

## artforum.com / 500 words



[Jibade-Khalil Huffman](#), *IF THIS MEANS YOU*, 2016, single channel video, color, sound, 5 minutes 45 seconds.

[Jibade-Khalil Huffman](#) is an artist working fluidly across poetry, video, photography, and installation. Fence Books has published most of his poetry—including the collections *Sleeper Hold* (2015) and *19 Names for Our Band* (2008). Currently an artist in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, he will present recent works in the group show “Tenses,” which is on view there from July 14 through October 30, 2016. Huffman is also opening a solo show in Los Angeles of a newly commissioned series of works. Titled “Verse, Chorus, Verse,” this exhibition is on view at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) from June 29 through August 14, 2016.

**I STARTED MAKING ART** because there were things I couldn’t articulate in writing. Occasionally I would have some sort of projection in the mix while reading poetry, but then projections became primary and now I see myself as an artist who uses text. I like working with media that already exist and exploding them with poetry. If you asked in one sentence what I do, it’s that. Leveling hierarchy is also important to me, both ethically and formally. I don’t want text to ever be more important than the visual. Objecthood as it relates to language is interesting to me—how do you make language as present as objects?

At LACE there will be primarily video works. *IF THIS MEANS YOU* is made of found stock footage of products and commercials in one frame and then a text is on screen for one second. It cuts really fast so the viewer has to attempt to catch up and process both the visual and the written. Also on view will be *You, or, RGB, or, The Color Purple*, a large projection I shot with performers walking through the neighborhood of Inwood in Manhattan. The installation will also have a room you can look into through peepholes to a three-channel video projected over paintings on tablecloths that are hung as screens. When you have to move and go up to the wall and look through a hole, looking becomes less passive than it usually is, but it’s not participatory either. It’s this in-between. The show is titled “Verse, Chorus, Verse,” and there is also going to be a live performance presenting excerpts of an ongoing long-form poetry project I’m working on with Triple Canopy concerning hip-hop, music videos, race, and

visibility in media.

I've never been in two shows that open in such quick succession. The photographs in the Studio Museum exhibition are part of my exploration of collage, painting, and photography and are made from stuff that I've been shooting out in the world and then bringing into Photoshop and taking them through a process of collage. I shoot six or seven photographs of the same thing, layer them, and then remove parts. Early on, I also knew I wanted to work with found windshields. I wanted to play around with the defrosting lines on them as lines, as drawing. I'm thinking about these as another kind of viewing screen. There will be wall works partly lit by some projections so there are moments where a photograph is changed by video. I'm interested in an exhibition that isn't fixed—there might be three minutes when a part is just dark, you can't see it, and that's OK. In some cases you're watching a flat-screen through a windshield, and you're watching a video of people in a car behind a windshield behind a windshield.

This work is meant to be dark. There's a lot of rage. I'm interested in therapy versus religion in the African American community and wanting to deal with that as a subject along with existential rage, anger, and depression—things that still aren't really talked about in the black community. There's more trust from an older generation in religion versus therapy. Within a black church, the pastor will often pause the sermon before it begins and say, "Congregation, turn to your neighbor, say, 'Neighbor, God is good,' " or something like that. In the Studio show, there will be a screen print of a text that reads, "Turn to your neighbor, say 'Neighbor,' " and it's called *Call and Response*. It's the first piece I made for this show and it's also a reaction to a meme spawned by the [Drake](#) and [Future](#) album *What a Time to Be Alive*. (The meme had [Future](#) dressed up as a pastor saying, "Congregation, turn to your neighbor, say 'Neighbor, what a time to be alive.' ")

What happens in this process of taking this verbal thing and not memorializing it, but fixing it, is interesting to me. If I want to make a work about police brutality and being a black man in America in 2016, there is a responsibility. Poetry allows me to be the person being attacked, the eighteen-year-old in the hoodie and the person standing outside of that. Writing provides me with the ability to slip in and out of different registers and that is ultimately why I'm working the way I do.

