

MEDIA ALERT

August 9, 2017

**SFMOMA DEBUTS COMMISSION BY JULIE MEHRETU
ON LABOR DAY WEEKEND**

Public Artist Talk on September 14



WHAT:

Opening Labor Day weekend, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will debut a commission by Julie Mehretu in the museum's Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Atrium as part of its free, art-filled public space. Mehretu's *HOWL, eon (I, II)* (2017) is an expansive exploration of the American West—its transcendent landscapes and violent colonial history. Created as part of SFMOMA's new art commissioning program, this site-specific diptych's two vast abstract canvases, each measuring 27 by 32 feet, flank the main staircase in the soaring Haas, Jr. Atrium, which is freely accessible to the public.

Born in 1970 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Mehretu conjures the sublime incomprehensibility of our ever-changing world through abstraction. *HOWL, eon (I, II)* examines the competing impulses of annihilation and preservation at the heart of 19th-century westward expansion, and explores how the Bay Area's history of colonialism, capitalism, class conflict, social protest and technological innovation have transformed the social and physical landscape. It features a base layer of distorted digital images of contemporary race riots, street protests and 19th-century depictions of the American West, topped with thick, luminous layers of paint and ink applied with brushes, spray painting and screen printing. Layered tangles of abstract gestures and

erasures reflect a landscape that is continually reshaped by physical movement and struggle, reminding us of the conjoined genealogies of chaos, exploitation and hope in the making of the American West.

On Thursday, September 14, Mehretu will discuss the commission in an Artist Talk in the Phyllis Wattis Theater at SFMOMA. Tickets are \$15 (\$13 for members). Visit sfmoma.org/event/julie-mehretu for more information.

WHY: The site-specific piece is part of SFMOMA's new art commissioning program, a vital part of the museum's commitment to sharing the art for our time with the Bay Area and beyond.

WHEN/WHERE: *Julie Mehretu*

On view Saturday, September 2, 2017–ongoing
Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Atrium, Floor 1

Julie Mehretu Artist Talk

Thursday, September 14, 6:30 p.m.
Phyllis Wattis Theater, Floor 1

ABOUT: Mehretu studied at Kalamazoo College in Michigan (BA, 1992) and at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal (1990–91). She received an MFA in painting and printmaking from the Rhode Island School of Design (1997). Mehretu has participated in numerous international exhibitions and biennials including the Sharjah Biennial 12: the past, the present, the possible; UAE (2015); and Documenta (13) in Kassel, Germany (2012). She has received international recognition for her work, including the US Department of State Medal of Arts Award (2015), and the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship (2005).

In 2009 and 2010, Mehretu exhibited a cycle of large paintings in *Julie Mehretu: Grey Area* at the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin, which then travelled to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. She has had solo exhibitions at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit (2007), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain (2006) and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2003).

Recent shows in 2016 include *Julie Mehretu: The Addis Show*, a solo exhibition at the Modern Art Museum Gebre Kristos Desta Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, organized in conjunction with the Desta Center and the United States Embassy, and curated by Dagmawi Woubshet (PhD), and *Hoodnyx, Voodoo and Stelae* at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

A solo exhibition of Mehretu's work, organized by Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal, opened in May 2017 and will travel to Centro Botín, Santander, Spain, in October 2017.

SUPPORT: Lead support for *Julie Mehretu* is provided by Carolyn and Preston Butcher. Major support is provided by Agnes Gund and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund. Generous support is provided by Ethan Beard and Wayee Chu, Gay-Lynn and Robert Blanding, Adam and Katherine Clammer, Concepción S. and Irwin Federman, Robert S. Fisher, Jessica and Jason Moment, Diana Nelson and John Atwater, Denise Littlefield Sobel, Susan and Jim Swartz, Pat Wilson, and Sonya Yu and Zachary Lara. Additional support is provided by Alka and Ravin Agrawal and Dolly and George Chammas.

HOWL, *eon* (I, II) is commissioned by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and is a promised gift of Helen and Charles Schwab.

SFMOMA's Art Commissioning Endowed Fund is supported by Roberta and Steve Denning, Patricia W. Fitzpatrick, Diana Nelson and John Atwater, and Denise Littlefield Sobel. Art Commissions at SFMOMA are also supported by illy coffee.

MORE INFO: **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art**
151 Third Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

SFMOMA is dedicated to making the art for our time a vital and meaningful part of public life. Founded in 1935 as the first West Coast museum devoted to modern and contemporary art, a thoroughly transformed SFMOMA, with triple the gallery space, an enhanced education center and new free public galleries, opened to the public on May 14, 2016. In its inaugural year, the expanded museum welcomed more than 1.2 million visitors.

Visit sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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IMAGE CREDIT: Julie Mehretu at work; courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery; © Julie Mehretu; photo: Tom Powell Imaging, Inc.