



The Role of Animation in Solange's 'When I Get Home' Film, According to the Artist Behind It



BY **ERIC SKELTON**
Deputy Music Editor. Contact: [Twitter](#) / [IG](#)

MAR 03, 2019



Image via Apple Music.

A day after releasing her new album, *When I Get Home*, Solange outdid herself by unveiling a stunning 33-minute accompanying video described as an "interdisciplinary performance art film."

The majority of the visual is centered around footage shot in Texas, but animation takes over the screen at the 28-minute mark, as album standout "Sound of Rain" plays in the background. Arriving at a pivotal moment near the end of the film, the surreal segment features flying horses, dancing figures, a cameo from Trina, and layers upon layers of

symbolism. The scene is the work of New York City-based artist Jacolby Satterwhite, who animated, directed, and produced it under the guidance of Solange.

"I met up with Solange and we just talked about life and how we grew up," Satterwhite says. "We talked about where we're at with our conceptual stuff. I think it was more like a creative meeting, and I listened to the album [...] I'm very sensitive and a close listener, and I feel very aligned with her." He tells Complex his scene lives under the guise of Afrofuturism and says, "It's the end of the film, so in a way it's kind of like extrapolating yourself, or bringing yourself into an existential mode where you're more centered."

Jacolby Satterwhite spoke with us about the influence of Houston's Third Ward on the film, what it was like creating visuals for Pharrell's production, and how Trina made a cameo. The conversation, edited and condensed for clarity, is below.

Can you share a little background information on yourself? What kinds of projects do you usually work on?

I work in film and animation, mostly in the fine art world. I'm an interdisciplinary conceptual artist. Like, next week my film is showing at MoMA in the permanent collection section, and there are pieces at Whitechapel now. I usually do experimental film for installation in a museum. I think that's where my work first connected with Solange, actually.

Yeah, I was curious how you linked up with Solange for this?

I've been doing small projects with Saint Heron for the past couple of years. I did a video installation for her creative collective Saint Heron at the Metropolitan Museum about three years ago. And just other miscellaneous stuff. Eventually she reached out to me to produce a film for this.

When she came to you for this, did she have a specific prompt in mind?

I met up with Solange and we just talked about life and how we grew up. We talked about where we're at with our conceptual stuff. I think it was more like a creative meeting, and I listened to the album. And I went back home and animated it all fall and winter. It was pretty simple. I'm very sensitive and a close listener, and I feel very aligned with her. We're the same age and we're born in a similar region in America, so we have similar tastes. And so it felt like a divine synchronicity in a way. It kind of felt effortless conceptualizing where she was into my language around her music.

Why do you think she wanted an animated component? What role do you think your section plays in the overall film?

I believe that whenever you have something like surreal science fiction or animation clashing with live action, it speaks to an escapism. A lot of people liked a lot of my practice with Afrofuturism, which is a practice that involves going to outer space to avoid the politics of being on earth. It's a practice to avoid the politics of oppression and to disembodiment yourself into another place and really find home. It's kind of like a psychological space, a spiritual space, and a space of reconcile. It's the end of the film, so in a way it's kind of like extrapolating yourself, or bringing yourself into an existential

mode where you're more centered. Sorry, I'm not very articulate about this stuff. But it lives under the guise of Afrofuturism. You know, like entering a futuristic unreal space as a form of escapism.

What was it like making visuals for a song like "Sound of Rain"?

Well, I mean I kind of love Pharrell's production. Ever since I was a kid I've been an N*E*R*D fan. It felt like a very natural, organic synesthesia. The sonic template really matches my palette, the way I work, and the kind of mood. And the lyrics, they're kind of defiant lyrics. They're kind of confident. I found it organic, and based on our conversations we had in Los Angeles, it was just a very smooth storyboarding process.

How did Trina end up making a cameo?

I shot Trina years ago in Miami for another film that I made that I'm still kind of finishing, actually. It was kind of like serendipity that her footage really aligned with what I was trying to gain from the "Sound of Rain" project, even with her gesticulations in relationship to the lyrics. It was more like a really great abstract parallel. And with a lot of the references to Miami on the album, too, it was just really great conceptually to have her in it.

The whole film was based around references to Texas, too. Was that something you focused on? Like, "Okay, I want this to feel like Texas"?

I projected Third Ward footage into the animation, and Solange really wanted Third Ward... I mean, that was her decision, that Third Ward would become highlighted. Originally, I did have Texas footage in it and then I changed it to something else. Obviously the black rodeo and the South and Texas were things that I definitely had in the animation archives to reference.

Solange is credited as the lead director on this project, in addition to contributing directors like yourself. How closely did she work with you all?

I don't want to say too much... but Solange is a genius, so she had hundreds of images and she even had a palette. Her sensibility with materials is super uncanny. You either have it or you don't, where you really pay attention to details in the organic way that she does. She definitely had a vision. She definitely had a template. She definitely had a firm, grounded concept to extrapolate from. There was a consistent suite of motifs that all the directors knew about, and we just went from there. But I don't want to overstep my bounds and reveal too much about the project.

Was there an overall feeling you were trying to convey with this video?

I don't even know how I would articulate that but I would say there was. There was a kind of a noir moodiness. As a filmmaker I kind of live in this liminal space when it comes to what I want to achieve in an image. It's not like I have a concrete language around that idea, but there's definitely a web of image genres that I'm trying to encapsulate when I'm making something. But yeah, it was wonderful. I feel really grateful to be able to do this, because I love the history of the music video medium. Some of my favorite artists were Michel Gondry and Chris Cunningham and people like that when I was growing up. So it was really fun to finally play in the medium a bit.

What differentiated this project from other things you've worked on in the past?

Well, I make albums, as well. It's kind of like I'm already working in the music video medium. It's not much of a deviation. I'm actually releasing a concept record and it's going to be a huge rollout in the museum and gallery world or whatever. So I kind of have been playing with that language for a long time, but now it was much more deliberate and literal. I've kind of always have been on that train of thought, you know?

Where can people find your other work?

I took my website down for remodeling, but my work is on my gallery websites. I show with Mitchell-Innes & Nash in New York, and I show with Moran Moran Gallery in Los Angeles. So between that and a lot of other random press in other exhibition catalogs online, you can find me. There's a lot of, I guess, material.

What else do you have coming up that people should be aware of?

There's a group show at MoMA going up this month. And I have a couple solo shows.

Is there anything else you would like to add about this project?

I hope people like it. I'm very, very, very excited about this film. I can't believe the network of talent and innovators that came together to bring this whole project together. It's wild, and I feel really blessed to be a part of it.

Jacoby Satterwhite's current and upcoming group exhibitions include Is This Tomorrow? at Whitechapel Gallery, London; Speculative Bodies at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis; About Face: Stonewall, Revolt, and the New Queer at Wrightwood 659, Chicago; New Order: Art and Technology in the Twenty-First Century at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and Open World: Video Games and Contemporary Art at the Akron Art Museum, Akron, OH. Upcoming solo exhibitions include the Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia and Pioneer Works, New York in the fall of 2019.