



Candice Breitz *The Audition* 2012, from the trilogy *The Woods*.

**City
Gallery
Wellington**
Te Whare Toi

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Candice Breitz

About the Artist

Candice Breitz was born in Johannesburg in 1972. She lives in Berlin and is Professor of Fine Art at Braunschweig University. Breitz is an internationally renowned video artist known for her exploration of identity. She describes her process as recycling, translating and interpreting. Breitz cuts and edits video footage to reframe and comment on her source footage.

Her work can be found in the collections of Museum of Modern Art (New York), and has been included in numerous biennials including Venice (2005) and Singapore (2011).

About the Exhibition

Candice Breitz's multi-screen video installations draw on pop music, film, and celebrity culture. She explores ideas around identity and the way we are shaped by popular culture. The exhibition consists of three bodies of work each representing different aspects of her thinking.

King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson) (2005) presents sixteen Michael Jackson fans re-performing the entire album *Thriller*. This work explores how fans emulate stars in order to represent themselves. Breitz chose her subjects from hundreds who responded to advertisements she placed on fan websites and magazines. They were selected for the strength of their love of Michael Jackson rather than for their resemblance to him or for their talent. Each was recorded separately, singing a *cappella*. Their performances were assembled into a wall of sixteen screens to become a pieced-together choir. The fans were free to dress, sing and dance as they pleased and each one interpreted Jackson's trademark moves and gestures in their own way. In the final work we don't see or hear Michael Jackson. He is present as a composite of the many different ways that his fans sample and remix his public persona in their own quest for individual expression.

Factum (2010) was constructed from a series of interviews with identical twins and triplets. The siblings were interviewed separately about their lives. The interviews were edited and displayed side by side, to play on similarities and differences in what the subjects say and how they say it. As the siblings both confirm and contradict each other's stories, Breitz draws our attention to the way that all of us construct our lives as a narrative, a story we tell ourselves about who we are. Breitz says *Factum* explores ideas around the individual and the community. This is a theme that runs through many of her works. She is interested in how we desire to be unique, distinct individuals but are shaped by identifying with communities of various kinds – families, races, nations.

In *The Woods*, Breitz works with Hollywood and Bollywood child actors and with two Nollywood stars known for playing child roles. While it plays on differences and similarities between US, Indian and Nigerian mainstream entertainment cultures, the trilogy also explores the ways children reflect and perform adult values. Breitz says, "Children are always understudies in a sense, observing and aping adults—and the culture of adults—to model themselves into social beings".

The Audition shows local child actors in LA performing rituals typical of Hollywood auditions. They deliver lines gleaned from online motivational videos, where industry gurus offer professional advice on how to audition. The work also shows them being 'slated' (introducing themselves to the camera) and singing.

The Rehearsal finds local child actors in Mumbai ventriloquising a series of quotations from interviews with Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan, who embodies the fame they aspire to.

Shot in Lagos, *The Interview* tells the story of Nollywood via two small-statured African actors famous for having played children.

"Much of my work deals with the question of how we become who we are, and to what extent this process is influenced by our absorption of the values sold to us by the mainstream media. More and more we learn who we are not only from our parents and our immediate social contexts, but also from the entertainment industry".

Further Information

Visit the City Gallery website for more information about the exhibition www.citygallery.org.nz/exhibitions/candice-breitz

Visit Candice Breitz's website to see other examples of her work www.candicebreitz.net/

Related Artist

Andy Warhol was an American pop artist well known for his fascination with celebrity culture. Between 1964 and 1966 he made many *Screen Tests* - long single-take silent film portraits of celebrities, friends, or anyone he thought had 'star potential'. To make these films Warhol simply turned the camera on and allowed his sitters to be themselves.

In addition to having scripts, the young Hollywood hopefuls in *The Audition* were given five minutes in front of the camera with no script and asked to present themselves as they wanted to be seen.

Pre-Visit and Post-Visit Classroom Activities

Watch Some *Thriller* Remakes

English, Media Studies, Visual Arts, Social Science.

Find out more about Michael Jackson and watch his *Thriller* video on YouTube. This video has inspired a number of parodies, including *Shrek*, *Minecraft* and *Lego* remakes. Watch them on YouTube. Why do you think it has been remade so often? Which remake was the best? Did everybody in the class like the same one?

Watch the *Thriller Haka* from the closing credits of the New Zealand movie *Boy*, a film about a dreamer who loves Michael Jackson.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-TiQXCJtRk>

This is a mash-up of *Thriller* and *Poi E*, a New Zealand hit song which was originally created with the intention of teaching young Maori to be proud of being Maori in a format that they were comfortable with. Discuss the ways that this reworking of *Thriller* is similar and different to Breitz's work *King*.

Think About Identity

English, Social Science,

Think about the word 'identity' and write a definition. Share these definitions with your class and compare the different responses. Were there key ideas which most groups agreed on?

Make a Portrait

Visual Arts

To make her portrait of Michael Jackson, Breitz didn't use images of the singer but instead turned to his fans to create an original portrait. Have a discussion about portraiture. What is a portrait? Is a person's appearance necessary to make a portrait, or are there other ways to evoke a human presence? Brainstorm some other ways to create a portrait beyond physical appearance. Create your own original portraits and have an exhibition in your classroom.

Perform Your Own Screen Test

Drama, Social Science

Discuss the image overleaf showing stills from *The Audition*. These children are young actors who were filmed as if auditioning for a part in a movie. Part of this process involved them being given five minutes in front of the camera without a script to 'be themselves' or present themselves as they want to be seen.

Describe the children. What are they doing?

What can you pick up on about how each child might be feeling from their facial expressions and body language?

Do you think they are all enjoying being in front of the camera as 'themselves'? Why might that be?

Try performing as if you were in a screen test? What are some of the ways you could show who you are?

Perform a Fan Portrait

Drama, Dance, Visual Arts, Sound Arts, Technology

Research some of Breitz's other fan portraits, which include *Queen (A Portrait of Madonna)* and *Legend (A Portrait of Bob Marley)*.

Make a similar portrait as a class or in smaller groups. Choose a popular singer and one of his/her songs. Set up a video camera and record each member of the group performing the song from start to finish with the freedom to dress, sing and move however they choose. Edit the footage to create a single video including every group member's performance. Screen your work in class and discuss:

How and why did you decide on the song and the performer?

What were the challenges in making this work?

Do you think that your work could be considered a portrait in the same way as *King*?