

somewhere: *artist David Hammons considers hair, and certainly not skin, to be a distinctive feature of race. Or to put it more precisely: hair texture, not skin color.*

When I was in Chicago this autumn, we walked around the *Fountain Of Time* one particularly grey and rainy day.

We tried to spot the sculptor Lorado Taft's self-portrait amongst the many other figures of his public allegory.

The sculpture was wet and shiny and its grey was turning yellow. Then I danced in the empty gallery. I was alone

and naked, my body covered with make-up the same color as my hair, Karl Holmqvist's and the sculptor's concrete self-portrait. The sweat on my body formed clearer zones around my lips, under my armpits, in between my breasts. My dark pubic hair was also quite visible—the make-up wouldn't cover it. This make-up is intended to be used on skin, not hair. I repeated the same dance moves I have been repeating for some time now and that I will probably repeat for some time in the future, for as long as I can.

These dance moves were invented by American performer Josephine Baker who settled in France nearly ninety years ago. She repeated them many times, to the point that her very last show was a spectacle about her career and her life, a semi-danced autobiography incorporating, of her past choreographies, only the bits she could still dance: the symptoms. Baker left the United States because, amongst other reasons, she didn't want to perform in front of segregated audiences. She never performed in minstrel shows—shows in which white and also black comedians blackened their faces up and enacted characters such as “dandies”, “Sambos”, “coons”, “buffoons”, “pickaninnies”, within a specific décor, that of an idealized southern plantation, washed of its

inherent violence. Baker preferred to enact another stereotype: a savage but free and sexually attractive woman. This was more in tune with her times and places, marked by the Harlem Renaissance's essentialist and essential vision of the African roots of black Americans and by the French avant-garde's interest in (and sometimes pillage of) non-European art forms.

When I trained as a ballet dancer we would often watch videos, memorize them and dance in front of the mirror until we could perfectly repeat the steps they featured. It is often how we learned. So I watch films showing Baker dancing and moving. Then, naked and my body covered with dark make-up, in the silence of my studio or an exhibition space, empty or full of works, I cut her choreographies into small bits, repeating and repeating just one bit in front of my camera. I try to not repeat the most exaggerated and comical parts of her art, although I find her incredibly funny and entertaining, as I feel this would be a caricature and an imitation, but not a means to bear some remote resemblance with her. I believe that the most offensive aspect of minstrel shows lies more in the caricature and the exaggeration of the stereotypes than in the actual blackening. I blacken my entire body and present myself naked in order to be vulnerable and not in a position of dominating my subject matter and my model. I too can only dance the symptoms.

Recently, I started intersecting these abstract dance bits with elements of my life in the studio (or the study)—making things, taking phone calls, looking at myself in the mirror, cleaning up the space, smoking, reading, sitting at my desk, naked and my entire body covered with dark make-up. The videos form some kind of journal, recording the places where I travel, work, exhibit and live. Because I would also like to bear some remote resemblance with myself.

Lili Reynaud-Dewar, *Live Through That (The Fifth Dimension, Logan Center for the Arts, Chicago) (still), 2013.*  
Courtesy: the artist and Emanuel Layr, Vienna



Text written to accompany “The Fifth Dimension”, curated by Monika Szewczyk at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, Chicago, 2013–2014.

## SHANNON EBNER *FROM CENTURY TO IMPERIAL* (2014)

All of these images were taken from a moving car in Los Angeles. The writing appears backwards because it was written in the opposite direction of traffic. The writing is found and was made by one or more pedestrians marking into the exhaust fumes that have accumulated over time along the walls of the tunnel.





