

Jacolby Satterwhite

Spirits Roaming on the Earth



Jacolby Satterwhite, *We Are In Hell When We Hurt Each Other*, 2020, HD digital video (still).
© Jacolby Satterwhite. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

This gallery guide is meant to support your experience by offering a path through the exhibition spaces and to provide further information on selected works. Please note several works contain nudity and depictions of sex. If you have questions or need further assistance please speak to the Visitor Experience Associates at the front desk.

This exhibition is the first major survey of work by Jacolby Satterwhite, a multimedia artist who was born in 1986 in Columbia, South Carolina. Satterwhite creates layered and exuberant 3D animated videos, immersive virtual reality environments, paintings, sculptures, albums, and performances. His artistic practice draws on a broad set of real and fantastical references that include video gaming, art history, mythology, and contemporary visual culture.

At its core, Satterwhite's multifaceted practice reveals the healing properties of human creativity. He possesses a special ability to turn existential uncertainty into a

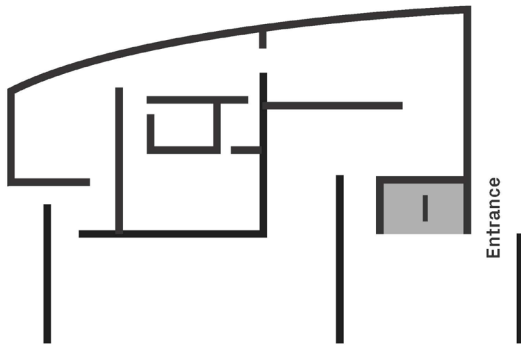
generative space of resilience, reinvention, and celebration. This is a quality the artist shares with his late mother and muse, Patricia Satterwhite, who leveraged her own irrepressible creativity to transform hardship into abundant possibility. Satterwhite pays homage to his mother throughout his work by infusing her artistic output into his own. Her drawings and musical compositions, which feature in the exhibition, make up the foundational elements of many of the video works.

Bringing together works from the past decade, this exhibition maps a holistic view of Satterwhite's extraordinary artistic trajectory and visionary spaces. In building these worlds filled with fantasy, storytelling, and dance, Satterwhite opens up a space to express joy, to heal, and to embody self-determination. Satterwhite's singular ability to masterfully synthesize personal, theoretical, and pop-cultural references with unmatched skill and dexterity affirms his position as one of the preeminent makers and thinkers of our time.



Jacoby Satterwhite, *Throne*, 2019. LED, Plexiglas, silicone, velvet chairs, plastic plants and HD virtual reality video with sound. © Jacoby Satterwhite. Courtesy the artist; The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia; and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

SECTION I



The first two galleries of this exhibition establish the foundational influence of the artist's mother, Patricia Satterwhite. The first gallery features a small selection from the thousands of drawings Patricia made that form a catalog of everyday items and fantastical inventions. These drawings are often accompanied by text that describes them and instructs users, such as "Umbrellas, hats and pocket books matching. Put a timer on the bike."

Her ultimate goal was for these items to circulate in the world through commercial shopping channels such as QVC and the Home Shopping Network. These drawings

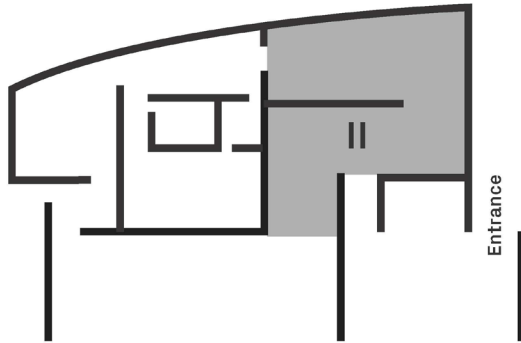
depict the everyday objects that make up the material comforts promised by the American Dream. They also represented an archive of personal memories for Patricia and gave her a way to process her evolving interior world as she dealt with the onset of schizophrenia. Her creativity was a lifeline, a way to heal as well as a means to make ends meet after her illness resulted in financial instability. The drawings were a way towards repair.

