

# WHITNEY

Whitney Museum  
of American Art  
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# PRESS RELEASE

## THREE NEW EXHIBITIONS OPEN AT THE WHITNEY MUSEUM THIS AUGUST



*Upcoming presentations include Mark Armijo McKnight solo photography show, What It Becomes drawing exhibition, and Raque Ford public art commission*

**New York, NY, July 25, 2023** — This August, the Whitney Museum of American Art debuts three exhibitions featuring new and rarely seen photography, drawing, public art, and more. On view in the Museum's free-to-visit Lobby gallery, *Mark Armijo McKnight: Decreation* is the photographer's first solo museum exhibition. *What It Becomes* features works from the collection that explore drawing as an act of transformation. Presented on the building facade across the street from the Whitney and The High Line, *Raque Ford: A little space for you right under my shoe* is a newly commissioned artwork by multimedia artist Raque Ford.

*Mark Armijo McKnight: Decreation* and *What It Becomes* open on Saturday, August 24, and *Raque Ford: A little space for you right under my shoe* is on view starting Monday, August 26.

***Mark Armijo McKnight: Decreation***  
**August 24, 2024–January 5, 2025**

*Mark Armijo McKnight: Decreation* features new and recent black-and-white photographs by **Mark Armijo McKnight** (b. 1984, Los Angeles, California; lives in New York, New York) and focuses on his ongoing body of work, “Decreation.” The concept, originated by the French philosopher, activist, and mystic Simone Weil (1909–1943), describes an intentional undoing of the self, a process Armijo McKnight explores in images of bodies and landscapes in intermediate states, such as anonymous nude figures engaged in erotic play amidst harsh environments. These photographs convey a sense of both ecstasy and affliction.

Working in the high desert of southern California, where he grew up, as well as the badlands of New Mexico, his maternal homeland, Armijo McKnight builds on a long history of photography in the U.S. West. Its dramatic terrain has frequently been used to symbolize sublime beauty and an ideal of freedom from society even as its imagery has been exploited for violently oppressive ends. Armijo McKnight explores these tensions—between liberation and repression, transcendence and despair—by embracing a range of contradictions in both the subjects he depicts and his technical choices. Using a large format film camera, his photographs retain a formal precision associated with Modernism, but trouble it with a queer refusal of photography’s surveying gaze. His images’ rich contrasts are the result of the in-camera and darkroom techniques he uses to obscure certain details and saturate the images with emotion. By drawing on sources ranging from art history to ancient mythology to social philosophy, Armijo McKnight layers his photographs with metaphor.

A new 16mm film in the gallery plays a cacophonous symphony of gradually unwinding metronomes, set amid the dramatic geological formations of the Bisti Badlands/De-Na-Zin Wilderness, that evokes ecological precariousness, the transience of human existence, or the contradictory demands of speech and silence. Two large limestone sculptures, which double as seating, suggest the forms of a pair of ancient sundials. As a whole, *Decreation* simultaneously evokes tumult and quietude, darkness and light, isolation and togetherness.

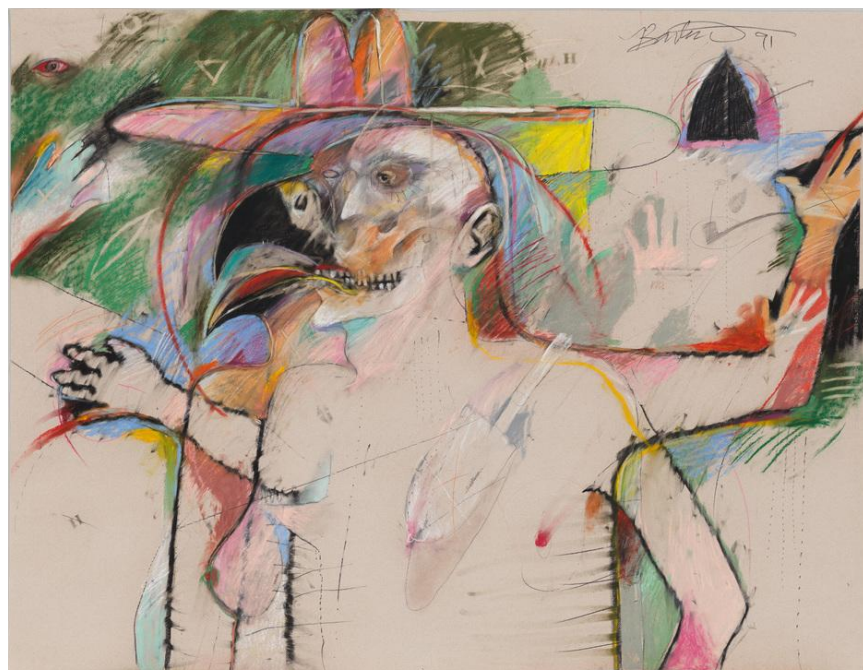
“*Decreation* demonstrates the Museum’s ongoing commitment to showcasing and supporting the work of artists early in their career,” said Drew Sawyer, Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography at the Whitney Museum. “I am excited to be working with Mark Armijo McKnight as he expands his exploration of metaphysical questions into film and sculpture.”

