

Studio Visit

Santiago Mostyn

by Eric Booker,
Exhibition Coordinator



I first came across multidisciplinary artist Santiago Mostyn's work on a visit to Moderna Museet in Stockholm. His video performance *Delay* (2014) followed the artist through the streets of the Swedish capital as he encountered affluent white men and addressed each racially charged interaction with the simple touch of his hand. It is in this way that Mostyn approaches his experiences, by becoming a character through which social forces are reflected, that drew me to his work.

Eric Booker: When we first spoke you brought up this idea of the American diaspora, which is an interesting point to start with, given your international upbringing.

Santiago Mostyn: I was born in San Francisco but my parents moved to Grenada when I was five months old. When political turmoil erupted there, they were airlifted out—against their will. My mother and I moved to Zimbabwe after that, but we ended up spending the majority of my adolescence in Trinidad, where I lived until I went to college at Yale. It's this experience of having gone back and forth between all these different places, the reversed triangle of the African diaspora, that stayed with me. After university I started traveling and living between New York and other cities. I ended up coming to Sweden to study, and it's developed into a good place to work from and to make sense of

some of the strange forces in the world right now.

EB: This experience of movement and migration has really tied your work to place. Your photographic project *All Most Heaven* (2008) documented your travels throughout the United States. How has travel motivated your practice?

SM: There's an obvious tear that occurs when someone has experienced being taken out of the place that they considered home. It was something that I felt was missing inside of me, that I needed to make

Santiago Mostyn
Delay (video still), 2014
Courtesy the artist

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sense of in order to figure out who I was—not that there's ever an answer to that question. When I first started thinking about making artworks, it felt like I was trying to fill this space with the images I was making or the projects I was doing. Early on, the Mississippi project wasn't just a documentation of this underground, radical train-hopping community. This was a life, and a community, that I was deeply committed to, with friends who were like family.

EB: How long did that project last?

SM: Initially two summers. We built rafts in Minneapolis and charted them down the Mississippi River, performing in each small town. I guess I'm

always trying to just make sense of space and take on large topics with . . . some kind of lightness of touch. I always think of Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988), where he talks about a delicate touch being the most productive way to face these massive, heavy subjects, and to really register their weight.

EB: What are you working on now?

SM: I've been working on a project called *Citizen*, a real world performance that is then documented on camera, but in such a way that the documentation is both part of the work and a work itself. To make the work, I rowed a small boat from the

Turkish coast to Samos, Greece, one of the nearest islands. So the work is the physical effort of having to row this great distance, unaided, between two landmasses that are actually not so far away from each other but are different realities—inside and outside of Europe—across a fluid, invisible border. It was an illegal crossing but obviously it was much less of a crime for me than for others. I would have been arrested and taken to jail if I had been caught, but I would not have been put into a camp. I'm not trying to take away from the extreme tragedy of the journeys that so many are

Santiago Mostyn
All Most Heaven, 2008
Courtesy the artist