

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

77 GEARY STREET MEZZANINE SAN FRANCISCO CA 94108 415.788.5126 F 788.5207

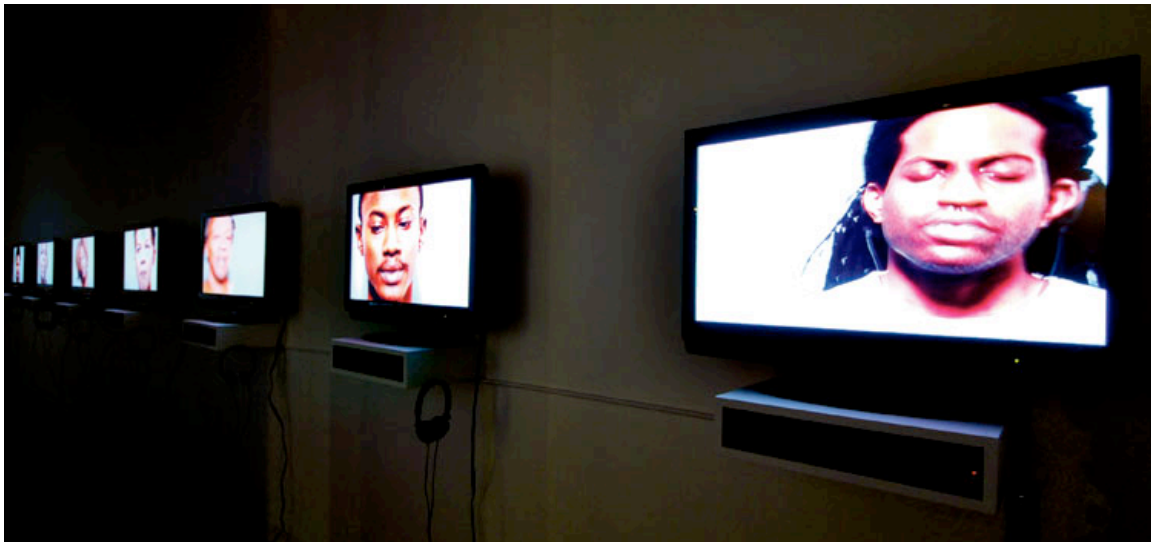
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Jefferson Pinder

By Kiki Anderson



Jefferson Pinder, installation view of "Juke" (2006).

John Riepenhoff/Inova/Kenilworth Gallery, Milwaukee

"Jefferson Pinder" at Institute of Visual Arts (Inova)

Milwaukee

Feb. 25 – June 14

Assembled here together for the first time in this large-scale survey, Jefferson Pinder's films and videos feature subjects who never speak. But their message comes across loud and clear nevertheless. When a white man repeatedly slaps a black man across the face (*Passive/Resistance*; 2008), or when two men in suits — one man is white, the other black — endlessly wrestle (*Fisticuffs*; 2004), or a lone, naked black man mysteriously finds clothes for the office as he races through woods and then city streets (*Marathon*; 2003), viewers understand that they are witnessing the difficulties and frustrations inherent in the African-American experience.

The highlight of the show is a 10-video series titled "Juke" (2006), which features close-ups of people lip-synching rock songs. Juke is slang for music or dance, but it is also used to describe a tactical move in football when a player fakes out someone from the other team by running in the wrong direction. In the videos, the performers, all African-American, reclaim the music that never would have existed had blacks not first invented the blues. Freddie Mercury's strange scatting in *Juke: Stanley* (*Under Pressure*) and Patti Smith's white punk appropriation of the "N" word in *Juke: Anna* (*Rock n Roll Nigger*) both become problematic in new ways via this interpretation. The scatting becomes silly, and Smith's attempt to redefine the racial slur wears thin. The tight close-ups on the actors offer pure and undiluted performances, and taken as a whole the work negotiates an visceral and cerebral existence that is far from didactic.