PERFORMANCES

PERFORMANCES ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

11/11
SATURDAY AT 12PM, 1PM, 2PM

11/12
SUNDAY AT 12PM, 1PM, 2PM

MARCUS GARVEY PARK, NEAR THE PARK ENTRANCE AT E. 122ND ST AND MADISON AVE
HARLEM, NYC

ABOUT STOREFRONT FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE
Storefront for Art and Architecture advances innovative and critical ideas that contribute to the design of cities, territories, and public life. Storefront's exhibitions, events, competitions, publications, and projects provide alternative platforms for dialogue and trans-disciplinary collaboration. To learn more, visit: www.storefrontnews.org

DIGITAL COLLAGE: BRYONY ROBERTS

HISTORICAL IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES

ARTIST ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank all of those who have helped to make this project possible, especially Eva Franch of Storefront for proposing a collaboration between Bryony and Mabel, Carlos Minguez Carrasco for helping to realize the concept, and Jinny Khanduja for finding the support to make the project happen. We are especially grateful to Eva and Carlos for their help in bringing the project to Harlem. We also wish to thank RoseLee Goldberg and Charles Aubin of Performa for supporting and featuring the project, and Connie Lee of the Marcus Garvey Park Alliance for presenting it in Marcus Garvey Park.

In addition, we want to thank those who have offered precious insight, critique, and encouragement through the process, especially John Lansdowne, Cory Buckner, Michelle Washington, Phu Hoang and Brian Joo, and Andy Vernon-Jones.

— Bryony Roberts and Mabel O. Wilson

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With *Marching On*, architectural designers Bryony Roberts and Mabel O. Wilson collaborate with the Marching Cobras of New York, a Harlem-based after-school drum-line and dance team, to explore the legacy of marching and organized forms of performance.

Commissioned by Storefront for Art and Architecture, this new project interweaves echoes of the 1917 Silent Parade against racial violence with references to the revered Harlem Hellfighters. Historically rooted in military training, marching band performances that animated streets across the U.S. offered a sanctioned means for African-Americans to gain access to public spaces, which had been severely limited by Jim Crow racial segregation. From the end of the Civil War through the early decades of the twentieth century, men donning military uniforms and women dressed in the colors of religious and civic associations marched to publicly assert solidarity against racial oppression while simultaneously celebrating the music and performance of their communities.

In the vibrant black crossroads of Harlem, marching thrived as a versatile medium that could bring together the sounds of ragtime and jazz while also serving to publize the political causes of figures like Marcus Garvey. In these performances, acts of militancy and civil disobedience could be cloaked by the display of precision-oriented military training, and by the steady cadence of marching men, women, and children.

Drawing from these multi-layered histories, *Marching On* plays upon the theme of camouflage as it relates to questions of public visibility and access. Informed by the geometric patterns of the park’s paving and traditional military formations, the Marching Cobras wear costumes and perform choreography that both merges with and stands apart from the public spaces and streets that surround them.

*Marching On* is inaugurated with a series of performances by the Marching Cobras presented by the Marcus Garvey Park Alliance during Performa 17. The performances are free and open to the public.

An exhibition expanding upon the politics of performance will be presented at Storefront’s gallery space in the Spring of 2018.
Marching On pays homage to the history of marching in Manhattan in the first decades of the twentieth century. Two events—the Silent Parade and the return of the Harlem Hellfighters—caused black residents to take to the streets of New York City.

On July 28, 1917, 10,000 black New Yorkers marched in the Silent Parade. Residents filled the ranks of a silent procession down Fifth Avenue in protest of brutal lynchings and other forms of violence taking place around the country. The event, organized by James Weldon Johnson of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) along with other civil rights leaders, was spurred by a race riot in East St. Louis, Illinois that caused hundreds of deaths and destroyed neighborhoods. To highlight their cause, women and children dressed in white to symbolize their innocence in the face of racial discrimination and violence, while men wore black suits to convey collective mourning. Together, they marched in silence, led only by the sound of muffled drumbeats. Marching On is presented on the heels of the 100-year anniversary of this protest march, a key early landmark event of the civil rights movement.

Two years after the Silent Parade, upon returning from battling Europe’s Central powers in World War I, the highly decorated 369th Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard, nicknamed the Harlem Hellfighters, triumphantly marched along Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue in February of 1919.

Beginning in Madison Square and ending in Harlem, they drew an audience of over one million New Yorkers.

After facing rampant discrimination during their stateside training, the Regiment, alongside French troops, had bravely fought the German army. The marching band of the Harlem Hellfighters, led by Lt. James Reese Europe, distinguished itself around Europe during the war with an original sound that merged march standards with the syncopation of jazz. The group returned to the U.S. and recorded many popular songs that influenced both marching and popular music. Their homecoming parade, featuring the marching band, was intended to publicly verify their patriotism, with the hope that their heroic service would lead to equal and fair treatment back at home.

Marching On takes place over Veteran’s Day weekend, acknowledging the long history of black military service and the efforts of groups such as the Harlem Hellfighters to leverage equal rights and citizenship.
Marching On takes place in Central Harlem’s Marcus Garvey Park, exploring performance as means of contestation and performance as a site for its own production.

Marcus Garvey Park has always been a site of transition. The park opened in 1840 after the enormous schist rock at its center proved an obstacle to extending Manhattan’s grid uptown. The rocky outcroppings and winding treescape remained in contrast to the surrounding density of brownstones and apartment buildings. In the 1930s, urban planner Robert Moses redesigned the park, inserting an axial organization of planted areas and playgrounds with stone walls that enclosed the park. Marching On reacts to and inserts itself within this formal organization, still in place in the park today.

For most of the twentieth century, the predominantly black residents of the surrounding neighborhood have used the park for recreation and relaxation, often as a site for performances. With Harlem undergoing rapid gentrification, recently constructed high-end condo buildings now surround the park. Their proximity has brought complaints from new residents about noise, many of them focused on events such as the weekly Saturday drum circle gathering, a long-standing neighborhood tradition.

The choreography of Marching On, developed by the Marching Cobras’ Terrel Stowers and Kevin Young with Roberts and Wilson, acknowledges the public dimensions of contestation and the right to public space itself as central to free expression within the cultural fabric of our cities and neighborhoods, particularly in the context of marching and performing arts in black communities.

The costumes of Marching On, designed by Roberts and Wilson and worn by the Marching Cobras’ drummers and dancers, reference various historical and contemporary black marching groups, and echo the two events that inspired the performance—the return of the Harlem Hellfighters and the Silent Parade.

With a reference to the exuberant uniforms of contemporary marching bands at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the drummers and the dancers in Marching On wear flowing capes with divergent chromatic palettes. Their costumes, comprised of uniforms and capes, play with the military connotations of marching bands in order to produce a visual language of historical camouflage that embeds the colors of the park’s paving pattern in the costumes’ fabric. The drummers wear olive shirts and pants based upon the military uniforms worn by the Hellfighters.

The dancers wear all white, alluding to the attire worn by the women and children marching in the Silent Parade. For the drummers, one side of the cape matches their white costumes, with a hint of the hybridized camouflage in shades of gray. One side of the cape matches their olive uniforms, with a hybridized green camouflage that blends with the park’s surroundings. All of the capes feature a multicolored lining that amplifies the colors of the park’s paving pattern and incorporates colors from the Marching Cobras’ logo. This double-sided patterning allows the performers to switch between modes of invisibility and visibility within the park.

The patterning on both sides of the capes merges historical and contemporary designs, bringing together the organic forms of military camouflage and the geometric shapes in the paving at Marcus Garvey Park.

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