

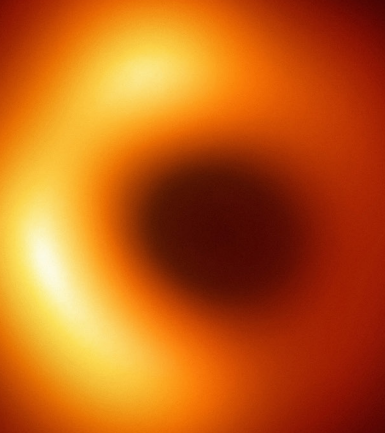
# MOBY DICK; OR, The Whale

WU TSANG



FEB 14-16, 2024

MCA



*Moby-Dick*, written in 1851 by Herman Melville, recounts the voyage of the *Pequod*, a whaling ship that embarks from Nantucket, Massachusetts, and sails throughout the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans in search of an albino whale named Moby Dick. Narrated by Ishmael, a mariner aboard the ship, the story is fueled by the vengeful and increasingly maniacal desire of the *Pequod*'s captain, Ahab, to kill the white whale, which claimed his leg during a past expedition.

*MOBY DICK; or, The Whale*, directed by Wu Tsang (b. 1982, Worcester, MA; lives in Zürich, Switzerland) and written by Sophia Al Maria, adapts Melville's canonical novel into a predominately silent, feature-length film, animated by a live orchestral score composed by Caroline Shaw and Andrew Yee with Asma Maroof and performed at the MCA by the Chicago Sinfonietta.

Tsang's film generally adheres to Melville's original plot while accentuating key elements that continue to resonate with our understanding of culture today. Informed by historian C. L. R. James's postcolonial reading of *Moby-Dick*, the film sifts through what Tsang describes as the "messy politics" of Melville's text, scrutinizing the imperial impulses that drive his characters to hunt

whales, traverse oceans, and obsessively map their surroundings.<sup>1</sup> *MOBY DICK; or, The Whale* also pays particular attention to the social life of the crew, taking inspiration from maritime historical accounts of sailors from different countries congregating on ships, which at the time were rare spaces of cultural exchange and revolutionary politics.<sup>2</sup> Presenting scenes of tender embrace between mariners and sensual sequences of sailors handling viscous whale blubber, the film draws out queer dynamics between crewmates alluded to in the novel, linking the production to many of Tsang's earlier works that similarly bring submerged queer and trans narratives to the surface. As it approaches its conclusion, Tsang's film increasingly turns to abstraction as a strategy to indicate the limits of empirical knowledge, exemplified by the inconceivable depth of the ocean, the persistent unknowability of the white whale, and the incomprehensible scale of colonialism and capitalism—systems at the heart of Melville's novel.

Since its premiere at the Schauspielhaus Zürich in 2022, *MOBY DICK; or, The Whale* has been presented in several cities across the United States, Europe, and Australia—a tour that feels all too fitting for a film anchored by the subject of travel across oceans. As the Midwest premiere venue for this project, the MCA is thrilled to bring Tsang's film to Chicago, a city by the water with a rich maritime history of its own.

Nolan Jimbo  
Assistant Curator

1. The specific text that informed Tsang's project was C. L. R. James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 2001); "Wu Tsang - interview | Madrid | 21 February 2023," Studio International, accessed December 10, 2023.

2. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).



BILLING

Directed by:  
WU TSANG

Written by:  
SOPHIA AL MARIA

Original Score by:  
CAROLINE SHAW and ANDREW  
YEE with ASMA MAROOF

Produced by:  
LAURA D'INCAU

Coproduced by:  
WU TSANG

Executive Producers:  
DAVID CODIKOW, NADJA RANGEL

Associate Producers:  
TOSH BASCO, SOPHIA AL MARIA  
STEFAN SCHEUERMANN,  
BARBARA HIGGS

Cinematography by:  
ANTONIO CISNEROS

Movement Direction by:  
TOSH BASCO

Choreography by:  
JOSH JOHNSON

Costumes by:  
TELFAR X KYLE LUU

Production Design by:  
NINA MADER

Virtual Production by:  
BILD STUDIOS

Video Design by:  
FRAY STUDIO

Edited by:  
JÉRÔME PESNEL

Dramaturgs:  
KATINKA DEECKE, JOSHUA WICKE

PERFORMERS

Titilayo Adebayo  
André Atangana  
Tosh Basco  
Vincent Basse  
Maja Beckmann  
Karim Boumjimar  
Gottfried Breitfuss  
Thelma Buabeng  
Enantios Dromos  
Timon Essoungou  
Mel Guesson  
Josh Johnson  
Rene Melliger  
Wiebke Mollenhauer  
Fred Moten  
Sebastian Rudolph  
Daniel Kweku Schmid  
Stéphanie Scholl  
Corey Scott-Gilbert  
Scopeta Shephard  
Malik Sievi  
Rafal Skoczek  
Steven Sowah  
Ondrej Vidlar  
Thomas Wodianka

CHICAGO SINFONIETTA

FIRST VIOLIN  
Carol Dylan  
James Sanders  
Caroline Slack

SECOND VIOLIN  
Emily Nash  
Karla Galva  
Edith Yokley

VIOLA  
Seth Pae  
Becky Coffman  
Scott Dowd

CELLO  
Ann Griffin  
Edward Kelsey Moore  
Andrew Snow  
Lindsey Sharpe

BASS  
Christian Dillingham  
Brenda Donati

CONDUCTOR:  
Juliano Dutra Aniceto,  
Chicago Sinfonietta  
Freeman Conducting Fellow



## IMAGE CREDITS

COVER: *MOBY DICK; or, The Whale* (2022), directed by Wu Tsang, produced by Schauspielhaus Zürich. © Design Pics Inc / Alamy Stock Footage. INSIDE COVER: *MOBY DICK; or, The Whale* (2022), Dir. Wu Tsang, Prod. Schauspielhaus Zürich. PAGE 4 (all images): *MOBY DICK; or, The Whale* (2022), Dir. Wu Tsang, Prod. Schauspielhaus Zürich. ABOVE: Production still (Tosh Basco as Queequeg), *MOBY DICK; or, The Whale* (2022), directed by Wu Tsang, produced by Schauspielhaus Zürich. Photo by Greg Amgwerd.

# SCHEDULE

Feb 14, 2024 | 7–9 pm  
Performance + Artist Talk

Feb 15, 2024 | 7–8:30 pm  
Performance

Feb 16, 2024 | 7–8:30 pm  
Performance  
(Audio Description +  
CART Captioning)

The MCA's presentation of *MOBY DICK; or, The Whale* is organized by Nolan Jimbo, Assistant Curator.

Moved by the Motion Presents: *MOBY DICK; or, The Whale*

A Production of Schauspielhaus Zürich

Lead support of the MCA's presentation of *MOBY DICK; or, The Whale* is generously provided by R. H. Defares.

Co-Commissioned by LUMA Foundation, Superblue, TBA21-Academy, HARTWIG ART FOUNDATION, The Shed, DE SINGEL and The Whitney Museum of American Art

Schauspielhaus Zürich

L U M A  
F O U N D A T I O N

T Thysen-Bornemisza  
B Art Contemporary  
A Academy

THE SHED SINGEL

For more information about the program, including details about the artists, their work, and funding, please scan.



For more information and upcoming performances and programs, visit: [mcachicago.org/events](https://mcachicago.org/events)

REPRODUCTION  
Unauthorized recording and reproduction of a performance are prohibited.

MUSEUM OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART  
CHICAGO