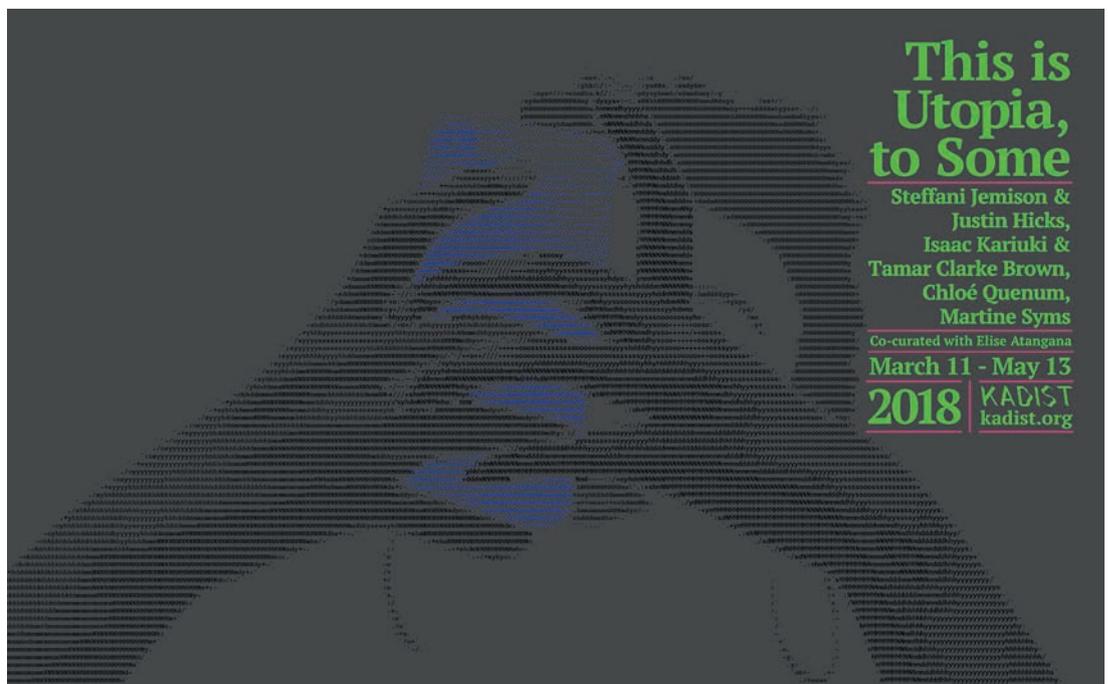


KADIST



This is Utopia, to Some
Steffani Jemison & Justin Hicks, Isaac Kariuki & Tamar Clarke Brown, Chloé Quenum, Martine Syms
Co-curated with Elise Atangana
March 11 - May 13
2018 KADIST kadist.org

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This is Utopia, to Some

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Co-curated with Elise Atangana

PRESS
RELEASE

Exhibition dates: March 11 – May 13, 2018

Artist in residence: Martine Syms from mid-May to mid-June

Opening reception on Saturday, March 10, 2018, from 5 to 8 pm ;
performance by Isaac Kariuki & Tamar Clarke-Brown, at 5.30 and
7:30 pm

The exhibition ***This is Utopia, to Some***¹ conceived in collaboration with curator Elise Atangana, **rearticulates visual narratives revealing a multiplicity of subjectivities and hybrid identities that coexist and interact.** The distinction between what is legitimated by the museum display and “ the culture of everyday life, which was thus de-valued as the denigrated product of mass-culture or as the de-valorised folk-culture of the urban masses”², **in other words, the distinction between high and low culture – has been rendered obsolete.** Instead, the definition of art should include the practices of artists who create their own editorial platforms, generate autonomous models outside the art world, as tools of visibility. They intervene at the intersection of private language and public communication and modify the relations between artist and audience. **New rituals of re-appropriation, translation, and sharing of personal and collective experiences fuel the circulation of images, maintaining links between the past, present and future.** By referring to specific sources as a form of resistance, transposed, translated into different fields (from graphic design and fashion, to music and literature) the participants of this exhibition generate formal languages that stimulate political imagination.

Cultural inheritance generates specific knowledge and implies ownership. It is not public, it is privately owned. The question of sources and of the responsibility toward histories requires special care during translation. **Chloé Quenum’s series of Allegories** appears as a formal abstraction. This series comes from her research in West Africa (Benin and Togo) on notions of origin and transmission through fabrics. The systems and graphic compositions on wax fabrics have specific meanings. The artist transposed these representations onto cathedral glass. Light reflection and glass vibration displace the reading of these patterns from their original context.

