

# WHITNEY

Whitney Museum  
of American Art  
Press Office

99 Gansevoort Street  
New York, NY 10014

pressoffice@whitney.org  
(212) 570-3633

# PRESS RELEASE



Sahra Motalebi (b. 1979), *Sahra Motalebi: Directory of Portrayals*, 2017. Performance view from an earlier iteration of *Directory of Portrayals* at The Kitchen, New York, NY. Image courtesy The Kitchen, New York. © Paula Court. Photograph by Paula Court

## PERFORMANCE AND FILM TO BE KEY COMPONENTS OF THE 2019 WHITNEY BIENNIAL

**NEW YORK, May 1, 2019**– From May 17 to September 22, the 2019 Whitney Biennial will feature an array of performances and films integral to the exhibition as a whole. Among the performance projects are some that directly engage with dance (and the history of the medium), while others focus on social engagement and critique. Seven artists and one collective will be working on performance projects in the galleries, in the theater, outdoors, and in various other spaces throughout the Museum. A dedicated screening program of eighteen films will immerse viewers in tales ranging from the world of global Black music, fashion, and visual culture to the discovery of a nine-thousand-year-old skeleton in Washington State.

Greta Hartenstein (a former senior curatorial assistant at the Whitney, now an independent curator focused on performance) has been invited by the Biennial curators, Jane Panetta and Rujeko Hockley, to co-curate the performance program of the Biennial.

Three guest curators were invited to select the artists for the film program: Maori Karmael Holmes (BlackStar Film Festival founder), artist and filmmaker Sky Hopinka (whose work was shown in the 2017 Biennial), and filmmaker/documentarian Matt Wolf (*Wild Combination: A Portrait of Arthur Russell and Recorder*).

Check [whitney.org](http://whitney.org) for more information about the Biennial performances and films.

## **Performance in the Biennial**

### ***Nibbling the Hand That Feeds Me (2019)***

**Morgan Bassichis**

**June 14, 7 pm**

**June 15, 7 pm and 9:30 pm**

The performance artist Morgan Bassichis, whose work combines standup comedy, music, and mysticism into stories of queer alienation, love, and liberation, will present *Nibbling the Hand that Feeds Me*, a standup routine performed in the Museum's Susan and John Hess Family Theater and Gallery, that wryly dives into the language of self-care. Bassichis draws on the transformational power of language and hints at the potential that humor holds for introspection and personal discovery.

### ***The Master and Form (2018/2019)***

**Brendan Fernandes**

**May-June: Friday 5-9pm, Saturday 12-4pm, Sunday 12-4pm**

**July-August: Friday 5-9pm**

**September: Friday 5-9pm, Saturday 12-4pm, Sunday 12-4pm**

Exploring the dynamics of mastery and discipline as embodied by ballet, Brendan Fernandes will present a sculptural installation in the galleries that will be activated on a regular basis by ballet dancers, who will be given the opportunity to test their endurance in displays of physical tension and self-control. Fernandes has likened the project to S&M culture with its "emphasis on trust and confidence within a space where roles of mastery and submission are in play." When the dancers are absent, the installation includes recorded sound of the performers.

### ***Ouroboros: Gs (2019)***

**Madeline Hollander**

**September, dates to be announced**

Madeline Hollander's choreographic work questions the boundaries between our bodies and the environments we inhabit. For the Biennial, she will explore the ways in which the Museum has had to adapt itself, post Hurricane Sandy, in the face of climate change. In a site-specific performance, Hollander will engage with the Museum's protective flood mitigation system—a system in which barriers surround the Museum in the event of an approaching storm. Hollander will be collaborating with Whitney staff to simultaneously build and dismantle a portion of the barrier.

### ***Directory of Portrayals (2019)***

**Sahra Motalebi**

**July 12, 13, and 20**

**7 pm**

During a two-week residency at the Museum, Sahra Motalebi will present a new iteration of her opera *Directory of Portrayals* in the theater. Motalebi based the libretto that gives *Directory* its structure on an ongoing exchange with her sister, who lives in Iran; the sisters met in person for the first time just last year, after Motalebi had been working on the project for two years. The project has evolved together with the women's relationship, incorporating their "untranslatable, often conflicting, geographical and cultural narratives."

