

# The Museum of Modern Art

## MoMA PRESENTS A NEW LARGE-SCALE INSTALLATION BY ADAM PENDLETON, MARKING THE ARTIST'S FIRST SOLO SHOW AT A NEW YORK INSTITUTION

### *Adam Pendleton: Who Is Queen?*

Sep 18, 2021–February 21, 2022

Floor 2, The Donald and Catherine Marron Family Atrium

**NEW YORK, July 8, 2021**— The Museum of Modern Art presents *Adam Pendleton: Who Is Queen?*, a large-scale installation on view in The Donald and Catherine Marron Family Atrium from September 18, 2021, through February 21, 2022. Adam Pendleton's (American, born 1984) paintings, drawings, and other works use linguistic, political, and historical material in unlikely forms and configurations to explore the relationship between Blackness, abstraction, and the avant-garde. *Who Is Queen?* questions the traditional notion of the museum as a repository, and addresses the influence that mass movements, including those of the last decade, such as Black Lives Matter and Occupy, could have on the exhibition as a form. Drawing on the work of figures as disparate as pianist Glenn Gould, political philosopher Michael Hardt, and activist and public theologian Ruby Sales, this monumental installation sits at the nexus of abstraction and politics. *Adam Pendleton: Who Is Queen?* is organized by Stuart Comer, The Lonti Ebers Chief Curator of Media and Performance, with Danielle A. Jackson, former Curatorial Assistant, and Gee Wesley, Curatorial Assistant, and with the support of Veronika Molnar, Intern, Department of Media and Performance.

Developed over the past decade, *Who Is Queen?* transforms the Marron Atrium into an monumental floor-to-ceiling installation consisting of three vertical, black scaffold towers that each span five stories. This construction, visible from every vantage point within the Museum that overlooks the Atrium, extends outward into the Museum and reframes visitors' experience of the space. The modular scaffolding systems are built from four basic units designed to resemble the balloon framing typical of American domestic buildings, and they serve as supports for layers of exhibited artwork: paintings, drawings, a textile work, sculptures, moving images, and a sound piece. Forming an alternative structure for the examination of history as an endless variation, the installation is a Gesamtkunstwerk—a total work of art—for the 21st century.

"*Who Is Queen?* is undergirded by a kind of Afro-optimism balanced by an abiding Afro-pessimism," said Pendleton. "It is optimistic in a deeply American sense of the word, and pessimistic along those same lines. That is to say, it is not black or white, and locates each within the other. It articulates the ways in which we simultaneously possess and are possessed by contradictory ideals and ideas."

*“Who Is Queen?”* is Adam Pendleton’s most ambitious project to date, interweaving the many strands of deep research and experimentation that have distinguished his career,” said Comer. “Working across poetic, spatial, architectural, linguistic, painterly, sonic, cinematic, and political means, this ‘total artwork’ reverse-engineers the idea of the museum, breaking down entrenched models of history into building blocks that can be remixed into new possibilities for the future.”

The artwork hanging on the scaffolds—on the front, in between, and jutting out from the sides—form a spatial collage. In his paintings, Pendleton creates layered fields of unresolved text, marks, and gestures, built up from spray-painted and brushed “originals” that have been photographed, photocopied, and enlarged for screenprinting. His drawings feature sketches and visual “notes,” as well as images of African art and other reproductions from books in his library. The artist’s visual language challenges legibility and sense-making, continuously writing and overwriting itself.

Sculptures composed of simple black lines and shapes, as well as three moving-image works, are also installed on the scaffolds. The moving-image component directly integrates the aesthetics and architecture of protest into the installation, including: footage of the embattled Robert E. Lee monument in Richmond, Virginia; depictions of scenes from Resurrection City, the ad hoc protest site built in 1968 on the National Mall in Washington, DC, dedicated to freedom and the elimination of poverty; and a new video portrait of the queer theorist Jack Halberstam.

A sound collage incorporating speech and music plays throughout the space. The collage functions like a “machine,” regulated by an algorithmic score that collects, digests, and recombines fragments from the past to generate new forms. The work is anchored by recordings of Amiri Baraka, Hahn Rowe, and a 2014 phone recording of a Black Lives Matter demonstration in Manhattan. These excerpts are interwoven with music by Jace Clayton, Julius Eastman, Laura Rivers, Frederic Rzewski, Linda and Sonny Sharrock, and Hildegard Westerkamp.

