

**musical**  
NEW VIDEO ART & SONIC STRATEGIES  
**thinking**

**Accessibility  
Brochure**

SENSORY MAP

VISUAL DESCRIPTIONS WITH  
WAYFINDING

GALLERY TEXTS WITH ASL  
TRANSLATIONS

**SAAM**  
Smithsonian  
American Art  
Museum

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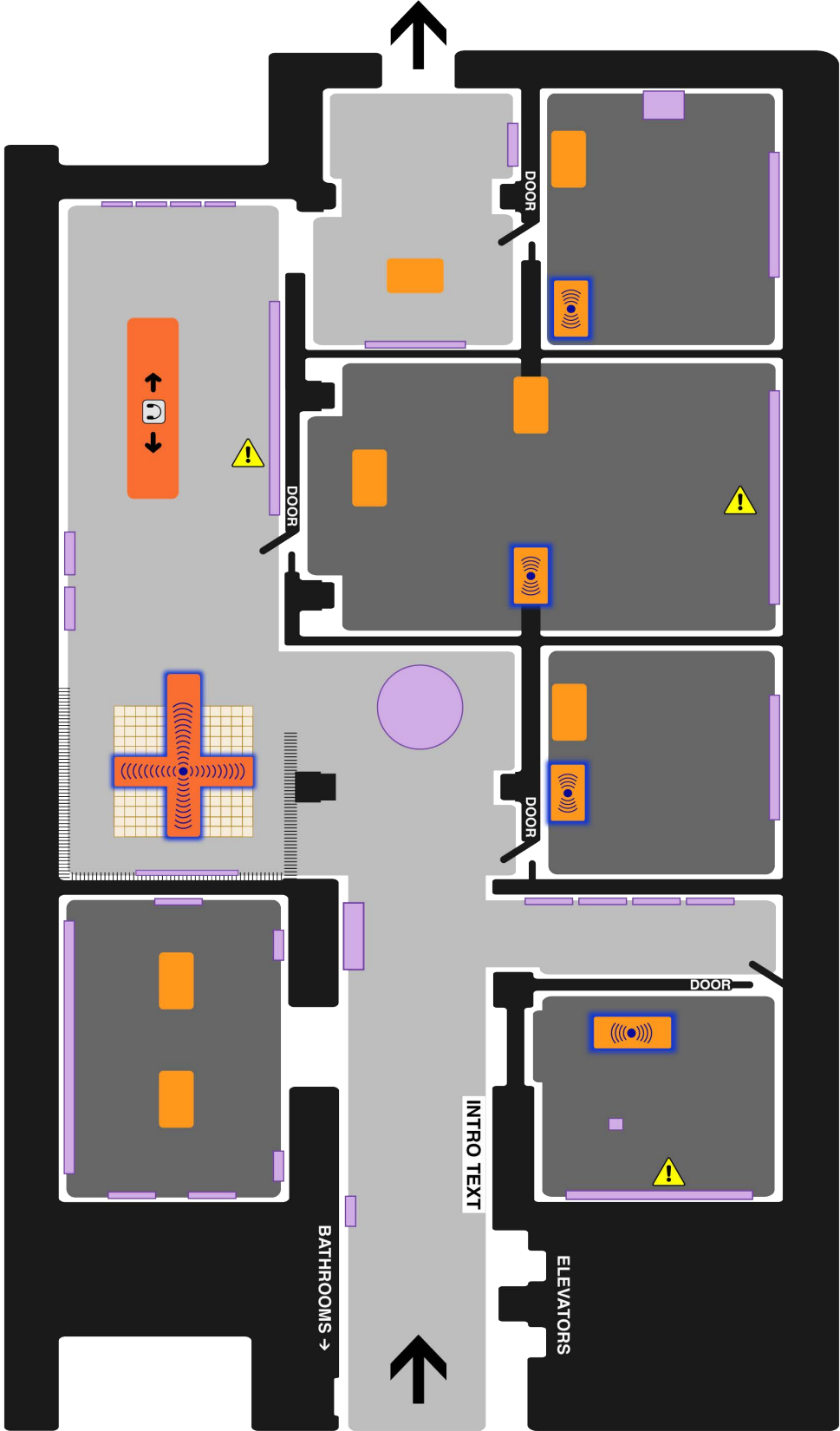
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# Sensory Map

Turn phone sideways while viewing on mobile device

**Key:**

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|    |    |    |
| Haptic with vibrations<br>(with blue lights)  | Headphones  | Content Alert   |
|   |   |   |
| Enter / Exit  | Interactive   | Seating   |
|  |  |  |
| Light reflective tinsel   | Well lit / some sound   | Low light / loud sound  |
|  |   |   |
| Walls   |   |   |



## Visual Description (Sensory Map)

Overhead architectural style view of the rectangular exhibition space. Walkways are shaded light gray and are coded as “well lit / some sound” in the sensory key. Across the top are four rectangular rooms shaded dark gray to signal “low light / loud sound.” There is also a similar room in the bottom right. In each room are orange rectangles to signal seating. The seat furthest to the right in each gallery, except the first gallery on the bottom right, has a sound-wave haptic symbol and blue light halo to indicate vibrational seating. The artwork in each gallery is coded light purple. Along the entrance walkway (indicated with an arrow) to the right, the intro text, elevators, and bathrooms are labeled. The interactive artworks are labeled dark orange, specifically a bench with headphones on it and a square dance floor with a haptic T-shaped walkway. The light reflective tinsel surrounding the dance floor on three sides is also indicated through striped lines. Content warnings, a yellow triangle with a black exclamation point, are in the second gallery from the top left, the work on the outside wall of that gallery, the top gallery furthest to the right, and the work outside the bottom right gallery.

# Exhibition Entrance and First Artwork

## Wayfinding

As you enter the gallery, there is a neon sign and the exhibition title printed large on the wall to your left. On the wall to your right is a large introductory text. Here and for all future wall texts, there is a QR code at the bottom center of the text block.

## Wall Text

### **Musical Thinking: New Video Art and Sonic Strategies**

Video and music have been sister art forms since the 1960s, when musicians were among the first to take up video cameras and define a new creative field that also shapes experiences over time. Today, artists from all backgrounds use musical strategies to create powerful video artworks that address personal as well as shared aspects of contemporary life.

Music is central—not an afterthought—to the moving-image work of the twenty-first-century artists featured here. They bring musical thinking to their creative process—employing scores, thematic improvisation, and performer interpretation—and to their selection of songs, styles, and structures that embed meanings from musical traditions. Rich with cultural references, their works use music to call up memories, provoke insight, and invite embodied engagement. By weaving visual and sonic layers, the artists draw out connections between ideas, histories, and people. Designing soundscapes that wrap around the space, their music-infused works transform individuals into communities that share a moment, move in sync, and feel their way into complex topics through senses that exceed words. In the galleries ahead, artists explore foundational ideas of the United States and contemporary understandings of identity through rhythm, counterpoint and a chorus of voices, casting the interrelation of past, present, and future as a form of remixing.

Musical Thinking celebrates recently acquired video works by Raven Chacon, Mariam Ghani and Erin Ellen Kelly, Martine Gutierrez, Arthur Jafa, Christine Sun Kim, Simone Leigh and Liz Magic Laser, and Cauleen Smith, plus existing holdings by ADÁL, which are paired with related prints, drawings, photographs, sculptures, and sound art by these artists. As you move through the artists' distinct spaces, we invite you to experience musical thinking across their many forms of creativity.

## Wayfinding

On the same wall as the intro text, about seven feet further along, there is the Gallery Experience description, with a QR code bottom center for a sensory map and access resources.

