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**Hammer Museum presents *Ulysses Jenkins: Without Your Interpretation*  
On view February 6 – May 15, 2022**



**(Los Angeles, CA)**— The Hammer Museum at UCLA presents the west coast premiere of *Ulysses Jenkins: Without Your Interpretation*, the first major retrospective on the work of groundbreaking video/performance artist **Ulysses Jenkins**. A pivotal influence on contemporary art for over fifty years, Jenkins—who was born and lives in Los Angeles—has produced video and media work that conjures vibrant expressions of how image, sound, and cultural iconography inform representation. Using archival footage, photographs, image processing and elegiac soundtracks, Jenkins interrogates questions of race and gender as they relate to ritual, history, and the power of the state. The exhibition is co-curated by **Erin Christovale**, associate curator at the Hammer Museum, and **Meg Onli**, former ICA Andrea B. Laporte Associate Curator at ICA Philadelphia, where the exhibition is on view through December 30, 2021. Onli is now director and curator of the Underground Museum in Los Angeles. *Ulysses Jenkins: Without Your Interpretation* will be on view at the Hammer from February 6 to May 15, 2022.

"*Without Your Interpretation* recognizes Ulysses Jenkins's groundbreaking body of work as well as his enormous impact on the development of video as a vital contemporary art practice. Over fifty years, Jenkins has pushed the boundaries of the format, and there is a special resonance to celebrating him in Los Angeles, where he is from, and where the moving image holds such an important place," said Hammer Museum director **Ann Philbin**.

"Ulysses Jenkins's singular and innovative explorations of Blackness and the American experience through video have had a far-reaching influence on experimental media and generations of artists," said **Erin Christovale**. "But since his work defies categorization, there has been an absence of scholarship around it. Meg and I are thrilled to be a part of placing his oeuvre in an art historical context, and to share it with the world."

"Ulysses Jenkins is the forefather of the practices of so many young video artists working today. It feels important to look back and chart that history—especially given the way Black experimental artists have come to the forefront in both art and independent film spaces in recent years—putting forward radically different modalities of moving image-making," said **Meg Onli**. "Jenkins's work always feels vibrant and bursting at the seams. I love the textures that he's making visually. I hope audiences will see his incredible practice and feel, as we do, there's just something undeniable about Ulysses."

Beginning as a painter and muralist, Jenkins was introduced to video just as the first consumer cameras were becoming available. He quickly seized upon the television technology as a means to broadcast

Images (L-R): Ulysses Jenkins, *Without Your Interpretation* rehearsal documentation, 1984. Color print. 3 1/2 × 5 in. (8.9 × 12.7 cm). Courtesy of the artist.; Ulysses Jenkins, *Two Zone Transfer*, 1979. Still of video transferred to DVD, color, sound. 23:52 min. Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix.; Ulysses Jenkins, *Centinela Valley Juvenile Diversion Mural Project* documentation, 1976. Boulevard Market, Lennox, CA. Courtesy of the artist.

alternative and critical depictions of multiculturalism, citing the catalyst of Melvin Van Peebles's *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) and its call to Black filmmakers to control their subjecthood by controlling the media that depicts them. Adopting the role of a "video griot," Jenkins is inspired by the oral traditions in videos that are often structured around music and poetic recitation as well as dynamic performances.

From his work with Video Venice News, a Los Angeles media collective he founded in the early 1970s, to his involvement with the artist group Studio Z (alongside David Hammons, Senga Nengudi, and Maren Hassinger), to his individual video and performance works with Othervisions Studio, Jenkins explicitly comments on how white supremacy is embedded in popular culture and its effects on subjectivity. Jenkins studied under Charles White, Gene Youngblood, Chris Burden, and Betye Saar, and has collaborated with many artists in his work, among them Kerry James Marshall, who performed in *Two-Zone Transfer* (1979); Hammons, who was the subject of *King David* (1978); and Nengudi and Hassinger, both of whom appeared in Jenkins's video *Dream City* (1981), among other works.

Organized closely with the artist—including the digitization of a sprawling archive and conversations with Jenkins and his collaborators—the exhibition encompasses a broad range of over twenty videos and more than sixty works in all that showcase his collaborations, mural paintings, photography, and performances, highlighting the scope of the artist's practice.

