

RASHAAD NEWSOME

MATRIX 161

FEBRUARY 3 - MAY 1, 2011

WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART



THE HERALD, THE COMP

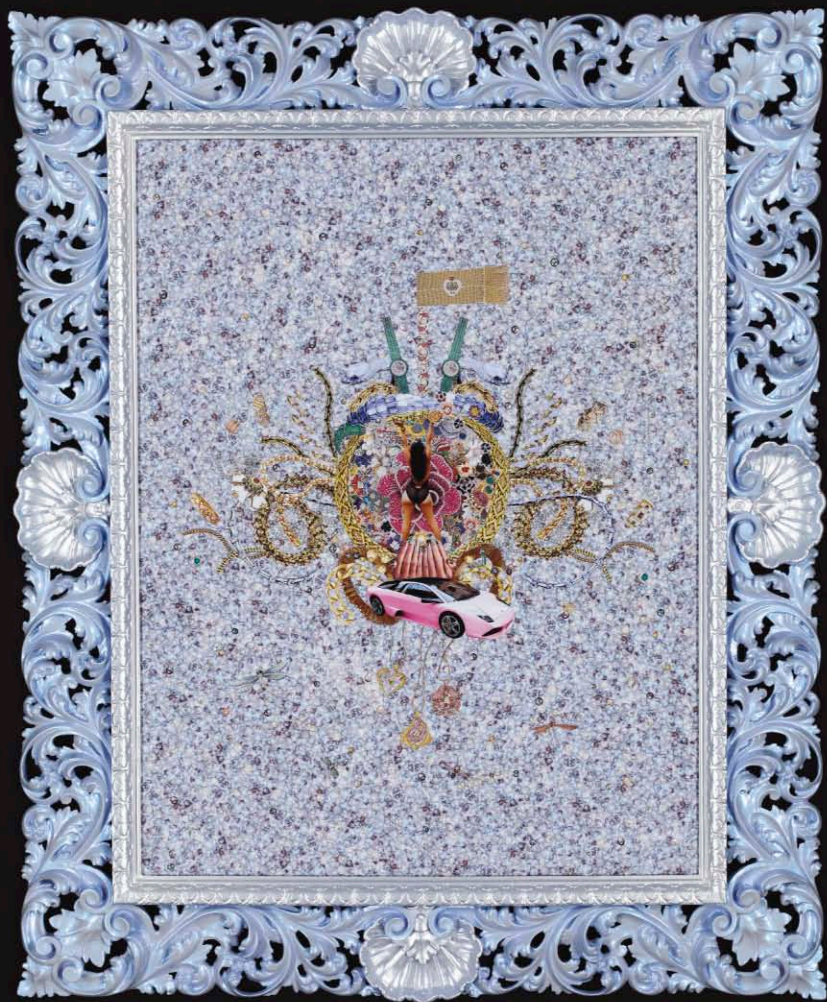
High society and street culture join forces in New York artist Rashaad Newsome's art, beginning with fantasy coats of arms created for today's hip-hop royalty. Borrowing the traditional design elements of medieval heraldry—initially developed to identify knights' alliances when covered in full-body armor on the battlefield—Newsome updates the ancient lexicon with the contemporary status symbols of black urban youth and its lead tastemakers, like rap music mogul Jay-Z. From Louis Vuitton hats and Rolex watches, to AMEX black cards and Mercedes sports cars, Newsome mines music magazines and auction catalogues for the luxury items, designer brands and oversized “bling” jewelry that are sanctioned by the hip-hop elite. Hundreds of individually-cut and pasted images form each opulent coat-of-arms collage in his “Status Symbols” series. By adopting an upper echelon hallmark and marrying it to low-brow culture, Newsome attempts to level the social and political playing field on a grand scale.

In *Venus de Video* (2010), a recent collage, Newsome makes reference to two iconic representations of Venus—the *Venus de Milo* (Greek, late 2nd century BC)¹ and Alessandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (c. 1485).² Newsome's mythological goddess of love assumes the form of a big-bottomed video girl set against a field of jewel-encrusted flowers surrounded by a variety of glistening gems and gold and platinum chains, with a pink Lamborghini at its base. Carpeted in pearls, the background is surrounded by an ornate frame with four scallop shells that allude to the perch of Botticelli's *Venus*. The frame is painted with Ferrari's customized pearlescent car finishes in powder blue and white. This armorial achievement—an excessive display of luxury—toys with the stereotype of the hip-hop crowd.

