



Arthur Jafa MATRIX 272 DECEMBER 12, 2018–MARCH 24, 2019
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM • PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

Arthur Jafa is an artist, director, editor, and award-winning cinematographer whose poignant work expands the concept of black cinema while exploring African American experience and race relations in everyday life. He has stated, “I want to make black cinema with the power, beauty, and alienation of black music.” **MATRIX 272** features two evening programs of screenings in BAMPFA’s Barbro Osher Theater as well as a gallery installation, including the debut of a newly commissioned video, *The White Album* (2018). On October 7, 2018 Jafa spoke with the exhibition organizers, Apsara DiQuinzio, curator of modern and contemporary art and Phyllis C. Wattis MATRIX Curator, and Kate MacKay, associate film curator, about his work and the exhibition. The following is an excerpt from that conversation, which has been lightly edited.

COVER

The White Album, 2018



APSARA DIQUINZIO You've talked about the importance of creating a new black cinema. What does that mean in terms of formal and structural approaches in your work, as well as content?

ARTHUR JAJA Black cinema, power, beauty, alienation—that whole mantra. Very central to my film practice, obviously. It's increasingly been put forward as a kinda meta-position in terms of my overall art practice. But in film terms it's, for me, very concrete—the idea that the potential of black cinema is inextricably bound up with, in technical or formal terms, synchronizing cinema (the apparatus itself) with black culture. It's not a case of what's been called African retention; one talks about black music, then some understanding of African music is fundamental to getting at the complexity of how that works. Cinema's just a little over a hundred years old, so there's no, per se, retention at play. But you can talk about aesthetic modalities. The register becomes primarily hypothetical, speculative. What one then starts to envision is a series of interlocking conceits, "If cinema (the apparatus itself) were incubated in a black context, what would it

look like?" I say "black" very specifically in the sense that by black I'm meaning the expressive continuities of black people, the folks of African descent who found themselves in the West by virtue of the slave trade.

This is very different from talking about Africanisms in, for example, jazz. There you can literally trace formal (technical and conceptual) continuities back thousands of years to the continent, to various African cultures and civilizations. But in cinema, it's as much a conceptual exercise as anything. Music, in the context of the West or the diaspora, is the one thing that everybody can agree on. It's the closest thing we have to a foundational expressive tradition, one that people have a total grasp of. So catalytically speaking, the mantra is really about trying to force people to think more deeply about what a black cinema might be, and what it might look like. In one sense it's a direct reaction to the definitions of black cinema that I grew up with—basically any cinema that had black people on camera was black cinema, which obviously is very limited, if not outright misleading, certainly

counterproductive. It's a kind of sociological definition of black cinema. By those terms, maybe even *Birth of a Nation* could be considered black cinema.

Cinema, to me, is maybe the richest ground to demonstrate the power—and latent potential, in fact concreteness, or realness—of black aesthetics, which is just the values of African people in the West, as they came to alternatively formulate themselves. When you talk about black culture—and I'm making a distinction from African culture—you're basically talking about a culture that was formed in freefall. Because all of the typical structures—infrastructures, conceptual infrastructures, and the social edifice that reaffirms, defines, codifies, and replicates what we would term a culture—a lot of those things were, at best, in disarray, if not absolutely nonexistent. So black culture has very specific things about it that are unique. It's not like the pre-contact (with Europe) cultures of New Guinea. It's not European culture per se. It's not *not* European culture: it's definitely a product of the West. But it is its own increasingly prophetic, contemporary-type culture, meaning certain of these circumstances, or the conditions of possibility that have generated or produced black culture, are being replicated increasingly everywhere, the maladies of globalization; homelessness, the migrant crisis, economic displacement, predatory and unconstrained capitalism. In a sense, it's the predominant example of a culture being formulated out of the fallout of global capitalism, because that's what the slave trade was, more than anything. So in a way, the thinking, conceptually speaking, is: how do we, in a sense, mine a catastrophe?