“I am invested in equivocality, poetics, timelessness, the otherworldly, and the archetypal. However, the unprecedented ecological and sociopolitical turmoil of our current moment have deeply impacted my psyche and subsequently my practice,” said Mark Armijo McKnight. “I have a sense of urgency to make and share this work because it is, in its way, both a reflection of and response to the tumultuous world in which we find ourselves... and hopefully also a place in which to find catharsis or take solace.”

This exhibition is on view in the Museum’s Lobby gallery, which is accessible to the public free of charge, as part of the Whitney Museum’s enduring commitment to support and showcase the most recent work of emerging artists.

Mark Armijo McKnight: *Decreation* is organized by Drew Sawyer, Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, with Nakai Falcón, Curatorial Assistant.

[View the digital press kit.](#)



### ***What It Becomes***

**August 24, 2024–January 12, 2025**

*What It Becomes* is an exhibition of new and rarely seen works from the Whitney’s collection that encourage us to think expansively about what drawing is and can be. Featuring the work of 11 artists, including **Darrel Ellis**, **David Hammons**, **Ana Mendieta**, **Catherine Opie**, and **Wendy Red Star**, *What It Becomes* explores how artists have turned to drawing as a way to reveal the unseen and make the familiar unrecognizable. The exhibition takes its title from the words of artist **Toyin Ojih Odutola**, who, describing how the act of drawing transforms the source imagery she works from, remarks, “What it becomes is what I’m interested in.”

The processes and techniques inherent to drawing play a fundamental role in the creation of the works presented here, whether they take shape on paper, in photography, or through video. Some artists employ maneuvers like inscription and erasure to alter or reclaim existing images. Others emphasize the tactility of the medium by using their bodies as drawing tools or surfaces, transforming their likeness in the process. Harnessing drawing’s relationship to touch and its ability to convey change, the artists explore the malleable nature of identity and the possibility of shaping and redefining oneself.

*What It Becomes* is organized by Scout Hutchinson, Curatorial Fellow.

[View the digital press kit.](#)



***Raque Ford: A little space for you right under my shoe***  
**August 26, 2024–March 2025**

Multimedia artist **Raque Ford** (b. 1986, Columbia, Maryland; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York) presents a newly commissioned work on the building facade across the street from the Whitney and The High Line. Working within the traditions of Pop art and Minimalism, Ford remixes visual and linguistic symbols of popular culture to explore how social codes shape private subjectivity. The words “A little space for you / right under my shoe,” excerpted from an original poem by Ford, wave within a collage of shoe prints and graphic shapes. Noted for its layered use of text, images, and media, particularly commercial materials, Ford’s work plays with the scale of the billboard to address the pedestrians below, pairing the entreatings of the poem with the imposing image of stomping shoes to create a work that can be interpreted on multiple registers. This site-specific project will be Ford’s first work created entirely digitally.

*A little space for you right under my shoe* is part of a series of public art installations organized by the Whitney in partnership with TF Cornerstone and High Line Art. This project is organized by Roxanne Smith, Senior Curatorial Assistant at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

[View the digital press kit.](#)

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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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## EXHIBITION SUPPORT

Generous support for *Mark Armijo McKnight: Decreation* is provided by the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation.

Additional support is provided by Stephanie and Tim Ingrassia.

Generous support for *What It Becomes* is provided by David Bolger.

*Raque Ford: A little space for you right under my shoe* is part of Outside the Box programming, which is supported by a generous endowment from the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation.

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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 Sapponckanikan

("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, 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.

**Image credits:**

Mark Armijo McKnight, *Somnia*, 2023. Gelatin silver print, 48 x 60in. (121.9 x 152.4 cm). Courtesy the artist. © Mark Armijo McKnight

Rick Bartow, *Autobiographical Hawk*, 1991. Pastel and graphite on paper, 46 5/8 × 59 7/8 in. (118.4 × 152.1 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of the Richard E. Bartow Trust 2022.69. © Richard E. Bartow Trust

Raque Ford, *A little space for you right under my shoe*, 2024. Inkjet print on vinyl. Collection of the artist, courtesy Greene Naftali, New York

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