

Martine Syms:
Borrowed Lady

Annotated Bibliography

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AUDAIN GALLERY

Articles about the artist

Dipesh Chakrabarty, Huey Copeland, Dovid Joselit, Michelle Kuo and Kobena Mercer, "Collective Consciousness," *Artforum*, Summer 2016, 264–277.

In a roundtable conversation for *Artforum's* issue on identity politics, this group of art historians, critical and cultural theorists and artists discuss the terrain of identity politics in twenty-first century contemporary art. They move through history, ideology, representation, language, aesthetics, performativity and political action. Syms' practice is discussed for how it addresses the commodification of black culture and exposes the "cracks in the spectacle". The in-depth discussion situates Syms practice amongst other artists such as John Akomfrah, Andrea Geyer and Arthur Jafa.

Catherine Damman, "Syms's City," *Artforum*, February 9, 2016. <http://artforum.com/slant/id=58051>

Damman reviews Syms' performance lecture titled "Misdirected Kiss", which she presented at the Western Front in Vancouver in 2016. Damman traces the non-linear, tentacular approach that Syms takes to reflect on the construction of identity. Syms draws on images of influential figures in her life such Queen Latifah, Tyra Banks, Aunt Bunt and Maxine Powell from her hard drive and the internet, suggesting that these repositories are prosthetics for consciousness and memory.

Emily McDermott, "The Conceptual Entrepreneur," *Interview Magazine*, December 29, 2015. http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/martine-syms-16-faces-of-2016/#_

McDermott interviews Syms about the entanglement of autobiography, fiction and humour in her practice. They discuss the influence of sitcom television on Syms' works *A Pilot for a Show About Nowhere* and *Notes on Gesture*. Syms expands upon how reading both objects and language is central to her practice, and influenced her desire to co-run a bookstore in Chicago called *Golden Age*, and inaugurate *Dominica* which is a publishing imprint in Los Angeles.

Emily Manning, “let martine syms and kahlil joseph unlock your mind in ‘memory palace’”, *i-D –Vice*, May 28, 2015. https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/let-martine-syms-and-kahlil-joseph-unlock-your-mind-in-memory-palace

i-D Vice premiered Syms’ and Joseph’s collaborative video *Memory Palace*, which was commissioned by MOCAtv. In the interview Manning and Syms discuss her recent online archival projects <everythingiveverwantedtoknow.com> and <readingtrayvonmartin.com>. Syms expresses her interest in online and material archives that span political histories, news items, family narratives and science fiction.

Laura Mclean-Ferris, “In Focus: Martine Syms,” *Frieze*, December 11, 2015. <https://frieze.com/article/focus-martine-syms>

Mclean-Ferris presents a thorough review of Sym’s exhibition *Vertical Elevated Oblique* at Bridget Donoghue in New York. The exhibition featured her video *Notes on Gesture* as well photos from her personal archive and belongings from her family’s home. Mclean-Ferris explores the influences on this body of work, including Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple*, Giorgio Agamben’s *Notes on Gesture* and John Bulwer’s *Chirologia: Or the Natural Language of the Hand*. She looks at the circulation of memes and GIF’s as context for reading how Syms explores contemporary vocal and physical gesture.

Aram Moshayedi, “The Unreliable Narrator,” *Mousse*, #49 Summer 2015, 62–69. <http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=1299>

Moshayedi talks to Syms about her turn towards and away from the title “conceptual entrepreneur” which she coined to address the lessons and tools she borrowed from conceptual art and business alike and to respond to the economic and critical concerns in contemporary art practice. She describes her practice as “fictional memoir”, in which she folds and obscures autobiographical, socio-political, historical and pop-culture narratives. Her expanded approach extends to how she considers the

Texts by the Artist

Martine Syms, "Portfolio: Martine Syms," *Frieze*. April 11, 2016. <https://frieze.com/article/portfolio-martine-syms>

"Portfolio" is a serial column in which artists share images, references, quotes and ideas that are important to them. In Syms' edition of "Portfolio" she shares an image from Octavia E. Butler's archive, a post from *The Public Archive* twitter feed, a quote from Bernice Johnson Reagon's *Coalition Politics* (1983) and Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1972), amongst others. Her selections express her broad interest in photo, literary, cinematic and design modalities and archives.

_____. "A Pilot for a Show About Nowhere," *Art Papers*, May/June, 2015, 24–28. http://www.artpapers.org/feature_articles/2015_0506-syms.html

Sym's has been developing a sitcom titled *She Mad* about a young ambitious black woman in Los Angeles' creative industry. This conceptual (auto)bio-pic, is influenced by the prominence of sitcom television in Syms' life and in American culture. Syms traces the sitcom's lineage, from the very first radio sitcom WMAQ Chicago's *Amos'n'Andy* in 1926, to Norman Lear's *Sanford and Son* in 1972, and Shonda Rhimes *Scandal* in 2012. She discusses the personal and social politics of TV viewing and how it expresses the conditions and values of a culture.