## Wall Text

### A Note on the Gallery Experience

Just as there are many ways music informs art-making, there are many ways music reaches into our lives. The Museum partnered with Motion Light Lab at Gallaudet University to create a layered experience of this exhibition available to all, including Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences. Single benches or those to the right in each gallery, indicated with blue light around the base, and the central dance floor conduct enhanced vibrations to allow physical appreciation of each video's unique soundtrack. Audio notes on the wall or open captions below the projection are included for each installation. QR codes offer ASL translations for the interpretive texts and written verbal descriptions of that section for those who use screen readers.

Please note: Artworks in the show include mature content and evoke a wide range of emotions. Interpretive texts have individual content alerts so audiences can determine their preferred path. The enclosed galleries may also have significant volume and light-level shifts; the dance floor pulses light.

## **Exhibition credit line**

***Musical Thinking: New Video Art and Sonic Strategies*** is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Generous support has been provided by:

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This exhibition received federal support from the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative Pool, administered by the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum, and the Asian Pacific American Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center.

## **Wayfinding**

The first work hangs high on the wall to the left when facing the exhibition title wall.

## Wall Text

The neon alternately highlights “I will light up your life,” a play on the title refrain from a popular 1970s ballad, or “I will light you up,” warning words from the Texas trooper who pulled Sandra Bland from her car during a traffic stop in 2015. When Bland, a Black woman who had been on her way to a new job the morning of her arrest, was found hanging in a jail cell days later, authorities ruled it a suicide. Depending on which phrase is most familiar, some audiences may first be charmed, others immediately disturbed. How does Smith play on our expectations and emotions by threading romantic lyrics and a violent threat?

## Artwork Label

Cauleen Smith, born 1967, Riverside, CA

*Light up My Life (For Sandra Bland)*, 2020, neon, MDF, paint, faceted hematite, and aluminum

New Britain Museum of American Art, 2021.3, General Purchase Fund

## Visual Description

A wall-mounted sign with neon words that flickers between two phrases: “I Will Light You Up,” and “I Will Light Up Your Life.” Vertically arranged, the words “I will light” and “up” shine a bright red light. The words “you” and “your life” alternate in blue light. A tangle of wires comes out from the black background panel and loops to a plug on the wall.

## Wayfinding

As you continue into the exhibition, the entrance to the first video room is on your left. The wall texts and QR code are located to the left of the entryway, approximately four feet into the room.



# Mariam Ghani and Erin Ellen Kelly

## Wall Text

In their collaborative series, *Performed Places* (2006–ongoing), Ghani’s filmmaking and Kelly’s choreography excavate layers of memory and meaning enmeshed in historic sites. Through archival research and by responding to physical remnants of a given space’s former life, they develop movement, narrative, and video choreography that reanimates the past.

*When the Spirits Moved Them, They Moved* engages Pleasant Hill, Kentucky’s Shaker Village, a nineteenth-century settlement where the preserved architecture and landscaping convey Shaker spirituality. Rooted in principles of simplicity, shared resources, and racial and gender equality, Shaker communities offer a utopian alternative to the primary settler-colonial values that shaped the United States at its founding.

Ghani and Kelly began with first-person accounts from the community’s archives, assembling a textual score that guided a daylong performance. Through hymns that become rhythmic stomping and folk dances that become frenetic movements, the work traces the emotional and spiritual arc of weekly worship meetings in which spiritual gifts overtake believers’ bodies. In the three-channel video, this performance is distilled from twelve hours into the choreographic journey shown on the central screen. On either side, mirrored shots of the serene environs emphasize the ordered design of Shaker life outside these chaotic convenings.

Projected life-size with surround sound, the video invites audiences to imaginatively step into this space and join this transformative gathering. The related photographs invite slower reflection on Shaker ways of being-in-common.

## Artwork Label

Mariam Ghani, born 1978, New York City and Erin Ellen Kelly, born 1976, St. Louis, MO  
*When the Spirits Moved Them, They Moved*, 2019, three-channel video (color, sound); 23:36 min.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase, 2021.23.1

With dancers Lauren Argo, Theresa Bautista, John Brewer, Amanda Carrick, Lauren Frederick, Lizzie Gulick, Erin Ellen Kelly, Faryn Kelly, Rob Morrow, Sanjay Saverimuttu, Ashley Thursby, Philip Velinov, Natalia Velinova, and singer Twana Patrick.

For full film credits, see: <https://www.mariamghani.com/work/1288>.

and

*Diptych (Bend in the Wall and Theresa at the Door)*

*Meeting House, Morning*

*Triptych (Two Houses, Two Shadows, Ashley Fallen to the Floor, and Last Cow in the Field)*

*Triptych (Trees Above, Amanda Abandoned, and Stones Below)*

*Benched #1*

All photos 2019, dye transfer prints on Dibond, from the series *When the Spirits Moved Them, They Moved*

Courtesy of the artists and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York

## **Visual Description**

As you step into the room, you face a central projection on the far wall. Along the walls to the left and right are mounted photographs, and the main wall text is to the left of the door. To the left and right of the doorway are benches oriented toward the projection wall.

The main video work, *When The Spirits Moved Them, They Moved*, is composed of three horizontal projections lined up to make up one long image that fills the wall. The left and right videos are mirror images of each other. They show matching overviews and close-ups of a preserved nineteenth-century village with white and yellow wooden buildings, bright green manicured grass, and lush trees with textured bark. The central video follows thirteen dancers as they warm up in a field and then walk into a two-story meeting house. They get dressed upstairs and then come down into the bright open interior where they perform together from morning to late afternoon. An older white woman sings while walking around the group. The dancers, dressed in all red, white, or yellow, trace coordinated movement patterns, and then begin to sway, shake, and swoop. They roll on the floor, form a circle and improvise wild dances in the center. At times, an audience is shown sitting on benches and clapping along. Finally, the dancers lie still on the floor and then sprawl around the room, leaning their bodies against the meeting house's wooden benches, windows, and open doorways. The video ends with a montage of the empty building with sunlight slowly fading.

The photos that line the gallery are printed stills of the natural scenes of Shaker Village in Kentucky and dancers from the videos.

## Additional Artist-Provided Text

To the right of the section text is a smaller printed panel that reads:

*On Mother Ann's birthday the whole Society met at the Meeting House to celebrate the day. Like all Sabbaths in Shaker villages, a beautiful stillness pervaded. After the body of worshipers gathered into order, we commenced the services by one bow and opened the meeting by singing a hymn. All that were able united into ranks to step for the first song, then formed two circles for the march. At this time in a meeting it was usual to step quick and lively for two songs, sing two songs for the slow march, then two for the round dance with the circle unbroken. On this occasion the house was too crowded to march with convenience, so the dancing commenced in a promiscuous manner by the middle and young classes, and was attended with great power. The seats had to be taken out of the room to give place for the spirits to sing and dance, and the gifts and blessings of heaven were poured forth by the heavenly Orders in great abundance. We received gifts of freedom and simplicity, life and zeal, balls of love and blessing, sparks of holy fire, palms of victory, staves of strength, crowns of love, mantles and robes of wisdom, chains of union, and numerous other gifts of a similar kind, calculated to strengthen our souls and fill us with life, which continued to flow almost incessantly throughout the meeting. Sometimes when an individual would receive a bush or other emblem filled with quickening power or holy fire, we would all unite and shake heartily. A great many were wrought upon by an irresistible power, which caused the assembly to shake and reel and toss like the trees of the forest when shaken with the wind. The involuntary exercise became so violent that we discontinued ranks and all united in the dance, and one was moved upon by the departed spirit of a female of some other Nation, and all her movements and motions seemed to prove she had lived to a very old age. There was some quiet sleepy kind of spirit took possession of Illinois Green, which caused her to sit about on the floor apparently asleep for some time, then all of a sudden she sprang to her feet and whirled and jumped about the room as tho she was affrightened into a fit. About the middle of the meeting, Emma McCormack was possessed by a spirit and lay helpless for some time, continually hollowing, then suddenly sprang to her feet and danced round the room very swiftly for a short spell. After this Emma broke out in the most melodious strains that the human mind could conceive of, singing songs new to us, that appeared to be from the Spiritual world. Much praise was danced and sung that day, and towards the conclusion we received from Holy Mother Wisdom, each one a drop of her pure love ... Some of those that were there say it was one of the liveliest meetings they were ever in.*

