



ALLISON JANA E HAMILTON

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY



BIOGRAPHY

Throughout her practice, Allison Janae Hamilton (b. 1984; Lexington, KY) draws on her upbringing in the rural American South, weaving themes of environmental justice, folklore, mythology, and the contemporary legacies of colonization and enslavement into sculpture, photography, and video. Layering plant matter, landscape and figurative imagery, complex sounds, and animal remains throughout her work, Hamilton creates immersive spaces that consider notions of Americana and our relationships to land in the face of a changing climate, particularly in the rural American South.

Born in Kentucky and raised in Florida, Hamilton also often visited her maternal family's farm and homestead in the rural flatlands of western Tennessee. Her relationship with these places forms the cornerstone of her practice—particularly her interest in landscape. In Hamilton's treatment of land, the natural environment is the central protagonist—rather than a backdrop—in the unfolding of historic and contemporary narratives. Blending land-centered folklore and personal family narratives, she engages haunting—yet epic—mythologies that address the social and political concerns of today's changing southern terrain, including land loss, environmental justice, climate change, and sustainability. Each work contains narratives pieced together from folktales, hunting and farming rituals, African-American nature writing, and Baptist hymns. Drawing from all of these references, she envisions what an epic myth looks and feels like in rural terrain.



Hamilton's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, GA; the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA; and Atlanta Contemporary, GA. Her work, *Love is like the sea...* (2023) is currently on view at the Poydras Corridor Sculpture Exhibition presented by the Helis Foundation in New Orleans, LA. In 2020, Creative Time commissioned Hamilton to produce a solo project, *Waters of a Lower Register*, for Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York. Select group exhibitions that featured Hamilton's work include *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration* at the Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS; Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; the Brooklyn Museum, NY; and the California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA; *there is this We*, Sculpture Milwaukee, WI; *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse*, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA; *Shifting Horizons*, Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV; *Enunciated Life*, California African Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA; *More, More, More*, TANK Shanghai, China; and *Indicators: Artists on Climate Change*, Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, NY. Hamilton's work is held in numerous public collections, including the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth University, Hanover, NH; The Menil Collection, Houston, TX; Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV; Speed Museum of Art, Louisville, KY; and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY, among others. Hamilton has participated in a range of fellowships and residencies, including at the Whitney Independent Study Program, New York, NY; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; and Fundación Botín, Santander, Spain. She is the recipient of the Creative Capital Award and the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant. Hamilton holds a PhD in American Studies from New York University and an MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University. She lives and works in New York, NY.



INSTALLATION VIEW, *LOVE IS LIKE THE SEA...* (2023)
POYDRAS CORRIDOR SCULPTURE EXHIBITION PRESENTED BY THE HELIS FOUNDATION, NEW ORLEANS, LA
ONGOING



LOVE IS LIKE THE SEA..., 2023

Love is like the sea...(2023) takes its title from Zora Neal Hurston's 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, set against the backdrop of the devastating Okeechobee Hurricane of 1928. The monumental sculpture—three columns of stacked tambourine forms cast in bronze—addresses the intersection of environmental crisis and cultural history. Hamilton's tambourine towers have, since 2014, explored these connections through the use of discarded tambourines, natural materials, and other found elements. *Love is like the sea...* is the first of Hamilton's tambourine towers constructed in bronze, representing a new chapter in her longstanding work with outdoor sculpture.

Allison Janae Hamilton

Love is like the sea..., 2023

Bronze

Three columns: 12 feet, 10 feet, 5.5 feet

Base: 26 x 59 x 33 feet

Unique within a series

(AJH.19665)



INSTALLATION VIEW, *HUMANE ECOLOGY: EIGHT POSITIONS*
JULY 15 – OCTOBER 29, 2023
CLARK ART INSTITUTE, WILLIAMSTOWN, MA



WHITE OUROBOROS I & II, 2023

Frozen in the act of consuming themselves, Hamilton's twin alligator sculptures mimic the ouroboros—an ancient symbol of a serpent locked in an endless cycle of death and rebirth. The artist often includes alligators in her work, playing on their multiple associations in the South: as predator and prey, as mythological figures, or as reminders of racialized violence—based on a legend that African American infants were once used as hunting lures. The incongruous setting of these animals in the Clark Art Institute's exhibition—set on the terrace outside the Lunder Center galleries, against a mountainous landscape—suggests a long voyage, as if they are climate migrants from a rapidly warming South. Environmental crises travel, the artist suggests, well beyond the southern Black communities that have long borne the brunt of them.



Allison Janae Hamilton

White Ouroboros I, 2023

ASA filament, paint, resin

8 1/2 x 44 1/2 x 36 1/2 inches

21.6 x 113 x 92.7 cm

Unique within a series

(AJH.19701)



Allison Janae Hamilton
White Ouroboros II, 2023
ASA filament, paint, resin
8 1/2 x 38 x 39 inches
21.6 x 96.5 x 99.1 cm
Unique within a series
(AJH.19700)



Allison Janae Hamilton

Garden Mask I, 2023

Vintage fencing mask, upholstery, wood flowers, resin

13 x 10 x 10 1/2 inches

33 x 25.4 x 26.7 cm

(AJH.20640)





Allison Janae Hamilton

Garden Mask II, 2023

Vintage fencing mask, upholstery, wooden flowers, dye, resin

13 x 9 1/2 x 10 1/2 inches

33 x 24.1 x 26.7 cm

(AJH.20641)



Allison Janae Hamilton

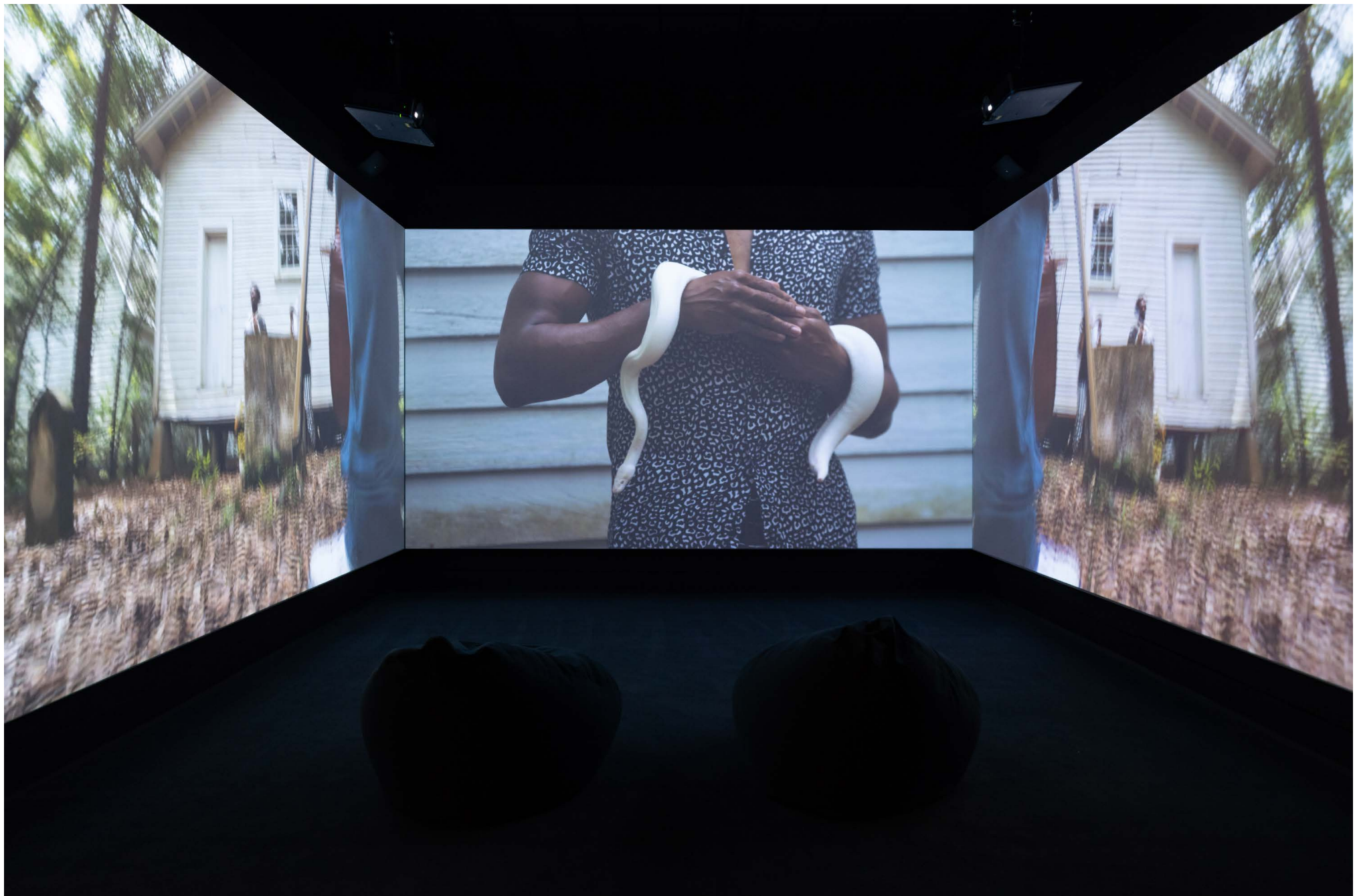
Garden Mask IV, 2023

Vintage fencing mask, wooden flowers, dye, resin

14 x 10 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches

35.6 x 26.7 x 24.1 cm

(AJH.20642)



INSTALLATION VIEW, *A MOVEMENT IN EVERY DIRECTION: LEGACIES OF THE GREAT MIGRATION*
MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM OF ART, JACKSON, MS
APRIL 9 – SEPTEMBER 11, 2022



Allison Janae Hamilton
A House Called Florida, 2022
Three-channel film installation
Total runtime: 34:46 minutes
Edition of 5
(AJH.19245)

WATCH FILM [HERE](#)



INSTALLATION VIEW, WACISSA
MIDNIGHT MOMENT – TIMES SQUARE ARTS, NEW YORK, NY
MARCH 27 – APRIL 24, 2021



Allison Janae Hamilton

Wacissa, 2019

Dimensions variable

Single-channel video projection

Total runtime: 22:14 minutes

Edition of 5 plus 2 AP

WATCH EXCERPT [HERE](#)





INSTALLATION VIEW, MORE, MORE, MORE
TANK SHANGHAI, SHANGHAI, CHINA
JULY 16, 2020 – JANUARY 31, 2021



INSTALLATION VIEW, *THE DIRTY SOUTH*
VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, RICHMOND, VA
MAY 22 – SEPTEMBER 6, 2021



INSTALLATION VIEW, *A ROMANCE OF PARADISE*
MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY
MARCH 27 – APRIL 24, 2021



INSTALLATION VIEW, *A ROMANCE OF PARADISE*
MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY
MARCH 27 – APRIL 24, 2021



Allison Janae Hamilton
Black River Under a Blue Sky, 2021
Archival pigment print
Image dimensions: 40 x 60 inches
101.6 x 152.4 cm
Edition of 5, with 2 AP
(AJH.18352)



Allison Janae Hamilton
Once Again Amid the Pine Trees, 2021
Archival pigment print
Image dimensions: 40 x 60 inches
101.6 x 152.4 cm
Edition of 5, with 2 AP
(AJH.18354)



Allison Janae Hamilton

A Pale Horse, 2021

Single-channel video projection

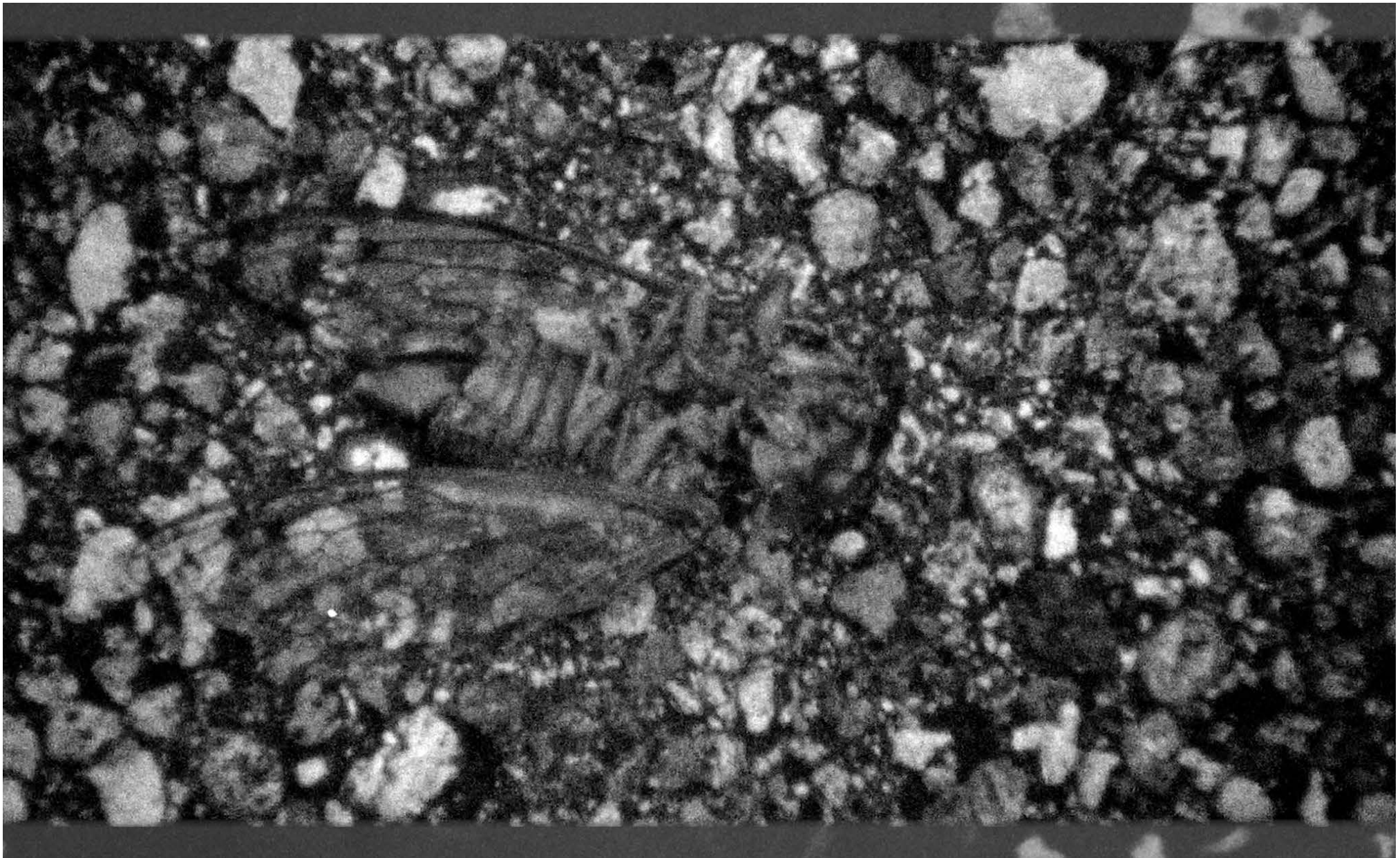
Total runtime: 3:02 minutes

Variable dimensions

Edition of 5, with 2 AP

(AJH.18351)

