

# CHAPTER NY

## Willa Nasatir

B. 1990, Los Angeles, CA  
Lives and works in New York, NY

### Education

2012 BFA, Cooper Union, New York, NY

### Solo Exhibitions

- 2024 Sea View, Los Angeles, CA
- 2023 Chapter NY, New York, NY
- 2022 Gaylord Apartments, Los Angeles, CA
- 2020 Chapter NY, New York, NY
- 2017 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
- 2016 François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
Chapter NY, New York, NY
- 2015 *White Room*, White Columns, New York, NY

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2024 *Excitement & Enticement – An exhibition of paintings*, curated by Jeanette Mundt, Oriole, Hamburg, DE  
*Hypnopomp*, Canepa Selling, Los Angeles, CA
- 2023 *Wishing Well*, Parker Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2022 *A Maze Zanine, Amaze Zaning, A-Mezzening, Meza-9*, David Zwirner, New York, NY
- 2021 *3.0*, Chapter NY, New York, NY  
*A Faust(o)ian Bargain*, Galleria Mazzoli, Modena, IT
- 2020 *50 Artists: Art on the Grid*, Public Art Fund, New York, NY  
*Forms of Life*, Morán Morán, Los Angeles, CA  
*All of Them Witches*, Deitch Projects, Los Angeles, CA
- 2019 *Studio Photography: 1887-2019*, Simon Lee Gallery, New York, NY  
Organized by Rob McKenzie, Mercy Pictures, Auckland City, NZ

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- 2017 *Sancho Panza*, presented by Veit Laurent Kurz, Oracle, Berlin, DE  
*Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*, New Museum, New York, NY  
Fourteen 30 Contemporary, Portland, OR
- 2016 *Bitter Water*, DREI Gallery, Cologne, DE  
*Window on Broad*, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, The University of Arts, Philadelphia, PA
- 2015 *Close to the Skin*, curated by Lumi Tan, Company Gallery, New York, NY  
*hTERT*, Hester, New York, NY  
*Joshing the Water Shed*, organized by Alex Chaves, Del Vaz Projects, Los Angeles, CA
- 2014 *Neueröffnung*, organized by Benjamin Horns, VAVA, Milan, IT  
*FALSE SCENT*, organized by Holly Stanton and Sean Keenan, 321 Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
- 2013 *Glass Delusion*, with Elizabeth Sonenberg, SPF Projects, Honolulu, HI  
*Don't Call It A Breakdown*, 313 Sunnyside Avenue, Toronto, CAN  
*Serious Play*, Galerie Marisa, New York, NY
- 2011 *Dysplastic*, La Mama Gallery, New York, NY

### Awards and Honors

- 2015 The Louise Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award  
2012 A.A. Low Fund Prize for Excellence in Art  
2008–12 The Cooper Union Full Tuition Scholarship

### Bibliography

- 2024 Russell, Livia. "Work in Progress: 'I know a painting is done when it feels like it is eating itself,'" *Frieze*, April 22, 2024.
- 2023 June, Sophia. "Nylon's 10 Painters to Watch: The art world's most exciting, up-and-coming painters," *Nylon*, December 5, 2023.  
Nam, Hiji. "Young Artists 2023: Willa Nasatir," *Cultured*, November 29, 2023.  
Prickett, Sarah Nicole. "Willa Nasatir: On self-disintegration and the beauty of misunderstanding," *Artforum*, October 19, 2023.  
Rodgers, Colleen. "Distorting Photographic Reality at Chapter NY," *Office*, October 11, 2023.  
"The New Social Environment: Featuring Willa Nasatir and Ksenia M. Soboleva," *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 16, 2023.  
"Highlight: Willa Nasatir at Chapter NY," *Mousse*, October 2, 2023.  
Shaar, Chloe. "Willa Nasator on the Artful Distortions of Her New Exhibition at Chapter NY." *Interview Magazine*, September 22, 2023.  
Hullander, Megan. "Willa Nasatir's art illuminates more than it illustrates." *Document Journal*, September 15, 2023.  
Vincler, John. "What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in September." *The New York Times*, September 13, 2023.  
Whittle, Andrea. "All the Must-See Art Shows of 2023 (So Far)." *W Magazine*, September 8, 2023.  
"Must See: Willa Nasatir at Chapter NY." *Artforum*, September 8, 2023.
- 2022 Baer, Hannah. "Review: Willa Nasatir at Gaylord Apartment." *Artforum*, October 20, 2022.



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- 2020     Fateman, Johanna. "Goings on About Town: Willa Nasatir." *The New Yorker*, April 3, 2020.  
Saltz, Jerry. "To Do: Willa Nasatir." *New York Magazine*, March 16–29, 2020.
- 2018     "In Miami Beach, young galleries bring a blazing world to the Positions sector." *Artbasel.com*, December 2018.  
Russeth, Andrew. "Please Buy Me These Artworks: 34 Highlights From Art Basel Miami Beach 2018." *ARTnews.com*, December 5, 2018.
- 2017     Larmon, Anne Godfrey. "Willa Nasatir at the Whitney Museum of American Art." *Artforum*, October 2017.  
Schwartz, Erin. "A Glove, a Car, and a Camera." *The New York Review of Books*, September 16, 2017.  
Kron, Cat. "Critic's Pick: Willa Nasatir at the Whitney Museum of American Art." *Artforum.com*, August 4, 2017.  
"Two Emerging Artists Highlighted in Summer Exhibitions at the Whitney." *ARTFIXdaily*, May 4, 2017.  
Dabkowski, Colin. "After 'Picasso' Albright-Knox sets sights on emerging artists." *The Buffalo News*, February 14, 2017.  
"30 under 30." *Forbes Magazine*, January 2017.  
Steer, Emily. "6 Artists to Watch in 2017." *Elephant Magazine*, January 2017.
- 2016     Cornell, Lauren. "Psychic Junkyards: Willa Nasatir." *Mousse Magazine*, Summer 2016.  
Sawyer, Drew. "Surface and Depth Artwork Willa Nasatir." *Document Journal*, Spring/Summer 2016, 112-117.  
Vogel, Wendy. "Critic's Pick: Willa Nasatir." *Artforum.com*, April 8, 2016.
- 2015     Rappaport, Emily. "Willa Nasatir White Columns/New York." *Flash Art*, November-December 2015.  
Sawyer, Drew. "Willa Nasatir's Spectral Images." *Document Journal*, September 21, 2015.  
*Kaleidoscope Magazine*, Spring/Summer 2017.  
Baxter, Jared. "JosHING the Watershed Del Vaz Projects/Los Angeles." *Flash Art*, March 17, 2015.
- 2014     Dombek, Kristin. "The Help Desk." *n+1 Magazine*, Spring 2014.

### Public Collections

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York  
Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio  
MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York

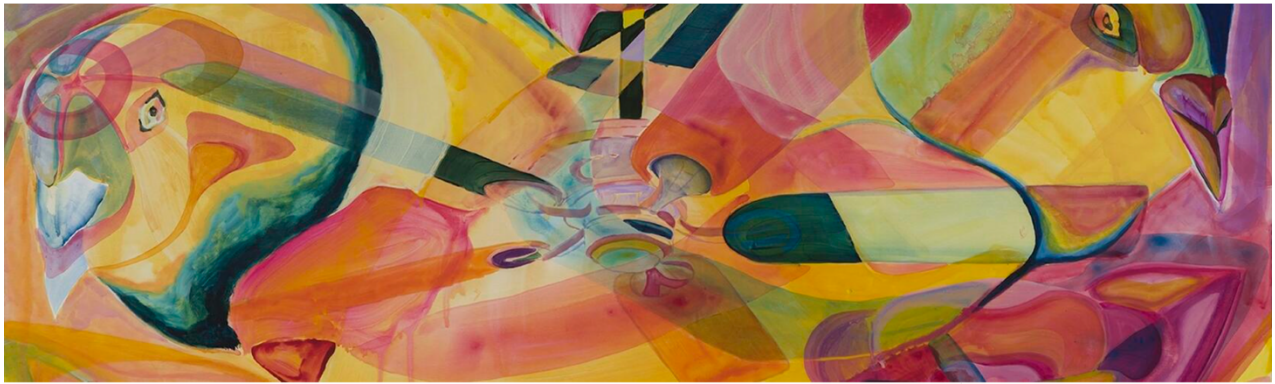
# FRIEZE

## Work in Progress: “I know a painting is done when it feels like it is eating itself”

We go behind the scenes with Gina Fischli and Willa Nasatir as they prepare to show new work at Frieze New York

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BY LIVIA RUSSELL, GINA FISCHLI AND WILLA NASATIR IN FRIEZE NEW YORK, INTERVIEWS | 22 APR 24



*For “Work in Progress,” we talk to artists bringing their latest works to Frieze fairs. Ahead of debuting new sculptures with Chapter NY at Frieze New York, Gina Fischli reflects on her joyful return to sculpture and the autonomous spirit of a work, while Willa Nasatir speaks about the hallucinatory edges of vision, memory and knowledge that frame her most recent paintings.*

**Livia Russell** How is your practice currently evolving?

**Gina Fischli** During COVID-19, I didn’t have a studio, so I only worked on flat surfaces, but now I’m really enjoying being able to make sculpture again. The work I will be presenting at Frieze New York will all be sculpture.

**Willa Nasatir** As of right now, I’m absorbed in painting. The relationship is in a very romantic place. I think my works are becoming more complex and harmonious, with the representational elements sinking deeper into the ground. I know a painting is done when it feels like it is eating itself.

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Willa Nasatir's studio. Courtesy of the artist and Chapter NY

**LR** Are there any new sources of inspiration that are guiding your work?

**WN** I've been thinking about vision span – the concept that there are delineated edges of your periphery where the eye can and cannot register things – and where that idea meets memory, hallucination and other kinds of sensory recall. I like thinking about the instances that we know things are there without being able to see them.

**GF** Often the works inspire themselves. You start with something, or maybe an "idea," but the work is steering in a totally different direction.