This echoes Steffani Jemison’s way of looking at how an experience can be at once aesthetic, ecstatic and intellectual. Power listening (Power power power power) results from a collaboration between Steffani Jemison and Justin Hicks with the inhabitants of a

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housing project in Brooklyn during Summer 2017. During the workshops, a listening session led to a collective transcript of an audio piece onto paper. From that experiment, Steffani Jemison produced a large drawing on velvet entitled *Power listening (How would we ever get over / over)*, to explore the correlation between drawing and writing.

CBT (Coding : Braiding : Transmission) is a collaborative performance and video installation conceived by Isaac Kariuki with artist and writer Tamar Clarke-Brown, in which braiding textures and gestures are translated into coding language. Using GoPro cameras and movement detection software, Isaac Kariuki echoes contemporary forms of policing that use technology to identify individuals. "Surveillance is nothing new for black folks"³. This work is to consider in relation to the recognition of Black bodies in the Western public space, whilst hair braiding is part of a historical and cultural tradition that has spread throughout the African Diaspora.

Martine Syms' practice explores how, in our highly mediated digital age, the production of images is linked to the production of identity. In 2012 she conceived the editorial platform *Dominica Publishing*, an imprint that is "dedicated to exploring blackness as a topic, reference, and marker, and audience in visual culture. **SHE MAD: Laughing Gas**, Syms' 2016 video installation, couples the form of the sitcom with omnipresent social media and phone screens as our quotidian backdrops. Syms's *Laughing Gas* uses Edwin Porter's 1907 silent film of the same title as a starting point for constructing a history of representation that extends into the present. Starring African American actress Bertha Regustus, the original film is "an early example of black women having a kind of subjectivity," says Martine Syms.

This is Utopia, to Some underlines the complexity of identities while showing their continuity. In that sense, the projection of a hypothetical future by the artists could be presented as multiple vernacular practices, which explore their own histories, modes of existence and re-appropriation, to counterbalance the representations framing our everyday life.

[1] The title is inspired by arecent novel *Solitude* written by Martine Syms, published by Triple Canopy: <https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/solitude/#three-one>

[2] Kobena Mercer, "Black Art and the Burden of Representation", in *Third Text*, vo. 4, n°10, 1990.

[3] Simone Brown, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Duke University Press Books, 2015, quoted by the artist.

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OPENING HOURS
Thursday to Sunday
from 2 to 7 pm
or by appointment
Metro stations:
Abbesses (12), Anvers (2)

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Chloé Quenum, *Les Allégories* (detail), 2016
39 in x 24 in
Cathedral glass, lead, steel
Courtesy of Joseph Tang Gallery



Isaak Kariuki & Tamar Clarke-Brown, *CBT (Coding : Braiding : Transmission)*, 2017
Photography
Courtesy of the artist

AVAILABLE
IMAGES

ELISE ATANGANA, LIVES AND WORKS IN PARIS, FRANCE.

Élise Atangana's work lies at the intersection between curatorship and exhibition production. Her research focuses on the relationships between physical mobilities and virtual mobilities (movement, representation, practice), how they affect our everyday lives and their link to contemporary art: how do the physical and virtual movements of individuals activate space today? How are artistic practices influenced by these new mobilities? How does our relationship to the body interact with the way virtuality modifies our perception of space, and what social and political implications do these modifications have?

Her recent curatorial projects include: *Seven Hills*, 2nd Kampala Art Biennale 2016, Kampala (Uganda, 2016); *Entry Prohibited to Foreigners*, Havremagasinet Art Center of Boden (Sweden, 2015); co-curatorship of the international exhibition *Produire le commun*, 11th Dakar Biennale (Senegal, 2014); *Rencontres Picha - Lubumbashi Biennale* (Republic of the Congo, 2013), in collaboration with Elvira Dyangani Ose. She is a part of the curatorial collective *On The Roof* with Caroline Hancock and Yves Chatap. From 2004 to 2009, she collaborated with the curator Simon Njami on several projects including *Check List Luanda Pop* for 52th Venice Biennale (2007).

ABOUT THE CURATOR

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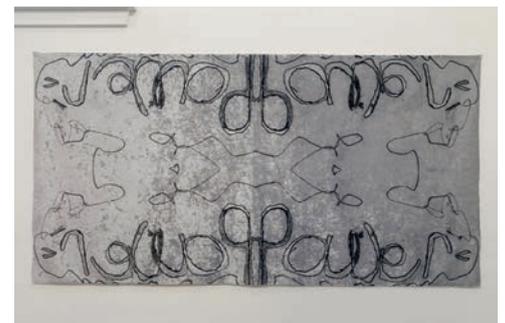
**STEFFANI JEMISON (BORN 1981 IN BERKELEY, UNITED STATES)
LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW-YORK.**

ARTISTS

Steffani Jemison uses a variety of mediums (video, installation, sound, performance). The investigation of vocabularies of words, images and movements as forms of language allows her to construct narratives in a dialectic of time that puts into perspective history, present and hypothetical future. **In 2017, Jemison and Hicks were invited to bring their collaborative work to the community center at Atlantic Terminal Houses in Brooklyn. Using the concept of “power listening” as a framework for thinking about politics, proximity, and sound, Hicks and Jemison organized public listening sessions and invited young people and adults to write, draw, and respond to songs selected by the community.** The mixed media work on velvet, sound installation, and video emerge from the exchange of ideas and images during the residency. The artists focus here on the relationships between drawing, writing and sound.

