



KAHLIL JOSEPH  
MATRIX 183

BLKNWS<sup>®</sup>

NOVEMBER 8, 2019 - MARCH 1, 2020  
WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

# BLKNWS

KAHLIL JOSEPH, *BLKNWS*, 2018-ONGOING.  
DUAL SCREENSHOTS. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

Originally pitched as a cable news program for a black American audience, artist and filmmaker Kahlil Joseph's *BLKNWS* (2018–ongoing) offers a creative approach to what “news” can be by focusing on narratives that celebrate empowerment and offer positive portrayals of black people.<sup>1</sup> “*BLKNWS* imagines a cable news network animated by a cosmopolitan, culturally omnivorous, politically engaged, art loving and intellectual black sensibility—a bit like if BET merged with CNN and then merged with *Artforum* and the *New Yorker*,”<sup>2</sup> writes *artnet News*. Presented on two large flat-screen monitors, a continual stream of images mixes found footage with original news desk segments. *BLKNWS* is a dynamic exploration of history, sports, music, art, literature, fashion, television, film, politics, and cultural criticism through a distinctly black lens. As a continually evolving artwork, *BLKNWS* is regularly updated to stay current as events make the news cycle.

Joseph's double-screen news presentation subverts the single-channel delivery system that is the genre's norm. At times the screens work as one—as with the *NWS Desk* (news desk) segments featuring a *BN* (*BLKNWS*) editor or guest on each screen—but at other times the content is unconnected. Writer, critic, and curator Hilton Als explains Joseph's thinking: “he began to ask himself what story he could tell from his perspective, and his community's. Black life and black culture weren't linear; they had been interrupted too many times by violence, prejudice, disaster, and compromise. And there was the flip side: the juicy originality that emerged from those bad days and funky nights. How best, then, to create on film a black aesthetic that represented the hope, the highs, and the losses of a twenty-first-century New Negro?”<sup>3</sup> Cinematographer, artist, and colleague Arthur Jafa further explains Joseph's disruptive presentation: “The mix is it. The mix is in the face of linear thinking, it is in opposition to reductive thinking.”<sup>4</sup> *BLKNWS* exemplifies the complexities of the news subject.

In addition to the unique two-channel display, *BLKNWS* is presented on a photographic backdrop. Joseph selects different historic photographs of all-black groups as source images for the wallpaper. These have included the Pittsburgh Crawfords baseball team (1932); the New Orleans congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family (c. 1900); and the 369th Infantry Regiment (United States) known as the Harlem Hellfighters (1919). Joseph explains these hero images:

“A vintage photograph of a group of black people stares out at the viewer. These photos are symbolic of the importance of family, of the importance of visual documentation, of the importance of the gaze, of staring history in the eyes. It is also a reminder of our American superstructure to undermine, erase, ignore and dismantle the black family, black history, black enterprise and, more generally, black assembly.”<sup>5</sup>

COVER: SOLDIERS OF THE 369TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, KNOWN AS THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS, WERE PHOTOGRAPHED UPON RETURN FROM WORLD WAR I, 1919. DETAIL. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION. COURTESY KAHLIL JOSEPH.



BN

BN Editor, Comedian

ALZO SLADE



## A New Exhibit Curated by Hilton Als Celebrates the Life of James Baldwin

"As a galvanizing humanitarian force, Baldwin is now being claimed as a kind of oracle," says journalist Hilton Als, who curated a new exhibition of depictions of Baldwin.





TRIFARI WILLIAMS

BN Editor, Ifa Priestess

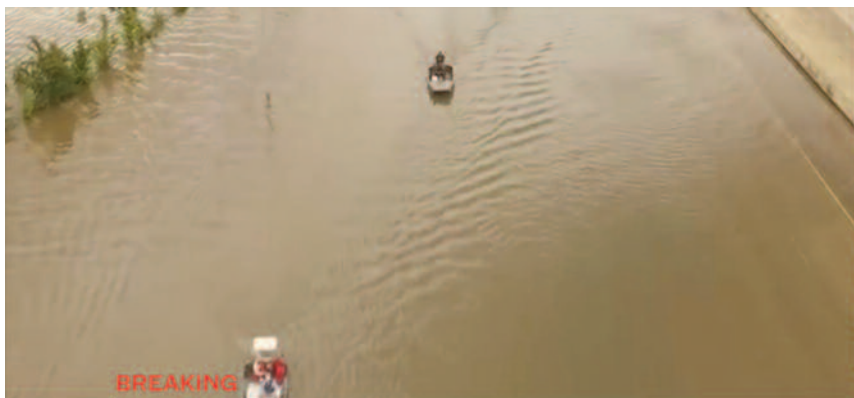
BN



TEAM USA

LIVE





**BREAKING**

**BN**

**Kenyan Court Blocks China-Backed Power Plant on Environment Grounds**

ent activism. She is known for having initiated the school strike for climate movement that formed in November 2



