

# Pinault Collection

Exhibition  
Palazzo Grassi  
17.03.2024 — 6.01.2025

EN

# Julie Mehretu

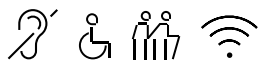
with Nairy Baghramian / Huma Bhabha / Tacita Dean / David  
Hammons / Robin Coste Lewis / Paul Pfeiffer / Jessica Rankin

# ensemble

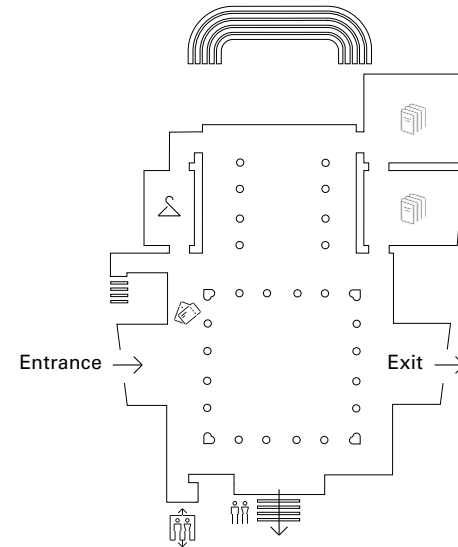
**Any question? Just ask me!**

Ask the **cultural mediators** if you have any questions about the current exhibition. The service is free and operates daily from 11 am to 1 pm and from 4 pm to 6 pm.

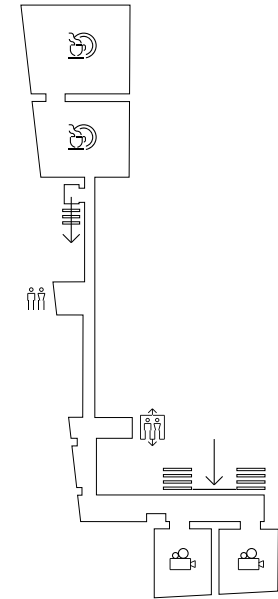
Ask for the **Accessibility Guide** available from April 20 at the ticket office: you'll find content in Italian Sign Language and International Sign Language, accompanied by simplified texts.



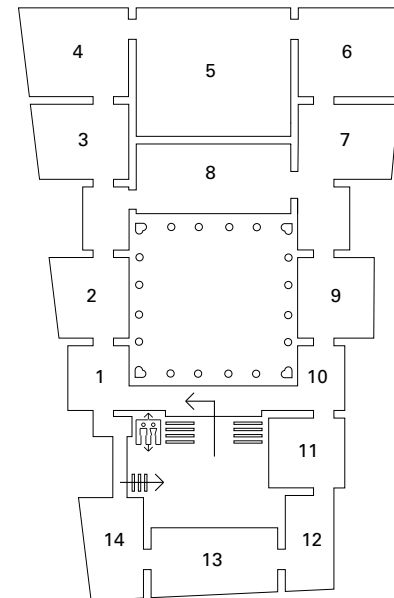
LEVEL 0



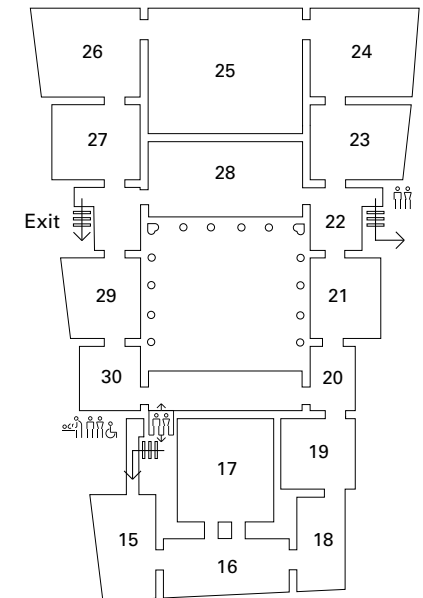
LEVEL M – mezzanine



LEVEL 1



LEVEL 2



Julie Mehretu's exhibition *Ensemble*—with Nairy Baghramian, Huma Bhabha, Tacita Dean, David Hammons, Robin Coste Lewis, Paul Pfeiffer and Jessica Rankin—at Palazzo Grassi spans the past twenty-five years of her work, including some of her most recent paintings. It is also punctuated by works by some of her closest artist friends, with whom she has developed, over the years, through exchanges and collaborations, a powerful affinity.

Spanning two floors of Palazzo Grassi, this exhibition is conceived according to a principle of visual echoes, as a meandering, non-chronological journey through Mehretu's work. Visitors can explore and understand how her artistic practice came into being and is constantly renewed. Like the layers and superimpositions of strata that go into her paintings, the exhibition is shaped by the correspondences that have developed among these works over the years. Deeply rooted in abstraction, Mehretu's practice is fed by the history of art, geography, history, social struggles, revolutionary movements, and the subjectivity of those who have made their mark on these major fields of knowledge and the arts.


The palimpsest of her work, forming multiple surface images, echoes with the collective dimension, the idea of working together, which we have sought to bring out here. In this exhibition, pieces by Mehretu's friends Nairy Baghramian, Huma Bhabha, Tacita Dean, David Hammons, Robin Coste Lewis, Paul Pfeiffer and Jessica Rankin enter into a rich dialogue with her own art. Beyond their formal differences, common concerns and shared driving forces become apparent, challenging the idea that the artist is self-sufficient and showing that, on the contrary, she is connected to others, to their thoughts and sensibilities. Their works inspire her and resonate with her own, with her way of looking at the world—all the more since each of these artists, like Mehretu herself, experienced displacements, by force or by choice, that deeply shaped who they became. Their participation in the exhibition is a testament to Mehretu's acute attention to these gradually woven relationships, to their seminal role and creative power.

Caroline Bourgeois

# Table of Content

---

JULIE MEHRETU	
Chapter 1: 2001–11	6
Chapter 2: 2012–16	8
Chapter 3: 2016–21	10
Chapter 4: <i>Maahes (Mihos) torch</i> , 2018–19	12
Chapter 5: Graphic works, 2016–20	14
Chapter 6: “about the space of half an hour” and “Among the Multitude”, 2018–22	16
Chapter 7: 2021–24	18
NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN	20
HUMA BHABHA	22
TACITA DEAN	24
DAVID HAMMONS	26
ROBIN COSTE LEWIS	28
PAUL PFEIFFER	30
JESSICA RANKIN	32
Chronology	34
Biographies	40

This guide does not reflect the order of the works on display. You can consult it by following the numbers with this icon , indicated on the wall labels of the works in the exhibition rooms. These numbers refer to the chapter numbers in this guide.



*Rise of the New Suprematists*, 2001  
Forman Family Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Courtesy the artist  
and Marian Goodman Gallery

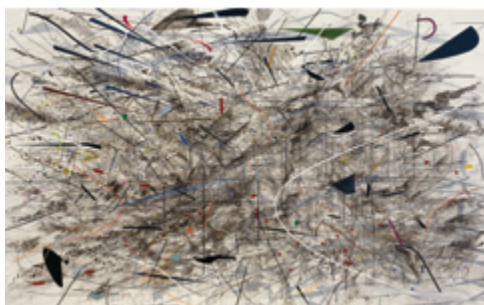
Room 19



*Vanescere*, 2007  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Steven Gerlich.  
Courtesy the artist and carlier | gebauer, Berlin

Room 4



*Black City*, 2007  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tim Thayer.  
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Room 9

In the early 2000s, Julie Mehretu began producing canvases on a very large scale. First, using a technical pen, she transferred the geometric order of straight lines and regular curves from architectural drawings compiled from a variety of sources. Having “sealed” these skeletons of fictional, composite cities with a layer of transparent acrylic, Mehretu applied tumultuous, atmospheric touches of ink and acrylic. Right from the start, therefore, everything begins with drawing. This is where the free, exploratory expression of the line-making gesture becomes visible: “The drawing has agency... I really think of the drawing as growing, as behaving, as building, as acting... It really isn’t that, it’s only a drawing, but I think of it and make it that way.”<sup>01</sup>

In *Rise of the New Suprematists* (room 19), an underlying network of lines arises from the entanglement and fusion of different spaces that blur our bearings. This web of lines is partly masked by lively brushstrokes that evoke shifting, agitated skies or swarms of small characters coming together to form mobile communities. By organizing the encounter and contamination of these different levels and registers of drawing, the canvas takes on the appearance of landscapes expanding or captured in a transitory moment that has the dynamic movement of a maelstrom—what Mehretu refers to as story maps of no location. Produced a few years later, *Vanescere* and *Fragment* (both in room 4) bear the marks of time spent by the artist in Berlin. The city’s unique identity and turbulent history left a lasting impression on her. Her confrontation with the mixture of urban strata and typologies is reflected in her new canvases: their fragmentary dimension is even more pronounced, as if the motifs were trying to escape the frame. The artist also began to erase more and more,

leaving her *pentimenti* visible. Her lively and mobile graphic marks, scattered on the canvases, convey a sonic and musical energy that becomes almost palpable.

