

# WHITNEY

Whitney Museum  
of American Art  
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# PRESS RELEASE

## WHITNEY MUSEUM PRESENTS A SURVEY OF PHOTOGRAPHY, PERFORMANCE, AND FILM BY ARTIST EVERY OCEAN HUGHES



***Starting January 14, the four-part presentation will highlight the artist's interest in death, transitions, legacy, and queer life.***

**New York, NY, January 9, 2023** — *Every Ocean Hughes: Alive Side*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, starting January 14, presents the artist's current series of works, connected by her interest in death, transitions, thresholds, kinship, legacy, and queer life, with intimacy, humor, and direct address. This four-part presentation by multidisciplinary artist Every Ocean Hughes, formerly known as Emily Roysdon, consists of an in-gallery installation of the artist's photographic series *The Piers Untitled* (2009–23); a screening of the film *One Big Bag* (2021), presented both in-person and online; two live performances of *Help the Dead* (2019); and the live premiere of the Whitney's newly commissioned performance, *River* (2023). Hughes, who

trained as a death doula pre-pandemic in 2019, centers self-determination, social interrelation, and the promises of community and collaboration through various mediums, including performance, photography, film, music, text, and set design.

This presentation will run from January 14 through April 2, 2023, and is organized by Adrienne Edwards, Engell Speyer Family Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, with CJ Salapare, Curatorial Assistant.

“I have long admired Every’s inquisitive and imaginative approach to artmaking, which has brought forth urgent and necessary propositions about living and dying in our time,” said Edwards. “For over two decades, she has been at the forefront of shaping an aesthetics of care, collaboration, and community through her artistic practice. I am delighted that the Whitney is featuring Every’s range of ideas through its four-part presentation, a mix of previously made works, revisited series, and the Museum’s newest performance commission.”

A selection of works from the series *The Piers Untitled* (2009–23) is on view in the Museum’s third-floor gallery from Saturday, January 14, through Sunday, April 2. As the artist describes, “The piers on the West Side of Manhattan are a remnant of the city’s industrial past and an important landscape in the cultural life of New York City. From the 1970s through the 2000s, the piers were a gathering spot for underground culture, artists, and queer life. In 2009, amid rapid gentrification, I photographed the piers with these histories in mind, thinking about the pilings themselves as unmarked memorials to the AIDS crisis and a cultural milieu that once occupied this unregulated waterfront.” Hughes, who moved to New York City in 1999, began contemplating the ghostly remnants of the piers as unmarked memorials or found monuments. For over a decade, as the city changed and her artwork developed, she revisited more than a hundred photographic negatives she had captured from the Hudson River. These images symbolize the evolving uses of public space at the intersection of cultural and geographical margins, alongside the relationship between personal and city cycles. This installation in *Every Ocean Hughes: Alive Side* features photographs, collaged images, and wallpaper-sized photographic reproductions.

*Help the Dead* (2019) is a live sixty-minute performance presented from Friday, January 27, to Sunday, January 29, in the Museum’s Susan and John Hess Family Theater. Part concert and part theater, *Help the Dead* mimes the form of a workshop. Inspired by her death doula training, Hughes weaves song, script, movement, and audience participation to approach the politics of dying and living in our times. The stage is set with glass sculptures and custom-made textiles around which performers Geo Wyex and Colin Self deliver salient passages like: “On this spectrum of alive and dead / dead is not the opposite of alive / It’s not a binary /or a simple biological fact / It’s a complex social choice / What is dead? / What do we let die? / Who do we let die? / Who do we actively harm? / What do we actively extinguish?”

*One Big Bag* (2021), a forty-minute film that will screen continuously from Friday, February 17, to Monday, February 20, in the Susan and John Hess Family Theater, reckons with end-of-life care for the newly deceased and those who love them. In the film, a death doula, performed by

Lindsay Rico, guides viewers through a mobile toolkit of everyday items used to clean and care for corpses. Instructive and forcefully delivered, the doula's monologue reveals how these objects, like cotton swabs, textiles, feminine hygiene products, medicines, and combs, are repurposed to practical and often profound ends. In the immersive installation, the objects featured in the film are also suspended in the theater among the audience at heights corresponding to their use and relation to the body. Together, the projected film and everyday items convey the complex realities and communal possibilities of caring for the dead while highlighting important debates around end-of-life practices, including the high costs of funerals, a death industry that curtails individual agency, and inequalities in medical care. Following the in-person screening, *One Big Bag* will be available to stream online at [whitney.org](http://whitney.org) from February 21 to April 2.

