

## Related Events

**Martine Syms** works in video, performance, and publishing. She received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Camden Arts Centre, London; Sadie Coles HQ, London; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Berlin Biennale; Manifesta, Zurich; the ICA London; Bridget Donahue, New York; the Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago; White Flag Projects, St. Louis; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Her work was featured in Surround Audience, the New Museum's 2015 Triennial. From 2007 to 2011, Syms was codirector of Golden Age, a project space in Chicago focused on printed matter; she is also the founder of Dominica, an independent publishing company dedicated to exploring blackness as a topic, reference, marker, and audience in visual culture. Syms is represented by Bridget Donahue, New York; and Sadie Coles HQ, London.

In conjunction with the Graham Foundation exhibition, Syms' work, *SHE MAD: Laughing Gas* (2016), is on view in Gallery 295 at the Art Institute of Chicago.

*Incense Sweaters & Ice*  
Martine Syms  
September 26, 2018–January 12, 2019

*Incense Sweaters & Ice* premiered at The Museum of Modern Art, in an exhibition curated by Jocelyn Miller, as part of the Elaine Dannheisser Project Series in 2017. In Chicago, *Incense Sweaters & Ice* is organized by Graham Foundation director Sarah Herda, and Ellen Alderman, deputy director, exhibitions and public programs.

Martine Syms thanks Project Support / LOGOS, Special—Offer, EMPAC, Electric Theatre Collective, Bridget Donahue Gallery, and Sadie Coles HQ, as well as Rocket Caeshu, Nicole Otero, Brent Freaney, Triston Walker, Girlfriends Labs, Kaitlyn Nagy

Graham Production team: Ava Barrett, Vidisha Aggarwal, Katharina Bayer, Alexandra Drexelius, Tom Leinberger, Zoe Kauder Nalebuff, Ron Konow, Junxi Lu, Cecilia Resende-Santos, Alexandra Small, and Kekeli Sumah. Special thanks to Alex Inglizian and Andrew Kephart (-ism).

Wednesday, September 26, 6–8:00 p.m.  
Opening reception

Wednesday, October 24, 6:00 p.m.  
*ARCHITECTURE EVENT / HORIZON*  
Mario Gooden  
Talk

Wednesday, January 9, 2019, 1–4:00 p.m.  
*I SEE you. Do YOU SEE you?*  
Fay Victor  
Vocal workshop and discussion

Wednesday, January 9, 2019, 6:00 p.m.  
*Experiments in Communicating Message*  
Fay Victor and Mike Reed  
Artist talk and performance

For more information and to RSVP, please visit [www.grahamfoundation.org](http://www.grahamfoundation.org).

Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts  
4 W Burton Place, Chicago  
Free Admission to the Exhibition  
Gallery and Bookshop Hours: Wednesday to Saturday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m.  
[www.grahamfoundation.org](http://www.grahamfoundation.org)

## Graham Foundation

# INCENSE SWEATERS & ICE MARTINE SYMS

September 26, 2018 – January 12, 2019

The Graham Foundation is pleased to present an immersive installation by Los Angeles-based artist Martine Syms. At the center of the exhibition is Syms' first feature length film *Incense Sweaters & Ice*. The film follows Girl—a traveling nurse—as she navigates relationships with family, friends, and her flirtations with WB (whiteboy), intercut with scenes of Mrs. Queen Esther Bernetta White who speaks directly to the viewer from a purple-hued soundstage. Through the daily life of the main protagonist, the project explores the proliferation of ways in which one's image is captured and transmitted in public and private life—from surveillance cameras to smartphones—and the ways one moves between looking, being looked at, and remaining unseen. The film is also a meditation on the three cities in which it is set—Los Angeles, California; St. Louis, Missouri; and Clarksdale, Mississippi—and how place lives on in its subjects, informing emotional and gestural landscapes across generations.

Painted vibrant purple, the Madlener House first floor gallery walls are offset by patterned violet filters on the windows, providing a setting for viewing the film that resembles a special effects backdrop. Purple is a color Syms uses for a multitude of implications, and also simply to make the viewer say or think “the color purple,” a reference to Alice Walker's 1982 novel. The film moves across three screens in the exhibition, requiring the viewer migrate through the space to follow the narrative. Exploring the idea of an expanded cinema, the second floor galleries feature work that extends the film, including a wall-scaled text painting *GIRRLGIRLLLGGGIRLGIIRL* (2017)—suggesting the vernacular greeting, “girl,” with various inflections—and a suite of 12 images overprinted on vintage movie posters marketed to African American audiences. The exhibition includes an augmented-reality (AR) phone application available for download called, *wyd rn?*, named for the acronym—What are you doing right now?—that is used in the incessant lexicon of electronic communication and social media. The app activates the AR features—GIFs and videos—over the poster's surface and brings the narrative full-circle back to the film. Collectively, the video, the app, and visitor engagement within the installation, realizes a real-time participatory collage.