The canvases *Black City* (room 9) and *Invisible Line (collective)* (room 8) are the culmination of these hybrid, cosmopolitan urban panoramas, in which fragments of fortifications, stadiums, amphitheaters, and airport terminals, along with logos, banners, and flags—often “abstracted” to the point of becoming ambiguous signs—intertwine and overlap. They testify to Mehretu’s interest in architecture, utopias, and the spaces of globalization: “I think architecture reflects the machinations of politics, and that’s why I am interested in it as a metaphor for those institutions. I don’t think of architectural language as just a metaphor about space. It’s about space, but about spaces of power, about the ideas of power.”<sup>02</sup>

The swarm of curved lines, fragments of ellipses, and simple geometric shapes, reminiscent of Alexander Calder’s mobiles or the plastic language of the Russian avant-gardes, introduce us to dizzying visual experiences that subject the eye to disorientation and drift. In this way, her canvases function as layerings of uncertain space and time, blending an enduring past with a future that we either dread or hope for.

01 — Julie Mehretu, interview with David Binkley and Kinsey Katchka, March 28, 2003.  
<https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/passages/mehretu-conversation.html>

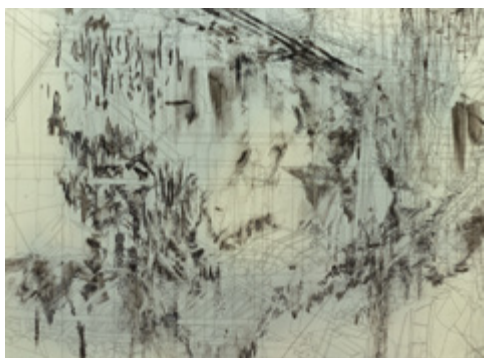
02 — Julie Mehretu, interview with Agustin Pérez Rubio, “Tracing the Universe of Julie Mehretu. A Choral Text” in *Julie Mehretu* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 29.



*Invisible Sun (algorithm 1)*, 2012  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Room 6



*Chimera*, 2013  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Room 3



*Conjured Parts (epigraph), Aleppo*, 2016  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Alex Yudzon.  
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Room 7

Around 2012, there was a distinct shift in Mehretu's work, and the architectural drawings that formed the underlying framework of her canvases gradually disappeared. In *Invisible Sun (algorithm 1)* (room 6), they are almost entirely covered by a diffuse grey glow, while in *Chimera* (room 3), they are present only as the ruins of one of Saddam Hussein's palaces/bunkers in Baghdad, bombed by the American army, as if the echo of the destruction caused by the war had gradually invaded the canvases with a dark veil. The human body, meanwhile, makes a furtive appearance in the form of spectral, schematic imprints—a sensitive homage to David Hammons's "body prints"—of Julie Mehretu's hands, of mouths, elbows, and tongues, associating the body with spaces marked by violence and political conflict. Following artist Glenn Ligon, a close friend of Mehretu's, they also constitute "a recognition that resistance can take the form of a hand raised in protest, a joy-giving erogenous zone, or a witnessing eye."<sup>01</sup>

In *Being Higher I* (room 12), the canvas is organized on the scale of the artist's body, and her agitated silhouette can be glimpsed, floating on an empty background, in a kind of 'bare-knuckled' fight with the work. In *Heavier than air (written form)* (room 6) and in the "Conjured Parts" series (rooms 7 and 11), the artist's richly spontaneous gestures seem to metamorphose into seismographic charts. Freed from the architectural drawings against which they were measured, her graphic marks become more gestural and nervous, seeming to capture the complex energies emanating from the world. In the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings and the beginning of the revolution in Syria, which quickly turned into one of the worst civil wars of recent decades, these canvases bear witness to that suffocating atmosphere and its blocked horizon. Mehretu works here in grisaille, restricting her palette

to a quasi-monochrome, infinitely varying the brushstrokes, tones, and textures. Grey becomes the metaphor for an in-between, a liminal space that gives the impression of a haze or vertigo that blurs optical legibility. The canvases of this period thus become indefinable *grey areas*, dotted with rapid brushstrokes, streams of small, suspended dots and broad, irregular brushstrokes, evoking geological faults, swarms of birds in flight, or clouds of smoke or tear gas.

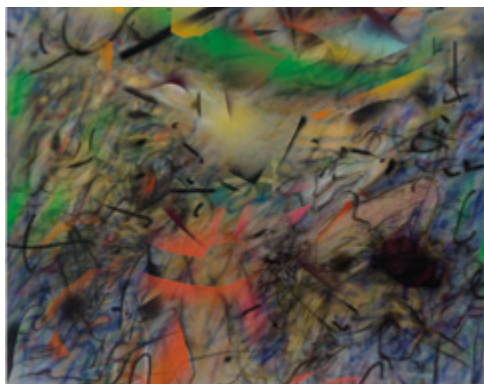
In *Invisible Sun (algorithm 6, third letter form)* (room 3), *Heavier than air (written form)*, and *Conjured Parts (epigraph), Aleppo* (room 7), the almost calligraphic brushstrokes also recall the liveliness of writing systems, showing Mehretu's interest in the evocative power of Babylonian and Egyptian stela and their colossal figures, flanked by scripts or hieroglyphs. Dark smoke engulfs the space of these works, pierced here and there by flashes of light. However, in the restlessness and ambiguity of the signs and the semi-darkness of the canvases, it is not hard to perceive infinite possibilities, an opening towards an uncertain and suspended future. The "invisible sun" may be about to reappear, and the fog may be about to lift.



*Ghosthymn (after the Raft)*, 2019-21  
Private Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Room 5



*Conversion (S.M. del Popolo/after C.)*,  
2019-20  
Lent by The Metropolitan Museum  
of Art, purchase, Allison and Larry Berg  
and Marietta Wu and Thomas  
Yamamoto Gifts, 2021 (2021.123)

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Room 15

In the mid-2010s, Julie Mehretu began to populate the background of her canvases with blurred, colored shapes. She obtained these by digitally manipulating press photographs, most of which had been widely circulated online and become emblematic of the events they captured. The information they contained—the event mediated by the image and experienced from a distance—is no longer legible. Through this radical loss of definition, the source image opens up and transforms into a space for almost limitless projection and reinvention. The artist is guided, in her choice of visuals, by an intuitive and affective approach, by the way they can haunt her, catch her off guard, and resurface unexpectedly from her memory. They are proof of her close attention to and engagement with what is happening in the world. In particular, she is interested in images linked to the rise of authoritarianism and white supremacy, the ferocity of civil wars and ethnic conflicts, catastrophic climate change (mega-hurricanes, giant forest fires, etc.), as well as emancipation movements and recent popular demonstrations and uprisings (in Lebanon, in Catalonia, and in the United States with the Black Lives Matter movement). They often capture the vulnerability of human beings in the face of violence, but also their formidable capacity for resistance.

Mehretu dedicates many of her paintings to central figures in Black American culture. This is a way of celebrating Black cultural heritage, paying homage to the free jazz musicians and composers John and Alice Coltrane, Don Cherry, and Sun Ra, and to literary and intellectual figures such as Toni Morrison and bell hooks. Other paintings relate not to contemporary events but to paintings from previous centuries. In *Ghosthymn (after the Raft)* (room 5) and *Conversion (S.M. del Popolo/after C.)* (room 15), for example, Mehretu reactivates the power of paintings by Théodore Géricault and Caravaggio respectively, transforming

the past into a resource for thinking about the present (the hope that can emerge despite the horror of the Atlantic slave trade in Géricault's famous *Raft of the Medusa*, or the dazzling revelation of divine light in Caravaggio's *Conversion of Saint Paul*).

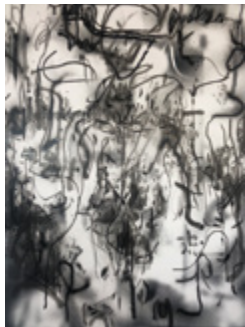
The artist's use of blurred photographs fundamentally transforms her relationship with color. She experiments with vibrant, shimmering hues that are at times acidic and saturated, in shades of red, electric blue, orange, violet, and green. These canvases exude a more explosive and volatile energy: the interplay of opacity and transparency is bolder and sharper. Mehretu regularly uses stencils and silkscreens. Her repertoire of supple, mobile brushstrokes grows more diverse, evoking swirls, showers of pixels, and computer glitches, while interlacing acrylics, sprinkled onto the canvas with an airbrush or spray, evoke the stridency of sound frequencies or the liveliness of graffiti. This complex and original combination results in works that engage the eye and the mind in a constantly teeming and ambiguous challenge.