The heraldic shield is the basis of Newsome's wall sculptures. Utilizing the shield form that is so closely associated with feudal knights, Newsome's contemporary constructions incorporate a variety of gold rope chains, diamond encrusted bands, and hip-hop pendants on faux fur fields. Fur patterning, particularly ermine, was a typical decorative device in heraldic shields. *Fess* (2010) incorporates faux chinchilla with a “fess,” or horizontal band, of black and white diamonds dividing the shield in half. Three “iced-out,” “street-cred” badges³ and praying hands adorn the shield. A gunmetal black Jesus and cruciform pendants hang beneath the shield. Symbols of the street mix with symbols of the spirit. Rappers often invoke religion and faith in their music and lives. However, in the context of this heraldic tradition, Newsome's crosses also make reference to the Crusaders whose white tunics and shields bore England's emblematic red cross of St. George.

Newsome's appropriation of European heraldry fits squarely into its eight-hundred-year history. Since its military beginnings, the language of heraldry has been used by the nobility, sovereigns and the Church. Over time, commoners devised their own coats of arms as a way of expressing class equality. This practice crossed the Atlantic to America, where prominent families proudly displayed their crests on possessions marking important events. The development of corporate logos and college and

POSER, THE CONDUCTOR



VENUS DE VIDEO, 2010
COLLAGE ON PAPER IN CUSTOMIZED FRAME
72 3/4 X 60 X 3 1/4 INCHES
COURTESY RAMIS BARQUET GALLERY,
NEW YORK

My works dismantle power structures one shiny block at a time.

—RASHAAD NEWSOME

university seals can also be attributed to heraldry. Leading Hartford citizens associated with the Wadsworth Atheneum possessed such arms for both family and business, including Samuel Colt and J. Pierpont Morgan. With strong examples of coats of arms in the Wadsworth Atheneum's American and European Decorative Arts collections, Newsome has selected several glass, silver, and ceramic objects to be displayed in dialogue with some of his own works in the museum's Connections Gallery. A highlight is *Louis XV* (c. 1755), a Chantilly porcelain bust of the French king that includes the familiar royal arms of France, bearing three fleurs-de-lys surmounted by a crown.

A self-labeled "composer," Newsome consistently plays with various media. In addition to composing collage and sculpture, music holds a key position in much of his work. (A native of New Orleans, his father was a musician.) Newsome's art engages and often combines multiple creative genres, including video, performance, choreography,

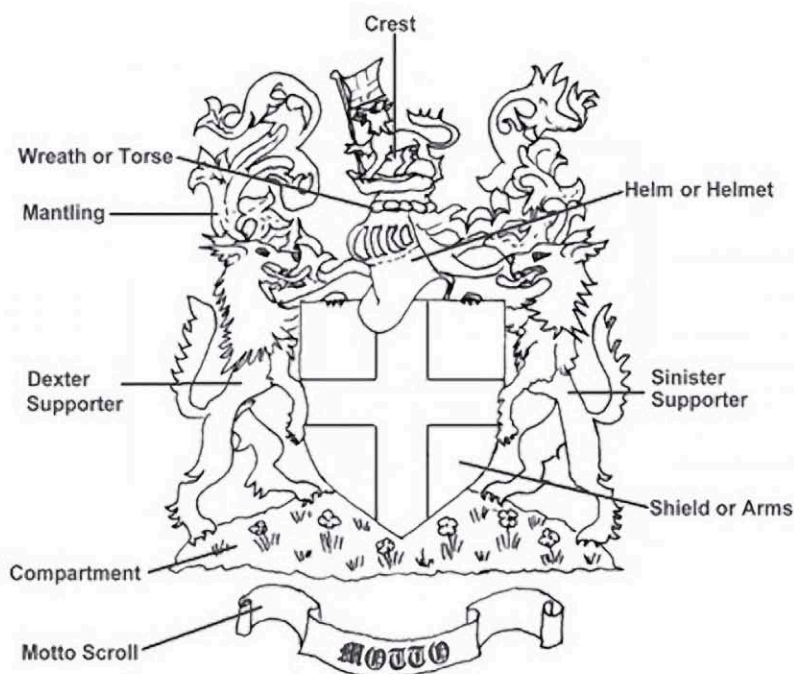


DIAGRAM OF A COAT OF ARMS

digital technology, fashion, and popular and urban culture. *Shade Compositions (Screen Tests 1 & 2)* (2008 and 2009) and *Shade Compositions 2009* (2009) exemplify this cross-disciplinary approach.