ADQ You've touched on this a bit already, but how does music relate to your concept of black cinema?

AJ As I've said, the music is the common denominator that everybody can agree on—that it's indisputably an amazing achievement. And one which is constantly evolving. If you say,

"black music," people know what you're talking about, even though black music couldn't be more diverse. I mean, are you talking about Bob Marley, or Young Thug, Billie Holiday, Aretha Franklin, Miles Davis, or Jimi Hendrix? It's broader than anything it could be reduced to, but at the same time, if you say black music, I think people still have a grasp on the general parameters of what you're talking about.

It's the one place in which the conceptual dimensions of the mantra can be understood by a lot of people, because people are just very versed with the entire body of work. In the same way people talk about being literate; in the tradition of the West, a well-read person would've read x, y, and z. It's curious the degree to which people have, by and large, heard everything.

And not only have they heard everything, you go back to the whole black-cinema-as-a-kind-of-almost-oxymoronic thing. I think Dave Hickey said it best; he said, "The dominant cultural form of the twentieth century was popular music." He said pop music, but basically that's black music. The only other thing that you could put up against it, even in terms of a debate, would be cinema.

The way in which those two things haven't really met is why the whole idea of black cinema also is so powerful—because outside of architecture, cinema is the most capital-intensive medium, which is another reason why black people, by and large, haven't been able to play in the arena. Not just make films, because black people made films from the very beginning. There's a feature film by a black director in 1916, so black people have always been in cinema. But when you talk about the degree to which people actually get to reshape the thing themselves, that depends on being able to play, and being able to play depends on capital. So, the capital-intensive nature has to do with why, on a large scale, we haven't seen the sort of counterculture transformations we might imagine would be part and parcel with black cinema. Those two things



haven't met. Black cinema and black music as an aesthetic formulation never really completely met.

There are instances, like the so-called UCLA rebellion and things like that, where people consciously set about to do that, and if you look at that body of work, it's amazing in that sense. I used to think we hadn't done it, but I think we did do it. The difference is, it's like having one record. That's like if John Coltrane had one record, or if Miles Davis had one record. The history of black cinema, outside of a few instances, is a series of amazing one-offs, eruptions. This comes back to the capital thing, which determines infrastructure, which in cinema, by and large, dictates sustainability vs. underdevelopment.

So I think it's a very powerful idea that points to a moment that fundamentally precedes the question of cinema, or even to a certain degree the question of black aesthetics. In what ways can we most powerfully demonstrate the humanity of black people? This is what precedes the whole thing, the question of why black aesthetics, indeed blackness itself, matters. And why this might matter to anyone besides black people . . .

it's kind of like Max Roach said about rhythm; he said, "It's both the least material and most felt of things." If, as an equation, you extract black people from what it is to be American, the American equation, then America just doesn't look anything like it looks now. And it can't be reduced to so-called political power, or even economic power. Even though I think in some ways the American economic miracle absolutely has to be understood as being inextricably bound up with several hundred years of free labor. Any system can work if you have free labor.

But beyond that, it's the ideas, how being black actually reformulated what was essentially a European paradigm into what we term America, the democratic ideals and all this. All of this driven, so to speak, from the bottom up. And not just black aesthetics, but the indigenous philosophical ideas of, for example, the Iroquois and things like this. So many of these "Americanisms" were formulated out of this. It's not like Europeans arrived here and nothing was here. There was an absence of *European* things, but that doesn't mean things weren't here. And

those things really did have a profound impact. So it's an assertion. We exist, we have always existed, we are real, and the evidence is the immaterial or ephemeral things that actually transformed everything.

The black cinema thing to me is kind of like that. Music, you can say, didn't just arise from black communities, it *arrived*. You can make the argument it came from Africa. But when you talk about black cinema, you can't say it came from Africa, what you're talking about is a thing being driven by, emerging in response to fundamentally immaterial ideas or values.

