THE WHITNEY TO PRESENT RACHEL HARRISON’S FIRST FULL-SCALE SURVEY

NEW YORK, August 13, 2019—Since the early 1990s, Rachel Harrison (b. 1966) has combined pop-cultural, political, and art-historical references in her work, creating a distinctive visual language that is multi-layered and full of mordant wit. Rachel Harrison Life Hack is the first full-scale survey to track the development of Harrison’s career over the past twenty-five years, assembling approximately one hundred works, including sculptures, photographs, drawings, and installations, ranging in date from 1991 to the present.

Harrison’s complex works incorporate everything from consumer goods to cement, with objects both made and found. Cans of olives, remote controls, NASCAR paraphernalia, and a restaurant meal appear in configurations that open up simultaneous and unexpected layers of meaning. In her practice, Harrison brings together the breadth of art history, the impurities of politics, and the artifacts of pop and celebrity culture, conjuring unexpected, wryly humorous combinations and atmospheres that suggest allegories of the contemporary United States. A remarkable cast of characters appear in her work, ranging from Amy Winehouse to Abraham Lincoln, Mel Gibson to Marcel Duchamp, David Bowie to Angela Merkel, Hannah Wilke to Buckethead, and Bo Derek to Al Gore.
The exhibition, organized by Elisabeth Sussman and David Joselit, with Kelly Long, will fill the Museum’s fifth-floor galleries through January 12, 2020.

Scott Rothkopf, Senior Deputy Director and Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator, remarked: “Although *Life Hack* gathers together the most significant examples of Harrison’s art from across her career, she has brilliantly approached the exhibition itself almost as an entirely new work of art. Visitors will be immersed in a sequence of dramatic sculptural environments that unfold across the Whitney’s sprawling clear-span gallery, which was designed to inspire precisely such bold experimentation.”

As Sussman writes in her catalogue essay (entitled “Rachel Harrison: Two or Three Things I Know About Her” after a film by Jean-Luc Godard), “From the beginning, Harrison was omnivorous. Working on the principle that art should include everything, she made things and environments, she found stuff and collected it. Nor did she limit herself to a specific medium.” Sussman further comments: “Harrison’s importance lies in that she has absorbed commodity and media culture into a paradigm of object making. She has consistently kept at the task of making meaning out of modern-day life for thirty years, and her contribution to contemporary art is singular.”

Co-curator Joselit noted, “Drawing on past sculptural practice, from a wide and seemingly contradictory range of precedents including Michael Asher, Mike Kelley, Adrian Piper, and Fred Sandback, Harrison de-familiarizes museum space and exhibition practices. By playing with the idea of pedestal and wall and often exploiting the ad hoc qualities of assemblage, she undermines the sense that a work or an installation is ever finished by calling attention to how it is framed.”

The installation is loosely chronological, beginning with a gallery devoted to works from the 1990s, then moving into more thematic and atmospheric spaces punctuated by smaller galleries devoted to specific bodies of work (a selection of Harrison’s Amy Winehouse drawings, for example). Two large galleries in the exhibition engage with the idea of civic space and monumentality, providing complex, evocative environments for Harrison’s work that are further activated by the presence of viewers.

**About the Artist**


**About the Catalogue**

The catalogue contains essays by Sussman and Joselit, as well as by Johanna Burton, Darby English, Maggie Nelson, and Alexander Nemerov. This publication, designed by Rachel Harrison and Joseph Logan, explores twenty-five years of Harrison’s practice and is the first comprehensive monograph on Harrison in nearly a decade. Its centerpiece is an in-depth plate section, which doubles as a chronology of Harrison’s major works, series, and exhibitions. Objects are illustrated with multiple views and details, and accompanied by short texts. This thorough approach elucidates Harrison’s complicated, eclectic oeuvre—in which she integrates found materials with handmade sculptural elements, upends traditions of museum display, and injects quotidian objects with a sense of strangeness. Published by the Whitney Museum of American Art and distributed by Yale University Press.
Curatorial Credit
Rachel Harrison Life Hack is organized by Elisabeth Sussman, Curator and Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, and David Joselit, Distinguished Professor, Graduate Center, City University of New York, with Kelly Long, curatorial assistant.

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About the Whitney
The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

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