**BLKNWS<sup>®</sup>**







# BLKNWS®

THE UNDERGROUND MUSEUM

BREAKING

SAIDIYA HARTMAN  
WRITER, SCHOLAR

BN®

INTIMATE HISTORIES OF SOCIAL UPHEAVAL

in "Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Trade." When enslaved African Muslims were originally b

Featured in the MATRIX presentation, the Harlem Hellfighters (formerly the 15th New York National Guard Regiment) famously served on the frontlines during World War I.<sup>6</sup> Serving 191 days and suffering approximately 1,500 casualties, the Hellfighters served longer and experienced more losses than any other American unit. Through the larger-than-life-size group portrait, these historic heroes communicate power and humility. Joseph also colorized the photograph in a dazzling blue violet, creating visual contrast with the often black-and-white offerings of *BLKNWS*.<sup>7</sup>

*BLKNWS*' content is refreshed in real time through a hard-wired internet connection to the artist's studio. This unique technology allows the broadcast to expand over the course of its presentation at every venue. *BLKNWS* is customized with material that is particularly relevant to each venue's community. From history to popular culture to current events, *BLKNWS*' various subjects are entertaining, informational, and educational. Black-and-white historical clips of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and

# Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

wins the Democratic primary in New York's 14th congressional district.

By Mike Lux JULY 13, 2018

The Democratic establishment is clearly flustered by the stunning upset victory of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez over the person who was considered to be the likely next Democratic leader in the House, Congressman Joe Crowley. Former DCCC Chair Steve Israel, in a recent *I Found* essay, taking as a former boss who has knocked on a lot of doors in Brooklyn, Israel, opined that "what sounds good in Brooklyn, New York, doesn't work in Brooklyn."

Israel's sarcasm, however, is a bit off-kilter, who is to blame a self-described "insurgent" for Ocasio-Cortez's victory? That a political system "too far to the left" could win in the Midwest. Other Democratic insiders are insisting that this upset isn't that big a deal, making the case that Ocasio-Cortez's ideas are actually no different from mainstream Democratic Party stuff, she just says it in the "social" vernacular. Which, of course

is a direct contradiction of the two quotes. Meanwhile, *AOC* people are calling her now) has become a rock star to progressive insurgent activists and other candidates, becoming a major fundraiser for the candidates she has endorsed and the groups affiliated with her. What is going on in Democratic politics?

As I write in my new book *How To Democrat In The Age Of Trump*, the answer to that question, as well as to the more vexing

June 26, 2018



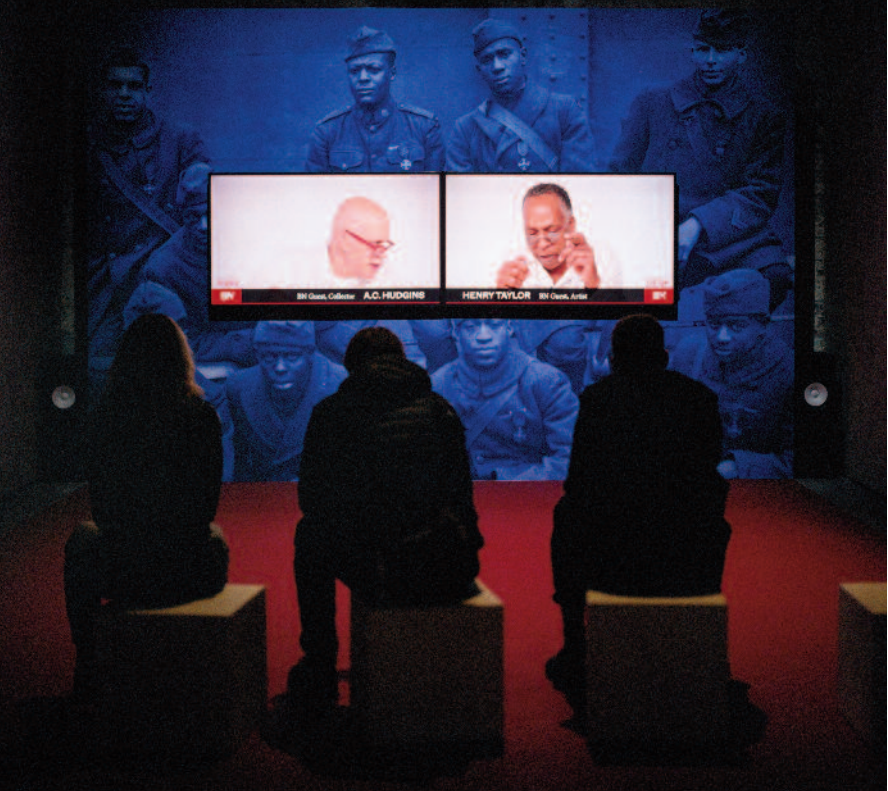
brought to the colonies, they quickly became known for rebellion. After the earliest recorded uprising on Christmas