**View of "[Martin Creed: The Back Door](#)," 2016.** Photo: James Ewing.

*A large-scale expression of his ongoing interests in play, rhythm, and scale, [Martin Creed's](#) exhibition "The Back Door" will be on view at the [Park Avenue Armory](#) in New York through August 7, 2016. His largest survey in the US to date, it features two new commissions, a retrospective of his films and music videos, a troupe of roving musicians, and evenings of cabaret. Creed's latest album, *Thoughts Lined Up*, will also be released July 8 from Telephone Records. Additionally, Creed's [Public Art Fund](#) project UNDERSTANDING, 2016, is on view in Brooklyn Bridge Park through October 23, 2016.*

**I WANTED** to do a show that's looking out at the world instead of in. The Armory's drill hall is such a huge space, occupying a whole block; its sheer size is one of its most obvious features. It's scary. I didn't want to make something big just to fill it, and I didn't want to create a world inside. I wanted to look out onto the world.

Something I've been thinking a lot about recently is that art galleries, studios, and houses can be cut off from the world. They are designed to keep things precious and away from dirt and difficulty. I think this produces a great

danger: you're looking away from life and not toward it.

When I was here on a visit I noticed a roller shutter on the back door of the building that opens onto Lexington Avenue. It just happened to be open with some trucks driving in. The view from the hall onto the street was amazing. So the whole exhibition was then designed to make that view of the street into something that could be enjoyed, almost like a film of real life. The main space is empty and dark to try to maximize the view of the street when the back door opens. I was working on just doing that and nothing else. But then I started thinking about making new films to alternate with the roller shutter opening and closing. 'Cos if the roller shutter were open all the time maybe you'd just get used to it.

The new films show people opening their mouths, and in each person's mouth there is food. The camera zooms in on the person, and the person opens and closes their mouth. It's like a nature film, in slow motion. The people I filmed are important to me: my mother, my partner, my stepdaughter, and my oldest friend.

As for coming up with things, I don't really know...but I often write things down in a notebook. I also make a lot of audio recordings, so ideas often are spoken or written down. If they keep coming back to me, maybe that's what makes me do something—basically to try and get rid of the idea because I don't want to hear the bloody voices in my head anymore.

There are roving musicians in the show that are singing arrangements of songs I've been working on recently, little lyrics repeated from voice notes I've recorded and turned into songs. The songs are a lot like the other works: a little thing magnified or amplified. Some little thing, but then you make a song and dance about it.

### **[Martin Creed](#) performs “Let's Come to an Arrangement” for 500 Words.**

I've been thinking a lot about work as a way of tidying up. The world is a mess. If you concentrate on a little bit of the world and you make a little composition, you're effectively tidying it up. You could say that a song is noises tidied up, made slightly neater. Rhythm is a form of neatness that separates the sound from the world. What you might call dirt over there you put in the trash, and this bit here you keep, you care about it for some reason.

I actively try and work with people—do a painting for example with others, make music with a band, put on a show with a gallery or a curator, many different people. I like being on my own, but I'm scared that if I'm on my own too much I go into a deluded bubble world. When I work with people I have to state my ideas, get them out from under the table, and I think that helps me to work out whether they're worth doing. It feels like often works are started and finished by using words to talk about them, even if the final work isn't finally taking the form of words.

I also try to work from the basis that I don't know what is best: to not prejudge, to just see what happens, to use words as well as actions and things. The ultimate idea would be to make onstage and offstage the same thing. If only your feelings could be more directly turned into something. That would be better work, more full of life.

**[Adam Broomberg](#) and [Oliver Chanarin](#), *Rudiments*, 2015, HD, color, sound, 12 minutes.**

*[Adam Broomberg](#) and [Oliver Chanarin](#) are a collaborative duo whose photography-based practice explores themes of institutional authority, surveillance, and consent in an era of rapid technological advances. Here they discuss their recent book, *Spirit Is a Bone* (Mack, 2015), as well as their first US solo exhibition, which is on view at the [Baltimore Museum of Art](#) through September 11, 2016.*

**IN MARK TWAIN'S** 1905 pamphlet *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, he assumes the persona of King Leopold bemoaning the arrival of the camera, the "incorruptible Kodak." This new technology is able to bear witness to the atrocities the king was committing in the Congo, and undermining the lies that he could previously manage in the press. Surveillance, of course, has since reached new levels of horror. Our book *Spirit Is a Bone* uses technology developed in Moscow, just now being rolled out worldwide, which allows the state to create a three-dimensional photograph, a digital life mask, of citizens in crowded public places—made without any consent or knowledge. They call these "non-collaborative portraits," and the phenomenon marks a fundamental shift in portraiture, where for the first time there is no relation between the imagemakers and the subject—the citizens. Using this same technology, we re-created August Sander's entire life's work in four days by casting all of his "categories" of people on the streets of Russia. Our poet is the wonderful [Lev Rubinstein](#) and the revolutionary is [Yekaterina Samutsevich](#), from Pussy Riot.