KATE MACKAY You grew up in Clarksdale, Mississippi. For me, Clarksdale, Mississippi is Robert Johnson, the Crossroads, and the home of the blues. It's a place with a powerful cultural legacy. Could you talk about the influence of growing up around Clarksdale, and in the South, on your work?

AJ Well, I could talk for hours about that. A lot of this isn't completely quantifiable, meaning it's just almost accidental, or coincidental, or maybe just magical. Seeing *2001: A Space Odyssey* in Clarksdale, which is really not about the culture of the South per se, except in the most negative way. It got there several years after it had shown everywhere else, and I saw it essentially on the white side of town, in a theater that black people didn't really go to. So that's part of it, that had a profound impact on me.

As you said, Clarksdale is like ground zero in terms of black American musical culture, which de facto means it's ground zero in terms of American musical culture. Which, in the twentieth century, means it's ground zero in terms of American culture period. Those things are inextricably bound up with each other.

It was a really intense place to grow up. Intense in sociological terms. Outside of maybe Appalachia, it's the poorest region in America, but paradoxically, it's so rich too, in terms of culture. I also think, on a metaphysical level, the Delta, which Clarksdale was in the center of, is a

very specific part of Mississippi. It's very different from the rest of Mississippi in some fundamental ways—it's flat for one thing, everywhere else has hills. And so the music that came out of that region bore the marks of that in a strange kind of way, the flatness of it. I always thought of it as a very trance-y environment. It's a very haunted (in social, political, and metaphysical terms) terrain.

When I grew up there was no Delta Blues Museum or anything like that; there is now. And it's strange if you go to that museum, it has a list of all the people that emerged from this . . . it's difficult to comprehend: Sam Cooke, Ike Turner, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, all these people come from a fifty- or sixty-mile radius. How do you account for that? It's bizarre, very *X Files*. If a high school produces a single professional athlete in any sport in a ten-year period, that's something. If they produce two or three, that's a kind of miracle. When a single region produces, I don't know, twenty-five to thirty percent (maybe more) of anybody who mattered musically at a certain point, how do you explain it?

ADQ Perhaps this relates, but could you discuss the importance of “affective proximity,” and how that pertains to your work?

AJ That's something John Akomfrah articulated in an interview. Something I felt was super essential to what I've been attempting. John said (and it's as lucid a crystallization of the idea as I can imagine): “At the end of the day, we're talking about putting things in some affective proximity to one another.” And I was like, “Yeah, that's clearly what I do.” To me, it's bound up with things like Duchamp's urinal, and Larry Levan as a DJ. This whole idea of how do you take givens, and without actually changing the material dimensions of those things, create a new thing? Which is essentially what the urinal was. It's what happens any time a great DJ does a set. They take these finite units of creation—and unlike hip hop, where they actually cut things up—and collage them. This is not collaging them, this is pure



sequencing, being a selector. They transform the actual—not just the experience of the thing, but the thing itself in some fundamental way—just by contextual resequencing. Or as John said, by putting them in affective proximity to one another.

I'm fascinated with the physics of this, because so much of Afro-American expressivity has been in the zone of what I would call immaterial expressivity. That is completely bound up with the fact that when we came here, we didn't control the material necessary to operate in the spaces of material expressivity; in fact, we were raw material ourselves, so we didn't have leeway to continue developing our architectural traditions, our traditions of sculpture, our painting, and things like that. Those things, relatively speaking, eroded or became underdeveloped in the context of the West. Most of our expressivity happened in the spaces where—and I've said this a zillion times, Nam June Paik has a great quote where he says—"The culture that is going to survive in the future is the culture you can carry around in your head."