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Gina Fischli's studio. Courtesy of the artist and Chapter NY

**LR** Which part of your process are you devoting your time to in the studio right now?

**WN** In the beginning of the year I was making lots of drawings and now those drawings have become skeletal structures for the paintings I am in the midst of. Right now it feels like I am dressing and undressing those forms.

**GF** I don't think I have a clear process, per se, I just work. When I'm in the studio working, sometimes I take a walk.

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**LR** How is presenting new work at a fair different from a gallery show?



Willa Nasatir's studio. Courtesy of the artist and Chapter NY

**GF** It's a very busy environment so people don't have a lot of time for individual works. It's more about impressions.

**WN** You're in an ocean of other work – personally, I love being in the ocean.

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**NYLON**

## NYLON'S 10 PAINTERS TO WATCH

The art world's most exciting, up-and-coming painters.

by LAYLA HALABIAN and SOPHIA JUNE

December 5, 2023

In the art world, few mediums feel as visceral as a painting. There's the relentless attention to detail from photorealist painters, the distressing representations of the psyche, and the utter ecstasy of works teeming with desire. Artists like Lizzy Lunday zero in on the artifice of obsession, while those like Sara Birns warp and remold the human face to play around with the meaning of recognition. A canvas is all that's needed to center the viewer in the present moment, to blast through and touch the spirit, and along the way, reshape perspective. For the 2023 Art Issue, NYLON brings you the newest crop of talented and thrilling artists, those who are pushing the boundaries in the ever-evolving medium of painting — and they're only getting started.



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SINK BY WILLA NASATIR

### WILLA NASATIR

Los Angeles native Willa Nasatir is a former Flickr girl who, as a teenager, worked at American Apparel as the protégé of the brand's creative director, taking photographs and creating advertising for the company. Her photography background informs her recent paintings, echoing the flatness of photographic imagery — standing in contrast to the propulsive dynamics of her psychedelic, abstract paintings that border on surrealist. Using imagery like teeth, X-rays, and children's toys, Nasatir is interested in distortion, in the logic of dreams, and in psychoanalytic perspectives. — SJ

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## CULTURED

November 29, 2023



### "I WAS TALKING WITH A FRIEND

the other day, and she said that being an artist is thinking, *This is bad, this is very, very, very bad*, but not derailing it," says Willa Nasatir, laughing. "Like throwing a birthday party and wanting to cancel it at the last minute. But the thing about being 33 is having a better grasp of how to sit through that." The artist is in a serene mood when I meet her at Los Tacos near Tribeca Park, and says that she hasn't been feeling the post-show depression that often hits two to three weeks after an opening.

The show in question is her third solo exhibition at Chapter NY, the gallery that has represented the Los Angeles native since 2016. The obligatory CV line about Nasatir tends to include the fact that she had a solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art five years out of Cooper Union, but what's useful in approaching Nasatir's compositions across photography and painting is the psychoanalytic dictum at the heart of her work: Everyone and everything that appears in our dreams is a part of ourselves.

Nasatir's pictures break down and anatomize the solidity of objects by splitting them up into parts, giving form to how the body is marked by and yields to the multiplicities of desire, power, and pleasure. As an observer-participant of the world she depicts, her process is arguably one of the subject reflecting on herself as an object, and the central theme of her work might be that of relationships—those that constellate the fractured facets within personality, sexuality, and friendship, dynamics that are never concretized but drift in an ever-shifting tide of ebbs and flows.

A couple days before our meeting, Nasatir had a dream that an Angelyne-like figure driving a hot pink Corvette backed into her car. The strongest emotional current in the dream was one of relief, she remembers, as she'd recently switched her car insurance from California to New York. She pauses as she realizes she's made a photograph of a brick smashing into a toy Corvette. It's currently hanging in the Chapter NY show. Why did she make it? "I'm not

sure," she grins. "I guess to fulfill the dream I had a month and a half later." She seems genuinely bewildered by this, but reasons, "I'm happy that my work still feels mysterious to me, that it doesn't feel solved or like I've reached the edges, the contours of the thing."

## WILLA NASATIR

33, New York

By HIJI NAM

Photography by MARY MANNING

culturedmag.com 191



INTERVIEWS

# WILLA NASATIR

On self-disintegration and the beauty of misunderstanding

By Sarah Nicole Prickett ☞

October 19, 2023 12:23 pm



Willa Nasatir, *Rest*, 2023, acrylic dispersion, gouache, flashe paint on polycotton, 20 3/4 x 37".

*Teeth, x-rays, parts of cadavers, children's toys, the steel heads of hammers: Real or ersatz, these are objects that could find each other only at a police station, or perhaps at the home of a murderer, unless, of course, they are compiled within the niches of an artist's studio. Willa Nasatir is the artist; the studio is part of her art. That is to say, her images are highly reflective of the processes by which they are made. The paintings and photographs she chooses to show are meticulously planned in relation to the picture plane, yet while their surfaces are shifty and coldly duplicitous, their auras are full of chaos and gunk. Nasatir is operating on a particular register of psychic disturbance, struggling to represent—yet never to reveal—the unseen.*

*She called me the morning before the opening of her show at Chapter NY in TriBeCa. This weekend, it closes.*

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**I WAS THE ONLY GIRL AT THE SKATEPARK.** I was a rollerblader, but I also had skateboards I would chop up and customize to look more like the ones the Z-Boys used, the Z-Boys being the first wave of skateboarders in Venice who pioneered a new style. I wanted to participate in a scene that didn't exist anymore. And I wanted to be a photographer. When I was fifteen, I got a Ricoh GR. I would take a picture of myself doing a trick that looked much more impressive in the photograph than it did in life, or of myself appearing to do a trick—because of the pose or positioning of my body, and because of the camera angle—that I couldn't do in life. I spent hours and hours trying to get the photographs right, as opposed to getting the tricks right. In fact, I was learning a totally different set of tricks: angle, frame, perspective. It's possible I owe my life as an artist to the skatepark at the Boys and Girls Club. Or, I guess, Boys and *Girl* Club.

In commercial photography, they use something called an infinity wall, which is like a half-pipe, curved. But it reads like a flat surface, endless space. I am still making tricky pictures. How many holes can you fit into a square or a rectangle? How can you make a photograph legible as something other than what it is, make it look like a painting? Or vice versa. My paintings have a translucency and a flatness to them that people associate with photography. Bending the perimeters of the medium as far as you can, that's the point.

Most of the interesting compositional moments in my paintings and photographs become accidentally beautiful, and then people misread them as something that they're not. I guess that happens to beautiful people and things all the time. The whole point of something being beautiful is its being misunderstood visually.

I was reading this article my friend Janique [Vigier] wrote about Hervé Guibert's photographs. Guibert had a chest deformity, which was a source of shame but also a point of pride or at least a point of self-identification. He would print out X-rays of his upper torso and hang them in the windows of his sixth-floor apartment, basically saying: You can see inside my body, but you can't see inside my house. How I live is more personal than how I look. So personal and exposing. So private at the same time. That's very appealing to me. It's like the perfect encapsulation of how I think about "representational" art.



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I hate the word “practice.” Or . . . when I’m hot-gluing a water-bottle top onto a rubber tongue and piercing it with a safety pin and then suddenly it all falls apart and it’s coated in dust because my studio floor is disgusting, it’s like, this doesn’t really feel like a *practice*. Making art is not like meditating. Practice feels like too hallowed a word for what I do on a daily basis, but it’s true that I have to keep it up, keep practicing. I don’t mind the verb. If I don’t practice, I’m unmoored. But then it’s like, would a better word for practice be . . . compulsion?



Willa Nasatir, *Brick*, 2023, UV Print on plexiglass, 27 3/4 x 22 3/4".  
Charles Benton

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When I was younger, I was obsessed with inserting my hand into the frame. How can I make a photograph feel more tactile, how can I demonstrate that, actually, I am creating something: *I did this, look I did it, there's my handprint*. As I get older, I'm getting less self-conscious about authorship, about needing to prove that it's my individuality at work. Instead, I want to disintegrate into the thing. I want the feeling when you've managed to take something so far that you psych yourself out and no longer feel like it's "you" who made it. When you start with something and you do so many things to it that you lose your own authorship, it's so satisfying. But the way I get to dissolution is by doing *more* by hand. That's a different kind of hand of the artist, hand of the author.

Do you know about the carvings on the aspen trees in Northern California? They're amazing, the aspen tree groves. You have to see them. First of all, aspen trees are unique because they have one continuous root system, all the trees are connected by this mother root. Secondly, these particular aspen trees served as message boards and canvases for Basque shepherders in the decades before those regions of California were populated. At first, the shepherders would carve their names into the trees, or sometimes the names of the places where they were from. Then the carvings evolved, or the herders got bored. They started making dick jokes and drawing boobs and stuff on the trees. You can see the ones that are eighty or a hundred years old. That's how long the trees live, which is funny because it's how long, ideally, a human lives. So it's interesting, seeing these clichéd expressions of human sexuality, desire, lust, or boredom alongside the bizarre continuum of nature.

