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McGarry, Kevin: Greater New Yorkers: Adam Pendleton

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## Greater New Yorkers | Adam Pendleton

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Adam Pendleton. Alec Holst

*The Moment hones in on five artists from Greater New York, an exhibition that runs May 23 – Oct. 18 at PS1 in Queens.*

Adam Pendleton works with language on many levels, using shards of text in his installations and wall works, and offering these works as open interjections into ongoing conversations about the radical nature of art and politics. His practice revolves around rephrasing vocabularies — verbal, formal and historical — that have shaped popular sentiments of how creative gestures become effective political gestures.

Pendleton's installation at P.S.1, *The Abolition of Alienated Labor*, takes its name from a 1963 Situationist work for which Guy Debord painted those words over an industrially produced painting by Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio. In Pendleton's work, recent drawings and images appropriated alternately from the 1950s African independence movement and a 1960s Godard film, silk-screened onto large mirrors, inhabit a corner of a room that

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beckons to viewers by an haunting reperformance of a jazz composition emblematic of the Civil Rights Movement.

Q.

**Can you explain the track that lead to your installation at PS1, *The Abolition of Alienated Labor*?**

A.

The piece brings together work that I have been making over the past year: new installments of *System of Display* — mirror and glass, text and image works — as well as some Black Dada drawings, which are a hybrid of poster and something else. The works are framed within the context of the ethos of experimental gestures, the potential of a political framework — or rather, of a politicized framework.

**Does that distinction, between drawing and poster, refer to this ethos of experimentation?**

I guess I have an unusual concept of the difference between approaches and mediums so I'm always thinking about something as two things. In this case it's not really one or the other, but I do think of them more as drawings because of the way they relate to process. Their execution is very process-oriented, not so finite. In a way they exist in flux.

**Where do you exist? How long have you lived in New York?**

For a while. It feels like forever. I think anything that lasts more than five years feels like forever sometimes.

**Do you work in the city itself?**

Basically everything I do is based between the city and upstate New York in the Hudson Valley, around Bard College. I'm almost constantly commuting back and forth. I like being up there, and I like coming here — I don't know if I *like* coming and going itself, but it's a necessary thing. I prefer living up there for reasons of time and space. I started to seek it out about two years ago, that degree of distance, because New York can feel like a perpetual office.

**Where did you live when you were in New York?**

I was in Fort Greene. It's amazing to go back and visit, neighborhoods change so rapidly.

**Is there interplay between your work at Greater New York and your upcoming exhibition at The Kitchen this fall?**

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They will be presented directly after each other, which was a coincidence because The Kitchen project has been in the works for over a year now. There will be new aspects of my work that people really haven't seen yet in both exhibitions, and they'll compliment each other. I've been thinking about the potential dualities between the two and how one can feed the other. Both will have a focus on the Black Dada project, which is a perpetually evolving concept — a historical insert of sorts. The Kitchen exhibition will include a video installation entitled *BAND*, which tracks the process of the indie rock, post-punk band Deerhoof working on and recording a new song, *I Did Crimes for You*.

**This a deliberately naïve question, but some people might think of the political and the experimental as naturally coexistent, or complimentary. Do you see the two as opposing forces?**

I think that gets at why the word ethos becomes a part of my vocabulary. Yes, I do think that there's a natural relationship between the two, but I'm also interested in how effective it is for encouraging some kind of motion. It could be motion that is regressive or progressive — I suppose regressive can sometimes mean progressive — but in short I'm interested in when certain gestures cause something to actually happen, so that it isn't some kind of hermetic inquiry but it's actually one that reciprocates, or facilitates — I'm trying to avoid the word “change”!

**Oh? And why not that word...?**

I don't know, I think it's a bit redundant. I want things that are very basic to happen in relation to the way the work affects or communicates with people, but for the means by which the work functions to be anything but basic, and for the *changes* that could happen because of the work to be tangible, to be very real. I'm curious if that's possible.

**Have you ever had the opportunity to see your work succeed in doing that?**

One thing I always like is when you come up with an idea, something like Black Dada, and you see a conversation develop around those ideas. Then people become a part of this active or functioning definition and they begin to define the parameters and the scope of the project. Then, instead of them working with my vocabulary, after a while it's more that I am working with their vocabulary. So it is kind of this perpetual feedback loop, which can be very satisfying: to posit something as one thing and for it to become this entirely different thing just because of the different interactions that people have had with an idea that you have put out there.

**Can you offer a definition for Black Dada at present?**

Black Dada is a way to talk about the future while talking about the past. It is our present moment.

**What is the audio element of your installation at PS1?**

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The source for the audio is a song performed by Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln at the height of the Civil Rights movement called *Triptych: Prayer / Protest / Peace*. The audio in my piece is me and my two collaborators, drummer Nasheet Waits and classical singer Alicia Hall Moran, looking at the original piece and rethinking its composition and whether the gestures it makes are inherently political or, once again, politicized.

The source song itself is a very emotive gesture, an intelligently emotive gesture. Through the means of music or of composition as a means of reading a situation, musicians like Roach and Lincoln read the landscape of that particular moment. The project is looking at whether and how a similar gesture can have any real effect today.

**Can you say more about the collaborative process behind the piece?**

Part of the project is to make something that functions as a kind of composition. With this entire project there is an interest in mark making. You can see that in the way that the words and language I'm using are fragmented, so they become marks instead of simply representations of language. There's this move towards process which is I suppose the inherent interest in composing something. Seeing how that is read is the participatory element of the work, asking for people to read it and to be a part of the composition, and that is why there is so much room for interpretation. I want people to feel as if they are participating in a part of the process.

**That's very positive.**

I don't know if it's so positive because I'm very critical of the results.

**Yes, but there does seem to be a certain openness to what you've described in terms of initiating vocabularies and gestures.**

It's funny because I've been using that word, overdetermined, to criticize a lot of things lately. It's a kind of unnecessary burden in a way, that doesn't leave space for much else. So what I am trying to do here is create space. That's also why I'm thinking of the grouping of works as an installation. Within the exhibition I'm trying to carve out a space that of course is in conversation with everything else around it, but does provide a particular moment.