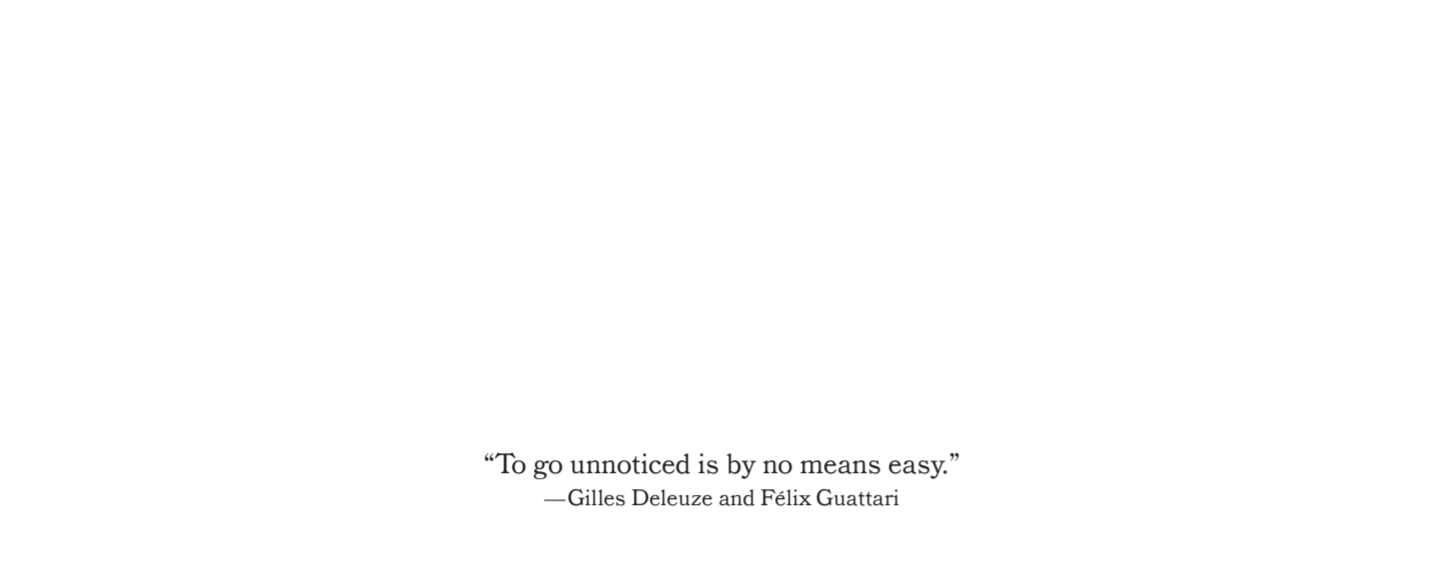


Adam Pendleton: Becoming Imperceptible



“To go unnoticed is by no means easy.”
—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Adam Pendleton: Becoming Imperceptible is the largest solo presentation of Adam Pendleton’s (b. 1984, Richmond, Virginia) work to date. Including film, wall paintings, ceramics, and silkscreens (on mylar, glass, steel, and canvas), this exhibition frames the artist’s oeuvre as a complex dialogue between culture and system, a body of work invested in the perpetual cross-referencing of aesthetic and social histories.

At the center of this exhibition are found images and texts, which have served as source material for all of Pendleton’s work from the last ten years. Reframed, reconditioned, and perpetually reoccurring, these images and words have been described by the artist as “indistinct.” And yet, harvested from the artist’s personal library, from texts and films ranging from *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994* and the poem “Black Dada Nihilismus,” by LeRoi Jones (later re-identified as Amiri Baraka) to Jean-Luc Godard’s film, *Sympathy for the Devil*, they serve as bedrock for Pendleton’s artistic practice and connect his form of abstraction with the history of Civil Rights Movements, the pre-war Avant-Garde, La Nouvelle Vague in film, and Minimalist and Conceptualist art practices of the 1960s.

Becoming Imperceptible takes its name from the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, with whose philosophical works Pendleton has long engaged, and positions Pendleton’s practice as a kind of counter-portraiture. If traditional portraiture figures the subject in contrast to or against its background, Pendleton’s works aim to disappear or camouflage the subject amid constantly alternating surfaces. The same, or almost the same, images return again and again across the exhibition, sometimes resurfacing without notice and always signifying differently.

