

WHITNEY

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PRESS RELEASE

THE WHITNEY MUSEUM PRESENTS ARTIST JOSH KLINE'S FIRST U.S. MUSEUM SURVEY



This mid-career retrospective examines how climate change, automation, contagion, and politics shape work and life in twenty-first century America.

New York, NY, February 23, 2023 — *Josh Kline: Project for a New American Century*, on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art from April 19 through August 13, 2023, is the first mid-career survey of Josh Kline's work by an American museum. The exhibition offers a thematic examination of over fifteen years of the artist's work, including a major new installation that will debut at the Whitney and projects that have never been seen before in New York. Kline is best known for creating immersive installations using video, sculpture, photography, and design to question how emergent technologies are changing human life in the twenty-first

century. One of the leading artists of his generation, Kline is unique among his peers in directly confronting class, labor, and inequity in the United States today.

Featuring more than a hundred works and installed across two floors of exhibition space, *Josh Kline: Project for a New American Century* addresses a range of societal concerns, including the dehumanizing nature of work, the effects of automation on the entire labor force, the precarious nature of individual health in the U.S., and the weakening of democracy in an era of extreme income inequality. The exhibition features new work by the artist and serves as the New York debut for his latest and most urgent projects addressing the climate crisis and its consequences. The survey will also feature important elements from his ongoing cycle of installations focused on the defining issues of the twenty-first century, imagining how they will shape the next one hundred years of society. In an era defined by escalating crises, Kline's work offers both a visceral warning and a call for a more human future.

“Josh Kline has had the uncanny ability to hone in on the most important issues of the day and create art that is disturbingly urgent,” says Adam D. Weinberg, the Alice Pratt Brown Director of the Whitney Museum. “Watching the magnetic attraction of viewers to his work is astonishing: they are simultaneously enraptured, bewildered, and repulsed. Kline's art is radical, uncompromising, and looks unblinkingly at the possible future.”

Josh Kline: Project for a New American Century is organized by Christopher Y. Lew, former Nancy and Fred Poses Curator at the Whitney and current Chief Artistic Director at the Horizon Art Foundation and Outland Art, with McClain Groff, Curatorial Project Assistant.

Kline envisions the entire exhibition as a series of immersive environments. Organized across ten rooms, *Project for a New American Century* features groundbreaking and influential early series as well as chapters from the artist's ongoing and as-yet-untitled cycle of installations developed over the past decade. The cycle examines potential future scenarios and how they might shape humanity. Rather than attempting to make accurate predictions, Kline explores the pressing concerns of today and tomorrow through science fiction. For the Whitney show, he will debut a new project from the cycle, a room-size installation about climate-driven migration.

“Throughout his artistic career, Kline has taken a hard look at how we live and work in the twenty-first century,” said Christopher Y. Lew. “This was apparent in his early works and it is evermore clear in his new ambitious installations made in response to climate change. It has been thrilling to follow his practice over more than a decade and it's a great privilege to organize his major mid-career survey at the Whitney Museum of American Art.”

The majority of the artworks included in the exhibition are drawn from private collections or courtesy of the artist.

Exhibition Overview — Josh Kline: Project for A New American Century

The earliest works in the exhibition are from Josh Kline's *Creative Labor* series, made during and in the aftermath of the Great Recession in the early 2010s. These works—which were

included in Kline's earliest solo shows in 2011 and 2013 and his first institutional group exhibition at MoMA PS1 in 2012, curated by Christopher Y. Lew—take critical aim at the creative class and the selling of the self through social media and the gig economy. Among them are Kline's first works made with 3D printing, early examples of artworks using this new technology. During the financial crisis and following recession, the artist was formally inspired by the design of high-end drugstores and corporate bank architecture. The assembled works suggest a slick, self-illuminated environment, addressing the demands of a round-the-clock economy and the creative class, producers, consumers, and products within this system.

Kline continued his exploration of labor and class through his *Blue Collars* series, which he began in 2014. The series consists of stand-alone sculptural portraits of working people in the United States produced using photographic 3D scanning and full-color photographic 3D printing, accompanied by vérité-style video interviews with the workers. Kline invited and paid his subjects—delivery workers, cleaning people, restaurant waitstaff, an employee at a suburban big-box store—to participate by 3D scanning their heads, hands, and feet. The uncannily realistic body parts were then 3D printed in full color, in some cases covered by the uniforms, brands, and logos of each person's employer. The matter-of-fact conversations between the artist and subject—informed by Kline's undergraduate studies in anthropology—shed light on their employment status, economic situation, political beliefs, and aspirations. The sculptures and videos from *Blue Collars* depict the often dehumanizing work experience of working-class Americans—many of whom have been recently deemed essential workers—in the early twenty-first century.

The exhibition will debut new work from Kline's ongoing cycle responding to the climate crisis and the unprecedented mass migration it has already set in motion. This new large-scale multimedia installation—presented for the first time—addresses the experiences of future climate refugees who will be forced to relocate due to catastrophic environmental changes. The installation features tent-like structures resembling emergency housing, a medical clinic, a car, and a remittance center for foreign workers. Fictional video interviews with imagined future refugees within each structure give a human face to devastating global changes already underway. These interviews pose questions about our part in the climate crisis and the responsibility to the millions of people whose lives will be impacted by its consequences.