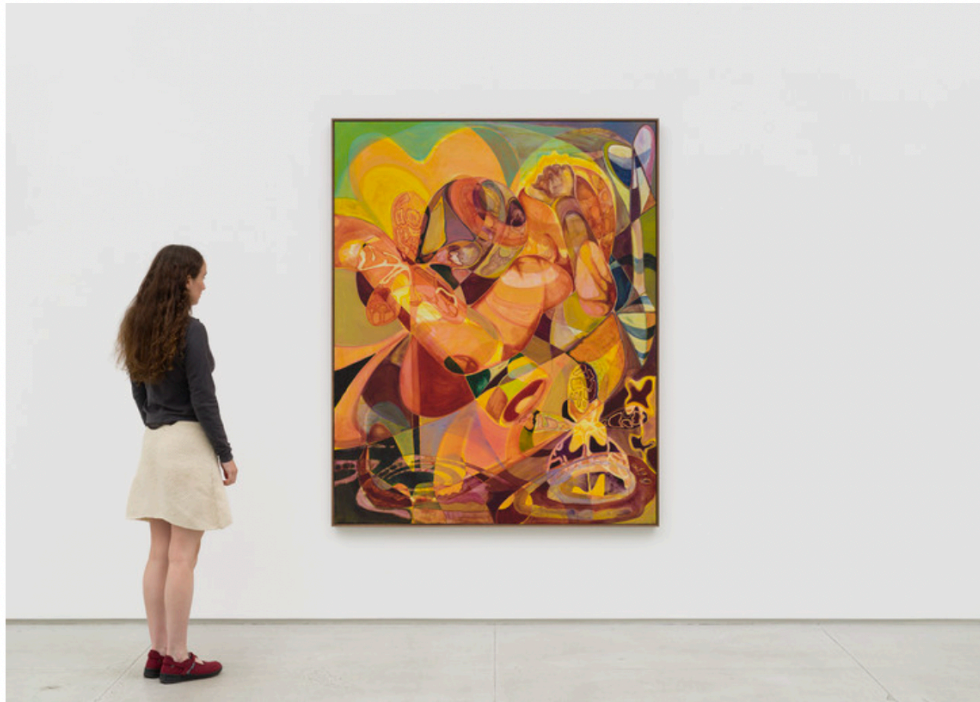
I forget why I'm talking about this. Oh, right. Both things, the continuous root system and the pornographic carving on the tree: That's what I want my art to be like.

—As told to Sarah Nicole Prickett

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### *office*

## Distorting Photographic Reality at Chapter NY



October 11, 2023

**Blurring the lines between photography and painting, Willa Nasatir transforms everyday objects to the point of the surreal. In her eponymous collection at Chapter NY, she distorts her subjects' objective truth and calls into question the accuracy of photography.**

**By abstracting real objects found on the street and even the trunk of her car, Willa makes the viewer question their own interpretation of said objects- are we looking at a real brick sitting atop a Corvette or an interpretation of one? The distinction is blurred.**

Text by Colleen Rodgers

Photos courtesy of ALMA Communications



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Informed by her background in photography, Willa's paintings intentionally evoke the translucency and flatness of photographic images and investigate the validity of reality depicted in photography. There's a sense of erotica in her work, that explores the antinomy that inanimate objects can evoke sensuality while body parts can be simultaneously de-sexualized. The ambiguity in each work plays with dualities of meaning and proposes an unraveling of boundaries as they relate to gender and power.

Office sat down with Willa to discuss her introduction into the art world, her relationship with photography, and the process behind her latest exhibition.



**Office- This set of works had a much more vibrant tone than some previous works. What was the inspiration behind this exhibition?**

Willa- Kodak makes a film called Portra VC that I used to hate, but now I love. VC stands for vivid color and it produces these super saturated colors that in some cases can be cloying but when done right can feel so lush. I don't actually use that kind of film in my work but it is a palette reference for my paintings especially. I am using acrylic, which is a synthetic, and because of that it can be misunderstood as harsh. But it's possible to produce something softer and deeper with it. I'm using a material that on its face feels artificial

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but can be worked into some kind of harmony with itself. When I think about tone I think about finish as well. The photographs are printed onto the underside of plexiglass so they feel buried in a thick gloss - it reminds me of cibachrome printing. I want to make things that feel both wet and dry, translucent and saturated.



**Were you always interested in art or was this something you delved into when you moved here for school?**

I knew I wanted to go to Cooper Union, which is an art school, so I had some conception of myself as an artist by the time I got here. As a teenager, my entry into thinking about “Art” was through subculture. I grew up in southern California, I was into skateboarding and inline skating and different music scenes. I thought about making art not really as a career but as a vehicle to connect with likeminded people and to articulate who I was and what I cared about. Going to school didn’t show me much about how to combat the professional stressors of the art industry, which are intimidating and difficult,



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but it did solidify this idea that making things consistently is a useful way of processing the world. As a counterpoint to religious faith or other devotional practices, it allows you to feel some other kind of purpose over a lifetime.

### **What is it that draws you to photography and distorting your images?**

Photographic images have a unique emotional impact - they moonlight as objective truth tellers even though we know they're subject to such intense manipulation. Noticing that power and pulling it apart through distortion is a rich problem. I like the relationship to chance in photography, that you don't know what you're going to end up with. Finding ways of surprising myself through photographic effect keeps me interested.



### **Do you prefer one medium of paint and photography over the other?**

No. Generally, people really want you to choose one thing, but when I spend a long time working in one way it makes me miss the other. I'm more interested in how two distinctly different ways of making things can balance one another out. This widens my ability to interface with the world. I like reflecting the history of one medium onto another so when I make photographs, I think about the history of painting and apply that kind of analysis to an image - but



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my paintings often are more grounded in different imaging processes or technologies as a subject than painterliness.

**Tell me more about how you depict the human body in your works- is sensuality playing a role or is it merely an analysis of form from varying perspectives?**

Erotic charge is absolutely a subject of my work but the non-human or inanimate can be sensual too. Meaning the most sensuous parts of the body can be desexed and at the same time you can make something inanimate feel hot. I get satisfaction out of flipping those things around.

**Where do you gather inspiration and resources for your pieces?**

I find things on the street a lot. I just took an inventory of the trunk of my car to answer this question. Right now I've got a fire hydrant screw top, a car boot, one of those cinder block flower shaped tiles that people build front yard walls with, some dried out pods that fall out of this tree by my studio, and a football helmet.

# Interview

STUDIO VISIT

## Willa Nasatir on the Artful Distortions of Her New Exhibition at ChapterNY

By [Chloe Shaar](#)

September 22, 2023



Willa Nasatir, photographed by Curtis Wallen.

“There’s something to the idea that you have to leave the place you’re from in order to understand the parts of it that you identify with or relate to,” says [Willa Nasatir](#), who left Los Angeles for New York at 18. In her new, self-titled show at [ChapterNY](#) in TriBeCa, one notices the influence of both cities, in the vibrant, warm colors of her paintings and the soft grunge of her photography, which incorporates everyday materials like mirror, glass, and mylar and calls to mind the days of Flickr. On a warm Thursday afternoon just before Nasatir’s early aughts-style opening party at [MadameX](#), I paid a visit to the gallery, where the artist and I delved deeper into her third exhibition, spirituality, her days working at American Apparel, and the poetry of Irene Silt.

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CHLOE SHAAR: Where are you from originally?

WILLA NASATIR: L.A., actually. I'm from Santa Monica. I live in New York. I've lived here since I was 18. New York is where I belong, but more and more I see how California has formed me. It's almost in the palette of my work, at least at this moment. I think there's something to the idea you have to leave the place you're from in order to understand the parts of it that you identify with or relate to.

SHAAR: [Points to one of Nasatir's works] I love this one.

NASATIR: Thank you. I make these constructions in my studio that are made from mirrors and glass and Mylar. And this is just a straight photo, it's not collaged in any way, but the way that the image gets broken up through distortion makes it kind of appear like it's floating in space. It's not that I'm trying to make anti-digital art in any way, but I'm more curious about how unexpected effects occur in the instrument of the camera rather than the computer.



*Images courtesy of ChapterNY Gallery.*



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SHAAR: Some of them have such a grunge, almost musk layer to them, but then others are these almost delicate and warm. It's a mixture of L.A. and New York.

NASATIR: You mean my slip and my t-shirt?

SHAAR: No, exactly. So what else are you drawing inspiration from?

NASATIR: There's something about two contradictory things and being able to demonstrate the ways that oppositional things can exist within one artwork. I think about that stuff in a more spiritual way.

SHAAR: Are you religious at all?

NASATIR: No, I'm not religious. I was not brought up with much religious grounding. I like the way that there are these self-contained systems of thought that can show people how to think about the universe or consider things that are unknown. A lot of people bring up psychedelia when they look at my work and ask me if I'm into psychedelics.

SHAAR: That was going to be one of my questions.

NASATIR: I mean, I'm not a tripper by any means. But I think the thing that's interesting to me about psychedelia is dissolving the edges of something. Once you think you understand a form or an identity or what something means, it shape-shifts. And that's a very appealing mode of processing the world to me. I feel like it exists within my art also; you look at something for long enough and something else appears.

SHAAR: Do you have a preference between painting and photography?

NASATIR: At this point, one explains the other. My photos show you how to look at my paintings. Whenever I'm doing one too much, it makes me miss the other. My friend once told me, "You're like a cat that leaves the door left open in order not to leave." I need to go really far in one direction in order to be able to come back to the other.

SHAAR: Have you always wanted to be an artist?

NASATIR: When I was a teenager, I was a lifestyle photographer. I was really active on this photo sharing community called Flickr, and I had all these friends on there: SoiL Thornton, Nina Hartmann, whose show opens at Silke Lindner the same night as mine. All these people who became artists who were taking pictures in whatever suburban environment we were in and posting them online and trying to look cool. Then I worked for American Apparel when I was a teenager.

SHAAR: Another California staple.

NASATIR: Yes, a deeply California experience. The creative director of the company, Iris Alonzo, took me under her wing as her protégé. I would take pictures of my friends and stuff and create content and advertising for the company.

SHAAR: Any crazy stories from the American Apparel days? That was literally their royalty era.

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*Images courtesy of ChapterNY Gallery.*

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NASATIR: I thought it was really cool, too. I'm trying to think of how to say it, but there's something about being a teenage girl and trying to mirror or reproduce the eye of a creepy, sleazy guy, and doing that in *service* of this company. It was about mimicry and effectiveness, the way that something casual can also be really controlled or specific. I think that all came into my photography and trying to understand how the artifice of photography can cast this tone onto all sorts of different things.

SHAAR: Right. So what happened next when you came to New York?

NASATIR: Well, when I came to New York, I was like, "Okay, what does it mean?" All of the things that I thought I was doing to be an artist, actually, that are really corrupt. I was exploiting people's bodies. How do you make art that doesn't fall into those kinds of power dynamics? As a teenager, I was like, "Oh, no, what have I done?" I think it was an important experience to learn to question.

SHAAR: "I actually don't want to be desired by 40-year-old men."

