

WHITEFACE

Candice Breitz

Over recent years, Breitz has collected and archived a wide range of found footage fragments that document 'white people talking about race.' Her archive includes the voices of prominent political figures, news anchors and talk show hosts, as well as those of lesser known and anonymous YouTube bloggers, covering white perspectives that run the gamut from neo-Nazi ideology and far right propaganda to everyday racism and the posturing of 'good white people.' Specifically, the archive observes the rising anxiety of white people as long-standing calls to dismantle white supremacy proliferate and intensify across the globe. As such, it offers insight into the ongoing backlash against anti-racist movements, as white people struggle to come to terms with public discourse that highlights phenomena such as 'white privilege,' 'white fragility,' 'white rage' and 'white guilt.'

In *Whiteface*, Breitz appropriates and ventriloquizes dozens of voices drawn from this archive, channelling them through her own white body. Wearing nothing but a white dress shirt and zombie contact lenses, the artist conjures up whiteness in a variety of its guises, rotating through a series of cheap blonde wigs as the work unfolds, among which her own platinum head of hair is featured. Breitz's un-wigged appearance among the characters that populate the piece, serves to acknowledge the artist's own embeddedness in whiteness. Yet, while Breitz and many of the disembodied voices that she lip-syncs may be recognisable in *Whiteface* (Tucker Carlson, Rachel Dolezal, Bill Maher, Richard Spencer and Robin DiAngelo all make vocal cameos), specific white folks are not the primary target of this stinging satire. Rather, it is the condition of whiteness that Breitz seeks to prod into visibility. Dislocated from the white people who originally uttered them, the words that stream through Breitz accumulate to provide a scathing study of the vocabulary and grammar underlying this condition, a critical survey of the language via which whiteness frames, normalises and leverages its power.

The white dogma that flows through Breitz will be deeply familiar to those whose lives are impacted by racism. *Whiteface* is a portrait of whiteness in a state of panic. As the privileged status of white people comes under increasing pressure, narratives about white extinction have multiplied across the political spectrum. At a time when we are all threatened by possible extinction in light of the climate change crisis and other looming threats, *Whiteface* parodies the absurdity of white extinction anxiety—which, perhaps more than any other expression of whiteness, points to the delusional narcissism at the heart of the condition.

Breitz's deliberately theatrical performance in *Whiteface* draws attention to the constructed nature of whiteness and other racial categories. Her bleached presence and deadened eyes locate the fictions that naturalise and perpetuate white supremacy squarely within the genre of horror. Race is a dangerous fiction that continues to exert real and violent consequences.

Parallel to *Whiteface*, Breitz will debut seven single-channel videos from a new body of work titled *White Mantras*, as well as a series of photographic portraits of the characters that make up the cast of *Whiteface*.

Born and raised in South Africa during the era of apartheid, Breitz has consistently sought to grapple with whiteness in her work, from early photographic series such as *Ghost Series* (1994), to later installations such as *Extra* (2011) and *TLDR* (2017). *Whiteface* represents her most direct stab at autoethnography yet.