### ***Ilustraciones de la Mecánica (2019)***

**Las Nietas de Nonó**

**June 28, 29, and 30**

**8 pm**

The collaborative duo Las Nietas de Nonó, comprised of sisters Lydela and Michel Nonó, draws on their own familial and community histories in their joint practice, which encompasses performance, theater, dance, visual art, activism, and education, and focuses on their home neighborhood, Barrio San Antón in Carolina, Puerto Rico. For the Biennial, they will present *Ilustraciones de la Mecánica*, which grapples with the history of medical experimentation in Puerto Rico, considering in particular the violence inflicted on Black women's bodies in the name of

medical research.

***Sanity TV (2016–)***

**Autumn Knight**

**June 29, 1 pm and 3:30 pm**

**July 27, 7:30 pm**

**September 5, 7:30 pm**

**September 7, 7:30 pm**

Autumn Knight's ongoing performance series *Sanity TV*, which began in 2016 during Knight's residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, takes the form of an imaginary television talk show, in which she plays the role of the host. Provoking laughter and occasional discomfort, Knight, who received a master's degree in drama therapy, often makes the psychology of group dynamics central to her work, constructing scenarios that exaggerate and probe the power relationships at play in a performance.

***objetos indispuestos o inauguraciones suspendidas o finales inevitables para un casi-baile (indisposed objects or suspended inaugurations or inevitable endings for an almost dance) (2019)***

**nibia pastrana santiago**

**June 6, 1–6 pm**

**June 7, time to be announced**

**June 8, 7 pm**

In her choreographic practice, *nibia pastrana santiago*, who was born in Puerto Rico and is based in San Juan, focuses on the history and physical characteristics of San Juan Bay; for the Biennial, she will present a new work in various sites around the Museum, including outdoors, investigating the Hudson River and the New York waterfront. The artist invites audiences to consider different ways to understand choreography and duration when bounded by a place.

***Futurity (2019)***

**Mariana Valencia**

**June 2, 9, and 16**

**8 pm**

Brooklyn-based artist Mariana Valencia, who works in dance intermingled with storytelling, object theater, and humor will present *Futurity* (2019), a new work developed for the Biennial in which she examines the concept of site—whether personal, public, historic, or fictitious—drawing particularly on the social history of the adjacent West Side piers and of downtown New York in the 1970s.

**Film in the Biennial**

***Observational Fictions***

**Guest curated by Maori Karmael Holmes**

Holmes's program includes work by the Ghana-born musician and filmmaker Blitz Bazawule, also known as Blitz the Ambassador; Darius Clark Monroe, part of the team behind the HBO series *Random Acts of Flyness*; and the British-born Jenn Nkiru, whose works map global Black music, fashion, and visual culture.

***Observational Fictions: Blurred Lines***

**Blitz Bazawule**

**Friday, May 31, 7 pm**

Blitz Bazawule's film *The Burial of Kojó* (2018) integrates real-world politics and allegorical fantasy by centering on a fractured family living amid illegal gold mining operations in Ghana. The film follows the story of a young girl as she recounts her childhood and the tumultuous relationship between her father and uncle.

## ***Observational Fictions: Breaking Ground***

**Darius Clark Monroe and Jenn Nkiru**

**Saturday, June 1, 4 pm**

In *Untitled Tennis Project* (2019), Darius Clark Monroe utilizes archival footage to examine the role of sports—specifically handball and tennis—in American culture. With original material shot on film, the cinematic portrait comprised of four short films illuminates the lives of players and club owners, and the unexpected communities, obsessions, and passions they have built around racquet sports.

Jenn Nkiru's film *BLACK TO TECHNO* (2019) recounts the history of the genre of techno music, employing a collage technique that includes original imagery and archival footage. Featuring cameos from the worlds of techno, hip-hop, funk, and soul, the film focuses on the expansive cultural geography of techno music, mapping the exchange of styles and techniques between Detroit, the genre's birthplace, and Berlin, where it exploded as a global style.

