

# WHITNEY

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# PRESS RELEASE

## NEW PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION AT WHITNEY MUSEUM HIGHLIGHTS VULNERABILITY, CONNECTIVITY, AND THE POWER OF IMAGES



**New York, NY, August 17, 2023** — *Trust Me*, opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art on August 19, 2023, brings together captivating photographs by artists Laura Aguilar, Genesis Báez, Alvin Baltrop, Jenny Calivas, Moyra Davey, Lola Flash, Barbara Hammer, Muriel Hasbun, Dakota Mace, Mary Manning, and D’Angelo Lovell Williams. These eleven artists embrace intuition and indeterminacy through varied techniques and experimentation with photography, suggesting parallels between material and emotional contingency. Drawing from the Whitney’s rich permanent collection, viewers are invited to engage with intimate parts of the artists’ everyday lives and experiences and explore connections to their own. These artists take a chance reaching out to a viewer they may or may not know, trusting the power of the images’ emotional resonance, and offer a space for contemplation and reciprocal vulnerability. The images in the exhibition highlight familial and ancestral bonds, friendship and romantic

partnerships, and networks of influence and exchange. The artists encourage viewers to make connections, sharing the vulnerability and feelings offered through explorations of memory, loss, creative expression, and identity, both personal and experienced within a community.

Although photography is often documentary in nature, the artists in [Trust Me](#) work against that impulse in unexpected ways, embracing indeterminacy as a viable creative mode. Photography is a precarious medium that relies on combinations of time, light, chemicals, and chance, requiring adaptability and openness to accidents, imperfections, and the unexpected. Through representational and abstract compositions, the works assert the vital importance of artistic and human connection, gesturing to both the relationships depicted in the image and the less visible relationships that helped bring it into being.

“The artists in *Trust Me* have so much to teach us about personal and creative care networks and vulnerability as a radical and central condition of artmaking,” says Kelly Long, exhibition organizer and Senior Curatorial Assistant at the Whitney. “At a moment when exhibitions around the country are exploring empathy, intimacy, and sociality, it’s clear that we are striving to better understand the role that connection plays in our lives and that art can help us on our way.”

“This is the first chance for visitors to see a group of important and interrelated photographs, many of them new acquisitions to the Whitney’s collection,” says Jane Panetta, the Whitney’s Nancy and Fred Poses Curator and Director of the Collection. “*Trust Me* represents an intergenerational group of artists through themes that invite interconnectedness while providing an opportunity for viewers to engage with the Museum’s collection in new ways.”



### **Exhibition Overview – Trust Me**

Artists like Barbara Hammer, Alvin Baltrop, Lola Flash, and Laura Aguilar explore the lives of their subjects and their own experiences, sometimes preserving or commenting on a moment in time. Personal, familial, and community relationships are common threads in their work, drawing from their own experiences and highlighting a range of emotional states, from love and joy to mourning and heartache. Though best known for her avant-garde, feminist film projects, **Barbara Hammer** developed a series of black-and-white photographs early in her career,

placing herself, friends, lovers, and collaborators at the focal point of the images. Hammer affirms that ordinary, daily life is a worthy subject for art through depictions of bodies at rest, at play, or engaged in sex. This series embodies the artist's life and social circle at the time, and the intimate moments captured attest to a life lived joyfully in queer community. **Alvin Baltrop's** photographs document the Hudson River piers and the lives of gay and transgender communities that found refuge on the crumbling piers in the 1970s. At times working in the background and others collaborating directly with his subjects, Baltrop captured the sexual freedom and creative expression happening in a place of both safety and danger. **Lola Flash's** *4 ray*, an example of the artist's signature "cross-colour" technique, which transforms images and preserves the anonymity of their subjects, most of whom are queer people of color. The cross-colour photographs present another version of the world where queer community, love, and joy are uplifted and embraced while allowing space for anger, grief, and remembrance. **Laura Aguilar's** *Plush Pony* photographs, one of three of the artist's series in the exhibition, feature portraits of patrons outside Los Angeles's eponymous lesbian bar. At the time Aguilar was making this series in 1992, there was widespread unrest in the city following the LAPD officers' acquittal for the brutal beating of Rodney King. Intense, shared feelings of despair permeated the city, and Aguilar decried the biased and unfair depictions of the working class and people of color in the media. The *Plush Pony* series offers another perspective, portraying queer working-class women in a kind and loving community.