If you look at where black Americans are strong culturally, it's in those spaces where our expressions and traditions could actually be carried on our nervous systems, because your oratorical traditions, your traditions of dance music, phonic expressivity—those things you can do on a slave ship, on a chain gang, in a prison camp. Those things go with you. This whole idea of affective proximity, and the transformation of a thing without manipulating the material dimensions of that thing, it's something that's present in the context of African expressivity. But in the context of the West, given the particular sociopolitical circumstances we found ourselves in, these essentially formal dimensions became hyperdeveloped. How do we take a thing (a given) that exists materially, and reformulate it without altering the actual material dimensions of the thing?

You can see that in hip hop. They take givens and make a new thing out of them. You see it in jazz with improvisation. Somebody said, "Black culture is culture in the frequency of emergency." And I always took that to mean like everything

happens in the moment, on the spot, do or die. But I also think of this in terms of emergency as emergence, as continual emergence. And that's bound up with the idea of, as I was saying in the beginning, freefall. Not coming out of a ground, but constantly arriving or emerging.

ADQ In this exhibition we're showing your new work, *The White Album* (2018). Do you consider it a sequel to *Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death* (2016)? And could you tell us a little bit about what inspired you to make the work?

AJ Well, I don't consider it a sequel, but I don't consider it not a sequel, either, because I don't know exactly what it is. Is it a work, or is it not a work? I'm not sure.

ADQ Why wouldn't it be a work?

AJ Well, it depends on what you consider a work. I was talking to another artist friend of mine about this: Are we doing anything more than just selecting things? Are we just curating? We were talking about Kanye's work of the last several years, how increasingly it's the product of a very sophisticated form of curation. Not that music production isn't always that, but it's foregrounded in a way.

When *Life of Pablo* came out, when it was released online, he was like, "It's not finished though." And it kept changing. If you went to TIDAL and listened to it, every week it was different. He was still remixing it. The album got released, there was a physical artifact that went out into the world, with a certain mix, but he continued modifying the mix. At some point another physical artifact went out which had a radically different mix. I guess, ostensibly, you could have them both. Whereas what he was doing was all of a sudden and there was no physical thing. The thing was just made available online. But that thing was evolving. That, to me, was amazing.

It's hard to say whether it is any more of a follow-up to *Love Is The Message* than anything

I do, the Serpentine book [*A Series of Utterly Improbable, Yet Extraordinary Renditions* (2018)], or anything else. They're all follow-ups, because they're preceded by alternate iterations of my thinking. And that line of thinking is continuous, continuously unfurling.

ADQ Getting to that line of thinking . . . I remember at one point you suggested that *The White Album* was a kind of reaction to the overwhelming response you got for *Love Is The Message*. Is that true?

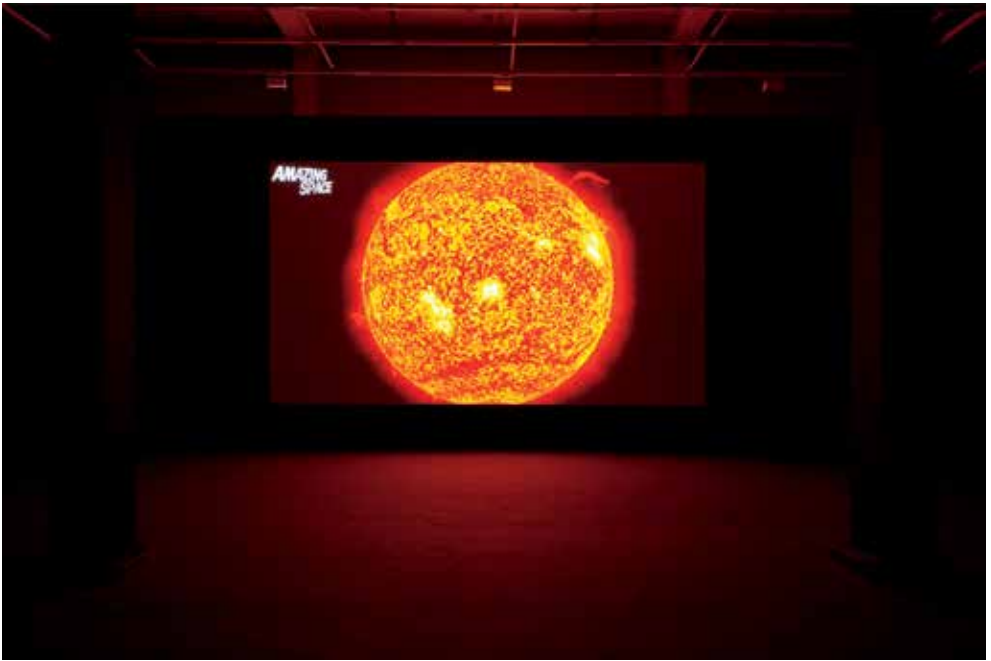
AJ It's definitely a reaction on a certain level, but so was *akingdoncomethas*. It's a double-edged sword. If people love it, great. *Love Is The Message* is roughly eight minutes long. People come up to me and say, "I cried." I don't know, presumably it's a compliment. But at a certain point I started feeling like there was some aspect of *Love Is The Message* that was too easy. People were getting this eight-minute epiphany so that even when people said, "Oh, I cried," the very cynical part of my brain suspected some kind of arrested empathy with regards to the experience of black folk. You know what I mean? It's not a very generous understanding of why people are responding to it. But I don't want to do any more eight-minute epiphanies. Hence, *akingdoncomethas* is two hours long. I wanted it to be something a bit more complicated to digest.

