

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) presents**

***Mary Lovelace O'Neal: Whales, A Romance...***

**An extensive installation of the 78-year-old Bay Area painter's *Whales Fucking* series**

**March 25 – August 23, 2020**

**(San Francisco, CA)**— The Museum of the African Diaspora is pleased to present *Mary Lovelace O'Neal: Whales, A Romance...*, an extensive installation of O'Neal's *Whales Fucking* series—works not seen together since 1982. The series of paintings was created upon viewing rhapsodic and free whales in the Pacific Ocean and the San Francisco Bay in the 1970s during her first visit and an extended stay on the West Coast. Monumental in scale and expression, the work of 78-year-old painter Mary Lovelace O'Neal demands overdue recognition.

Exploding in expressionist physicality, the abstracted landscapes on canvas are composed of oil paint, glitter, and tape. Also inspired by D.H. Lawrence's evocative poem *Whales Weep Not!*, this series followed O'Neal's noted abstract minimalist "lampblack" paintings. The dramatic landscapes and bestial realities of San Francisco catalyzed this turning point in O'Neal's career. Forty years after the creation of these works, O'Neal's intersecting environmental and social justice commitments present a timely reflection on the Bay Area as a central geo-social site of politicized artistic expression.

The exhibition includes large scale canvases and intimate works on paper from *Whales Fucking*, along with a documentary film of her life and career as an artist and activist. Having studied with David Driskell and Lois Mailou Jones at Howard University, O'Neal continued working alongside artists such as Bob Blackburn and Robert Colescott throughout her career. Deeply influential to generations of artists, Mary Lovelace O'Neal is an integral figure in expanding the canon of abstraction.

"Politically dissident, socially defiant and aesthetically daring—Mary Lovelace O'Neal's emotionally provocative, powerful gestural abstractions deny the conventions and contours of the canvas," says Erin Jenoa Gilbert, guest Co-curator and Curator of African American Manuscripts, Smithsonian Archives of American Art. "With vicious application of vibrant pigments, brushstrokes suggest birds, flora, and fauna pirouetting through the vista. With a command of the symbolic languages and mythologies of the deep south and global south, Mary Lovelace O'Neal critiques Eurocentric painting practices and dares the viewer to compare her to postwar painters such as Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler, Joan Mitchell and Grace Hardigan."

O'Neal is Professor Emerita of the University of California, Berkeley's Studio Art department. Underappreciated for her role as an important educator and abstract painter, she has impacted and inspired generations of artists in the Bay Area, nationally, and globally.

"The Bay Area has a long vibrant history as a haven for artists and creatives," states Monetta White, MoAD's Executive Director. "We are honored to be able to provide a platform to celebrate the impactful work of Mary Lovelace O'Neal, providing an overdue moment of recognition and scholarship."

Mary Lovelace O'Neal (b. 1942, Jackson, Mississippi) received her BFA from Howard University and her MFA from Columbia University. A painter and activist, O'Neal was a member of CORE and SNCC, and participated in a fellowship at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in the 1960s. O'Neal taught throughout the Bay Area at institutions including the San Francisco Art Institute, California College of Arts and Crafts, Humboldt State University, Laney College, and University of California, Berkeley, where she was the first African American awarded tenure in Berkeley's Department of Art Practice and ultimately became Chair of the department.

She has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1979), the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (1994) and the Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson (2002). Her work is in the permanent collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Smithsonian Institutions, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Oakland Museum of California, and the National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, Chile.

A 50-year survey of O'Neal's work, *Chasing Down the Image*, is currently on view at Mnuchin Gallery in New York.

*Mary Lovelace O'Neal: Whales, A Romance...* is curated by Emily Kuhlmann, Director of Exhibitions and Curatorial Affairs, MoAD and Erin Jenoa Gilbert, Curator of African American Manuscripts, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

A forthcoming catalogue with contributions from Emily Kuhlmann, Erin Jenoa Gilbert, and others will be published by Cameron + Co.

## FUNDING

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### **About MoAD**

Opened in 2005 in San Francisco's Yerba Buena arts district, MoAD, a contemporary art museum, celebrates Black cultures, ignites challenging conversations, and inspires learning through the global lens of the African Diaspora.

For more information about MoAD, visit The Museum's website at [moadsf.org](http://moadsf.org).

### **For media information or visuals visit our online press gallery or contact:**

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### **General Information**

The Museum is open Wednesday-Saturday 11am–6pm and Sunday, 12–5pm. Museum admission is \$10 for adults, \$5 for students and senior citizens with a valid ID. Youth 12 and under always get in free. For general information, the public may visit The Museum's website at [moadsf.org](http://moadsf.org) or call 415.358.7200. MoAD is located at 685 Mission Street (at Third), San Francisco, CA.

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