

**HEROINES OF
ABSTRACT
EXPRESSIONISM**

FEM

A Guide to Looking

This guide offers a selection of works from the exhibition.

Look at the included artwork and then use the text to help build a deeper understanding of the artists, their process, and their works.



NASSAU COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

Grace Hartigan (American, b. 1922-2008)

Fantasy Study, 1965

Watercolor and collage, 34 in h x 26 in w

Courtesy of Cindy Lou Wakefield and Rick Friedman

Inspiration

Grace Hartigan was at once a loyal student of the Abstract Expressionist Movement and one of its most rebellious teenage children. In the 1940s, Hartigan, returning to the East Coast after having left Newark to homestead in Alaska with her first husband only to run out of money by Los Angeles, began her career as a mechanical draftsman to support herself and her son. When she was given a book about Matisse she came to realize her calling and devoted herself to painting. In NYC she moved within the inner circle of the Abstract Expressionist painters and her work took on the hallmarks of the movement—bold gestures, experimental and expressive brushwork, with an emphasis on the physical process of painting as a reflection of the artist's inner reality. She is considered a second generation abstract expressionist painter because she followed on the heels of artists like Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Milton Avery. But Hartigan wasn't satisfied with the rigid rules of abstraction and began to include figures into her work. Fellow artists and critics withdrew their support of Hartigan, but she was undeterred: "I just had to throw in something of the life around me, even if it was just fragments, little memories, little snatches, little wisps of a corner, a piece of fruit, a vendor going by, something". Because of this her work is often considered a precursor to Pop Art, a movement she did not like because of its emphasis on mass production over the artist's hand. But Hartigan, like all great artists, pushed the trajectory of art along the path of change through the inclusion of the figure within the setting of abstraction.



Take a Closer Look

Fantasy Study is a watercolor, a medium that became so important to Harington in the 1960s that she even referred to it as her second expression. This work is a perfect example of Hartigan's combination of abstraction and figuration, meaning something we can recognize. What is the first thing you notice when you visit this work? Do you recognize any particular object? As your eye travels around the image, what parts seem abstract and what parts seem more figurative? Does it seem loud or quiet? Heavy or soft? How do the lines, and shapes, and colors help you answer those questions?

In the Artists Words

Hartigan did not enjoy her work being judged according to her gender: "If you are an extraordinarily gifted woman, the door is open. What women are fighting for is the right to be as mediocre as men." And on her association with the Pop Art movement which she thoroughly disliked, Hartigan conceded, "I'd much rather be a pioneer of a movement that I hate, than a second generation of a movement that I love".

Something to Talk About

Hartigan refused to be boxed in by what she considered to be the very rigid rules of Abstract Expressionism. She followed her vision to incorporate more representational images despite the criticism of her peers. She broke the barrier of a male-dominated art world and forged her own path of artistic expression. Sometimes breaking the rules makes way for positive change, and sometimes it doesn't. Who are today's rule breakers, forces of change, and ceiling shatterers?

Michael West (American, b. 1908-1991)

Michael, c. 1958

Oil on paper, double-sided with stand 40.4 in h x 39 in w

Courtesy of Cindy Lou Wakefield and Rick Friedman

Inspiration

Corrine Michael West, born in 1908, was a gifted pianist, poet, and painter. Undeterred in the male-dominated world of art, she studied in NYC in the 1920s with Hans Hoffman, and was influenced by his ideas of the pulsating, moving potential of color. West continued to paint and associate with many members of the Abstract Expressionist community including artists like Arshile Gorky (a romantic partner for a time) and Jackson Pollock as well as influential collectors and critics like Peggy Guggenheim and Clement Greenberg. Perhaps at Gorky's suggestion, she changed her name to Michael in the hopes that hiding her gender would help her career. She remained undeterred, despite the chauvinism of dealers, collectors, and critics who excluded women entirely.

Take a Closer Look

Does West's painting feel chaotic or ordered? Does it seem still or energetic? How do the lines, shapes and colors make it seem that way? Strong black lines, covering an ambiguous red shape, surrounded by specks, and spurts of paint converge into a powerful force to be reckoned with. It is almost a brutal work in which the imminent destruction of the human race serves as an all encompassing phenomenon. Her works are kinetic, physical acts of creation, as she used her whole body with her brushstrokes. Like many of the artists in our show, West transforms the canvas into a moment of explosive energy. She helped push the boundaries of what art could be.



