

EVERY OCEAN HUGHES

WHITNEY

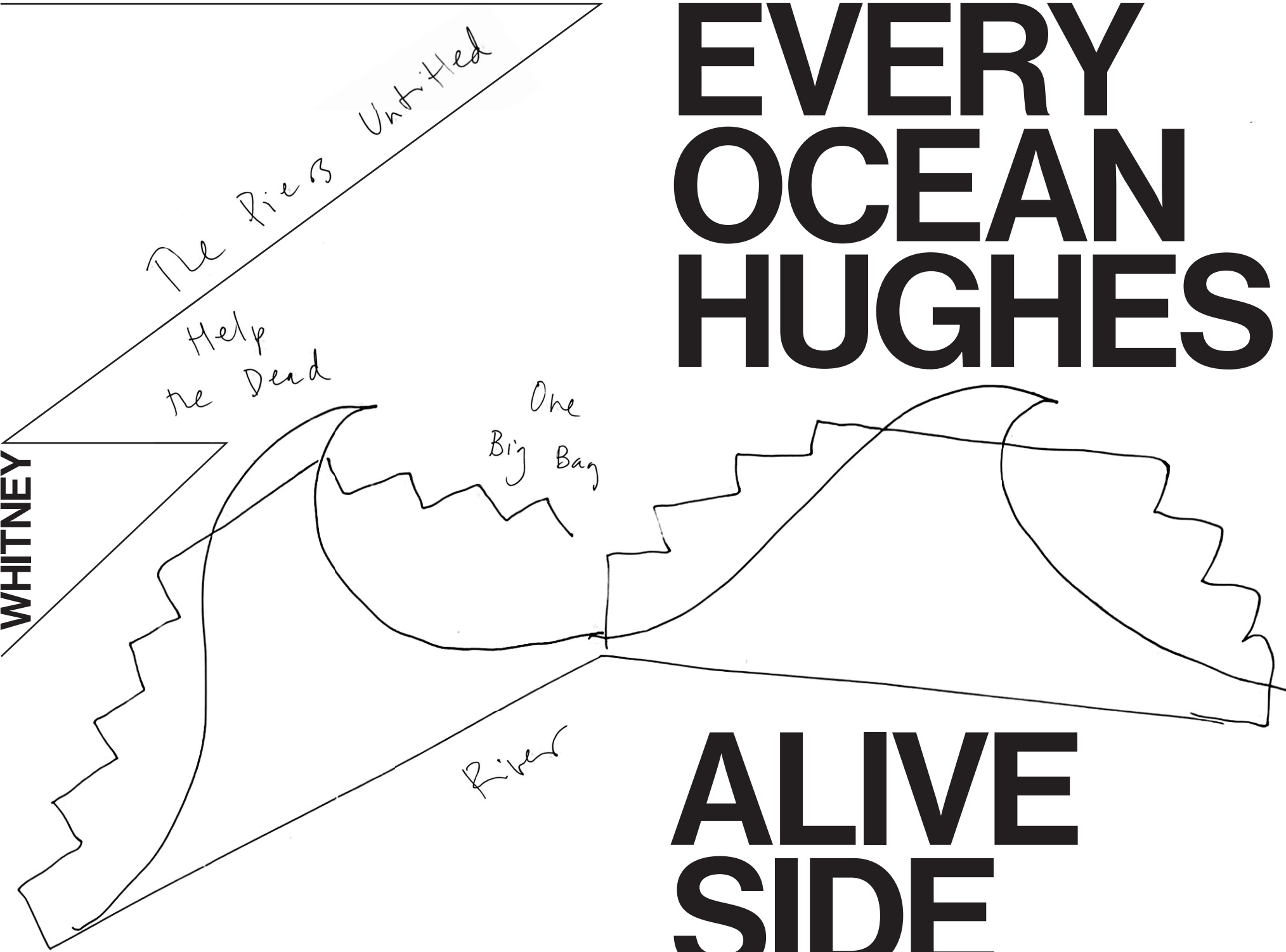
The Piers Untitled

Help
the Dead

One
Big Bag

River

ALIVE SIDE



Introduction

Using humor, intimacy, and direct address with distinct visual and sculptural forms, Every Ocean Hughes's (formerly known as Emily Roysdon; b. 1977, Easton, MD; lives and works between Easton and Stockholm) current series of works are connected by the artist's interest in transitions, thresholds, kinship, legacy, and queer life.

This four-part presentation at the Whitney includes *River* (2023), a newly commissioned performance that tells the mythic story of a community of characters who have the ability to make round-trip crossings to the underworld. The commission is the third part in a multidisciplinary series inspired by the artist's training in death care. Prior works include *Help the Dead* (2019), a sixty-minute musical that mimes the form of a workshop, and *One Big Bag* (2021), a forty-minute single-channel video installation that uses a mobile corpse kit—a bag filled with everyday objects that death douglas use to care for the newly dead. Featured alongside the performances and video is *The Piers Untitled* (2009–23), a photographic series that captures the piers on the West Side of Manhattan as an unmarked memorial to the marginalized communities and underground cultures that once occupied this unregulated waterfront.

This exhibition is organized by Adrienne Edwards, Engell Speyer Family Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, with CJ Salapare, Curatorial Assistant.