*Intro text adapted from:*

*A Brief account of the proceedings of the day, and the meeting of the Society at Pleasant Hill, Ky. December 25th, 1845. / Western Reserve Historical Society VIII A-49*

*June, 1847 / Spiritual journal, Pleasant Hill archives*

*Monday, March 8, 1852 / Spiritual journal, Pleasant Hill archives*

*Saturday, February 14, 1857, and March 1, Sabbath 1857 / Filson Historical Society, Bohon Shaker Collection, Volume 11 of 40, "Journal Kept by James Levi Balance, April 1, 1854-March 31, 1860"*

*THE LORD'S DAY, MAY 25TH/ JUNE 1st [1873] / "A Journey to Kentucky in the Year 1873," Elder Henry C. Blinn"*

## **Wayfinding**

As you exit the gallery room, make a left turn. A few steps forward is a display case that protrudes from the wall with the next works. On the other side of that case, about thirteen feet from the last gallery, is the section text with QR code.

# ADÁL

## Wall Text

Across decades of multimedia work, ADÁL foregrounded music as exemplary of a “Nuyorican” culture that keeps Puerto Rican roots alive in New York, while reinventing them to powerfully contribute to the fabled melting pot of America.

In *El Puerto Rican Passport*, ADÁL and collaborators emphasize imagination as key to overcoming the colonizing forces that have blocked self-determination for the island. The central manifesto points to forms of creativity that transcend borders, especially music and dance, as evidence of the independence and resilience of an already existent “sovereign state of mind.”

ADÁL’s video sculpture responds to *West Side Story*, the 1961 film adaptation of the 1957 Broadway musical. The creative teams of both the show and film had no connection to Puerto Rican communities, yet their recognizable songs and choreography introduced stereotypical Puerto Rican characters, mostly performed by white actors, to U.S. audiences and stubbornly embedded them in pop culture. Manipulating *West Side Story* film footage as his title suggests, ADÁL adds the historical context Hollywood left out. Documentary clips show the economic and political conditions that pushed Puerto Ricans to migrate to the continental U.S. Performances by talented Nuyoricans are seen and heard, in particular jazz legend Tito Puente’s propulsive percussion that fills the soundtrack. Police radio disrupts the music, underscoring the real dangers of fictional misrepresentation, and the well-worn suitcase suggests the personal costs of these movements of music and people.

*Please note, the video-sculpture addresses police and gang violence.*

## Artwork Label

ADÁL, born Adalberto Maldonado, 1948, Utuado, Puerto Rico, died 2020, San Juan, Puerto Rico  
*El Puerto Rican Passport, El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico: Adál Maldonado, 1994*  
*El Puerto Rican Passport, El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico: Luciana Alexandra del Rio de la Serna, 1994, issued 2012*

*El Puerto Rican Passport, El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico: Koki Kiki, 1994, issued 2005*

All lithography with photograph in staple-bound booklet

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 2013.19.1–.3

and

*West Side Story Upside Down, Backwards, Sideways and Out of Focus (La Maleta de Futriaco Martínez)*, 2002, suitcase, flatscreen LCD monitor, single-channel digital video (color, sound); 12:51 min.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2013.20

## Visual Description

A rectangular table-height case displays, from left to right, three passport-like booklets and a small suitcase.

The three printed passports are about five inches high and three and a half inches wide. The central booklet is closed, showing a black cover with beige print of capital letters spelling “EL PASSPORT” at the top, a domino symbol in the middle, and “El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico” below. The leftmost booklet is open to beige identity pages, with a blurry photo of a small brown frog, and black type giving a passport number, the frog’s name as “Kiki, Koki,” *nacionalidad* as “puertorriqueno,” and the issue date of 2005 at the bottom. The rightmost passport is open to central pages with black type. At the top left, the title reads “MANIFESTO: Notes on El Puerto Rican Embassy,” and the subsequent text block starts, “We are a Sovereign State of Mind,” and toward the end notes, “And why shouldn’t we be Independent? We know how to sing And dance And paint And write poetry And educate each other.”

On the far right, a worn brown leather box suitcase is standing on its side. There are metal clasps and a handle at the top, and faded stickers in the top left and bottom right corners. The center of the suitcase is embedded with a screen, about the size of a deck of cards, playing an original video that combines various sources of found footage. The first minute shows people in a 1950s suburban garden, then at a wedding around a bride and groom. A grainy shot of a plane taxiing on a runway is intercut with the artwork’s title and brief credits. Then scenes from the 1961 film *West Side Story* take over—actors dressed as fifties’ teen gangsters of Puerto Rican or European descent face off in choreographed fights and dances, on city streets and on the basketball court. The footage jarringly switches from black and white to color to inverted values, becomes staticky or blurred, and plays backward and upside down, repeating aggressive clichés within this chaotic, distorted storyline. Interspersed are archival clips, some capturing Nuyorican Tito Rodríguez’s mambo band surrounded by dancers, and others showing Puerto Rican workers traveling and isolated. At the four-and-a-half-minute mark, a Puerto Rican woman in a black dress sings “En Mi Viejo San Juan,” a song about longing for home. Projected behind her is ADÁL’s edit of *West Side Story*. Around six minutes, during the male voice-over, footage of sick workers dominates, before the singer returns. At the eight-and-a-half-minute mark, edits from *West Side Story* again fill the screen, now focusing on the dramatic end of the movie. Star-crossed lovers Tony and Maria dance, kill, and cry. At eleven minutes, overlaying actress Rita Moreno’s face, red text reads “Carajo! Vayanse de Vieques ya...and on the way out

tell Tony that Maria is dead, Chino la mato for treason...” Tony is then shot dead and mourned as big text reading ADIOS overlays the scenes. At the twelve-minute mark, the screen goes black and reads “El End” before showing longer credits.

## **Wayfinding**

Directly behind you is a hallway that showcases the next works. The hallway is straight, with framed works hung in a line on the wall to the left, with a railing of printed pages protruding at an angle below them. The section text with QR code is approximately thirty-five feet away at the very end of the hall, encouraging a visit to the video room before spending time with the hallway works.

# Raven Chacon

## Wall Text

Trained as a composer, Chacon (Diné) often starts from musically notated scores to create conceptually rich artworks across creative categories. Since scores are inherently fluid, even when they take fixed form in a video or print, the works based on them retain the possibility for further interpretation, collaboration, and reanimation in new contexts.

A performance of his 2001 composition of the same name, the 2015 video-installation *Report* (to the right), recasts guns as musical instruments, rather than as instruments of violence. Having no flexibility in tone, pitch, or volume, the firearms used in Chacon's score create a sonic complexity through the rhythmic staggering of different caliber shots. Location, casting, and framing for each performance, however, dramatically shape understandings of the shooters and their actions. In this video, musicians of various backgrounds and genders fire across a New Mexican landscape, offering musical resistance to the myth of an uninhabited American West and a reminder that gunfire has long been the soundtrack of this land.