We've spent some time in war zones, so when approaching new work, we decide to take some steps back and examine the beginnings of when young people give over to hierarchy, authority, and power. [Virginia Woolf](#) nailed it in *Three Guineas*, when she said that if men were not in control of education, business, and government, then perhaps there'd be a chance for peace. We gained access to a cadet camp in Liverpool—it's a grim military base where schoolkids between the ages of seven and seventeen get sent to learn how to march, drum, drill, and obey orders. What we didn't tell the military was that we were coming with a *bouffon*—a dark clown whose performance teeters on vulgarity. Each evening our bouffon held workshops with the kids, effectively getting them to unlearn the day's discipline. This power play is the basis of our film *Rudiments*, which is currently showing at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

#### **Trailer for [Adam Broomberg](#) and [Oliver Chanarin's](#) *Rudiments*, 2015.**

We typically work in spaces populated by journalists, not in an artist's studio or on a film set. But we treat these settings as backdrops to a performance, a dance with authority that inevitably ends in us being booted out. We are curious about how these institutions of power function, from the military to psychiatric hospitals. The state's increasingly insidious command of our lives is acutely troubling. As photographers we always try to remember that the technology of imagemaking is never morally neutral, that it always embodies the ideology of whoever uses it. So much of our work is about seduction—getting permission to enter these spaces to gain an understanding of the workings and then find some way of fucking them over, of exposing the machinery.

**View of "[Frank Stella](#) and Synagogues of Historic Poland," 2016.** *Frank Stella's assemblage series "Polish Village," 1970–74, is making its debut in Europe as part of the exhibition "[Frank Stella](#) and Synagogues of Historic Poland," on view through June 20, 2016, at the POLIN Museum in Warsaw. Here Stella discusses the show as well as the genesis of the works, their exhibition history, and what it means to present his works in Poland, where the titular inspirational wooden synagogues once stood.*

**THIS SERIES** has been exhibited before: at the Fort Worth Museum of Dallas in 1978, the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1987, and the Jewish Museum in New York in 1983, to name a few venues. This is the first time, though, that the works are being seen in Poland. This is worth noting only because the forty or so works in the series on display are based on photographs and drawings of wooden synagogues in eastern Poland. All of these buildings had been burned down by the Nazis. I came across the images in Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka's book *Wooden Synagogues* (Arkady, 1959). The photographs and drawings from the book are part of the exhibition, as is a close-to-scale reconstruction of the roof and painted ceiling of a synagogue that once stood in the city of

Gwoździec.

The carpentry of the synagogues is incredibly sophisticated on a formal level. The interlockingness—the complex geometric connectedness of each part of the building, which is visible in the photographs—really attracted me. My own works for the series began as simple forms on a flat plane. In the end, the final works are a kind of projected relief, if you hang them on the wall, or architecture models if you lay them on the ground. This was the first time, I suppose, that I directly dealt with relief.

Interestingly, the constructivist line in modernism in the early twentieth century can roughly be traced from Moscow to Berlin via Warsaw; this is mirrored in reverse by the path of the Nazis that led to the destruction of these wooden synagogues. The memory of the death of constructivism as well as the synagogues is embedded in the works.

The works weren't really about the synagogues (any more than they were about constructivism), but that's what they inevitably have to be about. You can't get away from where the works came from. That is, my series wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for the drawings I saw. Robert Rauschenberg once said that his paintings are an invitation to look somewhere else. You do what you can do and hope that people will look beyond the things themselves.

And I don't know about the exhibition in Poland. People seem to like it, which I think is nice. It's tough in a way—the work is in a museum of the history of Polish Jews, and I'm not Jewish and I'm not part of that history. But the synagogues are part of the history of art. And so it's inevitable that you react to that.