In the Artist's Words

Michael West was an acclaimed poet as well as painter.

Stars (poem from 1954)

Lacy stars—like Calder's wire-works

Glittering thru the sky—in geometric relations

Attach themselves to me inside

Oh—fiery constellations that prove

All theory again

This fluttering in the chest is but a twinkling

Planet—infinite in time and space

Who identifys me here

To stretch out and meet the other

Stars and form a ring of power

In this Realm of Eternity

So shines a holy light

In this world by inevitable science

And is Recognized thru Love

Something to talk about

Michael West suffered a stroke in 1976 but bravely painted until her death in 1991. West will be remembered as an artist who truly pushed boundaries, took risks, and never gave up on her passion. This exhibition seeks to celebrate the work and voices of women who pushed American Art forward but whose voices were not always heard. The women of our concurrent exhibition FEM stand on the shoulders of these fearless pioneers. Whose shoulders do you stand on?

Gallery Three

Chakaia Booker (American, b. 1953)

On and On and On and On, 2018

Rubber tires and wood, 38 h x 33 l x 17 w inches

Courtesy of the artist

Inspiration

American Sculptor Chakaia Booker's large-scale, monumental, abstract works transform commonplace industrial objects and materials into moving, stretching, bending forms of organic energy. By slicing, twisting, and weaving old tires into new forms and textures, Booker connects the feminine pursuit of weaving with industrial technology and the results are large scale public works-historically a man's world. The unique nature of each tire reminds her of the diversity of humankind. In addition, by manipulating each tire, she allows the viewer to contemplate the destructive and creative possibilities of our reaction with nature and our environment. Her work is both physical and technical - building models, constructing armatures from pressure treated wood and steel rods, employing computer software, and of course, repurposing the tires themselves, which she secures from car repair shops and salvage yards. Using material that never goes away, Booker turns waste into beauty. We never really think of tires until we need one but here Booker has us all marveling at the transformation of a commonplace industrial object into something akin to alive, as it blossoms and explodes with energy before our very eyes, similar to the Abstract Expressionist paintings on view.



In the Artist's Words

Regarding the use of tires, Booker says, "It's very infinite in just the possibilities. It's just limited to your own imagination. I do get up each morning and begin my day by sculpting myself, It's not that it's a mirroring of exactly what I do (as an artist), but it is about coming to the creative moment right off the start." Booker is always seen in her signature headdress, a link to her early work creating wearable art.

Take a Closer Look

Where does your eye travel when you first experience Chakaia Booker's *On and On and On and On*? Does your gaze rest in one spot? Does it dart from place to place? Or does it follow a winding path? How does the title of the work connect with your experience of observing it? Notice the different textures and patterns that exist within each strip of rubber. For Booker, the unique treads of individual tires are synonymous with the uniqueness of every human being. The varied tones of the rubber panels remind her of both human diversity - the wear and tear of the treads speak to wrinkled skin, fingerprints, scarification and the visible signs of aging - and industrialization's effect on consumer culture and the environment. Do you find this work of art beautiful? Why or why not? And does something have to be beautiful for you to like it?

Something to Talk About

Chakaia Booker presents the viewer with a question: How do we wrestle with industrialization and the natural world? Booker almost literally does this with the physical manipulation of tires and steel. How do we interact with our environment in ways that are creative and also destructive? Perhaps in this challenging time in which we are confronted with the future health of our planet, Booker's work can serve as a reminder to acknowledge the ways in which we do harm while also taking care to celebrate the possibilities for creativity.

Jeanne Silverthorne (American, b. 1950)

Snow White, 2017

platinum silicone rubber, 14 x 17 x 3 inches

Courtesy of Marc Straus, New York

Inspiration

Jeanne Silverthorne is inspired by the very place where she creates-her studio on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The studio is, for Silverthorne, a point of departure. It's the place where ideas are born and objects are created but it's also a metaphor. Surrounded by detritus of her work - brushes, tools, trash, old frames - she is reminded of her own mortality, and her work becomes an exploration of how we move on amidst the "littered field of failures and ever looming mortality." Each work is a hand-made rubber-cast sculpture of a familiar throwaway that she has reconstructed from memory. But it is not all doom and gloom for Silverthorne. There is some humor and lightness to her work, as the rubber gives the objects a cartoon like feel, perhaps even a sense of absurdity. In *Snow White*, you can even see she has invited a few creatures that share her studio into the mix. Silverthorne refers to these works as vanitas paintings and cites the 17th century Dutch still life paintings with ripe fruit, lush foliage or bursting flowers with signs of decay such as flies, insects, or mold as a warning against self-indulgence and the inevitability of death.