*Maahes (Mihos) torch*, 2018-19  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Room 1



*Maahes (Mihos) Torch, in process*

Courtesy Julie Mehretu Studio



Fire at the National Museum in  
Rio de Janeiro, 2018

STR/AFP via Getty Images

On the evening of September 2, 2018, a fire broke out at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In just a few hours, the blaze destroyed almost the entirety of the institution's collections; the extent of the tragic consequences of this fire for Brazilian ethnology, culture, and science are still difficult to gauge today. The event was widely covered by the media, and images of the devastating fire quickly circulated online. Julie Mehretu responded to a photograph in which huge flames are visible on the left, and thick clouds of grey smoke are billowing out of each of the windows at the front of the museum. In the foreground, a group of people, barely visible because they are not in focus, witness the event. The artist subjected the photograph to a series of transformations, keeping only its "DNA": it was blurred and converted to black and white, its values reversed, and rotated 270 degrees. She then entrusted an assistant with the task of airbrushing the resulting image onto the canvas, which, thus prepared, took on a blurred appearance made up of areas of light and shadow, populated by amorphous masses with no contours: "In these blurs, I felt apparitions; ghosts of the moment represented in the photograph. [...] I am fascinated with the blur, with the loss of focus, with how much of these images still comes through."<sup>01</sup>

Against this blurred, colored background, the artist proceeded step by step. Once one of the many layers was completed, it was "sealed" into the canvas by a transparent layer, carefully buffed with sandpaper, a process that adds complexity and modulates the density of the work. This procedure was combined with numerous ways of inscribing marks on the canvas. Mehretu used a variety of instruments: her hands (to make imprints and to paint directly with her fingers), as well as brushes of different sizes, stencils, and scotch tape (which

serve to delimit the areas in which she intervenes), airbrushes, and spray paint. The use of these tools introduces relationships of scale, superimposition, transparency, and contrast into the depth of the canvas. Some areas overflow with signs, while others are left almost empty, and the eye navigates the surface as it follows this syncopated rhythm. Mehretu modulates her actions endlessly: ink and paint are applied, projected, and silkscreened, forming myriads of tiny dots resembling clouds of pixels, incisive or blurred interlacings, or thick lines. While shades of grey dominate, reminiscent of the bouquets of dark flames escaping from the carcass of the museum in Rio de Janeiro, the artist also added vibrant, saturated colors to the composition: orange (located at the heart of the area where the fire is raging), green (at the site of a strange bright reflection in the foreground) and here and there, touches of blue, yellow, and violet.



*Epigraph, Damascus, 2016*  
Courtesy the artist and BORCH Editions

© Julie Mehretu. Courtesy the artist  
and BORCH Editions

Room 13



*Slouching Towards Bethlehem,  
First Seal (R 6:1), 2020*  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Courtesy the artist  
and BORCH Editions

Room 16

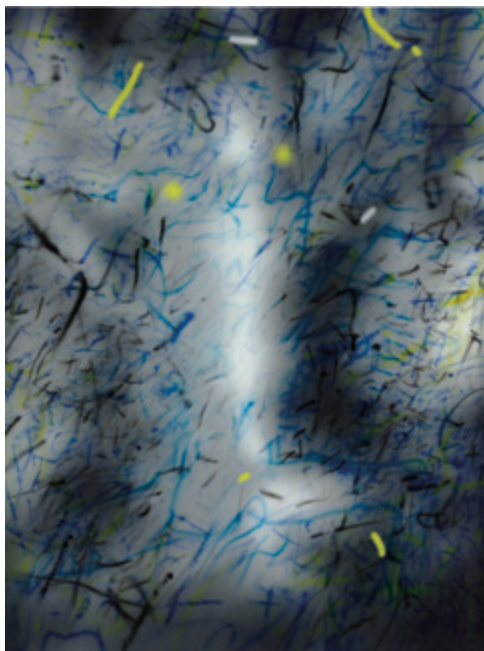
Since the mid-1990s, engraving and printing techniques have played a decisive role in Julie Mehretu's practice: they are her area of experimentation *par excellence*, the laboratory for her canvases. The use of specific techniques enables her to broaden her aesthetic: whether photogravure, chine collé, aquatint, etching, drypoint, or intaglio, over the years and in collaboration with the best master printers, she has patiently mastered all these practices, pushing their inventive possibilities further and further, and working them together to combine and enhance their effects. Her mastery of these techniques has enabled her, for example, to extend her palette of colors, to add complexity to the superimposition of images obtained by transfer by means of multiple passes through the press, and to test all the different ways of applying or hollowing out a mark.

*Epigraph, Damascus* (room 13) and the series "**Slouching Towards Bethlehem**" (room 16) were produced with the help of Danish master printer Niels Borch Jensen and his workshop. Produced in many different stages through a host of complex operations, these works each combine several printings with often invisible connections. The maximum dimensions of the paper is dictated by the size of the press. *Epigraph, Damascus*, for example, is comprised of a "panorama," a sequence of six pairs of prints, while in the "**Slouching Towards Bethlehem**" series four prints are combined for each impression. What the two works have in common is the use of photogravure, a process developed in the nineteenth century whereby engraving is used to transfer a photograph onto a "printing plate." In *Epigraph, Damascus*, a photograph of a huge drawing of architectural views of the Syrian city of Damascus is transferred onto an irregular grid that forms the background to the work. In "**Slouching Towards Bethlehem**", photogravure was used at a later stage, after the artist had drawn on two layers of transparent film. Aquatint is another process

that Mehretu uses extensively in her printmaking. This technique dates back to the eighteenth century (when it was known as "engraving in the manner of a wash"): the surface of a metal plate is covered with a thin layer of resin powder into which the artist "bites" with various tools. This process produces values ranging from light grey to dark black. By using aquatint in conjunction with other engraving processes, such as spit bite (in contrast to traditional aquatint, acid is applied to the plate with a brush), or sugar aquatint (used to obtain very clean, regular marks), the artist can greatly vary the ways in which the ink is applied and rendered.



## Chapter 6: “about the space of half an hour” and “Among the Multitude,” 2019–22 JULIE MEHRETU



*about the space of half an hour (R. 8:1) 3,*  
2019–20  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Room 27



*Among the Multitude XIII,* 2021–22  
Private Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Mezzanine

With the series “**about the space of half an hour**” (rooms 26 and 27) and “**Among the Multitude**” (mezzanine, rooms 12, 14, 15, 19 and 20), Julie Mehretu embarked on a more serial approach to painting. She completed the nine canvases that make up the first series in 2020, the same year she began the second. Both were deeply affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The artist experimented with formats that are rather unusual in her work: one vertical, evoking the shape of a page for reading, and the other more modest in scale, inviting us to look more closely. In these two series, Mehretu continues to reflect on our troubled present and pervasive sense of globalized anxiety. The paintings evoke those moments when a fatal event—a devastating fire, a pandemic, a revolution—explodes at heart of the system and sends it haywire.

The title “about the space of half an hour” refers to the Apocalypse: as described in the New Testament, there is “silence in heaven for about half an hour” after the breaking of the seventh (and last) seal on the scroll. This moment of suspense, tinged with dread, heralds the end of time: trumpets sound, and fire, incense smoke, thunder and lightning, hail and blood, are hurled upon the earth. The two paintings in the exhibition begin with press photographs in which fire plays a central role, evoking death and destruction as well as revolt: the fire at Grenfell Tower in London in 2017 and the explosion, fire and popular uprisings in Lebanon in 2019. The flames, smoke, and flags in the photographs become pale grey masses surrounded by darkness, dotted with flashes of blue, bright yellow, and black. The sense of urgency that emanates from these images is particularly palpable, as is the spectral presence of the events to which they relate, inspiring a sensation bordering on dread.

Open to freer interpretation, the title “Among the Multitude” evokes the place of each individual in the political community, a question that is particularly

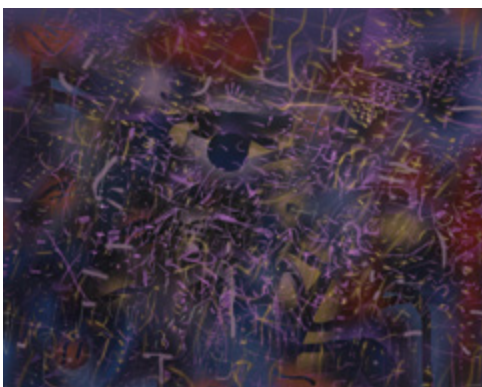
poignant in the context of the pandemic. The “multitude” here can evoke the innumerable and the disorderly, but also what brings us together and makes us act in common. Many of the photographs chosen by Mehretu show caregivers at work, particularly in China during the first weeks of the pandemic. Bodies disappear under protective suits or lie on stretchers. Reworked by the artist, they dissolve, and their ghostly presence can only be seen in the sky-blue areas (recalling the blue of operating gowns or gloves) that run across the backgrounds of some of the canvases in this series. In this smaller format, the artist continues the visual experimentation of her earlier work, multiplying the ways in which she intervenes on the canvas (by hand, brush, airbrush, printing) with forms and motifs that seem to pass from one work to the next.



