

New art exhibition celebrates 150 years of women at Yale

Yale-educated women artists are the subject of a new exhibition, 'On The Basis of Art: 150 Years of Women at Yale', at Yale University Art Gallery. Curator Lisa Hodermarsky speaks about the concept behind the show and the gravity of this moment in Yale's history



Mickalene Thomas (m.f.a. 2002), *Remember Me*, 2006. Chromogenic print. Yale University Art Gallery, Katharine Ordway Fund © Mickalene Thomas/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Yale University Art Gallery celebrates the work of Yale-educated women artists in a new exhibition, 'On The Basis of Art: 150 Years of Women at Yale'. The show spans a broad range of media – from sculpture to video, watercolour painting to photography – subject matter and eras. Created to mark two anniversaries – the 50th anniversary of co-education at Yale College and the 150th anniversary of Yale University's accepting female students – the exhibition is also a timely reflection of feminist movements such as the more recent Me Too.

Weaving cross-cultural references throughout the eclectic curation are a diverse selection of artists examining wide-ranging topics. Reinterpreting history is Maya Lin, whose winning design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington DC, in 1982 considers the topographical perspectives of the black granite wall engraved with over 58,000 names. Her studies of the memorial are composed of collaged pastels which consider how it looks from multiple angles, juxtaposing its sharp V-shaped architectural form against the hazily soft curves of the natural world.

The geographical form is also considered by Victoria Sambunaris, who rethinks the history of American landscape photography through her lens. Her large-scale colour photographs provide a unique perspective on how the massive shifts in nature and human industry have formed the land over time.



Rona Pondick (m.f.a. 1977), *Fox*, 1998-99. Stainless steel. Yale University Art Gallery, promised gift of Antonio Homem. © Rona Pondick

Domesticity, traditionally reserved for the female gaze, is given a contemporary reinterpretation. Sarah Sze uses an amalgamation of media to create modern scenes of mundane living – left in chaotic disarray, they are frozen in the middle of action, inviting the spectator to arrive at their own conclusions. Her use of everyday materials rethinks the limitations of fine art, as does Njideka Akunyili Crosby's, who also intertwines domestic interiors throughout her work. In *The Rest of her Remains*, the male figure from Édouard Manet's painting *The Dead Toreador* becomes female, prostrate in a modern bedroom surrounded by references to her Nigerian culture.



Sarah Sze (b.a. 1991), *Mirror with Landscape Leaning (Fragment Series)*, 2015. Acrylic paint, archival prints, wood, lamp, ladder, mirror, and reed. Yale University Art Gallery, purchased with a gift from Anna Marie Shapiro in honour of her husband, Robert F Shapiro, b.a. 1956, in celebration of his 60th class reunion. © Sarah Sze

The artists are also drawn to challenging conventions, illustrated by Rona Pondick in a mash of classical references and ancient mythology that becomes infused with modern technical methods. 3D scanning distorts the proportions of the body parts of the hybrid creature, its human features almost monstrous in a pointed perception of the human form. For Mickalene Thomas, photography is a medium through which to explore notions of and challenge conventions of the Black female body. Her photographs convey an intimacy – the imprint of a sock left on an ankle, the imperfection of reupholstered furniture – which nods to the social and political movements of the 1970s in their embrace of the corresponding decor and fashions.

