

White people are _____
→ CCS Bard Audrey
and Sydney Irmas
Atrium, CCS Bard
Galleries



White people are _____

ARTISTS

Pope L.

Bruce Nauman

Robert Longo

John Baldessari

Vanessa Beecroft

Tina Barney

CURATORS

Paulina Ascencio Fuentes

Georgie Payne

Gee Wesley

White people are _____

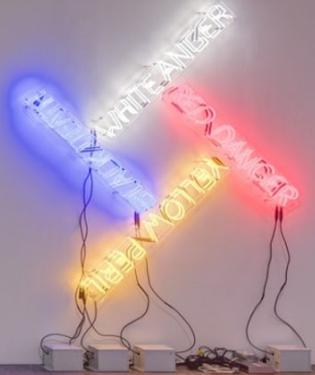
is a multimedia exhibition that asks viewers to consider the implications of white identity. “White” in this context, refers to a socially constructed racial category with no biological foundation, and “whiteness” refers to a set of privileges granted to “white” individual—a powerful structure with tangible, violent effects. Throughout the Western world, representations of white bodies and whiteness have historically dominated popular visual culture, literature, and mass media narratives. Yet, this disproportionate representation of the white identity remains largely uninvestigated by dominant white society, affording it a privilege to consider white individuals to be neutral or non-racialized and rendering the overwhelming ubiquitous presence of whiteness “invisible” to those privileged by it yet starkly evident to those oppressed/disadvantaged by this system.

White people are _____ is a framework to examine how whiteness has operated in the practice and biographies of a selection of artists from the Marieluise Hessel Collection: **Tina Barney, John Baldessari, Vanessa Beecroft, Robert Longo, Pope L. and Bruce Nauman**. The exhibition considers how white identity has been implicated, or not, in discussions and readings of these works. Focusing on pieces created between 1970 and 2000, the exhibition contextualizes these works within a complex socio-political history of race and class struggle in the United States that has been shaped by implicit biases, segregation, and structural and systemic inequality.

The exhibition takes its title from a text work from Pope.L’s Skin Set series which playfully demonstrate a wry criticism of “neutral” racial phrases often stated in liberal white circles that oversimplify racism as an individual action, rather than a systematic and deeply embedded aspect of society. In this sense, *White people are* _____ seeks not to fill the blank, or to create an essential idea of whiteness but instead to underline the unmarked quality of white identity by examining the values and social practices that normalize and reproduce the hegemony of a white-dominated society.









