

WHITNEY

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PRESS RELEASE

MARCELA GUERRERO AND DREW SAWYER WILL CURATE THE 2026 WHITNEY BIENNIAL



Whitney Biennial 2024: *Even Better Than the Real Thing*, in its final days on view through August 11, features the work of 71 artists and collectives working across media and disciplines.

New York, NY, August 6, 2024 – The Whitney Museum of American Art announces that the next Whitney Biennial will be co-organized by Museum curators Marcela Guerrero and Drew Sawyer. Guerrero, the DeMartini Family Curator, and Sawyer, the Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, will lead the development of the eighty-second edition of the Museum’s landmark exhibition series, set to open in spring 2026.

“As the 2024 Biennial draws to a close, we’re delighted to pass the baton to another superb team of Whitney curators in anticipation of the 2026 edition,” remarked Scott Rothkopf, Alice

Pratt Brown Director. “As much as the Biennial is a showcase of current artistic talents, it is also a platform for visionary curators like Marcela and Drew. The Biennial may open every two years, but it is ‘always on’ at the Whitney, helping to shape how we think about our broader artistic program, our collection, our ways of working with artists, and role in our community and beyond.”

“I’m thrilled to announce this curatorial partnership between two exceptional Whitney colleagues,” said Kim Conaty, the Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator at Whitney Museum. “In their years of experience at the Whitney and other prominent institutions, Marcela and Drew have established themselves as leading curatorial voices in the field, innovative and rigorous exhibition makers, and dedicated collaborators with artists. Each is a renowned scholar who possesses the rare ability to bridge past and future in their work by bringing great curiosity, care, and imagination to the space of artistic practice today. We can’t wait to see what they create together.”

A constellation of the most relevant art and ideas of our time, the Whitney Biennial is a showcase of contemporary artists working across media and disciplines, representing evolving notions of American art. Established by the Museum’s founder, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, in 1932, the Whitney Biennial is the longest-running survey of American art. More than 3,600 artists have participated to date, including Jean-Michel Basquiat, Lynda Benglis, Louise Bourgeois, Frank Bowling, Mark Bradford, Alexander Calder, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Raven Chacon, Ellen Gallagher, Jeffrey Gibson, Nan Goldin, Renee Green, Wade Guyton, Rachel Harrison, Jenny Holzer, Edward Hopper, Madeleine Hunt-Ehrlich, Joan Jonas, Ellsworth Kelly, Mike Kelley, Willem de Kooning, Barbara Kruger, Pope. L, Jacob Lawrence, Carolyn Lazard, Zoe Leonard, Roy Lichtenstein, Glenn Ligon, Agnes Martin, Daniel Joseph Martinez, Julie Mehretu, Sarah Michelson, Joan Mitchell, Tiona Nekkia McClodden, Georgia O’Keeffe, Claes Oldenburg, Mary Lovelace O’Neal, Laura Owens, Jackson Pollock, Postcommodity, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Rauschenberg, Cindy Sherman, Lorna Simpson, Rose B. Simpson, Martine Syms, Wu Tsang, Cy Twombly, Kara Walker, Andy Warhol, and David Wojnarowicz.

The early Biennials were organized by medium, with painting alternating with sculpture and works on paper. Starting in 1937, the Museum shifted to yearly exhibitions called Annuals. The current format, a survey show of work in all media occurring every two years, has been in place since 1973.

Whitney Biennial 2024: Even Better Than the Real Thing, on view through August 11, 2024, is organized by two Whitney curators, Chrissie Iles and Meg Onli, and features the work of 71 artists and collectives, working across media and disciplines. Presented throughout most of the Museum’s gallery spaces as well as a robust series of film and performance programs available at the Museum and online, the 2024 Biennial focuses on notions of “the real.” This examination of reality is highlighted through various throughlines and connections between artists, material, and ideas and acknowledges that today, society is at a critical inflection point. This crucial moment has been brought on by the introduction of machine learning models to daily life and

media, including the use of artificial intelligence, society's complex relationship to the body, the fluidity of identity, and the precariousness of the natural world.

About the Biennial 2026 Curators

Marcela Guerrero has worked at the Whitney for seven years and was the Museum's first curator to specialize in Latinx art. She currently serves as the DeMartini Family Curator and has curated landmark exhibitions like *no existe un mundo poshuracán: Puerto Rican Art in the Wake of Hurricane María*, in 2022. This exhibition explored the impact of the devastating storm on contemporary Puerto Rican art and was the first survey of Puerto Rican art at a major U.S. art museum in fifty years. Guerrero has also co-curated *Ilana Savdie: Radical Contractions* (2023), was part of the curatorial team that organized *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945* (2020), and curated *Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture*, a 2018 exhibition that featured the work of seven emerging Latinx artists.