A series of conversations organized and moderated by Pendleton will be published on [moma.org](http://moma.org) on a monthly basis. Fragments of these dialogues will be introduced iteratively into the sound installation, periodically renewing the combination of looped tracks and sound fragments playing simultaneously. In so doing, the audio component places the formal mechanics of musical counterpoint—the folding and unfolding of simultaneous voices—at the heart of the installation. Counterpoint, for Pendleton, is a means to affirm complexity and invent a space for aesthetic and political experimentation rooted in difference.

**DIGITAL OFFERINGS:**

As part of *Who Is Queen?*, the exhibition will feature a series of five corresponding recorded conversations between pairs of participants (writers, philosophers, poets, musicians, etc.), organized and moderated by Pendleton, and released monthly as an audio series on [moma.org](http://moma.org). The participants include author Lynne Tillman and theorist Jack Halberstam; political philosopher Michael Hardt and theorist Joshua Chambers-Letson; musicians Tyshawn Sorey and Matana Roberts; poet Susan Howe and author Alexis Pauline Gumbs; and poet Simone White and activist and public theologian Ruby Sales. Audio from these exchanges will be successively incorporated into the sound collage that is part of the installation in the Atrium. In addition to the complete conversations, a snapshot of the audio score that fills the Atrium will also be available for listeners online as a continuously looping streaming file, so that virtual audiences can, at any time, hear the sound piece that pairs with the installation.

**VIRTUAL CINEMA:****Modern Monday: An Evening with Adam Pendleton and Jack Halberstam**

**Mon, Sep 27, 7:00 p.m.–Mon, Oct 11, 12:00 p.m. Online.**

Join artist Adam Pendleton for the premiere of his most recent film, *So We Moved: A Portrait of Jack Halberstam*, followed by a conversation between Pendleton and the subject of the film, theorist Jack Halberstam. Throughout Halberstam's intellectual life, the author and gender theorist has reframed urgent questions about what Pendleton refers to as "the validity of queer theory with respect to the most pressing political and social movements of the past decade." *So We Moved: A Portrait of Jack Halberstam* is the latest in Pendleton's series of video portraits of artists, dancers, and activists. Previous subjects include Kyle Abraham, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Lorraine O'Grady, and Yvonne Rainer. This new work was conceived as part of the MoMA exhibition *Adam Pendleton: Who Is Queen?*. This program, moderated by Stuart Comer, The Lonti Ebers Chief Curator of Media and Performance, is presented as a live stream on September 27 at 7:00 p.m. ET and is available for streaming through October 11.

**PUBLICATION:**

Published to accompany the exhibition, *Adam Pendleton: Who Is Queen? A Reader* serves as a primer and a handbook, building on a series of readers the artist has published (beginning with *Black Dada Reader* in 2017). It includes photocopies of texts that have been critical to Pendleton's project, including the work of Glenn Gould, Michael Hardt, and Ruby Sales, alongside images of Resurrection City and Pendleton's own drawings, a roundtable, and a commissioned essay by Mario Gooden. 272 pages, 235 b&w illustrations. Hardcover, \$45. ISBN: 978-1-63345-110-0. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and available at MoMA stores and online at [store.moma.org](http://store.moma.org). Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOKID.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson in the rest of the world.

**ARTIST BIO:**

Adam Pendleton is an artist who lives and works in New York City. His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at institutions including Kunstverein, Amsterdam (2009), The Kitchen, New York (2010), Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2017), Baltimore Museum of Art (2017), MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge (2018), Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston (2020), Le Consortium, Dijon (2020), and The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2021). His 2016 solo exhibition *Becoming*

*Imperceptible* was organized by the Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, and traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, before closing at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland.

In 2017, Koenig Books published Pendleton's *Black Dada Reader*, a collection of documents and essays from various sources that relate to the conceptual framework of Black Dada. *The New York Times* named the Reader as one of the best art books of 2017. In 2021, Pendleton's publishing imprint DABA, with Koenig as co-publisher, will release *Pasts, Futures, and Aftermaths: Revisiting the Black Dada Reader*. This sequel builds upon the constellation of writers, artists, filmmakers, and philosophers in the first volume.

**SPONSORSHIP:**



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