NASATIR: Right. Or, am *I* the 40-year-old man, or am I different from the 40-year-old man, or what? I came to New York and I was like, "How do you take pictures of people that are portraits, that are sexy, but not with someone else's body in them? How do you create some kind of vibe without being extractive?" So that was my first wave of understanding myself as an artist, when I got to college. I went to Cooper Union, and that was what the school prompted me to think about. I stopped taking pictures of people. Then, I figured out how to render something that feels specific and about personality and about the people that I know or moments in my life without disfiguring something.



Images courtesy of ChapterNY Gallery.

## CHAPTER NY

SHAAR: On that note, how big a role is sex playing in these pieces?

NASATIR: I think sex is in everything. The things that I paint are both bodies and inanimate objects. How do you sexualize or make rough or make *active* a flashlight? There's something interesting to me about the non-human being imbued with human or desirable or *desiring* qualities. But it's so subjective. Some people tell me my work looks really violent and some people are like, "It's sexy." It depends what people are into.

SHAAR: To me, it gives vibrant and pleasurable.

NASATIR: There's a book that's been very important to me. It's a book of poems by Irene Silt, and it's called *My Pleasure*. It's all about how you can derive pleasure from an existence that is often not pleasurable. Those poems really show you how seeing beauty in a difficult world can be a propulsive force towards a richer life for everybody, painting does that for me.



Images courtesy of ChapterNY Gallery.



## CHAPTER NY

SHAAR: I was looking at your work from two, three years ago, even 2017. It's obviously similar in terms of style, but it's so different in terms of range.

NASATIR: I think the goal is to live in a world where we allow one another to change. And I've experienced that within my work.

SHAAR: What else are you drawing inspiration from? What are you doing when you're not making art?

NASATIR: I drive around outside of New York City as much as possible.



*Images courtesy of ChapterNY Gallery.*

SHAAR: Right. You were telling me how you were just in Maine.

NASATIR: I went to North Carolina too. Oh, now I'm *not* talking about the fact that I rock climb, but I do.

SHAAR: Do you rock in Brooklyn?

NASATIR: Yeah. [Laughs]. But we're not talking about that.

SHAAR: Have you been in love?

NASATIR: Sure have. Have you?

SHAAR: Yeah, I think so. What's your sign?



## CHAPTER NY

NASATIR: Cancer.

SHAAR: There it is. So you've never needed to think.

NASATIR: Yeah. I think I've never understood the idea of people only being able to work when they're suffering or something. Or that making art is connected to pain, necessarily. I've seen beautiful work that's about sublimating those feelings, but that's not my experience.

# CHAPTER NY

## DOCUMENT

Above The Fold

### Willa Nasatir's art illuminates more than it illustrates

Read time 4 minutes



Spoon, 2023. Acrylic dispersion, gouache, and urethane on polycotton. 57 x 71 in (144.8 x 180.3 cm) (WN 2227).

Text by

**Megan Hullander**

Posted

**September 15, 2023**

Upon her third solo exhibition with Chapter NY, the artist muses on the making and the meaning of her work

## CHAPTER NY

Willa Nasatir may use cameras and brushes, but she doesn't necessarily make photographs or paintings. "I think medium specificity is a sort of outdated method for categorizing art," she says. Her process is amorphous, and not easily tied to standard classifications; she first gathers materials, and then abstracts them, applying gouache and acrylics and images atop polycotton and plexiglass.

The way she works speaks to the themes present in the art itself, rendering the everyday surreal, and examining the simultaneity of realities, whereby two stories can exist at once—sometimes in conflict with one another, somehow each maintaining *truth*. Nasatir is inquisitive about power and the dynamics bred from it. "My work illuminates more than it illustrates," she explains. Her art exposes; it is dense but not definitive, more preoccupied with prompting questions than it is with presuming absolute answers.

Upon her third solo exhibition with Chapter NY, Nasatir muses on the making and the meaning of her work.





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**Megan Hullander:** How did you go about compiling the work for this exhibition? As it's your third with Chapter, can you trace any sense of narrative or evolution through them in this space?

**Willa Nasatir:** One piece at a time! But when I zoom out, I have made shows that are all paintings and shows that are all photographs, and each time I've hoped to incite a conversation where the work is actually being considered in relation to its opposite form. My photographs are often misidentified as paintings, and I like that inaccuracy. So it feels natural to show them alongside one another, existing in a continuum.

**Megan:** 'Multimedia' is a term that is often adopted by contemporary artists, but rarely employed to the extent that you exercise it. How do the multiple mediums you work within connect to the thematics of your work?

**Willa:** Whenever I say 'I'm a painter,' or 'I'm a photographer,' it feels disingenuous. Some people really like that kind of categorization, but I don't want to be one thing. It relaxes me to work in disparate mediums that both deflate and expand one another. In tandem, my work can undermine ideas of what a 'painting' or a 'photograph' is supposed to be. I think medium specificity is a sort of outdated method for categorizing art.



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“An artist’s belief system is embedded in their work, even if the work, on its face, doesn’t depict those beliefs.”

**Megan:** Your work is often described as fragmented, surreal, and otherwise complicated. Do you think art needs to be provocative or challenging to have meaning? How do you balance aesthetic pleasure with conceptual dexterity?

**Willia:** I like to try to ditch myself in the process of making something. It’s exciting to me when the subject matter of the painting or photograph I’m making becomes unrecognizable. I don’t know exactly how to talk about my paintings, and that is exciting to me—it means I am actually inside a process that is alive, rather than standing at a remove from it.

I feel that an artist’s belief system is embedded in their work, even if the work, on its face, doesn’t depict those beliefs. My work illuminates more than it illustrates. Broadly speaking, I think pleasure can be a useful tool for turning the world into something more livable. Something beautiful can also be offensive or uncomfortable, depending on who is looking at it. But I want to have a good time making the things I make, because I spend so much time doing it.

**Megan:** What is the process of making the ‘everyday’ surreal like? Is it something that comes into your daily life somewhat naturally, or is it a more active process?

**Willia:** I’m interested in the techniques people use to [adjust] the volume of their consciousness. Ayahuasca or silent meditation retreats or sensory deprivation tanks, for instance—most of which I haven’t actually tried. The desire to feel more or less in any given moment is so distinctly human. Allowing yourself to view the everyday as somehow charged rather than banal is in line with that instinct—the hope being to both tether yourself to the life you’re in, and to free yourself from it.

## The New York Times

# What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in September

By Travis Diehl, Martha Schwendener, Jillian Steinhauer, Will Heinrich, John Vincler, Seph Rodney, Holland Cotter, Arthur Lubow and Blake Gopnik

Published Sept. 8, 2023 Updated Sept. 13, 2023

*Want to see new art in New York this weekend? Check out Jay DeFeo's photographs in Chelsea. And in TriBeCa, see Gerald Ferguson's Canadian landscapes and Willa Nasatir's mind-bending photos.*

### TRIBECA

## Willa Nasatir

Through Oct. 21. Chapter NY, 60 Walker Street, Manhattan; 646-850-7486, [chapter-ny.com](https://chapter-ny.com).

The New York-based artist Willa Nasatir is best known for photographs that use mirrors and rephotographing (taking photographs of photographs) to make image-puzzles that you might call still lifes after you've worked out their spatial orientation and the commonplace elements they contain. Here, three of these characteristically mind-bending photos are joined by five paintings.



## CHAPTER NY



Willa Nasatir, "Hole," 2023, UV print on Plexiglass. Courtesy Willa Nasatir and Chapter NY. Photo by Charles Benton

It's worth looking between the photos and paintings, to parse the affinities and distinctions in Nasatir's approach to each. At a glance, it can be hard to tell which is which. In the photo "Hole" (2023), a blue paper bag illustrated with the head of the Statue of Liberty appears to have been burned through its front and back. A similar magenta bag is visible behind it. Both rest on a mirror that double and further defamiliarize Lady Liberty's visage. Through Nasatir's camera, bags flopped down on a table become a single transfixing picture.



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CULTURE

*Updated: Sep. 8, 2023*

*Originally Published: Jan. 12, 2023*

# All the Must-See Art Shows of 2023 (So Far)

*by* **Maxine Wally** *and* **Andrea Whittle**

Describing the 2023 arts calendar as “stacked” feels like an understatement. The sheer number of exhibitions, group shows, retrospectives, and openings is overwhelming in both number and scale. But fear not: we’ve put together a list of the highlights of this year in New York City, Los Angeles, and beyond. Consider this your grab-bag guide to the can’t-miss exhibitions of the season, and check back often—we’ll be updating this list as more events roll in.



### Willa Nasatir at Chapter NY

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Willa Nasatir, "Spoon," 2023.  
Courtesy of the Artist

In Tribeca, the visual artist and photographer Willa Nasatir is mounting her third solo show at Chapter NY (just in time for October, when the gallery will celebrate its 10th anniversary). On view from September 8 to October 21, the exhibition, named *Willa Nasatir*, follows Nasatir's abstract practice, which examines different approaches to imaging; the artist is known for her surreal, distorted photographs, drawings, and paintings. According a press release, the paintings "intentionally evoke the translucency and flatness of photographic images...informed by her background in photography. Within the show, embedded visual keys connect the paintings and photographs—further collapsing the relationship between mediums in her practice." This time, the works included in the show feature hyper-real details like an abdomen carved from stone and red bricks.

## CHAPTER NY

# ARTFORUM



Willa Nasatir, *Bear*, 2022, UV print on Plexiglas in walnut frame, 26 1/2 x 22 1/2".

LOS ANGELES

**Willa Nasatir**

GAYLORD APARTMENTS

3355 Wilshire Boulevard, Apt. 1402

October 8–November 6, 2022

A stereotype about Willa Nasatir's native Los Angeles is that it's a city obsessed with surfaces. Yet the artist's works are a joyful exercise in the study of a surface's depths—its layers, transparencies, reflections, films—challenging the eye to decode form via sundry smears and shimmers. The sextet of pieces on view here—three acrylic-on-canvas paintings and a trio of photographs printed on Plexi—visually rhyme with one another, partly through a shared fascination with the manifold veneers they

depict, stack, and obfuscate.