ADQ Why don't you want it to be digestible?

AJ I don't want it to be *uncritically* digestible. I mean, I've received no critical pushback to speak of about *Love Is The Message*. No one to my knowledge has formulated any problematics with the work. This in the face of the Dana Schutz controversy and all this other kind of stuff.

ADQ Are you hoping to elicit a critical response with *The White Album*?

AJ No, I'm trying to not be boxed in. I'm maneuvering, and the maneuvers I'm making are in relationship to the ground that I myself mapped out. You know what I'm saying? I don't want to be



trapped in it because I designed it. So, I'm very proud of *Love Is The Message*, and of course I'm pleased that people have been moved by it. *akingdoncomethas* is a lot less solicitous, it makes more demands on people.

The White Album is even resisting being a thing on a certain level, it's resisting being a work, as opposed to just a DJ set. It's a set; it is attempting to operate in the same rhetorical field as the other things, but to decenter some of what I think people think is central to what I do, which is to mainly focus on black folks. It's not that *The White Album* doesn't have black folks in it, obviously it does, but it's a very particular marginalization, or it de-figures, or pushes the black figure to the edges of it, and what's left is white folks.

ADQ What about your interest in the music videos by Oneohtrix Point Never? You put particular scenes of his videos in the work.

AJ I just think it's dope. It's in there because I think it's dope. I don't necessarily think he was consciously saying anything about whiteness, but then neither was Walt Whitman, even though it was very much about whiteness. Emily Dickinson isn't consciously articulating anything about whiteness even though she was. Maybe she thought she was saying something about the particular state of being a woman in society. A lot of it is just gut, it's not intellectual. There's something about all this that seems really to be about whiteness, even though maybe the authors wouldn't necessarily formulate it in those terms.

Even in *Love Is The Message* there's music videos all over it, it's just not extended. And that's what happened in the church film [*akingdoncomethas*] too: I just decided I wasn't going to do cuts, to resist the impulse to compress things. Which has a certain effect, I know how to do that. But I tried to let things retain a bit more of their autonomy. I'm not trying to dissolve Oneohtrix into the thing.

“Cinema, to me, is maybe the richest ground to demonstrate the power of black aesthetics.”

On YouTube these things are always preceded by something, and always followed by something. So it's not trying to be a thing. I'm just putting things in affective proximity to one another.

KM That leads to the next question, about the way your editing works. In *The White Album*, and *Apex*, and *Cassowary*, there's a mysterious, uncanny, and resistant quality to the editing. I was thinking about Joseph Cornell's films, he took footage that other people shot, and put it together, and then he would also remix the films for his little brother. I was also thinking of the way that Oscar Micheaux cuts sometimes, whether because the films have been broken up over time . . .

