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Kahlil Joseph’s Acclaimed BLKNWS Debuts at the Wadsworth Atheneum as MATRIX 183

Hartford, Conn. (November 12, 2019)— Concurrent with its run at the Venice Biennale Kahlil Joseph’s multimedia project BLKNWS comes to the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in the 183rd project in its MATRIX series. Artist and filmmaker Kahlil Joseph’s BLKNWS (2018–ongoing) offers a creative response to contemporary news, mixing found footage with original news desk segments in a continual stream of images that explore history, politics, and popular culture through a distinctly black lens. Kahlil Joseph / MATRIX 183 / BLKNWS is on view through March 1, 2020 in the Wadsworth’s video gallery.

“Joseph’s BLKNWS was an undeniable standout at this year’s Venice Biennale where crowds of visitors continually watched in rapt attention,” says Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art at the Wadsworth. “We are thrilled to share his vision with the Greater Hartford community. Relevant, intelligent, and affirmative, Joseph’s BLKNWS is geared to a black audience, but significant and inspiring to all.”

Presented on two large flat-screen monitors, BLKNWS focuses on narratives that celebrate empowerment and positive portrayals of black people. Black-and-white historical clips of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and novelist James Baldwin are
presented in cycles that also include color footage of contemporary figures like congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, athlete Serena Williams, and poet Maya Angelou. At times the two screens work as one—as with the NWS Desk segments featuring a BLKNWS editor or guest on each screen—but at other times the content is unconnected. The pace and interplay leaves viewers constantly scanning each screen as they absorb the visuals which defy a linear storyline.

In counterpoint to the glowing, two-channel display, BLKNWS is presented in front of a vintage photograph of the Harlem Hellfighters—the valiant soldiers who famously served on the frontlines during World War I. Joseph explains that the image is “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.”

Continuously-refreshed content feeds BLKNWS through a hard-wired internet connection to the artist’s studio. This technology allows the broadcast to expand over the course of its presentation at every venue and remain current as events hit the news cycle. From history to popular culture to current events the various subjects in BLKNWS are entertaining, informational, and educational.

**Artist Biography**

Kahlil Joseph, born in 1981 in Berkeley, CA, is a Los Angeles-based American artist and filmmaker best known for his large-scale video installations. Joseph has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions at institutions and museums including the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, Stanford, CA where BLKNWS was originally workshopped and remains on view; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH; The New Museum, New York, NY; Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, Netherlands; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA. He currently serves as the artistic director of The Underground Museum, an independent art museum, exhibition space, and community hub in Los Angeles that he co-founded with his late brother, artist and curator Noah Davis.

**Related Programs**

A conversation between Kahlil Joseph and curator Helen Molesworth (who is a NWS Desk editor in BLKNWS), will follow a screening of Joseph’s short films and video commissions on Saturday, January 18 at 6pm. On Friday, January 24 at noon, MATRIX curator Patricia Hickson leads a gallery talk.

**About MATRIX**

Inaugurated in 1975, MATRIX is the Wadsworth’s groundbreaking contemporary art exhibition series featuring works by artists from around the world. From its inception, MATRIX has been a forum for art that is challenging, current, and sometimes controversial. Through clear explanation and thoughtful engagement with the viewer, MATRIX exhibitions call into question preconceptions about art and increase understanding of its possibilities. Many MATRIX artists, such as Christo, Sol LeWitt,
Gerhard Richter, Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol, and Carrie Mae Weems are now considered seminal figures in contemporary art.

**Exhibition and Program Support**
The MATRIX program is 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.

**About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art**
Founded in 1842 with a vision for infusing art into the American experience, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is home to a collection of nearly 50,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years and encompassing European art from antiquity through contemporary as well as American art from the 1600s to today. The Wadsworth Atheneum’s five connected buildings—representing architectural styles including Gothic Revival, modern International Style, and 1960s Brutalism—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Hours: Wednesday–Friday: 11am–5pm; Saturday and Sunday: 10am–5pm. Admission: $5–15; discounts for members, students and seniors. Free admission for Hartford residents with Wadsworth Welcome registration. Free “happy hour” admission 4–5pm. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.


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