



## Electronic Press Kit

*Whiteness at Work*  
Stop-Motion Animated Film  
6:15 min

### PRIMARY CONTACT:

Peter Nelson (Director)  
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612-618-8906

### Website:

[www.beckernelson.com/whitenessatwork](http://www.beckernelson.com/whitenessatwork)

### Screener:

<https://vimeo.com/pbbnelson/whitenessatwork>  
(pw: white2023)

### Trailer:

<https://vimeo.com/pbbnelson/whitenessatworktrailer>

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*"White People . . . Your survival has never depended on your knowledge of white culture. In fact, it's required your ignorance."*

— Ijeoma Oluo, "Welcome To The Anti-Racism Movement..." *The Establishment*, April 15, 2019

### Summary:

*Whiteness at Work* follows a dough-faced character — an animated proxy for the filmmaker — as he uncovers critical moments that have shaped his limited understanding of race. As the character struggles to confront his unearned privilege, awkward pauses accentuate the discomfort that occurs when white people talk about whiteness.

This stop-motion animated short takes visual inspiration from Swedish filmmaker Roy Andersson's film *Härlig är Jorden (World of Glory)*, in which the protagonist flatly addresses the viewer in a bleakly stylized world. It also draws upon the wisdom and directness of scholar Peggy McIntosh's seminal essay "*White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*," in which the author lists the numerous perks that white Americans enjoy every day. Through a uniquely small-town Minnesotan perspective, *Whiteness at Work* reveals a larger legacy of white silence by naming the social conditions that tangibly benefit white people. As the main character says early on, "*Race was ignored. It was something other people had; something other people had to deal with. Not us.*"

### Screenings:

2023 Santa Barbara International Film Festival

2023 Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival (*Audience Choice Award*)

2023 D.C. Shorts

2023 DOC NYC

**Essay:** The following is an excerpt from *Off Script*, an essay by [Mike Curran](#), published in the exhibition catalog for *Build on this Gesture* at the Flaten Art Museum.



Peter Nelson is a shapeshifter. In his performance [Nine Monologues](#), he lip syncs the voices of women and girls who give diverging definitions of femininity. He made [Former Best Friends Forever](#) through a similar process, interviewing men who, at one point, he considered his “best friends”; in the video, he dresses in costume and mimics the words and mannerisms of each. With *Whiteness at Work*, Nelson’s new stop motion animated film, he summons the proxy of a dough-faced character, his blond hair permanently parted. The six-minute work follows him as he stumbles through memories that have shaped his understanding of whiteness.

Voiced by actor Adam Whisner, the main character’s snappy monologue contains all the requisite sentiment of a white person belatedly coming to terms with their racial identity: guilt and excitement, outrage and shame. Considering Nelson’s positionality as a white artist living in Minnesota, it might be assumed that the film is a reaction to the public murder of George Floyd and the summer of unrest and re-evaluation that followed. In reality, Nelson began the film a couple years prior in an attempt to turn his practice towards whiteness—which he recognized was silently snaking through his earlier projects. (*Former Best Friends Forever*, for instance, is not solely a representation of masculinity, but *white* masculinity.)

There’s a defensiveness to the character’s monologue—the type of uneasy, now familiar posturing that white people adopt when disavowing a supremacy they benefit from. But despite—and perhaps *because*—of this noise, *Whiteness at Work* is most affecting in its silences. As the character searches for the correct thing to say, there are pauses where his blue eyes blink or another figure shifts in their seat. Nelson cites as an influence Roy Andersson’s film *Härlig är Jorden* (World of Glory), which alludes to the horrors of the Holocaust through prolonged silences where the protagonist stares flatly into the camera. Following the character’s impassioned plea for white people to “do something” about their privilege, the final scene of *Whiteness at Work* shows him on his couch, scrolling through his phone. The living room is a drab blue and gray, echoing Andersson’s muted color palette.

*Whiteness at Work* exposes the artifice of stop motion to center a more latent constructedness: the way we maintain white supremacy by talking our way around it. With Nelson’s latest project, sitting with discomfort is the point.

*Whiteness at Work* debuted in February at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

### Director's Note:

As a Minnesota educator and filmmaker, this project — with the first screenplay drafted in early 2020 — took on new meaning after the tragic murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police and the national racial reckoning that followed. The legacy of white silence and anti-Black violence came into clear relief for me and many other white Minnesotans. Initially, there was great energy focused on listening, learning, protesting, and working towards social change. Predictably, however, that energy diminished over time, leaving many white people wondering what to do with a newfound understanding of race, privilege, and power.

### Director Biography:

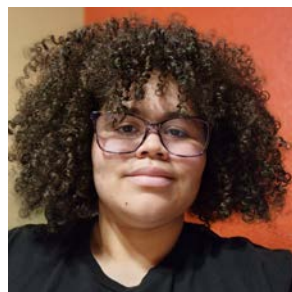


Peter Bonde Becker Nelson (he/him) is an interdisciplinary artist who works in animation, video, performance, photography, and installation. Drawing from the personal narratives of friends and family, his work critically examines the nuances of race, gender roles, relationships, memory, aging, and loss.