_____. "Black Vernacular: Reading New Media," *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter (Cambridge: MIT / New York: New Museum, 2015).

Syms introduces this essay with W.E.B. Dubois' notion of a "colour line" to express the "double-consciousness" or "two-ness" of Black life. Syms looks at how digital artists including Steffani Jemison, Jayson Musson, Keith Obidake, Nicole Miller and Tahir Hemphill use the structure, form, dialect and aesthetic of the digital line to question how networks and platforms shape collective imagination of the colour line. She references the cultural criticism, theory and poetics of June Jordan, Kevin Young, Lisa Nakamura, Kalamu Ya Salaam and Walter Wofram to support her readings of their work.

_____. *Implications and Distinctions: Format, Content and Context in Contemporary Race Film* (New York: Future Plan and Program, 2011)

Syms assesses the colour line in cinema from the 1990s to present, by examining her viewing patterns, cinematic narratives, and the culture and economies of movie houses. She is interested in performances of blackness within the production, distribution and presentation of cinema, and how representations and experiences both evolve and cycle through time.

_____. *New Guards* (Los Angeles: Dominica, 2014)

New Guards is an artist book that collects found scans from a water damaged copy of photographer Stephen Shames' important monograph *The Black Panthers*. The water has bound pages together, which when separated, expose multiple images montaged and layered through torn and peeled pulp. Images by Bert Stabler.

_____. *Show Bible* (Los Angeles: Dominica, 2015)

Show Bible explores the broader themes, character arcs and season-long dramatic events in Syms ongoing project *A Pilot For A Show About Nowhere*. It is a non-linear exploration of depictions of African Americans in the media.

Related Texts

Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

Agamben reflects on the history of cinema, in particular the social, economic and moral conditions that surrounded its emergence and early development. Drawing from Varro, Bergson and Deleuze, Agamben suggests that natural movement and gesturality and therefore ethics and politics evacuated European bourgeois life at the same time that cinema emerged, perhaps capturing it. In the twentieth century, gesture belongs to the screen, and ethics and politics to simulacra.

Rizvana Bradley, "Living in the Absence of a Body: The (Sus)Stain of Black Female (W)holeness," *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, ed. Dalton Anthony Jones, Issue 29, 2016. <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue29/>

Bradley writes this essay on blackness and gender as HBO's biopic on Anita Hill, an American attorney and academic who accused U.S. Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment in 1991, is about to be released. She takes up Toni Morrison's observations of the stain in "Friday on the Potomoc", Evelyn Hammonds's notion of the black (w)hole, and Toni Cade Bambara's "My Man Bova", to reflect on Hill's embodiment and publicized image.

Aria Dean, "Poor Meme, Rich Meme," *Real Life Mag*, July 25, 2016. <http://reallifemag.com/poor-meme-rich-meme/>

Dean proposes that the realm of the digital, including the internet, social media platforms and cellular phones. is the most concrete location for the collective being of blackness; and that this being circulates in the form of among other thing memes. She highlights how the circulation and modulation of the meme is a survival tactic, yet its flexibility makes it vulnerable to appropriation and impersonation. Dean proposes that the accelerated modulation of the poor image may allow it to surpass subjugation.

Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

Landsberg observes that the notion of empathy in western culture emerges at approximately the same time that cinema is invented. Through cinema, viewers became exposed to documents and enactments of lives and experiences they did not live or have a relationship to through hereditary or cultural memory. These memories, though not ones own or in one's blood, are grafted onto the body like a prosthetic limb. Now part of the self, Landsberg suggests that the prosthetic experience of cinema has the potential to inaugurate new capacities for empathy and forms of social and political gestures.

Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

Marks is interested in how filmmakers living between histories, geographies and cultures work with the form and structure of cinema to express their experience of interstitiality. She notes how these artists are often working with the silent spaces between acknowledged histories and narratives. She suggests that within this silence, filmmakers introduce "haptic visuality", which evokes a full range of multi-sensory sensations and memories of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing to express an embodied sense of place and culture.

Christina Sharpe, "Black Studies: In the Wake," *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research*, Vol.44-2 Summer 2014, 59-69.

Sharpe reflects on the "wake" as the residual motion behind a watercraft, the residual affect of that craft (such as the slave ship), the ritual of mourning, and a state of emerging consciousness, to offer philosophical texture and patterning to how familial, culture and political history is inherited in the body and mind.

AUDAIN GALLERY



**Canada Council
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SFU Goldcorp Centre
for the Arts
149 West Hastings Street
Vancouver BC, V6B 1H4

778.782.9102
sfugalleries.ca
audaingallery@sfu.ca
TUE - SAT / 12 - 5PM