From a karaoke bar in Los Angeles' Korea Town, to an archetypal pitched roof house in St. Louis, the film depicts the geographies and spaces—both emotional and physical—that Girl navigates. The architecture and urbanism of her everyday life emerges as the film traces her movement across the American landscape and a route that reflects a reversal of the Great Migration, as she moves from her

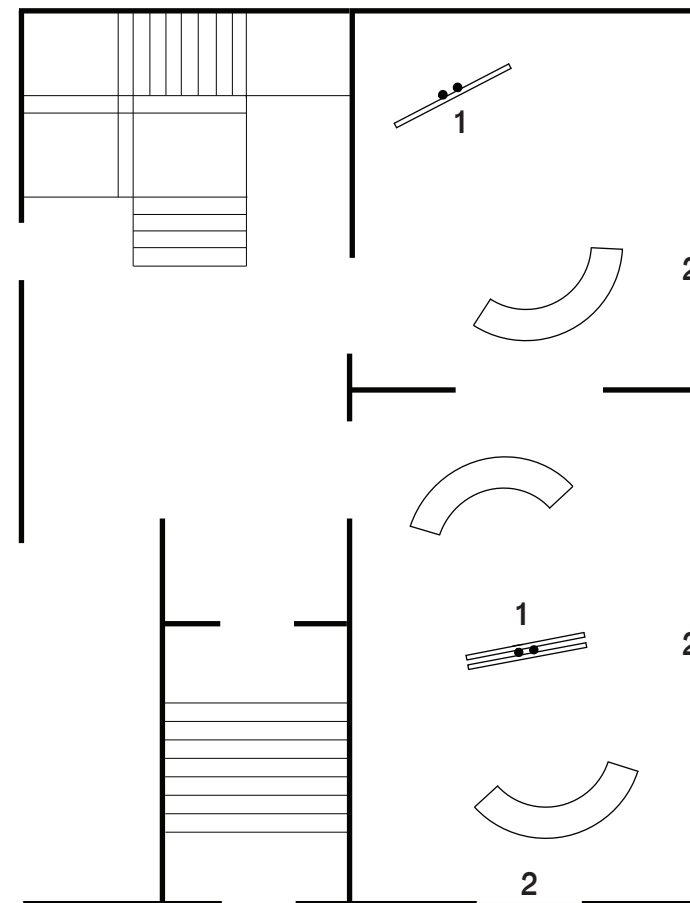
Los Angeles apartment, through St. Louis, to a clinic in Mississippi, and the generic hotel room she rents while on assignment. The conflation of private and public—a contemporary state of Foucauldian panopticism—underscores the fluidity of these definitions.

The intimate access to Girl's day-to-day life highlights familial, cultural, and gendered inheritances. As such, we see Girl transform herself for different situations: the club, a first date, and work. In a long sequence of Girl getting ready, the soundtrack features a set of personal rules: “The hair on your upper lip should remain visible at all times. It adds an air of masculinity.” “Your right side is your good side.” These preemptive aphorisms counter potential invisibility with what Syms calls having an extreme presence. Girl's narrative is counterbalanced by scenes with Mrs. Queen Esther Bernetta White who orates from a purple tonal stage and lectures on grooming, comportment, and power. These lessons of etiquette are inspired by Motown Record's Artist Development finishing instructor, Maxine Powell, and TED-famous social psychologist Amy Cuddy's talk, “Your body language shapes who you are.” Together, the contrast of Girl and Queen underscores how cross-generational social mores provide moments of tension in the culture of ubiquitous surveillance alongside charged histories of blackness, identity, and femininity.