[Thom Andersen](#)

06.03.16



[Thom Andersen](#), *The Thoughts That Once We Had*, 2015, digital video, black and white and color, sound, 1 hour 48 minutes.

[Thom Andersen](#) lives in Los Angeles. For over fifty years, his films, including *Red Hollywood* (1995) and *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), have critically engaged the documentary form. A retrospective of his work will run at *Anthology Film Archives* from June 3 through June 12, 2016. The screening series will also feature his latest full-length film, *The Thoughts That Once We Had*, plus the New York premiere of two new shorts.□

**MY WORK ISN'T EXPERIMENTAL, IS IT?** People call *Los Angeles Plays Itself* an essay film; personally, I prefer to call it a documentary. I think that when you go see a documentary film, you should learn something, and I don't think that's such a radical idea, actually. Of course we learn from a good fiction film as well, although maybe it's a different type of truth. I think all films should aspire toward truth, but people misunderstand the idea when it comes to movies. They think of truth as being accuracy, and that is unobtainable by the nature of film, which is selection by framing and editing. Truth is simply an aspiration, like any other classic virtue—charity, for example. Sometimes you may give money to a beggar, but other times you keep walking.

There's definitely an argument made in *Red Hollywood*, and maybe more successfully in *Los Angeles Plays Itself*. They're about an ethics of filmmaking. For my newest full-length film, *The Thoughts That Once We Had*, Deleuze's books *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time Image* were a main source of inspiration—and the other main source was when Turner Classic Movies had a marathon of MGM's musical compilation *That's Entertainment!* in 2013 to 2014, which, strange as it seems, was how I discovered Hollywood musicals, because I had never really liked them before. Deleuze makes a separation between what he calls realism and what he calls naturalism. And the three directors who he considers as naturalists were all blacklisted in one way or another. [Erich von Stroheim](#) was personally blacklisted, because he was too profligate in his methods of filmmaking. [Luis Buñuel](#) and [Joseph Losey](#) were both victims of the anticommunist blacklist. The naturalists are like the physicians of society, making a fundamental critique of the way things are. The real world is a derived milieu that has its roots, its origins, in something deeper—that can also be a characterization of Marxism, which is concerned with looking below the surface of social relations to get to its origins. But realists are concerned with the surface itself.

*Get Out of the Car* began as a little study of distressed billboards, which was an intentionally dumb idea. But from there it made sense to go to other kinds of signage, murals, some rundown buildings. Almost all the music in the film is either Latino or black in origin. The music of [Los Tigres del Norte](#), for example, expresses the feelings of *indocumentados*. That also says something about the history of Los Angeles and where it is now. It ended up being a movie about immigration as well as black culture in the city.

Most of the things that we filmed in *Get Out of the Car* are gone now. The murals are pretty much all destroyed. There's nostalgia there, but it's not something I'm going to apologize for. I'm not one of those who's contemptuous of young people; I think that I'm just the opposite. In the *Hollywood Reporter*, [Todd McCarthy](#) accused *The Thoughts That Once We Had* of a "leftism so tiresomely doctrinaire that it's quaint." *Red Hollywood* got the same treatment when it first came out, but maybe its time has finally come. When it played at Lincoln Center in 2014, the audience was very young. That was encouraging, because I don't think of leftist politics as some vague, exhausted dispute. What happened in the past, the way in which the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 turned labor unions against one another for instance, and the suppression of the left in the United States, that's a history that is still with us.

**Promotional image created by DIS for the 9th Berlin Biennale.** Photo: Natascha Goldenberg.

*DIS* are a collective whose activities flirt across many spheres of contemporary culture—art, fashion, publishing,

*and now curating, in which their first major outing is the ninth edition of the Berlin Biennale, “The Present in Drag.” The show opens on June 4 in various venues across the city and runs through September 18, 2016. Here the members of DIS discuss their new curatorial role, the process of putting together the exhibition, and a few projects one can expect to see.*

**THIS IS OUR FIRST AND ONLY BIENNIAL**, and in a sense it is a materialization of concepts, themes, and aesthetic interests embedded in the last six years of the DIS magazine website. This biennial is not a DIS piece, but we think that the way to approach it is not dissimilar to the way you might approach our site—it’s a hyperlinked landscape in which artists have set about restructuring and twisting existing narratives in response to the contradictory nature of the present, and the unstoppable digital influence on the way we think and feel. It is grounded in the idea that you exist online, but your ass still hurts and grinds. The biennial artists probe how layered, conflicting ideologies manifest in society, where even one product, image, or work of art inhabits self-contradictory positions. In the context of the Berlin Biennale, it becomes very clear how even something as basic as juice can also embody the uncertainties of the moment. Mexican artist [Débora Delmar](#)’s geopolitical juice bar, named after emerging global economies—Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey—links green juice to labor, economic shifts, aspirational lifestyle, celebrity culture, wellness, greenwashing, eco-confusion, and environmental degradation.

