

Steve McQueen's *Remember Me*

By Bill Horrigan

British artist Steve McQueen is widely celebrated in this country on the basis of his feature film work, notably *12 Years a Slave*, which was recognized with an Oscar for best picture in 2014. At the same time, for over 25 years, McQueen has maintained a rigorous studio practice, producing smaller-scale gallery projects that often involve moving image projection and draw on sculptural and photographic traditions.

Remember Me, from 2016, is a seldom seen series of neon sculptures, all bearing the same phrase: "remember me." Each individual articulation is given unique form by differences in penmanship styles and the acrylic paint coating the neon tubes. Even though each work repeats the blunt but ambiguous two-word appeal (is that an order? a request?), the variation in how that emotional utterance is graphically registered accounts for the work's powerfully lyrical dimension. Each separate utterance is given in its own written form, in some cases quite legibly, some mixing upper and lower cases, some almost indecipherable, some suggesting childhood, and still others suggesting boldness or fragility or desperation or mania. As many as 88 iterations of "remember me" have been displayed in a single installation, and the fluctuating

scale and arrangement of each presentation elicit a remarkably broad range of emotional response.

Each instance of “remember me” stands in for the absent presence of the person speaking directly to the viewer, unseen and unknown but voicing a sentiment deeply embedded in the consciousness of anyone who has gone unnoticed or felt forgotten. It’s on that fundamental level that McQueen uses writing with light to honor the ethical claims made by anyone seeking the human right to be seen.

Organized by the Wexner Center for the Arts and curated by Curator at Large Bill Horrigan.

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Acknowledgments

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