

# ASSEMBLY



A FILM BY

**RASHAAD NEWSOME & JOHNNY SYMONS**

Running Time: 99 min  
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## LOGLINE

*Assembly* follows visionary artist Rashaad Newsome as he transforms a historic military facility into a Black queer utopia, blending art, AI, and performance. Through stunning visuals and deeply personal performances, *Assembly* captures the transformative power of creativity as a fractured community comes together to find strength, solidarity, and liberation.

## SYNOPSIS

*Assembly* follows internationally acclaimed artist Rashaad Newsome as he embarks on his most ambitious project yet — a multimedia exhibition and performance at New York's historic Park Avenue Armory. Once a bastion of white military power, the Armory is transformed into a vibrant celebration of Black and queer culture through video projections, holograms, sculptures, collages, music, dance, and African fractal patterns. This reimagining challenges colonial power structures while honoring the complexity and resilience of Black experience.

The film opens with a haunting vision: enslaved ancestors thrown from a slave ship into the sea. This imagery sets the tone for a journey shaped by ancestral presences — those who resisted, endured, and were lost too soon. Rashaad's visit to Ghana, where he communes with ancestors in the dungeons of enslavement, deepens the film's exploration of history, memory, and guidance as he creates this monumental work.

The film also breaks new ground by centering an AI character, Being, as a fully realized entity with a rich emotional arc. Evolving from a conceptual artwork into a central figure, Being overcomes skepticism from humans as they teach the critical importance of decolonization. Their story mirrors the struggles of *Assembly*'s performers, creating a poignant parallel between technology and humanity. Performers like Nekia, a Black trans woman who channels public scorn into inner strength, and Kyron, who transforms his traumatic upbringing into healing vocal performances, bring raw emotional depth to the work. Dazié confronts the isolation of being Black and queer through his spoken-word poetry, while Puma resists toxic masculinity through movement rooted in her Brazilian and queer identities. Together with Rashaad, they form a lineage of resilience, turning pain into artistic power.

Through innovative hybrid storytelling, breathtaking visual effects, and the ongoing presence of ancestors, *Assembly* transcends traditional documentary as it weaves together Rashaad's creative process, dynamic performances, and the lives of his collaborators. Powerful moments, such as a memorial for murdered Black trans women that evolves into a protest march, highlight art's capacity to reclaim agency and inspire change, offering a vision of intergenerational resilience, transformation, and hope.

## MEET THE CREATORS



### **RASHAAD NEWSOME**

*Director / Producer / Director of Photography & Visual Effects*

**Rashaad Newsome** is an award-winning filmmaker, multidisciplinary artist, and innovator whose work defies conventional boundaries, blending film, performance, technology, and community organizing. Through his visionary approach, he crafts immersive experiences that challenge outdated narratives and create new spaces for Black, queer, and trans stories to thrive. Rashaad's previous works include critically acclaimed projects that merge animation, sculpture, music, and artificial intelligence. His films reflect a philosophy of collage—both in form and content—deconstructing and reimagining the world through expansive, inclusive lenses. A recipient of an Honorary Doctoral Degree in Fine Arts from the University of Connecticut, Newsome has exhibited and performed in galleries, museums, institutions, and festivals throughout the world, including Hayward Gallery (London), the Studio Museum in Harlem (NYC), Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), the Sundance Film Festival, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture (D.C.). He has created more than 15 short films that have screened in arts institutions, festivals and on PBS. Recent awards for his work include the 2022 Newfest Emerging Black LGBTQ+ Filmmaker Award, the 2022 Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica Award for Computer Animation, and the 2025 Creative Capital Award.

## MEET THE CREATORS



### JOHNNY SYMONS

*Director / Producer / Cinematographer*

**Johnny Symons** is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker who has directed and produced multiple award-winning LGBTQ-themed feature documentaries. His films include *Daddy & Papa*, which premiered at Sundance, broadcast in more than a dozen countries and garnered 12 festival awards, *Out Run*, which premiered at Full Frame and aired on public television, and *Ask Not*, which broadcast nationally on PBS and screened at the U.S. Capitol. His work has screened at more than 200 international film festivals and received support from funders such as Sundance, Tribeca, ITVS, Catapult, HBO, Frameline, and the California Council for the Humanities. He is a former fellow in the Sundance Institute's Documentary Film Program and longstanding member of New Day Films. Johnny is co-producer of the Academy Award-nominated *Long Night's Journey Into Day*, which won the Sundance Grand Jury Prize and streamed on Showtime, and executive producer of *Pray Away*, which premiered at Tribeca and is streaming on Netflix. He graduated with honors from Brown University and has a Master's in documentary production from Stanford. Currently, he is professor and MFA coordinator in the School of Cinema at San Francisco State University.