WATCH EXCERPT [HERE](#)



Allison Janae Hamilton

Lemon Tree, 2021

Single-channel video (8mm film)

Total runtime: 6:00 minutes

Variable dimensions

Edition of 3, with 2 AP

(AJH.18384)

WATCH EXCERPT [HERE](#)



Allison Janae Hamilton
Rooster Wire Mask, 2020
 Vintage fencing mask, rooster feathers
 13 x 13 x 13 inches
 33 x 33 x 33 cm
 (AJH.17838)



Allison Janae Hamilton
Full-Faced Flower Mask, 2020
 Vintage fencing mask, wood flowers
 13 x 10 x 10 inches
 33 x 25.4 x 25.4 cm
 (AJH.17830)



INSTALLATION VIEW, *WATERS OF A LOWER REGISTER*
CREATIVE TIME NEW YORK
DECEMBER 16 – 20, 2020

WATCH EXCERPT [HERE](#)



Allison Janae Hamilton

Waters of a Lower Register, 2020

Five-channel video

Total runtime: 13:42 minutes

Edition of 5, with 2 AP

(AJH.17967)

WATCH EXCERPT [HERE](#)



Allison Janae Hamilton
Floridawater II, 2019
Archival pigment print
Image dimensions: 24 x 36 inches
61 x 91.4 cm
Edition of 5, with 2 AP
(AJH.15792)



Allison Janae Hamilton
Floridawater IV, 2019
Archival pigment print
Image dimensions: 24 x 36 inches
61 x 91.4 cm
Edition of 5, with 2 AP
(AJH.15793)



Allison Janae Hamilton

Wakulla Cathedral, 2019

Single-channel video on monitor

Total runtime: 3:25 minutes

Edition of 3, with 2 AP

(AJH.17211)

WATCH EXCERPT HERE [HERE](#)



Allison Janae Hamilton

Three girls in sabal palm forest III, 2019

Archival pigment print

Image dimensions: 24 x 36 inches

61 x 91.4 cm

Edition of 5, with 2 AP

(AJH.16754)



INSTALLATION VIEW, *TRICKNOLOGY*
MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY, ASPEN, CO
JULY 26 – SEPTEMBER 9, 2019



Red Wolf, 2018
Two-channel video
Total runtime: 1:22 minutes
Edition of 3, with 2 AP
(AJH.15803)

WATCH EXCERPT [HERE](#)



INSTALLATION VIEW, MOOD: *STUDIO MUSEUM ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE 2018–2019*
MOMA PS1, QUEENS, NY
JUNE 9 – SEPTEMBER 8, 2019



Allison Janae Hamilton

Blackwater Creature II, 2019

Mixed media (Feathers, wood, hair, resin, metal)

13 x 62 x 90 inches

33 x 61 x 228.6 cm

(AJH.16765)



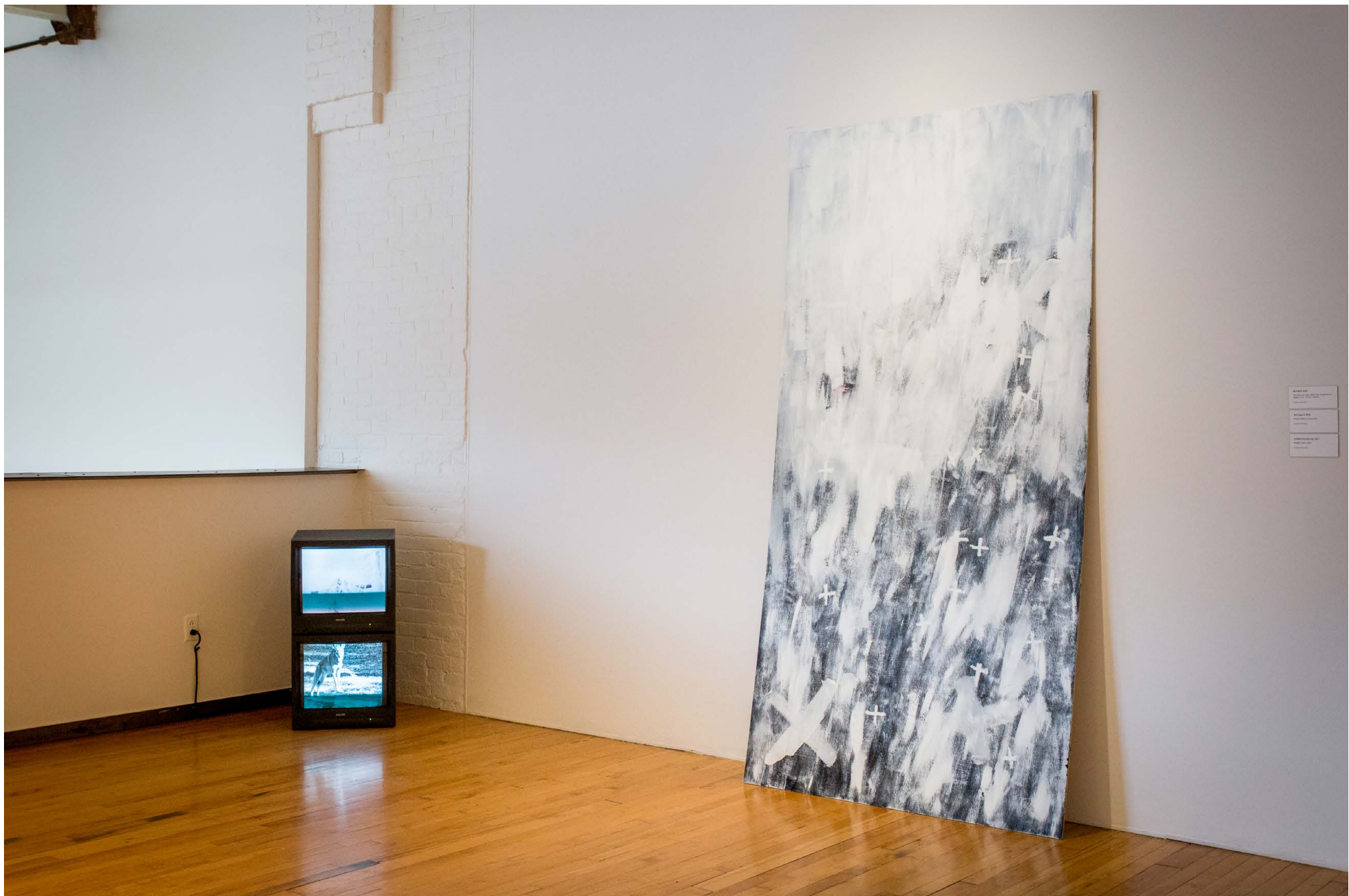
Allison Janae Hamilton
Yard Sign with White Feathers, 2019
Mixed media on panel
54 x 32 x 8 inches
137.2 x 81.3 x 20.3 cm
(AJH.16767)



INSTALLATION VIEW, ALLISON JANA E HAMILTON: *PITCH*
MASS MOCA, NORTH ADAMS, MA
MARCH 25, 2018 – MARCH 17, 2019



INSTALLATION VIEW, *ALLISON JANA E HAMILTON: PITCH*
MASS MOCA, NORTH ADAMS, MA
MARCH 25, 2018 – MARCH 17, 2019



INSTALLATION VIEW, *ALLISON JANAЕ HAMILTON: PITCH*
MASS MOCA, NORTH ADAMS, MA
MARCH 25, 2018 – MARCH 17, 2019



Allison Janae Hamilton

Gold Fencing Mask, 2019

Unique

Vintage fencing mask, upholstery tacks, resin

12 x 8 x 9 inches

30.5 x 20.3 x 22.9 cm

(AJH.17181)



Allison Janae Hamilton

Fencing Mask 10, 2018

Fencing masks, mixed media, unique

19 x 18 x 17 inches

48.3 x 45.7 x 43.2 cm

(AJH.15802)



Allison Janae Hamilton
Fencing mask 11, 2018
 Fencing mask, mixed media
 13 1/2 x 8 1/4 x 7 3/4 inches
 34.3 x 21 x 19.7 cm
 (AJH.16049)



Allison Janae Hamilton
Fencing mask 12, 2018
 Fencing mask, mixed media, unique
 14 3/4 x 8 1/2 x 9 inches
 37.5 x 21.6 x 22.9 cm
 (AJH.16050)



Allison Janae Hamilton
Yard Sign VIII (Wicked Problem), 2018
Acrylic on canvas
44 x 24 inches
111.8 x 61 cm



THE PEO-PLE CRIED MER-CY IN THE STORM, 2018

A monumental stack of tambourines, Hamilton's *The peo-ple cried mer-cy in the storm* (2018) takes its title the lyrics of "Florida Storm," a 1928 hymn Judge Jackson wrote in response to the Great Miami Hurricane of 1926, which devastated Florida and southeastern Alabama. The song became popular in the South after more than five thousand black migrant workers were killed when the Okeechobee Hurricane of 1928, an event that would later serve as a backdrop for Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The tambourine, a symbol of celebration, war, storytelling, and spirituality, conjures the various ways that Southern Black communities have interfaced with storms both natural and human made, linking these two hurricanes of the early twentieth century with contemporary discourses on cultural perseverance.



INSTALLATION VIEW, *INDICATORS: ARTISTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE*
STORM KING ART CENTER, NEW WINDSOR, NY
MAY 19 – NOVEMBER 11, 2018



Allison Janae Hamilton

The peo-ple cried mer-cy in the storm, 2018

Tambourines and steel armature

18 feet x 36 inches x 36 inches

548.6 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm

(AJH.17148)



Allison Janae Hamilton

Epos: soundscape for thousands, 2018

Live performance activation of *The peo-ple cried mer-cy in the storm*

Indicators: Artists On Climate Change

Storm King Art Center May 19 – November 11, 2018



INSTALLATION VIEW, *THERE IS THIS WE*
SCULPTURE MILWAUKEE, MILWAUKEE, WI
SPRING 2021 – FALL 2022





INSTALLATION VIEW, ALLISON JANAЕ HAMILTON: *PITCH*
MASS MOCA, NORTH ADAMS, MA
MARCH 25, 2018 – MARCH 16, 2019



Allison Janae Hamilton
FLORIDALAND, 2017/2018
Four-channel video
Total runtime: 7:46 minutes
Edition of 5, with 2 AP
(AJH.17200)

WATCH EXCERPT [HERE](#)



INSTALLATION VIEW, *FICTIONS*
STUDIO MUSEUM, HARLEM, NY
SEPTEMBER 14, 2017 – JANUARY 2018



Allison Janae Hamilton
Foresta, 2017

Mixed media installation
Birch logs, wrought iron fence posts, taxidermy forms,
horse manes, tambourines, clothing, and regalia



Allison Janae Hamilton

Brecencia and Pheasant II, 2015

Archival pigment print

40 x 60 inches 101.6 x 152.4 cm

Framed Dimensions: 42 x 62 inches 106.7 x 157.5 cm

Edition of 5 plus 3 AP

(AJH.16757)



Allison Janae Hamilton

The Hours., 2015

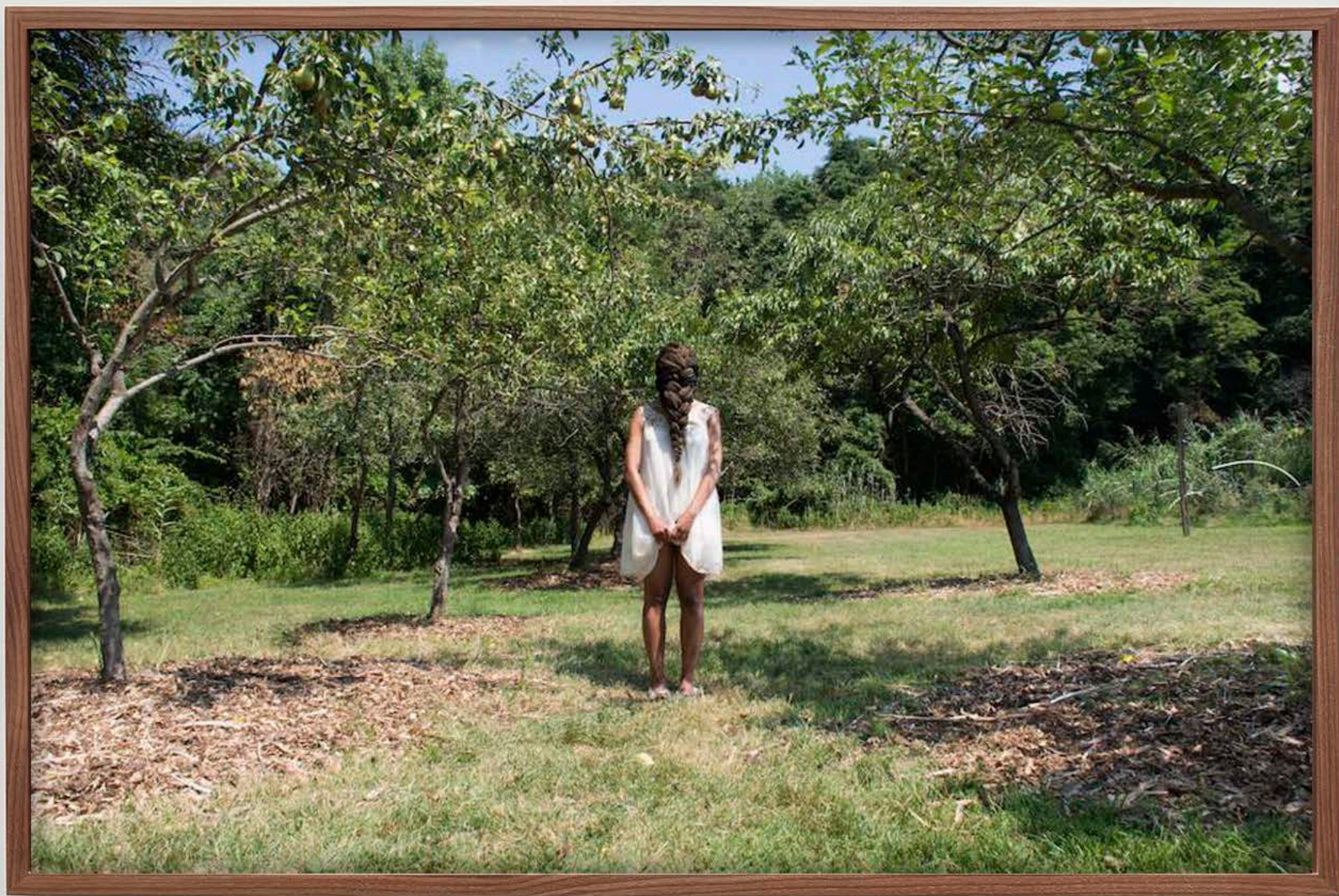
From the series *Sweet milk in the badlands*

Archival pigment print

24 x 36 inches 61 x 91.4 cm

Edition of 7 plus 3 artist's proofs

(AJH.16768)



Allison Janae Hamilton

Dollbaby standing in the orchard at midday., 2015

Archival pigment print

40 x 60 inches 101.6 x 152.4 cm

Framed Dimensions: 42 x 62 inches 106.7 x 157.5 cm

Edition of 5 plus 2 AP

(AJH.16759)

SELECTED PRESS

HYPERALLERGIC

ECOLOGY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MARGINALIZED

BY ANNABEL KEENAN | SEPTEMBER 25, 2023



Nestled in the mountainous Berkshires, the Clark Art Institute has a close relationship with the natural world. Inside the galleries, visitors can see miles of hiking trails and woodlands that weave through the 140-acre campus. Countless works from the collection feature nature, from romanticized and sublime to cultivated and colonized. Broadening a Western, exclusionary perspective on human and nonhuman relationships with nature is the Clark's latest contemporary exhibition, [Humane Ecology: Eight Positions](#). Featuring new and recent works across disciplines by artists of diverse backgrounds, the show asks viewers to consider different interpretations of nature, including those of groups of people who have been marginalized, silenced, and erased altogether.

