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**THE WELLIN MUSEUM OF ART AT HAMILTON COLLEGE WILL PRESENT
THEATERS OF FICTION
FROM FEBRUARY 16 THROUGH JUNE 9, 2019**

**The Exhibition Will Include Work by Seven Contemporary Artists and Explores Themes of
Illusion, Power, and Escapism Through the Physical Space of the Theater**



Ceal Floyer. *Double Act*, 2006. Light projection, photographic gobo, gobo holder and theater lamp, dimensions variable. © Ceal Floyer. Image courtesy 303 Gallery, New York, Lisson Gallery, London and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

Clinton, NY—The Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College will present *Theaters of Fiction* in 2019, including over 20 works by seven international contemporary artists. Spanning a variety of mediums, the works explore themes of illusion, power, escapism, and artificiality through the physical space of the theater. Curated by Katherine Alcauskas, the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art's Collections Curator and Exhibitions Manager, the exhibition will be on view from February 16 through June 9, 2019.

The artworks included in the exhibition were created within the last twenty years by a roster of international artists with divergent practices: Rhona Bitner (American, born 1960), Ceal Floyer (British, born 1968), Candida Höfer (German, born 1944), Lisa Kereszi (American, born 1973), Guillermo Kuitca (Argentinian, born 1961), Hiroshi Sugimoto (Japanese, born 1948), and Carrie Mae Weems (American,

born 1953). While some of the works address the theater and opera's historic associations with power, privilege, and wealth, others represent sites of more democratic and popular entertainment. All, however, engage in a dialogue around image creation, art production, and the audience/viewer, in a highly self-reflexive manner.

Alcauskas explains, "Rather than depicting actors or audience members, these artists look outside the performance itself to the space in which it unfolds. Foregrounding the absences present in spaces where fictions are staged, these works explore the enchantment and fallacy of fantasy and reveal the constructs and hierarchies of culture and of the fabrications with which we entertain ourselves."

Tracy Adler, the Wellin Museum's Johnson-Pote Director, adds, "By looking past the performance to focus specifically on the physical space of theater, the artworks in *Theaters of Fiction* highlight the power structures inherent in the relationship between the audience and the actors, the influence of drama and deception on the audience, and the representation of social class inherent in the theater space itself."

Exhibition highlights include two installations addressing the theater as a literal and metaphorical stage: Carrie Mae Weems' *Lincoln, Lonnie, and Me—A Story in 5 Parts* (2012) and Ceal Floyer's *Double Act* (2006).

Lincoln, Lonnie, and Me consists of a stage that features a "Pepper's Ghost," a video-based projection referencing a nineteenth-century theatrical illusionistic technique. Included are a historical video of busing protests from the 1960s, characters played by Weems, and footage of photographer and activist Lonnie Graham speaking to the futility of trying to enact social change. While probing issues of race, segregation, the male gaze, and the exploitation of women, the work also explores the artificiality of memory and is at once self-referential and political.

Conceptual artist Ceal Floyer's *Double Act* (2006) employs a theater light to project—rather than to illuminate—an image of a red curtain directly on the gallery wall, offering an illusion of a stage that calls attention to the fallacy of sight and underscores the anticipation created in the moments leading up to a public performance.

Rhona Bitner, Candida Höfer, Lisa Kereszi, and Hiroshi Sugimoto make photographs depicting the theater in a variety of styles. Bitner hones in on the physical space and accoutrements of the stage—such as lighting and curtains—to present photographs that attempt to recreate a fleeting moment of anticipation for both actor and audience. Photographs by Kereszi explore the theater in a more democratic and populist context, focusing on the banal, even gritty, aspects of the theater.

Höfer and Sugimoto turn their lenses outwards to capture broad views of the theater and its atmosphere, depicting the space as a microcosmic view of the world. Höfer's colorful photographs use perspective and light to explore tensions inherent in spaces where culture is consumed. Sugimoto's vertical frames look to Italian opera houses as predecessors for American movie houses, considering how the fiction presented on stage is mirrored by the illusion and grandeur of the theater itself.

Guillermo Kuitca's mixed-media collages are based on theater seating charts and architectural plans. The works explore the sphere of the audience, investigating the crowd's energy and identity from the performer's point of view. While seating plans typically ascribe a certain degree of order, Kuitca's collages are fragmented: disrupted and more dynamic. In effect, his works both speak to and subvert the common tendency to objectify or sterilize "the house," which stemmed from a desire to give the actor more control.

As part of the interactive and exploratory WellinWorks series, an experimental, pop-up theater space will accompany the exhibition and will host courses, a range of activities, and exhibition-related programming between February 16 and April 14, 2019.

Join the conversation on social media by tagging @wellinmuseum and using the hashtag #TheatersOfFiction when posting.

Brochure

Theaters of Fiction will be accompanied by an illustrated brochure providing further context about the exhibition and each of the seven artists and the works on view.

About the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art

Designed by Machado Silvetti, the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College opened in October 2012. Through its exhibitions, public programs, and educational outreach, the Museum promotes interdisciplinary approaches and the cross-fertilization of concepts and ideas vital to a liberal arts education. The Museum works with emerging and established artists and collaborates with Hamilton students and faculty to develop programming exploring a wide range of disciplines. The Museum features a 27-foot-high visible archive, 6,200-square-feet of exhibition space, and other amenities that foster common exchange and learning. <http://www.hamilton.edu/wellin>

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