In his print portfolio series *For Zitkála-Šá* (to the left), Chacon recognizes Zitkála-Šá (Yankton-Dakota, 1876–1938), an Indigenous and women's rights advocate and the first Native composer to use Western musical notation. The series of score-portraits celebrates contemporary Native women musicians in his circle. Each striking graphic is accompanied by performance instructions, inviting all to imagine how they might activate this legacy.

*Please note: The gallery to the right features the sights and sounds of extended gunfire.*

Audio Note: Opens with sounds of wind and rustling paper followed by silence, a count off, and then a rhythmic staggering of pops, bangs, and wind noises in the pauses between volleys, which can be felt through the bench.

## Artwork Label

Raven Chacon, born 1977, Fort Defiance, AZ

*Report*, 2001/2015, single-channel video (color, sound; 3:48 min.), and printed score shown on music stand

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2020.61A-C



## Visual Description

To the right of the section text is a doorway into a darkened video room. There is a bench to your right and the video projection filling the far facing wall. When seated on the bench, the view of the bottom of the screen is slightly obstructed by a music stand with sheet music of the score in the middle of the room. The video begins with people of mixed genders and backgrounds preparing a variety of gun models, adding bullets and checking the chambers of rifles, shotguns and pistols. They stand in line, each with a music stand holding sheet music before them, surrounded by scattered desert trees and bushes on dusty ground. After a man closest to the camera gives a soft countdown, they all raise their weapons and begin shooting. They appear focused, serious, and somber throughout. The camera cuts to various close ups and group views that silhouette them against an open blue sky. Intermittently, people reload their firearms. The screen is sometimes divided into two perspectives on the same scene, shown side by side, so it appears the mirrored line-ups are shooting at each other.

## Wayfinding

Exit the video room and make a left to return to the hallway. Now on your right is the long wall lined with the framed prints and a downward angled display railing approximately three feet above the floor.

## Artwork Label

Raven Chacon, born 1977, Fort Defiance, AZ

*For Laura Ortman*

*For Joy Harjo*

*For Ange Loft*

*For Candice Hopkins*

*For Olivia Shortt*

All from the series *For Zitkála-Šá*, 2019-20, lithograph on paper

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Julia D. Strong Endowment, 2022.7.1.1, .5, .10–.12

## Visual Description

Along the wall to the left of the section text are five letter-sized sheets of tan paper in individual black frames hung in a line. Each has its title in black block letters on the top right corner with a graphic design at the center. Below each print on the reader rail is a letter-size interpretive instructions for each of the scores provided by the artist. From closest to the wall text to the exit of the hallway, these show:

1. "For Olivia Shortt" written above a twelve-sided circular shape made up of twelve black arrows. Each arrow's thin base connects at an angle to the arrow before it so that each triangular tip points off into a different direction.

Instructions read:

"For a performer with any instrument surrounded by an audience of at least 11 people Start by facing any audience member. Watch or listen or learn from their actions or patterns of their dress or small sounds they make. Respond with sounds/music based on the information you receive. While nearing the end of that response, look to an audience member to the right of the previous one and read more information. Crossfade into a new music response. Continue pivoting clockwise, reading and responding until you have learned enough from the room. For seven of these responses, timbral effects should be used. At the four directions, play very quietly."

2. "For Candice Hopkins" written above nine thin gray lines arranged in six rows to form a diamond shape.

Instructions read:

At the top is a word.  
Translate it into two other languages.  
Then each of those into three other languages.  
Then those three into two.  
Then those two into your own.

3. “For Ange Loft” written above a four-row grid of sixteen symbols. The top two and bottom row have matching geometric shapes shaded differently. The third row has vertical arrows and horizontal lines.

Instructions read:

For voice and two drums

(Hand drum and one floor drum, on stand if needed)

Position the floor drum in the center of the room or performance space.

Hold the hand drum in your left or right hand and beater in the other.

Perform 8 sound events consecutively with seamless transitions.

A sound event is composed (pre-composed or at the moment) by choosing:

- 1.) One hand drum position from the first set of symbols: (above front, above left, above right, above behind, side front, side left, side right, side behind)
- 2.) One voice quality from the second set of symbols: (low voice, wavering voice, steady droning voice, high voice)
- 3.) A body position in relation to the floor drum from the third set of symbols: (in front of, to the left of, to the right of, behind)

A sound event is performed by alternating beating both drums with the beater (pendulum-like) while singing words of your choosing or vocables.

Oscillations caused by the drumbeat(s) affecting the voice, or by the voice influencing the tempo, are encouraged.

4. “For Joy Harjo” written above a grid of tiny symbols; the line at the top of the grid has slightly larger drawings of a U-curve, a right-arrow and a cross of directional arrows.

Instructions read:

To be performed with voice (sung, spoken or read) or played on any horn

Follow the sixteen diacritic event markings in any order or path.

Perform each sound event in one of three ways:

- Singing, reading or playing to yourself
- Singing, reading or playing to another
- Singing, reading or playing to everyone

The event inflections are:

- /voiceless / more rounded / half-long / aspirated/
- /long / lowered / long until / accented/
- /mid-centralized / extra short / creaky / labialized/
- /no audible release / noisy / breathy / raised/

If sung, spoken or read, any words may be used including the name of the diacritic.

5. "For Laura Ortman" written above dainty handwritten thin black music notes with extra flags arranged in four rows.

Instructions read:

For any stringed instrument

At each note of any duration, activate the string at the indicated speed (example: tremolo bowing, plucking, picking).

The direction of tremolo slashes also indicates one of two contrasting ways to embellish or approach the performing of the note.

When there is a smaller note above another note, activate the string in an even more different way at its indicated speed.

Or you may perform a secondary action at those times, related or unrelated to the playing of the instrument.

## **Wayfinding**

As you exit the hallway, with the prints on your right, take a right turn. On your right, about ten feet away, will be the next section text with QR code and a glass doorway to the next video room to the right of that text.

# Simone Leigh and Liz Magic Laser

## Wall Text

Leigh, who is best known as a sculptor, and Laser, whose practice often turns public and political speech into performance scripts, decided to creatively collaborate when they discovered a shared interest in the depictions of “female hysteria” in popular media. For the initial score for *Breakdown*, they gathered scenes from soap operas, plays, movies, and reality television shows featuring characters expressing psychological crisis. The artists then worked with Alicia Hall Moran, the renowned mezzo-soprano, to interpret direct quotes and poses from this research material, which developed into the final libretto and choreography for the video.

In her tour-de-force performance, Moran’s artistic range and improvisational ability transform the repetitive phrases and shrill cries of hysteria into musical layers that are associated with gravitas, heroism, and history. The overall operatic style aligns this Black woman’s emotional release with a traditionally elitist European high-art form, raising questions about which expressive displays are valued or criticized, and whose personal dramas are legitimized or dismissed. The performance also includes touches of the blues, jazz, and gospel hymns—African American musical forms that are themselves creative balms for the psychological and spiritual impacts of racial inequity and violence.

Though alone in a balcony, Moran points through the screen to us, her imagined audience. What role does our witnessing play when personal pain is presented for public consumption?

## Artwork Label

Simone Leigh, born 1968, Chicago, IL and Liz Magic Laser, born 1981, New York City  
*Breakdown*, 2011, single-channel digital video (color, sound); 9 min.

In collaboration with Alicia Hall Moran

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Samuel and Blanche Koffler Acquisition Fund, 2019.33.2

Video produced with Polemic Media. Producer, David E. Guinan. Director of Photography, Collin Kornfeind. Production Assistant, Fontaine Capel.