The painting *Slice* (all works 2022), features the catawampus wheel of an automobile, which is also a halved lemon. Warm and cool colors spill over one another, and certain forms drip so heavily that they evoke 1960s psychedelia. A glance at *Kiss #2* might first remind one of a biology textbook's cross-sectional illustrations of human organs richly layered with tissues and cells until the eye rests on the unmistakable outline of . . . a lawn chair. Go in deeper and you can start to see the eponymous osculation, though it's tricky to, um, "make out" through all the partially overlapping coats of semitranslucent paint.

The photographs depict reflective forms (jars, shards of pottery, a deadbolt lock) set upon or lodged into reflective surfaces (mirrors? Mylar?) picturing glass and sky. While each image has at its center a distinctive and absurd object (a pair of pareidolically stacked electric sockets, a shell jammed into a keyhole) what captures one's attention is not necessarily the cardinal subject, but the surfeit of surfaces all around.

In a place with too few clouds like LA, color is always somehow muted, blasted by the sun. All the work in Nasatir's show at Gaylord Apartments (a light-filled space on the top floor of a mostly residential building at the edge of Koreatown) appears sun bleached. This quality calls to mind the dual meanings of the word *exposure*, both in terms of vulnerability and the photographic process that reveals imagery via chemicals and light—nothing superficial about that.

—hannah baer



## CHAPTER NY

If real objects are rendered as near abstraction in the photos, the paintings often feature figurative details emerging from otherwise abstract compositions. Is that a duck, a dog or a fox in “Rest” (2023)? Nasatir’s investigative rigor in photography recalls the work of contemporaries like B. Ingrid Olson. In contrast, the paintings don’t yet reach this height. But Nasatir’s apparent genius for building up transparent layers of paint to create depth and chromatic effects is argument enough that she shouldn’t abandon the brush entirely for the camera. She makes magic in photos of everyday objects. In paint, she’s still calibrating the alchemy.

*JOHN VINCLER*





THE NEW YORKER

## GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

April 3, 2020

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ART

### Willa Nasatir

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This young American artist is best known for her painterly photographs, for which she shoots (and re-shoots) found-object assemblages, rendered otherworldly in her studio with mirrors and in-camera effects. The four paintings in her new show at Chapter (viewable online) are compositional cousins to those pictures, but they're also appealingly airier, with a springtime palette and swirly patterns that invite thoughts of Lilly Pulitzer gone experimental. The outlines of recognizable objects emerge from layered, abstract tangles. Zippers, a cougar's face, a bootprint, and a bird in flight are easy to spot; more ambiguous forms are lurking, too, if you look long enough at the jumbled shapes. A piece titled "Alligator" edges close to narrative: the reptile's snout overlaps with a figure in silhouette, dragging itself out of harm's way. Here, Nasatir's pastel, sun-dappled puzzle becomes a Trojan horse for drama.

—*Johanna Fateman*

## CHAPTER NY

# NEW YORK

To Do: March 16–29, 2020

### ART

#### 13. See Willa Nasatir

*A photographer-slash-painter.*

Chapter, 249 East Houston Street, through March 29.

At only 29, Willa Nasatir is already something of an artist about town. In 2017, she had a Whitney Museum project exhibition of her wild assemblage photographs that conjured fetish objects, desire, cast-offs, and do-it-yourself low-tech photography, all with muted but garish beauty. Behold, she's a painter too. Blowing up her scale and dialing in her inner image-maker, Nasatir is already an impressive colorist whose details begin to sing the song of painting electric. Call this a great beginning and stay tuned. J.S.

## CHAPTER NY

### ARTFORUM

Willa Nasatir  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
By Annie Godfrey Larmon  
October 2017

#### Willa Nasatir

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Camp, as Susan Sontag once described it, is expressed as a love of artifice and hyperbole, of “things-being-what-they-are-not.” Willa Nasatir makes pictures in this spirit; she coaxes both illusion and its failure from abstracted still-life photographs. Nasatir’s exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art—her first major institutional show in New York—includes ten large-scale C-prints and seven more modest gelatin silver prints (all works 2017). Glossy, a little melancholic, and very cinematic, each features illusion functioning variously. Though the images appear to have been digitally altered, each work is the result of the rephotographing of a single-exposure image. Nasatir constructs found-object assemblages on reflective flooring in her studio and subjects the arrangements to extreme lighting conditions; subsequently, she rephotographs the resulting print, obscuring it with various filters: colored Plexi or clear latex, pulled apart to create the look of lacy insect wings. The works recall Barbara Kasten’s “Constructs,” 1979–86, methodologically, but also for their neon noir aesthetic and mirror play. But these retool Kasten’s riff on the actual and the optic to address the body and its narrative.

Nasatir describes her images as portraits, a conceit that is campy in itself: props and prosthetics function as stand-ins for people, as well as exaggerations or distillations of character. For the artist, this approach avoids the human objectification so common in commercial photography and instead makes objects proxies for the body—in a mode more Surrealist than object-oriented ontology. (These works are purely anthropocentric.) The arranged props evoke a Hans Bellmer work gone butch—we see dismembered doll parts, gloves, and spindly-legged ladders, but also hard hats, hammers, and headlights. Of course camp, as a sensibility or genre, is in essence about liberation—a comeuppance to the dictates of taste. It’s worth noting that if we take the artist at her word, the subjects represented by these portraits are a relatively homogenous crew.

It’s worth noting, too, that these images don’t read as portraits—at least not of individuals. What the work best represents, I’d argue, is a contemporary worldview that is settling into a fog of deception and feint. Indeed, it has always been photography’s charge to reflect something of our world back to us. And there is something *de rigueur* to be said for the way Nasatir uses screens and filters and versioning to obscure her subjects—the way her works add up to a palimpsest of images of abstracted duration, the way they make analog digital effects. But what is more timely about her methodology, if it is not immediately apparent, is its reflection of the social and political ramifications of alternative facts and of a presidency writ by ratings as they seep into the general intellect. We’ve grown accustomed to “things-being-what-they-are-not.” As I scan, in vain, Nasatir’s seductive images for evidence of spatial or narrative coordinates, it occurs to me that we are living in a moment of unparalleled camp.

—Annie Godfrey Larmon



Willa Nasatir,  
*Conductor*, 2017,  
C-print mounted on  
wood, 75 × 61 3/4".



## CHAPTER NY

### The New York Review of Books

### NYR Daily

A Glove, a Car, and a Camera

By Erin Schwartz

September 16, 2017



Willa Nasatir: *Hitchhiker*, 2017

Willa Nasatir/Chapter NY

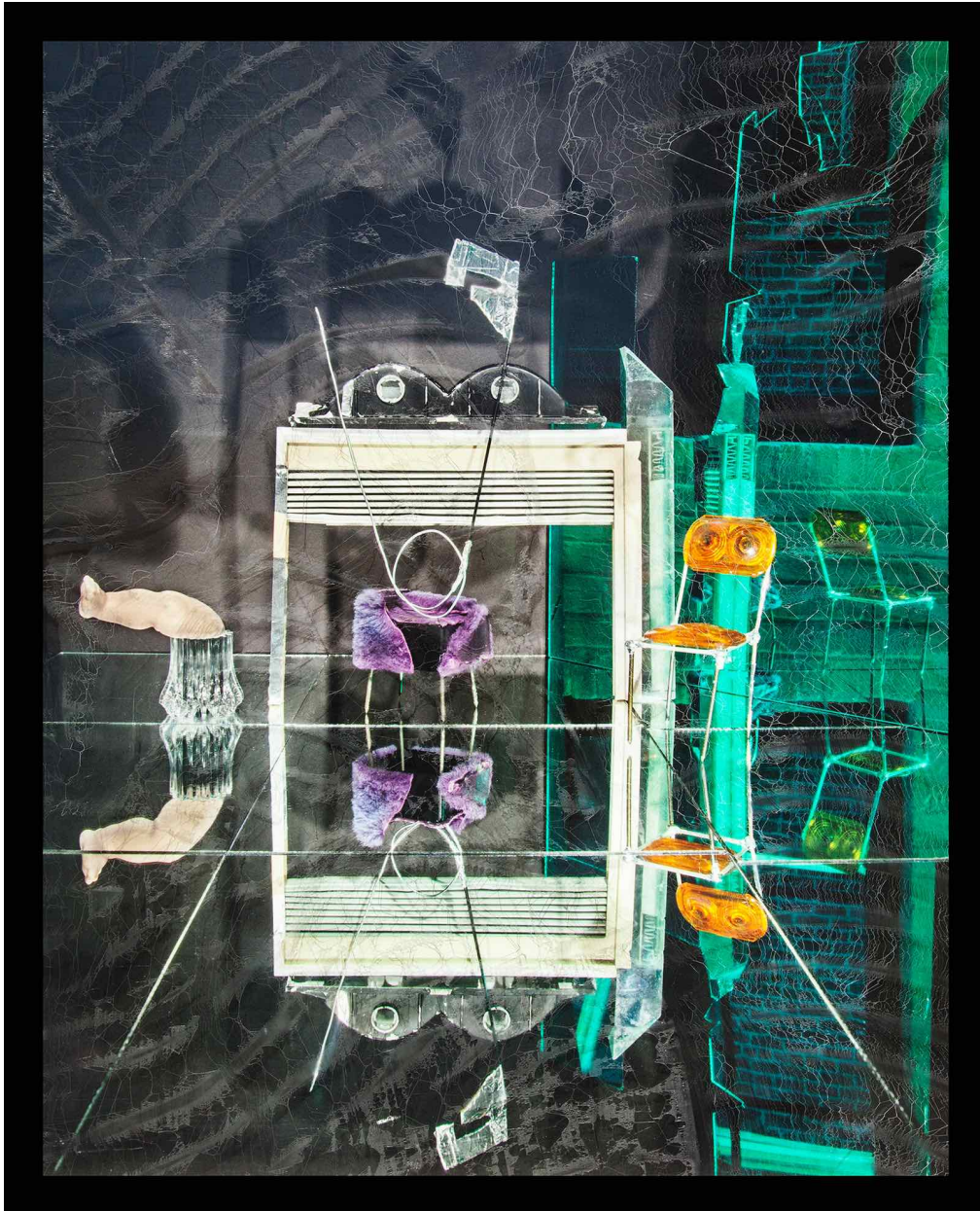
In *Hitchhiker*, a glove and a toy car seem to break the surface of their own mirror images, like flotsam sinking into reflective water. Glove and car have both been sliced in half and are photographed on mirror tiles with their cut sides facing down. A drinking straw affixed to the glove lifts a scrap of white cloth like a handkerchief, and in the background, another mirror reflects a blurred brick wall. The car is a glowing, neon fuchsia, the glove chalky white. What seems to be a liquid patina on the print's surface obscures the scene under swirls of indigo, mauve, and vermillion; a streak of gold, on closer examination, is distorted police tape, intimating the aftermath of a car accident. The image sets up a dark, absurdist joke: a stranded car and hand aren't able to hitch a ride.