One of our favorite projects for the biennial is an album of anthems produced by [Ashland Mines](#), aka [TOTAL FREEDOM](#), and published as twelve-inch records by Vinyl Factory. We liked the idea of a biennial you couldn’t get out of your head, and that had a component that could spread as a dispersed, viral extension of the show. Each song is a collaboration between artists and musicians: [Kelela](#) with [Adrian Piper](#) and [Elysia Crampton](#), [TOTAL FREEDOM](#) and [Isa Genzken](#), [Fatima Al Qadiri](#) and [Juliana Huxtable](#) with [Hito Steyerl](#). [Babak Radboy](#)’s visual and textual communication strategy for the biennial itself includes an array of participants like [Chris Kraus](#), [Roe Ethridge](#), and [Bjarne Melgaard](#), who are all in the part of the biennial called Not in the Berlin Biennale. They are not in the show but simply in front of it as a skin, the largest organ of all. Our idea of the body of the Berlin Biennale is about the relationship between its physical or social existence, and its online presence and outward communication. Who we are and what we project, our drag, our self as content—these are at once blurry and distinctly separate categories. Artists play with this performance and construction of personal identity, and we thought it was interesting to consider this in terms of a biennial, an entity swarmed by state and market, art and commerce.

When we got to Berlin and had to choose venues to use, we looked through all the venues that have been used for the Berlin Biennale since its first iteration, in 1998, and one by one we were told, “Now that’s a spa, that’s a hotel, that’s a gym, that’s a bank.” Every abandoned building here is available for event rentals—this had a profound influence on our relationship to the spaces we looked at, and ultimately to the themes and work in the show. In all of the venues, there’s a dichotomy between the hyperpersonal and the globally complex, from privatized public spaces, like the ESMT, a business school housed in the former and perfectly intact GDR State Council Building—which will host projects by [GCC](#), [Simon Denny](#), and [Katja Novitskova](#), all of whose work addresses capitalist business, state ideology, and their aesthetic manifestations—to the residential. The KW Institute, for example, is in Mitte, a neighborhood of permalancers and Airbnb. It’s a domain that was once circumscribed as personal and residential and is now a gray zone of public/private profit.

We were drawn to the aesthetics of transparency and glass facades, with their blatant visual similarity to airports

and shopping malls, because of the paradox of transparency as architecture or ethic. This feeling of private spaces with public faces has been really important—our central venue, Akademie der Künste in Pariser Platz, is surrounded by the US, French, and British embassies, the DZ and Commerz banks, and Lockheed Martin, among other buildings. But the Akademie and the Starbucks are the only two buildings the public is able to enter around there, which is a hard-core tourist zone. The biennial will be infiltrating the Akademie's passageways and event rooms. These glass spaces emulate the surrounding corporate buildings, and they are actually rented out regularly for corporate and government events. We're trying to make people forget they're in a biennial—most of the installations there don't initially connote art and many have adopted commercial formats. For instance, [Christopher Kulendran Thomas](#) has created an experience suite for his start-up New Eelam, which imagines the future of citizenship in an age of technologically accelerated dislocation by charting an alternative trajectory for Sri Lanka's recent history. [Trevor Paglen](#) and [Jacob Appelbaum](#)'s *Autonomy Cube* is a usable sculpture that turns the space where it is installed into an open wireless Tor network, an anonymous relay router for Internet traffic, revealing the usually invisible mechanisms behind digital surveillance and how they can be eschewed. It's especially relevant because this piece is directly across the street from the French embassy, at a moment when TOR has been particularly contentious in France.

The surreal used to be the domain of the future—but today it more accurately describes the present.