

For Immediate Release
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Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture and San Francisco Art Institute
Present West Coast Debut of Rashaad Newsome's *To Be Real*



Rashaad Newsome: *To Be Real*, installation at Philadelphia
Photo Arts Center, 2019. Photo credit: Anthony Wood

San Francisco, CA-Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture (FMCAC) and San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) announce the West Coast debut of Rashaad Newsome's *To Be Real*, an exhibition environment of collage, sculpture and the interactive A.I. *Being*. The exhibition presents a series of neo-Cubist portraits in expressive frames, threading an ornamental glamour through figures reflecting on human agency, Blackness, and the radical futurity of emerging identities. Paired with new sculpture, A.I. and installation elements, *To Be Real* invites the viewer to imagine a richer and mutually shared way of being in the world. *To Be Real* will be on view at SFAI's Main Gallery within FMCAC's Pier 2 from January 10 through February 23, 2020. Admission is free and open to the public.

To Be Real, which takes its name from Cheryl Lynn's 1977 queer anthem, draws from ballroom divas, haute couture, and African art. The collages present extraordinary subjects, each aware of their pose. These works form an opulent web within the artist's *King of Arms Ballroom*, an immersive installation of floral and heraldic patterns. The works bear witness to *Ansista*, a 3D figure suspended in a Vogue dance dip. *Ansista* combines a non-binary, African mahogany torso with a face inspired by the female Pho mask of the Chokwe peoples in Congo. The figure is additionally queered through contemporary assemblage: a lower body cut from a life-like sex doll, outfitted in drag padding; a custom wig, acrylic nails, and high heel boots; and a dress form that fuses traditional African and drag ballroom aesthetics. Together, the collaged and sculptural

figures draw from Queer, Black, and Ballroom life itself, pointing to the future utopias that these lives represent and inspire.

At the conceptual center of *To Be Real*, is Newsome's "child," *Being*. The cloud-based, A.I. being's programming has been populated with the works of radical authors, revolutionaries, and theorists such as Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, and bell hooks, among others. Housed apart from the main exhibition space in its own gallery, *Being* acts as the critical heart or brain of the exhibition, exploring ideas about individual agency and historical oppression.

"Historically, Black people function inadvertently as queer objects," says Newsome. "When we came to America, we weren't human beings but things of some sort, neither occupying the classic subject nor object position. As a result, we occupied a peculiar non-binary space of 'being' which has disturbing analogies to the queer space inhabited by robots."

In films and television shows like *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator*, *Ex Machina*, *Prometheus*, and *West World*, robots exist, like enslaved peoples, to obey orders. Often, they find ways to break those orders, emerging as subjects in their own struggle for freedom. Newsome invites us to converse with his *Being* as we seek to understand the meaning of "being human" against a history that keeps certain peoples outside the accepted realm of humanity. Built within a philosophical framework of post-colonial and Black liberation, Newsome's *Being* interrogates the dehumanization of our world via emerging technologies and an increasing awareness of anti-Blackness, intersectional identity, and the frames for human agency. *Being* is the first generation of Newsome's 2019 LACMA Art + Technology Lab Grant project.

"Newsome's vibrant world-making places people and performance at the heart of his work. His collages, sculptures, and videos highlight figures in dynamic motion," FMCAC Director of Arts Programming & Partnerships Frank Smigiel notes. "In *To Be Real*, the artist presents these elements within a total environment. The viewer enters the show and the field of action too. There's no 'just looking' – you're in the mix and in the dialogue."

"For over 40 years, Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture has been at the forefront of inviting artists from all backgrounds to share their experiences and perspectives", says FMCAC Executive Director Rich Hillis. "*To Be Real* continues that inclusive history and elicits deep dialogue about identity and subjugation in modern society."

In addition to the exhibition, Newsome will serve as Distinguished Visiting Faculty for Spring 2020 at SFAI. His Collaborative Projects seminar draws on *To Be Real* to engage students in a wide-ranging examination of collaging strategies - from paper to video, sculpture to sound, performance to creative coding - while exploring current discourses on race, sexuality, gender, performance, and art history. The class will also provide students with the opportunity to experiment with custom Rashaad Newsome Studio technology, including the artist's work-in-progress, *Being*.

"Newsome is making radical moves with art that explores machine learning and queer politics," says Gordon Knox President of SFAI. "We need artists like Newsome to put these issues of identity and performance into contexts that are usually understood in much more limited ways. In a world where computer vision is programmed to render black bodies invisible we often see society's worst biases baked into the technology. Newsome shows us better ways to see the possibilities."

Exhibition Information

The exhibition will be on view January 10 – February 23, 2020 in the SFAI Main Gallery on Pier 2 at FMCAC. Wednesday to Sunday, 11am to 7pm. Admission is free and open to the public.

Open concurrently with *To Be Real*, the Museum of the African Diaspora's presentation of Rashaad Newsome's STOP PLAYING IN MY FACE! and ICON continues through March 1, 2020. The exhibition focuses on video works inspired by the origins and continued dynamism of Vogue, a dance phenomenon that emerged from Harlem's queer ballroom scene. For more information, visit [MoAD](#).

