

STUDIO MUSEUM HARLEM

For Immediate Release

Media Contact: Liz Gwinn

212.864.4500 x213

egwinn@studiomuseum.org

The Studio Museum in Harlem's 2009-10 Artists in Residence



Valerie Piraino
Market, 2008
Courtesy the Artist



Mequitta Ahuja
Off The Edge, 2008
Courtesy the artist



Lauren Kelley
Big Gurl (video still), 2006
Courtesy the artist

NEW YORK, NY, October 20, 2009—The Studio Museum in Harlem is proud to announce the new 2009-10 artists in residence: **Mequitta Ahuja**, **Lauren Kelley** and **Valerie Piraino**. Since opening in a rented loft at Fifth Avenue and 125th Street in 1968, the Studio Museum has earned recognition for its catalytic role in advancing the work of visual artists of African descent through its *Artist-in-Residence* program. The program has supported over ninety graduates who have gone on to highly regarded careers.

Every year, the Museum offers a twelve-month studio residency for three emerging artists. Each artist is granted a free non-living studio space, a \$20,000 fellowship, and a \$1,000 materials stipend. The program is designed to serve emerging artists of African descent locally, nationally and internationally. Artists' media may include sculpture, painting, printmaking, digital art, mixed media, photography, and film and video. At the end of the residency, an exhibition of the artists' work will be presented in the Museum's galleries.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Mequitta Ahuja

Born 1976, Grand Rapids, MI

Education

2003, MFA, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL

1998, BA, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA

Dubbed “Automythography” by the artist, Mequitta Ahuja’s work blends cultural history and myth with personal narrative. By combining these elements, she integrates representational forms relating to both painting and photography and spanning the artistic modes of portraiture, fiction, realism and abstraction. She depicts “Black hair as an embodiment of drawing, equating drawn texture to hair texture...in response to the history of Black hair as a barometer of social and personal consciousness.” Ahuja’s process of self-portraiture begins with private performances in front of the camera, which she documents using a remote shutter control. The resulting photographs act as non-fictional source material for Ahuja’s preliminary drawings, to which she later adds invented elements. The resulting self-portraits embody a means of self-invention and creative self-sufficiency.

Lauren Kelley

Born 1975, Baltimore, MD

Education

1999, MFA, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

1997, BFA, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD

Video artist Lauren Kelley’s stop-motion animations are bawdy soap operas acted out by black Barbie dolls. This body of work began as a response to 1970s politics that helped transform the national perception of women from weak to strong. Kelley cites various sources of inspiration; among them are Todd Haynes’ *Karen Carpenter Story* and the Yes Men’s societal toy endeavors. Kelley says that both inspirations compelled her “to insert a small voice into a large feminine archetype.” Her interest in feminine strength has expanded to encompass an obsession with personal and cultural place, or turf.

Valerie Piraino

Born 1981, Kigali, Rwanda

Education

2009, MFA, Columbia University School of the Arts, New York, NY

2004, BFA, Maryland Institute college of Art, Baltimore, MD

Installation artist Valerie Piraino’s practice is concerned with reconciling the gap between the understanding of her birthplace, Rwanda—which she gained through family photographs—and the disparate reality of the place that confronted her upon returning as an adult. She is dexterous in her influences, ideas and production; oftentimes, she will reuse a work in several different contexts to create new installations. Piraino notes of this practice, “Observing the themes, materials and imagery that I repeatedly return to fosters a deeper of understanding of what my artistic motivations are.”

The *Artists-in-Residence* Program and annual exhibition are presented with the support of: Nimoy Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency, Jerome Foundation, Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation and by endowments established by the Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Trust and Andrea Frank Foundation.

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

The Studio Museum in Harlem's Department of Education and Public Programs offers a range of programs, activities and events that will incorporate artists, scholars and critics in thought-provoking discussions on a wide variety of issues central to the works on view. For more information on these programs, please visit www.studiomuseum.org or call 212.864.4500.

ABOUT THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

The Studio Museum in Harlem is a contemporary art museum that focuses on the work of artists of African descent locally, nationally and globally, as well as work that has been inspired and influenced by African-American culture, through its exhibitions, *Artist-in-Residence* program, education and public programming, permanent collection and archival and research facilities.

The Studio Museum in Harlem is committed to serving as a unique resource in the local community, and in national and international arenas, by making artworks and exhibitions concrete and personal for each viewer. The Museum provides a context within which to address the contemporary and historical issues presented through art by artists of African descent.



Photo: Ray A. Llanos

Since opening in a rented loft at Fifth Avenue and 125th Street in 1968, the Studio Museum has earned recognition for its catalytic role in promoting the works of these artists. The Museum's *Artist-in-Residence* program has supported over ninety graduates who have gone on to highly regarded careers. A wide variety of education and public programs have brought the African-American experience alive for the public by means of lectures, dialogues, panel discussions and performances, as well as interpretive programs, both on- and off-site, for students and teachers. The exhibitions program has also expanded the scope of art historical literature through the production of scholarly catalogues, brochures and pamphlets.

The Studio Museum's permanent collection contains over 1,600 works, including drawings, pastels, prints, photographs, mixed-media works and installations. It is comprised of works created by artists during their residencies, as well as pieces given to the Museum to create an art historical framework for artists of African descent. Featured in the collection are works by Terry Adkins, Romare Bearden, Skunder Boghossian, Robert Colescott, Melvin Edwards, Richard Hunt, Hector Hyppolite, Serge Jolimeau, Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis, Philome Obin, Betye Saar, Nari Ward and Hale Woodruff, among others. The Museum also is the custodian of an extensive archive of the work of photographer James VanDerZee, the quintessential chronicler of the Harlem community from 1906 to 1984.

The Studio Museum in Harlem is supported, in part, with public funds provided by the following government agencies and elected representatives: The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation; Assemblyman Keith L. T. Wright, 70th A.D.; New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency; Institute of Museum and Library Services; the National Endowment for the Arts; Council Member Inez E. Dickens, 9th C.D. and Speaker Christine Quinn and the New York City Council.



ADDRESS

The Studio Museum in Harlem is located at 144 West 125th Street, between Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard and Lenox Avenue. Subway: A, B, C, D, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 to 125th Street. Bus: M-2, M-7, M-10, M-100, M-101, M-102 or BX-15.

ADMISSION

The suggested donation is \$7 for adults and \$3 for students (with valid ID) and seniors. Admission is free for children twelve and under. The first Saturday of every month is free for everyone. Sundays are now free at the Studio Museum, thanks to generous support from Target.

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HOURS

The Museum is open Wednesday through Friday, and Sunday from 12:00 to 6:00 p.m., and from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday. The Museum is closed on Monday, Tuesday and major holidays. www.studiomuseum.org

Phone: 212.864.4500.

Fax: 212.864.4800.

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