

# Lone Wolf Recital Corps

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A multidisciplinary performance collective founded in 1986 by the artist and musician Terry Adkins (American, 1953–2014), the Lone Wolf Recital Corps consists of an evolving cast of collaborators that, during Adkins’s lifetime, typically convened in conjunction with his exhibitions to stage what he called “recitals.” These events, which took place inside the shows or at other venues, incorporated live and recorded music, video, recitation, and costumed, choreographed movement. For Adkins, they were part of “an ongoing quest to reinsert the legacies of unheralded immortal figures to their rightful place within the panorama of history.”<sup>1</sup> He would intensely study a particular historical figure, create an installation of objects and video addressing his or her biography, often in indirect ways, and then gather the Corps to collaboratively orchestrate a related multimedia performance.

Adkins described the recitals as “a kind of abstract portraiture”<sup>2</sup> and “a way of dealing with history, of rewriting it, of reimagining it.”<sup>3</sup> They commemorated and celebrated such figures as abolitionist John Brown, jazz musician John



Terry Adkins. *Sus Scrofa (Linnaeus)*. 2004. Contrabass, wild boar hide and skull, and wood. © Estate of Terry Adkins. Courtesy the Estate of Terry Adkins. Photo: Gregston Hurdle

Coltrane, abolitionist Frederick Douglass, scholar and activist W. E. B. DuBois, explorer Matthew Henson, blues musician Sam “Lightnin’” Hopkins, and blues singer Bessie Smith. They paid homage both to the achievements of individuals Adkins considered obscure and to the lesser-known accomplishments of well-known figures. Poetically titled recitals like *Black Beethoven* (2004) and *Meteor Stream* (2009) posed provocative questions like “Did Beethoven have African ancestry?” and “What if John Brown’s violent slave rebellion had been successful?” Moreover, in both their exuberant pageantry and their solemn ceremony, the recitals evoked the mystical rites of esoteric religious traditions and attained, if only briefly, the synthesis of the arts embodied by the notion of Gesamtkunstwerk.

*Projects 107* features looping video documentation of the collective’s past recitals, demonstrating their variety: the rapturous freeform musical improvisation of Adkins, accompanied by Charles Gaines, Cavassa Nickens, and Kamau Amu Patton, in *Atum (Honey from a Flower Named Blue)* (2012); performance artist Clifford Owens enacting a prowling wolf, ritualistically draped in the animal’s pelt, in *Facets: A Recital Compilation by Terry Adkins* (2012), which served as his initiation into the Corps; and horn players Vincent Chancey, Dick Griffin, Marshall Sealy, and Kiane Zawadi’s performance of *Last Trumpet* (2013). Their soundtracks pulse through the gallery, evoking the recitals’ atmosphere.

Adkins’s installations of sculpture sometimes doubled as stages for recitals, which often incorporated the display and performance of variously manipulated or invented instruments and musical machines. As he explained, “My quest has been to find a way to make music as physical as sculpture might be and sculpture as ethereal as music is.”<sup>4</sup> Adkins’s sculptural practice was guided by a process he called “potential disclosure,” which he described as summoning the innate value within the (often manufactured) detritus he aggregated. Adkins considered his technique consistent with his “black Southern heritage . . . rooted in the tradition of ennobling the worthless.”<sup>5</sup> The selection of sculptures in *Projects 107* traces the history of the Corps—from *Dark Night* (1987–88), a work Adkins created soon after he founded the group while at an artist residency in Zurich, to *Upperville* (2009) and *Methane Sea* (2013), assemblages featured in the last exhibition of Adkins’s work organized during his lifetime. Similar to Adkins’s installations, the *Projects 107* gallery serves as a set for activations and performances. It also demonstrates the implicit and explicit ways music features in Adkins’s sculptures as well as his concept of a synesthetic exchange between sculpture and sound. To the extent possible, the works are installed in a manner consistent with their historical modes of display. Sculptures



