

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum
of American Art
Press Office

99 Gansevoort Street
New York City, NY 10014

pressoffice@whitney.org
(212) 570-3633

PRESS RELEASE



Jennifer Packer, *The Body Has Memory*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 60 × 48 in. (152.4 × 121.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Promised gift of Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins. © Jennifer Packer. Image courtesy Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York, and Corvi-Mora, London

JENNIFER PACKER: THE EYE IS NOT SATISFIED WITH SEEING OPENS AT THE WHITNEY ON OCTOBER 30

The artist's first solo museum exhibition in New York features new paintings and rarely exhibited drawings

NEW YORK, September 2, 2021— This fall, the Whitney presents *Jennifer Packer: The Eye Is Not Satisfied With Seeing*, the artist's first major solo museum exhibition in New York. Jennifer Packer (b. 1984, Philadelphia, PA) combines observation, memory, and improvisation in paintings and drawings that focus on the emotional experience of Black people and the environments they inhabit. The exhibition features over thirty works from 2011—20, including new paintings and rarely exhibited drawings. Coming to the Whitney from Serpentine in London,

this exhibition will be on view in the Museum's eighth-floor Hurst Family Galleries from October 30, 2021 to Spring 2022.

The Whitney's presentation of *The Eye Is Not Satisfied With Seeing* is the largest survey of Packer's work to date, and is organized by Rujeko Hockley, Arnhold Associate Curator, and Jane Panetta, Curator and Director of the Collection, who presented Packer's work at the Whitney for the first time as co-curators of the 2019 Biennial. The exhibition title references Ecclesiastes 1:8 and points to the idea of an insatiable desire for knowledge through sensory experience and the significance of bearing witness. Among the portraits in the Whitney's presentation are works from the Museum's collection, including *The Body Has Memory* (2018) and *A Lesson in Longing* (2019), Packer's vibrant, rose-hued painting from the 2019 Whitney Biennial that depicts two subjects facing the viewer, equally obscured and revealed by Packer's application of thin washes and sweeping gestural brushstrokes. Also featured are new portraits created in the last two years.

"Over the past several years, the Whitney has presented significant shows dedicated to a range of contemporary painters, including Julie Mehretu, Laura Owens, and Salman Toor, and we are honored to add Jennifer Packer to this unfolding story," said Scott Rothkopf, Senior Deputy Director and Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator. "Her recent canvases were standouts in the 2019 Biennial, while this exhibition will provide an opportunity to survey the breadth of her extraordinary, still evolving body of work."

Packer's work draws on traditions of portraiture and still life, while situating these historical genres within a contemporary context. By depicting her community, Packer often acknowledges personal grief in response to tragedies of state and institutional violence against Black Americans. "My inclination to paint," Packer has said, "especially from life, is a completely political one. We belong here. We deserve to be seen and acknowledged in real time. We deserve to be heard and to be imaged with shameless generosity and accuracy."

"We are thrilled to be bringing Packer's work to a broader institutional audience, especially in such depth," said Jane Panetta and Rujeko Hockley. "Her ability to formally reimagine the possibilities of painting, combined with her unique engagement with a personal narrative fused with one around the acute vulnerability of Black life, make Packer a singular voice in contemporary painting."

Exhibited alongside her figurative work are the artist's floral compositions, which Packer first began painting from observation in 2012 as a respite between portraits. She applies the same tenderness to these floral tableaux, which reflect the fragility of life and reorient traditions of Dutch sixteenth-century *vanitas* paintings that historically symbolized earthly transience. Many of these works are described by Packer as funerary bouquets and vessels of personal grief, such as *Say Her Name* (2017), painted in response to the 2015 death of Sandra Bland.

About Jennifer Packer

Jennifer Packer (b. 1984, Philadelphia, PA) lives and works in New York. She received her BFA from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, in 2007 and MFA from the Yale School of Art in 2012. In 2012—13 she was an Artist-in-Residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem, and from 2014 to 2016 she was a Visual Arts fellow at The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Her 2017 solo exhibition *Tenderheaded* at the Renaissance Society, Chicago toured in 2018 to the Rose Museum at Brandeis University, Waltham, MA. In 2019 Packer exhibited in the Whitney Biennial; other group exhibitions include the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo (2018) and The Studio Museum in Harlem (2019, 2017, 2013, and 2012). Packer is

an Assistant Professor in the painting department at the Rhode Island School of Design. She is the recipient of the 2020 Hermitage Greenfield Prize and the Nancy B. Negley Rome Prize, American Academy in Rome 2020–21. Her solo exhibition opened at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA) on July 1, and she will be participating in Prospect New Orleans, 2021.

About the catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue of the same title co-published by Serpentine with Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König. Richly illustrated and designed by Roland Brauchli, it includes contributions by a number of artists, thinkers, and art historians including Rizvana Bradley, bell hooks, Dona Nelson, Christina Sharpe, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and an interview between Jennifer Packer and Serpentine Artistic Director Hans Ulrich Obrist.

Curatorial credit

Jennifer Packer: The Eye Is Not Satisfied With Seeing was initiated by Serpentine and curated by Melissa Blanchflower, Curator, Exhibitions and Public Art with Natalia Grabowska, Assistant Curator. The presentation at the Whitney is organized by Rujeko Hockley, Arnhold Associate Curator, and Jane Panetta, Curator and Director of the Collection, with Ambika Trasi, curatorial assistant.

About Serpentine

Championing new ideas in contemporary art since 1970, Serpentine has presented pioneering exhibitions for half a century from a wide range of emerging practitioners to the most internationally recognized artists of our time. Across two sites only 5 minutes apart, in London's Kensington Gardens, Serpentine presents a year-round, free program of exhibitions, architecture, live events and technological innovation, in the park and beyond.

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 ninety 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.

Exhibition Support

The lead sponsor for *Jennifer Packer: The Eye Is Not Satisfied With Seeing* is the Jerome L. Greene Foundation



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