In an interview with Kimberly Drew in this exhibition's monograph, Satterwhite shares: "When I would ask her about her drawings, I'd say: 'Are you drawing a teacup?' She'd reply, 'Yeah. Don't you see Diane's face in it?' Diane was her sister. She'd insist that there were figurative elements transcribed in the design of the cups, but I couldn't see it. In her schizophrenic condition, she would talk to herself for 12 hours a day while drawing. She would reminisce about real events, which she thought the objects contained. A time Diane betrayed her—perhaps something she found out over tea. The drawings stopped being about patents, which she only did for a year; they became an autonomous space for self-healing and the consolidation of her dark and positive memories."

Also on view in this gallery is a virtual reality sitting room, which includes yellow neon that reads "Throne," rendered in Patricia's handwriting. The symbol of the rattan peacock chair as a throne recurs throughout Satterwhite's work, referring simultaneously to its appearance in family photos, Patricia's drawings, and in

Blair Stapp's iconic portrait of Black Panther Party co-founder Dr. Huey P. Newton. Three different VR videos play on the three headsets, providing an immersive portal into Satterwhite's "autonomous zone of self-healing."

SECTION II



Featured in this gallery is *PAT's Record Store* (2021), where Satterwhite manifests one of his mother's dreams by creating a platform for selling merchandise. In this functioning retail space, Satterwhite elevates daily household items like towels, plates, and puzzles by adorning them with prints of his densely packed 3D animated environments.

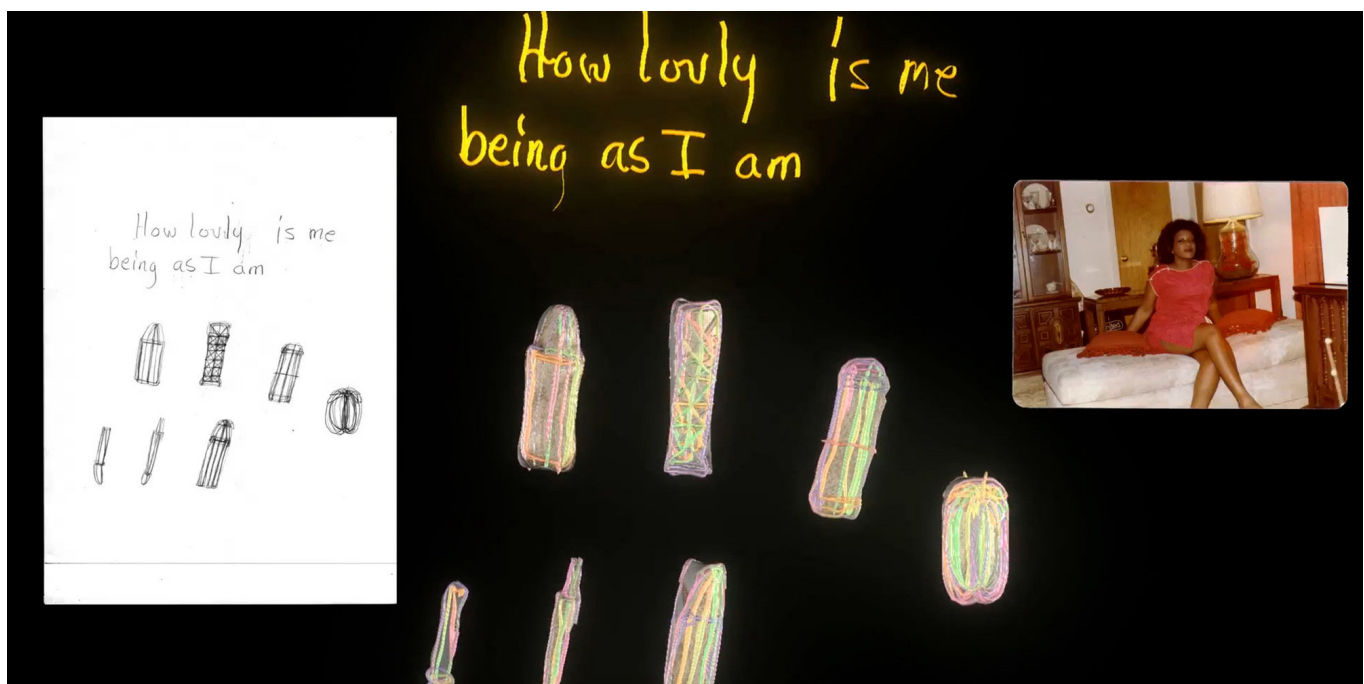
The store also serves as home to his concept album *Love Will Find A Way Home* (2019) made in collaboration with musician Nick Weiss. In addition to being an artist, Patricia was a musician who left behind hundreds of cassette recordings. Satterwhite samples 14 of her