Nasatir—whose exhibition currently at the Whitney Museum features ten large chromogenic prints and seven smaller black-and-white prints, all produced in 2017—shoots on film and does not digitally retouch her images. This is uncommon enough for a contemporary photographer (her work could not be further from the commercial detournement of Elad Lassry or Amanda Ross-Ho, or the ecstatic digital portraiture of Ryan McGinley) and her analog production is made all the more surprising by the complexity of her compositions, which densely layer objects, tangles of wire, mirrors, surface glare, and textured patina in a shallow depth of field. These dream-like tableaux are the product of clever staging using mirrors, plexiglass, sheets of reflective plastic, and colored spotlights, as well as manipulation and re-shooting of the original prints.

The photographs begin as sculptures of found objects, often assembled from pieces of trash that Nasatir picks out near her studio. *Butterfly* depicts a doll bed and what appears to be a plastic butterfly hair clip, leopard-printed and covered with small holes, angled and lit to cast a looming shadow. Nasatir made the butterfly “clip” by stretching patterned stockings over a handmade wire frame. Presented with the deliberation of a still life, such makeshift objects gain a sense of

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significance not fully explained by the image; they imply a story or character, but stop short of imposing a clear narrative. In a 2015 exhibition at White Columns in New York City, Nasatir recreated scenes from film noir—Crime #1 (Heel) presents a stiletto heel as an object charged with menace. It evokes the shock of discovering a clue while withholding the details of the crime.



Willa Nasatir: *The Green Room*, 2017

Willa Nasatir/Chapter NY

In the past, Nasatir has soaked prints in water, sanded them down, burned and frozen them, to be photographed a second, third, or fourth time through translucent screens textured with dense bubbles or hand-marbled streaks. The works now at the Whitney represent a simplification of this process. The scenes are photographed only twice: the first time captures the still life, and the second is shot through a spotlighted latex screen to produce the craquelure on the image's surface. Nasatir does not physically alter these prints. The surreal effects happen entirely in the camera.

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Nasatir's photographs reward extended viewing—it takes time to make spatial sense of the scenes pictured. A careful observer can almost piece together how each image is made: for example, a puzzling reflection in *Blue Girl*, created by an aquamarine mirror that duplicates an image without reversing it horizontally, implies that a second mirror faces the scene, set up outside of the photograph's frame. Nasatir extends the moment between apprehending an image and comprehending it; she seems unwilling to let it end.

This evasiveness counters photography's tendency toward rapid commodification and consumption of images, especially representations of the human figure put to commercial use, or circulating without consent of their subjects in the age of social media. It's no mistake that bodies appear only in allusions and fragments in these photographs: the glove in *Hitchhiker*, a single doll's leg in *The Green Room*, and a wooden hand manikin in *Conductor, Candy, and Half-Heart*. How can a photograph reveal enough to communicate meaning, but not so much as to violate its subject? Or, as Nasatir asked in an interview in *Document*, "How much of a figure needs to be shown for something to register as human?" This question produces restive, rich, and challengingly indeterminate works—there is no authoritative solution to the riddle, but parsing what the photographs reveal and occlude prompts you to imagine your own.

"Willa Nasatir" is at the Whitney Museum through October 1.



# CHAPTER NY

## ARTFORUM

August 4, 2017

### Willa Nasatir

**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**  
**99 Gansevoort Street**  
**July 14–October 1**

Willa Nasatir's photographs of her provisional and precarious studio assemblages reveal the artist's ruminative tinkering—but the use of dramatic lighting demonstrates a tight control over her environment. Nasatir's images are populated by the materials that frequently accompany artmaking, including hammers, stands, and brooms. And the interiority of these photos, whose configurations are distorted to the edge of recognition by her interventions, crucially echoes the personal nature of the studio itself.

The artist's high-contrast, theatrically lit work is visibly indebted to the eerily intimate 1980s tableaux of photographers such as Barbara Kasten, Laurie Simmons, Vikky Alexander, and Ellen Brooks. Unlike these artists, however, Nasatir insists on analog manipulations, via mirrors and clear latex screens, which register as a pointed contemporary disavowal of postproduction software. Her latest set of ten large-scale C-prints, shown here alongside smaller black-and-white prints, comprises her most ambitious work to date, while also her most evasive.

Of the ten, at least six contain allusions to the human form. In several pieces, model wooden hands and amputated fingers sprouting from makeshift armatures wordlessly beckon to us for a closer look: A chubby doll leg rests inverted atop a crystal stopper in *The Green Room* (all works 2017), while a rubber-dipped work glove ominously adheres to a gauzy white surface stained with red in *Coney Island #2*. The objects' physicality is further distorted by Nasatir's use of the mirror—that jejune signifier of identity—in each of her compositions. Though the approach sounds heavy-handed, it is indeed useful, as the reflections of the props bleed beyond the pictures' borders, allowing the artist's haunted figures to slip out of view and indulge their own private whims.



Willa Nasatir, *Conductor*, 2017, C-print mounted on wood, 75 x 61".

— *Cat Kron*

## Whitney Museum of American Art

WILLA NASATIR

LOCATING THE  
PHOTOGRAPHS  
OF WILLA  
NASATIRBy Jane Panetta,  
Associate Curator

July 14, 2017

Over the past several years, Willa Nasatir has engaged in a studio practice that avoids being dominated by the culturally prevalent digital technologies.<sup>1</sup> At a moment when the medium has turned inward and disengaged from the hand of its maker—and, as a result, is often labeled as being in a state of crisis—Nasatir has pursued a more manual approach, creating found-object sculptures to be photographed, altered, and re-photographed. While routinely playing with our expectations of what we imagine a digitally constructed image to be, Nasatir exploits the possibilities of photography as an expansive platform for experimentation across composition, scale, and process. In many respects, Nasatir's approach is mediated through other disciplines—specifically, sculpture and painting.

Distinguishing her photography from documentation reflecting truths about the world (she describes her work as “a depiction rather than a document”<sup>2</sup>), she has asserted the medium's capacity for formal invention while simultaneously pushing beyond the boundaries of her studio into the outside world. Nasatir maintains a long-standing interest in what she calls “the texture of the city.”<sup>3</sup> Many of her recent compositions are



Willa Nasatir. *Conductor*, 2017. Chromogenic print mounted on wood, 79 1/2 x 61 in. (201.9 x 154.9 cm). Courtesy the artist and Chapter NY.

## CHAPTER NY

distinguished by images and details of (and out of) her studio window, subtly suggesting urban views that locate the photographs in the New York environment in which she lives and works. While her works begin as objects in the studio, they emerge conceptually from dreams or memories, or even art history, while also drawing upon details of things she sees in the city: a woman on the street, a particular outfit, a general impression of the gentrification and persistent change of New York, and corresponding aesthetic.

Two ideas have surfaced repeatedly in conversation with the artist and in my thinking about Nasatir's work: the phrase "psychic junkyards"<sup>4</sup> and the notion of painterly abstraction. The former gets to a core idea about her photographs: while they begin as sculptural assemblages in her studio, her images are ultimately intended to reflect some otherworldly, invented place. As Nasatir maintains, "I'm less interested in photography as a medium for depicting the 'real' than I am in its capacity to display the otherworldly."<sup>5</sup> Although her compositions often originate in dreams or things fleetingly witnessed, they emerge from a psychic space that is tethered to her use of found objects—that is, the detritus of the world we inhabit. The works become "psychic junkyards" as they reflect the things around us and the limitless number of evocations that might result from them. Ultimately, the images suggest a place never realized, only imagined and implied; they are reflections *of* the world but not strictly *about* the world.

Equally important for Nasatir has been her engagement with notions of abstraction. While each work retains referential vestiges—a familiar object, an architectural detail, a distinct reflection—the end result is often abstract in its totality, both visually and in terms of any implied narrative. Accordingly, Nasatir shares an affinity with Charline von Heyl (b. 1960), given the ways in which the German-born painter incorporates familiar forms while denying us any clear or straightforward reading of them or of the work more generally. For Von Heyl, any figurative element becomes subsumed into the overall painting. Similarly, Nasatir's use of discrete objects and elements is ultimately in the service of her largely ambiguous compositions; these items remain present but are never a resolved end unto themselves. As Von Heyl tellingly explains about her work, "a painting can have several flip points, where things, while you are looking at them, shift from one state to another. They have a way of slipping out of your control, which makes them more interesting."<sup>6</sup>

Beyond this implied ambiguity, Nasatir's photographs function visually in ways similar to paintings, suggesting the value she sees in her medium's ability to render what might be called figurative abstraction. Many of her immersive images, created at a scale that few contemporary photographers outside documentary or landscape have pursued, immediately imply a spatial relationship to painting. After creating and photographing sculptural compositions in her studio, Nasatir routinely alters the surfaces of her initial prints and re-photographs them to generate the final work, often experimenting with materials such as latex and Plexiglas to create partially obscured or highly reflective surfaces with deliberate imperfections that abstract the overall composition. These unorthodox techniques produce an almost painterly scrim through which the image must be deciphered. Nasatir's compositions thus bring to mind the complex, layered, and



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Willa Nasatir, *Street Sweeper*, 2017. Gelatin silver print, 27 1/4 x 22 in. (69.2 x 55.9 cm). Collection of Jonathan Goldberg

highly worked surface of an abstract painting where the viewer is left struggling to determine which brushstroke came first amid interconnected layers of paint, here mimicked through her multiple layers of photographic process.