Take a Closer Look

Silverthorne plays with the opposing forces of vitality and decay in her work, just as classic vanitas paintings did in the 17th century. What part of the work seems to focus on vitality? Where is there decay? There are four guests attending Silverthorne's work-did you notice them right or away or did it take time to see them? Why do you think that is? As you explore *Snow White*, take in the variety of textures - smooth, rough, curved, pointy - all achieved through the manipulation of cast rubber.



In the Artist's Words

When discussing the viewer's understanding of a work, Silverthorne muses on the space between what she intends and what the viewer perceives: "As a pragmatist, when it goes out there in the world—because there are these multiple audiences whether I want them to get it or not is irrelevant to the fact that some audiences will, some audiences won't. It has a life of its own out there in the world, and there's not much I can do about it. I like that I can't control it because I'm not omniscient enough to know what effects should be created...Participation from the audience does not complete the meaning, I don't think the meaning is ever completed, but it keeps it moving."

Something to Talk About

Silverthorne takes her inspiration from the everyday objects of her art studio. These are the objects, the textures, the colors, that fill her day. Take a moment to go through a typical day and make a mental list of some of things that are a constant presence in your world. Do these objects bring you joy? Do they create discomfort? Do they spark memories? Perhaps by appreciating the everyday, as Silverthorne does, we too can be inspired by our own seemingly commonplace surroundings.

Gallery Three

Louise Nevelson (American, b. 1899 - 1988)

