

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum
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PRESS RELEASE



Laura Poitras (b. 1964), Laura Poitras filming the NSA Utah Data Repository construction in 2011. Photograph by Conor Provenzano

Laura Poitras's first solo museum exhibition opens February 5 at the Whitney, adding a new chapter in her work to the post-9/11 world

NOVEMBER 13, NEW YORK—This winter, the Whitney Museum of American Art will debut *Laura Poitras: Astro Noise*, the first solo museum exhibition by artist, filmmaker, and journalist Laura Poitras. On view from February 5 through May 1, 2016, this immersive installation of new work builds on topics important to Poitras, including mass surveillance, the war on terror, the U.S. drone program, Guantánamo Bay Prison, occupation, and torture. Some of these issues have been investigated in films, including *CITIZENFOUR*, which won the 2015 Academy Award for Best Documentary, and in her reporting, which was awarded a 2014 Pulitzer Prize. The exhibition is organized by, Whitney Curator and Curator of Performance, Jay Sanders.

“Over the course of her career, Laura Poitras has fearlessly created work of national and global importance, and uncompromising integrity. With *Astro Noise*, she tackles some of the most pressing issues of our time in profound and innovative ways, and the Whitney is proud to provide her a space in which she can continue to explore her ideas in new mediums,” said Adam D. Weinberg, the Whitney’s Alice Pratt Brown director.

The title, *Astro Noise*, refers to the faint background disturbance of thermal radiation left over from the Big Bang and is the name Edward Snowden gave to an encrypted file containing evidence of mass surveillance by the National Security Agency that he shared with Poitras in 2013. The Snowden archive partially inspired Poitras’s presentation at the Whitney.

For the exhibition, Poitras is creating an interrelated series of installations in the Whitney’s eighth-floor Hurst Family Galleries. The exhibition expands on her project to document post-9/11 America, engaging visitors in formats outside her non-fiction filmmaking. Instead she will create immersive environments that incorporate documentary footage, architectural interventions, primary documents, and narrative structures to invite visitors to interact with the material in strikingly intimate and direct ways.

“I very much like the idea of creating a space that challenges the viewer and asks them to make decisions. My films are about these questions—what do people do when confronted with choices and risks,” Poitras

explains. “By asking people to lie down and gaze upward in *Bed Down Location*, for example, I want them to enter an empathetic space to imagine drone warfare. In another piece, there is both the seduction of shafts of light to look into, but also the choreography of bodies in the space, bodies facing walls and the things you associate with that, like firing squads. I’m interested in making things hard to see, just like the deep state is hard to see.”

This exhibition continues the Museum’s involvement with Poitras, whose work was included in the 2012 Whitney Biennial. Sanders, who co-organized the 2012 Biennial, said, “Laura Poitras compels us to rethink the potential for an artist to explore and convey the nature of power and to affect understanding and responsibility in the larger world. *Astro Noise* sees her reconsidering the moving image toward other ways of addressing and engaging an audience, presenting the culture and mechanisms of surveillance and the war on terror in a very different way, through structured visual experiences that provide much more than information and compel an audience to enter into a visceral experience.”

About the Catalogue

Eschewing a traditional exhibition catalogue, Laura Poitras and Jay Sanders are editing a collection of original work that will be published in conjunction with the exhibition, *Astro Noise: A Survival Guide to Living Under Total Surveillance*. This series of contributions extends discourse surrounding the exhibition beyond both journalism and art writing. The aim of the book is to create an imaginative yet useful field guide of critical perspectives and responses to contemporary political reality. Contributors include Ai Weiwei, Jacob Appelbaum, Lakhdar Boumediene, Kate Crawford, Alex Danchev, Cory Doctorow, Dave Eggers, Jill Magid, Trevor Paglen, Edward Snowden, and Hito Steyerl.

Public Programming

A dynamic schedule of public programs will offer opportunities for audiences to explore the exhibition’s themes through hands-on workshops in subjects such as encryption; and public conversations with notable voices in the fields of media, law, technology, film, and art. These events are being produced collaboratively with the artist’s studio Praxis Films, Freedom of the Press Foundation, and others. A screening series devoted to experimental documentary and political filmmaking will examine Poitras’s historical precursors and influences and will feature films by Emile de Antonio, Frederick Wiseman, Alexander Kluge, and Andy Warhol, among others.

About Laura Poitras

Laura Poitras is a filmmaker, journalist, and artist. *CITIZENFOUR*, the third installment of her post-9/11 Trilogy, won an Academy Award for Best Documentary, along with awards from the British Film Academy, Independent Spirit Awards, Director’s Guild of America, Cinema Eye Honors, and others. Part one of the trilogy, *MY COUNTRY, MY COUNTRY*, about the U.S. occupation of Iraq, was nominated for an Academy Award. Part two, *THE OATH*, focused on Guantanamo and the war on terror, and was nominated for two Emmy awards. She has received many honors for her work, including a MacArthur Fellowship, Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Peabody Award. She has attended the Sundance Institute Documentary Labs as both a Fellow and Creative Advisor.

Her reporting on NSA mass surveillance based on Snowden’s disclosures won the George Polk Award for national security journalism, and shared in the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. She has taught filmmaking at Yale and Duke Universities, and is on the board of the Freedom of the Press Foundation.

Along with AJ Schnack and Charlotte Cook, she is co-creator of *Field of Vision*, a visual journalism film unit.

Exhibition Support

Major support is provided by The Andy Warhol 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 at a time 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 more than eighty 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 themselves, 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.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

<i>The Whitney’s Collection</i>	Ongoing
<i>Jared Madere</i>	Through–Jan 3, 2016
<i>Archibald Motley: Jazz Age Modernist</i>	Through–Jan 17, 2016
<i>Frank Stella: A Retrospective</i>	Through–Feb 7, 2016
<i>Rachel Rose: Everything and More</i>	Through–Feb 7, 2016
<i>Collected by Thea Westreich Wagner and Ethan Wagner</i>	Nov 20, 2015–Mar 6, 2016
<i>Laura Poitras: Astro Noise</i>	Feb 5–May 1, 2016
<i>Stuart Davis: In Full Swing</i>	June 10–Sept 25, 2016
<i>Carmen Herrera</i>	Fall 2016
<i>Sophia Al-Maria</i>	Summer 2016
<i>David Wojnarowicz</i>	Fall 2016/Winter 2017
<i>Whitney Biennial</i>	Spring 2017

The Whitney Museum is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Museum hours are: Monday, Wednesday, and Sunday from 10:30 am to 6 pm, Thursday through Saturday from 10:30 am to 10 pm, closed Tuesday. General admission: \$22. Full-time students and 65 & over: \$18. Visitors under 18 and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.

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