

PRESS RELEASE



Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), *Rebuilding of the cotton gin motor II*, 2016. Digital photograph. Courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York. Image courtesy Carlos Vela-Prado

KEVIN BEASLEY TO DEBUT IMMERSIVE INSTALLATION AT THE WHITNEY THIS DECEMBER

NEW YORK, October 22, 2018— For his most ambitious exhibition to date, Kevin Beasley confronts the legacy of the American South in a powerful new installation that explores the intersection of history, labor, land, and race. Reclaiming a 1915 electric motor that once powered a cotton gin on an Alabama farm during the middle of the twentieth century, Beasley creates a multipart installation in which he distills the visual and auditory experiences of the machine. *Kevin Beasley: A view of a landscape* opens in the Whitney’s eighth floor Hurst Family Galleries on December 15, 2018 and runs through March 10, 2019.

Through the use of customized microphones, soundproofing, and audio hardware, the installation detaches the physical motor from the sounds it produces, enabling visitors to have distinct sensorial experiences. In one room, the one-ton motor runs in a custom-made soundproof chamber; the sounds it generates are picked up by the microphones, which carry the audio signals into the adjacent room. There, the motor’s sounds, heard through an arrangement of speakers set at different amplifications, form a sonic landscape. During live performances, the sounds can also be manipulated and processed to produce a composition of the artist’s design. A series of performances by Beasley and other artists whom he has invited to perform will take place in the galleries throughout the run of the exhibition. (The performance schedule is below.)

“Kevin has been dreaming about this project for over seven years,” says Christopher Y. Lew, the Nancy and Fred Poses Curator, who is organizing the exhibition. “It’s an honor to help realize his most ambitious work to date at the Whitney. The work is truly of epic proportions. It re-animates an object that gives voice to the deep and recent pasts as well as our contemporary moment.”

Drawn by the motor’s material presence as well as by its historical significance, Beasley has spent years conceiving this installation. He initially displayed the motor, unaltered, as part of his 2012 thesis exhibition in the MFA program

at Yale University. The machine was used on a farm from 1940 to 1973 in Maplesville, Alabama, just thirty miles from Selma, Alabama, a key site in the struggle for racial equality. Beasley regards the motor as a kind of witness to some of the most significant events of the twentieth century, including the civil rights movement.

"The cotton gin, invented by Eli Whitney in 1793, increased the number of slaves by over 70%, deepening the trauma for Black folks in America. As the invention evolved and emancipation was declared, Black people have been working to reconcile our relationship to class, labor, race, and human rights within the structure of laws," said Kevin Beasley. "For me, this exhibition embodies a continued reconciliation that can extend to the broader public. Are we reflecting on this history collectively? And are we taking the necessary steps to generate a fresh approach and change to systemic issues that persist today?"

The exhibition also includes new large-scale "slab" sculptures made with a range of materials central to Beasley's practice, such as polyurethane resin, housedresses, du-rags, guinea fowl feathers, studio tools, electric appliances, audio equipment, and raw cotton from the artist's native Virginia, where his family has owned land for generations. Resembling freestanding walls, these sculptures are informed by architecture and inspired, in part, by Assyrian reliefs. Their abstract and representational compositions allude to Beasley's experiences and thoughts on history, labor, and race that have precipitated the exhibition. The sculptures suggest a narrative arc in three parts, beginning with *The Reunion*, which focuses on the artist's roots in the South and its land; followed by *The Acquisition*, which highlights his initial encounter with the motor in Alabama; and finally, *Campus*, which examines his experiences while attending Yale—where he first displayed the motor on its own. Each sculpture incorporates objects with direct ties to these events and ideas, such as cotton bale strapping and the operating belt used to drive the gin. Through the use of these materials, the works account for the lived histories shared by the artist, the continued journey of the machine, and the greater context of the American landscape.