The show also includes the first New York exhibition of *Adaptation*, a 16mm film that premiered in 2022 at LAXART and was recently included in the New York Film Festival. Produced using resolutely analog special effects—scale-models and matte shots, *Adaptation* is set in a future, flooded Manhattan. The film depicts a group of underwater relief workers as they emerge from the floodwaters of Midtown, coming off of their jobs dealing with an environmental catastrophe. Amid the ruins, life and work continue, as the essential workers adapt to their newly transformed city.

The exhibition features other major works from Kline's ambitious cycle. His *Unemployment* installation, for example, imagines the 2030s and 2040s as a time when AI and automation have replaced white-collar workers like accountants, administrators, and lawyers, destabilizing

society. This chapter of the cycle includes a startling installation featuring representations of laidoff individuals: life-size figures, rendered through a combination of 3D printing and CNC routing, are interspersed in the gallery, curled in the fetal position, and wrapped in clear plastic. *Contagious Unemployment* from 2016, another part of the installation, presciently draws connections between work, health, and disease. Here, large plastic sculptures of viruses enclose cardboard file boxes containing various workers' desk objects, such as office supplies, personal belongings, and family photographs. Intended as imagined portraits of desk workers, the installation concisely weaves together concerns that have only become more pressing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Civil War, an installation in Kline's cycle conceived in 2017 in response to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, is also set in a speculative America one or two decades in the future. The artist imagines a nation sent into chaos by mass unemployment due to AI. The project, which will be shown in New York for the first time at the Whitney, features two series of sculptures and a three-channel film installation. One group of sculptures is an amalgam of luxury and generic household appliances held together with stars-and-stripes-patterned packing tape. Each work is equipped with an audio element, a ticking sound—as if these sculptures about class division were time bombs. The second group of sculptures are full-size reproductions of various artifacts of middle class life made to look like concrete that has been ripped apart. Strewn across the floor, these works resemble rubble left as the result of a destructive conflict.

Kline's three-channel film installation, *Another America is Possible*, serves as a radical and utopian counterpoint to these dystopian works. Set in an alternative version of the 2040s—when the U.S. is anticipated to become a minority-majority country—the work depicts a diverse group of people who have gathered not only to picnic but also to collectively burn and bury the Confederate flag. Here, the destruction of this flag, which served as the “battle flag” of the pro-slavery secessionist states during the American Civil War and continues to be used as a symbol of white supremacy, celebrates the fight against racial inequality and terror within the United States.

About the Artist

Making and exhibiting art since the late 2000s, Josh Kline (b. 1979, Philadelphia; lives and works in New York) has developed a highly influential body of work through his examination of recent technological innovations and their societal repercussions. He has made use of technologies including 3D scanning and 3D printing, early deepfake software, CGI animation, and digital image manipulation to address how these advancements and related technologies have impacted or disrupted our lives. Kline produces uncanny works that are uncomfortably close to what they reference: 3D prints evoke the texture of dimpled skin, videos feature impersonations of world leaders and celebrities, and high-production sets resemble mainstream film shoots.

Primarily working through the lens of class, with a nuanced take on race that reflects his mixed-race heritage, Kline's art demonstrates how technology has widened and reinforced inequity in America while also conveying its potential to make a fairer world. Kline has been

included in recent major exhibitions spotlighting artists working with technology, such as *Art in the Age of the Internet: 1989 to Today* at the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, *The Body Electric* at the Walker Art Center, and *New Order: Art and Technology in the Twenty-First Century* at The Museum of Modern Art. His survey, *Antibodies*, was presented at Oslo's Astrup Fearnley Museum in 2020.

Catalogue

An accompanying exhibition catalogue, *Josh Kline: Project for a New American Century*, published by the Whitney and distributed by Yale University Press, features essays by curator Christopher Y. Lew, film curator Ed Halter, and critic Nora N. Khan, along with a conversation between Josh Kline and filmmaker Laura Poitras. The catalogue is designed by James Goggin in close collaboration with the artist. Featuring almost three hundred artwork images, this publication reproduces Kline's multifaceted and complex works from many vantage points. In their essays, Halter connects the artist's work with the legacy of video installation and new media while Kahn examines Kline's work through the lens of science fiction. Copies are available for purchase online and in the Whitney Shop (\$55.00).

Free Public Programs

A series of free virtual and in-person programs are offered in conjunction with *Josh Kline: Project for a New American Century*. More information about these programs and how to register will be available on the Museum's [website](#) as details are confirmed.

Exhibition Tickets

Starting February 28, visitors can purchase timed tickets for *Josh Kline: Project for a New American Century*, on view April 19–August 13, 2023. More [ticketing information](#) is available on the Museum's website.

Press Preview

The Whitney Museum will host a press preview on Wednesday, April 12, 10 am–1 pm. RSVP to the press preview by filling out this [form](#). A photography and broadcast hour will start at 9 am and requires registration. Please reach out to pressoffice@whitney.org for any questions about the photography and broadcast hour. Remarks by Adam D. Weinberg, the Alice Pratt Brown Director, Scott Rothkopf, Senior Deputy Director and Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator, and exhibition curator Christopher Y. Lew will begin at 10:30 am.

PRESS 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.

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, 11 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Member-only hours are: Saturday and Sunday, 10:30–11 am. 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:

Josh Kline, *Unemployment*, 2016. Installation. Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy, 2016–17

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