Screen Tests are the edited documentation of videotaped auditions conducted by the artist to cast the performance piece *Shade Compositions*. At Newsome's direction, a variety of women perform isolated elements of "throwing shade"—a means of communication of African American origin, based on expressive body gestures, movements and vocal sounds that are largely non-verbal. The *Screen Tests* provide a fascinating and often humorous anthropological exploration of individual expression. Newsome later cast more than twenty of these women in *Shade Compositions 2009*, a choreographed live stage presentation⁴ in which they perform a vocal symphony with sassy attitude in high style. Their costumes are neutral-hued, haute-couture ensembles created by fashion designer Kai Kühne. Newsome, front and center with his back to the audience, wears a classic black tuxedo, the customary attire for his role as the orchestra conductor. His baton has been replaced with a Nintendo Wii controller, with which he mixed sound and video live on a large screen above the stage. In this work, the artist transforms a cultural language of the street into a concerto for high and high-tech society. Newsome has cast and performed this work in several cities, nationally and internationally.

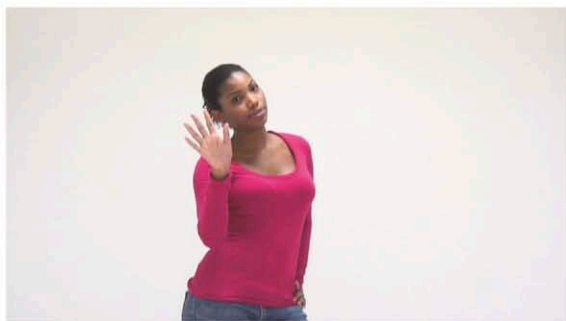
Related to *Shade Compositions* is *The Conductor*—perhaps Newsome's magnum opus—a two-part⁵ music-video artwork based on Carl Orff's iconic classical piece *Carmina Burana* (1935-36). The already-powerful musical masterpiece, which Newsome accentuates with samplings of pulsing hip-hop beats, visually explodes in a wall-size projection in brief clips pulled from popular rap videos obtained from a "best of" survey conducted by New York radio stations Hot 97 and 105.1. Featuring segments from LL Cool J, Rick Ross, T-Pain and Redman, among many others, more than 5,000 individual video frames were manipulated to focus on the various bejeweled, expressive hand movements of the hip-hop artists, adapted so that they appear to "conduct" the musical tour de force with rhythmic perfection.

Whether uniting a classical cantata with rap music videos, a traditional coat of arms with hip-hop status symbols, or a symphony performance with throwing shade, Rashaad Newsome creates powerful, original works combining culturally diverse materials. Through his seamless compositions in collage, sculpture, performance and video, he addresses issues of social difference and identity, while erasing the lines between high and low culture in perfectly composed packages of popular culture.

PATRICIA HICKSON

Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

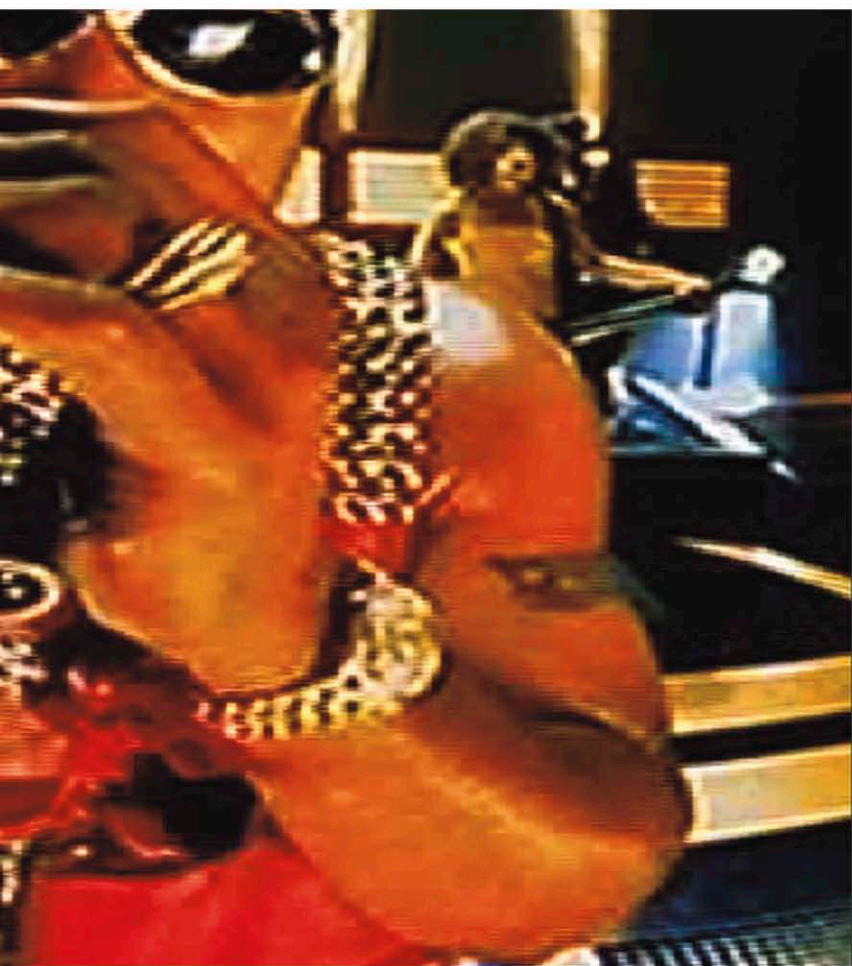
SHADE COMPOSITIONS (SCREEN TESTS 2), 2009
VIDEO STILL OF SINGLE CHANNEL VIDEO WITH SOUND
RUNNING TIME: 11:29
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



