

Will Rawls' *[siccer]*

Group Visit Teaching Guide to The Kitchen's exhibition *[siccer]* at The Kitchen at Westbeth

What is *[siccer]*?

Using the techniques and technologies associated with photography, cinema, and the stage, Rawls' *[siccer]* challenges divisions between the living, the captured, the rehearsed, and the performed. Experimenting with stop-motion animation, the work features a compilation of still images that have been stitched together to produce moving images depicting a cast of Black dancers in various states of movement. These stop-motion videos are then projected onto chroma green frames suspended from the ceiling, reminiscent of the green screens commonly associated with film production. At once caught, distilled, fragmented, and unfinished, gestures glitch in and out of focus across Rawls' cinematic scaffolding, which both literally and metaphorically speaks to the complex visibility of Blackness in contemporary society.

The project's title is inspired by the Latin adverb "[sic]," used to indicate incorrect spelling within a quotation, and often employed when Black vernacular speech is cited within a standard English text. Through this titular reference, *[siccer]* illuminates the ways in which Black performance evades white and Western forms of "correction" and classification, suggesting instead a way of being that is both iterative and endlessly becoming, much like the project itself. Within the work, as language and gestures mutate, so too does meaning, in the process revealing meaning itself as yet another construction—as that which both becomes and comes undone. In an image-saturated world wherein our technologies and identities are inextricably intertwined, *[siccer]* invites audiences to consider the verbal and physical play that marks how Black performance actively eludes capture and speculates on the potential for collective strategies of narrating the world, uncorrected.

Learn more about the [exhibition here](#).

Before Your Visit

Before you visit, think about:

1. Do you think photos and videos capture reality? In what ways do they capture the "real" and in what ways do they not?
2. How does language change over time? Can you think of an example where a definition of a word or phrase has changed? Try to trace that change; was it because of a piece of media or your group of friends? Or maybe its definition depends on the audience.

3. In what ways do you perform on a daily basis? Do you act, dress, or speak differently depending on your environment? Think about your workplace, school, home, etc.
4. Think about the ways in which your body moves day by day. Which of these movements are you conscious of? Which of these movements feel natural or subconscious?
5. What movements do you enact when you are happy? What movements do you enact when you are sad? Mad? Think of other emotions to add to the list: scared, nervous, insecure, proud, etc.
6. How do filmmakers and photographers evoke different emotions? Think about films or pictures you have seen that made you feel sad or happy or scared. What was the camera doing? Maybe it's zooming in slowly or only showing part of the subject's body. How would you use a camera to capture different emotions?

Important Words and Terms to Define

Below are some key terms used in the exhibition. Some of these terms are subjective and depend on different historical connotations. Read the below definitions and use your own research to expand upon them. Maybe you have your own definitions of them!

1. **Stop motion animation:** a filmmaking technique in which an object is moved incrementally, captured frame-by-frame in a series of photographs. These photographs are then replayed, creating an illusion of movement.
2. **Pixilation:** stop motion animation using human subjects
3. **Liminal:** a transitional phase between two places, stages, or states of being. It can be physical, emotional, or psychological. The word "liminal" comes from the Latin word *limen*, which means "threshold."
4. **Vernacular:** language spoken in a particular region, typically a language of the people
5. **Green screen:** a filmmaking technique in which a subject performs in front of a green background. This technique allows a filmmaker to replace the background behind a subject.
6. **Sic:** the project's title is inspired by the Latin adverb "[sic]," used to indicate incorrect spelling within a quotation, and often employed when Black vernacular speech is cited within a standard English text.
7. **Frame:** the visual boundaries of the screen in a film. All action happens within the frame.
8. **Site-specific installation:** an installation immerses the audience into an art piece. Instead of a single painting or video, an installation takes up room throughout a space. A site-specific installation is created specifically for the space it is in.

During Your Visit

This exhibition includes a film with a runtime of 53 minutes. This installation and film can be experienced in many ways. Use the below suggestions to create your own viewing experience.

1. Watch a portion of the film through one hanging frame. Then move to another frame and continue watching.
2. Watch the film while walking around the space. Then try watching it while sitting still.
3. Mimic the gestures of the dancers on screen. Can you hold a pose for a minute? Longer?
4. Face away from the screen and focus on the audio. What do you hear? What is the loudest sound? What is the quietest? There are 11 speakers in the space, each playing a unique channel of audio. Can you follow the sound channels as it moves from speaker to speaker?
5. Is there another way you can watch the film? Try it out.

After Your Visit

Reflection

1. Throughout this exhibition, Will Rawls uses the color green. Did this color bring about any memories or feelings? Why do you think he chose to use it?
2. Rawls uses the space to invoke a swamp. Where did you see that environment in the gallery space? Rawls' speaks about the swamp as a liminal space, not quite water and not quite land. Can you apply this metaphor of the swamp to the themes of the exhibition? How do animation, performance, and language capture the liminal?
3. Rawls pays homage to the classic films "The Wiz," and "The Wizard of Oz." Where do you see these inspirations in the exhibition? How do these films relate to the themes of the exhibition?
4. Rawls' work discusses Blackness as it relates to the camera and performance. How did it feel to be surrounded by moving images? Think about visibility as it relates to race; when are we able to be visible? Invisible? Too visible? How did this exhibition demonstrate the "complexity of visibility" as Rawls puts it?
5. This installation includes many hanging screens and a large dual screen. How would the film feel if it was presented on one traditional screen? In what ways would your experience differ?
6. What does it mean for the camera to capture the dancers' movements or emotions? What does it mean for the camera to free the dancers' movements or emotions?
7. Rawls describes each part of this film as a portrait of each dancer. Do you agree? What defines a portrait? Do you see that motif anywhere else in the installation? How do the portrait films differ from the ensemble?
8. The film includes green screens without added effects and a few moments of "behind the scenes" in which the audience can see the cameras and set. Why did Rawls choose to include this? Did you imagine anything replacing the green screen background? What?

Art-Making Activity

Explore movement and film with this simple, yet, evocative activity!

Materials Needed:

1. Movie that is meaningful to you
2. Video camera (could be your phone!)
3. Any props that you would like to use
4. Yourself

Steps:

1. Choose a movie that is meaningful to you. Maybe watch it again to remember why it calls to you.
2. Use your body to describe this movie. Choose 3 gestures or movements to represent a scene in the movie.
3. String those movements together in a sequence to create a dance.
4. Record yourself presenting that dance.
 - a. Dance it slow, then fast, then in between.
 - b. Pause at various moments of the dance. Then do it again pausing at other moments.
 - c. Can you do it in reverse?
5. Play around with the settings on your camera. Make it very saturated, use a filter, zoom in then zoom out.
6. How would this dance change with a prop? In a different setting? What colors are important to the dance?