AJ Doesn't matter.

KM They have this . . .

AJ Jagged . . .

KM Jagged, resistant quality. And so, watching some of your films, I feel like that's there. I think you were just suggesting that it is part of the strategy, but maybe you could elaborate.

AJ There is a certain formal precedence for me, direct formal precedence. Ben Caldwell's *I & I* is one of them, the still sequences, and clearly *Apex* is an outgrowth of that. Was it conscious? It was twenty years later, but that's one of those moments in my life of looking at films that just had an indelible impact on me. I remember where I was standing when I saw it. I was just standing in the door watching it, and I was like, wow, that's incredible. Ben was the first black experimental filmmaker I ever met. I was very interested in experimental films, but I didn't even know a black experimental filmmaker existed. That was a very prescient and powerful moment for me. In the same way I've talked about 2007.

It's the same thing with Oscar Micheaux, which I saw at Howard University. I saw *God's Step Children*; it was introduced by a professor who said, “Now I'm going to show you what not to do.” He introduced it negatively. We saw it, and my first reaction was like, yeah this is bad, lighting is bad, acting is amateurish, sound is terrible, but ten minutes in I was like, this is kinda interesting. I went on to become obsessed with Micheaux. I was at the Library of Congress looking at the works, and decided that he was like the Louis Armstrong of black cinema.

It also spoke to how underdeveloped black cinema was that it couldn't even identify its own Louis Armstrong. It's sad, but it's that aspect of the jaggedness in relationship to what people expect from a film that's a big part how it's an embodiment of who we are. Nobody says the Coliseum in Rome is any less majestic because it's mostly ruins. It doesn't matter whether it's ruins or not. The Micheaux I'm interested in is the Micheaux of our imaginations. At the end of the day, I don't care, beyond a certain point, how intentional or conscious it was. That's like trying to say in [Jackson] Pollock's works it mattered whether he could tell you what each little stroke meant; they don't work like that. You have to accept them globally.

There's certain things that I could very consciously say are formal precedents for what I do. That would be Ben Caldwell's work, that would be 2007: *A Space Odyssey*, that would be Oscar Micheaux's work, Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, that would be [Kenneth Anger's] *Scorpio Rising*. Outside of 2007, *Scorpio Rising* had probably had the biggest impact on me of any single film.



So, in a strange kind of way, I'm always trying to replicate the most intense experiences I have had as a moviegoer. I was eleven years old when I saw *2001: A Space Odyssey*. A big part of its effect was a consequence of my age and gaps in my understanding. Do you then build gaps into a work as a means of replicating some of the disorientation you experience seeing this as a kid? How do you recreate that experience?

Nobody ever talks about the church film in relationship to Warhol. It's my *Empire*. It's the durational, wearing-people-down aspect of it, even though it's two, not eight, hours. It's both of those things, but at the same time, anybody who grew up in a black church knew that's a big part of it. It's not just people having spells and falling out. That's what characterizes the black Baptist church experience. Well, if anybody grew up in it, so much was about being bored. It's like sitting in there with your grandmother, or your aunt, or sister, and looking off into space, spacing out in it.

A really good friend of mine saw a very early cut of *akingdoncomethas*, and her dad, who

was a deacon, said, "Needs more music and less preaching." He's thinking about it in terms of presentation, but I'm actually trying to have it be more *like* church than *about* church. And trying to figure out what's the difference between the two. Trying to exist in that space.

