Winter/Spring 2019 Exhibition Program

For its winter and spring 2019 season, the Frye Art Museum is pleased to announce exhibitions that mark the US West Coast debut of several international contemporary artists, as well as presentations of new work by eminent local figures from the literary, visual, and performing arts communities. Showcasing works in a multitude of mediums—from dance and video to paintings and works on paper—the exhibitions, while discretely conceived, consider perspectives on identity and being with particular attention to the current moment as a magnifying lens on various historical narratives.
Cherdonna Shinatra: DITCH
January 26–April 28, 2019

Public Opening Reception: Friday, January 25, 2019
7:30–9:30 pm

Seattle-based dance artist Jody Kuehner skewers social and cultural norms of gender and sexuality through her persona and alter ego Cherdonna Shinatra. Combining contemporary dance, drag, clowning, and the traditions of feminist and queer performance, Cherdonna defies categorization to dismantle the patriarchy and seek more liberated ways of being. DITCH will mark Kuehner’s most complex and demanding production to date, taking the form of an immersive installation that includes daily performances by Cherdonna with members of her newly formed dance company, DONNA. Over the course of eighty performances, Cherdonna—clad in an outfit reminiscent of Bozo the Clown—and her five assistants will grapple with the dismal state of the world by undertaking her greatest challenge yet: making every single person happy.
DITCH shines a light on Cherdonna’s varied expressions of femininity and complex personality, contrasting her charisma and constant need to please with the total fear and existential dread that ceaselessly plagues her. What happens when she can’t make everyone happy in the face of an oppressive existence? Is it better to stick it out or end it all? What about when she lets herself cross over into a state of abandon and resignation?

Comprising a wildly colorful, multi-textured environment of fabric-coated walls, checkerboard flooring, and audioscape, the installation purposefully rejects the traditionally “neutral” white cube aesthetic—what the artist construes as the patriarchal dimensions of the museum. DITCH is instead a matriarchal domain, presided over by the newly-created figure MomDonna, a larger-than-life disembodied sculpture in a state of ruin who births forth the performers on a daily basis. A central priority of Kuehner’s is to carve out a space—physically and psychologically—for femme, gender non-conforming, and queer folx. This exhibition will see Cherdonna and her dancers unapologetically inhabit their femme selves, to indulge conceptually, abstractly, and poetically to find retribution and visibility in this trash fire of a world.

Jody Kuehner is a 2017 Artist Trust Fellowship recipient, 2017 Henry Art Gallery Artist in Residence, 2017 CityArts Artist of the year, 2015 Stranger Genius Award winner, Velocity Dance Center’s 2014 Artist in Residence, and 2010 Spotlight Award winner. She was recently awarded funding by the New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Dance Project for one great, bright, brittle alltogetherness. Kuehner was Dayna Hanson’s Production Coordinator and Assistant Director 2010–2015 for various projects. She danced with Pat Graney company from 2007–2016 and also assisted Graney’s KTF Prison Project. As Cherdonna, she performs with the award-winning international sensations Kitten N’ Lou and is a member of The Atomic Bombshells.

DONNA is a contemporary dance company led by Jody Kuehner, aka Cherdonna Shinatra, and includes dance artists Allison Burke, Jenna Eady, Carlin Kramer, Alyza DelPan-Monley, Julia Sloane, and Katie Wyeth, joined by company dramaturg Maggie Rogers, understudy Erin McCarthy, costume designer Danial Hellman, company manager Sara Jinks, and designer Greg Newcomb. Cherdonna, together with these six dance artists, will create experimental experiences around their collective queerness and femme-centric, professionally-trained contemporary dance bodies.

Cherdonna Shinatra: DITCH is organized by the Frye Art Museum and curated by David Strand, head of exhibitions and publications. Generous support is provided by Vulcan, Inc., the Robert Chinn Foundation, and the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture.