*Oneironaut 1*, 2021-22  
Courtesy the artist and White Cube

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist, White Cube, London  
and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

Room 28



*Desire was our breastplate*, 2022-23  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist and White Cube, London

Room 30



*TRANSpaintings (recurrence)*, 2023  
Framed in an aluminium sculpture  
conceived by Nairy Baghramian  
Pinault Collection

© Julie Mehretu. Photo © White Cube  
(Theo Christelis)

Room 25

In this group of paintings, produced between 2021 and 2024, Julie Mehretu extends her exploration of the dystopian backwash of the present. Some motifs are recurrent, such as the immense, fixed, and inquisitorial eye, which seems to hold us under its control, that appears in *Desire was our breastplate* (room 30) and *Panoptes* (room 27), as well as in *Atlas* (room 28), which the artist completed in 2021. The eye can reference the panopticon, a type of prison architecture developed in the eighteenth century by Jeremy and Samuel Bentham to give inmates a sense of constant surveillance.

The photographs that constitute the artist's source images were taken during two traumatic events: the assault on the Capitol by Donald Trump's supporters on January 6, 2022, and the Russian army's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The loss of definition in the blurred photographic image may evoke the particular power of abstraction to remove and liberate the figure from the gaze, to literally escape definition. Revenants and ghosts populate these canvases. For *They departed for their own country another way* (room 5), Mehretu combined several photographs, creating in the depth of the canvas what she calls a "sea of ghosts" lurking behind a dense foliage of brushstrokes. In *Revenant Maroons* (room 26), the figures, like the flickering flames of a candle, appear to embody the "maroon slaves" who, fleeing colonial plantations, escaped from their masters and abusers to form autonomous communities out in the wilds. Another theme that runs through this group of works is displacement, the transition from one state to another, from the "lucid dream" (*Oneironaut 1* and *Oneironaut 2*, both in room 28) to exodus (*They departed for their own country another way*).

In *Desire was our breastplate*, Mehretu experiments with a new kind of acrylic paint: iridescent light emanates from the strokes that swirl across the surface. As you move across the canvas, you see them take on a pearly, opalescent quality with a metallic finish.

With the "TRANSpaintings" series (room 25), the artist frees her paintings from the wall for the first time. The support is no longer a canvas, but a slightly transparent polyester mesh whose surface is translucent in places, affording glimpses of the shadows of other visitors and adding to the sensation of a spectral human presence. Set within sculptural supports created by artist Nairy Baghramian, which function as both frames and framework, the "TRANSpaintings" are thus hybrid works, created by a duet, that unite painting and sculpture, encouraging a mobile approach. There is a striking contrast between the rectilinear structures of smooth, cold aluminium with metal tenons running through them, and the subtle shimmering or acidic, solar or more muted explosions of the paintings. Mehretu refers to the pleasure she takes in "painting backwards"<sup>01</sup>: covered in paint on one side only, they can nevertheless be viewed from both sides, creating infinite interplays of reflection and translucency. In addition to the harshness of the events to which these canvases refer, they also contain, in the words of the artist, "this other light that still can emanate, or is still possible."<sup>02</sup>

01 – "Conversations: Julie Mehretu and Adrienne Edwards | White Cube," September 15, 2023, uploaded October 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1mlTbotD3Q&t=1496s>.

02 – Ibid.

# Nairy Baghramian



*S'accrochant (ventre de biche)*, 2022  
Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto,  
Mexico City/New York

Photo: Gerardo Landa/Eduardo López  
(GLR Estudio), 2023. Courtesy the artist  
and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York

Room 5



*Se levant (mauve)*, 2022  
Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto,  
Mexico City/New York

Photo: Gerardo Landa/Eduardo López  
(GLR Estudio), 2023. Courtesy the artist  
and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York

Room 5

Using an abstract sculptural vocabulary (an “ambiguous abstraction,”<sup>01</sup> as the artist puts it) and materials such as steel, ceramic, casted aluminum, and silicone, this group of sculptures produced by Nairy Baghramian for her exhibition *Modèle vivant* at the Nasher Sculpture Center (Dallas, Texas, USA) in 2022 evoke the vulnerability of the human body by their sober, raw materiality. Most of the elements that constitute these works were initially made from polystyrene foam, which the artist cut, trimmed, gouged, and torch-burned. Molds were made from these foam forms and, using the sand-casting technique (which heightens the rough aspect of the result), she produced the final metal forms. The undulating surfaces of these sculptures, sometimes repulsive and sometimes seductive, are punctuated by crevices, folds, and gashes. *Se levant (mauve)* (room 5) is composed of an assembly of unpolished aluminum elements, with fragile edges and irregular surfaces, held together by painted steel structures and covered in places with ceramic, in an unstable balance. According to Mehretu, *Se levant (mauve)* “grimaces at us... monstrous and proud. She has a chunk missing, perhaps bitten off. She looks like a crippled, toothless elder posing, alert and proud for a family photo. [She] is present as upright as she can be with a slight lean in her back. Her stance is off but she’s fully aware, scarred, pockmarked, and naked in her disfigurement. Her body holds the gashes of her mutilation and the steel limbs that hold her in place. She needs propping.”<sup>02</sup>

At first glance, *S'appuyant* (room 4) and *S'allongeant* (room 5) look like bodies in a temporary resting position, one leaning against a wall, the other lying on the floor, adopting typical poses from the repertoire of life models. As we

move around them and look more closely, other initially invisible—or seemingly secondary—elements disrupt this initial reading. The mass of *S'appuyant* pushes itself away from the wall using a bronze hook and, through this pose, offers a view of its back. At the same time, *S'appuyant* is clamped and held in place by a wedge, while *S'allongeant* is made up of two elements sutured together, like a body in pieces sewn back together, or two bodies welded together. The elements that make up *S'accrochant (ventre de biche)* and *S'accrochant (crépuscule)* (both in room 5) are suspended from the ceiling by a system of hooks and metal bars. On both sides of the largest of the two, photographs show the coat of a horse, on which flies have alighted. The photograph plays a disruptive role here, disturbing the identification—however tenuous—of this sculpture with the throbbing membrane of a body. As Mehretu puts it, “in their savage disembodiedness and visceral fragility they feel skinless and meat-like, hurt, tragic... When I asked Nairy how she came to make the hanging/dangling pieces, she told me that the rest of her sculptures’ actions are done by agency: one sits, one stands, one leans. But when one is hung or is dangled from an armature, ‘there isn’t any choice.’”<sup>03</sup>

01 — Nairy Baghramian, in “Nairy Baghramian: Ambivalent Abstraction, in Conversation with Paulina Pobocha,” *Ocula Magazine*, August 28, 2020.

02 — Julie Mehretu, “Listening to *Modèle vivant*: On the liberation of the figure,” in *Nairy Baghramian, Modèle Vivant* (Dallas: Nasher Sculpture Center/New York: DelMonico Books, 2024).

03 — Ibid.

# Huma Bhabha



*New Human, 2023*  
Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

© Huma Bhabha. Photo: Kerry McFate.  
Courtesy artist, David Zwirner,  
David Kordansky Gallery and Xavier Hufkens

Room 8



*I Even Dream of You Sometimes, 2023*  
Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

© Huma Bhabha. Photo: Kerry McFate.  
Courtesy artist, David Zwirner,  
David Kordansky Gallery and Xavier Hufkens

Room 28

Huma Bhabha rose to acclaim in the early 2000s with a complex body of work that reinvents the human figure and profoundly explores its evocative potential. Oscillating between the monstrous, the fantastic, and the animal—profoundly human yet radically other—her hybrid totemic sculptures assert a sovereign and elusive presence.

The artist creates her sculptures working with everyday materials such as cork, polystyrene, found objects, animal bones, clay and bronze. Posing questions about the alien qualities of unfamiliar beings, and the criteria by which lifeforms are considered monsters, Bhabha locates the point where science fiction, horror, modernist form, and archaic expression intersect. The timelessness of her objects is enhanced by her intuitive and creative approach to her materials, as she describes: “My choice of materials remains specific, but, at the same time, I’m open to anything lying around the studio that needs to be suddenly added, to complete the piece.”<sup>01</sup>

The three sculptures in the exhibition, *New Human* (room 8), *I Even Dream of You Sometimes* (room 28) and *The Kind One* (room 28) may evoke both fantastical characters and figures from African and Egyptian art, but they also encourage other visual imaginings. Stoic and enigmatic, they always seem to be somewhere in between: “Some of my figures have the feeling that they might start walking. I give them the feeling of implied movement, even though they are completely stationary... The idea is that they are nomadic or they are on their way somewhere, who knows where.”<sup>02</sup>

Bhabha’s figures, or “characters,” as the artist calls them, seem to be haunted by the presence of a spirit, or to have survived an ordeal or war: *New Human*’s face is gouged with deep

gashes, and *I Even Dream of You Sometimes* is crowned with an animal skull. Bhabha is responding to an era marked by natural and man-made disasters, violence and conflict—the apocalypse is now, and not “yet to come.”

