Rashaad Newsome’s “Icon” on Screens at Westfield in New York and Century City in L.A.

By Pearl Fontaine | April 26, 2018

Last night in New York, Art Production Fund & Westfield World Trade Center celebrated the latest iteration of its public video art series. On view now through May at Westfield in New York and Century City in Los Angeles is Rashaad Newsome’s ICON on all public screens.

Art Production Fund’s Executive Director Casey Fremont and Westfield’s Executive Director of Art, Culture and Community for the U.S. Isolde Brielmaier toasted to Newsome to kick off the evening. At Osteria Dellapace within Eataly NYC, Downtown, guests like Chloe Wise, Zoe Buckman, Dee Poku Spalding, Michelle Hellman, Doreen Remen, Mangue Banzima, Dan Tanzilli, Jasmine Wahi, Shari Loeffler, and Alexandra Chemla enjoyed cocktails and a seated dinner.

Ahead of the event, Whitewall checked in with Newsome and Fremont to learn more about the public project.

WHITEWALL: How did the partnership with Westfield come about?

CASEY FREMONT: We began a conversation with Westfield curator Isolde Brielmaier on opportunities for APF and Westfield to collaborate to bring public art to these incredible spaces. The screens are a phenomenal opportunity to use the existing infrastructure of Westfield World Trade Center and Century City to present video art to the hundreds of thousands of daily visitors to the properties.
WW: Rashaad, what was the starting point for ICON?

RASHAAD NEWSOME: I was thinking about religious iconography as the starting point. For me, these folks in the video are not only icons within the ballroom scene, but because they inspire me through their resilience, they are also my icons. It’s a play on words.

WW: Casey, how did you work with Rashaad Newsome to create ICON for both specific spaces? How did the architecture of Westfield’s two locations and the multi-screen platform influence the project?

CF: We worked very closely with Rashaad and the Westfield team to place the various scenes from ICON on the individual screens. Rashaad carefully selected the location and edits of the video to best fit the layout of each screen and create the highest visual impact.

WW: Rashaad, how does it feel to know that your work is going to be displayed on such a large scale and in two cities simultaneously?

RN: It’s fantastic. When you work as an artist and you show at museums and galleries, there is something about going outside the bubble to show my work to people who don’t visit museums and galleries as much as others. I think that’s an important space to activate. And it’s interesting for me because this project is coming off of the heels of my project of mass processional performances around the country that are really inspired by my childhood. It’s about taking art out of the galleries and into the streets, and how the public interacts with you and the work and become a part of the work. In a way, I feel like that’s echoed through the experience of showing here at Westfield World Trade Center.

WW: Casey, do you think having people see ICON on these big screens will have a significantly different impact than, say, watching it on their phone or even within a gallery space?

CF: Absolutely. As is the case with public art in general, the majority of people that will experience the work at Westfield aren’t seeking it out. They aren’t downloading the video or entering a gallery to view it, they are on their way home or to work or to go shopping, so already that sets a very different tone. The large scale, resolution, and brightness of the screens is so striking, and the majority are positioned at eye level or just above the viewer. This fully immerses the viewer in to the video in a way that so many other public video screens can’t. It’s truly a unique and extraordinary way to view video art.

WW: Rashaad, It’s interesting that your work deals so much with redistributing material forms of power, and the work is being presented within a materially-focused building. Is that something you wanted to address?

RN: This was the exciting part about it—the idea of showing this work in an advertising context. I’m using a lot of the tropes from the world advertising, and so to show it interspersed with advertising in subversive ways is interesting. It’s an amalgamation of Voguers, Baroque architecture and the resilience of the Black community. You don’t see these bodies in spaces like this.
L to R: Doreen Remen, Rashaad Newsome, Danielle Weiner; Jessica Joffe, Roya Sachs; Chloe Wise, Antwaun Sargent. Photos by BFA.

L to R: Zoe Buckman, Isolde Brielmaier, Photo by BFA; Rashaad Newsome, ICON, 2014. Photo by Max Lakner/ BFA.com, courtesy of Art Production Fund and Westfield.

Rashaad Newsome, ICON, 2014. Photo by Max Lakner/ BFA.com, courtesy of Art Production Fund and Westfield.