White People Are Black People Are Good







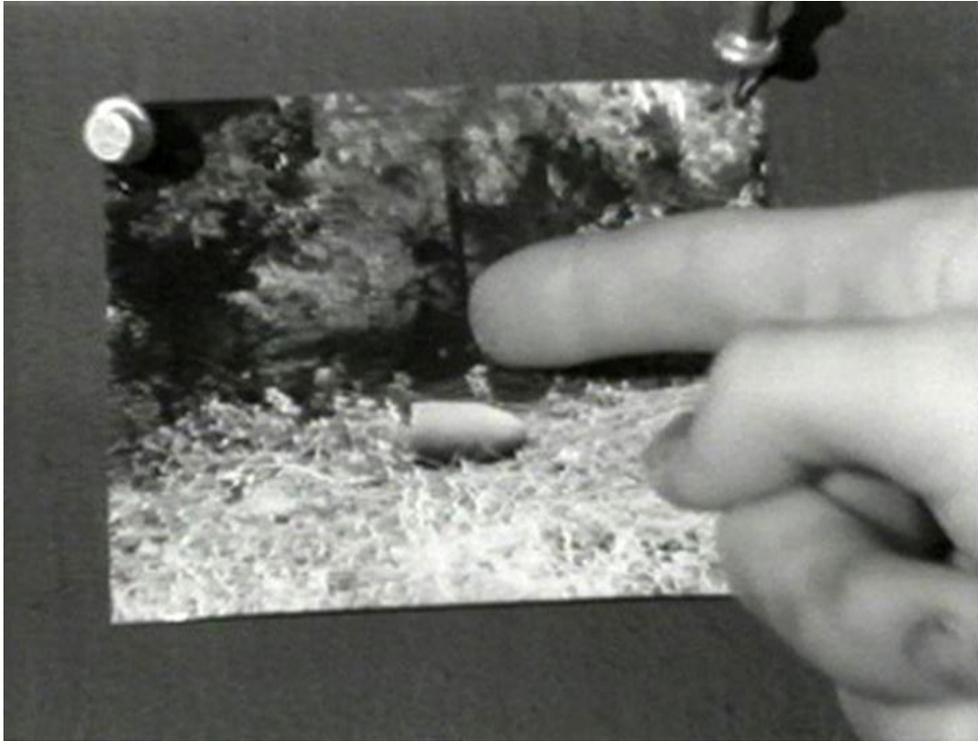
Wall Labels

White people are _____

sets a framework to examine how whiteness has operated in the practice and biographies of a selection of artists from the Marielouise Hessel Collection: **Tina Barney, John Baldessari, Vanessa Beecroft, Robert Longo, Pope L. and Bruce Nauman**, and how this identity has been implicated, or not, in racial dialogues of their work. Focusing on pieces created between 1970 and 2000, the exhibition contextualizes these works within a complex socio-political history of race and class struggle in the United States that has been shaped by implicit biases, segregation, and structural and systemic inequality.

Asking viewers to consider the implications of white identity, *White people are _____* is a multimedia exhibition that outlines “white” as a socially constructed racial category with no biological foundation, and “whiteness” as a set of privileges granted to “white” skinned individuals, a powerful structure with tangible, violent effects. *White people are _____* seeks not to fill the blank, but instead underline the unmarked quality of white identity by examining the values, and social practices that normalize and reproduce the hegemony of a white-dominated society at the exclusion and disadvantage of non-white people.

In order to encourage further reflection, *White people are _____* includes a bibliography and reading shelf that contextualize the approaches of the exhibition within critical race studies. All of the selected materials are available in the CCS Library and Stevenson Library catalogues.



John Baldessari

The Meaning of Various Photographs to Ed Henderson
1973

Video, black and white, sound

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for
Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New
York

In this work, Baldessari casts his student Ed Henderson to perform a series of exercises exploring identification, interpretation, and construction of meaning. The artist is interested in how truth can be manipulated when images are presented out of context, and the way the unconscious is projected in the process of interpretation. Henderson is introduced at the beginning of the video, which outlines how the subjectivity through which these images are read operates through particular conditions defined by race, class, and gender. This work is a prompt to consider how identities are implicated in this process of interpretation, both within the video and in the viewer's approach to the works in this exhibition.



