

Whitney Museum of American Art

Intro Text for *Kevin Beasley: A view of a landscape*

8th Floor

Dec 15 – Mar 10, 2018

Curatorial team: Christopher Y. Lew, Nancy and Fred Poses Curator, with Ambika Trasi, curatorial assistant

Kevin Beasley: A view of a landscape

In this ambitious exhibition, Kevin Beasley (b. 1985) engages with the modern history of the American South by way of an electric cotton gin motor. In operation from 1940 to 1973 in Maplesville, Alabama, this motor powered a gin that separated cotton seeds from fiber. Here, the New York-based artist, who was raised in the South and influenced by the Virginia countryside where his family has owned land for generations, has literally and metaphorically given voice to a one-ton machine from the region, creating a sonic landscape in which visitors can listen and wander.

Sight and sound are separated into distinct experiences: nearby, three large-scale “slab” sculptures composed of a range of materials including raw cotton sourced near Beasley’s family property in Virginia, silently make reference to a narrative arc centered around the motor, offering a pictorial language that recounts Beasley’s experiences and thoughts on history, labor, and race; in one gallery the motor runs inside a soundproof chamber; in the adjacent room the sounds it generates are processed to produce a composition of the artist’s design. During live performances in the galleries, the motor’s sounds will be manipulated by Beasley and other artists whom he has invited to create performances.

Drawn to the motor’s material presence as well as to its historical significance, Beasley initially acquired and displayed it over six years ago, unaltered. He imagined the motor as a kind of witness to some of the most meaningful events of the twentieth century, including the civil rights movement. It had been used on an Alabama farm just thirty miles from Selma, a major site in the struggle for racial equality, especially voting rights. Motors like this one also played a role in the mechanization of cotton farming and agribusiness in the middle of the twentieth century, which contributed to migration of Black families to Northern cities. By drawing connections across time and geography, *A view of a landscape* makes palpable the legacies of the South and the different histories that have helped shape this country.

Live performances are scheduled throughout the run of this exhibition:

For performance times and ticketing information, please visit whitney.org/Exhibitions/KevinBeasley.

Saturday, January 12

Kevin Beasley with Taja Cheek, multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, and vocalist

Saturday, January 26

Eli Keszler, artist, composer, and percussionist

Saturday, February 16

Kevin Beasley

Saturday, March 2

Jlin, electronic musician and producer