

# TERRY ADKINS

*Soldier Shepherd Prophet Martyr*  
*Videos from 1998–2013*

Edited by Kendra Paitz  
University Galleries of Illinois State University  
2017

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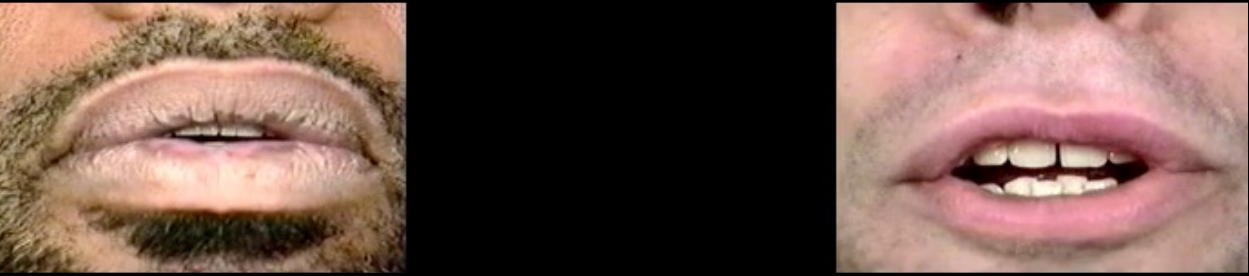
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## *Hiving Be* (*Apis mellifera*)



1998–1999. Digital video with sound (originally presented as a three-channel video on monitors). 9:36 minutes.

*Hiving Be* (*Apis mellifera*), the first of Adkins' three videos related to abolitionist John Brown (1800–1859), was made on the grounds of the John Brown House in Akron, Ohio. On October 16, 1859, Brown led a raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. The multiracial group of 22 men, which included one freed slave and one fugitive slave, hoped to gain access to weapons and supplies to arm a slave rebellion.<sup>1</sup> Brown was captured, tried for and convicted of treason, and later hanged for his actions. "Hiving bees" was the code name for the raid and "Apis mellifera" is the scientific name for a honey bee.<sup>2</sup>

In the video, the mouths of Adkins and a Caucasian man are shown in close-up as they repeatedly chant the words "soldier, shepherd, prophet, martyr" to draw attention to varying historical views of the abolitionist. Their recitation is accompanied by the sounds of buzzing bees, rolling thunder, and ringing bells. Meanwhile, images of bells, fleece, bees, and honey—references to Brown's life as a shepherd and his self-sacrificial mission to end slavery—fade into and out of the three sections on the screen. Over the course of the video, the images of the two men slowly fade from full-color to black-and-white, perhaps to further acknowledge Brown's pursuit of racial unity.

1. See <http://www.civilwar.org/hallowed-ground-magazine/Fall-09/john-browns-raiders.html> for information about "John Brown's Raiders."

2. Adkins, Terry. "Why the Civil War Still Matters to American Artists." Lecture at Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., March 2013.







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2004–2012. Single-channel  
digital video with sound.  
18:01 minutes.

## *Synapse* (from *Black Beethoven*)

In *Synapse* (from *Black Beethoven*), a framed portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) fills the screen as a tense instrumental soundtrack drones in the background. Slowly and seamlessly, the composer's skin tone, hair, and features shift from the traditional Caucasian depiction of the legendary figure toward one that shows him with darker skin and hair. The portrait shifts ever so slightly back to its original state before it begins another mysterious round of transformation. Beethoven seems to be trapped in an endless cycle of becoming, with the construction of his biography still up for debate.

Although Adkins was interested in questions of Beethoven's Moorish ancestry, he was more invested in celebrating the fact that the composer overcame deafness—the removal of the sense most connected to his musical gift—and reached generations of people with his symphonies.<sup>1</sup> Adkins said he was exploring the “idea of remembering what it's like to hear” so “the morphing of the images is very subtle, but the sound is very physical.”<sup>2</sup> The artist created the music using an old upright bass and a computer-based electronic processor.<sup>3</sup>

1. Adkins, Terry and George Lewis.  
“Event Scores: Terry Adkins and George  
Lewis in Conversation.” *Artforum  
International*, March 2014, 244–253.