Tina Barney

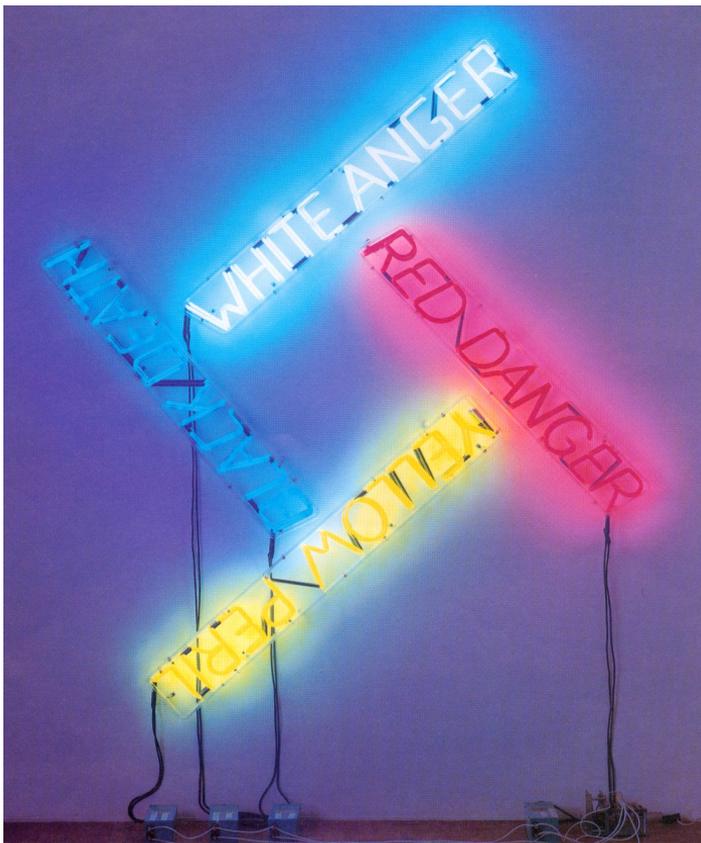
The Graham Cracker Box

1983

C-Print, ed. 3/10

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Barney is well known for large-scale color photographs that depict interior domestic scenes shot in upper-class American homes. She often includes subjects from her own wealthy, East Coast family and social circles. This exhibition invites viewers to read Barney's thoughtful meditations on affluence, status, and class through the lens of race. Consider, for instance, how *The Graham Cracker Box* might be discussed in terms of its subjects' white identity and privilege, and how the evolution of suburban US home ownership has been shaped through restrictions on Black home ownership ("redlining") and the retreat of demographic waves of white groups away from urban centers ("white flight").



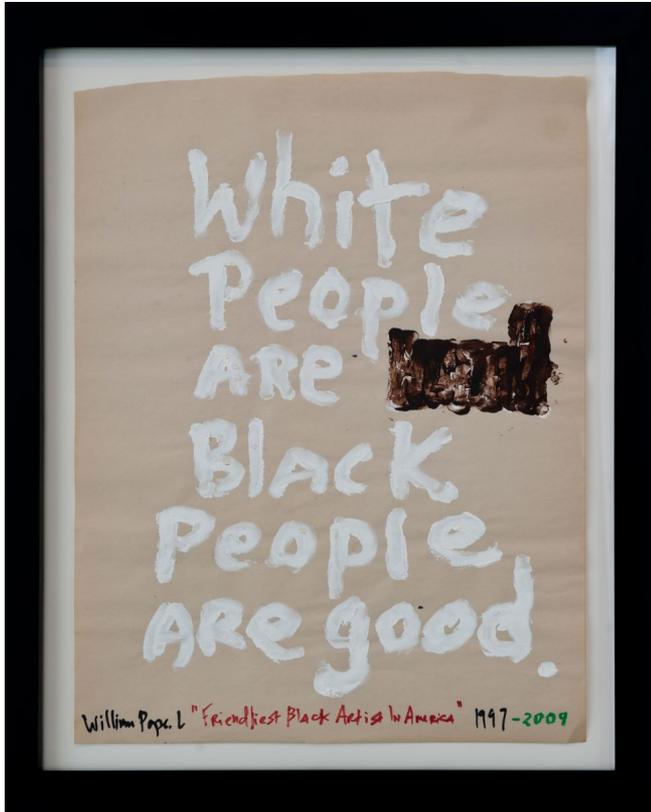
Bruce Nauman

White Anger, Red Danger, Yellow Peril, Black Death

1985

Neon tubing and wire with clear glass tubing suspension frame
Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for
Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New
York

According to its exhibition history at the Hessel Museum and external loans since its acquisition in 1992, this work has been contextualized in relation to light, color, and neon. However, these categories pay no attention to the text itself and render the language subordinate to the form in which it is presented. This work's reception has disregarded the literal meanings of the phrases that flash before the viewer. By distancing from the formal and material aspects in favor of a reading focussed on the words themselves, this exhibition foregrounds the work's relation to specific social dynamics based on racial prejudice.



Pope.L

White People Are Black People Are Good

1997-2010

Acrylic on paper

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Works from Pope.L's *Skin Set* series, made between 1979 and 1994, are a wry criticism of "neutral" racial tropes commonly used in liberal white circles through a playful take on evasive "colorblind" phrases. Directly addressing the social constructions of language and race, Pope L.'s work demonstrates the absurdity of how these phrases function within a flawed understanding of racism in terms of individuals and actions rather than a systemic function of society. The phrases to which he refers thereby downplay or degrade the realities of how race operates in society.