SHADE COMPOSITIONS 2009, 2009
VIDEO STILL OF SINGLE CHANNEL VIDEO WITH SOUND
RUNNING TIME: 21:03
PERFORMANCE AT THE LOWER MANHATTAN CULTURAL
COUNCIL'S DOWNTOWN DINNER AT THE KITCHEN, NEW YORK
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

THE CONDUCTOR, 2005-09
VIDEO STILL OF SINGLE CHANNEL VIDEO
WITH SURROUND SOUND
RUNNING TIME: 6:19
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST





RASHAAD NEWSOME

EDUCATION

- 2001 BA, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA
2004 Certificate, Film Video Arts, New York, NY

SOLO EXHIBITIONS & PROJECTS

- 2011 *Rashaad Newsome / MATRIX 161*,
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art
2010 *Honorable Ordinaries*, Ramis Barquet
Gallery, New York, NY
Futuro, ar/ge Kunst Galerie Museum,
Bolzano, Italy
2009 *Standards*, Ramis Barquet Gallery,
New York, NY
2008 *Compositions*, Location One, New York, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *Free*, New Museum Of Contemporary Art,
New York, NY
In the Company of..., Housatonic Museum
of Art, Bridgeport, CT
Greater New York, MoMA PS1,
Long Island City, NY
Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of
American Art, New York, NY
East Coast Video, Ramis Barquet Gallery,
New York, NY
Stage II, The Project Gallery, New York, NY

COMMISSIONS

- 2009 *Status Symbols #22*, Atlantic Records,
New York, NY
Shade Compositions 2009, Lower
Manhattan Cultural Council Downtown
Dinner, New York, NY

SELECTED PERFORMANCES

- 2010 *Honorable Ordinaries, Under the High Line*,
24th St., New York, NY
Shade Compositions, MoMA PS1,
New York, NY
Shade Compositions, Garage Center for
Contemporary Culture, Moscow, Russia
FIVE, Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York, NY
2009 *Shade Compositions 2009*, The Kitchen,
New York, NY

Born 1979, New Orleans, Louisiana
Lives and works in New York, New York

SELECTED AWARDS

- 2011 Pilchuck Glass School Artist in Residence, Seattle, WA
- 2010 The Urban Artist Initiative Individual Artist Grant, New York, NY
- 2009 Rema Hort Mann Foundation, Visual Arts Grant, New York, NY
Summer/Fall Artist in Residence Program, Eyebeam, New York, NY
BAC Community Arts Regrant, Brooklyn Arts Council, Brooklyn, NY
- Harvestworks Van Lier Grant, Harvestworks, New York, NY
- 2008 Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Workspace Artist Residency Program, New York, NY
- 2006 Franklin Furnace Grant for Performance Art, Franklin Furnace Fund, New York, NY
- 2005 L'Entreprise Culturelle Artist in Residence, L'Entreprise Culturelle, Paris, France

PUBLICATIONS

- 2010 *Greater New York*, exhibition catalogue, MoMA PS1, New York, NY
- 2010 *Whitney Biennial*, exhibition catalogue, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