Refusing the constancy of context, Pendleton’s images are let loose—to participate in alternative narratives and interpretive traditions. Drawing from the histories of the Civil Rights and Black Resistance Movements, Black aesthetic tradition, and the historical avant-garde, *Becoming Imperceptible* invites you to reimagine both our history and future, and opens up a rigorous conversation about system and form in the European, African, and American avant-gardes of the last century.



FLOOR 2

As much as he constructs material and intellectual systems through the layering of images and text, Pendleton depends upon the practice of excision, redaction, and fragmentation to reposition received images. The galleries on the second floor demonstrate the artist’s practice of construction through removal, presenting fragments, excerpts, and parts of larger narratives and structures. Importantly, repetition builds with every floor, figuring images anew with every siting.

Top to bottom (clockwise)	<i>Untitled (code poem Los Angeles black)</i> , 2010–2016 Ceramic
<i>Nothing But a Man</i> , 2009/2016 Adam Pendleton (with Marc Hollenstein and Jaan Ewart) Silkscreen ink on Mylar	<i>Untitled (code poem)</i> , 2016 Ceramic
<i>Untitled</i> , 2009/2016 Adam Pendleton (with Marc Hollenstein and Jaan Ewart) Silkscreen ink on Mylar	<i>Untitled (code poem)</i> , 2016 Ceramic
<i>Tools</i> , 2016 Silkscreen ink on Mylar	<i>Untitled (code poem)</i> , 2016 Ceramic
<i>Sympathy for the Devil</i> , 2009/2016 Adam Pendleton (with Marc Hollenstein and Jaan Ewart) Silkscreen ink on Mylar	<i>System of Display, D (CALLED/ acceptera, 1931)</i> , 2016 Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror

Center gallery

Satomi, 2009
Single-channel black-and-white video, 6 1/2 seconds

Untitled, 2016
Silkscreen ink on Mylar

Gallery to left (clockwise around to center)

Notes on Black Dada Nihilismus (proper nouns), 2009
Acrylic paint on wall

Untitled (small water), 2014
Silkscreen ink on mirror
polished stainless steel
Private Collection, New York

Untitled (small water), 2016
Silkscreen ink on mirror
polished stainless steel

System of Display, T (WITHHELD/Heinz Loew, primary three-dimensional design elements, 1928), 2016
Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror

Untitled (1958), 2016
Silkscreen ink on Mylar

System of Display, X (EXPRESS/Poro secret society mask, Mano, Liberia), 2016
Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror

Left wall to right wall (clockwise)	<i>A Victim of American Democracy I</i> (wall work), 2015 Vinyl
<i>Black Lives Matter #3</i> (wall work), 2015 Vinyl	<i>WE (we are not successive)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on mirror polished stainless steel
<i>Not Reconciled, Or Only Violence Helps Where Violence Rules (matte black)</i> , 2016 Silkscreen ink on mirror polished stainless steel	<i>Untitled</i> , 2016 Collage on paper
<i>Black Dada/Column (A/A)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on canvas Collection Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen	<i>Untitled</i> , 2015 Collage on paper
<i>System of Display, P (PROTEST/Hannes Meyer, 1928)</i> , 2016 Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror	<i>System of Display, G (WAITING/ Ian Berry, couple dancing, Ghana, 1962)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror Private Collection, New York
<i>Magicienne #2</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on mirror polished stainless steel	<i>Independance (Protest II)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on mirror polished stainless steel panel
<i>System of Display, H (HOUR/ Preliminary course of L. Moholy-Nagy, n.d.)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror	<i>Yes But</i> , 2008 Acrylic paint on wall

Black Dada/Column (A) II, 2015–2016
Silkscreen ink on canvas

A Victim of American Democracy II (wall work), 2015
Vinyl

Untitled, 2016
Collage on paper

System of Display, I (LIVE/Ian Berry, couple dancing during the Independence celebrations, Congo, 1960), 2016
Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror

Black Dada/Column (A) II, 2015–2016
Silkscreen ink on canvas

A Victim of American Democracy II (wall work), 2015
Vinyl

Untitled, 2016
Collage on paper

System of Display, I (LIVE/Ian Berry, couple dancing during the Independence celebrations, Congo, 1960), 2016
Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror

Black Dada/Column (A) II, 2015–2016
Silkscreen ink on canvas

Salon of Prints

A collection of framed mylar prints, operating as liminal works—somewhere between a drawing and poster—demonstrate not only Pendleton’s appropriation of found images and texts but also his penchant for collaboration. Of the six prints on view, four “posters,” conceived after-the-fact for exhibitions and films (Jean-Luc Godard’s *Sympathy for the Devil* and *Nothing But A Man*) evidence Pendleton’s collaborations with Amsterdam-based graphic designers Marc Hollenstein and Jaan Ewart, with whom Pendleton conceived and realized his first two print publications, *Grey Blue Grey* (2010) and *Radio* (2011). The final two prints, more recent collages, draw from archival images from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, NY, and layer imagery and text from the vinyl wall works on the first floor.