So *The White Album*, to me, exists conceptually in the same space. I never got to go to the Paradise Garage and hear Larry Levan. I've heard mixes, audio tapes, Larry Levan and Ron Hardy, genius DJs who created a lot of the formal parameters of what we would call DJ culture now. You listen to those cassettes, what they were doing, the kind of volatility, the dynamics, how they're manipulating the bpm of different tracks, making them align (and misalign) in different ways; this is all, to me, again bound up with the Duchamp thing. Duchamp had a readymade, boom! But what if you take five readymades, and you have to organize them in the space in relationship to each other? That's the affective-proximity thing. How do those things, in relationship to each other, create a new thing? And, to make a crazy conceptual leap,

it's just the slave ship experience again. Africans as readymades, a bunch of people chained in relationship to each other, bound up, creating a new thing. That new thing is blackness.

ADQ How do the notebooks relate to the notion of affective proximity?

AJ Same thing.

ADQ How long have you been making the notebooks; is it still ongoing?

AJ Like everything—it's finished, but not over. The films, in a certain respect, can be seen as extensions of the notebooks. But I'm a little resistant to the idea that the books are simply some sort of archival impulse mapped onto film. Yes and no (mostly no). I stopped making the books at precisely the moment that I stumbled onto Adobe Bridge—which is software designed to manage large-scale digital capture and, as a default, allows you to organize images on a scalable grid.

ADQ Oh, interesting.

AJ Yeah, the Internet, Google, and YouTube—all these things came online right around the time my son was born; he's fourteen now. I remember very distinctly discovering Bridge, because I'd subscribed for the film-editing app of the Adobe suite, and was like, what's this? When professionals started taking digital stills, a photographer might take 10,000 stills at a time when a few hundred would've been the max before. Software applications like Lightroom and Bridge became necessary just to handle the unprecedented number of images one could capture at a go. So, I started downloading images from the Internet. That made the whole process of hitting newsstands to "harvest" images obsolete. The Internet was just so much quicker, and was free. My thirties were spent trawling newsstands and searching for used magazines. I just ran out of gas. The very last books were made shortly after my son was born. I'd made

some version of the books from my late twenties through my early forties, pretty obsessively. They were stand-ins for making work. And they were driven, to a certain degree, by my frustration with what I was imagining versus what I was able to actually make. So, even when they're characterized as "art," they were never "art" to me. They're virtualities, not actualities. The way a chef's recipe isn't a cake. So the books, to me, were always equations. Almost anything in them, I could tell you, "That was about this, I was thinking about making this work, which I never made." So, they're bound up with failure, and other kinds of stuff; they're abortions.

ADQ So Bridge is the new form of a notebook.

AJ Well, files. Bridge is just a way to manage or present the files. It allowed me to organize the images in a number of ways. You can order images alphabetically, you can set it up so that a specific image stays in place, regardless of the number of images you add. I could move images around very quickly and resequence them on the fly. Then for *Apex*, in particular, I was showing it to people just by clicking through it manually, and a friend of mine put that sequence on a timeline, and showed it back to me. And I was like, wow, okay.

KM In terms of the collection of images and moving images for your works, do you collect them and catalog them into different areas, or do they . . .

AJ They gravitate to each other. The daily practice, unless I'm caught up working on something else, is one that goes back almost ten years. "3/17" will be the file name; that's March 2017. Outside that it'll say "WK1," which means the first week of that month, then "DZ1, DZ2, DZ3," depending on how many days I do it. I pull any- and everything that catches my attention, pretty automatically, intentionally uncritically. Sometimes, if I'm reviewing the sets as I go, I'll be like, okay, I've been pulling these kinds of images for a while, and consciously shift my focus. But generally I pull anything that draws my attention,



whether it's something I've intentionally searched for, and found, or something I've randomly come across.

At some point I'll go to a particular month, one that's ended, and collapse everything. Say, I pulled forty images a day per week for a month, I then make selects for that month, maybe sixty images that seem the most interesting. I do this as the months are completed, then at the end of the year I collapse all of these. These files, which are distillations of specific months, when looked at globally, in relation to one another, become diaristic, gestalt, psychoanalytic even.