2. Ibid.

3. Author's conversation with Joshua  
Mosley on November 23, 2015.







# TERRY ADKINS

SOLDIER  
SHEPHERD  
PROPHET  
MARTYR

Videos from 1998–2013

This exhibition has been made possible by a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, with additional funding from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.







EXIT





# LORNA SIMPSON

*In Conversation with Kendra Paitz*

KP: You and Terry were friends for a long time. How did you first meet?

LS: We met many years ago on the Lower East Side, through art historian Kellie Jones. I was helping her move and she said, “Oh, I also called my friend Terry,” and he showed up.

When was that?

It must have been sometime around 1987.

Terry performed in your 2004 film, *Cloudscape*. I was watching it again a few days ago and was struck by its profundity. Alone and whistling, Terry is slowly enveloped by fog before the video reverses and cycles through again. It’s impossible to see it now without thinking about Terry’s presence and absence. How did partnering for that project come about and what was it like to work with him?

I had the desire to make another project based on *Easy to Remember*, a piece I had created in 2001. The music for it was generated by humming as opposed to singing or speaking. I wanted to do another piece that involved musicality of the body, so I decided to focus on whistling. These works were structured on the premise of loops, and I wanted the structure of the loop to affect the melody.

Many of my early works, and even new works, include people that are in my life. It’s a very natural way for me to work. I asked Terry to participate because I wanted him to not only perform the piece but also select the music. I cannot read music anymore; it was a childhood gift and I lost that ability. I had a songbook of spirituals from 1905—*Twenty-four Negro Melodies: Transcribed for the Piano* by composer S. Coleridge-Taylor. I asked Terry to choose a song with an interesting melody that was both familiar and unfamiliar, and to select a sequence to work with as a loop. As I look through that book now, the bookmark for the song that Terry selected is gone. So, at this moment, I am not sure which one it was. This 1905 collection of songs was both made possible and preserved by the efforts and talents of faculty and students and Jubilee Singers at Fisk, Hampton, and Tuskegee. At the time, I did not make the literal connection of this legacy to Terry’s family history. I had chosen a songbook that was at the heart of Terry’s early engagement with music, and his family’s history of education. His uncle Rutherford was a physics teacher at Fisk University and later became the president of the university. Terry’s father got his master’s degree at Fisk; his younger brother attended Tuskegee University; and his sister went to Hampton University.

*Cloudscape* was shot at Sean Kelly Gallery in Chelsea, New York. Setting up the lighting, manipulating a fog machine, and asking Terry to do it all in one take



Lorna Simpson, Still from *Cloudscape*, 2004.  
Video projection with sound, 11:00 minutes (loop).  
Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.

# BIOGRAPHY

*Terry Adkins (1953–2014)*

Terry Adkins was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Alexandria, Virginia, with his parents and four siblings. He attended Fisk University (Nashville, Tennessee), where he studied with Martin Puryear and Aaron Douglas before graduating with a B.S. in Printmaking in 1975. He then received an M.S. in Printmaking from Illinois State University (Normal) in 1977, and an M.F.A. in Sculpture from University of Kentucky (Lexington) in 1979.

Adkins researched groundbreaking historical figures—such as John Brown, Matthew Henson, or Bessie Smith—whose legacies were in danger of being forgotten. A jazz musician who played the saxophone, he created a vast body of work that included sculptures, photographs, videos, prints, installations, and performances. Adkins said, “I try to make sculpture that is as ephemeral and transient as music is... And when it comes to working with sound... I try to make it more of a physical thing, so that embedded in the sculpture is the trace of sound, the trace of the nature of sound.”<sup>1</sup> In 1986, Adkins founded the Lone Wolf Recital Corps, a collaborative group with rotating membership, with whom he performed dynamic combinations of spoken word, music, and song, within installations that often included costumes, sculpture, video, and (sometimes invented) instruments such as his 18-foot long *Akrhaphone* horns.

Adkins’ work was recently presented in the 2015 *Venice Biennale*, the 2014 *Whitney Biennial*, and the traveling exhibition *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*. In 2012, his thirty-year retrospective was organized by the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, and later traveled to the Mary & Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern

University, Evanston, Illinois. Adkins’ work has also been exhibited at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; American Academy in Rome; Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago; and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, among many others.