Special thanks to New Covenant Temple, New York, NY

## **Visual Description**

When you enter the video room, seats line the back wall to your left and the screen is directly in front of you. The haptic seat is the seat closest to the doorway, with blue light at its base. The video opens on an empty, dimly lit theater balcony. A Black woman in a black dress with bob haircut walks calmly down the steps of the aisle. The shot cuts to showing her from the knees up, facing the camera with her head hung low. She jerks her hands up to her face as she cries and begins to sing. Her face and body contort, moving through a wide range of deeply felt emotions that match her vocal gymnastics. At the five-minute mark, the shot changes so she is backlit by the theater's hanging white-candle chandelier, which is blurred in the background. Around seven minutes, the scene fades to black as she pauses her song. When the image returns, it is a long shot of her singing further up in the balcony aisle, barely visible in the darkness. Her arms gesture and her body wobbles and leans as if she might fall. At the end of her song, she walks up the stairs, exiting the balcony as the screen fades to black.

## **Wayfinding**

As you exit the video room, take a right turn. To the right of the video room exit is a support column. As you step out and continue to the right about sixteen feet, a sculpture is in the center of the walkway. There is textured tape surrounding the circular base for cane detection and to keep all visitors a safe distance from the piece.

## Wall Text

A brown-glazed stoneware torso sits atop a monumental raffia skirt or house-like structure. Combining body with object with architectural or found forms is a hallmark of Leigh's work, which centers an exploration of Black femme subjectivity.

Like much of Leigh's work, *Cupboard VIII* resonates with scholar Saidiya Hartman's idea of critical fabulation, through which imagined narratives can counter erasures in historical and archival records. Here, the figure's outstretched arms and the open jug mouth invite speculation on what sparked this expressive gesture and what remains unsaid.

## Artwork Label

Simone Leigh, born 1968, Chicago, IL

*Cupboard VIII*, 2018, stoneware, steel, raffia, Albany slip

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Bridgitt and Bruce Evans

## Visual Description

The sculpture towers over visitors, about ten feet high with most of the height created through a dome-shaped skirt that just brushes the floor and meets the ceramic torso about eight feet above. The skirt itself is made of layers of raffia, a light tan grassy dried palm leaf that looks similar to a thatched surface. Centered at the top of the skirt, a female upper body is modeled in brown stoneware with a glossy finish. A traditional-looking round jug angles forward, balanced on the figure's neck in place of a human head. Two arms reach out softly.

## Wayfinding

As you round the sculpture, to the left, there is a silver tinsel-lined gallery. If you turn to the left, ninety-degrees, you will be facing the video wall, and ahead is an elevated dance floor with a short ramp. When facing the video, the wall to the right, another nine feet away, has the next section text and QR code.

# Martine Gutierrez

## Wall Text

In her own words, Gutierrez is “driven to question how identity is formed, expressed, valued, and weighed as a woman, as a transwoman, as a Latinx woman, as a woman of indigenous descent, as a femme artist and maker.” Through videos, photographs, performances, installations, and self-released albums and magazines, she incisively plays with stereotypes and their repeated commodification.

*Clubbing* explores the coding and performance of gender binaries in a scene of multiple selves sharing an otherworldly space that blends fantasy and reality. Gutierrez claims total control of every aspect of her projects, including *Clubbing*, taking on all the roles in front of and behind the camera. From the painted-on eyes to the sixties’ mod costumes to the addictive groove that gets these bodies moving, it all comes back to Gutierrez, alone in her studio, aiming to create a welcoming world for all.

Though on first glance she appears to present heterosexual pairings, Gutierrez’s layered drag performances open a kaleidoscope of queer possibility. Filmed through gauze, the hazy indefinability of the locale evokes the idea of queer nightclubs as utopian zones, havens from a dangerously divisive society, since utopia means “no place” in Greek. Celebrating the joys found there, *Clubbing* stands as an ode to the creativity and liberation of dance floors and their importance as places for self-discovery, interpersonal harmony, and nonconformist community building.

*Feel free to step up and dance along. The floor lights pulse with the music, while the black pathways transfer vibrations from the soundtrack to the soles of your feet.*

Audio Note: Electric fuzzy keyboard and clonking wooden beats start the instrumental song that continues throughout the video. A plucked bass and kick drum join as the *Clubbing* credit appears, after which a consistent groovy melody comes primarily through bass, keyboard, and electric guitar sounds. The chorus, when the dancers are in sync, has increased volume and percussion, which can be felt and seen on the nearby dance floor.

## Artwork Label

Martine Gutierrez, born 1989, Berkeley, CA

*Clubbing*, 2012, HD video (color, sound); 3:06 min.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase, 2021.23.2



## Visual Description

Silver and black tinsel lines three walls to define a corner gallery. A raised dance floor is positioned in front of the projected video art. The dance floor has white light up squares and a black ramp leading up to a haptic crosswalk. The video opens in close-up as two stylish figures in glittery black and silver outfits turn to face the camera. The first is female presenting, with long black hair, the other has shorter hair and a painted-on mustache. All characters also have extra-large eyes and eyelashes painted onto their cheeks. The title, *Clubbing*, appears against a shimmering silver-gold background that stays consistent throughout. The camera drops down to reveal the two figures in sexy sixties-inspired clothes, doing sixties-style dance moves with nonchalant cool. At the instrumental chorus, they break into exuberant mirrored choreography, spinning around each other. At the one-minute mark, another couple is introduced, first in close-up and then seen sharing the shimmering dance space. They are dressed more elegantly and move more freely, but it is clear now that all characters are played by the same person. As the chorus returns, they dance in sync in a line, twirling between each other to change positions. A third couple appears, moving shyly at first and then overtaken by the music just in time for another chorus. All six dancers jump, swirl, and get down in a line. The wide shot is then replaced by layered close-ups of faces, arms, and swiveling hips that slowly peel back to two final dancers. Floating credits in glitter signal the end.

## Wayfinding

With your back turned away from the video, walk straight out of the tinsel area, and away from the dance floor. To your right is a wall with the next section text alongside a glass doorway that leads into a video room. The QR code is about fifteen feet from the end of the dancefloor ramp. To the left of the glass door is a stanchion that demarcates a two-foot space off the long wall that follows, guiding people to engage with the long photo panels from a few feet away, or to pass on the other side of a bench running down the middle of the gallery.

# Arthur Jafa

## Wall Text

Jafa is an artist and filmmaker with a lifelong practice of compiling visual material he deems striking and relevant to understanding Black life in the United States. Long admired for his cinematography, Jafa is now equally known for videos, photographic works, and sculptural installations that feature in art spaces around the world.

*Love is the Message, The Message is Death* offers a swift-moving montage of the African American experience as captured in moving images, from nineteenth-century silent films to today's camera phone recordings of police killing unarmed civilians. Clips sourced from the internet are interwoven with Jafa's own home movies and past projects, and set to Kayne West's 2016 gospel-hip-hop anthem, "Ultralight Beam," itself a compendium of Black music history and voices. The selection whiplashes viewers between moments of celebration and mourning, humor and crisis, profound historical significance and everyday intimacy.

Throughout, Jafa edits and adjusts playback speeds to mimic the exceptional tempo and tone control of Black musicians. This technique represents one way in which he pursues his long-stated goal of a "Black cinema with the power, beauty, and alienation of Black music."

In *APEX GRID*, the same approach of appropriating and remixing is applied to photographs. Scaled to fit like thumbnails into neat rows, hundreds of images reflect what Jafa sees as popular culture's managing of ideas and fears around Blackness.