01 — Conversation between Huma Bhabha and Julie Mehretu, in *Huma Bhabha* (New York: Peter Blum Edition/New York, Salon 94, 2011).

02 — Ibid.

# Tacita Dean



*GDGDA*, 2011  
Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery,  
London and Marian Goodman Gallery,  
New York/Paris/Los Angeles

Film still. Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery,  
London and Marian Goodman Gallery,  
New York/Paris/Los Angeles

Room 17



*One Hundred and Fifty Years of Painting*,  
2021  
Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery,  
London and Marian Goodman Gallery,  
New York/Paris/Los Angeles

Film still. Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery,  
London and Marian Goodman Gallery,  
New York/Paris/Los Angeles

Room 17

Since the mid-2000s, Tacita Dean has made numerous portraits of artists, always filmed in 16mm. In fixing the images of the people she portrays, she foregoes any traditional biographical narrative and instead links each artist, shown at work, in conversation or in the apparent banality of their daily lives, to the materiality of their production and the subtle mechanics of their thinking. Two films, showing a more intimate side of Julie Mehretu, one at work, the other in casual conversation with another artist, Venezuelan-American Luchita Hurtado, bear witness to the long intellectual companionship and unfailing friendship between Dean and Mehretu.

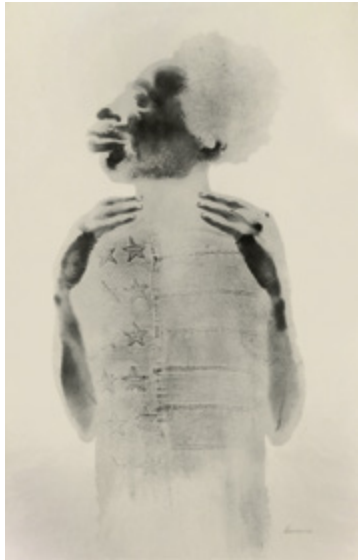
In 2007, with the help of architecture and urban planning researchers Lawrence Chua and Beth Stryker, Mehretu won a competition to create a gigantic canvas, *Mural* (2009), for the main entrance hall of Goldman Sachs's New York headquarters. For *GDGDA* (room 17)—the title of which comes from the word for “wall” or “mural” in Amharic, one of the Semitic languages of Ethiopia—Dean filmed the artist and her assistants at work in Berlin for an afternoon and a morning: “I was awed by [*Mural*’s] manufacture and its complexity, and by Julie’s rigor and discipline, and the ease and respect with which she delegated. The painting was taking on great authority and visual energy, and I had never seen anything like it. One afternoon and the following morning, I filmed a few moments of its construction in the studio, without any rigor or discipline of my own, but merely to bear witness to this rich and labored production, and the density of process involved in the making of this monumental work.”<sup>01</sup>

A decade later, Dean realized that her two friends, Hurtado and Mehretu, were born on the same day, fifty years apart, and that in 2020 they would be celebrating their hundredth and fiftieth birthdays. She decided to film the two artists, who

already knew and esteemed each other, in the privacy of Hurtado’s apartment in Santa Monica, California, on January 3, 2020. The film, edited from rushes of an entire day’s conversation between the two women, lasts around fifty minutes and is shown in a loop, so that there seems to be no starting point and no end, only an eternal new beginning. *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Painting* (room 17) shows the two women freely discussing life and death, milestones in their lives, seminal journeys, their experiences as immigrants to the United States and as mothers, their youth, and climate change. They also talk, of course, about their painting practice, which is deeply rooted in their way of seeing the world.

01 — Tacita Dean, “GDGDA,” in *Seven Books Grey, Selected Writing* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig (MUMOK)/Göttingen, Steidl Publishers, 2011), 117.

# David Hammons



*I Dig the Way This Dude Looks*, 1971  
Pinault Collection

© David Hammons, by SIAE 2024

Room 3



*Untitled*, 2010  
Pinault Collection

Installation view, *Ouverture*, Bourse de Commerce — Pinault Collection, Paris, 2021.  
© Tadao Ando Architect & Associates, Niney et Marca Architectes, Agence Pierre Antoine Gatier.  
© David Hammons, by SIAE 2024.  
Photo: Aurélien Mole

Room 4

Cultivating marginality, David Hammons has been developing since the 1970s a fugitive, subversive body of work whose radicalism has paved the way for a whole generation of African American artists. Through his practice of assemblage, sculpture, and performance, he produces works imbued with a strong symbolic and poetic charge. For example, while it's easy to recognize the American Star-Spangled Banner in *Oh say can you see* (room 7), the artist has transformed it in ways that radically alter the significance of this national symbol. The work sports the colors of the pan-African flag created in 1920 by the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League, the Black nationalist organization founded by Marcus Garvey, which was widely adopted by the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s and is still used today. Lacerated, perforated, and torn on all sides, Hammons's flag no longer floats in the wind but hangs inert, like the scorned banner of a nation in ruins.

*I Dig the Way This Dude Looks* and *Untitled*, 1976 (both in room 3) belong to the "body prints" series. The artist smeared his partially naked body with margarine, using it as a "living brush" to make marks directly on the canvas, which he then sprinkled with dark pigment. Indexing his own body, he fragmented and reconfigured it. *I Dig the Way This Dude Looks* shows his face in profile, arms close to his body, forearms raised to his shoulders in a slightly stiff gesture. In place of his bust is the imprint of a fragment of the American flag. The figure of the artist merges with the patriotic emblem and "pressurizes the human form, as if it is the agent of disfiguration and distortion."<sup>01</sup> In *Untitled*, 1976, the elements of the face,

stand out against a background of an incomplete jigsaw puzzle, about which Julie Mehretu observes that "you can play with the puzzle again, no matter the construct. One is able to play with identity, build it and grow it, it's not a fixed thing. It can be broken up into many parts and pieces. Some pieces can go missing and then be found again, but identity is something that is constantly in flux."<sup>02</sup>

*Untitled*, 2008 (room 6), and *Untitled*, 2010 (room 4), belong to the more recent series of "tarp paintings," which combine used, crumpled, or torn plastic bags, recovered by the artist and reconfigured, with abstract canvases or partially concealed surfaces of kraft paper. In their various states of wear and tear, these bags take on shapes and textures of astonishing diversity, "charged" with the lives they have passed through. By reusing poor materials found in the street, the artist makes these discarded objects almost endlessly polysemous. They symbolize both a tremendous human creativity and the rapid transformation of urban life and its contradictions. While these works have an elegiac and funereal dimension, they are also full of provocation and irony, revealing, in Mehretu's words, "the sham and conceit of the art world, criticism and the discourse, ... exposing the shady, racist and unscrupulous classicism of the art world and the hubris narrative of European and White American art history."<sup>03</sup>

01 — Apsara DiQuinzio, "David Hammons: Printing the Political, Black Body," undated, <https://www.wattis.org/our-program/on-our-mind/david-hammons-is-on-our-mind-2016-2017/david-hammons-printing-the-political-black-body-by-apsara-diquinzio>.

02 — "The Artist Presents – Julie Mehretu about David Hammons," talk by Julie Mehretu at the auditorium of the Bourse de Commerce–Pinault Collection, January 17, 2023.

03 — Ibid.

# Robin Coste Lewis



*Intimacy*, 2022  
Courtesy the artist  
and Marian Goodman Gallery

Film stills. Courtesy the artist  
and Marian Goodman Gallery

Room 23



A single-channel video projection with sound, the installation *Intimacy* (room 23) features images drawn from several hundred photographs discovered by Robin Coste Lewis some twenty-five years ago at the home of her maternal grandmother, Dorothy Mary Coste Thomas Brooks. The trove of portraits—sepia, tintypes, color and black-and-white photographs—constitutes a photographic archive of the artist’s family and circle of friends spanning several generations. Lewis’s family (her great-grandmother was born in France, then immigrated to the French colony of Louisiana before it was ceded to the United States) was one of millions of American families that fled the Southern states as part of the Great Migration not northward, but westwards to escape racism and violence between the 1910s and the 1940s. Given the upheaval of forced migration, and the concomitant scattering of family units and dispersal of their possessions, this ensemble of photographic images represents a distinctive vernacular collection that is remarkable for its sheer existence, rarity, intimacy and size.