Satomi	A silent, looped six-and-a-half second excerpt from Pendleton’s 2009 video work, <i>BAND</i> . <i>Satomi</i> stages Pendleton’s formal commitment to repetition and narrative abstraction. Pendleton pulled the fully decontextualized fragment from his three-channel video installation <i>BAND</i> , itself, a kind of cover of Jean-Luc Godard’s film, <i>Sympathy for the Devil</i> made in the aftermath of May 1968. Employing footage from the Rolling Stones studio session for the seminal track, <i>Sympathy for the Devil</i> , as backdrop for the broad social and political unrest of the period, <i>Sympathy</i> establishes Godard’s move towards a more direct engagement with politics and class struggle. For <i>BAND</i> , Pendleton recast the Rolling Stones with the indie rock band Deerhoof, and interspersed footage from <i>Teddy</i> , a short documentary developed by the National Institute of Mental Health with the U.S. Office of Education about the life of a politically conscious 17 year-old African-American male. <i>Satomi</i> , in turn, takes its name from its subject, Satomi Matsuzaki, the lead singer of Deerhoof.
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Notes on Black Dada Nihilismus (proper nouns)

Echoing both the form and logic of the wall painting on the floor below, *Notes on Black Dada Nihilismus (proper nouns)* appropriates its language from Amiri Baraka’s poem by the same name, redacting all context and retaining only the poet’s references to proper names.

Code Poems	The symbolic forms of <i>Code Poem</i> were derived from images published in poet Hannah Weiner’s book of the same name, <i>Code Poem</i> (1982). Using the International Code of Signals—a 19th Century system for signaling at sea that employed a constrained vocabulary of semaphores, signal flags, and morse code—Weiner’s visual and verbal arrangements disrupted the linear logic and meaning-making intended by her systems. And in addition to the dashes and dots familiar to Morse code, Weiner included a third element, the square—interfering and upturning a recognized symbolic system. Pendleton’s appropriation of Weiner’s poetic language acknowledges his own indebtedness to, and engagement with, contemporary American poetry, and particularly that associated with the L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E poetry movement of the 1990s, and reaffirms his commitment to abstracted forms and their capacity to disrupt conventional organizations of knowledge.
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FLOOR 1

To occupy public space has long been a tool of civil disobedience. One might expect to find in Adam Pendleton’s work, occupying all three floors of the Contemporary Arts Center, protest in the form of images from historic days of liberation and calls for independence. But, the artist refuses such demonstrative tools for dissent. Instead, he turns to abstraction—of symbolic systems, whether political or aesthetic—to position his practice most firmly as demonstration against established and often segregated discourses. Pendleton’s occupation of nearly every millimeter of wall space on the first floor provides a kind of index of his expansive practice, which operates in a range of mediums and histories. A collagist, Pendleton layers histories as well as works, building from individual paintings or silkscreens to full wall installations and floor-through configurations.

Left wall to right wall (clockwise)	<i>A Victim of American Democracy I</i> (wall work), 2015 Vinyl
<i>Black Lives Matter #3</i> (wall work), 2015 Vinyl	<i>WE (we are not successive)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on mirror polished stainless steel
<i>Not Reconciled, Or Only Violence Helps Where Violence Rules (matte black)</i> , 2016 Silkscreen ink on mirror polished stainless steel	<i>Untitled</i> , 2016 Collage on paper
<i>Black Dada/Column (A/A)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on canvas Collection Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen	<i>Untitled</i> , 2015 Collage on paper
<i>System of Display, P (PROTEST/Hannes Meyer, 1928)</i> , 2016 Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror	<i>System of Display, G (WAITING/ Ian Berry, couple dancing, Ghana, 1962)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror Private Collection, New York
<i>Magicienne #2</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on mirror polished stainless steel	<i>Independance (Protest II)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on mirror polished stainless steel panel
<i>System of Display, H (HOUR/ Preliminary course of L. Moholy-Nagy, n.d.)</i> , 2015 Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror	<i>Yes But</i> , 2008 Acrylic paint on wall