Playing on the term human ecology — the study of humans and the natural and built environment — the exhibition eschews a human-centric, hierarchical view for a more nuanced approach encompassing all organisms. The “eight positions” of the title point to the artists: Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, Korakrit Arunanondchai, Carolina Caycedo, Allison Janae Hamilton, Juan Antonio Olivares, Christine Howard Sandoval, Pallavi Sen, and Kandis Williams. Some works engage with the theme more directly, such as Sen's garden installed outside the museum. Comprised of plants from India, where the artist grew up, the species thrive in extreme conditions, specifically heat and drought. Their ability to grow at the museum reflects climate conditions new to the region. Other works,

like Williams's photo collages with glimpses of Black performers (dancers, models, sex workers) on artificial plants, address how Black individuals are often fetishized in popular culture, and offer a more conceptual approach to the theme.

Los Angeles-based Aparicio's large latex rubber castings of Ficus trees greet visitors to the exhibition. The trees, introduced to LA in the mid-20th century, have invasive roots that damage sidewalks and have created debates over who should maintain (or remove) them, and how. The work raises complex questions surrounding the terms “native,” “introduced,” and “invasive” species, a theme also addressed in Sen's garden. With colorful, anthropomorphic shapes — arms, legs, and contorted bodies — on the backside of the latex casting and the reference to Salvadoran crime policies in the title, “Mano dura,” Aparicio links the work with conversations on immigration, as the controversial policies were enacted to fight gang-related violence that led many people to seek refuge in the US in the 1990s and early 2000s. With the Ficus, Aparicio more broadly considers the treatment of Central American migrant workers who arrived around the same time as the trees and were eventually deported.

Nearby are Howard Sandoval's soot drawings and sculptures on handmade paper embedded with bear grass stalks and seeds. The artist's choice of bear grass, a material used in Native American basket weaving, speaks to her heritage. Scorching select parts, she references the Indigenous practice of using controlled burns to prevent forest fires. Ancestral knowledge and environmentalism are also at the core of Caycedo's work, which pays homage to community leaders and Native elders, often female, who care for the natural world. She also depicts medicinal traditions of the Mohican people native to the land the Clark now occupies.

Howard Sandoval's scorched works recall the wildfires that spread annually and with increasing devastation across the West Coast. When she created these pieces, the idea of a smoky, amber sky would have been considered a West Coast problem, but as smoke from the recent Canadian wildfires filled the Northeastern US, the issue took on local significance. While the artist could never have known her work would do so, she illustrates how an environmental concern new to one community can have a deep history in another.

Howard Sandoval's pieces mark a timely link to the past, present, and — most likely as the effects of climate change worsen — future of Northeastern skies. Hamilton's alligator sculptures outside the window represent another potential timeline. Biting their own tails in an ouroboros symbol of the infinite cycle of destruction and rebirth, the alligators are installed on platforms as if sitting in the dense woods. Native to Hamilton's home of Florida, the animals are out of place in New England, but as water temperatures increase in the South and the Northern climate becomes balmy, perhaps there could be a future where they inhabit the forests. Pointing to the [legacy of racialized imagery](#) of alligators,

Hamilton draws a parallel between their climate migration and Black communities that have historically endured the effects of environmental crises.

This relationship between marginalized communities and nature is an undercurrent throughout the show. The unknown and silenced repercussions of human behavior, from capitalism and colonization to environmental destruction, are brought to the fore, as are the beings who cultivate and care for the natural world. As the climate shifts and visitors' relationships with nature change, their understanding of the interrelation of all organisms, including those overlooked, can — and should — evolve.

ARTNEWS

"A MOVEMENT IN EVERY DIRECTION" EXPLORES THE GREAT MIGRATION'S CONTINUING INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN CULTURE BY THE EDITORS OF ARTNEWS | MARCH 14, 2022



In the years between the start of the 20th century and the mid-1970s, more than six million African Americans left the rural South in what is known as the Great Migration. Forced from their homes by limited economic opportunities and legalized segregation, they settled primarily in towns and cities in the North and West, creating a new Black urban culture.

At the **Mississippi Museum of Art**, the exhibition "**A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration**" explores the impact the Great Migration had on American families, communities, and society at large, as well as its continuing influence on social and cultural life in the United States today. The show was co-organized with the Baltimore Museum of Art.

The exhibition consists of newly commissioned works from 12 acclaimed Black artists with connections to the South: Akea Brionne, Mark Bradford, Zoë Charlton, Larry W. Cook, Torkwase Dyson, Theaster Gates, Allison Janae Hamilton, Leslie Hewitt, Steffani Jemison, Robert Pruitt, Jamea Richmond-Edwards, and Carrie Mae Weems.

Importantly, the show frames the Great Migration as not only a flight *from* economic and racial inequality, but also a move *toward* independence and self-invention. "[The exhibition] will posit migration as both a historical and political consequence, but also as a choice for reclaiming one's agency," according to co-curators Ryan N. Dennis and Jessica Bell Brown. "The works examine individual and familial stories of perseverance, self-determination, and self-reliance through a variety of expressions."

Although the pieces in the exhibition range across media, they are largely researched based. "We asked this group of talented artists to join us on this journey over a year ago, during the pandemic, to investigate their connections to the South," say the curators.

Not surprisingly, then, this research has resulted in art that often focuses on family. Combining large-scale photographs with archival images, Maryland-based conceptual artist **Larry W. Cook**, whose work explores intergenerational narratives about fatherhood and forgiveness, traces his own paternal lineage in a series of photographs that include landscapes, portraits, and family pictures. Conversely, New Orleans-born photographer **Akea Brionne's** project *An Ode to You ('all)* (2021) addresses maternal family structures, centering on the lives of her great-grandmother and three great-aunts, who remained in the South and created a support system that enabled Brionne's grandfather to pursue higher education. Woven jacquard in the form of sculptural and digitally collaged tapestries retraces her grandparents' subsequent move from Mississippi to New Mexico.

Also focusing on family experiences, Oregon-born activist artist and 2013 McArthur Foundation Fellow **Carrie Mae Weems**—some of whose earliest pieces incorporated photographs and recordings of family members—turns her attention to her grandfather Frank Weems, a tenant farmer and union organizer in Arkansas who, after surviving an attack by a white mob in 1936, relocated to Chicago. She traces his journey north in a new video installation titled *LEAVE! LEAVE NOW!!* and *The North Star* (2022), a series of digital prints.

Closer to the present day, Baltimore-based artist **Zoë Charlton's** *Permanent Change of Station* (2022), a large-scale installation featuring a wall drawing and a life-size pop-up book of collages and drawings, considers how military service enabled social advancement for families like her own, even during periods of American intervention in the Philippines and Vietnam. And Chicago social practice artist **Theaster Gates's** *The Double Wide*, a 2022 sculptural installation with soundtrack, pays tribute to an uncle whose trailer functioned as a candy store by day and a juke joint at night.

Expanding the conversation from family to community, Los Angeles-born painter **Mark Bradford** contributes *500* (2022), an installation of 60 painted panels inspired by an early 20th-century Black settlement in New Mexico advertised as a safe and self-sufficient community for African Americans. New York City-based artist **Robert Pruitt**, known for his figurative drawings of Black subjects incorporating cultural signifiers drawn from hip-hop, science fiction, comic books, and religious practices, presents *A Song for Travelers* (2022), a large-scale drawing that takes as its subject his hometown of Houston, particularly its Third and Fourth wards.

Several works address Black communities in the context of global warming. Landscape is central to the narrative work of Kentucky-born, New York City-based multidisciplinary artist **Allison Janae Hamilton**; in her three-channel film installation *A House Called Florida* (2022), she explores the mutual dependence between the Southern environment and its Black inhabitants, and speculates on their respective fates in a changing climate. In a similar vein, Maryland artist **Jamea Richmond-Edwards**'s mixed-media collages consider the effect of natural disasters on Black migration. And Brooklyn-based multidisciplinary artist **Torkwase Dyson**'s installation of modular sculptures, *Way Over There Inside Me* (2022), examines the relationship between our current environmental crisis and plantation economies.

Conjuring the potentiality of Black culture, Brooklyn-based artist **Steffani Jemison**'s video piece features Alabama-based actress Lakia Black and other performers acting out a variety of real and imagined identities. Similarly, the abstract sculptures in New Yorker **Leslie Hewitt**'s *Untitled (Slow Drag, Barely Moving, Imperceptible)* (2022) are informed by destabilization and movement. Both suggest that the Great Migration is a multivalent narrative that is still unfolding.

BURNAWAY

MISTY SHORES AND PALM FORESTS: SOUTHERN SPIRITUALITY THROUGH THE LENS OF FILM AND ART

BY JASMINE WEBER | AUGUST 26, 2021



Adorned by luscious, deep greens, murky browns, and bottle blues, the surreal landscapes of the coastal American South are embedded with centuries of racial, religious, economic, and environmental histories. In artworks exploring the region, these unique ecologies are as central to the storytelling as protagonists. Imaginings crafted by visual artists, writers, and filmmakers interweave the histories and futures of these coasts, enmeshing temporal boundaries between generations past and forthcoming. This mode of storytelling, inspired by actual histories, is a particular means of world-building, of reclaiming painful histories—many of which waned or were lost during long journeys across the Atlantic and up North.

A primary result of American assimilation is the burying of traditions into a broader mainstream culture; the contributions of Black Americans from the South have been especially shrouded—from countless recipes that have been whitewashed as “American” food to the shallowness of the mainstream recognition of Juneteenth, and more. In the face of this erasure, the coastal South—with its longstanding cultural connections to the traditions of enslaved African communities—offers image-makers potent ground from which to recognize self and community, to explore their ancestry, and to imagine new possibilities for cultural recognition.

The steamy bayous and misty shores of the Southern coasts operate as dreamlike settings for films and photographs about the region’s woes and triumphs. Black artists, in particular, have used this surreal scenery to dissipate the boundaries of time and space through magical realist cinema, writing, photography, and other forms of storytelling. From the sculptures and installations of Allison Janae Hamilton to films like Kasi Lemmons’s *Eve’s Bayou* (1997) and Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), treatments of these sweeping landscapes tell the stories of Black women and girls. These artists reimagine the Southern coast as Eden—the ground is rich and fertile, nearly utopic at a glance, with deep roots winding beneath the surface. The dense forests function as almost mythic, science-fiction-like spaces for artists to imagine new worlds or conceptualize lives previously lived and lost along these waters. Dripping with foliage, the overgrown ecosystems open up a transportive space to explore intergenerational relationships and the nonlinear potential of time. Navigating these bayous and forests, the artists take visual approaches to what Saidiya Hartman has termed critical fabulation.¹

Daughters of the Dust, the first feature film released in the United States by a Black woman director, utilizes a circulatory form of storytelling—birth and death, beginning and end—set on the Georgia coast in a Gullah community of African slave descendants at the turn of the twentieth century. In experimenting with the film’s narration, voiced by both an unborn child and a soon-to-be great-great-grandmother and matriarch of the Peazant family, director Julie Dash revises memories and simultaneously offers glimpses at the future. She captures scenes of a tumultuous two-day period during which the Peazants prepare for their journey to the “mainland”—away from the Georgia islands where their Gullah culture—a unique livelihood steeped in West African social traditions, language, and spirituality—was born.

Omnipresent throughout the film is a tense relationship between Afrodiasporic beliefs and Christianity, one of the greatest points of misunderstanding between the Peazant family members as they prepare to leave Ibo Landing, their home.² In forging this theme, Dash hones in on a common spiritual tradition throughout the South and other African diasporic communities: the bottle tree, a means of capturing spirits by carefully placing glassware on the ends of tree branches. In the film, the artifact is among many talismans crafted by Nana Peazant as a means of familial and ancestral protection. Her grandson, Eli, professes his newfound refusal of his grandmother’s belief system, catalyzed by his wife’s sexual assault by a white man on the mainland—a signal to him that Nana’s magic is no protection at all. He smashes the bottles in a gutting scene of frustration and cultural loss. But the elderly matriarch Nana is unfazed: “The bottle tree reminds us of who was here and who’s gone on.

[...] You appreciate the bottle tree each day, as you appreciate your loved ones." Her cool resolve resounds throughout the film, her spiritual conviction undaunted.

Versions of the bottle tree are seen repeatedly in the works of Betye Saar, a California-born artist whose artistic practice draws from the Afrodiasporic religious traditions of the South, American folk archives, and generational memory. In her work *Sanctuary Awaits* (1996), a wooden throne is ornamented with amber bottles. The amber bottles also appear above the entryway of her installation *House of Gris Gris* (1989), co-created with her daughter Alison Saar. The Saars' explorations of Afrodiasporic spiritualism have been a force throughout their respective decades-long careers.

Memories of these ancestral histories often faded after African Americans' journeyed north. I grew up hearing my family histories in snippets—never in full—and grasped at details to piece together a complete picture of my family history. Two generations removed from my own family's migration from Georgia, my not-far-off family history of healing and rootwork³ went unspoken. Nonetheless, they were present in my day-to-day life, unbeknownst to me: my father's reverence for spiders, for instance. Never kill a spider in the home. We'll lose money. Superstitions—or so they seemed—like these were steeped in the idiosyncrasies of Afrodiasporic folklore and spiritual beliefs.