Nasatir's works also incorporate critical historical precedents of her medium, particularly through her nod to photography of the 1930s and 1940s. This relationship is especially apparent in a series of silver gelatin prints debuting here at the Whitney and largely installed together. Nasatir produces these images at a more conventional size of roughly twenty by twenty-four inches, referencing historical photography through technique, scale, and even the experience of viewing the works. While the visual vocabulary of her gelatin prints is similar to that of her larger-scale work, she forces a more intimate engagement with each

photograph as the viewer must approach the image—almost as a portal—to experience its myriad intricate details.<sup>2</sup> The monochromatic nature of these works results in an all-over quality that is unique within her practice; each image seems to function as a single, unified moment within the mind's eye. Unlike in her larger, chromogenic prints, where Nasatir uses disparate colors and objects to clue us that she has drawn from many sources and ideas, here she suggests an encapsulated moment—a single memory or idea that is arguably more fictionalized than factual. (Creating black-and-white photographs allows Nasatir to distinguish these works fundamentally from the reality of what we actually see with our own eyes.) Ultimately, her exploitation of scale and medium enable her to complicate the delivery of ideas and references, as these experiments in black and white become what she describes as a sub-medium of her own photography.

Nasatir's explorations of the formal possibilities of black-and-white photography is perhaps most specifically related to examples by Man Ray's contemporary and student Maurice Tabard (1897–1984). Tabard trained as a portrait photographer and worked extensively as a commercial fashion photographer, an important experimental platform for the development of the medium at the time. What frequently resulted were dreamlike works that made use of both the female body and domestic or mundane objects, fused into surreal, unsettling tableaux. But a distinguishing factor that links Tabard's approach with Nasatir's is the sophisticated layering effect he achieved, through the use of double exposure and developing techniques such as solarization. His most sophisticated

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works—often containing strange, spectral silhouettes—yield complex arrangements that become difficult to parse given his ambitious technique and the visual elements that comprise each photograph.

Nasatir's work shares visual affinities with that of Tabard and his Surrealist colleagues such as Man Ray, both stylistically and through her use of unconventional photographic techniques (particularly in the face of what is available digitally), as well as her de-emphasis on photography's indexical capability. Arguably, her works in this vein take these qualities and techniques to a new level. Whereas much of this earlier photography emphasized the medium's relationship to composition and only loosely played with ideas of materiality and texture, Nasatir foregrounds these elements acutely. There is an unsettling handiness to the strange, almost inexplicable sculptural arrangements that appear in her work, and that serve as essential points of origin for her compositions. The tableaux she composes and the photographs she produces from them seem hastily assembled and almost deliberately dysfunctional. While committed to formally imparting the technical acuity of historical precedents from this emergent moment for photography, Nasatir implicitly denies the cool, transcendent slickness of these Surrealist images, seeking instead to depict "something eroding or precarious."<sup>8</sup> Her hyper-materiality maintains a deliberate connection to the world we inhabit and the detritus of lives lived, here reimaged amid a certain level of chaos and visual noise.

The photographs of Alvin Baltrop (1948–2004), who famously documented Manhattan's West Side piers in the 1970s and 1980s, and specifically its gay cruising culture, are an important body of work for Nasatir. Baltrop's images—primarily in black and white—are perhaps more often read as documents of a now-disappeared New York, but they also suggest an otherworldly realm through their textures and unique sensibility.<sup>9</sup> (In this, they indicate the haven this space represented for the gay community from the harsh reality of persistent homophobia at the time.) Many of Baltrop's figures seem to float in unreal spaces. He presents us with surreal images that, while based in the documentary, equally point to something imagined or dreamed. While the photos are essential documents, often of beautiful male bodies lovingly and erotically intertwined, they become utopic images suggesting an open-ended invitation to free love. The anonymity of the figures in many of the photos is an essential element, implying some hoped-for future; many of Baltrop's images are portraits without specified people, much in the way that Nasatir's photographs suggest portraits but never a figure or specific presence. "I think it's possible—if not more seamless—to depict the felt experience of the body without showing the form of the figure itself," Nasatir has said. "I think I'm most successful at it when the figure is androgynous, faceless, abstracted, or even disfigured."<sup>10</sup> Similar to Baltrop's interest in personifying the piers as places that evoke a particular moment, Nasatir has consistently implied figures and even narratives without ever creating a straightforward portrait. And for both artists, the ruined or decaying object has been a productive means to eliciting these ideas.

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Alvin Baltrop, *Untitled*, (1977). Gelatin silver print, 9 x 6 7/8 in. (22.9 x 17.5 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Photography Committee 2009.<sup>31</sup>

Some of Baltrop's most dreamlike (though perhaps least iconic) photographs are images taken from within buildings along the piers, with figures lurking only at the edges, if at all. In these examples, the windows frame views onto the Hudson River or the piers themselves, many of which were soon to be demolished. Baltrop's poetic documentation seems to acknowledge the sanctity of this location, likely to disappear and already heavily in ruins. And notably, these photographs share a recurring element within Nasatir's works, present in some of her new series of images made specifically for the Whitney exhibition. Nasatir regularly works from her studio, often leaving the viewer with few clues as to where a photograph was made; these are studio photographs about composition, decidedly less about place. However, in a number of instances Nasatir includes—often in the corner of her composition—a clear detail of a studio window, looking out onto buildings that we somehow know are New York. This is no

accidental or arbitrary addition. Nasatir openly acknowledges the significance of New York within her work—and particularly her interest in the aspects of the city's culture slowly being lost to gentrification.<sup>11</sup> And while this preoccupation is not primary to her compositions, it lurks in the corners, imbuing the photographs and objects within them with new significance. Strange found objects suddenly read as items cast off by the city's inhabitants—possibly part of some downtown culture slowly being disassembled and discarded—suggesting a shared interest with Baltrop in “picturing the city as a vulnerable rather than heroic subject.”<sup>12</sup> Nasatir selects what read as inherently urban objects, things of little monetary value but important for the stories they hold. A student of Baltrop's timely documentation, Nasatir seems to warn us that if we are not careful, the city's rich and varied fabric—already fraying as we speak—will someday be cast off.

For the Whitney exhibition, Nasatir has produced a six-part installation of large-scale, color chromogenic prints made specifically for the gallery space. The images—which Nasatir describes as “six individual yet interrelated scenes”—introduce a new palette within her work, an almost fluorescent blue-green in addition to the dark, film noir-like overall palette. Nasatir has acknowledged that this highly saturated color represents a notion of the future (as well as a contrast to her previous and recurrent use of red). “There's a certain type of green that I wanted that I hadn't used in a photograph,” she told me. “It reminds me of the ways that the future was depicted in films in the eighties, kind of this neon, spooky green.”<sup>13</sup> Her comment brings to mind the film *Tron* (1982),



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where the “digital” world in which most of the action occurs is depicted as a dark black space punctuated by color, often a deep blue that resembles the palette for Nasatir’s *Conductor*, 2017. In this composition, Nasatir allows this deep blue to permeate the view we see out of the window, suggesting an immersion in a strange, futuristic, and almost dystopic realm. This distinctive palette becomes one of the unifying compositional elements of her six-part installation, augmenting Nasatir’s ability to suggest an otherworldly future across the tableaux. These colors cue viewers, even from a distance, that we are entering an alternate space.<sup>14</sup>



Installation view of *Willa Nasatir* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, July 14–October 1, 2017). From left: *R.V.*, 2017; *The Green Room*, 2017; *Bird*, 2017; *Blue Girl*, 2017; *Sunbather*, 2017; *Conductor*, 2017. Photograph by Ron Amstutz

Nasatir’s ambitious installation—as an unexpected hybrid of painting, photography, and sculpture—points to the significance of her work residing within this space of multiple mediums. While the complex legibility of the individual images directly references painting, the works are suffused with sculptural elements, both visual and physical. The installation reads as a physical object or intervention into the gallery: the presence of the six mounted photographs, installed directly against one another, imparts an object-like quality—what she describes as a “solidity”—to these images, placing the work in dialogue with yet another medium beyond photography.<sup>15</sup> It is in these liminal spaces—among various media, between the suggestion of form and abstraction, between place

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and no place—that Nasatir has opened up possibilities for contemporary photography to complicate and to slow down the very process of looking; as a result, her works are never straightforward and are difficult to digest in a single take. As Nasatir explains, “I hope to make work where the experience of viewing is extended, and new meaning occurs with time,”<sup>16</sup> reinforcing her sustained interest in the ambiguity of looking through the creation of her unique, photographic conditions.

1. In contrast to contemporary photographers such as Michele Abeles, Lucas Blalock, and Eileen Quinlan, who have productively harnessed and privileged digital technologies in their studio-based practices to address the fundamental challenge our digitally dominant culture presents to photography, Nasatir has made images with a related visual affect but without the benefit of digital manipulation. This, I would argue, yields a different sensibility and tactility to her work.

2. Lauren Cornell, “*Psychic Junkyards: Willa Nasatir*,” *Mousse Magazine* 54 (Summer 2016).

3. Nasatir, interview with the author, June 2017.

4. See Cornell, “*Psychic Junkyards*.” The phrase was also used by the artist’s friend Tip Dunham in conjunction with Nasatir’s work.

5. Cathleen Chaffee, *Willa Nasatir*, exhibition brochure (Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2017), p. v.

6. Jason Farago interview with Charline von Heyl, *Even*, no. 7 (Summer 2017), p. 55.

7. Nasatir acknowledges the influence of a work like Marcel Duchamp’s *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d’eau, 2° le gaz d’éclairage* . . . (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas* . . . ), 1946–66 (Philadelphia Museum of Art), on these smaller-scale prints. Much like the way in which Duchamp forces the viewer to peer into his invented tableau, Nasatir’s works function as transportative portals that present a highly constructed yet contained space.

