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Pulitzer Explores Deeper Dimensions of the Environment in Video and Film

On Earth, On View March 8 – August 4, 2024

ST. LOUIS, MO, January 9, 2024—The Pulitzer Arts Foundation will screen five contemporary video and film works in an exhibition titled *On Earth*. The show explores the layered and nuanced relationships between humans and the natural world from sentiments of joy and reverence to the ways in which human interventions shape land and our relationships with it.

Produced between 1975 and 2022, the artworks highlight a range of urgent and interconnected realities. Addressing environmental devastation, displacement, and land rights, the artists draw parallels between our treatment of the earth and the people who inhabit it.

The participating artists bring a global perspective to these issues. The artist roster includes Ali Cherri (based in Brooklyn, NY, born 1976, Beirut, Lebanon); Jeffrey Gibson (based in Hudson, NY, born 1972, Colorado Springs, CO); Sky Hopinka (based in Brooklyn, NY, born 1984, Ferndale, WA); Ana Mendieta (born 1948 in Havana, Cuba, died in New York City, 1985); and Rivane Neuenschwander (based in São Paulo, born 1967, Belo Horizonte, Brazil).

“In the current moment many of us are deeply—and even urgently—reflecting on our inextricable bonds with the Earth. Art can offer us opportunities for reflection as we face challenging futures and remember shared pasts. The works in the exhibition serve as conduits for sorrow, loss, and solemn meditation but also spiritual awareness, celebration, and delight in the relationship between humanity and the environment,” says Cara Starke, the museum’s Executive Director.

Stephanie Weissberg, Curator, Pulitzer Arts Foundation, and the organizer of *On Earth*, notes that, “Moving images have the unique ability to capture the constant flux of the natural world. The five artists have leveraged the capacity of this medium to offer profound, reflective, and even open-ended commentaries on the many ways we engage with, rely on, transform, and trace our origins to the Earth.”

On Earth occupies the entire lower level of the Pulitzer. Each work will be screened in a distinct space and will be on view continuously with a total run time of under one hour.

THE EXHIBITION

Upon descending the main stairway and entering the lower level, the visitor encounters the first work in *On Earth*, a video by Sky Hopinka, an artist, writer, poet, and member of the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin.

Mnemonics of Shape and Reason, 2021, opens with a shot taken from inside a moving car traversing a mountainous desert landscape. The vista soon destabilizes, however, as the viewer begins to decode



Sky Hopinka, *Mnemonics of Shape and Reason*, 2021

the presence of an alternate landscape, superimposed upside down. For the next four minutes, propulsive audio rhythms and poetic text lead the viewer through meditative and reassembled dreamlike landscapes.

It is a kaleidoscopic journey, where sky, earth, water, and fauna in undefined locales rush by as fragments, some visually altered—dark green pools, black-limned clouds, and orange lakes.

Transparent silhouettes glide by and layer atop the images of landscape before finally giving way to the image of flaxen grasses and water blowing in the wind, which in turn dissolves into one moving, speeding blur. The title of the work is drawn from one of Hopinka's poems and alludes to the ways in which people connect with memories. Hopinka refers to a sacred burial site, Soaking Mountain, built by the artist's ancestors and located at the confluence of the Trempealeau and Mississippi Rivers in Wisconsin.

Joy and exaltation at being in connection with the land are expressed in the next gallery in **To Feel Myself Beloved on the Earth**, 2020, by the Mississippi Choctaw and Cherokee artist Jeffrey Gibson, who will represent the U.S. at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

Although best known for his painting and sculpture, video-making is an important part of his practice. This 16-minute single-channel work was produced during the coronavirus pandemic at a time of great civil unrest. In the video, lone dancers swathed in capacious, jewel-toned robes made by the artist's studio animate lush green countryside, forests, and an urban studio and balcony. The percussive intensity of musicians seen drumming in close-up shots knits together six performance vignettes, while audio recordings from a 2020 Black Trans Lives march in New York overlay some scenes. While the work addresses painful experiences, it also emphasizes pride, exuberance, and resilience in the face of adversity.



Jeffrey Gibson, *To Feel Myself Beloved on the Earth*, 2020



Rivane Neuenschwander, *Quarta-Feira de Cinza / Epilogue*, 2006

Extending the notion of performance in an unexpected way is the next video, **Quarta-Feira de Cinza / Epilogue**, 2006, by Rivane Neuenschwander, which is set on the floor of a rainforest in Brazil on the last day of Carnival, right before the advent of Lent. Shot in close-up as day fades into night, the camera follows a colony of leafcutter ants as they nudge and lug shiny gold, blue and orange confetti to their nests. To the human eye, the ants's Sisyphian labor feels almost choreographed, scored

to the clicking sounds of Brazilian samba music played with match sticks and the ambient sound of bird calls and rustling leaves. The work speaks to the relationships between humans and other animals that inhabit the natural world.