Nelson lives and works on occupied land of the Wapekute Band of the Dakota Nation, now known as Northfield, Minnesota. He teaches digital, time-based, and performance art at St. Olaf College.

Nelson was awarded a 2019 McKnight Media Arts Fellowship, a 2020 Jerome Foundation Film, Video and Digital Production Grant, and multiple Minnesota State Arts Board Grants (2005, 2015, 2021). His work has been screened, exhibited, and performed nationally and internationally, most recently at The Walker Art Center (MN), San Luis Obispo International Film Festival (CA), Austin Film Festival (TX), D.C. Shorts Film Festival (Washington D.C.), Currents International New Media Festival (NM), and the Sioux City Art Center (IA).

### Cast and Crew:



**DeA Brown (Production)** (they/them/theirs) is a 2021 St. Olaf college graduate with a BA in Studio Arts. Interested in the psychological aspects of identity, DeA's aims to investigate these elements of life through use of 3D and new media elements. They're current works focus on the intersections of race, queer identity, and addiction.



**Liberty Czarnik (Production)** is a math-loving animator currently residing in Minnesota. She enjoys watching cartoons with her siblings, tutoring Mathematics through AmeriCorps, taking care of her many houseplants, and posting freelance animation on her YouTube channel (<https://youtube.com/@LibertyCzarnik>).



**Ana Freeberg (Production)** is a digital producer and board operator at Minnesota Public Radio and works part time at the Walker Art Center. Ana is passionate about painting with bold colors that challenge political topics such as horseracing and the Mexican-American experience in the United States. Her experience has been utilized in several mural and mosaic projects that reside on Lake street in south Minneapolis.



**Chris Golinski (Music)** is a musician, entrepreneur, and educator dedicated to finding new modes of expression and innovative technology-based solutions for artists. Chris has performed across the United States, Europe, and Asia and has released five albums of his work internationally. His music merges the various influences he has absorbed, from experimental rock to contemporary classical, and challenges pre-existing notions of what music is and should be.



**Brin Constant Gordon (Lead Animator)** is an animator, dramaturg, and pataphysician whose work and play are engaged with genres of being and knowledge. They received their MFA in Experimental Animation from CalArts, and are currently based out of Los Angeles, California.



**Marcel Hones (Production)** is a filmmaker and painter based in Minneapolis, MN. His practice engages with family, neighbors, co-workers, and dreams, in the process of understanding collective memory. Most recently, he has pursued his interest in education as a teaching assistant in the Minneapolis College of Art and Design Youth Programs.



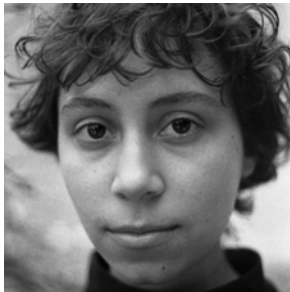
**Mary Loven (Costumer)** is an Ole whose student work job was to design and sew costumes for the Dance and Theater Departments. Her career was in early childhood education, but she briefly worked in the costume shop at the Guthrie Theater, and has done costuming for several community theaters as well. She created the detailed costumes for the puppets in *Whiteness at Work*.



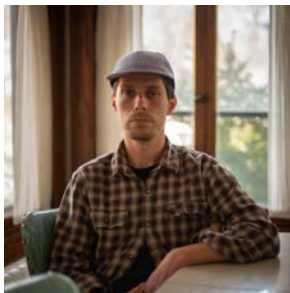
**Sofia Moran (Production)** is a St. Olaf '21 alumna with majors in sociology & anthropology and race and ethnic studies. During her time at St. Olaf, she was active in a Latinx organization, an art and literature student publication, and worked as a peer advisor at the career center. Sofia currently lives in Providence, RI, where she works in community outreach.



**Carter Schafer (Post-Production)** is a photographer, musician, and digital creator from Seattle, WA. He's currently a junior at St. Olaf College studying computer science and environmental studies, as well as playing on the school's ultimate frisbee team. He enjoys traveling, spending time outside, and is passionate about solving environmental issues.



**Luca Trujillo (Production)** is a Junior at St. Olaf College from Lawrence, Kansas. They are currently continuing their degree in Studio Art and working at the St. Olaf sculpture studio. Luca is interested in sculpture, filmmaking, and puppetry and specializes in paper-mache mask art.



**Evan Weselmann (Art Director)** is a Minneapolis based artist working in illustration, animation and painting. Focusing on bold color, hand type, and goofy characters, he seeks to extract the maximum amount of fun out of any given subject. His clients include Chet Faker, JD Sports and Bloomberg Businessweek among others.



**Adam Whisner (Featured Actor)** is a full-time stage, on-camera, and voice actor. He performs regularly with Minneapolis-based Pillsbury House + Theatre's Breaking Ice program, a touring corporate theater program which creates custom-made educational experiences around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Adam lives in "Nordeast" Minneapolis, with his wife, two lazy shih tzus, and too many motorcycles and guitars.

**Support:**

This project was supported by a McKnight Media Arts Fellowship, a Jerome Foundation Minnesota Film, Video and Digital Production Grant, a Minnesota State Arts Board Grant, and St. Olaf College.



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