Dawn's Landscape XV, 1975

White painted wood; 38 x 26 x 4 inches

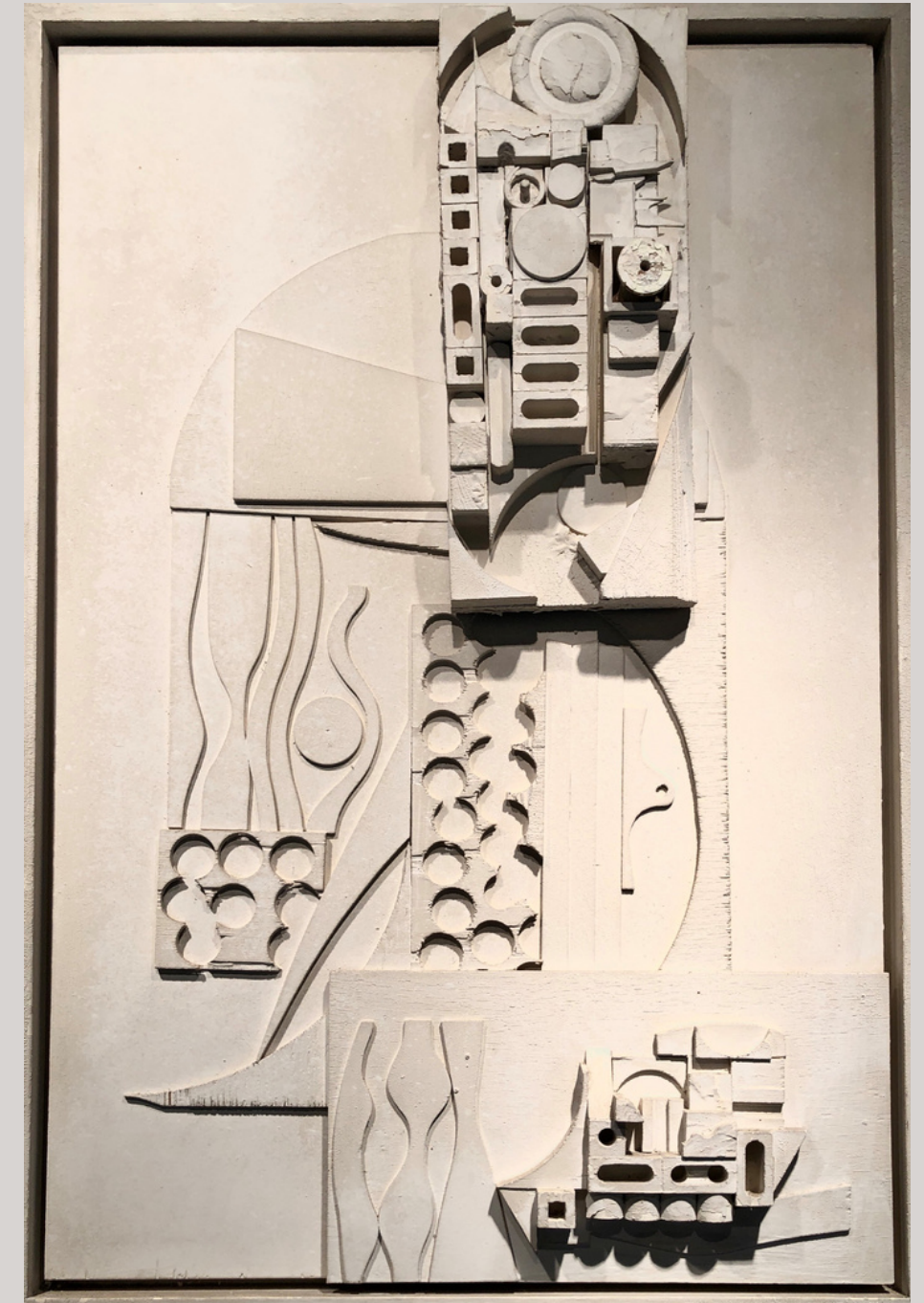
Courtesy of Dr. Harvey Manes

Inspiration

Louise Nevelson is known for her monumental, compartmentalized abstract sculptures painted in a solid mass of black, white or gold paint. With the color black representing a totality of all color for Nevelson, she felt that white represented an emotional promise or new dawn and the color gold represented both timelessness and materialism. Beginning with the use of found objects and transitioning to working primarily with wood as her material, her sculptures challenged the societal standard of what type of art a woman could create. Louise Nevelson's iconic sculptures are emblematic of her decades long career as an artist impacted by the movements of surrealism, cubism and modernism juxtaposed with her own life experiences.

Take a Closer Look

Louise Nevelson's *Dawn's Landscape XV*, is part of a series of white puzzle-like, compartmentalized sculptures where the painted shapes within are a contrast of both curved and angular forms. The raised forms of the sculpture, while painted white, also allow for shadows to exist and give a sense of both depth and presence of light. This focus on contrasts, even within a monochromatic enclosed sculpture, seems to reflect and contemplate on the nature of the world.



In the Artist's Words

“Humans really are heir to every possibility within themselves, and it is only up to us to admit it and accept it. You see, you can buy the whole world and you are empty, but when you create the whole world, you are full.”

"The thing is that doesn't mean that through the ages the female did not have creative ability but that society did not recognize it."

Something To Talk About

Louise Nevelson's sculptures range in scale from being small enough to fit on top of a table to her last sculptural environment Dawn Forest, which contains one section measuring fifty-four feet in length. How would our reading of this sculpture change if the scale was changed, made to be either much larger or much smaller?

Gallery Three

Rona Pondick (American, b.1952)

White White Blue Gray, 2014 - 2018

Pigmented resin and acrylic, 13.875 x 8 x 125 inches

Courtesy of Marc Straus, New York

Inspiration

Rona Pondick is an artist whose sculptures manipulate elements of the human body and often combine them with examples of flora and fauna to create hybrid forms. She explores with scale, gesture, and their inherent psychological effect upon the viewer. Pondick exclusively uses her own head and body in creating the sculptures; she has shared if she used someone else's body the work would take on a different meaning.

In the Artist's Words

"Gestures and postures don't translate solely into symbolic interpretations particular to a culture or time period. Otherwise, why would people look at historic work?"

Take a Closer Look

The rounded, bulbous and distorted form of the figure is juxtaposed on top of the smooth, angular planes of a square in undulating shades of blue. The hindquarters are in stance that seem to imply a slight movement, and yet there are no feet. The hands are elongated and are larger in scale than the head, poised in a gesture both implying support and transition. Pondnick has frequently shared her inspiration from ancient Egyptian sculptural fragments, which are about stance, internal tension and for Pondnick, are more monumental in being incomplete.



Something to Talk About

Pondick has been casting her own head for over twenty years to use in her sculptures, and this one is no exception. The downcast head of the figure has its eyes closed, leading the viewer to question if the figure is dead or merely sleeping. What does it mean to keep the eyes closed and turned away from the viewer?