The next work in *On Earth* is by Ali Cherri, a Lebanese artist working across film, video, installation, drawing, and performance. His work often sheds light on global environmental disasters and population displacements. Shot in northern Sudan, **Of Men and Gods and Mud**, 2022, is a three-channel video that follows a group of brickmakers as they produce building materials from mud at a factory in Northern Sudan. The factory is located near the massive Merowe Dam, which is one of the largest hydroelectric projects in Africa. Although it brought much-needed electricity to the region, its creation destroyed ecosystems and displaced more than 50,000 people, resulting in civil unrest.



Ali Cherri, *Of Men and Gods and Mud*, 2022

Brickmakers stand waist deep in mud with backs bent to shovel, daub, mold, fire, stack, and hose down mud during a working day. Shots of brickmaking are interspersed with images of the nearby Nile River and Merowe Dam, drawing connections between mud as the source of human life and a material that people harness for their own creations. The narrations, in English and Arabic, are excerpted from Ali's printed *Book of Mud*, which references a range of global mythologies, including origin myths describing clay as the primordial material for the human body and stories about destructive floods common to many cultures around the world. In the closing shots, views of the dam and a powerful flowing river transition to black. The distant shadow of a figure walking in the dark holding a lamp recedes as a pinhead of light in a pitch black universe. In 2022, this video work was awarded the Silver Lion at the 59th Venice Biennale.

The last work encountered in the exhibition is **Soul Silhouette on Fire** ("Alma Silueta en Fuego"), 1975, one of the most recognized works of performance and time-based art by the Cuban artist Ana Mendieta. The three-minute silent film is one in a series where Mendieta constructed silhouettes of her own form onto the earth. The ephemeral interventions were assembled with a range of materials—

flowers, moss, cloth, sticks, mud—and were partially inspired by Afro-Cuban rituals, Indigenous Central American belief systems, and Santeria, a pantheistic worship in relationship to the earth.

For “Soul Silhouette on Fire,” the then-27-year-old artist used her own body as subject—and, symbolically, as sacrifice. She lay on the ground, spreading her arms and tracing the outline of her body. Once the outline of her form was carved into the dirt, she shrouded it in white cloth. Finally, she set the silhouette afire in a flame that seemed to spontaneously burst from the center of the silhouette. Shooting with a hand-held stationary Super 8 camera at mid-distance, Mendieta documented the flames engulfing and consuming the figure. The film ends with a shot of charred remains. Mendieta described her *Siluetas* series as a means to heal a profound sense of loss stemming from the pain and displacement of her early life. Sent from Cuba to the United States as part of Operation Peter Pan—a secret evacuation of minors whose parents feared Communist rule—Mendieta was separated from her family at the young age of twelve. She said “I have no motherland, I feel a need to join with the earth.”

The exhibition runs from Friday, March 8 to Sunday, August 4, 2024, simultaneously with the exhibition *Delcy Morelos: Interwoven*.

About the Pulitzer Arts Foundation

Located in the heart of St. Louis, the Pulitzer Arts Foundation presents art from around the world in its celebrated Tadao Ando-designed building and surrounding neighborhood. Exhibitions include both contemporary and historic art and are complemented by a wide range of free public programs, including music, literary arts, dance, wellness, and cultural discussions. Founded in 2001, the Pulitzer is a place where ideas are freely explored, new art exhibited, and historic work reimaged. Open and free to all, the Pulitzer is a cultural and civic asset to the St. Louis community and a popular destination for visitors from around the world.

In addition to the museum, the Pulitzer is home to several outdoor spaces, including Park-Like—a garden of native plants and pathways, the Spring Church—an open air stone pavilion and beloved landmark, and the Tree Grove—a shady picnic spot with oak and redbud trees. The museum is open Thursday through Sunday, 10am–5pm, with evening hours until 8pm on Friday. The outdoor campus is open daily, sunrise to sunset. Admission is free. For more information, visit pulitzerarts.org or @pulitzerarts on social media.

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Image Captions

Sky Hopinka, *Mnemonics of Shape and Reason*, 2021. HD video, stereo, colour, 4 minutes and 13 seconds. Open edition (HOPINKA-2022-0015). Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin and Los Angeles

Jeffrey Gibson, *To Feel Myself Beloved on the Earth*, 2020. Single-channel video with stereo sound, dimensions variable, 16 minutes. Courtesy of the artist; Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York; Roberts Projects, Los Angeles; and Stephen Friedman, London

Rivane Neuenschwander, *Quarta-Feira de Cinza / Epilogue*, 2006. DVD projection, Duration: 5 minutes, 45 seconds. Installation dimensions variable. Edition of 8; 2 Aps. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles, Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel Galeria, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

Ali Cherri, *Of Men and Gods and Mud*, 2022. Three-channel video installation, Projection Duration: 18 minutes, 20 seconds. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès, Paris