

For his solo exhibition at Sant'Andrea de Scaphis Arthur Jafa presents the video *Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death*, a layered homage to 70s club anthem *Love Is The Message* by Philly International's studio orchestra MFSB, (a favorite of Paradise Garage DJ Larry Levan and once upon a time theme song for *Soul Train*) and to the classic short story, *Love is the Plan and the Plan is Death*, by one of Jafa's most beloved shape shifters, 70's "New Wave" speculative fiction author James Tiptree, aka Alice "Raccoona" Bradley Sheldon.

The viral outgrowth of an aborted found-footage exercise, the 7-minute video is an alternately mirthful- cum-melancholic- cum-cardiac-arresting meditation on race-agency wrapped in a visually sermonic recitation of race tragedy wrapped in a nuanced and feverish exultation of diverse Black American lives at various states of collapse and regeneration--a spectrum of community including those identified by Jafa in an earlier project as "The Uncommon Folk", alongside more widely celebrated figures he indexes as "The Specialists".

Undergirded by Kanye West's aspirational and eschatological rap-gospel masterpiece, *Ultralight Beam*, Love's vertiginous movement from sequence to sequence obeys a finely-tuned editing logic that Jafa has evolved and categorized under the rubric "Black Visual Intonation". The presence of BVI motion- enhancing techniques delivers on Jafa's oft-stated desire to create a cinema that, "replicates the power, beauty and alienation of Black Music". Repeated viewings of *Love Is The Message* reveal the artist's microsurgical attention to cinematically apprehending the dynamism of culturally and rhythmically- confident Black bodies in swooning, swaying, sanctified, synaptic, erotic, choreographic, athletic, cognitive and violently-assaulted motion. The cornerstone of this artist's vision lies in marking and re- manipulating the ways in which those bodies warp and woof the curvature of space, transfix the flow of time and alter our perceptions of the world's materiality with existential fluidity. There is at work here a poetic convergence of sublimated rage, lyrical image-making, ethnic Pop-ism, scar-tissued "flesh- memories" and horrifically zeitgeist- citizen reporting—a retelling of the myriad ways Black lives are victimized by state-sanctioned terrorism and yet somehow continue to resist with style, joy, sex, smarts, footwork and snark.

Seen, heard and felt in total, *Love Is The Message* is a hallucinatory and gutting intervention in the charged conversations, eruptive reckonings and implosive introspections which mark this scarcely-post but indeed most-racialized tinderhook epoch in America's schizoid skin-and-color mad trajectory. A runaway story-arc that may soon see the country careening towards either reactionary suicide or a radically deracialized redistribution of justice, wealth, empathy and democracy.

Mississippi-born Arthur Jafa is an omnidirectional polymath with overlapping practices as film

director (selected works: *Slowly This, Smile, Until, Deshotten, Dreams Are Colder Than Death, Adrian Young*); working cinematographer (with feature-film directors Haile Gerima, Julie Dash, Spike Lee, John Akomfrah and Andrew Dosunmu); internationally exhibiting “white cube” visual artist; principal member of studio collective TNEG (along with Elissa Blount Moorhead and Malik Hassan Sayeed); widely-respected trans-Atlantic university lecturer; and published scribe of critical theory manifestos.

This text has been excerpted and adapted from “The Changeling Mis-en-Scène—Arthur Jafa’s Meta Love and the New Black Reportage” by Greg Tate, one of two essays in the book *Love is The Message, The Message is Death* specially produced to accompany Jafa’s first solo exhibition at Gavin Brown’s enterprise (2016).

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