COLLAGE

Status Symbols #26, 2010

Collage on paper in customized frame
40 x 34 x 5 inches
Courtesy of the Collection of Stavros Merjos and Honor Fraser

Status Symbols #33, 2010

Collage on paper in customized frame
66 x 33 x 4 inches
Courtesy Ramis Barquet Gallery, New York

Status Symbols #35, 2010

Collage on paper in customized frame
38 ½ x 33 ½ x 3 ½ inches
Private Collection

Status Symbols #37, 2010

Collage on paper
33 ¼ x 25 1/8 x 1 ¾ inches
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Rothschild

Status Symbols #40, 2010

Collage on paper in customized frame
28 ½ x 22 x 3 inches
Private Collection

BO\$\$, 2010

Collage on paper in customized frame
64 ¼ x 54 ¼ x 6 inches
Courtesy Ramis Barquet Gallery, New York

Venus de Video, 2010

Collage on paper in customized frame
72 ¾ x 60 x 3 ¼ inches
Courtesy Ramis Barquet Gallery, New York

Duke of NOLA, 2011

Collage on paper in customized frame
47 x 36 ½ x 4 inches
Courtesy of the Artist

Sun King, 2011

Collage on paper in customized frame
55 x 46 x 7 inches
Courtesy of the Artist

WALL SCULPTURE

Honorable Ordinaries, 2009

Plexiglas, faux fur, and jewelry

26 ½ x 18 ½ x 2 inches

Courtesy Ramis Barquet Gallery, New York

Bend, 2010

Plexiglas, leather, faux fur, and jewelry

32 x 19 x 7 inches

Courtesy Ramis Barquet Gallery, New York

Fess, 2010

Plexiglas, faux fur, and jewelry

36 x 17 x 2 inches

Courtesy Ramis Barquet Gallery, New York

VIDEO

The Conductor (Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi) and

(Primo Vere, Omnia Sol Temperat), 2005-09

Single channel video with surround sound

Running time: 6:19

Courtesy of the Artist

Shade Compositions (Screen Tests), 2008

Single channel video with sound

Running time: 10:44

Courtesy of the Artist

Shade Compositions (Screen Tests 2), 2009

Single channel video with sound

Running time: 11:29

Courtesy of the Artist

Shade Compositions 2009, 2009

Single channel video with surround sound

Running time: 21:03

Courtesy of the Artist

THANKS

Cecil Adams, Ramis Barquet, Erik Bowen, Mary Busick, Tara Cantor, Tova Carlin, Alyce Perry Englund, Fabiana Faria, Mark Giuliano, Eric Gleason, Nina Goodale-Salazar, Ritz Henton, Nicholas Kilner, Meixi Ma, Adria Patterson, Allen Phillips, Johanna Plummer, Emma Randers, Kim Reynolds, Linda Roth, Dina Silva, Marlborough Chelsea, Ramis Barquet Gallery, the lenders to the exhibition, and, especially, artist Rashaad Newsome.

COVER IMAGE:
FESS, 2010
PLEXIGLAS, FAUX FUR, AND JEWELRY
36 X 17 X 2 INCHES (OVERALL)
COURTESY RAMIS BARQUET GALLERY,
NEW YORK

ARTIST TALK

MATRIX Gallery Talk
Rashaad Newsome
Thursday, February 3, 2011
6:00 pm

Rashaad Newsome will discuss the work in his exhibition in the Avery third floor galleries.

MATRIX 161 has been made possible in part by NewAlliance Foundation and the current and founding members of the Wadsworth Atheneum's Contemporary Coalition.

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Wadsworth
Atheneum
Museum of Art

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¹ *Aphrodite of Milos* (Greek, late 2nd century BC, marble), better known as *Venus de Milo*, resides at the Louvre Museum, Paris, France.

² Alessandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (c. 1485, tempera on canvas) resides at the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

³ The badges read: "B. The Black Wall Street. Live for Everything. Die for Nothing." "Hoodstar Certified. Money, Power, Respect." And "USDA Certified. Inspected and Passed by the Streets."

⁴ *Shade Compositions 2009* was performed at The Kitchen for the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Annual Dinner and is presented in the MATRIX exhibition as a video work.

⁵ To date, Newsome has completed two of six parts of *The Conductor*. The first two parts—*Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi* and *Primo Vere, Omnia Sol Temperat*—are presented in the MATRIX exhibition.