

WHITE FLAG LIBRARY

Martine Syms

January 10 – February 28, 2015

Working across mediums to collapse cultural conventions, Martine Syms' interdisciplinary practice allows for "code-switching" as she shifts between the roles of artist, graphic designer, writer, lecturer, filmmaker, publisher, and entrepreneur. Her new video series, *Lessons*, uses television as a site and resource for the performance of identity. The series began with Syms making commercials for each of the five lessons on black radical traditions outlined in Kevin Young's book *The Grey Album*. After creating commercials for each of the five lessons, using found footage, personal archives, and original footage, she continued the series, exploring blackness as topic, reference, audience, and marker in visual culture. Adopting mechanisms used in the production of images such as c-stands and autopoles, Syms moves them from framing apparatuses to within the frame of an image, as if zooming out on the various structures that inform how we see and what we believe.

Checklist

Lesson I-XXX, 2014-2015

HD Video

Series of 24 videos, 12 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

Girlfriends (2000-2008), 2015

Vinyl banner on c-stand

Banner: 2 x 5 feet, c-stand: 27.5 x 53/126.5 inches

About the Artist

Martine Syms has exhibited with the New Museum, New York; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and other venues. She has lectured widely at institutions such as Yale University, Project Row Houses, and Johns Hopkins University. Syms currently runs Dominica Publishing. She earned her BFA in Film, Video, and New Media from the School of the Art Institute Chicago. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

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In The (Commercial) Break

Martine Syms

1. We love the 30-second spot because we love television.
2. A great television ad becomes important when it functions as a temporal marker. The spot must symbolize the beliefs, tastes, language, and emotions of an audience and an era.
3. What makes a commercial? Duration—fifteen seconds, thirty seconds, sixty seconds, ninety seconds. Focus—communicate exactly one idea.
4. Writers use the commercial break to structure narrative action. Viewers see the interruption as a time for criticism, speculation, and bathroom visits. At least, viewers used to see it that way. Now there is pause.
5. We call this time shifting. This concept has recently given way to the metaphor of a “stream”; a continuous flow of material. Both scenarios are preconditioned on economic and affective demand.
6. It’s helpful to confuse time shifting with stop-time. Conflate the commercial break with Charlie Parker’s alto solo, and later, G.C. Coleman’s drumming, and later still, the bongos on “Apache.”
7. Kevin Young wrote five lessons of the black radical tradition. More lessons have since revealed themselves to me.
8. My favorite commercial features Michael Jordan explaining that he is successful because he has failed.
9. My favorite commercial features Tyrese singing on a Metro bus.

10. "...And he just kept that beat going. It might be that certain part of the record that everybody waits for—they just let their inner self go and get wild."

11. Arthur Jafa recently described the camera as a proxy for the white male gaze. He went on to discuss how capturing motion has a symbolic relationship with black history. Fred Moten added that this "fugitive modality" is enacted on screen whenever a black figure is present. Jafa had to figure a way out of this with his cinematography.

12. In *Read me that part a-gain, where I disin-herit everybody* (2014) Gordon Hall says, "Politics is something you do with your body." Before that, Hall talks about the ways that "physical spaces can prevent us not only from saying or doing particular things, but even from thinking particular thoughts, or feeling particular feelings."

13. Resist the dominant logics of the cut, the figure, the voiceover, the frame.

14. Radical politics. Black aesthetics.

15. I know the black radical tradition in the religious sense, which is to say, I feel it deeply.

16. Young writes about the truth and the "troof". He wonders if the dialectic between the two ever resolves itself. When I asked him about that part in the book, he confirmed that there is no truth. But if there was it would be the lie we call the vernacular.

17. I've got the feeling. Don't fight the feeling. Feel the feeling. You've got to feel the feeling. Feel the feeling now. Got to feel the feeling. Just feel it.