Adkins’ work is in the collections of Tate Modern, London; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; and Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin. He was awarded the Jesse Howard, Jr. / Jacob H. Lazarus Metropolitan Museum of Art Rome Prize in 2009. Adkins was also awarded fellowships by the National Endowment for the Arts, Joan Mitchell Foundation, and New York Foundation for the Arts, among others.

A dedicated educator, Adkins taught briefly at University of Kentucky and California State University, Chico, before joining the faculty at State University of New York at New Paltz for eight years. From 2000–2014, Adkins was a professor in the Department of Fine Arts in the School of Design at University of Pennsylvania. He mentored a number of artists, including Demetrius Oliver, Jamal Cyrus, and Jacobly Satterwhite.

Adkins lived in Brooklyn, New York, with his wife, Merele Williams, and their children, Titus and Turiya. His estate is represented by Salon 94, New York.

<sup>1</sup> Adkins, Terry. “Event Scores: Terry Adkins and George Lewis in Conversation.” *Artforum International*, March 2014, 252.



Portrait of Terry Adkins.  
Copyright Chris Blade, 2013.  
[www.chrisblade.com](http://www.chrisblade.com)





## COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

*College of Fine Arts, Illinois State University, May 11, 2013*

*Adkins, who received his M.S. in Printmaking (1977) from Illinois State University's School of Art, delivered the 2013 College of Fine Arts commencement address and was also inducted into the College's Hall of Fame.*

President Bowman, Dean Major, distinguished guests, alumni, faculty, family, friends, and graduating students. I am deeply touched by the distinguished capacity of being honored as the 154th commencement alumni guest speaker for the College of Fine Arts class of 2013. It is for me a great cardinal homecoming, teeming as it is with sentiments of the highest regard and with the perennial flourish of ceremony, grandeur, and celebration that mark the transitional magnitude of this most auspicious occasion. I first arrived at campus in the winter of 1975, having driven a rental van from my alma mater, Fisk University in Nashville, northward through ice, snow, and frigid temperatures so severe that I quickly discovered what the survival tactics of thermal underwear and layering were all about. I return today forever grateful for the excellent educational experiences that I received at this Midwestern oasis that is Illinois State University. She sharpened my mind, honed my gifts, opened my eyes, and tuned my heart to the humbling measure of responsibility that accompanies the great privilege of joining the ranks of an international consortium of young emerging professionals in the arts. Tonight I stand before you straddling fond memories of the past with a projected vision of hope for the future as you, our alumni to be, are now about to

embark upon one of the most fascinating journeys of your life. Congratulations to the College of Fine Arts' class of 2013.

Congratulations are in order too for the other members of this eager-eyed assembly of heightened anticipation. Here's to the duly proud loved ones—parents, siblings, extended family, friends, and faculty gathered tonight in your honor. Their sacrifice of unwavering support for your creative endeavors springs from deep-seated faith and the promising certainty that you will indeed realize the fullest potential of your respective vocations in the years to come. What an ardent and reaffirming faith it is too, practiced most lovingly by your parents, whose devout and steadfast belief in the enduring value of an education in the arts transcends the practical concerns of their better judgment. They have stood by you in united gallantry, ignoring the harsh realities of the slim possibility that you might somehow make a decent living from your chosen calling. And yet, we must boldly face and firmly address the menacing questions that hover in the shadows of this joyful event. How will you survive with a higher education in the arts? How can your learning be meaningful or fulfilling in a turbulent world beset by catastrophe in every conceivable sphere of human experience? When I posed these questions in 1977 after being flung into the real world as you are about to be, the options were few, the circumstances dire. We had to resign ourselves to but two options—to either pursue an extended career in higher education through teaching or to make risky

pilgrimage to thriving art centers to put our talents and ideals to the test against all odds in search of fame and fortune. Needless to say, extremely few of us emerged from the narrow end of the funneling tide with our career-laden dreams still intact.