*Last Trumpet*. Performed as part of Performa 13, New York, November 18, 2013. Photo © Chani Bockwinkel. Courtesy Performa

that silently evoke music include *Symphonic Dream* (1992), *Nenuphar* (1998), *Sermon* (2002), and *Sus Scrofa (Linnaeus)* (2004). Each features parts of musical instruments yet cannot be played. Of works like these, Adkins said, “Embedded in the sculpture is the trace of sound, the trace of the nature of sound, even if the sculptures aren’t sounding.”<sup>6</sup> Conversely, *Last Trumpet* (1995) is “at the crossroads where sculpture can make sound.”<sup>7</sup> It comprises four eighteen-foot-long horns that are both monumental sculptures and functional musical instruments, which Adkins called “Akrhaphones.” He retained this work until his death, including it in several of his exhibitions, where he would conduct various brass players in the Corps in activating it. In addition to the sculptures, the exhibition includes two recital stage elements: *Obelisks in Rome* (2009–10), a tenebrous split-screen slide show of obelisks in the Italian capital that was originally projected as the backdrop for the 2013 recital *At Osiris*, and *A Man Was Lynched Yesterday* (2007), Adkins’s version of the banner that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) used to fly from its headquarters on Fifth Avenue, in New York, whenever a lynching had taken place.

In an interview at the beginning of his career, Adkins explained, “Music keeps me from being bored with sculpture and sculpture keeps me from being bored with music. So, they both reinforce each other. I think what is different about my work is that music influences my attitude about making sculpture . . . I like for the work to almost make itself and to think of myself as

a composer, bringing disparate things into a harmonious balance of gesture and grace.”<sup>8</sup> Adkins’s direction of the Lone Wolf Recital Corps was not unlike his approach to sculptural assemblage. He brought together luminaries in music, literature, and the visual arts to form the Corps’ ever-changing, accumulative membership. The Corps is not a conventional band but rather consists of two distinct groups with overlapping and revolving memberships. At the center of the Corps is a fraternity of sorts, called the Sacred Order of Twilight Brothers. Initiates are all de jure members of the Lone Wolf Recital Corps, but not all participants in the Corps are members of the Sacred Order of Twilight Brothers. Adkins collaborated with a diverse array of individuals, and in its more expansive form, the Corps performed with undergraduate art and music students of no renown. The roster of participants in *Projects 107* draws primarily on Adkins’s most frequent collaborators—the Sacred Order of Twilight Brothers.

The spirit of collaboration at the heart of the Corps is perhaps best embodied by its most elusive member, Blanche Bruce, Adkins’s artistic alter ego, whose only published “biography” describes him as “a vigilant torchbearer of the 1960’s jazz avant-garde and of the anonymous tradition” who “shuns the recognition of singular authorship in favor of visitant collaborative experiences with likeminded creative thinkers.”<sup>9</sup> Adkins empowered his collaborators in the Corps to adopt his alter ego, who would wear an identity-masking



balaclava when performing. The pseudonym resurrects Blanche Kelso Bruce (1841–1898), the first African American and only formerly enslaved person to serve a full term in the United States Senate. “He’s another way in which I put a twist on collaboration, with this mercurial character who can be occupied by anyone,” Adkins explained. “Anyone that I collaborate with can be Blanche Bruce.”<sup>10</sup> In recital announcements and exhibition ephemera, Bruce is listed as a member of the Lone Wolf Recital Corps and as Minister at Large of the Sacred Order of Twilight Brothers. Bruce appears throughout *Projects 107*’s performance program.



Blanche Bruce at the American Academy in Rome, 2010. Photo: Luca Nostri. Courtesy Lugo Land

*Projects 107* features a selection of the most iconic Lone Wolf Recital Corps props and paraphernalia. Over many years, Adkins gathered and embellished these materials, distributed them to his collaborators for use during recitals, and then reclaimed them to be utilized by future iterations of the Corps. In the same way that certain priestly vestments are worn on specific occasions, some of these costumes and instruments are associated with specific recitals (for example, fezes, megaphones, and tambourines were used in performances of *Last Trumpet*). Iridescent royal blue sashes embroidered with various insignias, on the other hand, were worn during most of the recitals. Like a band’s uniform, academic regalia, or the distinctive garb of religious orders, fraternities, and secret societies, these accoutrements simultaneously served to formally unify the Corps and to distinguish individuals’ specific roles within a given performance.

