

ARTFORUM

Isaac Julien: "Best of 2024: Top Ten"

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10. ISAAC JULIEN, *ONCE AGAIN . . . (STATUES NEVER DIE)* (WHITNEY BIENNIAL, WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, NEW YORK)



Isaac Julien, *Once Again . . . (Statues Never Die)*, 2022, five-channel 4K video and 35 mm transferred to 4K video, black-and-white, sound, 31 minutes 32 seconds. Installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo: Ashley Reese.

Played on five double-sided screens in a room of mirrored walls, Isaac Julien's *Once Again . . . (Statues Never Die)*, 2022, was many things. A portrait of the critic Alain Locke (played by André Holland). A reflection on Black queer desire. An evocation of the swirling creative milieu of the Harlem Renaissance. A revisiting of Locke's argument that African masks and sculpture deserved status equal to that of works by Western artists like Pablo Picasso. But what held me most was the captivating final scene, when Locke stands with eyes closed, snowflakes falling about him, and imagines Black creative freedom, invoking the words of bell hooks, as a "mystical diasporic dream-space" where "a culture of infinite possibility is ready to receive us . . . artistic freedom as pure and unsullied as falling snow."

For more on Isaac Julien's *Once Again . . . (Statues Never Die)*, visit Andrew V. Uroskie's feature on the Whitney Biennial from our Summer issue.

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