## MEET THE CREATORS

**Keenan Newman** (cinematographer) is a queer California-based director and cinematographer focused on documentary, fiction and commercial work. He recently spent six months in rural Alaska filming *Newtok*, a feature documentary about the acute impact of climate change on a Yup'ik village, which premiered at DOC NYC.

**Ash Verwiel** (editor) is a trans & queer filmmaker and editor from the Netherlands, based in Oakland. With a focus on documentary film, often through an experimental lens, he also makes deeply personal work. Experimental short doc *Heart Whispers* (2020), which has won various festival awards, voices the struggle to find oneself as a trans person and immigrant from a rural small town.

**M. Jamison** (composer) is an interdisciplinary producer and musician based out of Minneapolis, MN. Her practice centers the narratives of Black trans/queer artists through record production, sound composition, film scoring, and community arts organizing. M's production and engineering work on Ms Boogie's debut album *The Breakdown* received positive reviews from them, The Cut, Pitchfork and Paper Magazine. Her collaborative compositions have been shown and performed in institutions such as The Shed, Walker Art Center, ArtCenter College of Design, and Park Avenue Armory, where she composed the original music for the *Assembly* performance. *Assembly* is M's debut as composer for a feature length film.





## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

*Assembly* is more than just the title of the film and Rashaad's exhibition—it is a metaphor for the coming together of dozens of skilled, cutting-edge artists who contribute to a powerful collective voice project that manifests in a remarkable performance space. The result is a film that resists categorization—blurring the lines between art, documentary, performance, and activism.

At its core, *Assembly* is a synthesis of our two distinct creative approaches and a testament to the power of collaboration. Rashaad's background as a visual artist, AI creator, and VFX specialist—grounded in the practice of collage—shapes the film's vivid and cohesive aesthetic. His approach, which integrates performance, animation, sculpture, and music, creates a visual language that is both dynamic and immersive. This aesthetic blurs the line between the real and the surreal, inviting viewers into a deeply layered cinematic experience. By foregrounding both his own interiority and that of his subjects, Rashaad's vision brings emotional depth and a liberatory imagination to the narrative, transforming the way Black queer stories are seen and felt.

Johnny's extensive experience as a documentarian delivers a crucial counterbalance to the film's bold visual style. His career focuses on capturing the nuanced realities of queer lives, cultures and movements, using observational storytelling to reveal the subtle and often hidden complexities of identity and community. In *Assembly*, this approach allows the narrative to unfold through authentic moments of connection, tension, and transformation that infuse the larger issues with humanity and meaning. His ability to build trust with subjects as he documents their journeys offers viewers intimate access to the collaborative and deeply personal process behind the creation of this groundbreaking work.

Through merging our distinct approaches, the film becomes an assembly of voices, histories, and visions, showcasing how art can serve as both a mirror to society and a tool for liberation. In capturing this process, we invite audiences to experience the profound impact of collective artistry and the boundless potential of reimagining the world through creative collaboration.



## CREDITS

**Written, Directed and Produced by**  
Rashaad Newsome and Johnny Symons

**Editor**  
Ash Verwiel

**Cinematography**  
Keenan Newman, Johnny Symons

**Director of Photography & Visual Effects**  
Rashaad Newsome

**Composer**  
M Jamison

**Music**  
M Jamison, Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe,  
Rashaad Newsome, Cristobal Tapia de Veer

**Executive Producer**  
Carrie Lozano



## HOW TO SEE IT

### **SXSW Film & TV Festival** – WORLD PREMIERE

Rollins Theatre at The Long Center (Capacity 210)

Friday, March 7 at 6:15 pm – Main Screen with live Intro and Q&A

Violet Crown Cinema 1 (Capacity 50)