a cappella tracks to make a double-portrait album of himself and his mother. In contrast to the intangible experience of streaming music, Satterwhite grounds this work in an installation of a record store, where visitors can browse the merchandise, imagine the ways these objects will fulfill their desires, and ultimately consume the products born out of the hybrid world of Patricia and Jacoby Satterwhite.

In childhood, Satterwhite developed his skills as an artist to help his mother make drawings. In 2012, Satterwhite returned to these drawings as source material for his film *Matriarch's Rhapsody Codex* (2012). Using 3D rotoscoping—an animation technique that involves tracing over live-action footage frame by frame—Satterwhite created 230 digital renderings of his mother's drawings, which he then paired with their original drawings and family photographs taken by his father. This compilation forms a codex that the artist returns to over and over again using this collaborative archive as a blueprint for his own practice.

Also in this gallery is *Country Ball, 1989–2012* (2012), in which Satterwhite selects 30 recreational objects from *Matriarch's Rhapsody Codex* like a lemonade pitcher, a trampoline, and picnic benches. These objects populate a 3D animated realm shown alongside home recordings of a family picnic from Satterwhite's childhood. *Country Ball* creates an autonomous space where Black joy, dancing queer bodies, nostalgia, and fantasy come together. These key themes that run throughout all of Satterwhite's work appear in this early two-channel video.

Forest Nymph (2010) is the earliest work in the exhibition and establishes motifs that continually reappear in Satterwhite's work as he evolves as a



Jacoby Satterwhite, *Matriarch's Rhapsody Codex*, 2012. 3D animation and video. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © 2022 Jacoby Satterwhite. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York.



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Room for Ascension*, 2019. Mirrored acrylic, HD color video, aluminum, enamel, plywood, PLA filament, epoxy, epoxy resin and wood.
© Jacolby Satterwhite. Courtesy the artist; The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia; and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

performer, animator, sculptor, musician, and filmmaker. In this three-channel video, Satterwhite performs out in the forest, *en plein air*, queering a beloved Impressionist tradition of working improvisationally in nature. He performs as Robin, a persona that blends the artist and his mother into a multi-gendered nymph-like warrior who combats animated viral orbs with a kanekalon ponytail. Robin wields their hair-as-weapon by twisting, voguing, and serving moves that require extraordinary physical dexterity as they blend ball scene choreography and video game imagery. A survivor of childhood cancer, Satterwhite performs a healing ritual where Robin claims bodily control through movement and transforms a Black femme beauty product—kanekalon—into a protective weapon against an external threat. Works such as *Forest Nymph* are inspired by the solace he found in the fantasy worlds of video games during his childhood cancer treatment.

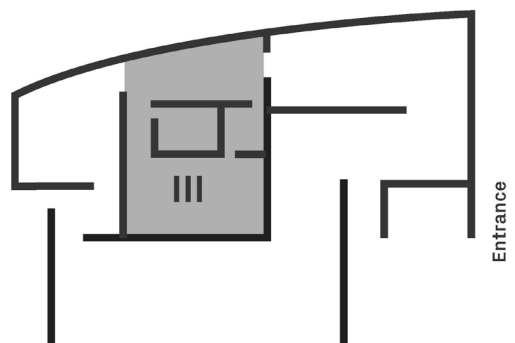
Alongside *Forest Nymph* are two recent paintings, which represent a return to Satterwhite's origins as a painter, and a refocus inward with the physical body. After over a decade of working primarily in the digital space, this shift to painting was driven by the artist's desire to translate

