

Artblog

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Video fact meets fiction
Post from Colette Copeland



Performance artist, writer and activist Coco Fusco's new video debuted at The Project, a 57th St. gallery in New York. After spending three years curating the "Only Skin Deep Exhibit" at [ICP](#), I wondered when she found time to create a major new work.

As in Fusco's previous work, the video "a/k/a/ Mrs. George Gilbert" critically examines racialized politics and imagery, exposing the inequities of justice for people of color. Specifically, it is the story of a FBI agent who confesses his involvement in the nation-wide search for Angela Davis, the black philosopher who was fired from UCLA in 1969 at the order of then governor Ronald Reagan. In 1970, she was placed on the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted List," after which she fled underground.

During the two months that Davis was a fugitive, hundreds if not thousands, of other women were incorrectly identified by law enforcement officials and many were arrested as Davis. Her case culminated in one of the most famous trials in recent history and she was acquitted of all charges in 1972. (Top, the real Angela).

Fusco collaborated with Rick Moody, the author of the movie "The Ice Storm," on the writing of the script.

By combining both fictional and documentary source materials, the video successfully creates doubt as to the veracity of history as recorded by the government and presented to the public by the media. Fusco employs the visual strategy of filtering and altering the 'fictional' footage, so that it resembles the original source material, which includes newspaper articles, photographs and film clips. The voiceover of the FBI agent performed by Hacktivist (digital zapatista) Ricardo Dominguez personalizes the faux-documentary. His persistent clearing of the throat throughout the 40-minute video adds a bit of humor to the character. (Right, images from Fusco's "Dolores from 10 to 10").



I was struck by the seeming absurdity of the case. I had to watch the video twice before I could fathom what crime the government was charging Angela Davis with. Ultimately what lingered, is the timeliness of this piece and the fact that it so closely mirrors what is going on today in our country in the name of security and patriotism. It testifies to the extremes that the government will pursue, in order to protect 'the ideals' rather than the individuals.

The work is on display through July 24 at [The Project](#).

As a side note, both Coco Fusco and Ricardo Dominguez were keynote speakers at last fall's Society of Photographic Education's conference in New Jersey, which I co-chaired. Both of them are dynamic speakers and performers, definitely not to be missed if you have the opportunity to see them.

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