

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum
of American Art
Press Office

99 Gansevoort Street
New York, NY 10014

pressoffice@whitney.org
(212) 570-3633

PRESS RELEASE

THE WHITNEY PRESENTS THE NEW YORK DEBUT OF AMY SHERALD'S FIRST MAJOR MUSEUM SURVEY



Amy Sherald: American Sublime, the artist's first New York museum solo exhibition, arrives at the Whitney in Spring 2025 and explores her career to date, signature portrait style, and depictions of American life.

New York, NY, December 16, 2024 — The Whitney Museum of American Art will present [Amy Sherald: American Sublime](#), the artist's debut solo exhibition at a New York museum and the most comprehensive showing of her work. Opening to the public on April 9, 2025, *American Sublime* considers Amy Sherald's powerful impact on contemporary art and culture, bringing together almost fifty paintings spanning her career from 2007 to the present. This exhibition positions Sherald within the art historical tradition of American realism and figuration. In her paintings, she privileges Black Americans as her subjects, depicting everyday people and foregrounding a population often unseen or underrepresented in art history. The exhibition features early works, never or rarely seen by the public, and new work created specifically for the exhibition, along with iconic portraits of First Lady Michelle Obama and Breonna Taylor—two of the most recognizable and significant paintings made by an American artist in recent years.

Sherald places her work within the lineage of American realism and portraiture, alongside artists like Robert Henri, Edward Hopper, Alice Neel, and Andrew Wyeth—all represented in the Whitney Museum's collection. The early American realists sought to capture the ethos of American places and people. However, there is an evident absence of Black Americans in these

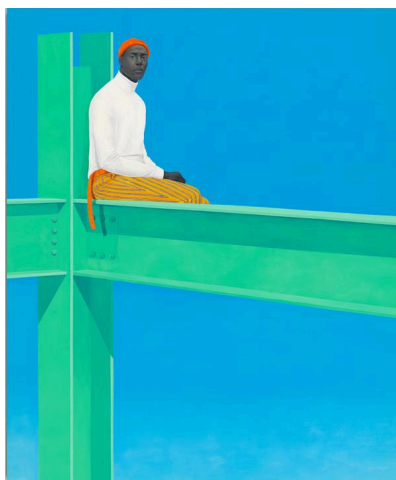
representations. Deeply committed to expanding notions of American identity, Sherald's compositions center her subjects, inviting viewers to meet them eye to eye and empathetically step into their imagined worlds. Employing props and iconography—a tractor, a beach ball, the American flag, a toy pony, or a teacup—the artist crafts universally relatable narratives, illuminating her subjects' idiosyncrasies and their unique life experiences. By including symbols that resonate with common ideas of American identity and history, these portraits offer a more complete view of the complexity of twenty-first-century American life. The resulting body of work attests to the multiple facets of American identity, reinforcing Sherald's profound belief that "images can change the world."

"It is a great honor to work with Amy Sherald, one of the most compelling, generous, and impactful artists of our time," said Rujeko Hockley, Arnhold Associate Curator at the Whitney Museum. "Her unwavering dedication and commitment to what she has called the 'wonder of what it is to be a Black American' is deeply felt, and I am thrilled to share her visionary work with our audiences."

"*American Sublime* is a salve," said artist Amy Sherald. "A call to remember our shared humanity and an insistence on being seen."

"Few contemporary artists make images as gripping and indelible as Amy Sherald. Each of her paintings distills the essence of an individual while also conveying a broad sense of humanity," said Scott Rothkopf, the Whitney's Alice Pratt Brown Director. "Over the years that I've been in dialogue with Amy, we've visited works in the Whitney's collection by Paul Cadmus, Barkley Henricks, and Edward Hopper, among so many American painters whose legacy she both inherits and extends. I can think of no better home for this important exhibition, which we're honored to present."

Amy Sherald: American Sublime will be on view April 9–August 2025 at the Whitney Museum. The Whitney presentation of this exhibition is organized by Rujeko Hockley, Arnhold Associate Curator, with David Lisbon, curatorial assistant. *Amy Sherald: American Sublime* is organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) and curated by Sarah Roberts, the former Andrew W. Mellon Curator and Head of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA.



Exhibition Overview – Amy Sherald: American Sublime

American Sublime explores the work of one of the most preeminent artists of our time. Arranged chronologically, the exhibition begins with Amy Sherald's poetic early portraits and leads into the distinct and striking figure paintings for which she is best known. In her intentional privileging of Black Americans as her subjects, Sherald tells stories of a population underrepresented in traditional portraiture. Influenced by her childhood fascination with family photographs—a black-and-white portrait of her grandmother in particular—Sherald aims to portray Black people in quiet, authentic moments. She chooses subjects who vary in age, gender, and identity, placing them in scenes from everyday life to share perspectives she wants to see depicted in the world.

Sherald identifies as an American realist. She tells stories of the American experience through her paintings, much like artists Edward Hopper and Andrew Wyeth. It wasn't until she saw a painting with a Black person in it at a museum as a child that she realized she hadn't yet seen herself represented in art history—a pivotal moment that continues to impact her career. Sherald's portraits contribute new narratives to the collective American story by recasting figures in archetypal American roles, like a cowboy, a beauty queen, or a farmer. While Sherald acknowledges the political dimension of her work, she wants her impact to reach beyond that. Sherald invites viewers to challenge established preconceptions about race and engage with the universal stories told in her portraits, revealing the richness and complexity of humanity. Her signature gray palette for skin tones deemphasizes the focus on race, expanding her subjects' narratives and demonstrating that there is more to an individual than can be contained in a single image or facet of their identity.