In a conversation with artist Allison Janae Hamilton over Zoom, I asked her about the modes in which her own familial and community histories appear. The artist frequently employs her family, friends, and herself as photographic subjects, but I query further into her portraits of a group of young girls—children of her friends, she says—and what they represent about the temporality of the South. Their hair is plaited and topped with bloodred flower crowns; in many shots, the young sitters wear Easter Sunday-ready frocks, not unlike the starched, white, and gorgeously lacy dresses of the Peasant women. With her portraits frequently set in the extraordinary palm forests of northern Florida, Hamilton points to the act of witnessing: "What those trees have witnessed, what these figures of these young children will witness," she explains.⁴

These acts of witnessing and documenting are at the core of her practice, as well as those of countless other Black artists. Their ethereal presence—"whether they're meant to be children or angelic, fairy-like figures," Hamilton adds—collapses the earthly and transcendental realms and draws our attention to the circularity and passage of time.

In ruminating on the potential of both the artist and viewer as witnesses, equally prescient in Dash's narrative is the process and significance of documentation. Mr. Snead, a photographer, is tasked by cousin Viola to document the family before their journey to the mainland. Through his lens, as through Dash's, we watch the family's men, children, and close-knit women stage scenes on their beloved coastline, one to which they may never return after their journey across the Georgia waters.

The film is marked by gorgeous, slow-moving scenes of Black women cradling one another beneath a ratty parasol, nestled in knotty branches of massive live oaks, splayed in the sand, bathed in golden light, and traversing on boats through snaking waterways.

Along with Dash's directorship, filmmaker Arthur Jafa served as *Daughters of the Dust's* director of photography and artist Kerry James Marshall as its production designer, lending to these striking visuals. The intimacy in this collaborative image-making between African American artists (who, at the time of filmmaking, were still emerging artists) becomes as significant as the narration and dialogue. In the vein of entangled cultures coming together to form a greater Black culture, the artists' capabilities for carving out worlds among the foliage is only heightened by the union of their collective experience in depicting the fictional Peasant family's life as a reflection of history.

Also culling the modern while heavily referencing the past, is one of the few pop-culture portrayals of the coastal South: Beyoncé Knowles's *Lemonade*. Directed by Khalil Joseph (a collaborator with Jafa), the visual album takes heavy inspiration from the singer's Southern upbringing as well as *Daughters of the Dust's* gothic aesthetics and subtle storytelling. Its release in 2016 even inspired conversations about Dash's film getting a new wide release, according to the director in an interview for *Vogue*.⁵

In watching Dash's debut film, I see frequent parallels to Hamilton's practice. Also centering the inner lives of Southern Black people, Hamilton portrays her communities through loving eyes and with a graceful approach. She explained to me that she sees films like Dash's as a mirror, but finds direct inspiration from her own experiences growing up in the South, as well as those of her family and friends.⁶

Hamilton's photographs present sumptuous, rich images of similarly verdant landscapes, depicting the beaches, mangroves, and forestry of the Florida coast. Her lyrical scenes of folks from the area allow us a glimpse at the region's thriving contemporary culture. She weaves in Southern spirituality, introducing us to mythic creatures: talismans made from palm fronds, fencing masks, dried seaweed, and animal skulls. In these lyrical depictions, we also often get a glimpse of white dresses beneath the water, ballooning around bodies in a choreographed photograph, with ballet shoes pointing outward with fingers splayed open and elegant body language frozen in time. In viewing her video work *Wacissa* (2019), we become one with a gushing stream, traversing in a seemingly endless loop through rapid waters over rocks and through seaweed as if unfettered by any weight at all.

These artworks—diligently researched and based on the family and archival histories of their makers—render historical archives visible, in contrast to the gaps in historical records surrounding the inner lives of enslaved people and their descendants in the United States throughout history. Through them, intergenerational trauma is bound as well as broken open. The omnipresent role of Afrodiasporic spirituality is explored through shifting ideas of religion and faith from the past to the present.

Following in Dash's cinematic footsteps was Lemmons, with her debut feature film *Eve's Bayou*, the tale of an upper-class Creole family and their complicated relationship with magic, rife with noir inspiration in the form of black-and-white visions and mysterious deaths.

"You told daddy you don't practice no voodoo," says Eve, the film's ten-year-old-protagonist, slyly to her Aunt Mozelle, a seer (with whom Eve unwittingly shares a gift). The contrast of Mozelle's intuition and innate magic with the rigorously scientific approach of her brother, Eve's philandering father, seeps into every aspect of the plot. Set in the 1960s, *Eve's Bayou* is rich with shots that pan the unique Louisiana landscape—from willowy swamp cypress trees growing out of brackish water tinted green by plant matter to impossibly tall oaks on the family's picture-perfect property.

"Memory is the selection of images—some elusive, some printed indelibly on the brain," we hear as the film closes, by an adult Eve. "Each image is like a thread, each thread woven together to make a tapestry of intricate texture. And the tapestry tells a story, and the story is our past."

In creating this artwork, Lemmons—like Dash, Hamilton, Knowles, and the many other Black women artists centering coastal traditions and spiritualities—is preserving memories and building a historic narrative (albeit a gothic, fantastical version). Through photography and film, these women are crafting worlds without overlooking the real violence and historical circumstances of their protagonists, told via glimpses into their lives.

[1] Originating in Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts," critical fabulation addresses the genre of autofiction—the combination of fabrication and autobiographical storytelling. Specific to Hartman's terminology is the potential to navigate the suppressed histories of oppressed people through the process of writing.

[2] In 1803, Ibo landing (or Igbo Landing) was the site of a mass suicide of enslaved people hailing from the area that is now Nigeria. Historical documentation provides evidence of a brave rebellion by the captured people, who, according to accounts, walked into the water, electing for death over enslavement. The lore behind the historic incident grounds the Peazant family's relationship to the land of their island: it operates as an example of the great bravery of their ancestors; the significance of the waters as a symbol of resistance; and an example of the strong ancestral memory still guiding their community. In *Daughters of the Dust*, the revelation of Ibo Landing's history, as told by Eula and Eli, serves as a revelatory moment toward the film's conclusion as the family reflects on their roots. Against the backdrop of this story, the family members decide their fates: to leave, or to stay.

[3] Rootwork is a practice born out of Southern African American culture, which melds

African traditions preserved during slavery, Indigenous knowledge of herbalism, and other cultural influences, often including Christianity.

[4] Jasmine Weber in discussion with the artist via Zoom, June 2021.

[5] Julia Felsenthal, "Director Julie Dash on *Daughters of the Dust*, Beyoncé, and Why We Need Film Now More Than Ever," *Vogue*, November 18, 2016, <https://www.vogue.com/article/daughters-of-the-dust-julie-dash-interview>.

[6] Hamilton did, however, cite Ava DuVernay's *Queen Sugar* as a series that succeeds in its portrayal of the South as a place continuing to thrive and evolve into modernity, rather than as a place stagnant in history.

WHITEWALL

ALLISON JANAE HAMILTON INTERROGATES MYTHS AROUND LANDSCAPE AND STORIES OF PARADISE

BY KATY DONOGHUE | AUGUST 13, 2021



Allison Janae Hamilton's "A Romance of Paradise" was on view at Marianne Boesky in New York this spring. It was the artist's first solo show with the gallery and showcased her multidisciplinary practice and ongoing investigation of themes around environmental justice, folklore, and tradition. An ethereal palette of white, cream, blush pink, and pale yellow contrasted with the darker, sometimes haunted undertones of works like a series of fencing helmets adorned in feathers, beads, and hair or sculptures of animals of prey rendered in white and covered in flowers and eggs.

Using sound from her films as a way to immerse, Hamilton is able to transport her viewer to the fertile, storied landscape of the American South, once believed to be the actual Garden of Eden. She addresses how the myth of southward expansion has justified and covered up the atrocities of the land, as well as the current climate change crisis impacting vulnerable rural communities.

Whitewall spoke with Hamilton around the opening of "A Romance of Paradise," when she had just gotten back to New York after spending all of the last year in her hometown due to the pandemic.

WHITEWALL: What was the starting point for the show?

ALLISON JANAE HAMILTON: The content and the concept is something I've been curious about for a while, which is this idea of mythology and landscape. As a kid growing up in school, we all learn about manifest destiny and western expansion. But the South also had myths that helped to justify this American expansion southward.

Early explorers in the region thought the literal Garden of Eden was in the American South—the 35th parallel line, which ran from eastern North Carolina to Memphis. I was reading all of this material and primary sources that described the South as lush, fertile, and rich for cultivation. A lot of the language was very feminine, "lush, fertile land." Whereas the West had this "home on the range," let's conquer the open space. The South was swampy, even more so hundreds of years ago—more subtropical.

In order to justify something horrific, there has to be a story. That's the effect of the narrative; you're creating a storyline that excuses or makes it okay. Exploring that was interesting to me. That's something you see all over the world. What are the stories and what are the myths that become entrenched and ingrained that were originally meant to justify something? How are those myths operating now? What does that mean for the future?

WW: While your home in Florida has always served as inspiration, you spent close to a year back in your hometown as a result of the pandemic. How do you think that impacted this new work?

AJH: I'm from the northern part of Florida, like a 15-minute drive from the Georgia border. Culturally, it's the American South—gumbo and grits, and whatever. It's got that low country culture, that Gulf South culture. I call my region Jurassic Park, especially in the summertime. Being there for the spring and summer for the first time since college, it was overwhelming, oppressive . . . the humidity, the lush trees. It's like a jungle.

I always try to have a bit of immersion in what I'm doing, so I think that even though the show has a little bit of restraint—I wanted there to be space and I wanted there to be this ethereal, heavenly vibe— it definitely still was important for me to have some kind of immersion. The soundscape was important. I did want the viewer to feel somewhat surrounded.

WW: There's something about nature in that part of the country—you can't ignore it.

AJH: It's different. And everyone lives with it. There's an idea of the person who appreciates nature as an environmentalist or conservation-minded folks. But in the South, everyone is really into nature. So part of what the environment does in the work for me is present a different location than what people are used to talking about and thinking about when it comes to climate change. It's all-encompassing. It's a total landscape, and you just really have to learn to live with it. Like you said, you can't escape it. With hurricane season, too, it's just part of it.

The effects of climate change are happening now. You look at the way cities were designed, and you look at the aftermath of American slavery during the reconstruction era, how certain communities were placed in certain areas—all of that was deliberately thought of. There were conversations about this, like where are we going to put these formerly enslaved people?

And when you think about something like a hurricane, well, who tends to be on the wrong side of the levy or which community tends to be in the most vulnerable parts of the city or community? What's going to happen to those folks as climate change makes the storms more intense, more frequent? That means that climate change is not really an equal thing.

WW: In the show, there are two new videos, Lemon Tree and A Pale Horse. Can you tell us about them?

AJH: I'm always playing around with what is tangible, what is real, what is fictitious, what is mythic. Playing into the allegorical, epic forms I like to explore, the Lemon Tree is part of an 8-millimeter series that allows me to kind of push and pull the viewer a little bit and kind of question reality. It's almost scientific or archaeological, and then there's things that are happening in the video that seem not real or seem ritualistic, or seem like a different part of your brain has to absorb what's happening.

And the other video, A Pale Horse, was part of another video of mine, Florida Land. I wanted to have something of mine anchoring the show that was emblematic of the work but in an abstract way. There's something disturbing with the bugs skimming the surface of the water. There's always kind of an element of the work that doesn't let you fully sink in or fully get comfortable. I want to allude to the precariousness of the environment—especially coming from Florida. I do think it's stunning but there's a horrific history and there's a lot of complicated present things going on.

WW: How did you approach the new series of photographs?

AJH: In general, with the environmental portraits, the figures are almost ghostlike or apparitions. It's always friends and family that's in the work, which was partly conceptual and partly practical. My mom is in the work, my godmother, another close family friend. Also, I thought that politically this was a moment where I could give Black woman of a certain age a prominent place in the show.

There's something a little ritualistic and a little mystic about the photos as well. It's not so direct, but there was something about that. I wanted to have them in the show in this moment—and on their own terms. The body language is very matter of fact. They're taking ownership of their space. I liked presenting them with a lot of autonomy.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

ALLISON JANAE HAMILTON WITH YASI ALIPOUR

BY YASI ALIPOUR | APRIL 7, 2021

My first encounter with Allison Janae Hamilton was years ago. Allison entered the room with a kind smile and one of her iconic hats. She sat down and spoke slowly and gently. Her words were honest, grounded, and full of wisdom. She had just returned from a residency run by Joan Jonas.

This was my orientation to Columbia's MFA program where we became classmates. Over the years, Allison has continuously moved and inspired me: from her early video-piece *FLORIDALAND* (2017/2018) and the powerful image of her body becoming a mythical figure with a bird mask riding a white horse; to her critical commitment to Climate Change through a lens that faces the entanglement of the crisis with the social inequalities of our past and present.

I met with Allison Janae Hamilton as she was preparing for her inaugural solo exhibition with Marianne Boesky, *A Romance of Paradise*. Traveling through Zoom, I caught up with Allison in her Florida studio. We were surrounded by the pieces of this exhibition and the dense soundscape of the land that is at the heart of Allison's work. In what follows, we journey through "A Romance of Paradise" and Allison's multidisciplinary practice, as she tells us about her family's farm, the rivers, her Black south, violent myths, and "The land as participant, as history, and as culture."

Yasi Alipour (Rail): It is so exciting to catch up as you prepare for your upcoming exhibition at Marianne Boesky, *A Romance of Paradise*. I'm finally having a chance to visit your studio, alas, only through Zoom. To get us started, I want us to focus on a critical aspect of your practice: your relationship with the land. In your work, whether it is your photographs, videos, installations, or even sonic collaborations, the surrounding landscape is not merely a backdrop. It is the main character. The land is the homestead, it becomes a place—instead of empty space. You draw a lot of your inspirations from your lived experience and ancestral relationship with the American South. In your work, the landscape can be as literal as your childhood memories of the family's farm or as philosophical as the rituals, stories, and questions shared among the African diasporic experience.

Allison Janae Hamilton: A lot of it is just part of my biography. I grew up in the South. I was born in Kentucky and raised in Florida. My mom's side of the family has a farm in Tennessee. My mom's family business was the farm. We still have it, and my grandma still lives there. Growing up every planting and harvest season, we were up there helping. As my school friends were going on vacation on their break, we would pick beans. We would go up to Tennessee to help. My paternal side of the family is from the Carolinas. So, I grew up having this interesting hybrid relationship to different types of landscapes. And growing up in Florida, a hurricane



state, you're hyper-aware of environmental pressures and the vulnerability of the landscape. Being at sea level and having canals and swamps everywhere, you are intimately connected to the terrific part of the landscape, and I mean that in both senses of that word. How powerful it is. And then, in Tennessee, I was instilled with an understanding of cultivating the land. The land as participant, as history, and as culture. It just was what it was; I didn't think about it until I moved to New York City after graduating college. I had never been around a critical mass of Black folks from the North before. Many Black families have that great migration story. But on both sides of my family, I'm from the part of the family that stayed in the South. Moving to New York gave me another lens to look at my own experience. And I began to explore in a more observational way what was just very normal to me—and maybe even took for granted.