Paradoxically, these works always feel timely because they point to patterns in Black life that repeat time after time. How might our experiences of Jafa's work change as today's news cycles make different elements suddenly—but repeatedly—feel relevant or raw?

*Please note, these works include mature content, including images of violence and nudity.*

## Artwork Label

Arthur Jafa, born 1960, Tupelo, MS  
*APEX GRID*, 2018, Epson fine print face-mounted Diasec acrylic on aluminum panel  
Private Collection

and

*Love is the Message, The Message is Death*, 2016, single-channel high-definition digital video (color, sound); 7:25 min.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Joint museum purchase with the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Nion T. McEvoy, Chair of SAAM Commission (2016–2018), and McEvoy's fellow Commissioners in his honor; additional funding provided by Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest Fund, 2020.001, 2020.3

## Visual Description

Filling the wall to the left are four massive photographic panels; on each end of the wall is a stanchion with a sign reading, "The work on this wall includes mature content, including images of violence and nudity. Enter this space to engage or chart an alternate path around the bench to the right." Walking along the wall, one encounters hundreds of images scaled to fit, like thumbnails, into a tight grid, each image separated from its neighbors by the light gray background. Cumulatively, the images stretch in lines across the glossy mounted surface. Strong representations of Black musicians, album covers, and other cultural touchstones are intermingled with cartoon characters, African-inspired fashion, punk posturing, nudes, otherworldly microscopic organisms, and a vast array of science-fiction and horror references, some from film and some from real world tragedies around the globe. The large scale makes it impossible to take in the full collage and singular image details at once.

To the right of *APEX GRID* is the glass door to the video room. In the dark room, there is a bench in the center back and two more benches near support columns along the left and right walls. The bench to the right is haptic, indicated by blue light at its base. The video is projected at maximum scale, filling the facing wall.

The video is a tightly edited collage of Black American experiences from early silent-era, black and white films to recent cell-phone recordings and Hollywood blockbusters. The first thirty seconds move from a news interview with a local hero, to swaying fans at a basketball game, to civil rights protesters, to hip-hop dancers, to camera-phone footage of an unarmed man in green—Walter Scott—running and collapsing when he is shot from behind by a cop. The next seven minutes continue this pace and range. Widely recognized figures include President Obama singing "Amazing Grace" from a podium and Beyoncé dancing on a balcony; musicians Nina Simone, Jimi Hendrix, Biggie Smalls, Drake, Lauryn Hill, Michael and Janet Jackson and Louis Armstrong, among others, performing; and athletes Serena Williams, LeBron James, Michael Jordan, and Muhammad Ali dominating and celebrating. Politicians and philosophers MLK Jr, Malcolm X, Angela Davis and more recent figures appear throughout as do everyday folks praying at church, being harassed by police, enjoying sports, wading through flooded streets, farming, fighting, dancing, protesting, rodeoing, and going viral on YouTube. High-definition footage shot by Jafa at his daughter's wedding returns repeatedly. Also recurring are scenes from *The Birth of a Nation*, a 1915 film showing white actors in blackface and as hooded Klansmen; close-ups of the fiery surface of the sun as seen through a telescope; and snippets

from big-budget alien movies. When the main song cuts out, the interrupting audio is synced with the visuals. This happens around three minutes in when police dashboard footage of a traffic stop shows a woman walking backwards along a highway at night as she begs for police for an explanation. Around four minutes, the actor Amandla Stenberg looks into the camera and asks a pointed question; later we hear and see crying young boys arrested in their home or practicing “hands-up” for a police encounter. As the song returns and reaches its climax, the final visual sequence shows a woman twerking in her bedroom, the close-up of the sun, and soul music legend James Brown dramatically falling to his knees, microphone clutched close. His singing and applause mix into the audio before the screen goes black and there is silence.

## **Wayfinding**

As you exit the Jafa video room, cross to the facing wall about eighteen feet away where two framed drawings start the Christine Sun Kim section. To the right of these drawings, approximately twenty feet further from the second one, is the main text for Kim’s work with the QR code for the section. Be aware that centered between the Jafa wall and the Kim wall is a large interactive sculptural bench.

# Christine Sun Kim

## Wall Text

Through her art, Kim encourages audiences to attend to the links between music and meaning, sound and other senses, perception and interpretation, and various modes of communication. She uses scores, graphical notation and text, and performance and media installations to explore how she and the larger Deaf community establish their own relationships to the world of sound.

Kim wrote a text score for *One Week of Lullabies for Roux*, guiding seven friends (who are also parents) as they composed original soothing soundtracks for coaxing her own newborn, Roux, to sleep. Kim's instructions called for lullabies without lyrics that emphasized low frequencies, so she would be able to monitor and feel comfortable about the audio she was introducing into her baby's "sound diet." The artist-designed bench evokes a color-coded weekly pillbox, suggesting these songs are daily medicine.

For *Close Readings*, Kim edited together clips from five movies, removed the sound, and partially blurred the visuals. Then she invited four Deaf or hard-of-hearing collaborators to write unique captions, which she added to each channel above the existing studio captions. The four screens play in sync, showing vastly different verbal interpretations of the same scene and soundtrack, and underscoring how different approaches to captioning significantly impact viewing experiences.

*Please note, the video captions contain mature language.*

## Additional Wall Text

In 2020, Kim was invited to be the American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter for that year's Super Bowl, performing these two patriotic songs alongside pop star Demi Lovato and gospel singer Yolanda Adams. Kim's monumental charcoal score drawings, made later that year, reflect her careful preparation. The graphic staff lines, clustered notes, and reordered, spatialized lyrics map her ASL translation, designed to match the singer's rhythmic and dynamic range with her own. The compositional arrangement and word choice also reveal Kim's continued engagement with this moment and material, conveying a perspective that is both critical and hopeful. This intentional historical positioning is further articulated in the artist statement at right, which she asks accompany this work whenever possible.

Kim felt conflicted around the Super Bowl invitation. Intended as a gesture of patriotic support for disability visibility and intersectional solidarity, her appearance also pointed to gaps between promised and actual equity. These subsequent drawings, scaled to the human body, ask us all to consider our relationship to these songs, their histories, and their promises.

## Artwork Label

Christine Sun Kim, born 1980, Orange County, CA  
*The Star-Spangled Banner (Third Verse)*, 2020, charcoal on paper

and

*America the Beautiful*, 2020, charcoal on paper  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase and purchase through the Asian Pacific American Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center and through the Julia D. Strong Endowment, 2021.31.1-.2

## Visual Description

Hung on the wall are Kim's two works, on the left, *America the Beautiful* and on the right, *The Star-Spangled Banner (Third Verse)*.

*America the Beautiful* is a line drawing in black charcoal on square white paper that is almost five feet on each side in a white frame. Centered at the top in all handwritten capital lettering is the title "AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL." Kim's ASL translation of the song is drawn below in sheet music style, delicate music notes with single-word lyrics symmetrically arranged over the page. Most lyrics are huddled along the two sides of the paper, sitting above notes that are connected by long lines to mimic a musical staff. These words are mirrored, reading "Harvest", "America" or "Collab" on both ends of the line. Other words sit above shorter note clusters; at the top of the page, these include "amazing," "look," "purple," "mountain," and "wave." Just below those is a line of tightly linked notes that all have "grow" written above them. In the bottom third of the page, floating notes have "grace," "group," "sea," and "shine" written above them.