Photography is an important element of Sherald's creative process, serving as her sketchbook and the foundation for her compositions. With the exception of her two commissioned portraits of First Lady Michelle Obama and Breonna Taylor, the artist selects each sitter based on their inherent qualities, such as poise, style, or wit—what she calls their “ineffable spark.” During photoshoots, Sherald allows her models to pose organically, allowing for the synergy to build between them so that she can authentically capture their essence. She curates each scene and styles the subjects in clothing that speaks to the narrative she wishes to craft, creating a sense of magical realism. In titling her paintings, Sherald often draws inspiration from Black women writers and poets like Toni Morrison and Lucille Clifton, reinterpreting their poetry to develop different contexts around the interior worlds of her subjects. Through her explorations, Sherald redefines common beliefs about American identity, weaving a broader visual story of history and belonging. Ultimately, she portrays everyday Black people as individuals, not in contention or inherently politicized, but simply existing.

In addition to the paintings on view in the galleries, Sherald will present work on the facade of the Horatio Street building across from the Museum.

About the Artist

Born in Columbus, Georgia, and now based in the New York City area, Amy Sherald (b. 1973) documents contemporary African American experience in the United States through arresting, intimate portraits. Sherald engages with the history of photography and portraiture, inviting

viewers to participate in a more complex debate about accepted notions of race and representation, and to situate Black life in American art.

Sherald received her MFA in painting from the Maryland Institute College of Art and her BA in painting from Clark Atlanta University. In 2016, Sherald was the first woman and first African American to ever receive the grand prize in the Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition from the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.; she also received the 2017 Anonymous Was A Woman Award; and the Smithsonian Ingenuity Award, the Pollock Prize for Creativity, and the David C. Driskell Prize in 2018. In 2018, Sherald was also selected by First Lady Michelle Obama to paint her portrait as an official commission for the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Sherald's work is held in public collections such as the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; Embassy of the United States, Dakar, Senegal; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); Museum of Fine Arts Boston; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA); Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C.; Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C.; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Exhibition Tickets

Starting in winter 2025, visitors can purchase timed tickets for *Amy Sherald: American Sublime*, opening April 9, 2025. More [ticketing information](#) will be available on the Museum's website.

Press Preview

The Whitney Museum will host a press preview on Wednesday, April 2, 10 am–2 pm. [RSVP to the press preview by filling out this form](#). A photography and broadcast hour will start at 9 am and requires advance registration. Please reach out to pressoffice@whitney.org with any questions about the photography and broadcast hour. Remarks will begin at 10:30 am.

Catalogue

Amy Sherald: American Sublime is accompanied by a publication—the artist's first comprehensive monograph—representing the broad sweep of Sherald's painting practice and her key influences and inspirations. Contributors include exhibition curator Sarah Roberts, Elizabeth Alexander, Dario Calmese, Rhea Combs, and Deborah Willis. *Amy Sherald: American Sublime* is published by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in association with Yale University Press. Copies are available for purchase online and in the Whitney Shop (\$45.00).

Free Public Programs

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

PRESS CONTACT

For press materials and image requests, please visit our press site at whitney.org/press or contact:

Meghan Ferrucci, Publicist

Whitney Museum of American Art

(212) 671-8346

Meghan_Ferrucci@whitney.org

Whitney Press Office

whitney.org/press

(212) 570-3633

pressoffice@whitney.org

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

Amy Sherald: American Sublime is sponsored by

BANK OF AMERICA 

 **DELTA**

Generous support is provided by Judy Hart Angelo, Agnes Gund, and the Kapadia Equity Fund.

Significant support is provided by the Girlfriend Fund.

Additional support is provided by Alice and Manu Sareen, and George Wells and Manfred Rantner.

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](#).

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 twenty-five 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 credits:

Amy Sherald, *Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama*, 2018. Oil on linen, 72 1/8 × 60 1/8 × 2.5 in. (183.1 × 152.718 × 6.3 cm). National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. The National Portrait Gallery is grateful to the following lead donors for their support of the Obama portraits: Kate Capshaw and Steven Spielberg; Judith Kern and Kent Whealy; Tommie L. Pegues and Donald A. Capoccia. Courtesy of the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery

Amy Sherald, *If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 130 × 108 × 2 1/2 in. (330.2 × 274.3 × 6.4 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee, Sascha S. Bauer, Jack Cayre, Nancy Carrington Crown, Nancy Poses, Laura Rapp, and Elizabeth Redleaf 2020.148. © Amy Sherald

Amy Sherald, *What’s precious inside of him does not care to be known by the mind in ways that diminish its presence (All American)*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 54 × 43 × 2.5 in. (137.16 × 109.22 × 6.35 cm). Private collection, courtesy Monique Meloche Gallery. © Amy Sherald. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photograph by Joseph Hyde

Amy Sherald, *Precious Jewels by the Sea*, 2019, oil on linen, 120 × 108 × 2 1/2 in. (304.8 × 274.32 × 6.355 cm). Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas. © Amy Sherald. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photograph by Joseph Hyde

###