Black Dada/Column (A) II, 2015–2016
Silkscreen ink on canvas

A Victim of American Democracy II (wall work), 2015
Vinyl

Untitled, 2016
Collage on paper

System of Display, I (LIVE/Ian Berry, couple dancing during the Independence celebrations, Congo, 1960), 2016
Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror

Black Dada/Column (A) II, 2015–2016
Silkscreen ink on canvas

A Victim of American Democracy II (wall work), 2015
Vinyl

Untitled, 2016
Collage on paper

System of Display, I (LIVE/Ian Berry, couple dancing during the Independence celebrations, Congo, 1960), 2016
Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror

Black Dada/Column (A) II, 2015–2016
Silkscreen ink on canvas

A Victim of American Democracy II (wall work), 2015
Vinyl

Untitled, 2016
Collage on paper

FLOOR 3

Becoming Imperceptible might be interpreted as a presentation of a theory of portraiture, and within it, an exploration of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. Moving from the second-floor portrait, *Satomi*, to the artist’s third-floor portrait of David Hilliard, the ambiguity of representation resounds. The exhibitions finally resolves into a hall of mirrors that serves as intersection for a history of art and contemporary experience, of reflection of self and of art objects—seen again for the first time.

My Education: A Portrait of David Hilliard, 2011–2014
Three-channel black-and-white video, 9 minutes 19 seconds

Final gallery (Left to right)

Black Dada/Column (K), 2015–2016
Silkscreen ink on canvas

Black Dada/Column (B), 2015–2016
Silkscreen ink on canvas

Black Dada/Column (A), 2015–2016
Silkscreen ink on canvas

Untitled (water), 2014
Silkscreen ink on mirror
polished stainless steel

Untitled (water), 2014
Silkscreen ink on mirror
polished stainless steel

Untitled (water), 2014
Silkscreen ink on mirror
polished stainless steel

Untitled (water), 2014
Silkscreen ink on mirror
polished stainless steel

All works courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery, New York, unless otherwise noted.

Adam Pendleton: Becoming Imperceptible

April 1–June 16, 2016	Galeria Pedro Cera, Lisbon; and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich; and members of the John T. Scott Guild: Rhesa & Alden McDonald, Chairs; Wayne Amedee; Bryan Bailey; David T. Baker; Neil A. Barclay; Cathy & Morris Bart; Brenda Boettner; Jessica Bride & Nick Mayor; Debbie Brockley & Jonathan Red; Lisa Brooking & Bennett Davis; Robin Burgess & Terence Blanchard; Winston & Wendy Burns; Naydja & Adolph Bynum; Dathel & Tommy Coleman; Michele Cooper, MD; Vaughn Fauria; John Foley; Melissa P Gray; Tina & Barry Kern; Colleen Levy; Karen & Bobby Major; Kara T. Oidge; Samuel M. Oliver; CCH Pounder; Staci Rosenberg; Robyn & Andrew Schwarz; Mariana Sheppard; Aimée & Mike Siegel; Darlene & Reggie Thomas; Hank L. Torbert;
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Curated by Andrea Andersson, The Helis Foundation Chief Curator of Visual Arts

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Black Lives Matter #3, Victim of American Democracy II, and Victim of American Democracy I

The phrase “Black Lives Matter” first appeared on twitter in the wake of George Zimmerman’s acquittal in the Trayvon Martin shooting. Attributed to no single author, Pendleton has located the sentiment in a much longer history. “Black Lives Matter, and the political situation that it has raised awareness of, has been around for a long time,” explains Pendleton. “The political dynamic isn’t new. What’s new is the language that is at once a public mourning, a rallying cry, and a poetic plea.” The artist first employed the phrase in his 2015 presentation at the Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. First appearing on a flag on top of the Pavilion, notably constructed during the reign of King Leopold II at the height of colonialism and racial oppression in Belgium, the phrase has since figured in three other wall works and four paintings. In each instance, the specific language, graphically reproduced, figures at once as representational and abstract. As such, it refuses its neat identification in recent history. Layering the phrase above an image of an unidentified sculpture—of African origins or perhaps a European modernist reproduction—Pendleton locates *Black Lives Matter* in a contested historical narrative. Two other wall works figure on the first floor and take their name from Malcolm X’s oft-repeated identification as one of many “victims of American democracy.”