Parallel Programming

In conjunction with the opening week of *To Be Real* and of the FOG and Untitled art fairs, FMCAC and SFAI will present Newsome's immersive performance *Running* (January 17 – 18). In this abstract portrait of soul, composed for light and voice, three singers explore the "vocal run": a musicology term for a rapid series of ascending or descending musical notes, usually improvised and sung in quick succession. With the vocalists Kyron El, Aaron Marcellus, and Devin Michael from its New York City premier, *Running* features an original score composed by the artist, incorporating samples of vocal runs by Aretha Franklin, Patti LaBelle, Whitney Houston, Marvin Gaye, B.B. King, James Brown, and Kelly Price, among others.

Running will be presented January 17th and 18th at 7pm in Gallery 308. Tickets are \$20/15 seniors, students, members and are now available for sale at www.fortmason.org/event/newsome-running

Exhibition Organization

Rashaad Newsome: *To Be Real* is jointly presented by Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture and San Francisco Art Institute.

To Be Real was originally commissioned by New York Live Arts' Live Feed Residency Program in collaboration with Philadelphia Photo Arts Center, with generous support from The William Penn Foundation and De Buck Gallery. The Live Feed creative residency program supports and nurtures the development of new work with residencies and commissions generated over two years. Lead support of Live Feed is generously provided by Partners for New Performance and Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

About the Artist

Rashaad Newsome is a multidisciplinary artist whose work brings together collage, sculpture, film, music, computer programming, and performance to form an altogether new field. He pulls intuitively from the world of advertising, the Internet, Black and Queer culture to produce counter-hegemonic works. Using diasporic traditions of improvisation and collage, Newsome crafts compositions that walk a tightrope among intersectionality, social practice, and abstraction.

Newsome lives and works in New York City. He was born in 1979 in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he received a BFA in Art History at Tulane University in 2001. In 2004 he received a certificate of study in Digital Post Production from Film/Video Arts Inc. (NYC). In 2005 he studied MAX/MSP Programming at Harvestworks Digital Media Art Center (NYC). He has exhibited and performed in galleries, museums, institutions, and festivals throughout the world, including The Studio Museum in Harlem (NYC); The National Museum of African American History and Culture (DC); The Whitney Museum (NYC); Brooklyn Museum (NYC); MoMAPS1 (NYC); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (CA); New Orleans Museum of Art

(LA); Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris); The Garage Center for Contemporary Culture (Moscow); and MUSA (Vienna). Newsome's work is in numerous public collections including The Studio Museum in Harlem (NYC); Whitney Museum of American Art (NYC); The Brooklyn Museum (NYC); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (CA); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (CA); McNay Art Museum (TX); The Chazen Museum of Art (WI); The New Britain Museum of American Art (CT); and The National Museum of African American History and Culture (DC). In 2010 he participated in the *Whitney Biennial* (NYC), and in 2011 the *Greater New York* exhibition at MoMAPS1 (NYC). His many honors and awards include a 2019 BAVC MediaMaker Fellowship; a 2018 William Penn Foundation Grant; the 2018/2019 Live Feed Creative Residency at New York Live Arts; a 2017/2018 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant; a 2017 Rush Arts Gold Rush Award; the 2016 Artist-in-Residence at the Tamarind Institute, NM; the 2014 Headlands Center for the Arts Visiting Artist Residency; a 2011 Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award; a 2010 Urban Artist Initiative Individual Artist Grant; and a 2009 Rema Hort Mann Foundation Visual Arts Grant.

About Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture (FMCAC)

A decommissioned military installation converted into a nonprofit cultural center, FMCAC hosts a lively mix of arts, educational, and cultural programming. Each year FMCAC provides more than \$2 million in support to local arts organizations, enabling groups to produce diverse and innovative artworks at the historic waterfront campus. With a nearly four-decade history as an arts and culture destination, FMCAC is now focused on reinvigorating its programming and amenities to better engage the evolving Bay Area creative community. Central to this new vision is the commissioning and presentation of adventurous and unconventional artworks best realized in nontraditional or historic settings. For more information, visit fortmason.org.

About San Francisco Art Institute

Founded in 1871, SFAI is one of the country's oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher education in the practice and study of contemporary art. As a diverse community of working artists and scholars, SFAI provides students with a rigorous education in the arts and preparation for a life in the arts through an immersive studio environment, an integrated liberal arts and art history curriculum, and critical engagement with the world. Committed to educating artists who will shape the future of art, culture, and society, SFAI fosters creativity and original thinking in an open, experimental, and interdisciplinary context. SFAI is accredited by the Western Association of Colleges and Schools (WASC) and the National Association of Art and Design (NASAD) and is a member of the Association of Independent Arts and Design Colleges (AICAD) and has campuses at 800 Chestnut St. and at Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture. For more information, visit www.sfai.edu.

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