his fantastical, mythic spaces onto a canvas. The artist explains the shift in energy that he has found through painting: "I spent my last two series interrogating and responding to the female energy that raised me. It's interesting [that] I'm using oil painting to interrogate the male energy." Satterwhite has also found that the dynamic interplay between two spaces—the digital studio and the painting studio—provides ample room for creativity and interpretive possibility. Throughout this exhibition other recent paintings are interspersed with Satterwhite's videos, hinting at the interconnectedness of these two practices.

On view in this gallery and on a screen in *Room for Ascension* (2019) are part one, two, and three of the six-part *Reifying Desire* series, begun in 2011. In this seminal body of work, Satterwhite creates 3D animated worlds by transforming the objects from his mother's drawings into a kind of architecture in which he performs. The artist draws a vast array of influences into these worlds, including celebrity icons and cult figures, and addresses poignant social issues such as the dehumanizing conditions of capitalism as well as its liberating power. Within these rich and layered compositions appear imagery that invokes the cycles of life, death, and gestation, and the purification powers of ritual and water. Visuals generated in one chapter of the series can be found again in another. As Sasha Bonét writes in the monograph that accompanies this exhibition: "Each film progressively begs the question with higher frequency: How many ways can one contort without breaking?"

Objects that Patricia drew are repeatedly used as vehicles for transformation within the artist's animated worlds and in the physical world as sculptures. Satterwhite often expresses motifs in multiple formats and resists linear stories in his practice. By being hard to pin down, impossible to control, and by constantly shifting form, Satterwhite's body of work is a wellspring of resistance to systems that thrive on flattening humanity into harmful stereotypes.

SECTION III



The three prints on the right side of this gallery are derived from the animation in *We Are In Hell When We Hurt Each Other* (2020). These works continue Satterwhite's practice of inserting Black and queer cultural icons into his 3D animated worlds. British musician Dev Hynes of Blood Orange, and fashion model, icon, and activist Bethann Hardison occupy space within Satterwhite's world of gyrating fembots. In the print *Black Luncheon* (2020), Hardison's figure is multiplied to replicate the same tableau from Édouard Manet's painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* [Luncheon on the Grass] (1862–63). The conflation of art historical and pop cultural references swirl in Satterwhite's fabricated realms, resisting easy definition. Being hard to define is a way to stay free and survive—that which cannot be pinned down cannot be oppressed or captured.

In the neon sculpture *Black Luncheon*, Satterwhite animates a kanekalon ponytail—a motif also seen in the video *Forest Nymph*—as a weapon against contagion. A dramatic “Boom” illuminates as the ponytail bursts a viral cell, invoking comic book aesthetics while playfully affirming the power of Black femme beauty. Satterwhite again plays off the composition of Manet's painting, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, which is often cited as Modernism's point of origin. *Black Luncheon* is displayed alongside sculptural renderings of Patricia's drawings. In this one