About the Artist

Kevin Beasley (b. 1985, Lynchburg, VA) earned his MFA from Yale University in 2012 and has been exhibiting his work since 2006. He recently had a solo exhibition at ICA Boston and has had previous one-person shows at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Project Row Houses, Houston; Casey Kaplan, New York; and kim? Contemporary Art Centre, Riga, Latvia. Beasley has performed widely and has been featured in major group exhibitions including the 2014 Whitney Biennial; Liverpool Biennial 2018: *Beautiful world, where are you?*; *Solidary And Solitary: The Pamela J. Joyner And Alfred J. Giuffrida Collection* (2017), Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans; *Between the Ticks of the Watch* (2016), The Renaissance Society, Chicago; *Greater New York* (2015) at MoMA PS1, New York; and *Fore* (2012) at The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.

Schedule of Performances

All performances will take place in the evening in the eighth floor Hurst Family Galleries. Please check whitney.org for exact timing.

Saturday, January 12

Kevin Beasley with Taja Cheek

Taja Cheek is a multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, and vocalist from Brooklyn, who released her debut LP *L'Rain* in 2017. She works as an Assistant Curator at MoMA PS1, where she co-organizes the ongoing Warm Up and VW Sunday Sessions series.

Saturday, January 26

Eli Keszler

Eli Keszler is a New York-based artist, composer and percussionist. His installations, music, and visual work have appeared at Lincoln Center, MIT List Center, 67 Ludlow, Victoria & Albert Museum, Sculpture Center, The Kitchen, South London Gallery, Hessel Museum, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Luma-Foundation, Centraal Museum in Utrecht, Barbican-St. Lukes, Walker Art Museum, LAX Art, and Greater New York at MoMA PS1. Keszler is a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music and was a 2016 New York Foundation for the Arts fellow. His latest solo record on Shelter Press, entitled *Stadium*, was released on October 12, 2018.

Saturday, February 16

Kevin Beasley

Saturday, March 2

Jlin

Jlin is one of the most prominent female producers of electronic music of the current generation. She grew up in Gary, Indiana. Though she previously used samples in her work, her tracks are now composed of all original material.

Curatorial Credit

This exhibition is organized by Christopher Y. Lew, Nancy and Fred Poses Curator, with Ambika Trasi, curatorial assistant.

Exhibition Support

Kevin Beasley: A view of a landscape is part of the Whitney’s emerging artists program, sponsored by

NORDSTROM

Generous support for this exhibition is provided by Helen Zell.

Significant support is provided by Candy and Michael Barasch, Further Forward Foundation, and Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis.

Additional support is provided by Bill Block, Lonti Ebers, Elise Jaffe and Jeffrey Brown, Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins, Gerald and Jody Lippes, Laura Rapp and Jay Smith, Komal Shah and Gaurav Garg, and Jackson Tang.

Curatorial research and travel for this exhibition were funded by Rosina Lee Yue and Bert A. Lies, Jr., MD.

Production support is made possible by Casey Kaplan.

The creation of this work is made possible by a generous contribution from VIA Art Fund.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Mary Corse: A Survey in Light	Until November 25, 2018
Programmed: Rules, Codes, and Choreographies in Art, 1965 – 2018	September 28, 2018 – April 14, 2019
Andy Warhol – From A to B and Back Again	November 12, 2018 – March 31, 2019
Kevin Beasley	December 15 – March 10, 2019
Where We Are: Selections from the Whitney’s Collection 1900–1960	Ongoing
Derek Fordjour: Half Mast	Ongoing

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Museum hours are: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday from 10:30 am to 6 pm; Friday and Saturday from 10:30 am to 10 pm. Closed Tuesday except in July and August, and on select Tuesdays following the opening of Andy Warhol—From A to B and Back Again: November 13, November 20, November 27, and January 1. Adults: \$25. Full-time students, visitors 65 & over, and visitors with disabilities: \$18. Visitors 18 years & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.

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