Vanessa Beecroft

VBGDW

2000

Digital C-Print, ed. 2/6

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Since the 1990s, Beecroft has created photographs and large scale durational performances with nude and semi-clothed professional models flanked in rows or posed in exhibition spaces, and highlighted skin tones and the body as formal elements. This exhibition shifts attention on Beecroft herself by prompting viewers to consider how the artist's white identity has shaped the presentation and signature style of her work. *VBGDW* is a work depicting the artist's own wedding. Although Beecroft's recent work has shifted to increasingly present non-White subjects, these series nonetheless reduce race to the aesthetics of skin tone, fetishizing skin color without consideration for the political and social complexities of race.



Robert Longo

Untitled (White Riot Series)

1982

Charcoal, graphite, and ink on paper

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Part of Longo's iconic *Men in Cities* series (1977 - 1983), this monolithic drawing depicts an archetype of success and money-driven young white urban professionals, more commonly known as "yuppies."

Though the series has been exhibited widely since its debut in 1980, it has gone largely uninvestigated in terms of the racial implications of the figures and their role within the city spaces to which the title alludes. Within this exhibition, Longo's figures and their unmarked white identities are drawn out for consideration, for instance, how they might be implicated in waves of gentrification across major metropolitan centers in the US.



Bruce Nauman

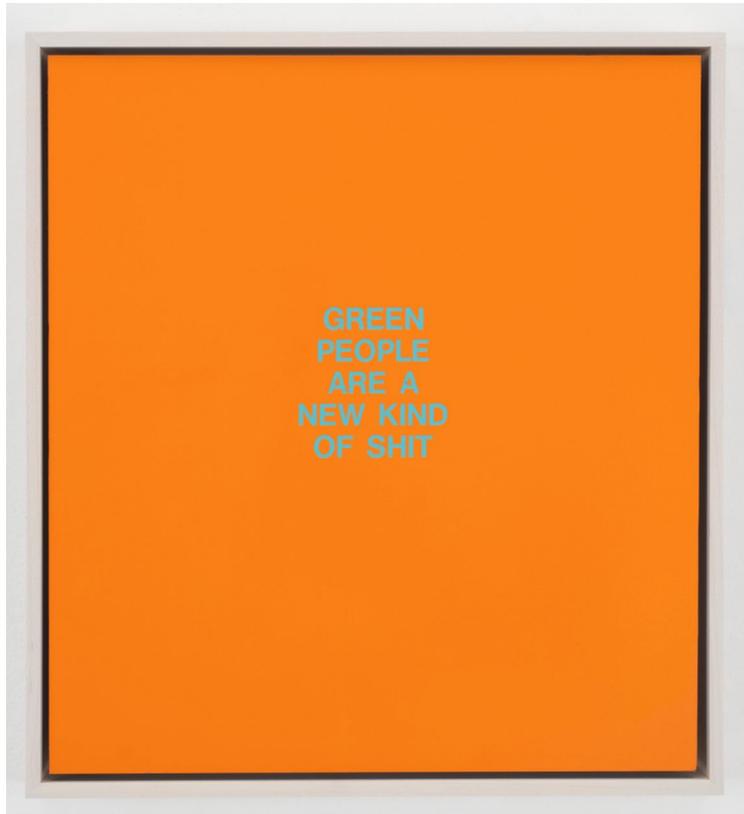
Good Boy, Bad Boy

1985

Two-channel video installation (color, sound), ed. 31/40
Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for
Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New
York



In Nauman's *Good Boy, Bad Boy* two figures, one a white female, the other a black male, read the same series of one hundred phrases, five times each. As they read, the performers' deliveries grow increasingly emphatic and intensified, varying in tone, cadence, and speed, creating moments of synchronicity and dissonance between the two monitors. By focusing on the dichotomy set up by the artist, this exhibition asks viewers to consider their own projections and implicit bias within the racialized and coded implications of the two performers' delivery of the identical scripts.



Pope.L

Old Time Saying

2003

Vinyl and PVS

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for
Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New
York

bibliography



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THE
HISTORY OF
WHITE PEOPLE
NELL IRVIN
PAINTER