*The Star-Spangled Banner* is a similar line drawing in black charcoal on square white paper of the same size. Centered at the top in all handwritten capital lettering is the title "THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER." Kim's ASL translation of the third verse is drawn below in sheet music style. At the top, clusters of delicate music notes are paired with the words "tap" and "look." The rest of the page is filled with a symmetrical distribution of lyrics hovering around three distinct bands of parallel lines. These evoke musical staves even though each line is actually part of a note-pair, connecting the top of two notes that are on opposite edges of the page. Single words—"stripe," "glare," "stars"—sit atop these notes along the edges, while others are

emphasized by being paired more centrally between the lines—these include “where” and “band,” “hireling” and “slave,” “gloom” and “grave.” Scattered in the middle of the page are the words “war” and “bomb” above individual notes. Underneath the three line bands, individuals notes float in a V-shape toward the bottom, with words like “free,” “land,” “wave,” and “brave” lettered above them. A separate panel with the artist’s statement is hung to the right of this piece.

## Additional Artist-Provided Text

### Artist Statement

#### July 2020

This is a notation drawing of the American Sign Language (ASL) translation of *The Star-Spangled Banner*, the national anthem of the United States, which I signed during Super Bowl LIV in February 2020 in front of millions of viewers. Accepting the invitation to give such a performance was not an easy decision; however, it was vital for creating visibility for the Deaf and disabled communities in America. While I initially dissected and rearranged the anthem in a way that suits ASL and my vantage point as a disabled performer, I have since learned that Francis Scott Key, the anthem’s lyricist, actively defended the rights of slave owners, owned slaves himself, and cultivated an openly anti-Black and anti-Abolition attitude. With this information in mind, I wish for the work’s potential visibility to now be extended by highlighting the fact that Black disabled people are disproportionately targeted by the police: Half of people killed by police have a disability (David M. Perry and Lawrence Carter-Long, 2016) and more than half of Black people with disabilities will have been arrested at least once by the time they reach their late 20s (Erin J. McCauley, 2017). Systemic racism permeates American culture so deeply that it becomes a norm and it goes unchallenged, and often unnoticed—much like the country’s anthem. We must all support the movement by practicing both anti-racism and anti-ableism. Black Disabled Lives Matter.

#### September 2020

The full song of *The Star-Spangled Banner* consists of four stanzas; only the first one is used for the national anthem. The following is the third stanza:

*And **where is that band** who so vauntingly swore,  
That the havoc of war and the battle’s confusion  
A home and a Country should leave us no more?  
Their blood has wash’d out their foul footsteps’ pollution.  
No refuge could save **the hireling and slave**  
From the terror of flight or **the gloom of the grave**,  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave*

*O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.*

Upon reading all four stanzas, I found them to be heavily tainted with racism and mockery. I selected three phrases (above in bold) and placed them under the beams of the stripe notes, as if they're part of the flag. Analyzing the text, a number of experts have suggested that "Where is that band" refers to the Colonial Marines, a group of enslaved Black Americans that fought for Britain in order to earn freedom. "The hireling and slave" is Francis Scott Key's way of mocking both British soldiers and the Colonial Marines. "The gloom of the grave" is perhaps his reaction to them as a slave owner, cursing both to the grave. I added this focus on the third verse in response to racial injustices that have been inflicted for centuries, and I support the growing call to replace *The Star-Spangled Banner* with *Lift Every Voice and Sing* of 1899 by J. Rosamond Johnson and James Weldon Johnson, which is considered the Black national anthem.

—Christine Sun Kim

## Wayfinding

To the right, at a 90-degree angle to the wall with Kim's drawings, is a shorter wall with four monitors playing a silent video work. Turning away from the wall with Kim's drawings or videos, in the center of the gallery, is a low-lying interactive bench that is seventeen feet long and three feet wide.

## Artwork Label

Christine Sun Kim, born 1980, Orange County, CA

*One Week of Lullabies for Roux*, 2018, mixed-media sound installation

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2020.79.1

and

*Close Readings*, 2015, four-channel video (color, silent); 25:53 min.

In collaboration with Jeffrey Mansfield, Ariel Baker-Gibbs, Alison O'Daniel, Lauren Ridloff  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2020.79.2

## Visual Description

A low rectangular bench divided into seven square seats by different colored cushions. These cushions shift chromatically from a bright red to a light magenta to muted maroon and blue, and ending with a deep purple. Each seat has a set of over-ear headphones resting in the center, its wire plugged into the bench. On the headband of each is a printed name. From red to blue side, these read: Juan Cisneros; Melissa Dubbin and Aaron S. Davidson; David Horvitz; Carmelle Safdie; Sonja Simonyi, Nico Van Tomme, and Niels Van Tomme; Lotti Sollevi; and Alex



Waxman. A different low-frequency song plays through each set of headphones, ranging in duration from less than thirty seconds to over eleven minutes long.

On the wall closest to the purple side of the bench is the other work. Four monitors are hung in a line on the wall, screens synced, playing the same twenty-six-minute edited sequence of film clips. The top two-thirds of all the images are slightly blurred to highlight two sets of captions along the bottom of each screen. Stepping back to view all four monitors, one set of burned-in captions remains standard and synced across all screens. These are less detailed, portray little emotion, and are very sparse. Above these captions, are bolder, brighter, white captions that are different from monitor to monitor and appear with more frequency and density, each conveying a unique linguistic sensibility. The first four minutes of appropriated movie clips feature a disembodied, animate hand—the character known as “Thing” —from *The Addams Family*. The next two minutes show a family confrontation from the Greek film *Dogtooth*, followed by seven-plus minutes of actors Whoopi Goldberg, Patrick Swayze, and Demi Moore in *Ghost*. Kim’s edit concludes with five minutes from Disney’s animated film *The Little Mermaid* and a little more than seven minutes from *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Take as an example the scene from *Ghost*, around ten to eleven minutes in, when lovers played by Moore and Swayze, realize they are sharing space, even if he is dead. Close-ups of their faces appear across all four screens as do the lower captions, as given by Hollywood. These indicate no background noise or music, transcribing only bits of dialogue. In this same stretch, the upper captions across the four monitors, as written by Kim’s collaborators, are rich with information. The left two screens note “soft, sustained gasp” and “the sound of air passing through the lips of a comely young woman” as Moore’s mouth opens. A moment later, the third screen’s captions read: “It’s a brave and bold move to ask the audience to suspend their disbelief about demi feeling swayze through whoopi.” The fourth screen, on the right, next chimes in, imagining “music formulated to biologically stimulate mirror neurons to trigger uncontrollable weeping.” Then the leftmost and rightmost screens notice Swayze’s ghost is moving a penny up a door, and describe scraping sounds that such an action likely makes, but which the movie-studio captions do not signal. A few seconds later, all upper captions take turns underscoring the scene’s emotional intensity, adding “intense stare,” “bitten lip,” “trickling tear,” “feel stuff,” and “she is C.R.Y.I.N.G.” to the imagined sonic landscape.

## Wayfinding

Turn away from the video wall, so the screens are to your left. Straight ahead is the next gallery space, which has slightly dimmed lighting. To your right is a bench and a projected video work. Straight ahead, about eighteen feet after the Kim video wall ends, is the glass door entrance to an enclosed video room and the wall text to both works is to the right of that doorway.

# Cauleen Smith

## Wall Text

Smith's art and filmmaking has always been driven by histories of Black brilliance that resonate across time. Listening closely to the spiritual and musical philosophies of composer, performer, and swamini Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda (1937–2007) has inspired Smith's recent works. Smith's cinematic collages connect Coltrane's transformative visions to others who create spaces for liberation from the nineteenth century to the present.