Rail: It's interesting because I think, at least in New York, we often discuss the Black diaspora and radical aesthetics through the narrative of uprootedness, the great migration, and the fugitive body. That's a very different relationship with the landscape. Sometimes you talk about how alienated you felt by the way the word "urban" was used as synonymous to Black.

Hamilton: My experience is land being very still, constant, and steadfast in a way because for my family, it has been. My mom's side has been in Tennessee since we got into this country; I have the slave schedules with my family name. I know exactly what plantation my family was on. I have the papers with the name of my great, great, great-grandma on it. And we've been in the same county since we've been in America, at least on that side of the family. So, my experience as a southerner—and that of my friends who are from down here—feels different than the one you described. For me, it feels like I can always come home. Even when I talk to my grandma, she's like, "When are you coming home?" For her, that means Tennessee. And in the context of this pandemic, deciding to leave New York City at the beginning of this crisis, I knew that I could come down to Florida temporarily. For me, the land is kind of this place. When I go home, my grandmother's house smells the same as it smelled when I was four years old. The land, all the different barns and sheds, and places I used to run and play hide and seek with my cousins, they're all still there. It's always been that way. My grandma's 90, and then I have old photos of when she was a little girl. So much is the same. Same trees! It's the same land. My great-grandfather bought that farm there in the '30s. So, for me, it's a very familiar and familial relationship. There's this kind of cyclical, circular, seasonal sensibility that is the agrarian lifestyle. Things always are coming back around to the beginning of that again. So really—for better, or for worse, for all these different, interesting, and intricate ways—there's a lot of sameness and a lot of constancy in my particular experience.

Rail: This makes me want to hear more about the word "paradise" in the title of this exhibition.

Hamilton: I was thinking about the denotation of that word as it once was commonly used. Now when we think of paradise, we think of tourism and travel, a drink with an umbrella in it. But I'm really thinking about that original use of the word. Paradise meaning heaven. When early explorers came down here, some of them literally thought that the Garden of Eden was here in America. Growing up as an American kid in school, we all learned about Manifest Destiny, this idea that bolstered and rationalized this violent expansion westward. But different regions in this country also had these myths to justify the violent conquering of different landscapes, and the snatching of people from another landscape, and bringing them to work those particular, conquered landscapes. There are all these myths, ideas, and narratives to market something horrible into something palatable and justifiable. So, early on, there was this idea of the American South as heavenly, as fertile, as rich. There was this idea of this possibility that was wrapped up in this experience

of heaven. Almost like this new afterlife, rich with potential. But that potential was agriculture and forcing people to cultivate this "unruly," swampy place. Those stories are metaphors for this landscape that was ready to be tamed. I'm exploring these myths that allowed the South to be cultivated, for this violent exploitation of people forced to labor on it, and the people for whom, in the aftermath of that, this land is now home. My work is an exploration of what all that means, and what it means today. A lot of people categorize the South as this place stuck in history, but for me, all these myths, all these metaphors, all these historical actions have a bearing on today's lived experience. I'm really thinking about that original idea of paradise but propelling it forward. Dragging the examination of that myth into today so that we can see what the through lines are, particularly in the face of climate change and environmental injustices.

Rail: In thinking about how your work approaches the urgent issue of global warming, my mind goes instantly to your pieces that focus on bodies of water. In your recent video installation—that will be on view in Time Square Arts Midnight Moment this April—the water takes over. *Wacissa* (2019) is so movingly disorienting. One wonders: are we drowning or flying? This water is so beautiful and incredibly powerful. Maybe, as you said, it is terrific in both senses of the word. In this exhibition, you also have the video *A Pale Horse* (2021). We look down at the sky as it is reflected on the surfaces of the water. Insects slowly sit on the water, creating these subtle ripples on the surface. I was really captivated by this fleeting moment. As we were just discussing, in your work you unearth the myths of history, and at the same time you make them meet with the intense urgency of today's happening. Here, the South is not merely the past. In a similar manner, when you discuss climate change and environmental injustice, you refuse to view the crisis as located in the distant future. You face climate change as the disaster that is very much of the here and now.

Hamilton: The thing about *Wacissa* is that there are two things kind of happening at once that I was thinking about. Hurricane Michael had just hit down here a few months before I shot that video. That's why in the video, there are trees that are in the water. It's like, wait, that's a tree, it's on top of the video frame, but it's on the floor of the river. It's this disorienting thing. That hurricane was really late in the season for us. It's interesting to think about what's going to happen when these storms get more and more violent, more and more frequent, longer and longer seasons. Growing up in Florida, it used to be rare to get a category four. And now it's like fours and fives all the time. So *Wacissa* is looking at that. My work resists the idea of climate change being this future thing. It also resists climate change being universal because it's not going to affect everybody the same, and it's not affecting everybody the same. The *Wacissa* River is part of this river system that was cut through by the slave canal. And as the name suggests, the slave canal was dug out by the labor of enslaved Black folks here in Florida. The purpose was to bring cotton from Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico. But as soon as it finished, the railroad came to town, so it never really got used for its intended purpose. I was riding through that particular river system that has this history of violent labor, and I'm showing the aftermath of this hurricane.

These two things are coming together in Wacissa. There's a current reality of people living here, but how it's affecting and will always have the affectation of historical impetus.

Rail: You know, you often talk about the murkiness of that body of water. I can't help but think about Glissant's opacity. Another element that seems so key to your practice is storytelling. You draw your inspiration from myths, lore, superstitions, even mundane conversations among the women in your family. The echo of history that you were discussing in your work is not the kind of history that one finds in textbooks; it's the intense truth that can only be passed down through stories told over generations. In some of your last bodies of work, the main character was these young Black girls—daughter of one of your friends. You and your mother have been in a bunch of your works. Now in *A Romance of Paradise*, you have these recent photographs that focus on older women. That feels so important.

Hamilton: The figures in the new photographs read as middle-aged Black women. I've been quarantining here in the South during much of the past election year. I was in New York during the Democratic primary season. And it was an interesting experience. I consider myself a progressive, but when the South Carolina primary happened, and everyone knew that was probably going to be Biden's comeback, I heard and read a lot of New York progressives referring to South Carolina Democratic voters as "low information voters," or questioning why there was such an early Democratic primary in the South at all. It felt like a code. The South Carolina primary is known for galvanizing that kind of traditional, older, churchgoing Black voter, particularly Black women. It's traditionally more of a moderate vote, generally speaking. Agree or disagree politically, those voters are not low information voters. And so then fast forward, and I'm down here at home in the South—in the Big Bend area of Florida—during the general election season. I'm a 15-minute drive from the Georgia border. So when the senate runoff happened, every commercial break was an ad for the Georgia runoff. It was a really intense few weeks. And then after that election, everyone's like, "Oh my god, thank you, Black women, for saving America. Thank you, Stacey Abrams; Black women saved the day. Thank goodness for Black voters in Georgia ..." And so, I thought, "Wait a minute, a few months ago, the Black Southern voters were low information voters. And now the same people are saying they're saving America? Which one is it?" I keep thinking, these are very high information voters, not to mention lived experience, you know? That was all fascinating to me. I was thinking a lot about that and this erasure of Black women of a particular age, and this dismissal and then adoration based on political convenience.

Rail: So true.

Hamilton: It's my mom and all my aunties and my godmother and my elder cousins, and my grandmother and the women in my family and community that can be thrown away one minute and adored the next minute; I just feel like there's

something to that that I wanted to explore. Also, part of it was practical. We were here in the pandemic in quarantine. So, I also was able to work with family and friends we had already been sort of bubbled up with.

Rail: When I saw the new photos, I instantly thought about generational conversations. I don't know, to me, these days, it feels ever more important to think about these sorts of conversations while thinking about marginality and histories of oppression. To understand the lived experience and the complexity of their survival? And these dialogues can be messy, can be intense; they can be filled with passionate disagreements, and then there's also deep wisdom.

Hamilton: That lived experience gets folded into ideology. You know?

Rail: Yeah, totally. The women in your photographs are so amazing. They are so deeply generous and vulnerable with you.

Hamilton: Yeah. There is a vulnerability and there is an inner power at the same time.

Rail: Yeah.

Hamilton: I love a couple of those facial expressions. It's like really no-nonsense, and a softness.

Rail: This brings me to our earlier discussion about the past. Something that I find really moving about your work is how you allude to different rituals—from the southern Black church to Hoodoo. This feels so key to how your works explore and flirt with storytelling, narratives, and even fragmentation.

Hamilton: I mean a lot of that is bound up with the land and the ways that landscape operates in the context of healing, and of ritual. That is one way that the concept of land in my work connects to other parts of the Black diaspora—through the ritual practice of land, and through intimate connections to nature. The ways that the land operates as a mechanism of agency, not only as a burden. In the US context, Hoodoo is a big part of that. And I draw from those rituals, patterns, and habits I witnessed from my elders growing up. Sometimes I draw from fragments of family lore—like my great grandfather having visions of a headless horseman, or my grandmother's sister killing all of the peach trees when they were forced off of their land prior to settling on their second farm in the '30s that we still have today. Black American nature writing operates as a similar influence for me. Particularly Richard Wright's collection of haiku. I've always been inspired by those poems—they are my favorite collection of poetry. I titled the photographs in *A Romance of Paradise* as an homage to that body of literature. I'm curious about the multiple, complex, and sometimes conflicting meanings that landscape and nature has in the context of my own culture, as well as throughout the world.

Rail: That's so powerful. Sometimes in your talks and interviews, you share a few of these "stories." One that I found incredibly moving was what your grandmother told you about the story of the lost farm, your aunt, and the killing of the peach tree.

Hamilton: Yes, my grandmother's sister.

Rail: Right.

Hamilton: The peach tree is killed out of this defiant act. But it's also a sorrowful act. We think of the peach tree as something sweet, something that represents the height of summer and leisure. A sweet respite in the middle of those dog days of summer. I wanted to capture that conflicting emotional resonance. For a lot of my process, a story of that sort becomes the jumping-off point. Someone might view one of my artworks and think, "this has a heaviness to it," but I never really outlined or explained the full story to the viewer. I have these storylines or narratives within the work that are really just for me, at least for now. They're my organizing system. The viewer really gets the emotional resonance of it, not the cover-to-cover story. I like the audience to feel like they've been just dropped in the middle of something. Maybe something horrific has just happened, or is about to happen. Or, maybe something joyful or ecstatic. I want the viewer to feel dropped into a mid-point, destabilized. I like for the observer to be a bit cut off from the whole storyline and left with an abstraction, and they're forced to orient themselves, whether that happens in linear fashion or not.

Rail: A good friend of mine that is a Latinx anthropologist argued once that you couldn't be merely an observer for a ritual, you are either in it, or you have missed it. This makes me think about how your work drops the viewers in the middle. It's so committed to the effect of history, the act of storytelling, and refusing a Western "linear" retelling. There's something like an "utterance" in your work—utterance as an act that is in language but can never be contained by it.

Hamilton: The work isn't meant to be didactic. It's not a history lesson. It's more like, here's the emotional resonance I'm exploring in my attempt to think through where we are now—and then positioning the landscape as the main thrust of the work. And that's a narrative in and of itself because there is a history of the landscape, and there is a contemporary reality to the landscape. And then I am kind of taking bits and pieces of that and collaging together, hitting you with past, present, and future all at once. It's kind of a choose your own adventure. You know those books from the '90s? You can get really into the storyline, and some of the characters repeat. They have names, habits, and characteristics, but I don't present all that for the viewer. And whatever the viewer gets from it, they get from it. But going back to this idea of paradise, the main thing is that this is a place that has been seen as this rich, beautiful, pleasurable landscape. And yet, there is a foundation to it that is terrific! As in, causing terror. There's a haunting quality to it. And that is all existing at the same time. The folks that have been people who have been the most vulnerable on

this landscape—and who continued to be—also find this place home. They have used the landscape for their own ritual, their own healing practices, modalities, their own medicine, and their own spiritual rituals. So, it's the land. The Southern land is not just this thing to be afraid of; it doesn't only present the obvious.

Rail: This refusal to reduce things to only the obvious! I was watching your recent talk around the immersive video installation you did with Creative Time in Brooklyn Heights, *Waters of a Lower Register* (2020). You said you were eager to see how its sound element would interact with the soundscape of New York, like the honking cabs. It made me think about what is considered as silence in each of these landscapes. Sometimes you discuss that people ignore the kind of knowledge your mom or your aunt has of climate change. It's a knowledge that is lived experience, that is corporeal, that is about hearing the sounds that have been lost, silenced. Sound is such a key element in your work. As someone who grew up and only has lived in metropolitans, the honking you mentioned has been surrounding me my entire life. But I've learned not to hear the cityscape, learned to tune out all of New York. But in this work, you created this intense meeting between the two landscapes, bodies of water, and their sound! It's disorienting and moving. I heard what I had considered as my "silence." Can you talk to us about sound?

Hamilton: It's funny that you say that because we've been doing all these Zoom visits during the pandemic. I jokingly call my hometown "Jurassic Park," especially in the summer, because it is completely overflowing with wildlife. And for everyone here, that's just part of the way of life. We accept it. It's just like this. This is swamp country. And if you choose to live here, you choose to live with the swamp. All year, I have had these Zoom studio visits, and a frog will hop into the studio or a feral rabbit will go by, or some insect will fly in. One time I was showing a video during a Zoom call, and it was about to rain. So, the birds were super loud. Someone said, "Wow, there are a lot of birds in that video." I was like, "Actually, no, that's just the environment I'm in right now ... it is what it is." [Laughter] So sound, that's just what it is. I always remember being a kid, flying into Memphis or Nashville and then driving what felt like forever to get to the farm, when you pull up in my grandma's driveway and get out of the car. When you close the car door, it is like a sound vacuum. It sounds like when you drop a ball in a jar. It is so rural and so spread out that it sounds like you're on the moon. And then when you hear the bird, it's like a piercing sound. But here in North Florida, it's ubiquitous, global, a total orchestra of crickets, frogs, birds, you name it. Now I'm used to hearing New York's sirens, traffic, and other audible signs of city life. It's a soundscape of its own. But when I first moved here, the first night, I cried because the city sounds were so overwhelming, I called my mom and I was like, "I'm never going to fall asleep here!" [Laughs]

Rail: Do you think you would recognize the sound of your home? Like a recording of it?

Hamilton: Yeah, yeah. 100 percent yeah.

Rail: There's something very visceral about that.

Hamilton: I feel like most Floridians will tell you yes, whether they're from the south, central, or north parts of the state.

Rail: It hit me only recently that I can recognize the soundscape of Tehran in a heartbeat. Which is curious cause it is simply another big messy city with a lot of noise, but somehow, it feels like my body just knows it when it's my hometown. I keep thinking about this performance by John Cage and Sun Ra in New York. How they both think so much about silence and how they each related to this city. When they play together, one can almost sense how different silence is for each of them.

