

Project Title:

!watching (2013)

Current Completion Status:

Completed and ready for installation

Short Project Description:

An interactive video installation which interrogates position, power, pleasure, and visibility.

Discipline:

Visual / New Media

Materials:

video, high-definition video camera, infrared lights, computer

Project Description:

!watching is an interactive video installation completed in Fall 2013. It was produced in Vin Hill's studio practice as part of a planned series of interactive works which interrogates the power and privilege of visibility and orientation. It is the inaugural work of the series and can operate independently or in conjunction with the companion works.

The installation requires a projection surface at least 7 feet across and between 100 and 144 square feet of space. A camera must be mounted near the projection surface facing the audience at an angle with little to no back lighting. A video projector is used and must be mounted either on the ceiling or on a shelf at least 7 feet tall. AC power must be available to power the projector, camera, and custom-built computer that runs the system. Infrared lights may be installed to improve camera performance.

Once installed, !watching can run indefinitely without intervention. It is recommended that the projector is turned off during exhibition space closing hours.

This setup creates a stage for action where the audience mingles and observes between the projection and the projector. Anyone within the space may become a participant if the system decides to watch them. The "watching" occurs as a break and may appear like a system glitch. It may be sustained or sudden. It also may happen between multiple participants the system gravitates to. Because of this capability, !watching will also interact with any other artwork installed within its range of vision that has a recognizable face.

!watching premiered at Slingshot Festival 2014 in the foyer of the Morton Theater in Athens, GA. One of the first, and the oldest surviving African-American built, owned, and operated vaudeville theatres in the United States, the Morton Theatre opened in 1910 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Artist Statement:

!watching (pronounced "not-watching") is an interactive video installation which interrogates position, power, pleasure, and visibility inspired by the works of Manet, Titian, and fashion photographer Guy Bourdin. Three models – one in an evening gown, two dressed as housekeepers – engage in a power exchange. Each one becomes Venus while serviced by the others, the current Venus signified by the "crown" of red high heels lovingly placed on her feet. Audience members typically encounter the system as a montage of decisive moments of this scene. At key moments during this montage, the presentation transitions from still images to video then back. The first of such moments is when one of the models rise to perform a "victory lap". The

second is when, based on the whims of the system itself, the location of faces of audience members is determined by camera using face detection software and all the models stare at whoever is at that location. The models in the scene may continue to stare at anyone in the audience for an indefinite time.