The photographs in *Intimacy* thus provide access, in a fragmentary and tenuous way, to certain aspects of the history of this American family, while situating it within a much longer historic arc—a meditation on the history of time. The elation and deep sense of closeness that pervades many of the moments captured on film denote resilience and resistance in the face of the profound hostility and systemic racism rampant in the United States, particularly during the period of segregationist laws known as Jim Crow (approx. 1877–1968). However, Lewis plays darkly with nostalgia by juxtaposing an original soundtrack that relocates African Diasporic migrations within the context of the history of time and human evolution. Lewis’s entrancing and disarming reading—which the artist describes as almost an incantatory singing—of her lyric poem titled *Intimacy (for Julie) Part 2*, dedicated to Julie Mehretu, and interspersed

with long stretches of silence, serves as an homage to the multitude of diasporas all human beings have created over millennia—and the central roles Black people have played within this enduring history.

The poem and the resulting composite installation stem from Lewis and Mehretu’s friendship, which grew over decades, based on a continuing conversation between the two, who met as graduate students during the heady 1990s through their shared assimilation of post-colonial theory, queer studies, and critical race theory. *Intimacy* highlights the centrality of history, mark-making, human migrations, desire, and abstraction (of language and painting and the echoes and correspondences between them) in both their imaginations and their work.

# Paul Pfeiffer



*Incarnator (Manila), 2021*  
*Justin Bieber Torso (Manila)*  
*Justin Bieber Right Arm (Manila)*  
Sculptor: Luis Ac-Ac  
Paete, Laguna, The Philippines  
Courtesy the artist and carlier | gebauer,  
Berlin/Madrid

Photo: Roberto Herrero. Courtesy the artist  
and carlier | gebauer, Berlin/Madrid

Room 12



*Incarnator* includes a series of hyper-realistic sculptures of the body parts of the singer Justin Bieber—for instance, his torso (room 12), his arms (room 12), his legs (room 13)—, an archetypal pop star whose image has embodied a kind of eternal adolescence ever since he was “discovered” by the music industry at the age of twelve. This slender body, dismembered and tattooed all over its torso, from his collarbones to his wrists, dispatched on several walls of the exhibition, is reminiscent of the relics of a young saint or Christ, displayed for devotion.

With these sculptures, as well as in *Incarnator (Seville)*, *Justin Bieber Study for Ecce Homo* (room 13) and *Incarnator (Manila)*, *Leg on Branch* (room 11), Paul Pfeiffer refers to the Spanish tradition of the “encarnadores,” the “flesh painters” and sculptors renowned for their creation of realistic, polychrome Catholic icons. In *Incarnator (Pampanga)*, *Kurt* (room 14), he even depicts the son of one of the sculptors with whom he collaborated. The “encarnadores” practice, which originated in Seville in the sixteenth century, was later introduced to the Philippines by Spanish missionaries. The process involves carving and then drying the wood for six months before applying several coats of polychrome paint and varnish, and repeatedly sanding the surface until the figure appears to glow from within. These sculptures, highly prized to the point of becoming fetishized objects of pious devotion, are still found today in churches across the Philippines, which has the largest Christian population in Asia. In the Philippines, where Pfeiffer grew up, this cult manifests itself most vividly in the devotion to Santo Niño de Cebú, a sculpted, naturalistic representation of the infant Jesus dressed as a Spanish monarch, which was brought from Spain in 1521 by Ferdinand Magellan. The statue, considered miraculous, is at the center of the Philippines’s biggest festival, Sinulog, when hundreds of thousands of people come together to celebrate.

By emulating this age-old practice, Pfeiffer creates a disturbing parallel between two types of devotion: one introduced by Catholic religious authority and the other promoted by a rapidly expanding media landscape and the cult of celebrity. As in his masterful video montages, in which he rearranges sequences from sporting events, giant concerts, and Hollywood films, his sculptures confront us with our fascination (rooted in the distant past) with different forms of “sainthood,” unmasking their hidden psychological effects and showing the role they play in transforming people’s consciousness.



# Jessica Rankin

---



*Field of Mars*, 2016  
Collection of the artist

© Jessica Rankin. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.  
Courtesy the artist and White Cube, London

Room 15



*Forever on the Verge of Becoming*, 2023  
Private Collection, Asia

© Jessica Rankin. Photo: Trevor Good. Courtesy  
the artist and carlier | gebauer, Berlin/Madrid

Room 14

Drawing on a wide range of subjects, Jessica Rankin’s art weaves personal experience, literature and poetry, the languages of abstraction, map making and landscape painting as well as observational mark making and drawing. Often using media traditionally associated with women’s activities—embroidery and needlework—her work takes the form of “mental landscapes.” For Rankin, “Sewing has a longevity, a resonance. It requires an ongoing relationship that reflects the random, repetitive motion of a word in your head, which lingers and returns.”<sup>01</sup>

In these delicate and spectral textile works, she explores the personal ties that bind her to her environment, capturing, for example, the celestial constellation on a date of particular importance to her, as in *Field of Mars* (room 15). This painting is named after the cemetery on the outskirts of Sydney where the artist’s mother, the Australian poet Jennifer Rankin, is buried, but its title can also refer to the planet in the solar system. Each of her lyrical compositions, worked with needle and thread, is made up of layers, coded symbols, and constellations that form psychogeographical maps. Writing plays an equally important role in the artist’s practice: she often initiates her creative process by inscribing on paper words she draws from her own stream of consciousness, from stories she has lived or heard, or from fragments of texts from marginalized voices in literature (queer writers and authors of color), rearranged to form new sequences using a method that might be described as “guided chance.”

Since 2016, Rankin has more fully embraced abstract gestural painting, coupling painting with embroidery to create works where the paint and the thread interweave, echo and refract one another. Lines of poetry are embroidered onto the sides of the stretchers similar to the spines of books. On the surface of her canvases,

colored threads accompany, reverberate with, or contradict the multiple ways in which the paint behaves (applied in flat areas, imitating watercolor, etc.), creating a constant visual back-and-forth between the varied effects of their material reality. Through her highly fluid and dynamic approach to the medium, Rankin creates “deep spaces” in her works in which the eye loses itself, while the emphasis she places on expressing feelings of desire, joy and tenderness suggests their capacity to constitute a force of resistance.

# Chronology

---

1943 **Birth of David Hammons, Springfield, Illinois.**

---

1946 The United States (US) cedes sovereignty back to the Philippines.

---

1947 Independence of Pakistan.

---

1948 The British Mandate for Palestine ends.

---

1948–49 Arab-Israeli War and beginning of the *Nakba*.

---

1949 Armistice Agreements signed between Israel and the neighboring Arab countries, formally ending the 1948 Arab–Israeli War.

---

1951 *Drum* magazine is founded in Johannesburg, South Africa.

---

1956 Suez Crisis.

---

1957 Independence of Ghana, the first postcolonial independent country in Africa.

---

1960 Sharpeville massacre, South Africa: a crowd of protesters go to the police station, where the police open fire, killing 249 people.

---

1961–68 and 1971–76 *Transition Magazine* operates in Kampala, Uganda.

---

1962 **Birth of Huma Bhabha in Karachi, Pakistan.**

---

1963 Creation of the Organisation of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas.

---

1964 **Birth of Robin Coste Lewis in Compton, Los Angeles, California.**

---

First United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

African American actor Sidney Poitier wins an Academy Award, as first African American to be awarded the prize for Best Actor.

---

Nelson Mandela’s “I Am Prepared to Die” speech, a key event for the anti-apartheid movement.

First broadcasts of BBC Two television, UK.

US President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev announce plans to cut back production of materials for making nuclear weapons.

First major student demonstrations against the Vietnam War on Times Square, New York and in San Francisco.

Twelve young men in New York publicly burn their draft cards to protest against the Vietnam War.

Nelson Mandela and seven others are sentenced to life imprisonment and sent to the Robben Island prison, South Africa.

Freedom Summer, a volunteer Civil Rights project promotes voter registration for as many African Americans as possible in Mississippi.

The US Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin is enacted.

The International Olympic Committee bans South Africa from the Tokyo Olympics on the grounds that its teams are racially segregated.

During a tour of the US, John Lennon announces that the Beatles will not play to segregated audiences.

3,000 student activists at the University of California, Berkeley, 34

block a police car from taking a CORE volunteer arrested for not showing his ID. This protest gives way to the Berkeley Free Speech Movement.

Martin Luther King Jr. is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Northern Rhodesia becomes the independent Republic of Zambia, ending seventy-three years of British rule.

---

1965 **Birth of Tacita Dean, Canterbury, United Kingdom.**

---

Assassination of Malcolm X, Harlem, New York.

Selma to Montgomery marches in Alabama by nonviolent activists to demonstrate the desire of African American citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

---

1965–73 Major anti-Vietnam War protests and demonstrations in the US.

---

1966 **Birth of Paul Pfeiffer, Honolulu, Hawaii.**

---

Birth of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence.