*River* (2023), a newly commissioned performance that will debut at the Whitney, is the most recent installment of Hughes's multidisciplinary series inspired by death care, this work addresses the closely entwined themes of legacy, loss, and inheritance. The performance will be presented from Friday, March 24, to Sunday, March 26, in the Susan and John Hess Family Theater. In this performance, Hughes reimagines mythological crossings to other worlds through song, text, choreographed movement, and set design. The artist merges the trope of descending into the underworld—a recurring motif in ancient mythologies—with the porous, transcultural frame of the “crossing.” She emphasizes the term's dual meanings, which denote the ability to travel between one world and another, along with the thresholds that permit entry and return. This performance draws references from the piers that lined the West Side of Manhattan, which are depicted in the photo installation of *The Piers Untitled*.

“I'm very excited to return to New York City and the Whitney to share this new series of works that explore ‘alive time’ in the light of death and dying, alongside my 2009 photographs of the piers.” Hughes said about the exhibition. These works have been some of the most meaningful of my career, and it's an honor to present them in what feels in many ways like a hometown show.”

### **Performance Listings**

***Help the Dead*** (Live Performance)

**Friday, January 27, 7 pm**

**Saturday, January 28, 4 pm and 7 pm**

**Sunday, January 29, 4 pm**

Location: The Susan and John Hess Family Theater, Whitney Museum of American Art

Tickets: \$25 includes Museum admission; Registration required

Event Link: [whitney.org/events/every-ocean-hughes-help-the-dead-7pm](http://whitney.org/events/every-ocean-hughes-help-the-dead-7pm)

***One Big Bag*** (Continuous Film Screening)

**Friday, February 17, 7–10 pm**

**Saturday, February 18, 10:30 am–6 pm**

**Sunday, February 19, 10:30 am–6 pm**

**Monday, February 20, 10:30 am–6 pm**

Location: The Susan and John Hess Family Theater, Whitney Museum of American Art

Tickets: Free with Museum admission

Event Link: [whitney.org/events/every-ocean-hughes-one-big-bag](https://whitney.org/events/every-ocean-hughes-one-big-bag)

***River*** (Live Performance)

**Friday, March 24, 2023, 7 pm**

**Saturday, March 25, 2023, 4 pm and 7 pm**

**Sunday, March 26, 2023, 4 pm**

Location: The Susan and John Hess Family Theater, Whitney Museum of American Art

Tickets: Tickets will be available soon on [whitney.org](https://whitney.org).

Event Link: [whitney.org/events/every-ocean-hughes-river-7pm](https://whitney.org/events/every-ocean-hughes-river-7pm)

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Every Ocean Hughes (b. 1977 in Easton, Maryland; lives and works between Easton and Stockholm, Sweden), formerly known as Emily Roysdon, is a multidisciplinary artist and writer. For over twenty years, she has shaped an artistic practice around her ongoing interrogations of life and liveness, reimagining their terms, conditions, and possibilities for connection.

Addressing these elemental concerns has required a fluid, rather than fixed, set of approaches, which Hughes embodies through her prolific collaborations, expansive takes on queer life and communities, and use of mediums such as performance, photography, video, and text. She has served as editor and co-founder of the queer feminist journal and artist collective *LTTR*, written lyrics for several bands, and designed costumes for choreographers.

The artist has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Studio Voltaire, London (2022); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2022); Secession, Vienna (2015); and PARTICIPANT INC., New York (2015). She has been commissioned to create work for Tate Modern, London (2012, 2017); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2014); and The Kitchen, New York (2010). Group exhibitions include the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2023, 2014); Hammer Museum and Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2021); Future Generation Art Prize at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2010); and the Whitney Biennial (2010).

Hughes was a 2019–20 fellow at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. From 2013 to 2021, she was a professor of fine art at Konstfack University College of Art, Craft, and Design in Stockholm. Currently, she is the 2021–23 Sachs Visiting Professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

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## PRESS CONTACT

For press materials and image requests, please visit our press site at [whitney.org/press](https://whitney.org/press) or contact:

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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 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, 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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## VISITOR INFORMATION

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30 am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Visitors eighteen years and under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. COVID-19 vaccination and face coverings are not required but strongly recommended. We encourage all visitors to wear face coverings that cover the nose and mouth throughout their visit.

**Image caption:**

Every Ocean Hughes, still from *One Big Bag*, 2021. Film and multimedia installation, 40 minutes. Co-commissioned by Studio Voltaire, London, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, with assistance from the Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy the artist

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