

WHITNEY

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PRESS RELEASE



Photograph by Marco Anelli

Whitney Opens New Building with Site-Specific Project, *Mary Heilmann: Sunset*

NEW YORK, April 23, 2015—To coincide with the opening of its new downtown home in Manhattan's Meatpacking District on May 1, the Whitney Museum of American Art has commissioned Mary Heilmann to create a site-specific installation for its largest outdoor gallery, located on the building's fifth floor. *Mary Heilmann: Sunset* comprises three main components: a pair of shocking pink geometric forms climbing the Museum's north facade, a group of forty sculptural chairs to be used by visitors, and a video Heilmann shot around the Museum's new neighborhood in 1982.

Heilmann (born 1940) became known in the 1970s for vibrant paintings that married taut abstract forms with quivering line and vivid color. For more than thirty years she has intermittently explored a stair-step motif brushed within rectangular fields or expressed through irregularly shaped canvases, which happen to rhyme with the dramatic setbacks and grid lines of the Whitney's new building. This serendipitous connection inspired Heilmann to enlarge a detail of one such painting and print it digitally on two large panels that turn the building itself into her canvas and tweak its sharp geometries. Extending more than fifty feet up the facade, the panels are visible from the High Line, the streets to the north, and the West Side Highway.

Heilmann's intervention extends to a group of sculptural chairs scattered like a shower of confetti across the terrace. Adapted from furniture she has displayed in homes and exhibitions, the chairs will provide visitors with a space to lounge and chat with one another while taking in the majestic views of the Hudson River to the west and the Manhattan skyline. Looking down from the Museum's higher terraces, the installation will resemble a playful abstract composition on the paved floor below. "Museums are places to hang out," Heilmann remarked, a social function she also associates with older New York rooftops.

Donna De Salvo, the Museum's Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Programs, commented, "We designed our outdoor galleries to inspire artists to work in ambitious ways that we could never accommodate before. For the opening of the museum, our hope was to create a setting that would allow visitors to relax and enjoy the truly transcendent views of the city and the water beyond, as well as one another. Mary really grasped the spirit of our invitation and exceeded all our expectations. We're honored that such an important artist would inaugurate our largest outdoor terrace with an installation so complex yet exuberant."

The final component of the installation is a large outdoor monitor that will screen the debut of Heilmann's video *Swan Song*, which she made in 1982 with artist Kembra Pfahler. Heilmann moved to Manhattan's west side waterfront in 1977 and documented the neighborhood, capturing the light over the Hudson River, the destruction of the former West Side Highway, and the warehouses that dotted the ever-changing area. This work creates a poignant counterpoint to the festive atmosphere created by the chairs, and offers viewers a glimpse back in time of the neighborhood the Whitney now calls home.

Mary Heilmann: Sunset is organized by Scott Rothkopf, Nancy and Steve Crown Family Curator and Associate Director of Programs.

About Mary Heilmann

Mary Heilmann (born 1940) is primarily known for an important body of abstract paintings that she has been making since the late 1960s. She studied literature and painting at the University of California, Santa Barbara, before earning an M.A. at the University of California, Berkeley. Heilmann has also worked across various media, including sculpture, ceramics, and furniture. She received major exhibitions at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2015); Parrish Museum of Art, Southampton, New York (2009); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2008); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2008); and Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California (2007), among others. Her work has appeared in three Whitney Biennial exhibitions (1972, 1989, and 2008) and is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, and Orange County Museum of Art. Heilmann has lived and worked in New York since 1968.

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.

Sponsorship

The inauguration of the Fifth Floor Outdoor Gallery is sponsored by



Mary Heilmann: Sunset is part of Outside the Box programming which is supported by a generous endowment from The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation.

Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

<i>America Is Hard to See</i>	May 1–Sept 27, 2015
<i>Archibald Motley: Jazz Age Modernist</i>	Oct 2, 2015–Jan 17, 2016
<i>Jared Madere</i>	Oct 16, 2015–Jan 3, 2016
<i>Frank Stella</i>	Oct 30, 2015–Feb 7, 2016
<i>Rachel Rose</i>	Oct 30–Feb 7, 2016
<i>The Westreich/Wagner Collection</i>	Nov 20, 2015–Mar 6, 2016
<i>Laura Poitras</i>	Feb 5–May 15, 2016
<i>In Full Swing: The Art of Stuart Davis</i>	Summer/Fall 2016
<i>Carmen Herrera</i>	Fall 2016
<i>David Wojnarowicz</i>	Fall 2016/Winter 2017
<i>Sophia Al-Maria</i>	2016
<i>Whitney Biennial</i>	Spring 2017