

Kandis Williams

Death of A

Opening Thursday 2 November 2023 at 7.00 pm

in Espai 13

‘Fixations per Minute’

Season of exhibitions in Espai 13 of the Fundació Joan Miró

Curated by Yaby (Beatriz Ortega Botas and Alberto Vallejo)

With the support of the Fundació Banc Sabadell

Press Release

Kandis Williams presents a four-channel HD video installation with sound that draws on Arthur Miller’s play *Death of a Salesman*.

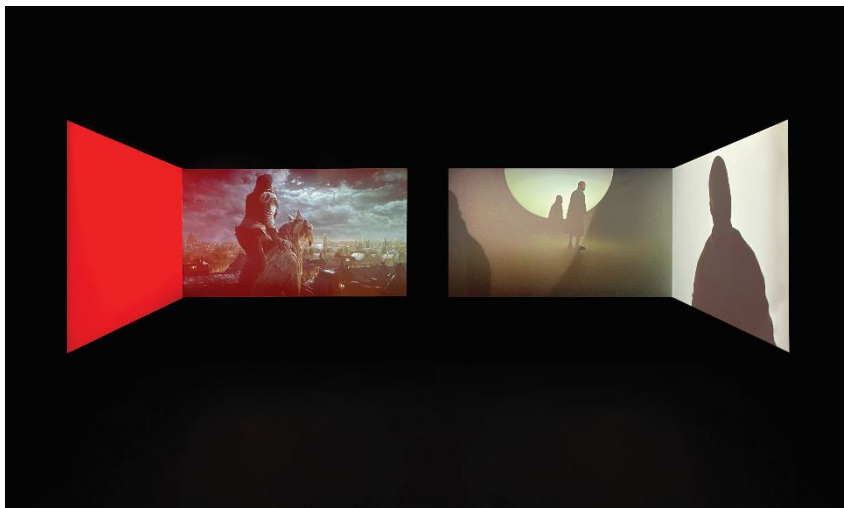
- **Espai 13 of the Fundació Joan Miró will be hosting the exhibition *Death of A* from 2 November 2023 as part of the Loop Festival.**
- ***Death of A* employs the conventions of American theatre and explores certain themes raised in Miller’s work, among them frustration, failure and the disappointment of the American Dream.**
- **This is the fourth and last exhibition of the ‘Fixations per Minute’ season of exhibitions in Espai 13 that the Fundació Joan Miró is organising with the support of the Fundació Banc Sabadell. Curated by Yaby (Beatriz Ortega Botas and Alberto Vallejo), the project examines the concept of reading and its connection with artistic practices today by means of works by a selection of artists on the local and international scene.**

Barcelona, 30 October 2023. Espai 13 of the Fundació Joan Miró will be hosting ***Death of A***, by the American artist Kandis Williams, from 3 November 2023 to 21 January 2024.

Death of A is the last exhibition in the 'Fixations per Minute' season in Espai 13. Kandis Williams presents a four-channel film based on *Death of a Salesman*, the play by the American playwright Arthur Miller that is part of the theatre canon. Williams adapts the original text, delving into its theatrical use of soliloquy and the complexities of exposing a character's interiority. The result is almost a monologue performed by a Black actor in an abstract space that gradually acquires context through layers of images projected onto adjoining screens. Turning the main character Willy Loman into a Black man complicates the universalising aspiration of Miller's character, underpinned by the great human themes of hopes and dreams, moral conflicts, fate, failure and death. But as Saidiya Hartman explains, the 'transubstantiation' of the life of a Black body into a universalisable abstraction of the human is improbable, not to say impossible. The relationship of this Willy Loman with the category of the human is marked by a dissonance that Williams accentuates by adding images to the actor's voice. His aspirations and his death are amplified by the grave visual memory of Black bodies being attacked, fetishised and spectacularised on the internet, on television, in Hollywood and on Broadway.

From the beginning, *Death of A* shows images of nuclear detonations. Atomic testing began in the 1940s and started to be filmed and televised very soon after, coinciding with the years of the writing, premiere and reception of *Death of a Salesman*. To these synthesised and aestheticised clips of explosions that make their violence abstract, Williams adds others that document the destructive effects of bombs on a house, sometimes inhabited by test dummies representing a typical American family. The travelling salesman enters the scene saying that he is exhausted, that he cannot go on, that he cannot concentrate on his driving because the images around him and his own daydreams assault him. The exploding bombs and razed homes are coupled with quotes by J. Robert Oppenheimer on the denial of evil within us and by Martin Luther King Jr. on the relation between his own dream and the American dream, adding contexts that diffract Miller's script. Miller's humanist delimitation of the porosity of the human psyche towards its social environment is shattered and opened up to a much deeper and more remote trauma: here the brutal destruction of the bomb extends into the house and reaches its inhabitant. The playwright's Marxist conception of the American dream is directly confronted with the enormity of the evil that sustains it, exposing the denial of slavery as the foundational violence that structures racial capitalism.

Through this exercise in audiovisual collage, Williams intensifies Miller's experimental aspirations in relation to the staged construction of a psychological portrait and the temporality of theatrical narration. The cumulative development without transitions of *Death of a Salesman* is concentrated into a soliloquy replete with archive images of Black people stereotyped by mainstream audiovisual culture that unravel its internal congruence even further. As Loman expresses his weariness and his anxieties about being liked, accepted, competitive and successful, the images derail his thoughts and his voice. They turn his body into a signifier and a political symbol for the spectator, triggering a collective unconscious created by the American cultural industry, of which *Death of a Salesman* has been a part since its first performance.



Kandis Williams. *Death of A*, 2022. Four-channel HD video installation with sound. Courtesy of the artist and Morán Morán.

About the artist

Kandis Williams (Baltimore, 1985) lives and works in Los Angeles, New York and Berlin. Her practice includes collage, sculpture, video, performance, writing, publishing and curating. She explores and deconstructs critical theory, addressing issues of race, nationalism, authority and eroticism. Williams is also the founder and editor of Cassandra Press, a publishing and educational project focused on spreading ideas, distributing new languages, propagating ethics centred on dialogue, aesthetics, femme-driven activism and Black scholarship. She has recently exhibited at the Whitney Biennial, 52 Walker and the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond), the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin) and the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), as well as in the Julia Stoschek Collection (Berlin) and

at The Studio Museum in Harlem (New York). Her work is included in numerous collections, such as those of the MoMA, the Hammer Museum, MOCA and the Baltimore Museum of Art.

Press materials and images

Images and materials for the press are available at bit.ly/E13Fixacions. You can follow Espai 13's activities on social media using the hashtag [#FixacionsEspai13](https://twitter.com/fixacionsEspai13).

With the support of the **Sabadell Foundation**



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