



entirelyunexpected

For Immediate Release

Contact: Barbara Briggie-Smith or Christine Crawford

Tel: 515.271.0343 or 515.271.0344

E-mail: bbsmith@desmoinesartcenter.org or
ccrawford@desmoinesartcenter.org

Des Moines Art Center Exhibition Named One of Five Commended by the 2018 Sotheby's Prize

Des Moines, IA (December 2018) – In its second year, the Sotheby's Prize continues to celebrate curatorial excellence and champion the work of innovative institutions that strive to break new ground and challenge our understanding of art today, including the Des Moines Art Center's upcoming exhibition *For Today I Am a Boy: Contemporary Queer Abstraction*, organized by the Des Moines Art Center's Assistant Curator Jared Ledesma.

Launched in May 2017, the Sotheby's Prize offers an annual sum of up to \$250,000 to recognize curatorial excellence and help facilitate exhibitions that explore overlooked or under-represented areas of art history. In addition to the main prize, a sum of \$10,000 is also awarded to a select number of institutions whose exhibitions and initiatives are judged by the jury panel to be inspiring and transformative. Between them, the commended list embraces both established and underrepresented artists, as well as the relatively unexplored aspects of sexuality and race in art, while at the same time supporting inspired new plans for community-based mobile exhibitions.

Presented to the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures (opening in Los Angeles in late 2019), the \$250,000 award will support their exhibition, *Regeneration: Black Cinema 1900-1970*, which opens in fall 2020. The first exhibition of its kind, *Regeneration* will reveal the important and under-recognized history of African American filmmakers in the development of American cinema.

The Art Center's exhibition, *For Today I Am a Boy*, received a \$10,000 grant as one of the five exhibitions also to be recognized from a total of 93 applications from institutions in 19 different countries across all major continents.



See caption below



entirelyunexpected

The Des Moines Art Center is proud to be commended alongside the following organizing institutions: Hura, Israel; the Wallace Collection in London; the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati; and the Norval Foundation in Cape Town, South Africa.

This year's nominees and winners were determined by a jury of esteemed art world figures representing a broad spectrum of cultures and disciplines: Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair of Arts Council England; Connie Butler, Chief Curator at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles; Okwui Enwezor, former Director of the Haus der Kunst in Munich; Donna De Salvo Senior Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; Emilie Gordenker, Director of Mauritshuis in The Hague; Allan Schwartzman, co-creator of the Prize and Chairman and Executive Vice President of Sotheby's.

Robin Woodhead, Sotheby's Prize co-creator and Chairman of Sotheby's International, said: "This year we decided to acknowledge five exhibitions because there was such depth of very strong applications. We've come to realize, even in the first year of the Prize, that the commendations have made a big difference for the museums in their ability to raise funds from other sources and to gain support within their own communities."

For Today I Am a Boy: Contemporary Queer Abstraction will be the first exhibition in the Des Moines Art Center's 70-year history to focus exclusively on queer subject matter. It marks a substantial shift in the Art Center's programming by purposely including queer voices that have been left out of art history. The show opens in June 2019, which coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprisings, the series of demonstrations that served as catalyst for the modern gay rights movement.

Historically, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer artists have turned to the language of abstraction to illustrate diverse facets of sexuality and gender. In response to specific struggles — such as the criminalization of homosexuality, the Civil Rights Movement, and the AIDS crisis — queer artists have embraced abstraction to communicate their unauthorized desires and identities through an accepted mode of art. Currently, abstract art that embodies this mode of expression has gained the moniker "Queer Abstraction," and has become a growing aesthetic force during the present, unsettling era. *For Today I Am a Boy* unites contemporary artists who utilize the amorphous possibilities of abstraction to convey what it means to exist on the margins.

The exhibition will encompass more than 50 works of art ranging from intimately-scaled paintings to large, site-specific installations, mounted in the Art Center's Anna K. Meredith Gallery and I. M. Pei building. Artists confirmed to date include Mark Bradford, Edie Fake, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Harmony Hammond, John Paul Morabito, Carrie Moyer, Sheila Pepe, Prem Sahib, Jonathan VanDyke, and Jade Yumang. The project also includes the commissioning of works by Elijah Burgher and Mark Joshua Epstein, and a new edition of artist Tom Burr's large-scale sculpture *Deep Purple*.

For Today I Am a Boy will be accompanied by a catalogue with essays by Jared Ledesma, and David Getsy, the Goldabelle McComb Finn Distinguished Professor of Art History at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Getsy is the author of *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (2015), and the editor of *Queer* (Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary Art series, 2016).

"As the Des Moines Art Center strives to become more inclusive and welcoming to diverse audiences, we are committed to organizing challenging and timely exhibitions to promote empathy and gain understanding of each other through the art of our time. The Sotheby's Prize jury's recognition of *For Today I Am a Boy* supports these efforts and helps us to recognize the queer experience as a significant influence on modern and contemporary art." Jeff Fleming, Director, Des Moines Art Center



entirelyunexpected

"I am thrilled that *For Today I Am a Boy* has been commended. This is a major step forward in the recognition and appreciation of queer art history. I thank the esteemed jury for this fantastic honor."
Jared Ledesma, Assistant Curator, Des Moines Art Center

"This exhibition has the potential to shift how we view abstraction, ordinarily considered a universal language, in relation to gender and sexual identity. It acknowledges pioneering thinking by a young curator and the commitment of a mainstream American institution to support ground-breaking thought."
Allan Schwartzman

"This exhibition will look at queer abstraction in the context of the history of modern and contemporary art. It is a really smart, risky, bold, and committed project."
Donna De Salvo

Caption:

Carrie Moyer (American, born 1960)
Jolly Hydra: Unexplainably Juicy, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
84 x 78 inches
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sid and Shirley Singer, Mamaroneck, NY

Des Moines Art Center

Recognized by international art critics as a world-class museum in the heart of the Midwest, the Des Moines Art Center, an AAM-accredited institution, has amassed an important collection with a major emphasis on contemporary art. The collection's overriding principle is a representation of artists from the 19th century to the present, each through a seminal work. This accounts for an impressive collection that ranges from Edward Hopper's *Automat* to Jasper Johns' *Tennyson*, Henri Matisse's *Woman in White*, Georgia O'Keeffe's *From the Lake No. 1*, Francis Bacon's *Study after Velásquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, Bill Viola's *Ascension*, and Cecily Brown's *Half-Bind*.

The Art Center's physical complex marries with the collection for a totally integrated experience. The collection is housed in three major buildings, each designed by a world-renowned architect—Eliel Saarinen, I. M. Pei, and Richard Meier. With the exception of special events, admission to the museum is free.

In September 2009, the John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park opened in Des Moines' Western Gateway Park. Philanthropists John and Mary Pappajohn provided funding for and donated 30 sculptures by internationally acclaimed contemporary artists to the Des Moines Art Center. The collection of sculptures by such artists as Ai Weiwei, Louise Bourgeois, Deborah Butterfield, Willem de Kooning, Mark di Suvero, Olafur Eliasson, Keith Haring, Ellsworth Kelly, Yayoi Kusama, Jaume Plensa, Richard Serra, and Joel Shapiro is the most significant donation of artwork to the Art Center in a single gift in the museum's history. The Pappajohn Sculpture Park is a collaboration of the Pappajohns, the City of Des Moines, the Des Moines Art Center, and numerous corporate and private donors.

#