Today the issues surrounding these questions and their rejoined consequences have become even more pervasive, complex, and exaggerated. The stakes have been raised; survival for young professional artists, composers, musicians, playwrights, and actors seems to be an even more insurmountable undertaking than it was 36 years ago when I was in your shoes. The sign of the times in reign of quantity that presently engulfs us has shaped an age characterized by the stutter and mounting brevity of time collapsed into space, wherein quantity overwhelms quality; information is more valued than knowledge; image veils a lack of substance; success is equated with wealth; mediocrity is propped up as genius; the billionaire is the hero of modern life; even the intrinsic value of the arts is constantly threatened by the encroachment of monetary rank, merited by the degree to which they are usurped and regurgitated by the gigantic. But fear not. Fortunately, the alarming rise of these monstrous deviations has coincided with the advancement of promising alternatives that hopefully signal the dawning of our recovery from them.

The expanded fields of the arts have openly embraced an interdisciplinary ideal, dissolving longstanding boundaries and incorporating the underlying principles and strategies from other bodies of knowledge as never before. Under the banner of creative research, one commonly finds imaginative arts practitioners employing methodologies normally ascribed to immersive studies in science, history, architecture, politics, design, archeology, literature, activism, and sociology, among others. These tendencies coupled with redefining developments in platforms for global communication have revolutionized the flow of information, transformed the matrix for the exchange of creative ideas, and given access to burgeoning audiences for the arts. Mind you, these virtual conveniences are only tools, prospects for asserting your voice in the world. There is

no substitute for the discipline, rigor, and devotion to craft that must fuel your quest for aspiring to attain the standards of excellence embodied in the timeless masterworks of our artistic heritage.

Nor does the facile access to massive amounts of information come without a charge of vital responsibility. The limitless palette of life can never be truly grasped through the envelope of a computer screen. Data is merely compiled material that must be filtered through the sieve of unquantifiable human experience in order to be transformed into discerning critical knowledge. Accordingly equipped, you can help to pry the arts away from their being reduced to dangling modifiers of societal excess to once again becoming urgent spiritual necessities for all, driven by the purpose of reflecting upon the myriad dimensions of what it means to be human today. Walt Whitman (1819–1892) beautifully encapsulates the transcendent universals that comprise what he calls this “vast similitude” in his poem “On the Beach at Night Alone”:

—  
*On the beach at night alone,  
 As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song,  
 As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the  
 universes and of the future.*  
*A vast similitude interlocks all,  
 All spheres, grown, ungrown, small, large, suns, moons, planets,  
 All distances of place however wide,  
 All distances of time, all inanimate forms,  
 All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different, or in  
 different worlds,  
 All gaseous, watery, vegetable, mineral processes, the fishes, the brutes,  
 All nations, colors, barbarisms, civilizations, languages,  
 All identities that have existed or may exist on this globe, or any globe,  
 All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,  
 This vast similitude spans them, and always has spann'd,  
 And shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them.*  
 —

Our questions yet remain. How will you survive with an education in the arts? In most any way that you choose. How can a career in the arts be meaningful

and fulfilling in a turbulent world? However you see fit to make it so. We need to hear from the talented and struggling voices of your generation. We want to see what happens when your creative imaginations clash with the realities of our existence. We want to know what you critically think and how you passionately feel about contemporary life on this small planet. The degrees that will soon be conferred upon you are not only important milestones in your gifted young lives. They are also an urgent call to arms.

Go forth from this place emboldened by your accomplishments to state your dream and stake your claim to the promising future that awaits you. Imagine it. Harness it. Realize it with integrity. Its authorship is in your hands; the choices are all up to you. Keep the faith. Thank you.

## *Terry Adkins Memorial Scholarship for Diversity*

The School of Art at Illinois State University has created an endowed scholarship to honor the memory of alumnus Terry Adkins, who received his M.S. degree in Printmaking in 1977. The Terry Adkins Memorial Scholarship for Diversity will help art majors from traditionally underrepresented populations pursue their education in the School of Art.

The School of Art provides a professional and academic education for students desiring careers in the visual arts. Fully accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design, the School of Art offers the following degrees: B.F.A., B.A., and B.S. in Studio Arts, Graphic Design, Art History, and Art Teacher

Education; M.A. in Visual Culture; M.S. in Art Education; and M.F.A. in Studio Arts.

To make a donation, please visit [advancement.illinoisstate.edu/terryadkins](http://advancement.illinoisstate.edu/terryadkins) to pay by credit card. You can also send a check made out to Illinois State University, with “Terry Adkins Memorial Scholarship” in the memo line. Mail to:

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