---

1967 Six-Day War between Israel, a coalition of Arab countries.

With “Loving v. Virginia”, the US Supreme Court rules that laws banning interracial marriage violate the constitution.

---

1967–70 Nigerian Civil War.

---

1968 5,000 protesters gather in Oakland for the liberation of Huey Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party.

Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

In France, demonstrations, general strikes, occupation of universities and factories.

The Mexican Student Movement is violently suppressed and culminates in the Tlatelolco Massacre.

Athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos perform the Black Power salute at the Mexico Olympics.

1969 “Harlem on My Mind” protest led by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York to address the absence of Black curators at the museum and the fact that a show about Black culture would not include the work of Black artists.

The Art Workers’ Coalition and the Women Artists in Revolution form in New York.

---

1970 **Birth of Julie Mehretu, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.**

---

1971 **Birth of Nairy Baghramian, Isfahan, Iran.**

**Birth of Jessica Rankin, Sydney, Australia.**

Foundation of “Where We At” Black Women Artists, Inc., New York. *Contemporary Black artists in America*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

---

1972 The Munich massacre is carried out during the Summer Olympics.

---

1973 Military coup in Chile.

---

1974–75 The Ethiopian Revolution, followed by a military takeover and a full-scale military dictatorship (-1991), ends with the deposition and assassination of Emperor Haile Selassie I.

---

1974–86 The art gallery Just Above Midtown (“JAM”) operates in New York, foregrounding African American artists and artists of color.

---

1975–79 Cambodia takes the name of Kampuchea under the totalitarian dictatorship of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge.

---

1977 **Julie Mehretu and her parents flee Ethiopia and move to East Lansing, Michigan.**

Festac ’77, the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, Lagos, Nigeria. 35

The Warehouse nightclub, one of the birthplaces of house music, opens in Chicago.

---

1978–79 The Iranian Revolution culminates in the replacement of a secular and authoritarian monarchy by an anti-Western Islamist theocracy.

---

1979 Protests against the Roxbury Murders in Boston, led by the Combahee River Collective.

Release of the eighth issue of *Heresies*, “Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other”.

---

Late 1970s Early years of hip-hop.

---

1980 Following a fifteen-year civil war, Robert Mugabe becomes prime minister of the newly independent Zimbabwe, marking the end of white minority rule.

---

1981 Release of the feminist anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.

**Huma Bhabha moves from Pakistan to the US.**

---

1982 Culture and Resistance Festival, University of Botswana.

---

1983 **Nairy Baghramian’s family flee from Iran to Berlin.**

---

1983–85 **Julie Mehretu’s family briefly relocates to Zimbabwe before moving back to the US.**

---

1983–91 The independent house music record label Trax Records operates in Chicago.

---

1987–93 Artist collectives such as Gran Fury, Silence=Death Project, Gang, and fierce pussy disseminate ACT UP’s messages.

---

1987–93 First Intifada of civil disobedience and violent protests against Israel, fed by the frustration of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip since 1967.

---

1988–94 Hip-hop’s golden age.

---

1989 Fall of the Berlin Wall.

---

1990 **Julie Mehretu attends coursework at the Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal.**

Nelson Mandela is released from prison.

---

1990–91 First Gulf War.

---

1990-2002 The Clit Club, a sex-positive mixed party for cis and trans women self-identified as lesbian, queer and androgynous, operates in New York.

---

1991 Beating of Rodney King, an African American man, by officers of the Los Angeles Police Department during his arrest. The incident, filmed by a local resident, is covered by news media around the world and cause a public uproar.

---

1992 **Julie Mehretu graduates with a Bachelor of Arts from the Kalamazoo College, Michigan.**

---

1992-2002 Drexciya helps define Detroit techno.

---

1993 Founding of the European Union with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. World Trade Center bombing.

*1993 Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art.

The first Dyke March is initiated by the Lesbian Avengers, Washington, D.C.

---

1994 First democratic elections, South Africa.

Following the signature of the first of the Oslo Accords, Israel starts

the construction of the Gaza strip–Israel barrier.

*Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, Whitney Museum of American Art.

---

1995 Oklahoma City bombing by two anti-government extremists and white supremacists; it remains the deadliest act of domestic terrorism in US history to this date.

---

1997 **Julie Mehretu graduates with a Master of Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design.**

Launch of SixDegrees, often regarded as the first social media platform.

---

1997–99 **Julie Mehretu attends the Core Residency Program at the Glassell School of Art of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.**

---

1998 **The art gallery The Project opens in Harlem, and features some of the first exhibitions of Julie Mehretu, Paul Pfeiffer and Jessica Rankin.**

---

1999 The European Union introduces the Euro as its common currency.

**Julie Mehretu settles in New York City and joins The Project.**

---

Late 1990s **Julie Mehretu and Robin Coste Lewis attend the same lectures and conferences on post-colonial theory, queer studies and critical race theory.**

---

2000 **Julie Mehretu and Jessica Rankin meet in a bar.**

**Julie Mehretu and Paul Pfeiffer participate in *Greater New York*, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York.**

---

2000–01 **Julie Mehretu is Artist-in-Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.**

---

2001 **The exhibition *Freestyle at the Studio Museum, New York*, showcases the work of 28 African American artists, including Julie Mehretu.**

**Julie Mehretu and Jessica Rankin spend the summer in upstate New York where Julie Mehretu works on new paintings for an exhibition at The Project.**

September 11 attacks.

---

2001–02 **Julie Mehretu is Artist-in-Residence at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.**

---

2001–11 The US, backed by his allies, launch major wars against Afghanistan and Iraq in response to the September 11 attacks, falsely accusing Saddam Hussein of developing weapons of mass destruction and of having ties with al-Qaeda.

---

2002 *The Short Century, Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994*, MoMA PS1, New York.

---

2003 ***Drawing into Painting*, Julie Mehretu’s first solo exhibition in a museum, Walker Art Center.**

---

2004 **Julie Mehretu, Paul Pfeiffer, and Lawrence Chua open Denniston Hill, an artist-centered interdisciplinary arts organization in the Southern Catskills, New York.**

---

2005 **Birth of Cade Elias Mehretu-Rankin, first child of Julie Mehretu and Jessica Rankin.**

Hurricane Katrina.

---

2006 **Julie Mehretu and Jessica Rankin create “a poetic chart of their lives, comprised of influences, residences, and friends” on the occasion of the group exhibition *When Artists Say We*, Artists Space, New York.**

Execution of Saddam Hussein, sentenced to death by hanging after his conviction of crimes against humanity.

2007 The first-generation iPhone is announced by Apple CEO Steve Jobs.

---

2007–09 **Julie Mehretu’s residency at the American Academy in Berlin is followed by a further long-term stay in the city, where she works on *Mural*.**

---

2007–10 US subprime mortgage crisis.

---

2008 Democratic candidate Barack Obama is elected the first African American president of the US.

---

2009 **Julie Mehretu’s first trip to Ethiopia since Mehretu’s family fled the country in 1977.**

**Julie Mehretu: Grey Area, Deutsche Guggenheim Museum, Berlin.**

---

2010 **Birth of Haile Iskinder Mehretu-Rankin, second child of Julie Mehretu and Jessica Rankin.**

**A conversation between Huma Bhabha and Julie Mehretu is published in *Huma Bhabha*.**

The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi triggers the Tunisian Revolution, effectively launching the Arab Spring.

---

2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. Killing of Osama bin Laden, founder of al-Qaeda, by US special forces, Pakistan.

The Egyptian Revolution, after massive protests in Tahrir Square, leads to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, one of Africa’s longest serving dictators.

---

2011–ongoing Syrian civil war.

---

2012 George Zimmerman fatally shoots Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old unarmed African American, Sanford, Florida.

**Julie Mehretu presents a series of four large-scale paintings, *Mogamma*, at DOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, informed by the waves of protests prompted**

**by the Arab Spring.**

**Julie Mehretu attends *The Cairo Seminar* jointly conceived by CIRCA and DOCUMENTA (13) held at MASS Alexandria, Egypt.**

---

2013 *Rise and Fall of the Apartheid*, International Center of Photography, New York.

Hurricane Sandy hits New York. Death of Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe.

---

2013–ongoing The Black Lives Matter movement is launched after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the police officer who killed Trayvon Martin.

---

2015–17 **Julie Mehretu and Jessica Rankin’s duo exhibitions *EARTH FOLD*, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium and *Struggling With Words That Count*, earlier | gebauer, Berlin.**

---

2016 A UK-wide referendum votes in favor of Brexit, the same year of the highest number of recorded casualties of migrants crossing the Mediterranean.

**Julie Mehretu: *The Addis Show*, Gebre Kristos Desta Center–Modern Art Museum, Addis Ababa.**

Donald Trump is elected president of the US.