The Rain Doesn’t Know Friends from Foes: Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, Hesam Rahmanian

January 26–April 28, 2019

Public Opening Reception: Friday, January 25, 2019
7:30–9:30 pm

Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, and Hesam Rahmanian work collectively to create paintings, works on paper, and stop-motion animations that transform found material into timeless parables. Taking images found in internet videos and television newscasts out of their original context, their works interrogate the voyeuristic role of the spectator as a passive consumer of mass media spectacle. The Dubai-based Iranian artists—two brothers and their childhood friend—create animations composed from thousands of individual works on paper, each of which are painted directly onto printed news photographs or video stills. *The Rain Doesn’t Know Friends From Foes*—their first exhibition on the West Coast—will include selected works on paper and a survey of their animations to date, including the US debut of *From Sea to Dawn* (2016–17) and *Macht Shon* (2016). Both videos intervene in the photojournalistic representation of migrants crossing into Europe, interjecting painterly patterns, fablelike animal imagery, and surreal mirroring effects. In *From Sea to Dawn*, these alterations serve to disrupt the Western moral codes (especially the sentimental, romanticizing pathos) embedded in the photographs, while in *Macht Shon*, they allegorize the actions of Hungarian journalists caught on video tripping fleeing migrants.
Also included are *Big Rock Candy Mountain* (2015), in which artifacts toppled by ISIS militants thwart their censors by mutating into fanciful mythic beasts; *Letter!* (2014), which amplifies the performative, media-induced hysteria of a protest by the radical activist group Femen; *Reign of Winter* (2012–13), a grotesque adaptation of the coverage of Prince William and Kate Middleton’s wedding that underscores the arcane, densely coded nature of ceremonial spectacles; and *Just What Is It that Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (2010–11), in which media imagery from the 2009 Iranian demonstrations is transformed into a sordid pageant of monstrous animalistic humanoids. The latter was inspired by Bijan Mofid’s satirical musical play *Shahr-e Qesseh*, or *City of Tales*, which was written in 1968 as an allegory about the strictures of pre-Revolutionary Iran and adapted from traditional folk tales. Turning this tactic on the present moment, the artists’ videos and works on paper foreground the irrationality and violence that underlies our hypermediated reality and many societal conventions.

**Ramin Haerizadeh** (b. 1975, Tehran, Iran), **Rokni Haerizadeh** (b. 1978, Tehran, Iran) and **Hesam Rahmanian** (b. 1980, Knoxville, Tennessee) have lived and worked together in Dubai since 2009. They create work independently and together in a collective that constantly grows and contracts to incorporate friends, writers, and artists. Their installations build upon their perception of life as theater while also exposing their process. Generally, their proposals begin with the “creatures” the three artists become, physically and mentally, through their work. Placing emphasis on the importance of “reporting on our time,” they wish to bring attention to the urgencies of the present moment while opening up questions over a spectrum of subjects such as views on art and culture, gender fluidity, and power mechanisms. The collaborative has presented solo exhibitions at Officine Grandi Riparazioni, Turin (2018), MACBA, Barcelona (2017), Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2015), and Kunsthalle Zurich (2015). A monograph of their work, entitled *Ramin Haerizadeh Rokni Haerizadeh Hesam Rahmanian*, was published by Mousse Publishing in 2015.

*The Rain Doesn’t Know Friends From Foes: Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, Hesam Rahmanian* is organized by the Frye Art Museum and curated by Amanda Donnan.

Tschabalala Self’s first museum solo presentation on the West Coast brings together figurative works in painting, sculpture, and video, including four new pieces created for the occasion. The show highlights Self’s engagement with the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality, and her particular focus on the iconographic significance of the black female body in contemporary culture. Through her work, Self creates exuberant, multilayered characters—not depictions of herself or others, but “avatars”—that resist reductive representations of blackness, performing their individual identities in defiance of the voyeuristic fantasies of the spectator. These avatars are most often constructed from machine-sewn fabric scraps including velvet, denim, and animal prints, combined with cut-out portions of discarded canvases, layered with acrylic paint, oil pastel, and charcoal. The specific associations attached to certain fabrics and patterns anchor Self’s characters in reality, becoming a visual grammar through which new personalities and alternative narratives can be imagined.

The exaggerated physical attributes of the depicted figures reflect the artist’s own experiences and contemporary cultural attitudes toward race and gender, but their detailing celebrates the complexities of black identity. These complexities are often obscured in American culture, in which an entrenched legacy of stereotyping makes the black female figure hypervisible—explicitly sexualized or enshrouded in narratives of pain and suffering.
Self’s unruly subjects disrupt expectations by asserting their agency and physical autonomy. Seen leaping, dancing, touching themselves, coupling, and contorting their bodies, her characters expand the scope of liberatory movements, asserting that ordinary pleasures can also be acts of resistance.

