the illusion of subjectivity. Intertwining technique and narrative, the video drives at the tension between surveillance and self-promotion that pervades our many avenues of self-documentation and broadcast. Shot in locations that reflect the route of the Great Migration (Los Angeles, Chicago, and Clarksdale, Miss.), the video employs distinct camera techniques to foreground the camera itself as a central character.

Each scene marks a shift of viewpoint in relationship to the action, illustrating the impossibility for the camera's gaze to be neutral. We watch as Girl gets ready, waits, kills time, and flirts. In each instance, the camera switches personas and performs a different role: as the boyfriend, the audience, the surveillance camera, the documentary maker, the director. The camera is recast again as Girl relaxes reading in the apartment. A wide, fixed frame transports us to the family dinner and surveils her hotel room as she gets ready. Text messages periodically disrupt the on-screen action to reveal her digital interactions with another screen, her smartphone.

Although shot primarily on-location, *Incense, Sweaters, and Ice* includes interludes by Queen White, which were filmed at EMPAC and woven into the episodic structure of the film.



MARTINE SYMS. FILM STILL FROM *INCENSE, SWEATERS, AND ICE*, 2017.
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND BRIDGET DONAHUE, NEW YORK.

STAFF

Geoff Abbas / Director for Stage Technologies
Aimeé R. Albright / Artist Services Specialist
Eric Ameres / Senior Research Engineer
Argeo Ascani / Curator, Music
Eileen Baumgartner / Graphic Designer
David Bebb / Senior Network Administrator
Peter Bellamy / Senior Systems Administrator
Michael Bello / Video Engineer
Victoria Brooks / Curator, Time-Based Visual Arts
Eric Brucker / Lead Video Engineer
Bruce Bryne / Master Carpenter
Michele Cassaro / Guest Services Coordinator
Gordon Clement / Media Systems Integrator
John Cook / Box Office Manager
David DeLaRosa / Desktop Support Analyst
Zhenelle Falk / Artist Services Administrator
Ashley Ferro-Murray / Associate Curator, Theater & Dance
Kimberly Gardner / Manager, Administrative Operations
Johannes Goebel / Director
Ian Hamelin / Project Manager
Ryan Jenkins / Senior Event Technician
Shannon Johnson / Design Director
Carl Lewandowski / Production Technician
Robin Massey / Business Coordinator
Daniel Meltzer / Master Electrician
Stephen McLaughlin / Senior Event Technician
Josh Potter / Marketing and Communications Manager
Candice Sherman / Senior Business Administrator
Avery Stempel / Front of House Manager
Kim Strosahl / Production Coordinator
Jeffrey Svatek / Audio Engineer
Todd Vos / Lead Audio Engineer
Michael Wells / Production Technician