THE PIERS UNTITLED

The Piers Untitled (2009–23)

Every Ocean Hughes's *The Piers Untitled* is an ongoing series of photographs begun in 2009. For Hughes, who moved to New York City in 1999, the remaining pilings of the piers were “unmarked memorials, found monuments, to the lives that needed that unregulated place. To those who died living queerly. Those who died from neglect, poverty, AIDS, violence, and politics. And to those seeking life by crossing West Street.” About the title, Hughes has said: “I wanted to address the piers historically and formally while also holding open the site as unfixed.”

For over a decade Hughes has continuously revisited more than a hundred photographic negatives of the Hudson River that she captured. As the city changed and her artwork developed, she kept returning to these images and this site. This exhibition features photographs as well as collaged images layered upon wallpaper reproductions. Together the photographs and installation are resonant of the history of the waterfront, the evolving uses of public space at the intersection of cultural and geographical margins, and the relationship between personal and city cycles. This presentation marks a return to the Whitney Museum for Every Ocean Hughes, who revisits *The Piers Untitled* after its original premiere at the 2010 Whitney Biennial.



HELP THE DEAD

Help the Dead, 2019

Live performance

Friday, January 27 4 pm and 7 pm
Saturday, January 28 4 pm and 7 pm
Sunday, January 29 4 pm

The Susan and John Hess
Family Theater

“What is dead?” A simple question becomes a riddle, catalyst, and prompt for imagination in *Help the Dead* (2019), a combined theater and concert performance by Every Ocean Hughes. The artist, inspired by her death doula training, mimes the workshop format to approach death from a queer perspective. Weaving together song, script, movement, and audience participation, performers Colin Self and Geo Wyex help to stage the possibilities of mutual aid and self-determination. *Help the Dead* is at once an inquiry and an imperative: by contending with the politics of dying and living in our time, it renders their calls for social responsibility and communal stakes anew.

Writer and Director: Every Ocean Hughes
Performers: Colin Self, Geo Wyex
Assistant: Tony Karlsson Savci
Music by: Annea Lockwood;
Every Ocean Hughes, Colin Self,
Geo Wyex; Threshold Choir;
Stevie Wonder
Textile Designers: Every Ocean Hughes,
Bryce Wilner
Costume and Textile Fabricator: oni lem
Glass Fabricator: Simon Klenell

Commissioned by Volt, Bergen, Norway, and co-produced by the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, with the support of Konstnärnämnden, Stockholm, DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program, and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles



ONE BIG BAG

One Big Bag, 2021

Film and installation

Friday, February 17 7 pm
Saturday, February 18 10:30 am
Sunday, February 19 10:30 am
Monday, February 20 10:30 am

The Susan and John Hess
Family Theater

Every Ocean Hughes’s *One Big Bag* (2021) reckons with end-of-life care for the newly deceased and those who love them. At once useful, political, and poignant, a “death doula” (performed by Lindsay Rico) guides us through a mobile toolkit of everyday items used to clean and care for corpses. Instructive and forcefully delivered, the monologue reveals how these objects—which include cotton swabs, textiles, feminine hygiene products, medicines, and combs—are repurposed to practical and often profound ends. Presented as an immersive film installation, these objects are suspended at heights corresponding with their relation and use 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.

One Big Bag will be available to stream online at whitney.org from February 21–April 2, 2023.

Writer and Director: Every Ocean Hughes
Performer: Lindsay Rico
Producers: Every Ocean Hughes and Madeleine Molyneaux
Editor: Kersti Grunditz Brennan
Prop and Costume Designer: Montana Levi Blanco
Choreographer: Miguel Gutierrez
Music by: Sarah Hennies
Director of Photography: Sarah Tricker
Assistant Camera Operator: Emilia Aghamirzai
Script Supervisor and Key P.A.: Gabby Preston
Coffin Builder, A.D., and Right-hand: JD Samson
Set Builder: Dame Lewis
Sound Designer: Lynne Trepanier
Re-recording Mixer: Gordon Neil Allen
Colorist: Tom Brennan, CSI
Post-production Studio: The Flock
Subtitler and Translator: Kristofer Fredriksson, LinQ Media Group
Title Designer: Bryce Wilner

Co-commissioned by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Studio Voltaire, London, with additional support from the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Filmed on location at The Kitchen, New York

IV.

RIVER

***River*, 2023**

Live performance

Friday, March 24 7 pm

Saturday, March 25 4 pm and 7 pm

Sunday, March 26 4 pm

The Susan and John Hess
Family Theater

River (2023), a newly commissioned performance by Every Ocean Hughes, reimagines mythological crossings through song, text, choreographed movement, and set design. Hughes 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. To situate this thinking, the artist turns to a longstanding interest: the piers that lined the West Side of Manhattan, which were a gathering spot for queer and other marginalized communities, and the pilings that remain of them today. Within this multivalent context, this performance addresses the closely entwined themes of legacy, loss, and inheritance through its cast of characters—which includes two protagonists, chorus-like figures, and a banjo player. *River* is the third and most recent installment in Hughes’s multidisciplinary series inspired by death care.

Writer and Director: Every Ocean Hughes

Commissioned by the Whitney Museum
of American Art, New York

**Whitney Museum
of American Art**
99 Gansevoort Street
New York, NY 10014

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every-ocean-hughes](https://whitney.org/exhibitions/every-ocean-hughes)