Jemison holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BA in Comparative Literature from Columbia University. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in exhibitions, performances, and screenings. Group exhibitions and screenings include *Economy of Living Things* at MABA (Nogent, 2017), *Crossing Brooklyn* at the Brooklyn Museum (New-York, 2014), and *Dreamlands* at the Whitney Museum (New York, 2017). She also had several solo exhibitions and commissions, which include *Plant you now, dig you later* at Mass MoCA (North Adams, Massachusetts, 2017), *Sensus Plenior* at Jeu de Paume (Paris, 2017), *Sol* at Jacob Lawrence Gallery (Seattle, 2016), and *Promise Machine* at the Museum of Modern Art (New-York, 2015). Jemison’s work is in the public collections of the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Brooklyn Museum, and Kadist. www.steffanijemison.com/

Justin Hicks is a composer and performer. His work has been featured at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Baryshnikov Arts Center, PS122, The Japan Society, The Knitting Factory, Jack, Bowery Arts and Science, MoMA, Dixon Place, and La Mama. He was a member of Kara Walker’s *6-8 Months Space* and was a performer and sound designer for Kaneza Schaal’s *Go Forth*, as well as the Obie Award-winning (Abigail Deville, design) production of *Prophetika: An Oratorio* by Charlotte Brathwaite. His vocal tribute *The Odetta Project: Waterboy and the Mighty World* was featured during Jack’s Freedom Songs Festival: Which Side Are You On, Friend? (Jack 1015). Most recently Justin was a contributing songwriter and performer in Meshell Ndegeocello’s *Can I Get a Witness?* (Harlem Stage 2016).



Steffani Jemison, *Power listening (How would we ever get over / over)*, 2017
Dye-sublimation print and acrylic on synthetic velvet
54in x 106in
Courtesy of the artist

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ISAAC KARIUKI (BORN 1993 IN NAIROBI, KENYA) LIVES AND WORKS BETWEEN LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM AND NAIROBI, KENYA.

The work **CBT (CODING : BRAIDING : TRANSMISSION)** explores the relationship between body and digital spaces in an attempt to understand how the Internet and new technologies build identities and define our perception of the world. **This installation, made in collaboration with american curator Tamar Clarke Brown, convert the act of braiding hair into an act of resistance. Through a computer programme designed by the artist, the movements of the girls' hands are translated into a code.** By causing a traditional practice and technologies used by surveillance policy to interact, this installation pictures a use of digital tools that emancipate themselves from technological surveillance.

Isaac Kariuki graduated from Central Saint Martins (MA Applied Imagination in the Creative Industries) and University of Kent (BA Digital Arts). His work has been showed in several exhibition including *Ctrl+Alt+Delete* at Meta Gallery Miami (2015), *Weaponise The Internet, Futures Exhibition* at TATE Modern (2016) and *Potentially «Flawless»* at House of Vans in Toronto (2017). He also had solo exhibitions : *SIM Card Project* at National Museum of Uganda during Kampala Biennale (2016) and *Skype Fashion Week* at Meta Gallery Miami (2015). He is the founder of *Diaspora Drama* a publication that focuses on creative people of color and their relationship to new technologies and Internet. He regularly provides talks and lectures and write for various magazines. isaackariuki.com/

Tamar Clarke-Brown is a London based freelance curator, critic and creator. She holds an MFA in Curating from Goldsmiths, University of London (2016). Her interdisciplinary practice focuses on experimental futurisms, digital culture, representation and the black diaspora. Tamar has worked with institutions including Serpentine Galleries and Autograph ABP and presented at institutions such as ICA London, Tate Galleries and Bard Berlin. Tamar contributes to platforms including AQNB, Screenshot Magazine and Protein Journal, most often writing on the intersection of technology and black critical theory, resistance and speculative futures. Recent curatorial projects include *I Am* at Playco (2018), *embassyHACK* at the Government Art Collection (2016) and *#Blackmendream LDN* at Buster Mantis (2016), which extended through a digital zine. <https://www.tamarclarkebrown.com>



Isaac Kariuki & Tamar Clarke Brown, *CBT (Coding : Braiding : Transmission)*, 2017
View of the performance, November 1st 2017, Protein Studios, London, UK
Courtesy of the artist

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CHLOÉ QUENUM (BORN 1983 IN PARIS, FRANCE) LIVES AND WORKS IN PARIS, FRANCE.