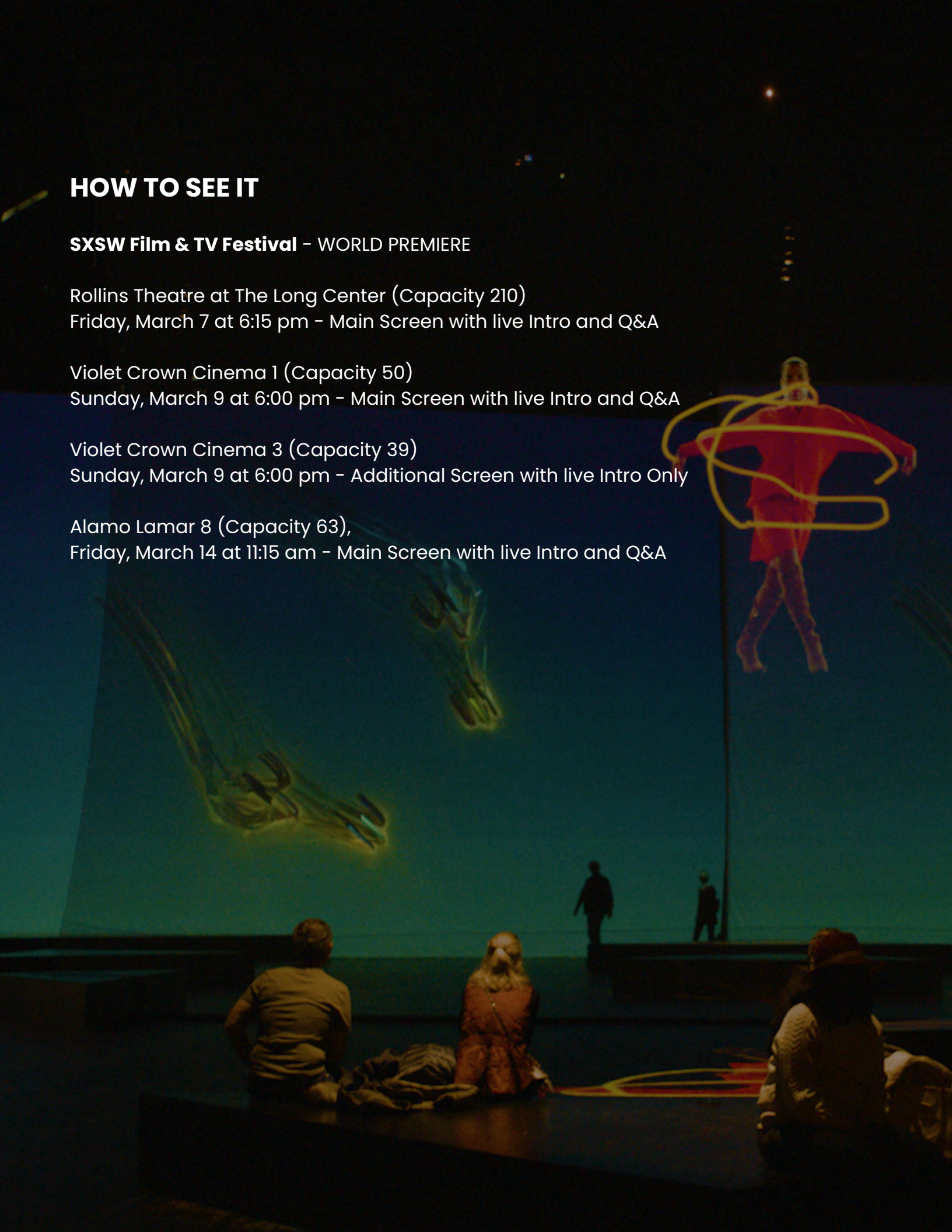
Sunday, March 9 at 6:00 pm – Main Screen with live Intro and Q&A

Violet Crown Cinema 3 (Capacity 39)

Sunday, March 9 at 6:00 pm – Additional Screen with live Intro Only

Alamo Lamar 8 (Capacity 63),

Friday, March 14 at 11:15 am – Main Screen with live Intro and Q&A





## PRESS CONTACTS

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