Hamilton: That's fascinating. The photographs in *A Romance of Paradise* have some influence from Sun Ra and George Clinton. People associate figures like Sun Ra, or George Clinton, with the North. And they both grew up in the Black Baptist Church in the South, just like I did. Sun Ra is from Birmingham, Alabama and George Clinton was born in Kannapolis, North Carolina. But George Clinton now lives right down the road from here, in North Florida. He's been here since the '90s. My point is that there's an erasure of their Southern-ness in most discourse around their work. When I listen to Sun Ra or any of those types of figures, I hear the South. I hear the Black Church; I hear the sound that I grew up with. That's something that, to me, that really resonates, particularly with Sun Ra.

Rail: And thinking about this relationship between sound and the memory of a place, I wanted to ask you about your relationship to installation, especially your immersive installations.

Hamilton: Sometimes I do a literal installation piece, and you're meant to be immersed in this landscape. You're taken up by it physically. And then other times, like in this show, there are individual works, but there exists an immersive quality to it. I'm from a landscape that is all-encompassing. One that is total. A big moth just flew on to one of my sculptures just now. [Laughter] My experience with the land is immersive, even if it is the immersion into silence like what I experience on my family's farm in Tennessee. And the landscape totally makes up for it in other ways like the immensity of the stars out there; you feel like you can literally touch them. I just remember going to the farm and sitting out on the porch, and the stars feel like they're low, it is like, drama! And the drama of that makes up for any lack of sound. Or down here in Florida, you have this feeling of being just completely turned over to the summer, heat, and humidity that is so oppressive. There is a feeling of being sucked into this swampy, balmy landscape. There are just so many things about the Southern landscape that are so dramatic. The drama of that is something I've tried to bring into the work.

Rail: It's so moving to hear you talk about the landscapes, the nuances, the difference, the intensity. To move towards your sculptural work, I wanted to begin

with the "Yard Signs." I know you have deep knowledge, appreciation, and respect for the vernacular of the Black Southern "outsider" artists who have explored this format. Looking at your "Yard Signs," I see that influence but at the same time, you give us these pieces that are so uniquely yours as they float between, sculpture, painting, and poetry. I guess that's what I meant by utterance rather than translation, or story telling rather than history writing.

Hamilton: I don't want to be representative. I have this one experience and I'm literally drawing from what I know. I'm staying in my lane. I don't want to speak for the South; I don't want to speak for any one particular Black American experience. I flesh things out from my own experience. I don't want to translate because I'm not going to translate it the same way my mom or my brother or my grandmother would. I'm not even going to try. I'm threading the historical narratives I've studied, the experiences that I've had, the family histories that I've heard passed down from my elders, the visceral experience, the sonic experiences. I'm threading it through a narrative that is partially tangible, partially archetypal and mythic.

Rail: I think what is so generous about your work is also how willing you are to give us the complexity of things.

Hamilton: Yeah.

Rail: To expand on your relationship with the landscape, history, narratives, and your own lived experience, I want to ask you about the importance of embodiment. I am thinking about some of your most iconic sculptural work, the "Creatures" and the "Masks" series. In the "Creatures," the animal forms become nearly allegorical. And you turn the fencing masks into these beautifully excessive customs.

Hamilton: Yeah, embodiment is a huge part of the work. I think some of that does come from my previous background in costume design. I am very aware of what the body is doing, whether I'm performing in the work or a family member. And it's always really interesting—I'm talking about photos and videos now—because I tell my family, "It's not you, it's a character." And sometimes, they get really into it. And then I'll put myself in work. It really started out of necessity because the first time I asked my mom, my grandma, my god mom to be in one of my early photography series, and only my mom said yes. I'd come all the way down to North Florida from NYC and didn't want to return with only one character in the portraits, so I decided to use my own body in character. This was *Scratching the wrong side of firmament* (2015) and *When the wind has teeth* (2015). Before that, I never intended to put my own body in my work. And then it became more necessary when I wanted to work with horses. I was in Santander, Spain working with Joan Jonas at Fundación Botín. And in Cantabria, they have these beautiful stables along the sea. I wasn't there with any of my friends or family who had typically been characters in the work, and because I ride horses regularly, I felt able to do it myself. Somehow, I convinced the people at the stable to let me film, in character, while riding one of their horses.

So even after I did it the first time in North Florida, I wasn't necessarily planning to continue putting myself in my work. It just happened that way.

So different relationships to one's body ends up appearing throughout the work, in both conceptual and practical ways. In the images in *A Romance of Paradise*, there's almost a casual defiance and vulnerability in the figures' posturing that I love. And then with the fencing masks, there's almost the absence of a body, and you don't know if you're supposed to take these as heads or as figures or as representatives. People have told me that they look like a jury when they're lined up based on their height. I install them a bit higher than the standard gallery height so that they do look somewhat intimidating. Or the "Creatures," they are meant to be these animal-like bodies, populating this ecosystem that anchors the narrative of each body of work. That is part of the mythology. I'm fascinated by epics. The kind of dramatic tales that move from one long episode to the next and to the next. It's almost like one piece, but it's different chapters. The "Creatures" are, in some ways, like the court jesters of the story. They have a playfulness and yet also possess a heavy quality.

Rail: Thinking about their simultaneous playfulness and heaviness, I'm really drawn to what feels like precariousness in your work. I'm thinking about the body and the way you discuss political knowledge, not as abstract thought but as lived experience. I'm also thinking literally about the story, the epic, as the tale to be told and retold. The word "romance" feels so loaded in this exhibition.

Hamilton: Yeah, to me, the word "romance" suggests an examination of the metaphor, the myth, the story, the seductiveness of these violent myths, and narratives used to justify something as horrific as American slavery, and the transatlantic slave trade in general. It's hard to find the words, the mental gymnastics, the psychological acrobatics, to justify an institution such as that. There has to be a great deal of romance to make a population feel that they have the right to control, abuse, and torture another population. In everyday use, you think of romance novels, romance poetry, rom-coms, Valentine's Day. I'm thinking about the romance of a story. The seduction involved in rationalizing something that would otherwise be understood as pure trauma and violence. So, in an attempt to get away from the horrifying quality of the facts, those in power must provide romance.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

IN BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK, ARTWORK CONFRONTS CLIMATE CHANGE

BY JANE MARGOLIES | DECEMBER 6, 2020



Those who wander the circuitous paths of Pier 3 in Brooklyn Bridge Park may be drawn to the western edge of the pier by the lapping of water. But the sounds may not be coming from the East River, which borders the site.

Rather they may be emanating from an installation of videos of lush and swampy Southern landscapes.

It will all be part of "Waters of a Lower Register," a work by the artist Allison Janae Hamilton, which will play on five 70-inch screens, beginning Dec. 16 and continuing until Dec. 20. The screens will be placed in an arc on the northwest corner of Pier 3, offering the intimacy of a screening room and the safety of an open-air setting, with the view of the Lower Manhattan skyline behind them.

Ms. Hamilton, 36, has lived in New York since 2006. "Waters of a Lower Register" focuses on the watery landscape of northern Florida, where she was raised, to explore the human-inflicted forces of climate change. Rising sea levels and violent storms affect both Florida and New York, Ms. Hamilton said. And Brooklyn Bridge Park is in a flood zone, after all.

"It's meant to be immersive," Ms. Hamilton, said by phone from Florida, where she has been holed up for much of the pandemic.

The artist is intentionally juxtaposing the rural areas of her home state with the urban cityscape of New York. But she explained that even seemingly untouched landscapes have been shaped by humans, often to the detriment of people of color. She shot some of her footage from a kayak on the Wacissa River, which was bisected by a canal built by enslaved people.

"Waters of a Lower Register" came about when Creative Time, the public art organization, had to rethink its event calendar in the early days of the pandemic, said Justine Ludwig, its executive director. Ms. Ludwig contacted Ms. Hamilton in July, and the artist seized the opportunity to create a new work that would express the turmoil of a year that has included, in addition to the health crisis, frequent hurricanes and horrific instances of racial injustice in the United States.

The video sequences take the viewer "from drowning to flying," Ms. Hamilton said, adding that it "mimics the roller coaster of this year."

The 13-minute film installation will play on a loop from 4:30 p.m. until the park closes at 1 a.m. An online talk with the artist will take place December 17 at noon.

The new work highlights the potential for Pier 3, which opened in 2018, as a site to showcase complex works of art.

Pier 1, opened in 2010, has been home to multiple temporary art installations, including Anish Kapoor's whirlpool-like "Descension" in 2017 and the giant orange bells of Davina Semo's "Reverberation," currently on view. But Pier 3 has recently proven itself a formidable outdoor gallery as well.

Earlier this year the same paved plaza at the end of the pier that Ms. Hamilton's installation will occupy was the setting for Antony Gormley's gigantic slinky-like "New York Clearing," which proved popular with parkgoers.

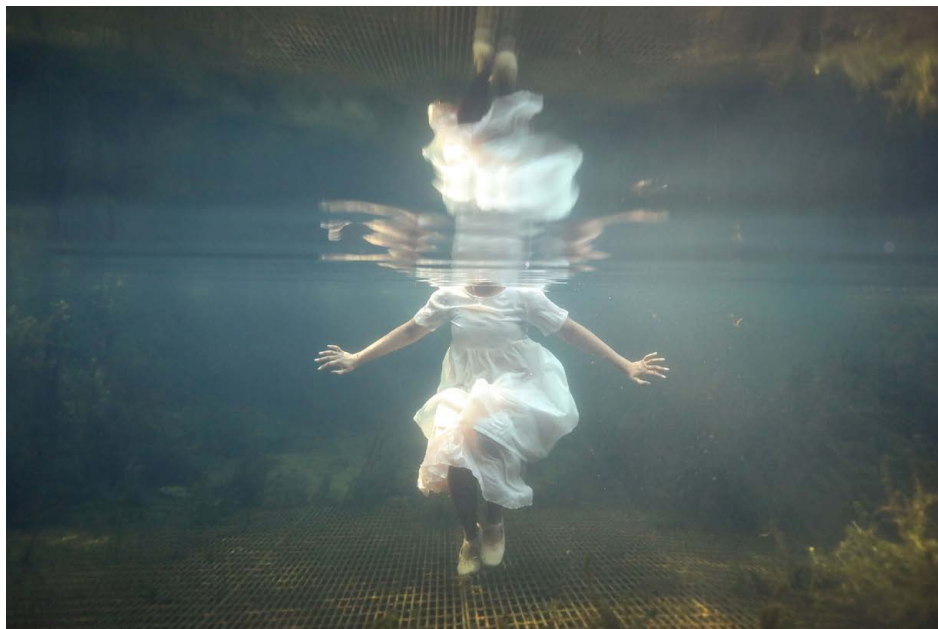
Placing a large artwork there "was the aha moment when it hit us that, wow, this is a fantastic place for art," said Eric Landau, president of Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation, which runs the park.

Ms. Hamilton is curious what sounds the city itself will contribute to the experience of viewing "Waters of a Lower Register," and what will seep in. "I think it could be interesting to hear a taxicab honking" in the background, she said. "It could enhance the work perhaps in a way we don't yet know."

MOMA PS1

MOOD: STUDIO MUSEUM ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE 2018-2019

JUNE 9 – SEPTEMBER 8, 2019



ANCIENT HISTORIES AND NEW WORLDS: ALLISON JANAE HAMILTON

By: Farah Jasmine Griffin

Allison Janae Hamilton creates worlds. Her lush and luscious landscapes invite you to wonder as you wander. It is a world of sound and sight, a world of motion, of tall green pine, of waterrooted cypress, a world where masked women walk, skip, dance, or ride on horseback, where reptilian figures inhabit the swamp and pheasant the forest, and we share it all with them. She at once immerses you in a past both prehistoric and postbellum, while projecting you into a future postapocalyptic and Afrofuturist. Her work is fully imaginative, ethereal, and beautiful, but also grounded in the realities of race, history, land, economic exploitation, and the impact of climate devastation. The landscape and history that inspire much of Hamilton's work is the dense pine woods of northern Florida. As scholar/artist she is a daughter of this earth, and like her forebear, Zora Neale Hurston, she knows it well. In ethnography and fiction, Hurston was one of the first to document and write about this part of the black South, to offer firsthand accounts of the turpentine workers who lived in and traveled through the pine forests, tapping the trees for the pungent, gummy substance. As one of them told her, "Turpentine woods is kind of lonesome."¹ Hamilton builds upon this history to explore the relationship between the people and

the land, between the natural world and generations of black peoples, and between the exploitation of labor and nature. One senses, if not the "lonesome," then the solitude, the singularity of inhabiting this space. While we often place black workers, enslaved and "free," in the context of plantation slavery or cotton sharecropping, Hamilton expands our sense of the black South, of the types of labor that black people engaged in, and of the myriad cultures they produced. Northern Florida is dense and swampy, populated by a variety of bird and plant species, as well as reptiles-snakes and alligators. In this way it may remind viewers of Louisiana, but it is distinct from that better-known space. Hamilton brings this landscape into the realm of the aesthetic, and allows it to give birth to her imaginings, and in so doing makes it a mythopoetic space, much like Jean Toomer did for the red earth and pine forests of rural Georgia in *Cane*, his genre-bending novel of 1923.

Although she is in dialogue with these literary forms, Hamilton also engages with and builds upon the work of filmmakers, such as Julie Cash's *Daughters of the Oust* (1991) and Kasie Lemmons's *Eve's Bayou* (1997). Both films show us the deep, magical beauty of very specific locations in South (the Sea Islands and the Louisiana Bayou), and especially of the black women who inhabit them, while also showing the limits of realism and linear narrative. For Dash, Lemmons, and Hamilton, the land is as much a part of the culture as are the food, music, and spiritual traditions that it gives birth to. Hamilton goes even further. She gives us a story, a deeply immersive one, with characters and narrative threads, but one must work to find and follow them; one cannot be a passive viewer. The more engaged we become, the more the work yields to us over time. Here she also notes the influence of the highly popular *Game of Thrones*. In this way, each exhibition is almost episodic, building upon the last, taking us deeper into the forest and the psyches of those illusive, sometimes masked, figures who dance, walk, canoe, or ride on horseback. We view a canopy of trees but also encounter actual trunks and scents, and make note of the groomed horse tail that hangs on the wall like a series of carefully curated whips. She invites us to participate in the magic-making, to join her in the act of creating.

Walking through an installation, or accompanying the artist downriver on a kayak, as the films allow viewers to do, creates an act of surveying. We may not know what has come before, but we have happened upon a landscape after disaster. There is a quiet that is disquieted. There is stillness that is haunted. A fallen tree suggests something traumatic has occurred: a storm or worse. These are ancestral grounds, one feels their presence, evoked by the ethereal figures who appear and then disappear as we wander past a still photograph or as a filmed figure gallops by. Sometimes we stumble upon the unknown, that for which we have no name, like the pink creatures (2018), flowing and folded ochre blobs, with tufts of horses' hair and

pearl-adorned crowns. They are like new life forms that could have emerged from the ocean's bottom or grown from the earth like fungi. Animal heads seem to emerge from walls, rather than having been mounted upon them, familiar yet like no animal we have ever seen. We bear witness to a new era of evolution.