Moyra Davey, Jenny Calivas, D'Angelo Lovell Williams, and Muriel Hasburn experiment with process, memory, remembrance, and self-expression in their works. As part of her artistic process for *Trust Me*, **Moyra Davey** began mailing her photographs to friends and gallerists, placing the postal stamps directly on the images and receiving them back with surface abrasions, fingerprints, and creases. Featuring intimate interior scenes of the artist's New York apartment overlaid with textual fragments by the writer Lynne Tillman, this body of work illustrates the connection between physical and psychic vulnerabilities. Agency and collaboration are central to **Jenny Calivas's** process. Paying homage to broader traditions of feminist image-making, in Calivas's ongoing series of self-portraits in nature, the camera timer remains visible in the artist's hand. Though the artist depends on the eyes and hands of an assistant we never see in the final images, she retains control of the camera. Calivas's self-representation remains crucial to counteracting a traumatic memory from her past as she seeks to reclaim her relationship with the natural world. **D'Angelo Lovell Williams** also utilizes self-portraiture in their work. The artist has said *Nah*, one of their works on view, is a meditation on freedom. The photograph takes its title from historical examples of resistance to enslavement and is partially inspired by reports of the May 1803 rebellion of enslaved Igbo people, who overturned their captors before dying by mass suicide. In this self-portrait, the artist dons a delicate, sheer white gown previously worn to a drag ball, asserting their freedom of self-expression and identity. During her childhood, **Muriel Hasburn's** father, a dentist, was tasked with identifying casualties from the Salvadoran civil war (1979–92) using eerie and absorbing images of teeth and other anatomical attributes. Decades later and after her father's death, Hasburn rediscovered the dental X-rays and rephotographed them to reveal intimate connections to the subjects, people we cannot fully see or know. Apparent and concealed markers of cultural identity thread throughout the artist's work, acknowledging her Palestinian, Polish, and French Jewish ancestry and her upbringing in El Salvador.

Genesis Báez, Dakota Mace, and Mary Manning weave themes of intergenerational ties, community, and loss into their photographs. Often featuring the women in her family in her photographs, **Genesis Báez** connects herself and her mother in *Crossing Time*, one of three works by the artist on view. She depicts her mother holding a thread with the artist's shadow appearing to grasp the other end, creating an illusory, unbreakable link between generations. The space between these two connected figures, who seem to inhabit separate worlds, alludes to the sense of distance felt by members of the Puerto Rican diaspora and a disruption of place and belonging exacerbated by migration, colonial legacies, and climate change. Due to a silver allergy, **Dakota Mace** cannot practice silversmithing, her family's ancestral trade, or gelatin silver printing, an artistic process used for black-and-white photography. This material sensitivity redirected her creative process toward alternate photographic techniques, often combined with beadwork, embroidery, and other craft traditions. Mace honors her Diné ancestry and the significance of the number four in her *Béésh Ligaii* series, which symbolizes the interconnectedness of people and land in her culture. Leaning into the silversmithing practices passed down through generations, Mace abstracts her grandfather's designs, making her own unique contributions to the lineage. The loss of **Mary Manning's** father prompted the artist to revisit memories during car rides punctuated by brief pauses to photograph flowers he'd spot during the drive. For Manning's *His Estate*, the artist rephotographed two of their father's pictures of flowers using the camera they inherited from him. The works represent the extraordinary in the everyday by giving careful attention to the people, objects, and moments.

*Trust Me* is organized by Kelly Long, Senior Curatorial Assistant at the Whitney Museum, and will be on view through February 2024.

### **Free Public Programs**

A series of free virtual and in-person programs are offered in conjunction with *Trust Me*. More information about these programs and how to register will be available on the Museum's [website](#) as details are confirmed.

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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.

### Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgment

The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning “island of many hills.” The Museum’s current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Saponckanikan (“tobacco field”). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region’s original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum’s Land Acknowledgment, [visit the Museum’s website](#).

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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 credit:

D'Angelo Lovell Williams, *Nah*, 2018. Inkjet print: sheet (sight): 44 1/2 × 29 1/2 in. (113 × 74.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Photography Committee 2020.130. © D'Angelo Lovell Williams

Mary Manning, *His Estate*, 2022. Chromogenic prints, mat board, and artist’s frame, sheet: 33 × 22 1/4 in. (83.8 × 56.5 cm); frame: 33 1/4 × 22 1/2 × 1 1/2 in. (84.5 × 57.2 × 3.8 cm). Edition 2 of 3. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Photography Committee. © Mary Manning

Lola Flash, *4 ray*, 1991, from the series *Provincetown*. Chromogenic print: sheet, 24 × 20 in. (61 × 50.8 cm); image, 24 × 20 in. (61 × 50.8 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Photography Committee 2022.38. © Lola Flash

Genesis Báez, *Crossing Time*, 2022. Inkjet print: sheet, 37 5/8 × 27 3/8 in. (95.6 × 69.5 cm); image, 33 1/2 × 24 in. (85.1 × 61 cm). Edition 5/8. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Anne Levy Fund. © Genesis Báez

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