Film and installation artist Catherine Sullivan (American, b. 1968, Los Angeles; lives in Chicago) often borrows from literary sources and social, political, and cultural history. She constructs elaborate video installations whose immersive character attests to her debt to experimental theater. Sullivan’s interest in improvisation stems in part from the world of theater while also aligning her artistic methods and preoccupations with the adjoining realm of jazz and related improvised music. Sullivan teamed up with AACM historian and jazz musician George Lewis, composer and director Sean Griffin, and conceptual artist Charles Gaines to produce Afterword, the three-dimensional pendant of a much larger project that will premiere on the MCA Stage. It is a full-scale opera composed by Lewis, also titled Afterword, that is based on the postscript to A Power Stronger Than Itself, his history of the AACM. The film, conceived by Sullivan within the framework of this ambitious collaboration, features actual AACM members—her medium truly is the ensemble—acting out different scenes culled from the aforementioned epilogue and shot in existing theater sets, ranging from the backdrop of a lavishly designed Porgy and Bess to a production of Samuel Beckett’s absurdist classic Waiting for Godot featuring an all—African American cast. The resulting vignettes are projected inside a space whose walls are adorned with the schematic contours of Charles Gaines’s stage designs for Lewis’s opera. It all makes for a quintessentially collective homage to the quintessential collective that is the AACM.

Catherine Sullivan with George Lewis, Charles Gaines, and Sean Griffin
Afterword via Fantasia, 2015
Single-channel video (color, sound) and mixed media installation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artists

TOP
Production still, Afterword via Fantasia, 2015
From left, William Pope.L, Ann Ward, Democco Atcher, Coco Eyases
Shot on set for Waiting for Godot directed by Ron OJ Parson
Court Theater, Chicago
Scenography: Courtney O'Neill
Lighting Design: Lee Keenan

BOTTOM
Production still, Afterword via Fantasia, 2015
Zachary Brown
Shot on set for production of Porgy and Bess directed by Francesca Zambello
Lyric Opera, Chicago
Production owned by Washington National Opera
Scenography: Peter J. Davidson
Lighting Design: Mark McCullough