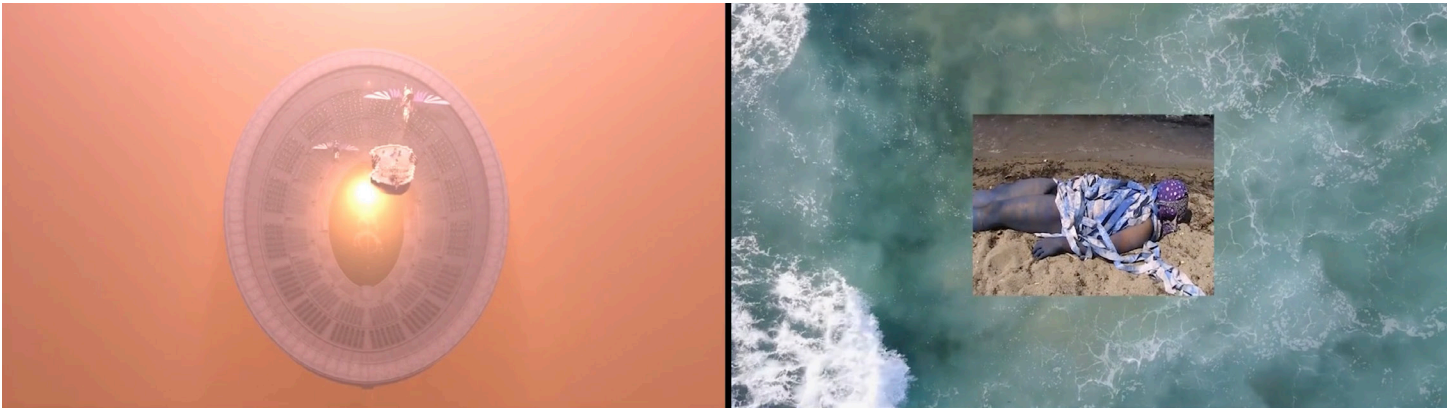
piece, the artist irreverently toys with the art historical canon, claims a space within it for Black femmes who have been routinely and violently written out, and introduces his own artistic language into the lineage of Modernism.

Reifying Desire 6 (2014), on view in the video gallery, is about gestation. Satterwhite depicts himself being impregnated by gay porn celebrity Antonio Biaggi, who was infamous for not using protection in his films. Biaggi's fame reached a pinnacle around the time that PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) was made available, which, when taken, reduces the risk of being infected by HIV. The recurring subjects of gestation, contagion, protection, and the healing spaces of queer culture reach a crescendo in this sixth film of the *Reifying Desire* series. Throughout his work, Satterwhite subverts the spectacle of taboo by abstracting transgressive behavior and portraying a profoundly humanizing vulnerability.

The sculpture *Room for Cleansing* (2019) explores the bathtub as a healing space of retreat, self-care, and regeneration. Patricia's drawing of a bathtub (“Water Tub Seat to soak in”) forms the basis of the sculpture, which contains female nude figures referenced from the canonical *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) by Pablo Picasso. In the video *Reifying Desire 5* (2013), Picasso's



Jacoby Satterwhite, *Black Luncheon*, 2020. Animated neon. © Jacoby Satterwhite. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Birds in Paradise*, 2019. 2-channel HD color video and 3D animation with sound. © Jacolby Satterwhite. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

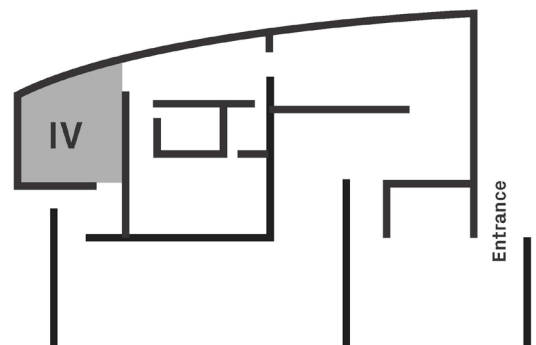
women are transposed into Patricia's tub while an avatar pours hot pink bath beads over them in a dance ritual that includes a "death drop" vogue dance move. As *Reifying Desire 5* opens, Satterwhite appears covered in chrome, dancing and watering the concrete-colored femme bot women. Images of Satterwhite's mother Patricia float through this world as if she is there to bear witness. A femme bot then grows a phallus that shoots out miniature Jacolbys, a creation of both the masculine and the feminine. Satterwhite's preoccupation with patriarchy and mythology merges here to form a world that reifies—or materializes—femme power.

Reifying Desire 4 - Model It (2012) is a two-channel video of nature versus civilization. Displayed on a perpendicular wall, the placement allows the viewer to understand the intersections that exist when moving between these worlds. Patricia sings in a raspy and comforting voice that resembles an embrace as Satterwhite vogues through New York City's Upper East Side. She encourages him never to stop, despite the taxis, people, and pets that traverse across the screen as if Satterwhite were invisible. The X-men army base is also featured in this film, furthering the concept of mutant othering. Satterwhite weaponizes the kanekalon ponytail as a combat agent in this video game-like setting, protecting the body from invaders as he performs amongst the trees.