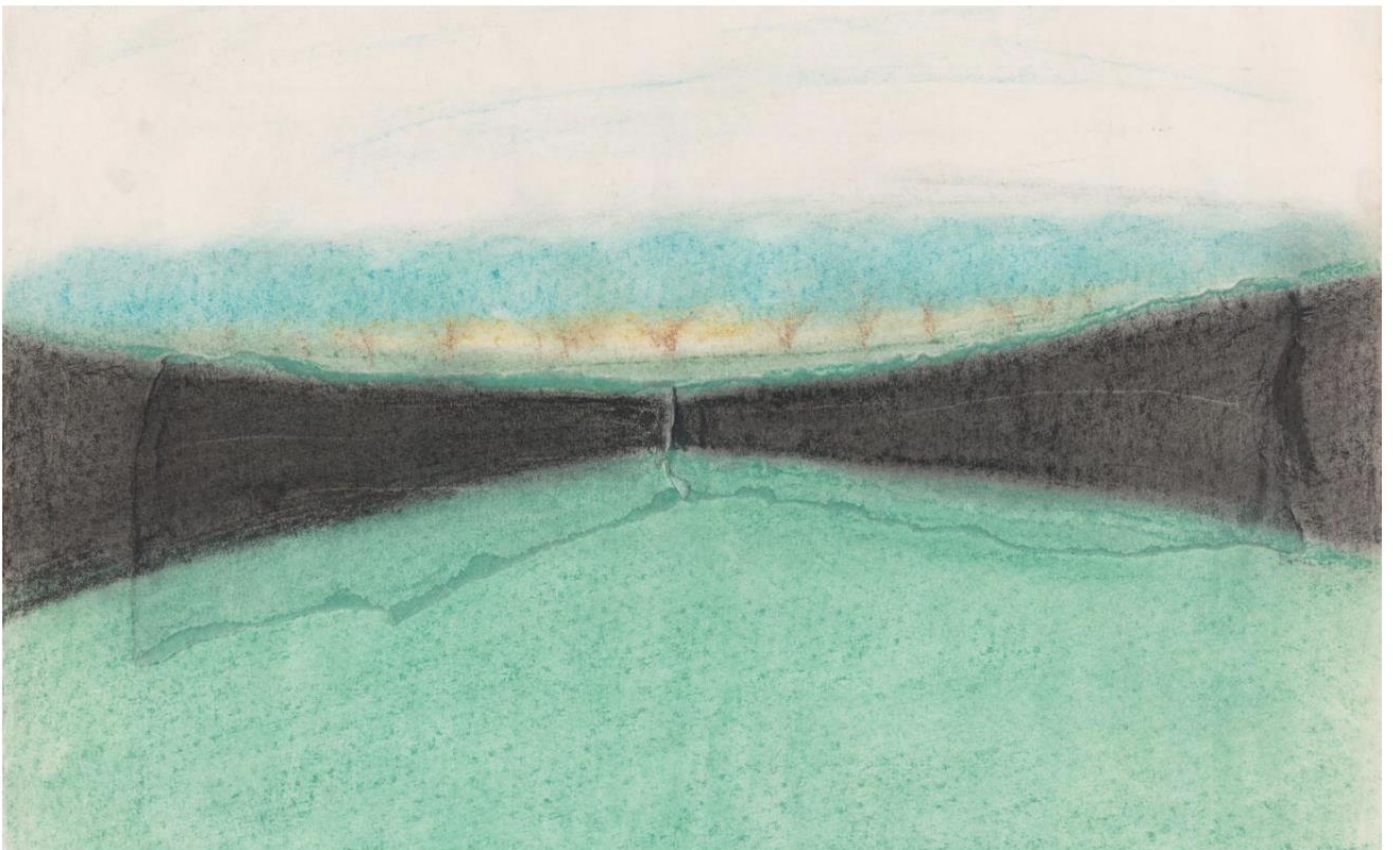
‘We wanted to provide a forum, the first significant one ever, for these amazing generations of women to tell their stories,’ says curator Lisa Hodermarsky on the intention behind the exhibition. Her organisation of the show into six categories – Carving a Presence, Sculpting Space and Place; Threading Myth, Legend and Ritual; Modeling Nature; Tracing the Human Footprint; Drawing Identity and Catching History, Etching Memory – imposes a fluid order on the wide-ranging works.

‘Works can exist in more than one section,’ says Hodermarsky. ‘With certain artists, they might have one work in one section and another in another section – the artists aren’t necessarily able to fit into one category. The six sections seemed to be a good structure for the aesthetic provision of the work, but the truth is, most work defies categorisation that way.’

‘Women really came to Yale to study art out of a deep passion, and to be taken seriously for their work at a time when that was not necessarily the case,’ adds Hodermarsky. ‘Positive and not, about their Yale experiences and their careers afterwards, it was very difficult to find representation, and we are tracing that and allowing the women to tell their stories. We wanted the artists to take the lead on what stories they wanted to tell.’ ✱



Njideka Akunyili Crosby (m.f.a. 2011), *The Rest of Her Remains*, 2010. Charcoal, acrylic, ink, collage, and Xerox transfers on paper. Yale University Art Gallery, purchased with a gift from the Arthur and Constance Zeckendorf Foundation. *Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner*



Maya Lin (b.a. 1981, m.arch. 1986), *Study for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, 1980. Pastel on paper. Yale University Art Gallery, promised gift of Maya Lin, b.a. 1981, m.arch. 1986, in honour of Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director, 1998-2018, and Vincent J. Scully, Jr., b.a. 1940, m.a. 1947, ph.d. 1949 © *Maya Lin Studio*



Victoria Sambunaris (m.f.a. 1999), *Untitled (Haleakala Crater)*, Maui, Hawaii, 2005. Chromogenic print. Yale University Art Gallery, gift of Susan and Arthur Fleischer, Jr., b.a. 1953, ll.b. 1958 © Victoria Sambunaris. *Courtesy the artist and Yancey Richardson Gallery*

INFORMATION

'On The Basis of Art: 150 Years of Women at Yale', Yale University Art Gallery, September 2021 - January 2022

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