In *Pilgrim*, Coltrane's experimental jazz piano unfurls as Smith's camera moves solemnly through the white ashram buildings and hillside setting of the Hindu community Coltrane founded in California. These scenes soon merge with the gothic spirals of Watts Towers, mid-twentieth-century folk sculptures in southern Los Angeles, before fading into a Shaker cemetery in upstate New York, where a pre-Civil War religious group lived the values of racial and gender equality.

*Sojourner* expands this mapping of utopic possibility. While visuals touch down at significant sites across Philadelphia, Chicago, and California, voice-overs explicitly align Coltrane's mystical writings with those of Rebecca Cox Jackson, a Black Shaker eldress whom Smith found had described astral journeys a hundred years earlier, similar to Coltrane's. Their voices, and readings of the Combahee River Collective's 1977 manifesto, seem to be transmitted via old radios to a collective of futuristically fabulous young women of color. They carry bright banners with poetic phrases along a beach, behind a protest, and outside Watts Towers Arts Center, a community hub founded by the late sculptor Noah Purifoy, whose Outdoor Desert Art Museum near Joshua Tree, California, serves as their concluding location. After gathering within and winding around Purifoy's large assemblages, their final pose is a feminist twist on a famed photo from 1966 of stylish young men gathered around Watts Towers.

Audio Note: Set to a live album recording, the video begins with unseen audience applause and Alice Coltrane's voice introducing "One for the Father" as a song she composed and dedicates to John Coltrane. Passionate instrumental piano then rumbles and wavers for the next seven minutes. Heavy low chords and delicate trilling build into rolling, rapidly ascending and descending free jazz exploration of the full keyboard. As the song and video end, audience applause accompanies the closing credits.

## Artwork Label

Cauleen Smith, born 1967, Riverside, CA

*Pilgrim*, 2017, digital video (color, sound); 7:41 min.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by the SJ Weiler Fund, 2020.54.2

and

*Sojourner*, 2018, digital video (color, sound); 22:41 min., installed with disco balls, turntable, artist-designed wallpaper, and reference photo commissioned from Bill Ray for LIFE, July 1966

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by the SJ Weiler Fund, 2020.54.1

## Visual Description

To the right of the section text is a bench and small projected video in a purple-painted corner gallery. The video opens with a black screen, as one hears applause and Coltrane's voice, followed by footage of a bird in a barren tree against a blue sky. Green text spelling "pilgrim" flashes on the screen. The camera pans across a double-tiered organ encased in dusty plexiglass. Shots cut between its black and white keys, wooden surfaces, and a handwritten letter. Different angles emphasize the play of shadow and raking light on the instrument. As views expand, the organ is seen at the front of a sunlit congregation room surrounded by large, framed photos of a dark-skinned smiling woman, Alice Coltrane. Static shots capture details of the room: blue carpet, yellow floor pillows, scattered books, and musical instruments. Moving outside, two Black women show the camera the lush trees and white domed buildings of this spiritual retreat. A far-off view of the main ashram building merges in double exposure with shaking blue film footage showing a cluster of spiky silhouetted spires; sun-flares in the camera add sparkle to these circling shots of LA's Watts Towers. The double exposure of the ashram is replaced by a merging of Watts Towers with a dark green tree that ultimately transitions the viewer to a different landscape—green grassy fields and white fences surround wooden farm buildings. Close-ups of ferns, cows, and wildflowers intermingle with the growing intensity and beats of the music. A handheld camera moves through an uneven graveyard, its view landing on the headstone of "Mother Ann Lee." The final image is of a street-side sign reading "Shaker Cemetery," filtered by red and yellow light flares, before fading to black and showing the credits. Projected to the right of these images, throughout, is a portrait shot of interpretive performer Trevor Shannon, a Black man with short dreads and a blue button-up shirt, who uses a mix of expressive gestures, piano playing pantomime and ASL to convey the soundtrack.

If you turn so this video is to your back and walk away from the screen, to your right is the glass door entrance to a darkened video room. A haptic bench sits to the right of the door, and another non-haptic bench is to the left. Disco balls are clustered along the left wall, and a large

projected video appears on the wall straight ahead. The video's opening scenes are shot on old film stock, so the images are slightly fuzzy, square projections within the larger black screen. First, horses run around a plot of land with cars driving around, followed by views of various townhouse buildings, and a historic marker noting John Coltrane's residence. Cut to older buildings, gravestones in grassy countryside that appeared in *Pilgrim*. People wave patterned flags—or semaphores—outside of a community center, on rocky ledges, and in wildflower fields. Shots of white ashram buildings and framed photos of Alice Coltrane echo scenes from *Pilgrim*. At four and a half minutes, the image becomes full screen and crisp, no longer fuzzy film stock. The camera pans down over LA rooftops, and then the spires of Watts Towers, to find a group of young women of color in bright, stylish outfits, walking around the base of the towers, carrying neon orange banners with black text. One woman extends the antenna of an old radio, and as she walks, she leads the group—with a quick cut—from urban streets to a rocky beach. They sit and listen together and pose with banners among the rocks. At the nine-minute mark, the scene shifts to a city gathering; Black women organizers hand out flyers and speak out of a megaphone while street life continues and passersby stop to engage. The orange banners are seen in the background, held by various activists. Around eleven minutes, the camera cuts to two more futuristically dressed young women sitting atop a sun-kissed sculpture, listening to another old radio. The camera moves closer and flies over their heads to show pairs of women walking among additional funky, large, colorful assemblage sculptures in a desert during peak golden hour. A woman enters a circular hut-sculpture and hugs comrades found inside who are also listening to a handheld radio. More and more women walk between sculptures, convening in an open structure where they sit intently, facing a radio, as it broadcasts on Black feminism. Around fifteen minutes in, they spread out to further explore this outdoor desert museum. Those carrying banners line up, and another woman wanders alone to listen to the final statement over the radio. As this voice-over relays the words of the Lord, shots of the banners reveal their texts add up to repeat the Lord's message, reading "At Eventide," "Be so Big that Sky will learn Sky." With these banners and a boombox-holder in the lead, the whole group proceeds across the desert to the closing music as the sun sets. They enter an open-air structure and assemble into a fierce, final pose, some seated, some standing defiant. They all face the camera with an air of determination, staring into the future. Credits roll.

## **Wayfinding**

As you exit the video room, turn to the right. High on the wall, about fifteen feet on the right, is the final piece.

## Wall Text

As neon words light from the bottom to the top, they build the choral repetitions of “my life” that kick off Roy Ayers’s summer classic, “Everybody Loves the Sunshine” (1976). Smith’s title offers a darker kind of repetition, recounting the names of eight trans women of color all killed within weeks of each other in 2020. Daring to live in the light as their true selves, these women’s names are now shouted at protests affirming that their lives matter even if their deaths go unsolved. Smith uses the song’s familiarity as a hook for considering complicity—when do you notice the violence, and when do you just sing along?

## Artwork Label

Cauleen Smith, born 1967, Riverside, CA

*Sunshine (for Brayla, Merci, Shakiie, Draya, Tatiana, and Bree, Riah, Dominique...)*, 2020, neon, MDF, paint, gold-pleated chain link

Courtesy of the artist and Morán Morán, Los Angeles

## Visual Description

A wall-mounted neon light sign with a black background that reads “Sunshine in the my life, my life, my life, my life.” Vertically arranged, the words “Sunshine in the” are bright yellow, the first “my life” is orange, then red, then a white purple, then a fuller purple. The last “my life” is about half the size of the rest. A tangle of wires come out from the black panel and loops into an electrical box on the wall.

## Wayfinding

As you continue past the neon work, to your right, there is a closing title wall to your left and the gallery exit straight ahead.

## End Credits

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