_Tschabalala Self_ (b. 1990 Harlem, New York, NY) lives and works in New York and New Haven. She received her BA from Bard College in 2012 and her MFA from the Yale School of Art in 2015. Recent exhibitions include: _Bodega Run_, Yuz Museum, Shanghai (2018); _Bodega Run_, Pilar Corrias Gallery, London (2017); _Tschabalala Self_, Tramway, Glasgow (2017); _Tschabalala Self_, Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art, London (2017); Desire, Moore Building, Miami (2016); _The Function_, T293, Naples (2016); _A Constellation_, Studio Museum Harlem, Harlem (2015); and _Tropicana_, The Cabin, Los Angeles (2015).

_Tschabalala Self_ is organized by the Frye Art Museum and curated by Amanda Donnan. Generous support is provided by the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture and ArtsFund.

Seattle-based artist Gretchen Frances Bennett explores issues related to visual perception at the intersection of personal and historical memory. Working primarily in drawing, she demonstrates a preoccupation with mundane yet cinematically-inflected moments that retain the fascination of a time diffuse between past and present. She is perhaps best known for luminous color pencil translations of personal photographs and artifacts of popular media, as in a series of drawings of Kurt Cobain based on YouTube videos and the Gus van Sant film, Last Days (2005). Acknowledging the fragmentary and intermediary nature of her source material, Bennett includes “surface evidence” within her drawings, like accidental tears in the original photograph, the grain of lo-fi digital video imagery, or the color imbalances of inkjet print-outs.

Recently Bennett’s practice has extended to writing. In conjunction with a collection of personal essays and poems that she has been working on for over a year, she is creating a slideshow video in collaboration with photographer Paulo Castillo and a series of time-intensive, large-scale drawings that examine constructed and deconstructed notions of the self. Based on sources ranging from photographs taken during childhood travels to stills from Céline Sciamma’s film Tomboy (2011) and screen grabs from online spiritual guides’ video channels, this new body of work tracks Bennett’s process of deprogramming, healing, and (continual) re-becoming by retracing
and unfolding formative moments. *Air, the free or unconfined space above the surface of the earth* showcases these new works alongside a selection of key pieces from previous moments in her practice, revealing the artist’s special ability to spark unexpected poetic associations across time and subject matter.

**Gretchen Frances Bennett**'s (American, b.1960) recent projects include the exhibitions *Becoming American*, San Juan Island, WA (2018); *Fire in the Mountains*, Jackson, WY (2018); and *The Rough Draft of Everything*, Bridge Productions, Seattle, WA (2017). She has read her writing at the Holiday Forever Gallery, Jackson, WY (2017) and as part of the series *This Might Not Work* at INCA, Seattle, WA (2016). In 2014, Bennett received the Seattle Art Museum’s Betty Bowen Special Recognition Award and completed postgraduate work at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. She is presently at work on her first collection of essays.

*Gretchen Frances Bennett: Air, the free or unconfined space above the surface of the earth* is organized by the Frye Art Museum and curated by Amanda Donnan. Generous support is provided by Vulcan, Inc.

Through her films, objects, and installations, Los Angeles-based artist Cauleen Smith reimagines a world that is black, feminist, spiritual, and unabashedly alive. Smith roots her work firmly within the discourse of mid-twentieth-century experimental film but operates in multiple materials and arenas. With this exhibition, she revises the threat, “take it or leave it,” and proposes a new rule for a better world: create something, offer it, and gift it—regardless of whether the gesture is accepted. “Give it or leave it” is a rule for the self, not an ultimatum for the other, born of a spirit of generosity, hospitality, and selflessness.

Featuring new films and banners, a site-specific light installation, and revised versions of two sculptural works, *Give It or Leave It* connects four distinct universes: Alice Coltrane (1937–2007) and her ashram; a 1966 photo shoot by Bill Ray (b.1936) at Simon Rodia’s Watts Towers; Noah Purifoy (1917–2004) and his desert assemblages; and black spiritualist Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795–1871) and her Shaker community. These locations, while not technically utopian societies, embody sites of historical speculation and radical generosity between artist and community.