Gallery Seven

May Stevens (American, b. 1924-2019)

Artemisia Gentileschi, 1976

Courtesy of Sonja Hansard-Weiner

Inspiration

May Stevens was a feminist, activist, educator and an artist. A fixture of the civil rights, anti-war and feminist movements of the 60s and 70s, Stevens's art was a direct response to the racism, sexism, and inequalities she saw in American society. She became interested in the 17th century artist depicted here, Artemesia Gentileschi (1593-1653), during the feminist movement of the 1970s after coming across an article entitled, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Acknowledging her own failure to teach students about female artists she turned to the great Florentine painter, Artemisia Gentileschi, and her incredible story of resilience, talent, and independence. Stevens, along with 13 other female artists, envisioned a monumental hall of fame celebrating women's achievements from a female perspective. "The Sister Chapel" opened at PS 1 in Queens in 1978 with 13 portraits of influential, brilliant, strong and groundbreaking women.

In the Artist's Words

When asked about the challenges of using art to agitate for social change in the 1970s Stevens responded, "Why is it so hard for art-minded people to understand art as a natural vehicle for political passion, not an adulterant but an irritant, a stimulant, a rich and common source of energy? The obvious answer is that art which the establishment is least able to accept is not the avant-garde (which fights prior art concepts) but the politically effective (which fights establishment myths of patriotism and nationalism, the superiority of one class, sex or race to another)."



Take a Closer Look

The portrait is full of references to Artemisia's incredible story and work. Stevens based Artemisia's face on proposed self-portraits and her clothing was adapted from Artemisia's own monumental painting of Esther before Ahasuerus, on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC. The Latin text behind Artemisia first describes the artist's parentage and date of birth. But what follows is the transcript of the trial of Agostino Tasi, a colleague of Artemisia's father (both of whom were painters), hired to teach Artemisia about perspective. When she was 17 years old, Tasi raped Artemisia. A long, painful trial ensued. Tasi was prosecuted but his punishment never enforced. Artemisia was married off and left Rome for Florence after the trial and began her life independent from her father, becoming a tremendously sought after artist in her own right. The rape of Artemisia is often cited as the inspiration for the strong women depicted in her paintings.

Something to Talk About

When you look at May Stevens' portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi, what words come to mind? How would you describe the famous 17th century painter from Rome? Does she seem strong or weak? Capable or powerless? Notice her stance: facing out, looking ahead, a tool of her trade in her hand. Is she studying a model for her next painting? Is she presenting her work as the first woman to ever join the Florence Art Academy? The possibilities are endless but there is no mistaking that feminist art activist May Steven's portrait of one of history's prominent artists is bold, compelling, and monumental. Who are the bold, compelling and monumental women in your life? And how has the fight for equality among the sexes evolved from the time Artemesia in the 17th century, to Stevens in the 1970s to today?

Gallery Five

Wangechi Mutu (Kenyan, b. 1972)

Untitled- Butterfly Kisses

Watercolor, ink and collage on vellum

41 1/2 x30 inches

Courtesy of Carol Wolowitz

Inspiration

Born in Nairobi, Kenya and educated in the United States (at Parsons, Cooper Union and Yale), Mutu investigates a prismatic range of cultural and inter-disciplinary perspectives, including African traditions, global politics, the global fashion industry, pornography, science fiction, gender, race, war, colonialism, global consumption and the exoticization of the Black female body.

Take a Closer Look

At first glance, we recognize the female figure in Wangechi Mutu's work *Untitled - Butterfly Kisses*, identified in the sinuous lines traditionally used to depict a woman's body. What is less familiar is the myriad effects of elaborate patterning, coloration and multiplying organic forms, resembling microscopic algae and other protean elements that fill the contour outlines of the figure. Mutu builds layers of visual complexity using collaged elements of found materials, magazine cutouts, sculpture, and painted imagery amalgamated in a way that de-familiarizes an otherwise familiar pose.



In the Artist's Words

Mutu's figures are hybrid combinations of human, animal, plant, and machine. They refer to a variety of source materials and textures that cast a critical eye on Western consumerism and excess. Deeply concerned with Western commercialism, Mutu explains that “a lot of my work reflects the incredible influence that America has had on contemporary African culture.”

Something to Talk About

Mutu's work, often linked with science fiction, taps the deep well of Afrofuturism, a cultural aesthetic developed in 1993 which combines the intersection of the African diaspora and technology and which envisions an alternate course of history for people of African descent. Does a viewer of the artist's work have to have the same life experience as an artist to make a connection? Are we asked to complete the work on our own terms with our own life experiences, biases and sensibilities?

