

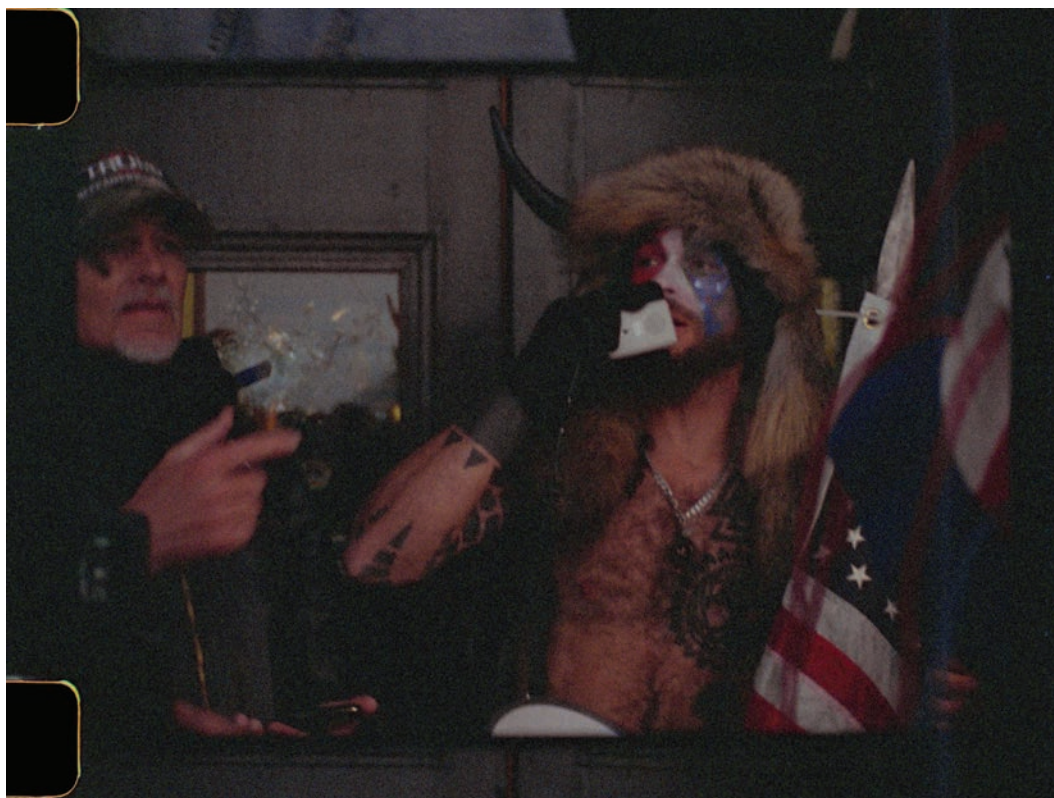
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Gallery Two]

Tomi Faison, *First As Tragedy, Then As LARP*

January 21-February 26, 2023

Opening Reception: Sat. January 21, 6-8PM



Tomi Faison, *First As Tragedy, Then As LARP* (film still), 2022. 16mm film footage shot by the artist at the January 6th 2021 “Stop The Steal” protest turned riot, two flags, dimensions variable.

Public Programs:

Artist Led Tour

Sat. February 4, 2pm

Tomi Faison, *First As Tragedy, Then As LARP*

Smack Mellon is pleased to present *First As Tragedy, Then As LARP*, Tomi Faison's first solo exhibition in NYC. The exhibition unfolds through two of the artist's recent works that combine cold, filmic realism with the fantastic and unhinged performativity of the increasingly politicized world. The two works appear in the exhibition using different looping mechanisms projected onto opposite sides of the gallery and separated by a wall. Faison's practice is informed in equal parts by her upbringing in Washington DC—watching the ongoing deployment of protests on Capitol Hill; cinema in its expanded materiality, history, and social spaces; as well as her participation in online communities, particularly Do Not Research (DNR), an online platform gathered around topics of political fragmentation, memetic propagation, and the role of the internet in shaping emergent cultural and ideological trends.

The exhibition's central installation, *First As Tragedy, Then As LARP*, comprises a 16mm film flanked by two fabric flags. The film contains footage captured by the artist on a Bolex camera in Washington DC during the "Stop The Steal" insurrection on January 6, 2021. In absence of an accompanying soundtrack, the film sets a quiet stage for the escalating violence that transpired through the day, enacted by protesters wearing Trump merchandise and military tactical gear. By retaining the film in its original medium, Faison devirtualizes the event, grounding it directly to her experience and apart from its wide consumption and unstable relationship to reality in the public imaginary.

The flags mounted on either side of the film projection depict Melpomene and Thalia, the muses for tragedy and comedy in ancient Greece—the birthplace of democracy—captured from 3D scans of statues at the Louvre. The title of the work "First As Tragedy" and "Then As Larp" surrounds the two muses respectively, written in a font and format often used to construct internet memes. The titular phrase borrows from a well known and heavily quoted (and misquoted) phrase by Karl Marx, remarking that historical entities often appear twice, "first as tragedy, then as farce." Her adjustment of the language to reference Live Action Role Playing (LARP) games, combines with the dramaturgy of how the events of January 6 unfolded on a global stage to present a poignant and chilling representation of current American political affairs.

The exhibition's second work, *Carousel No. 1* appears somewhere between photography and moving image. A looping slide projector rotates through 80 slides—both found and captured by the artist. The montaged images are sequenced associatively, close-up images of teeth precede those of car crash sequences, internet memes and vulnerable bodies. They compose a temporal experience that gestures towards the physical, psychological, and emotional fragility of the individual within an endless cycle of capitalism, accounting for desires, bodily limitations, and psychological distress.

Smack Mellon

BIO

Tomi Faison is a multidisciplinary artist and filmmaker. Her work is interested in systems, politics, psychoanalysis, and internet culture. She has participated in group shows and screenings in Baltimore, DC, Frederick, Holyoke, Ann Arbor, Chicago, and New York. Her first solo show, *Phase Change*, at the Frederick Arts Council in 2019 was a year long, three part, exploration of difference and becoming articulated through the phases of the hydraulic cycle. In 2020, she was a founding curator and technical director of a public access style 24/7 live stream project called *QuaranTV*, which streamed non-stop for the first 2000 hours of the pandemic and was listed as a part of Wire Magazine's best of 2020. In 2021 she was a founding member of online arts, politics, and research community and publishing platform *Do Not Research*, where she now serves as the director of audio-visual programming. Currently, she is in post production on her first narrative feature film *Transformers: Terminal*, a film she co-wrote and produced, set for release in 2023. She lives and works in Baltimore, Maryland with her partner where she likes to drive her '94 Ford Ranger a little too fast.

This exhibition is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, New York City Council Member Lincoln Restler, and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature, and with generous support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Ruth Foundation for the Arts, Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Robert Lehman Foundation, Select Equity Group Foundation, many individuals and Smack Mellon's Members.

Smack Mellon's programs are also made possible with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and with generous support from The Edward and Sally Van Lier Fund of The New York Community Trust, Jerome Foundation, The Roy and Niuta Titus Foundation, Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation Inc., and Exploring The Arts. In-kind donations are provided by Materials for the Arts, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs/NYC Department of Sanitation/NYC Department of Education.

Space for Smack Mellon's programs is generously provided by the Walentas family and Two Trees Management.

Smack Mellon would like to extend a special thanks to all of the individuals, foundations, and businesses who have contributed to the NYC COVID-19 Response & Impact Fund.