novelist James Baldwin are presented in cycles that also include color footage with contemporary figures like congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, athlete Serena Williams, and writer Saidiya Hartman. YouTube videos, Instagram stories, and actual news clips accompany newly produced NWS Desk segments with a range of BN editors and guests: actress Amandla Stenberg, comedian Alzo Slade, artist Henry Taylor, and Ifa Priestess Trifari Williams. And it is notable that the slick and authoritative *BLKNWS* logo maintains a prominent presence in the creative/commercial enterprise.

As previously noted, *BLKNWS* was conceived as a cable news program. It was always intended for a broader audience. *BLKNWS* has found a place in the art world with recent presentations in art galleries, biennials, and museums,<sup>8</sup> but Joseph's sites for *BLKNWS* are more diverse than these arts institutions. The artist has placed the work in private residences and social gathering spots that include markets, hotel lobbies, and barbershops.<sup>9</sup> The genre-defying *BLKNWS* belongs in all these worlds amid numerous calls for *BLKNWS* to become an actual network,<sup>10</sup> which seems likely.



INSTALLATION VIEW OF *BLKNWS* AT THE  
ARSENALE, 58TH VENICE BIENNALE, 2019.  
PHOTO BY LUKE LYNCH



*Art Papers* reported that “Kahlil Joseph is a filmmaker who’s poised to profoundly disturb the boundaries between art forms, and disorder the depiction of race on film. His works erode lingering distinctions between music video, art-house film, and new-media art. A common experience in front of one of his films seems to be that viewers don’t care what they think they are watching—they just want to see it again.”<sup>11</sup> *BLKNWS* captivates the viewer in its ability to both embrace and transcend the news. As broadcast news programs continually and questionably expand what qualifies as newsworthy stories, Kahlil Joseph’s *BLKNWS* brings an enlightening alternative with relevant, intelligent, and affirmative content geared to a black audience but significant and inspiring to all.

**Patricia Hickson**

The Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art

# KAHLIL JOSEPH

## SELECTED SOLO AND TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *One Day at a Time: Kahlil Joseph's Fly Paper*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA  
*Fly Paper*, The Store X The Vinyl Factory Commission, Soho House, Berlin, DE  
*Kahlil Joseph: Until the Quiet Comes*, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH
- 2017 *Kahlil Joseph: Shadow Play*, The New Museum, New York, NY  
*Kahlil Joseph: NEW SUNS*, Bonnefontenmuseum, Maastricht, NL
- 2016 *HENRY TAYLOR with a New Film by Kahlil Joseph*, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA  
*Young Blood: Noah Davis, Kahlil Joseph, The Underground Museum*, Frye Museum of Art, Seattle, WA  
*Wildcat: Kahlil Joseph*, McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX  
*Kahlil Joseph*, Bernier/Eliades Gallery, Athens, GRC
- 2015 *Kahlil Joseph: Double Conscience*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *May You Live in Interesting Times*, The 58th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, Corderie dell'Arsenale and Giardini Central Pavilion, Venice, IT
- 2018 *Strange Days: Memories of the Future*, The Store X 180 the Strand, London, UK
- 2017 *The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*, PROSPECT.4, New Orleans, LA
- 2016 *The Infinite Mix*, Hayward Gallery at Southbank Centre, London, UK  
*Black Cowboy*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY  
Art Basel Unlimited, Basel, CHE
- 2014 *The Oracle*, The Underground Museum, Los Angeles, CA  
*Ruffneck Constructivists*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA

## SELECTED PUBLIC SCREENINGS

- 2019 *No Direct Flight*, British Film Institute with the British Council, Nowness, BlackStar Festival, and Pervasive Media Studio, BFI Southbank, London, UK  
*An Evening with Kahlil Joseph*, San Francisco Film Festival, San Francisco, CA  
*Blame the Audience #3: A Film Series Organized by Jason Simon*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
- 2017 *Black Mary - A Film by Kahlil Joseph*, commissioned on the occasion of *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, Tate Modern, London, UK
- 2016 *Open Window*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA  
*Holding Blackness in Suspension: The Films of Kahlil Joseph*, Troy Moore Library, Atlanta, GA
- 2015 *The Reflektor Tapes*, Toronto International Film Festival, World Premiere, Toronto, CAN  
*The Reflektor Tapes*, Marfa Film Festival, Marfa, TX
- 2014 *Wildcat*, Artist's Film Biennial 2014: *Avant-Noire*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, UK  
*m.A.A.d., A Short Film*, Sundance NEXT Festival, Los Angeles, CA  
*Kahlil Joseph Screening and Conversation in conjunction with BlackStar Film Festival*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
- 2013 *Until the Quiet Comes*, Sundance International Film Festival, Salt Lake City, UT  
*Black Up: Through the Lens of the Blues Aesthetic*, evening of shorts as part of *Blues for Smoke*, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

Born 1981, Berkeley, California  
Lives and works in Los Angeles, California

## AWARDS, GRANTS, AND RESIDENCIES

- |      |   |      |  |
|------|---|------|--|
| 2019 | Stanford Presidential Residency on the Future of the Arts, hosted by The Cantor Center for the Arts and Institute for Diversity in the Arts, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA<br>VIA Art Fund Production, Acquisition Grant Recipient | 2017 | Los Angeles Artadia Award Recipient<br>Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, 2017<br>Biennial Grant Recipient        |
| 2018 | Artist in Residence, Headlands Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA   | 2016 | John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellow<br>Emmy Nomination, Outstanding Directing for a Variety Special |
|      |   | 2013 | Grand Jury Prize for Short Films, Sundance Film Festival   |

## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, NL  
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA  
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

## WORK IN THE EXHIBITION

Kahlil Joseph  
*BLKNWS*, 2018–ongoing  
Dual-channel video, color, sound  
Running time: variable  
Courtesy of the artist



## ARTIST PROGRAM

Screening and Conversation with Kahlil Joseph  
Saturday, January 18 | Aetna Theater  
5pm Reception  
6pm Screening  
7pm Conversation  
Free

A conversation between MATRIX artist Kahlil Joseph and curator Helen Molesworth will follow a screening of a selection of Joseph's short films and video commissions featuring music by artists including Flying Lotus, Kendrick Lamar, and Alice Smith.

## CURATOR TALK

Patricia Hickson  
The Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of  
Contemporary Art  
Friday, January 24, noon  
Hilles Video Gallery  
Free with museum admission



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM  
MUSEUM OF ART

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[thewadsworth.org](http://thewadsworth.org)

MATRIX 183 is generously supported by the Wadsworth Atheneum's Contemporary Coalition.

Sustaining support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided by Newman's Own Foundation and the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign.

NEWMAN'S OWN  
FOUNDATION



<sup>1</sup> See Alexander Dumbadze, "Venice Biennale," *Art in America* 107, no. 8 (September 2019): 91.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Goldstein, "Why TV Executives Should Make Kahlil Joseph's 'BLKNWS' Network, a Star of the Venice Biennale, Into a Reality," <https://news.artnet.com>, 14 May 2019 (accessed 5 October 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Hilton Als, "The Black Excellence of Kahlil Joseph," *The New Yorker*, 30 October 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Jafa quoted in Myriam Ben Salah, "Kahlil Joseph," *May You Live in Interesting Times*, Short Guide, English Edition. *La Biennale di Venezia 2019*. Short Guide, English Edition. (Venice: Biennale Arte, 2019), 84.

<sup>5</sup> Kahlil Joseph quoted in email correspondence between the author and Emily Rose, 26 September 2019.

<sup>6</sup> The Harlem Hellfighters served in both WWI and WWII, but the 1919 photograph features a WWI group.

<sup>7</sup> The Harlem Hellfighters photomural was also featured in the BLKNWS presentation at the Arsene at the Venice Biennale in 2019, where the image has gained iconic status.

<sup>8</sup> Art venues include the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA; the Underground Museum in Los Angeles, CA; and the 2019 Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy.

<sup>9</sup> Public satellite locations for BLKNWS include Eaton Hotel and Lee's Barbershop, Washington, DC; Lagunitas Dining Hall and Harmony House, Institute for Diversity in the Arts at Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA; and UNION in Los Angeles, CA and Lower Harajuku, Tokyo, Japan.

<sup>10</sup> See Goldstein, *artnet*.

<sup>11</sup> *Art Papers* quoted in Kahlil Joseph, *Artadia Awardee*, Los Angeles, 2017. See [www.artadia.org](http://www.artadia.org) (accessed 3 October 2019).