

GOTHAM

"Woody De Othello: The Whitney Biennial Makes a Highly Anticipated Comeback This Spring"

By Pili Swanson

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Curators Adrienne Edwards and David Breslin.

The Whitney Biennial makes a highly anticipated comeback this spring.

After a year's delay, the [Whitney](#)'s flagship exhibition and longest-running series, the Whitney Biennial, will showcase contemporary American art in its presentation of *Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet as It's Kept*. For its 80th edition, 63 artists and collectives will sprawl over most of the museum's space, primarily the fifth and sixth floors, during the biennial's five-month run, while certain portions of the exhibits will also continue through October.

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Denyse Thomasos, "Displaced Burial/Burial at Gorée" (1993).

He began to combine figurative and nonfigurative elements in his work as a graduate student at California College of the Arts in San Francisco (where he met his West Coast gallerist, [Jessica Silverman](#), in his first year during an open studio day). Previously, he had created life-size, mannequin-like pieces and installed them in unexpected neighborhood spots: the bodega or a barbershop. But then he began thinking about individual limbs and fragmented body parts that could stand alone in a gallery space, and possibly open his work to a wider range of interpretations. "Then the viewer becomes the figure," he says. "You bring your own experience and your own evidence to the work. Though there are a lot of visual cues to both guide and complicate that." He adds, "In a lot of my work, there's a confrontation of self. I'm a Gemini; I've got multiple sides to my personality."

Biennials are meant to capture the cultural and social reflections of a moment in time. *Quiet as It's Kept*—a colloquialism typically said before the statement of something obviously meant to be kept a secret—was selected as the title after the co-organizers, curators David Breslin and Adrienne Edwards, were inspired by the usage of the phrase in a Toni Morrison novel and as the title of a Max Roach album. "The 2022 biennial arrives at a time haunted by a global pandemic and plagued by ongoing racial and economic inequities and polarizing politics," says Adam D. Weinberg, the museum's Alice Pratt Brown director. "The artists in the exhibition challenge us to consider how these realities affect our senses of self and community and offer one of the broadest and most diverse takes on art in the United States that the Whitney has offered in many years."

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Rebecca Belmore, prototype for "ishkode (fire)" (2021)

"Deliberately intergenerational and interdisciplinary, the biennial proposes that cultural, aesthetic and political possibility begins with meaningful exchange and reciprocity," says Edwards. "Rather than proposing a unified theme, we pursue a series of hunches throughout the exhibition."

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Woody De Othello, study for "The will to make things happen" (2021)

On view will be Mexican artist Andrew Roberts' "La Horda (The Horde)" and a black-and-white line painting, "Displaced Burial/Burial at Gorée," by Denyse Thomasos. Incorporating video and film programs as equal to traditional art, Jacky Connolly's *Descent into Hell* and Coco Fusco's *Your Eyes Will Be an Empty World* films will be displayed as well. "We've organized the exhibition to reflect these precarious and improvised times," says Breslin. "The biennial primarily serves as a forum for artists, and the works that will be presented reflect their enigmas, the things that perplex them, the important questions they are asking." *April 6-Sept. 5, 99 Gansevoort St.*

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