## ***What Was Always Yours and Never Lost***

**Guest curated by Sky Hopinka**

**Friday, September 20, 7 pm**

**Saturday, September 21, 4 pm**

Guest curator Sky Hopinka selected Thirza Cuthand, who combines pop genres like sci-fi, horror, and fairy tales into highly personal, confessional works; Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, a Mexican collective, whose moving-image works confront violence and corruption in contemporary Mexico; James Luna (1950–2018), whose work over a thirty-year career interrogated America's iconography of Indigenous experience through a wide array of practices, including multimedia installation, video, and performance; Caroline Monnet, whose moving-image works and mixed-media installations engage with the contradictions of Indigenous life and identity in Canada; and collaborators Adam Khalil, Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys, whose video work challenges assumptions about Native American culture, notably through the story of a nine-thousand-year-old skeleton found in Washington state in 1996.

### **Thirza Cuthand**

Throughout her work, Thirza Cuthand addresses issues of sexuality, queer and Indigenous identities, and mental health with an often deceptively DIY aesthetic and sardonic mode of address. *2-Spirit Introductory Special \$19.99* (2015) uses the format of a cheesy QVC-style infomercial to address non-binary notions of gender that existed in First Nations tribes before contact with white settlers.

### **Colectivo Los Ingrávidos**

In *Impressions of a Sound and Light Machine*, from Colectivo Los Ingrávidos (founded in 2011 in Tehuacán, Mexico), a woman's speech is laid over images from an old Mexican film, its celluloid tearing until it disappears. As described by Hopinka, "Theirs is a counter-cinema of elegant rage, a poetics of resistance that contests the unpunished murder of women, the rippling effects of narcocapitalism, and the failures of the state."

### **James Luna**

In his 1993 video *The History of the Luiseño People*, James Luna depicted himself spending a lonesome Christmas on his couch at home in California's La Jolla Indian Reservation, chain-smoking, drinking beer, and making phone calls to friends, relatives, and exes. Oscillating between the tragic and the comic, Luna's work explores the intersection of Native and white American cultures in miniature.

### **Caroline Monnet**

Caroline Monnet's moving image works and mixed-media installations combine a precise, formalist approach and a pointed engagement with the contradictions of Indigenous life in Canada. *Mobilize* (2015) utilizes 1960s-era footage from the National Film Board of Canada's

archives depicting Native life and work, set to music by the celebrated Inuk composer and throat singer Tanya Tagaq. The film contrasts traditional and modern labor practices, mapping the trajectories of Native life in the twentieth century.

### **Adam Khalil, Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys**

In their video *The Violence of a Civilization without Secrets* (2017), Adam Khalil, Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys examine the story of “Kennewick Man,” a nine-thousand-year-old skeleton found in Washington state in 1996, recognized as an ancestor by the tribes of the Columbia River Basin, a claim that was contested. Using archival footage, CGI, and newly shot material, the artists’ dynamic exploration of this historic episode opens into an expansive argument over what it means to live on stolen land and the assertion of the vitality of Indigenous cultures in the present and future.

### ***Invisible Monuments***

**Guest curated by Matt Wolf**

**Friday, August 2, 7 pm**

**Saturday, August 3, 4 pm**

Filmmaker/guest curator Matt Wolf will present work by the late Barbara Hammer, the prolific lesbian filmmaker whose films explore the bodies, relationships, and narratives of queer women in particular who have been absent from both cinema and history; Sam Green, whose documentaries fearlessly probe complex ideas and fraught historical events; and FIERCE/Paper Tiger Television, two groups who banded together to examine the conflict over the Christopher Street Pier, gentrification, and the erasure of queer histories and spaces.

### **Barbara Hammer**

Barbara Hammer, who died on March 16, 2019, created an expansive body of work in film, performance, photography, and installation that centered on lesbian identity and experience. In *History Lessons Redo: The Meat Market* (2019), Hammer revisits the making of her 2001 film *History Lessons*. In the original film, Hammer used a range of archival footage—newsreels, popular, educational, and stag films—to reclaim lesbian history. *Redo* is a narrated slideshow that meditates on vanishing histories, both of 1920s working class New York as previously captured by the photographer Weegee, and Hammer’s own lesbian history in the Meatpacking District in which the Whitney now stands.

### **Sam Green**

For the past decade, filmmaker Sam Green has developed a genre of “live documentaries” in which he narrates nonfiction stories in tandem with live music, while projecting films and images. His latest is a portrait of a seminal queer countercultural figure whose legacy has been largely overlooked. Accompanied by musician and artist JD Samson, Green presents a portrait of this fixture of the queer underground that tracks gay rights milestones, such as the Stonewall Rebellion and the formation of the Gay Liberation Front and ACT UP, as well as the epoch of the legendary nightclub Danceteria.