The figures referenced by Smith do not turn their backs on the here and now. Each exploration served as antidote to a pervasive hopelessness perceived in American society. This defiantly aspirational energy drives the exhibition. As an idiom, “give it or leave it” mutates the coercive attitude behind “take it or leave it.” Smith’s recast proposes a liberating rule for a better world—creating, offering, and gifting, regardless of a gesture's recognition, acceptance, or rejection.
Cauleen Smith (b. 1967, Riverside, California) is an interdisciplinary artist, whose work reflects upon the everyday possibilities of the imagination. Drawing from structuralism, Third World Cinema, and science fiction, she makes things that deploy the tactics of these disciplines, while offering a phenomenological experience for spectators and participants. Her films, objects, and installations have been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including those at the Studio Museum in Harlem; the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; the Yerba Buena Center for Art, San Francisco; the 2017 Whitney Biennial; Prospect.4, New Orleans; the New Museum, New York; D21, Leipzig; and Decad, Berlin. Smith has had solo shows of films and installations at The Kitchen, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; the Art Institute of Chicago; and Threewalls, Chicago. She earned her BA in creative arts from San Francisco State University and her MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles’s School of Theater, Film, and Television. Smith teaches in the School of Art at CalArts.

Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It is organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania and curated by the Daniel and Brett Sundheim Chief Curator Anthony Elms.

Support for the exhibition has been provided by the Ellsworth Kelly Award. The Ellsworth Kelly Award made possible by The Ellsworth Kelly Foundation and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. Additional support has been provided by B.Z. & Michael Schawrtz, Meredith & Bryan Verona, and Susan Weiler.

The installation at the Frye Art Museum is overseen by Amanda Donnan, curator.

Jane Wong: After Preparing the Altar, the Ghosts Feast Feverishly
June 1–September 1, 2019

Public Opening Reception: Friday, May 31, 2019
7:30–9:30 pm

Jane Wong’s poems and essays unearth silenced histories, immigrant narratives, and intergenerational trauma. The Seattle-based writer’s recent projects consider the social, historical, and political contexts that “haunt” the work of contemporary Asian American poets. For her first museum solo exhibition, Wong draws inspiration from her upbringing in a Chinese American restaurant in New Jersey as well as her family’s experience of hunger and poverty in rural China to consider the ways we reconcile the gaps in our lives and histories.

Engaging gluttony and hunger across multiple generations, After Preparing the Altar, The Ghosts Feast Feverishly conjures food as childhood comfort while throwing into sharp contrast the personal histories of Wong’s own family members. Wong’s mother was born at the end of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), a Maoist campaign that sought agricultural and industrial reform in the Chinese countryside. Also known as the Great Famine, the campaign resulted in an estimated 36 million deaths due to starvation. Wong’s installation is comprised of altars, comfort objects, sculptural poems, and personal effects that provoke deeper understandings of food waste and the realities of low-income immigrant families.

Seeking to honor her family, ancestors, loved ones, and all that sustains life in an otherwise fraught world through writing, Wong implores us to become more attuned to our shared histories. As the final lines of the exhibition’s title poem ask, “Tell us, little girl, are you/ hungry, awake, astonished enough?”
Jane Wong is a poet, essayist, and professor who grew up in a Chinese American take-out restaurant. Her poems can be found in Best American Poetry 2015, American Poetry Review, and jubilat, among others. A Kundiman fellow, she is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize and fellowships from the U.S. Fulbright Program, the Fine Arts Work Center, Hedgebrook, 4Culture, and Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference. The author of Overpour (Action Books, 2016), Jane is an assistant professor at Western Washington University. Invested in public scholarship, her project on the poetics of haunting in Asian American poetry has appeared as a TEDx talk and a multimedia website.

Jane Wong received the 2017 James W. Ray Distinguished Artist Award, which is funded by the Raynier Institute & Foundation through the Frye Art Museum | Artist Trust Consortium. The award supports and advances the creative work of outstanding artists living and working in Washington State and culminates in a presentation at the Frye Art Museum.

Jane Wong: After Preparing the Altar, the Ghosts Feast Feverishly is organized by the Frye Art Museum and curated by Amanda Donnan. Lead support for this exhibition is provided by the Raynier Institute & Foundation through the Frye Art Museum | Artist Trust Consortium. Additional generous support is provided by 4Culture/King County Lodging Tax and Frye members.

Image: Courtesy of the artist.