The works of Chloé Quenum draw their inspirations and forms across multiple fields and cultural domains. She appropriates them in order to shift uses and generate new formal and symbolic identities. Recently, the artist traveled to West Africa where she became interested in the relationship between weaving techniques and their symbolic correspondence in terms of narratives and codification. **Les Allégories create abstractions from fragments of wax textile motifs (a fabric widely used in sub-Saharan Africa), which are transposed into the technique of stained glass. The artist brings together symbolic elements from distinct cultures that share a tradition of visual narrative.** An analogy thus takes shape between the iconographic function of stained glass which in the Middle Ages told stories and the social function of the ideograms represented on African cloths.

Chloé Quenum graduated from École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts of Paris and studied anthropology of writing at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. She is represented by Joseph Tang art gallery (Paris). She has taken part in many group shows among which *PER/FORM*, *How to do Things With(out) Words* at Centre d'art Dos de Mayo (Madrid, 2015), *Period Room* at Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 2014) and *Hapax Legomena* at Mercer Union (Toronto, 2012). She has also had several solo exhibitions including *Elise* at Joseph Tang art gallery (Paris 2017), *From Milk to Fall* at Ronwg wonrg (Amsterdam, 2016), *Dune* at Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 2016) and *Parade* at LTD Los Angeles (Los Angeles, 2011). She is currently in residence at Wellington with The French Institute and Massey University (New-Zealand).

<http://www.galeriejosephtang.com/category/chloe-quenum/>



Chloé Quenum, *Les Allégories*, 2016
39in x 24in
Cathedral glass, lead, steel
Exhibition view "ELISE", Joseph Tang art gallery, Paris, 2017

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**MARTINE SYMS (BORN 1988 IN LOS ANGELES, UNITED STATES)
LIVES AND WORKS IN LOS ANGELES, UNITED STATES.**

Martine Syms draws on early cinema history and the language of television for *Laughing Gas*, the pilot episode of a situation comedy titled *She Mad*. This television series addresses not only on-screen representation but the assumed target audiences within American television history. Early programs were responsible for giving, in Syms's words, "visibility to a private black sphere." Syms' *Laughing Gas* (2016) uses Edwin Porter's 1907 silent film of the same title as a starting point for constructing a history of representation that extends into the present. Porter's nine-minute silent film featured Bertha Regustus, an African American actress whose character's infectious laughter, triggered by the administration of nitrous oxide at the dentist's office, affects everyone she encounters over the course of a single day. Notably, the film was one of the earliest examples of a black female actress performing an independent role on-screen. With *Laughing Gas*, Syms approximates Porter's film. She casts herself in the role of "Martine" in a series of largely improvised scenes, positioning her own identity alongside those of contemporary viewers in relation to a history of cinema that otherwise presumed universal stories for a seemingly universal subject.

Martine Syms uses video and performance to examine representations of blackness and its relationship to American situation comedy, black vernacular, feminist movements and radical traditions. Her artwork has been exhibited and screened extensively, including presentations at the Museum of Modern Art, the New Museum, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, MCA Chicago, Green Gallery, Gene Siskel Film Centre, and White Flag Projects. She has lectured at Yale University, SXSW, California Institute of the Arts, University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins University, and MoMA PS1, among other venues. Syms' recently presented exhibitions include *Borrowed Lady*, SFU Galleries, Vancouver; *Fact and Trouble*, ICA London; *COM PORT MENT*, Karma International, Los Angeles; *Vertical Elevated Oblique*, Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York. From 2007-2011 she was the co-director of the Chicago artist run project space Golden Age, and she currently runs *Dominica Publishing*: an imprint dedicated to exploring blackness in visual culture. She is the author of *Implications and Distinctions: Format, Content and Context in Contemporary Race Film* (2011). She is a faculty member in the Art Department at the California Institute of the Arts.

martinesyms.com/



Martine Syms, *SHE MAD: Laughing Gas*, 2016
4-channel video installation (color, sound),
loop, 6min59sec
Photo by Jeff McLane, © Martine Syms,
Courtesy of the artist and Bridget
Donahue, NYC
KADIST collection

KADIST believes contemporary artists make an important contribution to a progressive society, their work often addressing key issues of our time. KADIST is a non-profit organization that encourages this engagement and is dedicated to extending the reach of artists represented in its collection to a global audience, thus facilitating new connections across cultures. Its programs develop collaborations with artists, curators and many art organizations around the world. Local programs in KADIST's hubs of Paris and San Francisco include exhibitions, public events, residencies and educational initiatives. Complemented by an active online network, they aim at creating vibrant conversations about contemporary art and ideas.