

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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## ‘RADICAL JUXTAPOSITIONS’: ADAM PENDLETON AND YVONNE RAINER IN AN EXCHANGE OF MEMORY AND MOTION

by Angela Brown



Of all the words and images rushing through ceaseless streams of data—news bytes, obituaries, tweets, pictures—which kinds of documents matter? In his videos, paintings, and writings, Adam Pendleton reaches into the stream and grasps at fragments, combining them in ways that elude categorization and address complexities that are often overlooked.

On Monday night at Anthology Film Archives in New York, Pendleton premiered his latest video portrait: *Just Back From Los Angeles: A Portrait of Yvonne Rainer*. Presented by the Performa Institute, this is the third in a series of video portraits, following *Lorraine O’Grady: A Portrait* (2012) and *My Education: A Portrait of David*

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Hilliard (2011-2014). The one with Rainer, notably, is the only video in which Pendleton himself can be seen. This was at Rainer's request, the audience learned at a Q&A afterward, and it transformed the work from a portrait to a resonant document of exchange—of ideas, words, tears, and histories.

In the video, projected in stark black and white, Rainer and Pendleton sit across from one another at the classic Ridgeway Diner on Sixth Avenue near 20th Street in Manhattan. She orders a turkey burger and fries (“Why not?,” she says, granting herself permission). He orders spanakopita (a Greek kind of spinach pie). They discuss their 50-year age difference and the fact that they have met only twice before. The vantage shifts between three cameras, offering close-ups of Rainer's hands, the diner counter lined with silverware, and views through an outside window of Pendleton mirroring Rainer's arm movements. At one point, Pendleton asks Rainer to read an assemblage of found texts he had prepared in advance: accounts of Rainer's life and work, descriptions of the killing of Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner, and critical essays that inform Pendleton's work.

Reading slowly, in a steady voice, Rainer's eyes fill with tears. “That is an impressive document,” she says when she finishes, clearly moved. “Thank you for reading it,” Pendleton replies, with reverence. Shortly after, they stand and hold each other's arms, drop them, and grab them again in different positions—in an exercise called Arm Drop, which Rainer created with Steve Paxton. Having just returned from Los Angeles, where she spent hours in a gallery improvising with old friends, Rainer was reminded of Arm Drop and, with it, a nostalgic wave of memories. The video ends with footage of Rainer's famous 1966 dance Trio A. Pendleton paired the dance with “I Am Saved,” a song from a gospel compilation titled This May Be My Last Time Singing. Then, Rainer's calculated motions continue on, in silence.

The screening at Anthology was followed by a conversation between the artists and moderated by curator Adrienne Edwards, who arranged for Rainer and Pendleton to work together. When asked what she thought of the video, Rainer said she couldn't believe that three hours of conversation could be condensed so poignantly into 14 minutes. And she was amazed that Pendleton could breathe this new life into Trio A, which she referred to as “an old warhorse.” Pendleton described his process: poring over Rainer's writings in *The Mind Is a Muscle* for references to music, memory, and film, and then putting the quotations to work alongside writings from his self-published collection of essays *The Black Dada Reader*, including “The Pitfalls of Liberalism” by Stokely Carmichael and a work by Malcolm X that reads “They're beginning to see what they used to only look at.”

Pendleton referred to his process as a series of “radical juxtapositions,” a term coined by Susan Sontag to describe Allan Kaprow's “Happenings” in 1960s New York and which Rainer uses in reference to her own films. Edwards asked about the political nature of this thinking, and Rainer explained that she switched from dance to film in the '60s because of a split between her aesthetic rebellions in dance and her activism

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against the Vietnam war and for women's rights. She turned to film, she said, "in order to address the split." Considering this in relation to Pendleton's video, she mentioned the way that ordinary things—like eating a turkey burger or "going to Trader Joe's"—happen on the same screen, and in the same reality, as news reports of police brutality and war.

Pendleton said such parallel occurrences are essential to his work and that revealing their intersections—through video as well as in his two-dimensional works—is his response to absurdity and violence. He does not worry about clarity, he said, because he finds a certain freedom in illegibility. Moving issues of race, class, and society into realms of abstraction allows them to accumulate new vocabularies and, therefore, to enter peoples' minds with more pertinence, more urgency. Considering the abstraction of primary documents becomes a radical move.

Edwards—whose recent group show at Pace Gallery, "Blackness in Abstraction," alluded in part to this abstract radicality—brought up how both Rainer's and Pendleton's work relates to Dada, in that they obscure some meanings in order to free others. Both artists' juxtapositions act as gauges of history, it seemed, and their interaction suggests that the past is never dormant. "I hope, as artists," Pendleton said calmly, "we are creating documents that matter."

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