In this work, Hamilton sets us in the day after the end of the world, and reminds us that all new worlds sit atop the ruins of old ones. She offers us an invitation to join her as she builds anew, ever mindful of the history that precedes us, ever open to the possibility that awaits our making.

HYPERALLERGIC

THE GHOSTS OF OUR FUTURE CLIMATE AT STORM KING

BY LOUIS BURY | JULY 29, 2018



In economics, an indicator refers to a statistic or metric that helps analysts understand and, especially, forecast market conditions. Economic indicators are classified as one of three types, according to their timing: lagging indicators, such as unemployment rate, are measurements that change only after the economy as a whole changes; coincident indicators, such as retail sales, change at approximately the same time as the economy; and leading indicators, such as stock market returns, change before the rest of the economy. Each type of indicator thus provides information about the economy's past, present, or future.

Indicators: Artists on Climate Change, a group exhibition at Storm King Art Center featuring work by almost 20 contemporary artists, implicitly asks what type of indicator visual art might be with respect to anthropogenic climate change. The obvious answer, evident in the exhibition's diversity of work, is that art can be any of the three types and that each type has its own value and function. The more interesting answer, evident in the exhibit's future-oriented works, is that one of contemporary ecological art's most unique and important functions is to model possibilities for how our species might anticipate — and even accept — its eventual displacement or disappearance.

A selection of artworks that point back in time evince a strong sense of historical conscience. Allison Janae Hamilton's *The peo-ple cried mer-cy in the storm* (2018) — a precarious installation of Jenga block-like stacks of black-and-white tambourines sited on a small island on the Center's grounds — stands as a testament to African-American perseverance in face of actual and metaphorical storms. Steve Rowell's film *Midstream at Twilight* (2016) — a helicopter's-eye survey of petroleum pipeline pathways in winter — offers an icy vision of, in the artist's words, "a fossil fuel industry in decline." Alan Michelson's film *Wolf Nation* (2018) — eerie, purple-tinted security camera footage of a wolf sanctuary — serves as a ghostly reminder that Storm King occupies Lenape, or Wolf Tribe, territory. A trio of Tavares Strachan works deconstruct whitewashed narratives of early 20th-century arctic discovery.

A spirit of defiant resolve animates many of these historically minded works. In a light box panoramic photograph, *Standing Alone* (2013), a parka-clad Strachan stands beside a fictitious flag, designed in the colors of his native Bahama and planted in an otherwise empty arctic vista. Michelson's indistinct, purplish wolves prowl back and forth menacingly, as though they were guard dogs rather than captives. Hamilton's tall, white tambourine towers contrast with their expansive and verdant environs, and contain latent celebratory potential, which will be activated by performances during the exhibition's run. Each artwork strikes its own distinct tone in response to a socially troubled past, but — with the exception of the installation *Eighty circles through Canada (the last possessions of an Orcadian mountain man)* (2013), Mike Nelson's response to his friend's death in a mountaineering accident — none are stricken with melancholy or regret. Instead, the emphasis is on recuperative acts of creation in the present.

The artworks that resemble coincident indicators also emphasize imaginative creation by putting twists on mimetic or documentary techniques. Maya Lin's contributions play with perspective: a pair of white encaustic reliefs, *Before It Slips Away* and *59 Words for Snow* (both 2017), depict polar ice topography from a distant aerial perspective, while an installation, *The Secret Life of Grasses* (2018), zooms in on 10-foot-tall root-to-tip cross sections of prairie grass. Justin Brice Guariglia's *Mining Landscapes* series (2018) manipulates photographs to achieve a splotchy and scarred figurative abstraction, while his LED highway construction sign, *We Are The Asteroid* (2018), flashes warning messages such as "THERE IS NO AHEAD." Gabriela Salazar's installation, *Matters in Shelter (and Place, Puerto Rico)* (2018), leavens its architectural pragmatism with poetic touches: the tarp-covered shelter references Puerto Rico's recent recovery efforts following Hurricane Maria in 2017, while its lyrical details — the tarp's translucent blue shimmer; the use of coffee grounds as a construction material (a nod to Puerto Rico's coffee industry and the artist's mother, raised on a coffee farm) — bespeak a poignant fragility.



Jenny Kendler, *Birds Watching*, 2018, Reflective film mounted on aluminum on steel frame, 6' 6" x 40' x 2'
Courtesy of the artist, photograph by Jerry L. Thompson

Among such works, Jenny Kendler's crowd pleasing *Birds Watching* (2018) takes a particularly imaginative approach. Across the length of a 40-foot steel frame, the artist has affixed 100 images of variously sized and colored birds' eyes — all species imperiled by climate change. At a glance, this cluster of concentric color looks like a whimsical shooting range or a floral bouquet. Upon further inspection, the viewer finds her or himself being viewed by a quizzical and accusatory collective stare. This horde of disembodied eyes, each printed on shiny reflective film, reverses the customary human-bird watcher/watched dynamic to incarnate something like an interspecies conscience.

While many of the exhibition's lagging and coincident indicators seek to prick the viewer's conscience, the works that resemble leading indicators are rarely accusatory or moralistic. The emphasis in such forward-looking works is less on what has been

lost to climate change and more on how our species might adapt to, and cope with, the coming changes. The result is a set of works that, though created in the present, speak in a peculiar future perfect tense. In a group show in which the work is consistently of high quality, many of these pieces stand out as especially thought-provoking and powerful.

Mary Mattingly's *Along the Lines of Displacement: A Tropical Food Forest* (2018) embodies this anticipatory logic. Imagining a turn-of-the-next-century future in which the earth's average temperature has risen by the forecasted 4 degrees Celsius (7.2 degrees Fahrenheit), the artist has planted a group of tropical fruit trees on Storm King's picturesque grounds. The trees' palm fronds and pliant trunks appear out of place amid the leafier deciduous trees native to the region. However, more than just a fatalistic warning, Mattingly's incongruous forest, in its ability to grow fruit, is also a proposition on how future generations might find sustenance in midst of tragic displacement.

The artistic collective Dear Climate — comprised of Una Chaudhuri, Fritz Ertl, Oliver Kellhammer, and Marina Zurkow — goes a step beyond silver-lining resourcefulness toward a paradoxical embrace of the climate in order to better adjust to its coming upheavals. Their installation, *General Assembly* (2018), consists of a circle of twenty black-and-white banners whose combinations of text and image — for example, "Say Hello/ To The Hurricanes," with a silhouetted image of a person holding an umbrella over a house — display a knowing humor. Previous versions of the project were installed in poster form, but this version's sturdier materials (nylon banners hung from wood poles) give the work a statelier feel and create a fitting tension between its form's gravitas and its content's jarring levity.



Mark Dion, *The Field Station of the Melancholy Marine Biologist*, 2017-18
Mixed-media installation, 16' 2 3/4" x 24' 1 1/2" x 9"
Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, photograph by Jerry L. Thompson

Not all the forward-looking work in the exhibit welcomes change. In his installation *The Field Station of the Melancholy Marine Biologist* (2017-18), Mark Dion imagines a scientist who has vacated their cabin workstation — temporarily or permanently, we don't know — because the dire implications of his or her climate research are too much to bear. Ellie Ga's artistic tarot cards, *The Deck of Tara* (2011), made in response to her time as an artist-in-residence on a nautical scientific expedition to the Arctic, also evince anxiety about the future's perils and uncertainties. But however emotionally resonant, both works are, in this context, intellectually dissatisfying for the way they abdicate a sense of agency through fantasies of escape or fate.

Two of the quietest yet most compelling works in *Indicators*, David Brooks' *Permanent Field Observations* (2018) and Jenny Kendler's *Underground Library* (2017-18), exercise what agency is available to them in subtle and evocative ways. Elegiac time capsules intended for a deep future that has become estranged from its past, both works provide a keen sense of art's capacities and limitations as an indicator. Perhaps not coincidentally, in an exhibition whose spacious outdoor grounds permit, even encourage, its artists to work at monumental scale, both artworks are comparatively mouse-like, almost invisible, in size and appearance.



David Brooks, *Permanent Field Observations*, 2018, Bronze, dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist, photograph by Jerry L. Thompson

Brooks' sneakily smart installation consists of 30 bronze castings of woodland objects, such as rocks, fallen branches, and tree roots, with each replica placed alongside the real thing on the Center's grounds. The small sculptures are located on marked forest trails that run, aptly, along Storm King's periphery, but each sculpture site is unmarked, sending interested visitors on a scavenger hunt for elusive flecks of bronze. Side-by-side with its original, the metallic half of each unassuming object pair looks like a twinkling prosthetic

eye. Subject to the vagaries of time, just like a rock or branch in nature, Brooks' replicas are poetic memorials to their own eventual displacement and obscurity, artistic winks to a future that may or may not recognize them as such.

Kendler's *Underground Library* also stages the process of its own decay and disappearance in smart and subtle ways. For the long-term project, the artist alters used or discarded climate change books through biocharring, a process that sequesters carbon from the earth's atmosphere. As sculptural objects, the charred books — crinkly stacks of warped and blackened paper — provoke dystopian jitters about book burning. Yet those burnt books not reserved for gallery display are buried underground in unspecified sites, where they provide benefits to plants and grasses, such as reducing soil acidity and feeding microbial life. Kendler's repurposed and mostly invisible library combines aesthetic and conceptual suggestiveness with practical ecological touches.

Like Ellie Ga's spookily taciturn gelatin silver print, *Remainder* (2010), portraying four shovels standing in a grey, horizonless expanse of snow, Kendler's *Underground Library* and Brooks' *Field Observations* manifest an almost archaeological interest in the objects that humans leave behind. Unlike Ga's print, however, which depicts traces of the past as encountered during her Arctic expedition, Kendler's and Brooks' works compel the viewer to imagine what objects from the present will remain in the future, and in what ghostly forms. Both works are elegies for climate losses and changes to come.

Among the objects human beings produce, artworks seem some of the likeliest to persist, relatively intact, in the future. Unusual amounts of thought and care are put into both their making and their maintenance. As climate indicators, then, artworks offer clues about how our species understands its material legacy in an era when it has become increasingly difficult to imagine the exalted posterity such works were once meant to secure. Through feats of creative remembrance, documentation, and forgetting, the works in *Indicators* hint at how it feels to bear witness to the dawning awareness of your own decline.

MASS MOCA

ALLISON JANAE HAMILTON: PITCH

MARCH 25, 2018 – MARCH 17, 2019



Allison Janae Hamilton's art abounds with references to boiling swamps and impossibly tall pines, wild horses and waiting alligators, ancestral spirits and old clapboard houses. With her evocative photographs, videos, and sculptures, she draws out the soul of the Southern landscape-particularly the north Florida region that is home to her family. For Hamilton, the south is more than the stereotypes we know; it is rich with epic mythologies and everyday stories waiting to be told. Place, in her words, is made up of "tangible matter," but it is also a state of mind, a continuum that connects the past with the present and forms who we are. The work featured in Pitch highlights the power of the landscape to shape and reflect the character of its inhabitants and to articulate the complexities of lived experience in all its beauty, brutality, and fragility.

The title of both the exhibition and a new installation, Pitch draws on a number of meanings and associations. It suggests the inky black of rural nights and thick forests, as well as the sounds and music that animate the landscape. It also refers to the resin of the conifers tapped in the turpentine camps of northern Florida- an industry that bolstered the southern economy from the Jim Crow era to the 1950s and relied on the grueling labor of African-Americans. Evoking the towering pines characteristic of the area, the artist has installed a grove of trees in the gallery. Ghostlike, they conjure the real and metaphorical scars that the turpentine industry left on the environment.

Nestled within the trees, a small room contains a fourchannel video titled FLORIDALAND (2017/2018). The atmospheric work envelops viewers in an intimate, kaleidoscopic experience of the landscape. Images of shimmering ponds, reflected clouds, and swirling canopies provide a backdrop for masked characters – including the artist wearing the skull of a large bird – who dance through marshy fields and roam the coast on horseback. The wild horses that still thrive on the prairies in north Florida are a potent symbol for Hamilton who channels their physical power and historical associations. Sitting tall on a steed in her white cotton housedress, the artist blends images of the domestic with the heroic. Intermingling recordings of church singers with these images of nature, Hamilton highlights both music and the land as sources of strength and transcendence. Indeed, sound is central to Hamilton's evocation of place, from the noises of animals and insects to the traditional "lining hymns," that she grew up with. These songs, which begin with a single caller chanting a line that is then repeated by the congregation, are part of a wealth of musical traditions that grew out of the symbiotic relationship between work and worship from the era of slavery to the re-imagined slavery of the turpentine camps.

Hamilton has also embedded abstract allusions to work songs, blues and funk lyrics, and African-American nature poetry in wooden boards incorporated into the

installation. The boards themselves reference the handpainted vernacular road signs that populate the landscapes that Hamilton calls home. Her repeated marks are a nod to the constellations of the night sky that similarly guide and orient us.

A selection of photographs from her series *"Sweet milk in the badlands ..."* presents images of the artist, along with friends and family performing within the landscape. These masked protagonists are a recurring cast of characters whom Hamilton imagines as haints or ghosts that haunt her enigmatic narratives. Churches, porches, pine forests, lakes, and fields provide the setting for these imaginary tableaux that bring to mind both the dream-like images of Sally Mann and the psychologically tense portraits of Diane Arbus. *In The Hours*. (2015) a girl in a bright yellow dress and green hair ribbons sits on the front stoop of a house, two suitcases packed. On her head she wears the skull and antlers of a stag-merging human and animal as well as a symbol of male prowess and sweet femininity. *Brecencia and Pheasant II*. (2018) depicts a woman dressed in her Sunday best, holding a pheasant and wearing a mask made from a fox head and feathers. She appears, like the bird, to be a natural part of the forest that surrounds her—an integral part of the ecosystem, rooted in place.

Hamilton's use of masks reminds us of the roles as disrupters of social identity and hierarchy as well as protective attire. A group of fencing masks line the gallery wall like a phalanx of helmeted warriors. The artist became interested in fencing masks after finding a vintage photo of two African-American soldiers engaged in a fencing bout. Painted and embellished with feathers and hair, her fantastical armor takes on a mythic character—flights of the imagination rooted in the familiar. Leaning against a nearby wall, decorative wrought-iron rods used in garden fences look like spears. Adorning them with horsehair, Hamilton once again invests the artifacts of daily life with allusions to epic battle.