Yes But	Acrylic paint on wall
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For his first-floor wall painting, Pendleton appropriates text from *The Future(s) of Film* (2002), a collection of three interviews with the French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard. Plucking language without rule or constraint, Pendleton’s selection preserves Godard’s rhetorical style despite its wholesale abstraction of the filmmaker’s subject of address. Pendleton’s painting demonstrates the legibility and persistence of the artist or author’s hand in the most abstract, conceptual, and even outsourced aesthetic production.

System of Display (H: HOUR Preliminary course of L. Moholy-Nagy) and (D: MEMORIES/Heinz Loew, primary three dimensional design elements 1928)

In 2008, Pendleton began his *System of Display*, an ongoing series of wall-mounted black boxes, framing found images—photocopied, enlarged, and silkscreened on a mirrored surface, encased by a glass pane, and printed with a textual fragment—commonly a single, remaindered letter of a once-longer redacted word (still legible in the work’s title). The images, often drawn from the pages of art publications or historical source texts, and letters, derived from a range of printed matter, hardly provide contextual specificity. Rather than neatly document a historical moment or work of art, *System of Display* serves to document forms of discourse themselves. The individual subjects recede, conventional hierarchies are undone by the artist’s system of organization. “Increasingly, I am starting to look at the work that uses historical images as one complex image or network,” explains Pendleton. “I am working to establish a system of display, of organization. I want to create a situation where we’re inclined to rethink notions of the past and the future, as well as our ability to understand them enough to make reductive statements.” As in many of his works, Pendleton’s use of a reflective mirror surface invites the viewer into the historical image itself, reanimating the image’s negative space with the vitality of the present moment.

Untitled & Unnumbered Applied Posters	Acrylic paint on wall
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Posters, applied directly to the wall, reproduce spreads from the exhibition publication and make plain that the expanded field of this project, *Becoming Imperceptible*, comprises the inhabitable spaces of the gallery and book alike and that the book’s potential to circulate broadly, to enter into new hands and new use, are a defining component of Pendleton’s practice.

My Education: A Portrait of David Hilliard	Acrylic paint on wall
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My Education: A Portrait of David Hilliard

With *My Education*, Pendleton redefines the terms for portraiture, recalling the cubist logic popularized by the works of Picasso and the writings of Gertrude Stein. A three-screen video installation filmed in Oakland, CA in 2011, *My Education* takes David Hilliard, a lecturer, educator, and founding member and former Chief of Staff of the Black Panther Party, as its subject. A film three years in the making, *My Education* refuses a singular perspective, presenting portraiture instead as a construction of abstracted language and image. Pendleton explains, “The way the piece is edited, you even get multiple views of what he’s talking about, which doesn’t always line up with what you’re looking at. I question the idea of historical fact and representing the truth of anything. Things change, both in terms of personal memory but also our collective consciousness. David became a conceptual vehicle to explore those ideas.” *My Education: A Portrait of David Hilliard* presents narrated footage of Hilliard and the neighborhoods of Oakland that were home to the Black Panther movement as well as the site of a fatal gun battle on April 6, 1968, two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, that wounded two Oakland police officers and killed Black Panther Treasurer Bobby Hutton.

Black Dada Paintings	Acrylic paint on wall
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Pendleton produced his first Black Dada painting in 2008, commencing his canonical series, which brings two different traditions of the American Avant-Garde squarely into dialogue. The black-on-black paintings pair cropped images of Sol LeWitt’s *Incomplete Open Cube* sculptures, a seminal work of the minimalist canon, with letters from the phrase “Black Dada,” taken from a poem by poet and activist Amiri Baraka (born Everett Leroi Jones). Exercising the monochromatic field of modernist painting, Pendleton’s Black Dada paintings engage formerly segregated aesthetic histories through formal means of abstraction.

Untitled (water) works	Acrylic paint on wall
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“Life is change—day and night, cold and warmth, sun and rain. It is more in-between the facts than the facts themselves,” wrote Josef Albers, two years after moving from the Bauhaus School in Dessau, Germany to Black Mountain College in North Carolina. At Black Mountain, Albers translated and imported seminal ideas and forms of the European avant-garde for a generation of artists who would lead the avant-garde in America. For the surface images of his untitled mirror works, Pendleton appropriates Albers’ photographs of water’s surface, taken in 1929 as part of a larger series of works documenting order and disorder in organic forms and arrangements.

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