

# 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

### Salon of Prints

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)

*Untitled (code poem Los Angeles black)*, 2010–2016  
Ceramic

*Untitled (code poem)*, 2016  
Ceramic

*Untitled (code poem)*, 2016  
Ceramic

*System of Display, D (CALLED/acceptera, 1931)*, 2016  
Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror

#### Center gallery

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

#### 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 *Code Poem* were derived from images published in poet Hannah Weiner's book of the same name, *Code Poem* (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 1980s, and reaffirms his commitment to abstracted forms and their capacity to disrupt conventional organizations of knowledge.

*Nothing But a Man*, 2009/2016  
Adam Pendleton (with Marc Hollenstein and Jaan Evert)  
Silkscreen ink on Mylar

*Untitled*, 2009/2016  
Adam Pendleton (with Marc Hollenstein and Jaan Evert)  
Silkscreen ink on Mylar

*Tools*, 2016  
Silkscreen ink on Mylar

*Sympathy for the Devil*,  
2009/2016  
Adam Pendleton (with Marc Hollenstein and Jaan Evert)  
Silkscreen ink on Mylar

*Untitled*, 2009/2016  
Adam Pendleton (with Marc Hollenstein and Jaan Evert)  
Silkscreen ink on Mylar

*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

## 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)

*Black Lives Matter #3* (wall work), 2015  
Vinyl

*Not Reconciled, Or Only Violence Helps Where Violence Rules* (matte black), 2016  
Silkscreen ink on mirror  
polished stainless steel

*Untitled*, 2016  
Collage on paper

*Black Dada/Column (A/A)*, 2015  
Silkscreen ink on canvas  
Collection Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen

*System of Display, P (PROTEST/Hannes Meyer, 1928)*, 2016  
Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror  
Private Collection, New York

*Magicienne #2*, 2015  
Silkscreen ink on mirror  
polished stainless steel panel

*System of Display, H (HOUR/Preliminary course of L. Moholy-Nagy, n.d.)*, 2015  
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

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

*WE (we are not successive)*, 2015  
Silkscreen ink on mirror  
polished stainless steel

*Untitled*, 2015  
Collage on paper

*System of Display, G (WAITING/Ian Berry, couple dancing, Ghana, 1962)*, 2015  
Silkscreen ink on plexiglass and mirror  
Private Collection, New York

*Independence (Protest II)*, 2015  
Silkscreen ink on mirror  
polished stainless steel panel

*Yes But*, 2008  
Acrylic paint on wall

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

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 refutes 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

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, remastered 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

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.

## FLOOR 3

### 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

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

"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.

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

#### Adam Pendleton: Becoming Imperceptible

April 1–June 16, 2016

Curated by Andrea Andersson, The Helis Foundation Chief Curator of Visual Arts

Support for the *Adam Pendleton: Becoming Imperceptible* publication and exhibition is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Additional support is provided by the Sydney & Walda Besthoff Foundation; The Helis Foundation; The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; Aimée and Mike Siegel; Pace Gallery, New York; and Staci Rosenberg; Robyn & Andrew Schwarz; Mariana Sheppard; Aimée & Mike Siegel; Darlene & Reggie Thomas; Hank L. Torbert; studio WTA; M.K. Wegmann & Lisa Mount; Gretchen & Rodger Wheaton; Jennifer M. Williams. In-kind support is provided by Astek Inc. and Ace Hotel New Orleans.



Contemporary Arts Center  
900 Camp Street  
New Orleans, LA 70130  
caco.org

MONDRIAN  
JESUS  
HERMES  
TRISMEGISTUS  
MOCTEZUMA  
WEST  
SARTRE  
GERMAN  
GOD  
TAMBO  
WILLIE BEST  
DUBOIS  
PATRICE  
MANTAN  
JACK