Ghada Amer (Egyptian, b. 1963)

Baisers #1, 2011-12, Bronze with blue patina; 21.5 x 20 x 17 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York

Inspiration

Egyptian born artist Ghada Amer is known for her embroidered multilayered paintings and drawings that explore and question traditional ideas of identity, sexuality and Islamic social culture. In juxtaposing the figurative and abstract, along with concepts of the feminine and masculine, Amer makes the viewer question what it is they're precisely seeing in her work and in the world. She is a true multimedia artist, with a portfolio of work expanding from the erotic paintings she is best known for, to public garden projects, sculptures and installations.

Take a Closer Look

Amer's sculpture *Baisers #1* takes the calligraphic lines of her embroidery and paintings, and makes them three dimensional. As the viewer moves around the sculpture the curved lines seem to overlap and obscure each other, much like Amer's multilayered embroidered paintings. Eventually, the profiles of two figures kissing becomes apparent. The title of the sculpture is a French word, historically meant "to kiss", but in contemporary, idiomatic speech has a much more explicit sexual connotation.

In the Artist's Words

When questioned "How has being a woman affected your career?", Ghada Amer replied "It makes me sell for much less money than if I were a male (and white) and it closes all doors for solo museum shows".

Something to Talk About

Ghada Amer's work is focused on subverting society's preconceptions and expectations of females. How does the media an artist chooses to work in either support or weaken their conceptual idea? For *Baisers #1*, why do you think Amer choose to execute her idea as a sculpture rather than a painting?



Gallery Five

Shirin Neshat (Iranian, b. 1957)

Rapture Series (Women on Beach Scattered), 1999

color photograph ed. 7/1020 x 24 in.

Courtesy of Dr. Harvey Manes

Inspiration

Shirin Neshat is a contemporary Iranian artist best known for her work in photography, video and film exploring gender, religious and cultural value systems, as well as individual and group dynamics. She has stated her work and identity fuses modernity and antiquity, even in the processes she uses to create and the way she presents herself. While much of her work is not allowed to be shown in her country of origin, and for much of her life she has been exiled herself, Neshat believes that culture is a form of resistance and much of her work contains political critique. Later work moved into more poetic imagery and narratives concerning her chosen subject matter.

Take a Closer Look

Taken from Neshat's 1999 film and installation entitled *Rapture*, a reflection on the gender politics of Islam, this photograph juxtaposes a scattered group of women with the shoreline of an ocean. Their backs are toward the viewer as they are captured in a state of motion towards the water, the movement of their chadors (full-length veils) contrasting with the linear appearance of waves. In Neshat's original installation of *Rapture*, two synchronized films play simultaneously: a group of men populate and move through a built, architectural environment while a group of women move through the desert towards the sea. The viewer would be caught between Neshat's use of gender clichés and stereotypes: men are equated with an ordered, rational civilization while women are equated with uncontrollable, irrational natural world. Rather than focusing on the narrative of a single protagonist in her film, she is focusing on the entirety of society.



In the Artist's Words

"Magical realism allows an artist like myself to inject layers of meaning without being obvious. In American culture, where there is freedom of expression, this approach may seem forced, unnecessary and misunderstood. But this system of communication has become very Iranian."

Something to Talk About

The imagery depicted in *Rapture Series (Women on Beach Scattered)* is originally from Neshat's film *Rapture*. Without even seeing the entire film, why do you think this particular moment was chosen to be printed as a photograph?

Gallery Seven

Allison Janae Hamilton (American, b. 1984)

Metal Yard Sign with Sabal Palm Fronts II, 2019

Mixed media on metal board; 81 x 45 x 6 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York

Inspiration

Allison Janae Hamilton was born in Kentucky and raised in Florida; this southern landscape is the focus of her work. Through her immersive installations and works Hamilton centers the American landscape as the protagonist of intertwined social, political and economic stories and histories, particularly with regard to climate change, environmental justice and sustainability. Incorporating elements of folktales, farming rituals, Baptist hymns, and personal narratives Hamilton tries to understand where we are now as a culture by looking at the land. While her work often draws on the specificity of the landscape she grew up on, Hamilton says you can see patterns and parallels in other places of how the land and natural disasters impact our lives.