---

2017 **Julie Mehretu and artists Adam Pendleton, Rashid Johnson, and Ellen Gallagher purchase the childhood home of Nina Simone in Tryon, North Carolina, in danger of demolition.**

**Jazz pianist, composer, and visual artist Jason Moran records *MASS {Howl, eon}* at the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle in Harlem, where Julie Mehretu is working on two site-specific paintings, *HOWL, eon (I, II)*, commissioned by SFMoMA.**

The Grenfell Tower fire, a social housing building in North Kensington, London, kills 79 people.

White supremacist “Unite the Right” rally, Charlottesville, Virginia. Hurricane Maria hits the northeastern Caribbean. Northern California wildfires.

---

2018 ***Tacita Dean, Julie Mehretu, Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris.* Paul Pfeiffer’s solo exhibition *Incarnator*, Bellas Artes Projects Outpost, Manilla, Philippines.**

Jair Bolsonaro is elected president of Brazil.

---

2019 Death of curator Okwui Enwezor and writer Toni Morrison.

First in a series of Lebanese protests.

---

2019–22 **Julie Mehretu’s mid-career retrospective, is co-organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the Whitney Museum of American Art, and travels to the High Museum, Atlanta, and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.**

---

2020 The Covid-19 epidemic is declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization.

The murder of the African American George Floyd by Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, leads to worldwide protests.

Beirut explosion after ammonium nitrate stored in port ignites. Joe Biden is elected president of the US, defeating Donald Trump.

---

2021 The US Capitol is stormed by hundreds of radical protesters in Washington, D.C.

President Biden ends the longest war in American history by withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

---

2022 Russia invades Ukraine.

**Julie Mehretu | *With an installation by Robin Coste Lewis*, Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris.**

**Nairy Baghramian’s solo exhibition *Modèle vivant*, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas.**

---

2023 **“The Artist Presents – Julie Mehretu about David Hammons,” conference at the Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection, Paris.**

**Premiere of *Archive of Desire*, a collaborative new performance by Robin Coste Lewis, Julie Mehretu, composer Vijay Iyer, and cellist/improviser Jeffrey Zeigler, National Sawdust, Brooklyn, as part of the “Archive of Desire” festival by the Onassis Foundation.**

**Julie Mehretu’s exhibition *They departed for their own country another way (a 9x9x9 hauntology)*, with sculptural interventions by Nairy Baghramian, White Cube Bermondsey, London.**

# Biographies

---

Born in 1970 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Julie Mehretu** lives and works in New York. In exploring palimpsests of history, from geological time to a modern day phenomenology of the social, Julie Mehretu's works engage us in a dynamic visual articulation of contemporary experience, a depiction of social behavior and the psychogeography of space. Mehretu's work is informed by a multitude of sources including politics, literature and music. Most recently her paintings have incorporated photographic images from broadcast media which depict conflict, injustice, and social unrest. These graphic images act as intellectual and compositional points of departure; ultimately occluded on the canvas, they remain as a phantom presence in the highly abstracted gestural completed works. Mehretu's practice in painting, drawing and printmaking equally assert the role of art to provoke thought and reflection, and express the contemporary condition of the individual and society.

**Nairy Baghramian** was born in Isfahan, Iran in 1971. She now lives and works in Berlin, to where she fled at the age of thirteen. Nairy Baghramian explores the practice of sculpture and installation to create works that question their setting and subvert expected modes of presentation, along with the architectural, sociological, political, and historical contexts that underpin them. Using an abstract vocabulary that often combines geometric and organic forms, and mixing industrial materials and processes with more supple and graceful elements, Baghramian highlights the vulnerability of the human body transformed by history.

Born in 1962 in Karachi, Pakistan, and based in Poughkeepsie, New York, **Huma Bhabha** came to the United States in 1981 and earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, and her Master of Fine Arts from Columbia University, New York. Her complex work of reinvention of the human figure and her practice, which embraces sculpture, drawing, and photography, reference ancient and contemporary art alike, while also nodding to elements of pop culture such as science-fiction and horror films.

Born in Canterbury, UK in 1965, **Tacita Dean** is a British European artist who now lives between Berlin and Los Angeles. Since the late 1980s, she has developed a singular body of work, a series of astonishing precipitations of time, matter, space, and perception that unfold through varied mediums that include film, photography and sound, drawing, printmaking, and collage. The artist counters the dematerialization of images by the slow work of the hand, reinvesting the materiality of her mediums, foremost among them 16mm film. She is particularly known for her series of filmed portraits of artists such as Cy Twombly, Merce Cunningham, Mario Merz, Michael Hamburger, and, more recently, of Julie Mehretu and Luchita Hurtado.

Born in Springfield, Illinois, USA, in 1943, **David Hammons** has been developing since the 1960s an elusive and subversive body of work, often taking the form of discreet actions presented in public spaces or at a distance from the art world, such as his now-legendary *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* (1983), a snowball sale held in the middle of the street without any announcement or publicity.

While the assemblages, installations, and sculptures he creates take a wide variety of forms, often using discarded objects, they can also incorporate the imprints of his own body (the "body prints" series, 1968–79) or abstract canvases (his "tarp paintings," since 2009). The artist draws on the realities of everyday life and the territory of the street, as well as on scholarly references to the history of modern art—Dada, Arte Povera, Marcel Duchamp—and to Black American culture, particularly jazz, and on a range of African and diasporic cultural traditions. His incisive works, marked by a strong symbolic charge that is as much poetic as it is political, point to the deleterious effects of racism, oppression, and precariousness.

Born in 1964 in Compton, California, USA, **Robin Coste Lewis** is an American poet, visual artist, and scholar. From 2017 to 2020 she was the Poet Laureate of Los Angeles. Her current research focuses on the intersecting histories of vernacular photography and constructions of time. As well as writing essays, libretti and poems, Lewis also creates mixed-media installations and collaborates on projects with visual artists, composers and filmmakers. She has published two collections of poetry, *To the Realization of Perfect Helplessness* (Knopf, 2022), which won the PEN Award for Poetry, and *Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems* (Knopf, 2017), for which she won the National Book Award.

**Paul Pfeiffer** was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA in 1966. After a childhood spent in the Philippines, in 1990 the artist moved to New York, where he now lives and works. Known for his virtuoso use of image and sound technologies and editing tools, Pfeiffer has worked in mediums as diverse as video, photography, installation, and sculpture. He reuses and transforms key images from popular culture (sequences

from sporting events, concerts, and Hollywood films), using a variety of visual techniques to invite us to look more attentively at them.

**Jessica Rankin** was born in Sydney, Australia in 1971. Her art, rooted in language and abstraction, depicts mental landscapes dotted with signs and symbols that reflect the processes of memory and interpretation. Her works on textile and paper combine and merge schematic representations of mountains, rivers, and constellations with lines of text, which together appear to transform before our eyes. Expansive and intuitive, Rankin's work is also often marked by the presence of stains, splashes, or coiled lines in bright colors. Her exuberant compositions spill over the sides of the canvas, revealing lines of poetry drawn from the writings of poets such as Etel Adnan, Paul Celan, and Brenda Shaughnessy. She lives and works in New York.

Exhibition Curator  
Caroline Bourgeois  
with Julie Mehretu

Texts  
Boris Atrux-Tallau  
Caroline Bourgeois  
Julie Mehretu

Chronology composed by  
Julie Mehretu

Translation  
Charles Penwarden  
and NTL – Il Nuovo Traduttore  
Letterario, Florence

Copy-editing  
Madeleine Compagnon  
and NTL – Il Nuovo Traduttore  
Letterario, Florence

Graphic design  
Les Graphiquants, Paris



---

#### **Discover, read, listen**

A podcast, interviews, videos, a calendar of events dedicated to the exhibition *Julie Mehretu. Ensemble*. Browse all in-depth content at [palazzograssi.it](http://palazzograssi.it)

The exhibition catalog *Julie Mehretu. Ensemble*, published in a trilingual version (Italian, English, French) by Marsilio Arte with texts by Hilton Als, Caroline Bourgeois, Lawrence Chua, Patricia Falguières, Julie Mehretu, Jason Moran, and Paul Pfeiffer is available at the bookshop and online.

---

#### **Are you already a Member of the Pinault Collection?**

Join now and discover the many benefits: exclusive visits, reserved events, and unlimited admission to the three museums in Venice and Paris!

Purchase your Pinault Collection Membership Card at the ticket office and your entrance fee will be deducted, or visit the link [pinaultcollection.com/palazzograssi/en/publics/membership](http://pinaultcollection.com/palazzograssi/en/publics/membership)



Keep your Palazzo Grassi ticket and visit the exhibition  
at Punta della Dogana *Pierre Huyghe. Liminal.*

[palazzograssi.it](http://palazzograssi.it)



By returning this guide in the container provided at the exit,  
you will contribute to a circular and ecofriendly use of materials. Thank you !