Among the many video works included in the exhibition is *Mass of Images* (1978), an innovative video art piece considered one of the first works in the genre by a Black artist. In it, Jenkins critiques the media's role in perpetuating racist and harmful images of Black people in the United States. Like other works in the exhibition, it is grounded in the issues that remain at the heart of contemporary conversations about inequality and environmental devastation amplified by unchecked capitalism, governmental oppression, and systemic racism's impact on Black cultural production.

Though many emerging Black video artists who came of age in the 1990s and early 2000s cite Jenkins as a major influence, Jenkins's groundbreaking and prescient work is only now being revisited by scholars, curators, and a wider range of artists. Particularly relevant today is the political and social commentary embedded in Jenkins's work, such as his interrogations of Black stereotypes in the American entertainment industry in *Mass of Images* (1978) and *Two-Zone Transfer* (1979) or calls to protect the rights of indigenous groups and champion environmental conservation in *Bay Window* (1991).

## **EXHIBITION CATALOGUE**

The exhibition is accompanied by the first publication devoted to Jenkins's work, jointly produced by ICA and the Hammer, designed by Los Angeles-based design studio ELLA. The publication features essays by exhibition curators Meg Onli and Erin Christovale and curatorial assistant Ikechukwu Onyewuanyi, along with a roundtable conversation between scholars Michael Gillespie and Alessandra Raengo and curators Greg de Cuir Jr. and Chrissie lies. Also included are reprinted articles by artists Aria Dean ("Written and Bitten: Ulysses Jenkins and the NonOntology of Blackness") and artist Kerry James Marshall ("Higher Learning"), as well as contributions from Maren Hassinger, Senga Nengudi, Cauleen Smith, May Sun, David Hammons/Charles White Archive, and art historian and curator Kellie Jones.

A reprint of Jenkins's memoir *Doggerel Life: Stories of a Los Angeles Griot* also accompanies the exhibition.

## RELATED PROGRAMS

### **Mass of Images: Experimental Music Videos**

**Thursday, March 3, 7:30pm**

An evening of videos, music, and conversation organized by **BlackStar**, with filmmakers and artists such as **Rashid Zakat** and **Cauleen Smith**, among others. Panelists will discuss the influence of experimental music videos, including the work of Ulysses Jenkins, on contemporary culture and their own work.

### **Ulysses Jenkins: History of a Video Griot**

**Thursday, March 17, 7:30pm**

#### **Copresented with the Getty Research Institute**

Exhibition curators **Erin Christovale** and **Meg Onli**, UC Irvine professor **Bridget R. Cooks**, and other special guests discuss *Ulysses Jenkins: Without Your Interpretation* as well as the artist's biography, archive, and inclusion in the Getty Research Institute's oral history project. Followed by a Q&A with **Ulysses Jenkins**.

## CREDIT

*Ulysses Jenkins: Without Your Interpretation* is co-organized by the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania.

The exhibition is organized by Meg Onli, former Andrea B. Laporte Associate Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, and Erin Christovale, Associate Curator, Hammer Museum, with Ikechukwu Onyewuenyi, Curatorial Assistant.

*Ulysses Jenkins: Without Your Interpretation* is supported by Pamela J. Joyner and Alfred J. Giuffrida and by Lyndon J. Barrois and Janine Sherman Barrois.

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## ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM

The Hammer Museum is part of the School of the Arts and Architecture at UCLA, and offers exhibitions and collections that span classic to contemporary art. It holds more than 50,000 works in its collection, including one of the finest collections of works on paper in the nation, the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts. Through a wide-ranging, international exhibition program and the biennial, *Made in L.A.*, the Hammer highlights contemporary art since the 1960s, especially the work of emerging and under recognized artists. The exhibitions, permanent collections, and nearly 300 public programs annually—including film screenings, lectures, symposia, readings, music performances, and workshops for families—are all free to the public.

## HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION

Admission to all exhibitions and programs at the Hammer Museum is free, made possible through the generosity of benefactors Erika J. Glazer and Brenda R. Potter. Tuesday-Sunday: 11am to 6pm. Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Boulevard at Westwood, Los Angeles. Onsite parking \$7 (maximum 3 hours) or \$7 flat rate after 6 p.m. Visit [hammer.ucla.edu](http://hammer.ucla.edu) for details or call 310-443-7000.