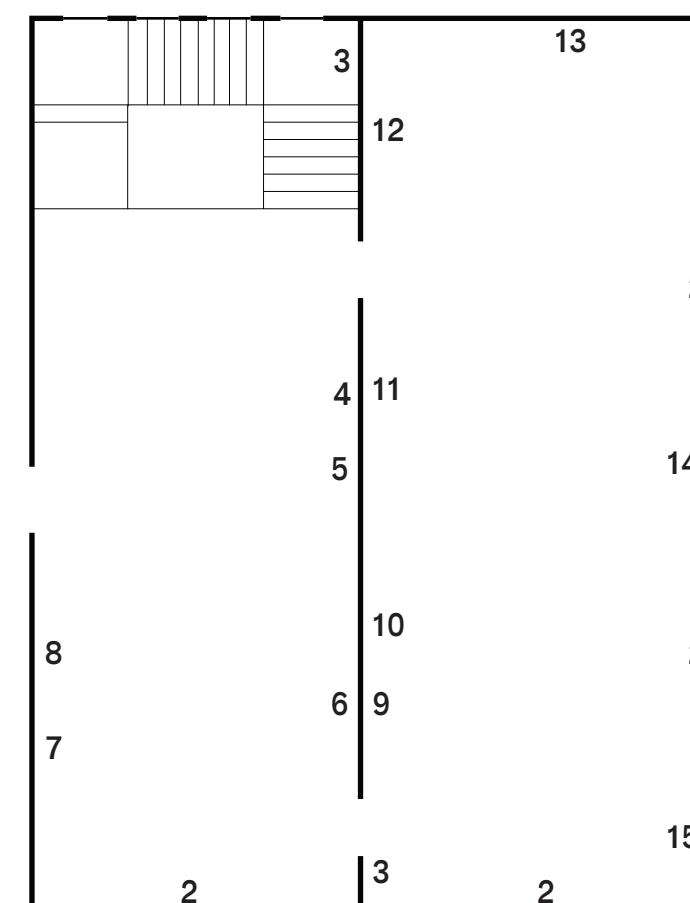
*Incense Sweaters & Ice* considers the inundation of contemporary culture, exploring relationships with spoken word, text, images, moving images, audio, the built environment, and the possibility for crosspollination across platforms and time. Throughout the installation visitors are led through a score by Syms, directing an experience that compels self-reflection, poise, awareness of moving through public and private space, and how universal it is to adjust personal performance accordingly. “If you are not feeling the way you want to feel,” Queen poses, “you need to change the way you move!”

This exhibition is the result of Martine Syms' selection as a 2018 Graham Foundation Fellow—a new program that provides support for the development and production of original and challenging works and the opportunity to present these projects in an exhibition at the Graham's Madlener House galleries in Chicago. The Fellowship program extends the legacy of the Foundation's first awards, made in 1957, and continues the tradition of support to individuals to explore innovative perspectives on spatial practices in design culture.

## 1st Floor



## 2nd Floor



All works by Martine Syms and courtesy the artist; Bridget Donahue, New York; and Sadie Coles HQ, London unless otherwise noted. Dimensions are listed height x width.

- 1 *Incense Sweaters & Ice*, 2017, video, color, sound, 72:00
- 2 *Belief Strategy XIV*, 2016, colored window film, dimensions variable
- 3 *GIRRLGIRLLLGGGIRLGIIRL*, 2017, wall painting, dimensions variable
- 4 *Half Sheet*, 2017, archival pigment print on found poster, 28 x 22 in.
- 5 *One Sheet*, 2017, archival pigment print on found poster, 40 x 27 in.
- 6 *40 x 60*, 2017, archival pigment print on found poster, 60 x 40 in.
- 7 *One Sheet*, 2017, archival pigment print on found poster, 40 x 27 in.
- 8 *Insert*, 2017, archival pigment print on found poster, 36 x 14 in.
- 9 *Three Sheet*, 2017, archival pigment print on found poster, 81 x 41 in.

- 10 *Window Card*, archival pigment print on found poster, 22 x 14 in.
- 11 *Insert*, 2017, archival pigment print on found poster, 36 x 14 in.
- 12 *Half Sheet*, 2017, archival pigment print on found poster, 22 x 28 in.
- 13 *Window Card*, archival pigment print on found poster, 22 x 14 in.
- 14 *40 x 60*, 2017, archival pigment print on found poster, 60 x 40 in.
- 15 *Three Sheet*, 2017, archival pigment print, 81 x 41 in.
- 16 *wyd rn?*, 2017, iOS app

To access additional content within *Incense Sweaters & Ice*, download the artist's art app, *wyd rn?*, developed by Brent David Freaney at Special—Offer. After downloading, follow the instructions on screen, and hold your phone over the artwork in the gallery. Connect to the Foundation's WiFi via GF Guest using the password: grahamvisitor.