This exhibition culminates in a series of live recitals. A changing group of artists presents new work and reprises selections from the Corps’ repertoire both within the exhibition and in the Museum’s theaters. The performance program brings together an intergenerational roster of



*Facets: A Recital Compilation* by Terry Adkins. Performed at the Arthur Zankel Music Center, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, November 8, 2012, as part of the exhibition *Recital* at The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery. Photo: Patrick O’Rourke

artists and musicians in the Lone Wolf Recital Corps: Sanford Biggers, Juini Booth, Blanche Bruce, Vincent Chancey, Arthur Flowers, Charles Gaines, Dick Griffin, Tyehimba Jess, Rashid Johnson, Cavassa Nickens, Demetrius Oliver, Clifford Owens, Kamau Amu Patton, Marshall Sealy, Dread Scott, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, and Kiane Zawadi; and others, including Da’Niro Elle Brown, Zachary Fabri, LaMont Hamilton, Jason Moran, and Kambui Olujimi.

At the time of Adkins’s death in Brooklyn in February 2014, his innovative interdisciplinary practice, and its influence on his contemporaries and students, was gaining broad recognition. *Projects 107* honors the collective achievement of the Lone Wolf Recital Corps and the living legacy of an artist who was dedicated to honoring the legacies of others.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Terry Adkins, artist bio for Performa 13: New Visual Art Performance Biennial, 2013, <http://13.performa-arts.org/artists/terry-adkins>.  
<sup>2</sup> “Event Scores: Terry Adkins, George Lewis,” *Artforum* 52, no. 7 (March 2014): 250.  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>4</sup> Terry Adkins, interview with Dana Roc, February 2006, [http://danaroc.com/inspiring\\_020606terryadkins.html](http://danaroc.com/inspiring_020606terryadkins.html).  
<sup>5</sup> Judith Page, “(Still) Getting Inside Getting Outside: A Conversation with Terry Adkins,” *Sculpture* 19, no. 3. (April 2000): 24.  
<sup>6</sup> “Event Scores,” 253.  
<sup>7</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>8</sup> Page, “(Still) Getting Inside Getting Outside,” 21.  
<sup>9</sup> Blanche Bruce, *Shadow of Freedom* (Lugo, Italy: Edizioni del bradipo, 2013), 45.  
<sup>10</sup> “Event Scores,” 248.

## Projects 107: Lone Wolf Recital Corps

August 19–October 9, 2017

The Museum of Modern Art

### Related Programs

<b>Modern Mondays: An Evening with Kamau Amu Patton</b> Monday, September 18, 7:00 p.m. The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2	<b>Recitals</b> A series of ticketed, after-hours performances take place in the exhibition and in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1.
Patton restages <i>Amun</i> ( <i>The Unseen Legends</i> ) (2013).	<b>A Living Space</b> Wednesday, September 20, 7:00 p.m. Floor 3
<b>The Legacy of Terry Adkins and the Lone Wolf Recital Corps</b> Wednesday, September 27, 6:00 p.m. The Celeste Bartos Theater	<b>Envy of the World (A Blues for Terry Adkins)</b> Sunday, September 24, 7:00 p.m. Floor 3
Conversation with Charles Gaines, Clifford Owens, and Kamau Amu Patton, moderated by Valerie Cassel Oliver and Akili Tommasino.	<b>A Visionary Recital (after Terry Adkins)</b> Tuesday, September 26, 7:00 p.m. Titus 1
<b>PopRally Presents: Twilight Brothers</b> Saturday, September 30, 8:30 p.m. The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1	For a detailed schedule of events, visit <a href="http://moma.org/lonewolf">moma.org/lonewolf</a> .

Organized by Akili Tommasino, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture.

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Cover: *Facets: A Recital Compilation* by Terry Adkins. Performed at the Arthur Zankel Music Center, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, November 8, 2012, as part of the exhibition *Recital* at The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery. Photo: Patrick O’Rourke

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The artists wish to dedicate this exhibition to the memory of Terry Adkins.

Projects



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