Reifying Desire 7 - Dawn (2022), Satterwhite's most recent project, is an ambitious two-channel video centered on rehabilitation and spiritual acceptance. Created during the latter half of the COVID-19 pandemic, the video incorporates six distinct landscapes or worlds focused on community, family, spirituality, faith, love, and health. Satterwhite uses each space for vulnerable introspection, spiritual exploration, and, ultimately, a step toward finding solace and rebirth. Satterwhite solicited texts and drawings from Cleveland's Fairfax neighborhood residents responding to the prompt, "What does Utopia look like to you?" Their creations—nearly 100 unique drawings—formed the inspiration for the successive stages of the work. In *Reifying Desire 7 - Dawn*, Satterwhite also incorporates his mother's lyrics

and vocals and taps musical artist Perfume Genius, also pictured in live action scenes, to create a dramatic electronic composition. The score opens with the lyrics "This Is Healing Music," setting the tone for the piece.

SECTION IV



Featured in this gallery is *Birds in Paradise* (2019), which uses Patricia's cassette recordings as its creative point of origin. When describing his mother's recordings in *Interview Magazine*, Satterwhite said: "She would imitate songwriting structures from Top 40 hits and add folk and gospel influences. There were these tape recordings that she would make in the mental institution and at home. When I was a kid, I was embarrassed by it. But as an adult, after grad school, I was like, 'Woah, these are poignant and interesting.' They kind of remind me of Gertrude Stein or Emily Dickinson—isolated women—making these poignant lyrics that I felt needed to be repurposed somehow." These recordings provided the foundation for *Love Will Find A Way Home*, an electronic dance album that also serves as the soundtrack for *Birds in Paradise*.

In this six volume, feature-length video, Satterwhite insists that sound can be aligned with imagery as a tool to immerse the viewer in a tangible, nearly tactile world. *Birds in Paradise* focuses on healing through sonic

SECTION V

On view on the Project Wall is *Dawn*, part of an ambitious multimedia project begun in 2021. Satterwhite was asked to conceive of a public artwork for the Cleveland Clinic's new BioRepository facility in the Black neighborhood of Fairfax. A major organization, the Cleveland Clinic has a historically fraught relationship with its Black neighbors and community. Working with Cleveland artists RA Washington and LaToya Kent, Satterwhite asked Fairfax residents directly to respond to the question, "What does Utopia look like to you?" The artist painstakingly digitized nearly 100 unique drawings created by participants responding to that prompt before animating their work in



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Dawn* (detail), 2022. Wallpaper. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

a 3D world. The layered graphic wallpaper on view here is a translation of the video back into a 2D space.

Jacolby Satterwhite b. 1986, Columbia, South Carolina; lives and works in Brooklyn. Satterwhite received his BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Arts, Baltimore, and his MFA from the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. The artist's work has been presented in numerous exhibitions and festivals internationally, including most recently at the Lincoln Center for Performing Arts, New York (2022); Miller Institute for Contemporary Art at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh (2021); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2021); the Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju (2021); the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2021); The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia (2019); Pioneer Works, New York (2019); the Whitechapel Gallery, London (2019); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2019); the Minneapolis Institute of Art (2019); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2018); La Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2018); the New Museum, New York (2017); the Public Art Fund, New York (2017); the San Francisco Museum of Art (2017); and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2017). He was awarded the United States Artist Francie Bishop Good & David Horvitz Fellowship in 2016. His work is included in the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others. Satterwhite has collaborated with several musicians, including Solange Knowles on her visual album *When I Get Home* (2019) and Perfume Genius on his album *Ugly Season* (2022).

Jacolby Satterwhite: Spirits Roaming on the Earth is organized by the Miller Institute for Contemporary Art at Carnegie Mellon University and curated by Elizabeth Chodos, Director. The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis exhibition is organized by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, former Ferring Foundation Chief Curator.

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