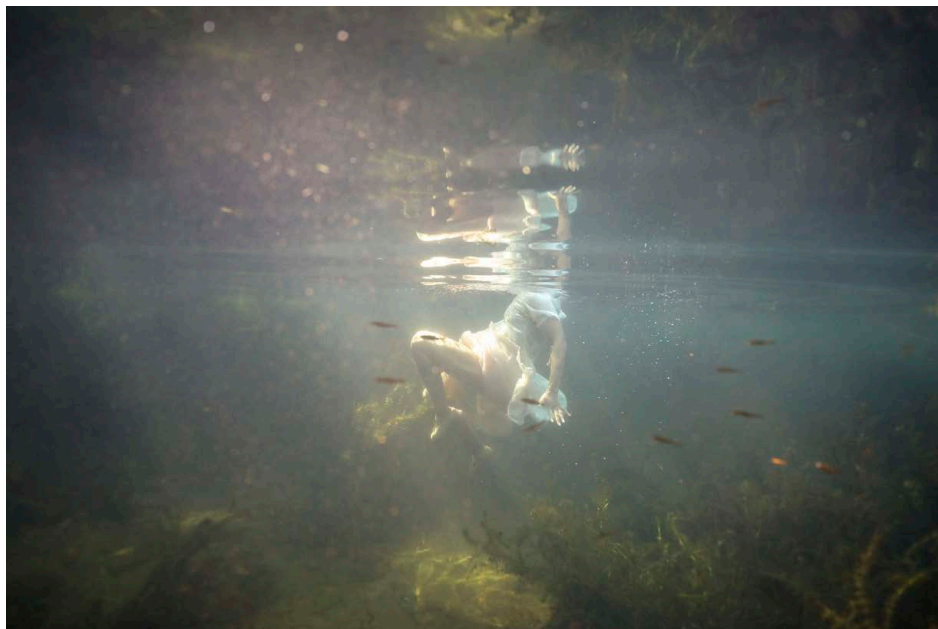
Two alligators twisted in circles like the ancient Ouroboros symbol articulate a similar conflation of daily reality and grand narrative. The Florida alligator is both predator and food source, and, for Hamilton emblematic of the complex, symbiotic relationships between the various occupants of the land. (The artist grew up in a network of hunters and sourced these skins from a friend.) Visceral signifiers of an eternal cycle of destruction and renewal, these powerful creatures also function as manifestations of the monsters we confront in our daily lives, or even those within us, lurking in the inner reaches of our consciousness.

— Susan Cross and Larry Ossei-Mensah

HYPERALLERGIC

THE SOUTHERN GOTHIC MOODS OF ALLISON JANAE HAMILTON

BY LOUIS BURY | JUNE 15, 2019



Before you even enter the room, the sounds of burbling water and flickers of light convey a sense of agitation. Two hanging yard signs covered with silver-painted palm fronds ("Metal Yard Sign with Sabal Palm Fronds I" and "Metal Yard Sign with Sabal Palm Fronds II," both 2019) lend a portentous feel to the narrow entry hallway that conjures a crypt's antechamber. Inside the shadowy main room, the menacing burbles grow louder as light flashes and river water rushes in Allison Janae Hamilton's short film, *Wacissa* (2019). The film is projected onto the far wall and the adjacent walls' corners. Its turbulent audiovisuals make it hard to discern up from down, water from sky, as if the video is simulating the experience of panicked and confused drowning.

The Studio Museum's 2018-19 Artists in Residence exhibition is called *Mood*. It also features excellent work by Tschabalala Self and Sable Elyse Smith in separate rooms. However, Hamilton's solo room envelops the visitor in a mood so ominous and constrictive it verges on claustrophobic. Several dimly lit photographs depict young girls incongruously clad in white dresses while ensconced in Florida forest- and swampland. A mysterious wooden yard sign ("Yard Sign with White Feathers," 2019), crowned with feathers and covered with a nest of painted white cross marks, recalls Southern yard art. Two sculptures of fantastic mythical creatures contain touches of dark humor: "Blackwater Creature II" (2019) is a creepily whimsical centipede made

from branches, feathers, horse hair, and bronze baby shoes; "Blackwater Creature I" (2019) is a dangling amalgam of horsehair and resin that resembles the Addams' Family's Cousin Itt and casts a shadow evoking a lynched figure.

Hamilton's previous, well-regarded multimedia installations, such as her recent *Pitch* at MASS MoCA, also conveyed a haunted, almost animist sense of the rural American South, where the artist was born and raised. Her installations are of a piece with a strand of contemporary African American art and critical thought in which traumatic, less visible histories are imaginatively reconstructed so as to counter-mythologize them. For example, photographer Dawoud Bey's exhibition, *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*, at the Art Institute of Chicago earlier this year, depicted underground railroad landscapes as if from fugitive slaves' points of view. Similarly, writer Saidiya Hartman incorporates what she calls "critical fabulation" — fictional narratives based on archival research — into her books to give voice to the gaps and silences in transatlantic slavery's historical record.

Hamilton's mythopoetic contribution to *Mood* stands out for how much gloomier it is than her previous installations. *Wacissa*, in particular, is unrelenting: 20-plus minutes of whooshing swampwater, with only brief, sporadic audiovisual respites. Exiting back into the museum hallway's stillness provides tangible sensory relief. The experience reminded me of artist Patty Chang's comparison of art-making to what scientists call free-diving's "struggle phase," that is, the point at which the gasping underwater diver must either come up for air or relent and drown. Hamilton's immersive installation allows visitors to wrestle with a mysterious land, its racial realities, and its mythic past, but also affords many the luxury — unavailable to those who live it — to extricate themselves from that struggle when it becomes too much to bear.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

ALLISON JANAE HAMILTON'S SPIRIT SOURCES

BY SIDDARTHA MITTER | OCTOBER 26, 2018



Indoors, for Allison Janae Hamilton, is always a kind of compromise. She grew up in Florida — first in Miami, attuned to the ocean and the Everglades, then in Tallahassee, with its exuberant tree cover, and where she enjoys kayaking in the haunting cypress swamps. Childhood summers were spent in western Tennessee, returning for planting and picking time on her maternal family's farm. Her multimedia art never strays far from her concern with the land, especially the Southern land, and its occupants, especially its black occupants.

"Landscape is this incredibly beautiful plane that we get to live on," Ms. Hamilton said. "But it's also a plane that has been wielded by those in power in a very violent way."

Her work has an unabashed pastoral quality. Yet every rustic setting where she stages her photography, every clip and sound in her video works, every artifact in her installations — the fencing masks, the tambourines, the bundles of horsehair, the taxidermy alligators — is present for a reason. Her aim is to manifest history: that of her family, the black South, and by this method, the nation.

Ms. Hamilton, 34, is based in New York: She arrived here in 2006, fresh out of Florida State University (where her father, Leonard Hamilton, is the head basketball coach), and after a stint in fashion, began earning graduate degrees. Before receiving her M.F.A., from Columbia in 2017, she already had a Ph.D. in American Studies from New York University, where she studied with the photography scholar Deborah Willis and wrote a dissertation on the carnivalesque in black visual culture. In the summer, she goes upstate weekly to ride horses.

This year New York tightened its claim on her when she landed a spot in the Studio Museum in Harlem's artist-in-residence program, a prestigious incubator of black talent, alongside fellow residents Sable Elyse Smith and Tschabalala Self. But even as her star rises in the art world, Ms. Hamilton is determined to invest in her soul base, the South, and eventually buy her own land. "There's just more space," she said. "And in order for me to think about these issues, it's important for me to be there, and in the community."

Recently, she explored the legacy of the turpentine industry that dominated the Southeast well into the 20th century, in which workers in backwoods camps, isolated and kept in debt by company scrip, tapped the pine trees for resins. Her research took her to abandoned camps in the forests of Florida and Georgia. "Pitch," her first museum solo exhibition, currently at Mass MoCA in North Adams, Mass., through March, is titled for the resinous substance that shipbuilders used to make vessels watertight.

She installed a deconstructed pine forest in a gallery of the old mill complex, with locally sourced 12-foot trunks, imposing and straight, set in twos and threes. The pine fragrance drifts through the gallery, along with the choral track, insistent and incantatory, of a video installation in a small walk-in room. In it Ms. Hamilton, her face concealed by a beaked mask, rides a brown horse. Insects hover across swamp waters. An African-American congregation worships in a country church.

Elsewhere, plywood panels lean against walls, roughly painted in the manner of Southern yard art, with splotches, stars or lettering. Photographs place their subjects in vistas of forests, fields, cabins, dressed in vintage apparel. One is Ms. Hamilton's mother, masked and holding a pheasant. In another room, two taxidermy alligators bite their own tails, in the classic ouroboros motif; a silent row of fencing masks looks on, some adorned in feathers or beads, while spears decorated with horsehair line the wall.

It makes for a visual language that both edges toward Southern Gothic and sets itself apart, with reminders of how different fates unfold in the same landscape, shaped by ancestral custom but also by stark hierarchies of race and class. The mystic references come from hoodoo, the knowledge of rural black healers, for whom hunting or cultivating are inextricably spiritual and economic. The pine trees express the beauty of a grove, but also the exploitation of land and labor.

"It's always interesting when an artist builds a vocabulary, a set of tools, and is able to skillfully utilize it," said Larry Ossei-Mensah, who curated "Pitch" with Susan Cross and who is now senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit. Ms. Hamilton's method, he said, is so original that he struggles to identify exact precursors. "There's a very clear line of sight," he added. "She has a clear sense of direction, which I think is refreshing."

Hallie Ringle, the curator of contemporary art at the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama, and until recently assistant curator at the Studio Museum, said Ms. Hamilton's practice reminded her of the Chicago-based painter Kerry James Marshall. "Maybe it's the richness of the composition, or the colors that she's tapping into," said Ms. Ringle, who selected Ms. Hamilton for "Fictions," the Studio Museum's showcase exhibition last year. It's an intriguing connection: the Chicago painter and the rural-South mixed-media artist, yet both invested in the spirit material of African-American life. "Her installations are super smart," Ms. Ringle said. "They're really layered, and they unfold almost as paintings."

In "Fictions," Ms. Hamilton showed "Foresta," a walk-in installation that paired her signature objects — the masks, the taxidermy forms — with shimmering footage of swamp waters. The installation in "Pitch" is both similar and different. "I repeat some footage," she said. "I figure if you can have motifs that repeat in drawings or painting or objects, why can't video have that too? I like having a marker."

On a recent afternoon, Ms. Hamilton's studio in the Studio Museum's temporary work space in Harlem, where it has taken up quarters during construction of its new building, was tidily arrayed with her tools. Alligator heads, agape and toothy, rested on a shelving unit beside antlers and pelts. Women in her family have all hunted, but Ms. Hamilton only shoots targets. "I'm not a good enough shot to give a clean death," she said. Her alligator skins come from friends who hunt for meat. "I try to get things sustainably that way."

The artist, who favors a vintage-casual look, from jeans and boots to fitted jackets and frills, fabricates the costumes that her portraiture subjects wear as she art-directs them in the woods. Next to the sewing machine in the studio were confections-in-progress like a fur collar mounted with cloth roses. With her Mass MoCA exhibition up — as well as an outdoor sculpture at Storm King, part of a collective show on climate change — she is back in research mode, starting the process toward her residency exhibition in the spring.

On her mind are hurricanes. This month, Ms. Hamilton watched from afar as Hurricane Michael walloped the north Florida coast and her home city. "Every hurricane season you feel more helpless being away," she said. Her attunement to the sting of these storms is partly a rural inheritance: "My grandmother can tell you everything about climate change," she said. But now her research takes her into the history of hurricanes — from the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 to this year's Florence and Michael — and their impact on black communities.

She knows that after the Okeechobee Hurricane of 1928, which appears in Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God," at least 1,600 black migrant laborers were buried in mass graves — archaeologists suspect many more. Katrina, a shaping event for society and politics today, had precedents. "My concern is which communities are more vulnerable," Ms. Hamilton said. "Which ones are given the least care, which ones are always on the wrong side of the levee; and how that relates to the history of power, and of the country."

Ms. Hamilton's sculpture at Storm King Art Center, through Nov. 11, involves stacks of white-painted tambourines, a quintessential storytelling instrument; its title, "The people cried mer-cy in the storm," quotes "Florida Storm," a hymn by Judge Jackson that responded to another devastating hurricane, of 1926. Music, sacred and secular, has participated through history in the self-narration of African-Americans, and their resilience through trauma. In her forthcoming works, Ms. Hamilton envisions adding original sound works into ever more immersive environments.

Despite the gravity, she feels her art growing less heavy as her research advances. "I feel interested in going lighter with color, more ethereal, playing up the water theme," she said. Even in trauma, after all, the land is beautiful. "So I want you to feel that. The lightness and beauty, but wait a minute — there's something amiss, something that's not quite right."

ART IN AMERICA

FIRST LOOK: ALLISON JANAE HAMILTON

BY ERIC SUTPHIN | MARCH 1, 2018



Since the Great Migration, the narrative of black experience in America has skewed toward urban life, to the point where the word “urban” now functions as racist shorthand for “black.” New York-based artist Allison Janae Hamilton uses this association as a conceptual backdrop to her films, photographs, and installations, which explore the historical connections between African American life and nature.

Born in Kentucky, Hamilton grew up in rural Florida and spent much of her childhood at her family’s farm in Tennessee. In 2017 she received her MFA from Columbia University. At her thesis exhibition, Hamilton debuted her video *Floridaland* (2017), which depicts several women—including the artist, her mother, and godmother—treading misty forest paths while wearing animal masks. On the soundtrack, voices sing a wordless melody in unison. Footage of a church service and of the artist, in a bird-skull mask, riding a white horse along a coastline is interwoven with panning shots of the gray-green Southern winter landscape. The three-channel video was displayed within an installation that included three taxidermy alligators purchased from hunters in Florida. One of the reptilian bodies hung from the ceiling with strands of beads wrapped around its head; the others were posed as ouroboros, the ancient symbol of a snake swallowing its tail that signifies the cyclical nature of time. Animal imagery is a recurring theme in Hamilton’s work. Hides and masks allude to hunting and storytelling—two activities central to her family history.

“Pitch,” which opens this month at MASS MoCA, is Hamilton’s first solo museum exhibition. The show’s title refers to both the frequency of sound and the resin from which turpentine is derived—the source of the idiom “pitch black.” The exhibition brings together past and recent work, including a new version of *Floridaland* that incorporates fragments from *A balm for the living* (2018), an evocative video shot at Hamilton’s family farm. In it, Hamilton appears in a bedroom wearing a white lace dress and various animal skull masks. Projections of the surrounding environment flicker against her body and the walls as she moves around the space, restlessly at some moments and tranquilly at others. The soundtrack is a cacophony of tinny percussion and high-pitched bird and insect noises. The sunlit farmstead grounds and quiet interior feel idyllic and timeless, yet a pervasive sense of anxiety recalls the specter of slavery that continues to haunt the architecture and landscapes of the American South.

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