

MIT List Visual Arts Center

Media Contact:
Mark Linga
mlinga@mit.edu
617.452.3586

listart.mit.edu

Edgar Arceneaux: Written in Smoke and Fire

Hayden and Reference Galleries

October 14, 2016–January 8, 2017

Opening Reception: Thursday, October 13, 6 PM

(September 19, 2016) Cambridge, MA—Edgar Arceneaux’s work in sculpture, drawing, and film reflects on cultural and personal memory, and is informed by the belief that all modes of inquiry and systems of knowledge are contingent. His recent projects consider a number of complicated personal legacies and, more broadly, the erasures and connections between seemingly disparate historical narratives.

His solo exhibition at the List Center will present three interlocking projects. The body of work titled *A Book and a Medal* (2014) takes inspiration in part from the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., connecting 1960s history with the landscape of contemporary postindustrial American cities. The 1964 Nobel Peace Prize medal awarded to Dr. King in recognition of his life’s work is currently the subject of a court battle between warring family members. Arceneaux examines these histories by reproducing redacted documents as sculptural assemblages and wall works that intersperse historical anecdote with recent events. At the center of this group is Arceneaux’s hour-long video *A Time to Break Silence* (2013). Shot in an abandoned church in Detroit, the video brings together excerpts from Dr. King’s last speech, addressing the Vietnam war, and references to Stanley Kubrick’s *2001*.

The Library of Black Lies (2016) is a labyrinthine, Borgesian book repository that evokes, as the artist has stated, part “cabin in the woods, part geode.” The spiral-shaped interior includes shelves with volumes of manipulated books, art catalogues, encyclopedias, and biographies with variously altered titles. Multiplied and fragmented in the mirrored interior, the books in the library have been variously burned or encrusted with sugar crystals. Arceneaux reflects on the inherent limits of translation and transcription, interventions that necessarily produce variations in meaning.



Until, Until, Until... (2016) is a new installation reconfiguring Arceneaux's first theater work, which premiered at the Performa Biennial in New York last year. The play looks at Broadway legend Ben Vereen's controversial blackface performance at Ronald Reagan's inaugural celebration in 1981. He staged a musical number in homage to trailblazing vaudeville performer Bert Williams, which was broadcast in a truncated version, triggering a backlash and derailing Vereen's career for decades. Arceneaux restaged the performance in its entirety, reflecting as much on the power of media representation as on what happens when an artist is gravely misunderstood.

The exhibition will be accompanied by Arceneaux's most comprehensive institutional catalogue to date. The book will contain an introduction by exhibition curator Henriette Huldish and three essays. Arceneaux himself will reflect on the body of work *A Book and a Medal*. Adrienne Edwards, curator at large at the Walker Art Center and curator for Performa, New York, will consider *The Library of Black Lies*. Art historian and critic Phil Taylor will discuss the gallery installation *Until, Until, Until...*

Edgar Arceneaux (b. 1972 in Los Angeles) lives and works in Los Angeles. Arceneaux was the director of the Watts House Project from 1999-2012. Solo exhibitions of his work have been mounted at Kunstverein Ulm, Germany; Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects; The Studio Museum of Harlem, New York; and the Project, New York, among others. He has been included in group shows at Mona Bismarck American Center, Paris; Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Orange County Museum of Art; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Kunstmuseum Basel; and the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, and many more.

Edgar Arceneaux: Written in Smoke and Fire is curated by Henriette Huldish, Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center

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About the MIT List Visual Arts Center

Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the List Visual Arts Center is a creative laboratory that provides artists with a space to freely experiment and push existing boundaries. As the contemporary art museum at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the List presents a dynamic program of six to nine special exhibitions in its galleries annually, a program of



exhibitions by emerging artists known as the List Projects, as well as a broad range of educational programs, events, and publications. The List also maintains and adds to MIT's permanent art collection; commissions new works through the MIT Percent-for-Art program, a collection of more than 50 site specific artworks throughout the campus; and oversees the Student Loan Art Program, which lends more than 600 works of art annually to MIT undergraduate and graduate students.

Originally named the Hayden Gallery, MIT established this center for the visual arts in 1950 to provide a dedicated structure upon which to build the Institute's existing relationship to the arts. It was renamed the List Visual Arts Center in 1985 in recognition of a gift from Vera and Albert List, and relocated to its current expanded location in the Wiesner Building on the campus of MIT, which was designed by MIT alumnus I.M. Pei (B.S. Architecture, 1940) and Partners Architects. In 2015 the List Visual Arts Center celebrated 30 years as MIT's contemporary art museum.