### **FIERCE and Paper Tiger Television**

Since the 1980s, New York’s Christopher Street Pier has been a safe gathering space for LGBTQ youth of color. In the summer of 2000, however, those youth were fenced out, while the pier was developed into what has become Hudson River Park. In response, a group of young filmmakers collaborated with the queer youth drop-in center New Neutral Zone, the media activist collective Paper Tiger Television, and the activist group FIERCE to document the transformation of the pier. Their collectively produced film *Fenced Out* is at once a diaristic account of life at the pier, and an intergenerational dialog about the site’s historic relationship to the gay liberation movement.

### **Whitney Biennial 2019**

Featuring seventy-five artists and collectives working in painting, sculpture, installation, film and video, photography, performance, and sound, the 2019 Biennial takes the pulse of the contemporary artistic

moment. Introduced by the Museum's founder Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1932, the Biennial is the longest-running exhibition in the country to chart the latest developments in American art.

### Curatorial Credit

The 2019 Whitney Biennial is organized by Jane Panetta, associate curator, and Rujeko Hockley, assistant curator, with Ramsay Kolber, curatorial project assistant.

### Exhibition Support

Whitney Biennial 2019 is presented by

# TIFFANY & CO.

Major support is provided by The Brown Foundation, Inc., of Houston; The Rosenkranz Foundation; and the Whitney's National Committee.

Generous support is provided by Lise and Michael Evans; and the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation.

Significant support is provided by 2019 Biennial Committee Co-Chairs: Beth Rudin DeWoody, Bob Gersh, Miyoung Lee, and Fred Wilson; 2019 Biennial Committee members: Ashley Leeds and Christopher Harland, Diane and Adam E. Max, Annette and Paul Smith, Sarah Arison and Thomas Wilhelm, Bill Block, the Debra and Jeffrey Geller Family Foundation, Rebecca and Martin Eisenberg, Amanda and Glenn Fuhrman, Barbara and Michael Gamson, Marjorie and James D. Kuhn, Kourosh Larizadeh and Luis Pardo, Melanie Shorin and Greg S. Feldman, Dora and Cranford Stoudemire, and the William and Ellen Taubman Foundation; and Further Forward Foundation, the Kapadia Equity Fund, The Keith Haring Foundation Exhibition Fund, Katie and Amnon Rodan, and Sotheby's.

Funding is also provided by special Biennial endowments created by Melva Bucksbaum, Emily Fisher Landau, Leonard A. Lauder, and Fern and Lenard Tessler.

Curatorial research and travel for this exhibition were funded by an endowment established by Rosina Lee Yue and Bert A. Lies, Jr., MD.

### Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Where We Are: Selections from the Whitney's Collection 1900–1960	April 28, 2017 – June 2, 2019
Derek Fordjour: Half Mast	September 28, 2018 – May 5, 2019
Spilling Over: Painting Color in the 1960s	March 29 – August 2019
2019 Whitney Biennial	May 17 – September 22, 2019
The Whitney's Collection: Selections from 1900 to 1965	Opens June 28, 2019
Jason Moran	September 20, 2019 – January 5, 2020
Rachel Harrison	October 25, 2019 – January 12, 2020
Alan Michelson: Wolf Nation	October 25, 2019 – January 12, 2020
Pope.L: Instigation, Aspiration, Perspiration	Opens October 2019
Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945	February-May 2020
Agnes Pelton: Desert Transcendentalist	Opens Spring 2020
Julie Mehretu	June 26 – September 20, 2020
David Hammons: Day's End	2020
Jasper Johns	Opens Fall 2020
Dawoud Bey: An American Project	Opens November 2020

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Museum hours are: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday from 10:30 am to 6 pm; Friday and Saturday from 10:30 am to 10 pm. Closed Tuesday except in July and August, and in March 2019 during the exhibition *Andy Warhol—From A to B and Back Again*. Adults: \$25. Full-time students, visitors 65 & over, and visitors with disabilities: \$18. Visitors 18 years & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).

###