On November 1, 2024, *Shifting Landscapes*, Guerrero's latest exhibition, co-curated with Jennie Goldstein, Jennifer Rubio Associate Curator of the Collection, Roxanne Smith, Senior Curatorial Assistant, and Angelica Arbelaez, Rubio Butterfield Family Fellow, will open at the Whitney. *Shifting Landscapes* explores how evolving political, ecological, and social issues motivate artists' representations of the world around them. While the art historical genre of landscape has long been associated with picturesque vistas and documentary accounts of place, the artworks gathered in this exhibition suggest a more expansive interpretation. Featuring 120 works by more than eighty artists, drawn from the Whitney's collection—including Firelei Báez, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jane Dickson, Gordon Matta-Clark, Amalia Mesa-Bains, and Purvis Young—*Shifting Landscapes* depicts the effects of industrialization on the environment, grapples with the impact of geopolitical borders, and gives shape to imagined spaces as a way of destabilizing the concept of a “natural” world.

Guerrero is responsible for many major acquisitions of work by prominent Latinx artists to the Whitney's collection, including Laura Aguilar, Patrick Martinez, and Freddy Rodriguez. She has also been instrumental in the Museum's digital and on-site Spanish-language Initiatives.

Prior to the Whitney, Guerrero served as a Curatorial Fellow at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, from 2014 to 2017. At the Hammer, she was involved in the much-lauded exhibition *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985*, organized as part of the Getty Foundation's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA initiative, and guest-curated by Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Andrea Giunta. Before joining the Hammer, she worked in the Latin American and Latino art department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where she served as Research Coordinator for the International Center for the Arts of the Americas. Born and raised in Puerto Rico and now a Brooklyn resident, Guerrero holds a Ph.D. in art history from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Drew Sawyer joined the Whitney Museum in July 2023, as the Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography. Sawyer oversees the Museum's collection of photography from 1900 to the present and leads its photography acquisition committee.

On August 24, 2024, Sawyer's first exhibition at the Whitney, *Mark Armijo McKnight: Decreation*, opens to the public. Featuring new black-and-white photographs, film, and sculpture by Mark Armijo McKnight (b. 1984, Los Angeles, California; lives in New York, New York), this exhibition, the artist's first solo museum show, focuses on his ongoing body of work, "Decreation." Originating from a concept by the French philosopher, activist, and mystic Simone Weil (1909–1943) that describes an intentional undoing of the self, Armijo McKnight explores this through 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.

An accomplished curator and art historian, Sawyer has focused on photography of the 1930s and 1970s, as well as queer art histories and contemporary practices in the United States throughout his career. Prior to the Whitney, Sawyer served as the Phillip and Edith Leonian Curator at the Brooklyn Museum, where he organized exhibitions like *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines* (2023), the first in-depth exploration of the intersection of zines and contemporary art practices in North America. Throughout his career, Sawyer has curated or co-curated notable exhibitions, including *Suneil Sanzgiri: Here the Earth Grows Gold* (2023); *Jimmy DeSana: Submission* (2022); *John Edmonds: A Sidelong Glance* (2020); *Garry Winogrand: Color* (2019); *Liz Johnson Artur: Dusha* (2019); *Art after Stonewall, 1969–1989* (2019); *Isaac Julien: Looking for Langston* (2018); *Allan Sekula: Aerospace Folktales and Other Stories* (2017); *Lucy Raven: Low Relief* (2016); and *'Social Forces Visualized': Photography and Scientific Charity, 1900–1920* (2011), among others.

Sawyer has also taught at Columbia University, Yale School of Art, and the Image Text Ithaca MFA Program and regularly contributes to scholarly volumes, exhibition catalogues, journals, and magazines. He has organized and participated in talks with artists Khalik Allah, John Edmonds, Liz Johnson Artur, Mark Armijo McKnight, Carlos Motta, Elle Perez, Sasha Phyers-Burgess, Laurie Simmons, Ming Smith, and others. In 2017, he co-organized with the art historian Sarah Miller a two-day symposium, "Reinventing Documentary Photography in the 1970s," which featured contributions from art historians, artists, and curators. Sawyer received a B.A. in Art History and Economics from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and a Ph.D. in Art History from Columbia University.

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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](#).

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. The Museum offers FREE admission and special programming for visitors of all ages every Friday evening from 5–10 pm and on the second Sunday of every month.

Image credit:

Marcela Guerrero and Drew Sawyer. Photograph by Bryan Derballa

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