The books are collections of recipes, or spells—now I'm making cakes, hopefully magic. The films are things that exist somewhere in between the images, which the books compile, and the material artifacts, which they map out, suggest, or engender. They issue forth from the same clot of preoccupations.

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Tupelo, Mississippi in 1960, Arthur Jafa studied architecture and film at Howard University. With Elissa Blount Moorhead and Malik Hassan Sayeed, Jafa is a member of TNEG, a motion picture studio committed to the expansion of black cinema. He has had solo exhibitions at institutions such as the Pérez Art Museum, Miami; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; the Serpentine Gallery, London; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit. He was featured in group shows at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; the Dallas Museum of Art; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; the Met Breuer, New York; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Jafa has screened his films internationally, including at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Park Avenue Armory, New York; Performa 17, New York; the International Center of Photography, New York; the Museum of Contemporary African Diaspora Art, New York; the Aurora Picture Show, Houston; and the 52nd New York Film Festival. He was awarded the Herb Alpert Award in 2018 and the Paul Robeson Award in 2017. He won Best Documentary at the Black Star Film Festival in 2015 for *Dreams are Colder than Death* (2014), and the Cinematography Award at the Sundance Film Festival in 1992 for *Daughters of the Dust* (dir. Julie Dash). Jafa has directed many films, including *Sharifa Walks* (2015), *New Soul Rebel: Adrian Younge* (codirected with Malik Hassan Sayeed, 2015), *Deshotten 1.0* (codirected with Sayeed, 2009), *Black Millennium* (2000), *Corner* (2000), *Yellowjacket* (2000), *Tree* (1999), *Smile* (1996), *Slowly This* (1995), and *Considerations* (1983). Jafa lives and works in Los Angeles and is represented by Gavin Brown's enterprise.

CHECKLIST

The White Album

2018

Continuous video projection; color, sound; approx. 40 min. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York / Rome; commissioned by the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA).

Untitled

1990–2007

Cut paper in plastic sleeves, bound in three-ring binders
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York / Rome

ILLUSTRATED STILLS

Arthur Jafa: still from *Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death*, 2016; digital video (color, sound); 7:30 min.; photo courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York / Rome. © Arthur Jafa, 2018

Arthur Jafa: still from *APEX*, 2013; digital video (color, sound); 8:22 min.; photo courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York / Rome. © Arthur Jafa, 2018

Arthur Jafa: still from *Dreams are Colder than Death*, 2014; digital video (color, sound); 52:57 min.; photo courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York / Rome. © Arthur Jafa, 2018

ARTHUR Jafa / MATRIX 272 IS CO-ORGANIZED BY APSARA DIQUINZIO, CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHYLLIS C. WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR, AND KATE MACKAY, ASSOCIATE FILM CURATOR, WITH MATTHEW COLEMAN, CURATORIAL ASSISTANT. THE MATRIX PROGRAM IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GENEROUS ENDOWMENT GIFT FROM PHYLLIS C. WATTIS AND THE CONTINUED SUPPORT OF THE BAMPFA TRUSTEES. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY MEYER SOUND. THE SCREENINGS IN THE BARBRO OSHER THEATER ARE PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS.



“The mantra is really about trying to force people to think more deeply about what a black cinema might be, and what it might look like.”



FILM SCREENINGS

BARBRO OSHER THEATER

Wednesday / 2.27.19 / 7:00

Dreams are Colder than Death (2014, Digital)

In conversation: Arthur Jafa and Leigh Raiford

New Soul Rebel: Adrian Younge

(Jafa, Sayeed, 2015, Digital)

Total running time: 71 min.

Thursday / 2.28.19 / 7:00

**Affective Proximity: Films by
Arthur Jafa and Others**

In conversation: Arthur Jafa and Greg Tate

Chasing the Moon (Dawn Suggs, 1991, Digital)

I and I (Ben Caldwell, 1979, 16mm)

APEX (2013, Digital)

Cassowary: Mechanics of Empathy

(2016, Digital)

Total running time: 72 mins