Take A Closer Look

Hamilton incorporates materials and objects directly from the source, traveling back to her native Florida from New York often to gather plants and elements from the landscape. This work incorporates palm fronds painted in silver and dipped in resin, then attached to a repurposed sign. *Metal Yard Sign with Sabal Palm Fronts II*, 2019, is a portion of a large installation designed as part of Hamilton's residency with Studio Museum Harlem and exhibited at MoMa PS 1's exhibition *Mood*. She states "Each time, the work doesn't necessarily need to live as an installation, but when it does, it's a way for the viewer to really situate themselves in this world and sink into it. So even if you see just one element, you can consider it not only for what it is but how it also relates to what's going on in the world and the other works that are shown with it in other formats."



In the Artist's Words

"These everyday confluences of life, labor, and land were the basis of my experience of the world. But the fraught history and present realities of the landscape were always intertwined with its seductions. In my work, I mine this simultaneous haunting and beauty as a material embedded in the natural elements of the land, whether in the turpentine industry in northern Florida or in the ability of natural disasters like floods and hurricanes to shed light on existing social disasters."

Something to Talk About

Hamilton's dreamlike mythologies derived from the landscape are both about the beauty and dangers of a place, particularly in a world facing the often inequitable ravages of climate change. She considers how natural disasters can devolve into social disasters, or exacerbate ones that are already in existence. While this work is just a fragment of a larger installation, how do you think it connects to or represents Hamilton's larger conceptual ideas?

Gallery Seven

Marie Watt (American, b.1967)

Flint/Sapling, 2019

Reclaimed wool blankets, thread, and Czech glass beads, 12 x 14 inches

Courtesy of Marc Straus, New York

Inspiration

Marie Watt is a Portland based artist and citizen of the Seneca Nation who uses symbolism, text and group activity to fuse Native American symbols with current social issues. Her work draws on Indigenous history and principles and uses materials that are attached to narratives, to memory and to community. Her work is often made through community collaborations like sewing circles and incorporates text from important concepts of indigenous culture, particularly from the matriarchy of Native American tribes, as well as from 20th century social activism. Flint and Sapling, a set of twins whose conflicting natures are central to the Seneca Nation Creation story, highlight the duality of darkness and light. Watt is inspired by everyday objects such as beads and used woolen blankets, which are embedded with the stories of their owners. History, memory, and community are intertwined in her work that often emphasizes the process of creation over the final result.

Take a Closer Look

There are so many perspectives from which to contemplate this work. Perhaps consider these three: texture, color, and content. What parts of the work appear soft, which parts hard? What do you notice about how Watt has played with color? How does the color green connect to your understanding of the work? And what connections do you make between the words Flint and Sapling? In the Seneca Creation Story, Flint and Sapling are the grandchildren of Skywoman, considered the First Woman, or Mother Goddess. Their conflicting natures have come to represent evil and good, night and day, destruction and creation, darkness and light. How does Watt treat each name—are they the same size, do they take up the same amount of space? What message does that send? Watt hardly gives us answers to these questions but, rather, provides us with opportunities for questions and reflection as we think about the various histories of indigenous cultures, our own connections to them, how we balance opposing forces in our lives.



In the Artist's Words

"Over the course of scavenging for wool blankets, I have come across twin blanket sets for twin beds. This is an unlikely prompt for “twin” references in our culture, but it is mine. In the Seneca creation story, Skywoman’s daughter dies giving birth to twins, sometimes referred to Right and Left, Sapling and Flint, Daylight and Night Dweller. While these brothers have conflicting natures, they are both considered necessary to keep the world in balance. In a chaotic world, making sense of light and darkness has urgency. Research, manifested in sewing circles with featured guests (Indigenous storytellers, a classical studies scholar, an astrologist, and twins), will generate new work (samplers, large hand stitched pieces, and a sculptural installation) that reflects on how Indigenous “twin” stories nurture, instruct, disrupt, and affect understandings of the universe, as well as how they suggest connections across cultures."

Something to Talk About

In Flint and Sapling, Watt asks the viewer to cross cultural boundaries as we wrestle with the duality of life. The opposing natures of twins Flint and Sapling highlight the presence of good and bad, light and dark, night and day. But how can we accept these opposing forces and use them as guides to create understanding and connection? Perhaps in these challenging times, this duality is more obvious than ever and allows us to look at ourselves and the world around us right now with renewed understanding and compassion. Can you think of a moment during these times where you have witnessed both?