8. Nasatir, interview with the author, August 2017.

9. See Valerie Cassel Oliver, *Alvin Baltrop: Dreams into Glass*, exh. cat. (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2012), p. 15. As Oliver notes, “Baltrop would continue to create texture with a palette of light and shadow for much of the decade that followed. . . . The artist would reprint negatives until he achieved the texture and emotional tenor he sought.”

10. Drew Sawyer, “*Willa Nasatir’s Spectral Images*,” *Document Journal* (September 21, 2015).

11. Nasatir has had a long-standing interest in the changing face of New York over the past decade, particularly notable in downtown Manhattan where she lives. She routinely references Jeremiah Moss’s blog *Jeremiah’s Vanishing New York*.

12. Chaffee, *Willa Nasatir*, p. ii.

13. Nasatir, interview with author, June 2017.

14. Nasatir is interested in creating photographs that she describes as “looking ahead rather than in the past.” Despite the medium’s logical association with things that have already occurred and been recorded, she strives to signal the future and unknown, and therefore the intangible.

15. Nasatir, interview with the author, August 2017.

16. Cornell, “*Psychic Junkyards*.”

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**ARTFIX***daily*  
Curated Art World News & Exclusives

Two Emerging Artists Highlighted in Summer Exhibitions at the Whitney  
ArtfixDaily.com  
May 4, 2017

Two new exhibitions by emerging artists will be presented by the Whitney this summer.



Willa Nasatir (b. 1990), *Butterfly*, 2017. C-print.  
Courtesy the artist.

NEW YORK, New York

“Following close on the heels of the Biennial, the Whitney’s summer season builds on the strong energy of our emerging artists program,” remarked Scott Rothkopf, Deputy Director for Programs and Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator. “Both born in 1990, Bunny Rogers and Willa Nasatir offer a pair of distinct but complementary visions. Each explores mysterious, often dark, narratives within stagey, lapidary tableaus, Rogers through sculpture and video, Nasatir in photography.”

For her first solo museum exhibition, Bunny Rogers will create a new body of work to be installed in the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Gallery on the Museum’s first floor, which is free and open to the public. The exhibition goes on view on July 7.

In her work, Bunny Rogers (b. 1990, Houston, TX) draws from a personal cosmology to explore shared experiences of loss, alienation, and a search for belonging. Her layered installations, videos, and sculptures begin with wide-ranging references, from young-adult fiction and early 2000s cartoons, like *Clone High*, to autobiographical events and spectacles of mass violence, such as the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. Rogers’s techniques are as idiosyncratic as her subject matter. She borrows from theater costuming, design, and industrial furniture manufacturing, and often crafts her work by hand. This hybrid approach gives Rogers’s objects and spaces a distinct texture; they read simultaneously as slick and intimate, highly constructed, but also sincere.

Elisabeth Sherman, an assistant curator at the Whitney, who is co-curating the exhibition with curatorial assistant Margaret Kross, noted: “Rogers’s work reveals how certain emotions and traits that we consider to be completely opposite, like empathy and hate, sincerity and deceit, really exist in shades of grey. To paraphrase Rogers’s own words, the viewer may find that both extremes sit within themselves.”



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Rogers has had solo exhibitions at Greenspon Gallery, New York; Foundation de 11 Lijnen, Oudenburg, BE; Société, Berlin; Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris. An artist book, *Flowers for Orgonon*, will be published in 2017.

For her Whitney exhibition, Willa Nasatir will present a significant new body of work in addition to a selection of earlier works, produced over the past few years. The exhibition will be installed in the Kaufman Gallery on the Museum's fifth floor, adjacent to the exhibition Hélio Oiticica: *To Organize Delirium*, with which it runs concurrently from July 14 through October 1.

In her work, Willa Nasatir (b. 1990, Los Angeles, CA) creates photographs that routinely begin as makeshift sculptures, assembled in her studio out of an array of unexpected objects. Using elements as disparate as decorative fans, copper tubing, and a car headlight, Nasatir composes these objects, which she then photographs and re-photographs, subjecting the surfaces to various material and light effects. The resulting works are hand-manipulated images that become psychologically charged and difficult to discern; the viewer is left to parse out unresolved narratives that the image only implies. As Nasatir herself explains, "I'm less interested in photography as a medium for depicting the 'real' than I am in its capacity to display the other-worldly." Creating works of varying scale, Nasatir makes compositions that function as part-still life, part-portrait (notably without bodies), as they evoke a surreal urban landscape that's simultaneously difficult to place while seemingly amidst a state of decay.

Nasatir has had solo exhibitions at Chapter Gallery, NY; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles; and White Columns, New York.

The Nasatir exhibition is organized by Jane Panetta, associate curator.

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### THE BUFFALO NEWS

After 'Picasso,' Albright-Knox sets sights on emerging artists

By Colin Dabkowski

February 14, 2017

Since November, [the big draw](#) at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery has been the work of [Pablo Picasso](#), an undisputed master of 20th century art. Now, as Picasso: The Artist and His Models" draws to a close, the gallery is shifting its focus to five artists you've probably never heard of. On Feb. 18, the Albright-Knox will open solo exhibitions featuring five new kids on this hallowed artistic block: [Tamar Guimarães and Kasper Akhøj](#), a duo from Brazil and Denmark; New York-based sculptor and painter [Eric Mack](#); Lewiston-born artist [Jacob Kassay](#); and photographer [Willa Nasatir](#) of New York.

The public can take a free sneak preview at the exhibitions on Feb. 17 from 7 to 9 p.m. The shows are the first solo exhibitions for each of the artists in an American museum. Willa Nasatir and Eric Mack's exhibitions are the first-ever museum solo shows for those artists. Collectively, the openings serve as a reminder of a longstanding commitment by the Albright-Knox to exploring the vanguard of contemporary art.

"Doing four exhibitions at once allows visitors to really see this commitment at the Albright-Knox not only to contextualizing the collection and bringing in masterpieces, but also introducing audiences to new voices," said Albright-Knox Senior Curator Cathleen Chaffee. "I love the idea that for a lot of people, this is an opportunity to say you saw it here first." The artists will be on hand for a public discussion with Chaffee at 7:15 p.m. Feb. 17 in the Albright-Knox auditorium. A fifth exhibition, featuring a single sculpture by French artist Camille Henrot, also opens Feb. 18.

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*Artist Willa Nasatir poses with her recently installed photograph "Out of the Blue, Part 3" in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. (Robert Kirkham/Buffalo News)*

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### **Willa Nasatir**

By arranging found objects in her studio just so, Nasatir photographs and creates abstract compositions that might be interpreted as distant landscapes or architectural structures. Working in the same mode as [Rochester-based photographer Carl Chiarenza](#), her artwork attempts to create mystery out of familiarity. According to a release from the gallery, "her cobbling and filtering is a sleight of hand that unmoors her subjects from their origins, and the resulting photographs call on us to create our own storylines."



**Forbes**

**30 UNDER 30**

**PROFILE / [Willa Nasatir](#)**

Edited By Caroline Howard with Natalie Sportelli

January 3, 2017



Willa Nasatir

Artist

Nasatir's still-life photographs depict elaborately arranged objects against shadowy backgrounds, some positioned in front of mirrors: a singed fan, a pair of open shears, a crown made of wire. She uses techniques like re-photographing prints through a screen made of Plexiglas and latex. She's had solo shows in New York and Los Angeles and in 2017, her work will be at the Albright-Knox museum in Buffalo.

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### 6 Artists to Watch in 2017

Text by Emily Steer

January 2017

Whether newly graduated or following up on a successful 2016, all six artists have at least one solo show in 2017 which promises great things — in cities including Berlin, Shanghai, New York and Paris.

#### **Willa Nasatir**

Willa Nasatir will have her first institutional solo show at New York's Albright Knox this February, running until June. Her photographic images are both familiar and illusive, using recognizable subject matter which is then obscured and disturbed by multiple compositions and physical interventions. There's a darkness that spills across many of her images also, avoiding the overexposure and mass of light leaks which often occur in these kind of overlaid images, instead focusing on pools of black and deep purples.



Willa Nasatir, *The Red Room*, 2016 C-print on panel, tacks 82 x 67 3 inches, Unique.



Willa Nasatir, *Boy*, 2016 C-print on panel, tacks 82 x 67 x 3 inches, Unique.

# MOUSSE

By Lauren Cornell  
Issue #54, July 2016

## PSYCHIC JUNKYARDS



The photography of Willa Nasatir is hard to place. It connects to contemporary approaches to still life or portraiture as seen, for example, in the work of Eileen Quinlan or R.H. Quaytman, where the subjects portrayed have been reflected and refracted out of recognition. But it has also been likened to the work of Lee Bontecou for its tactility, its rough-hewn edges and inorganic textures, and it draws upon queer aesthetic history. In recent exhibitions, at White Columns and Chapter in New York, Nasatir has continued to expand her artistic territory, moving away from works where she set upon photographs often violently, torching or drowning them, to creating and rephotographing elaborate sculptural arrangements. In this conversation, we discuss her process and approach, her negotiation of photography's "nascent" history, and, the way the subconscious manifests in her work.

BY LAUREN CORNELL

Lauren Cornell is a curator at the New Museum in New York City. She was previously executive director of *Rhizome*. Cornell, along with artist Ryan Trecartin, curated the New Museum's 2015 Triennial.

Willa Nasatir (1990) lives and works in New York. She has had solo shows at Chapter, NY as well as a White Room at White Columns, NY. Her work has been recently been included in group exhibitions at Hester, NY; Del Vaz Projects, LA; Company Gallery, NY; and Drei, Cologne. She was a 2015 recipient of the Louis B. Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award. Nasatir graduated from the Cooper Union.



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*Untitled (Candle #2) (detail), 2016. Courtesy: the artist and Chapter NY, New York.  
Photo: Jason Mandella*

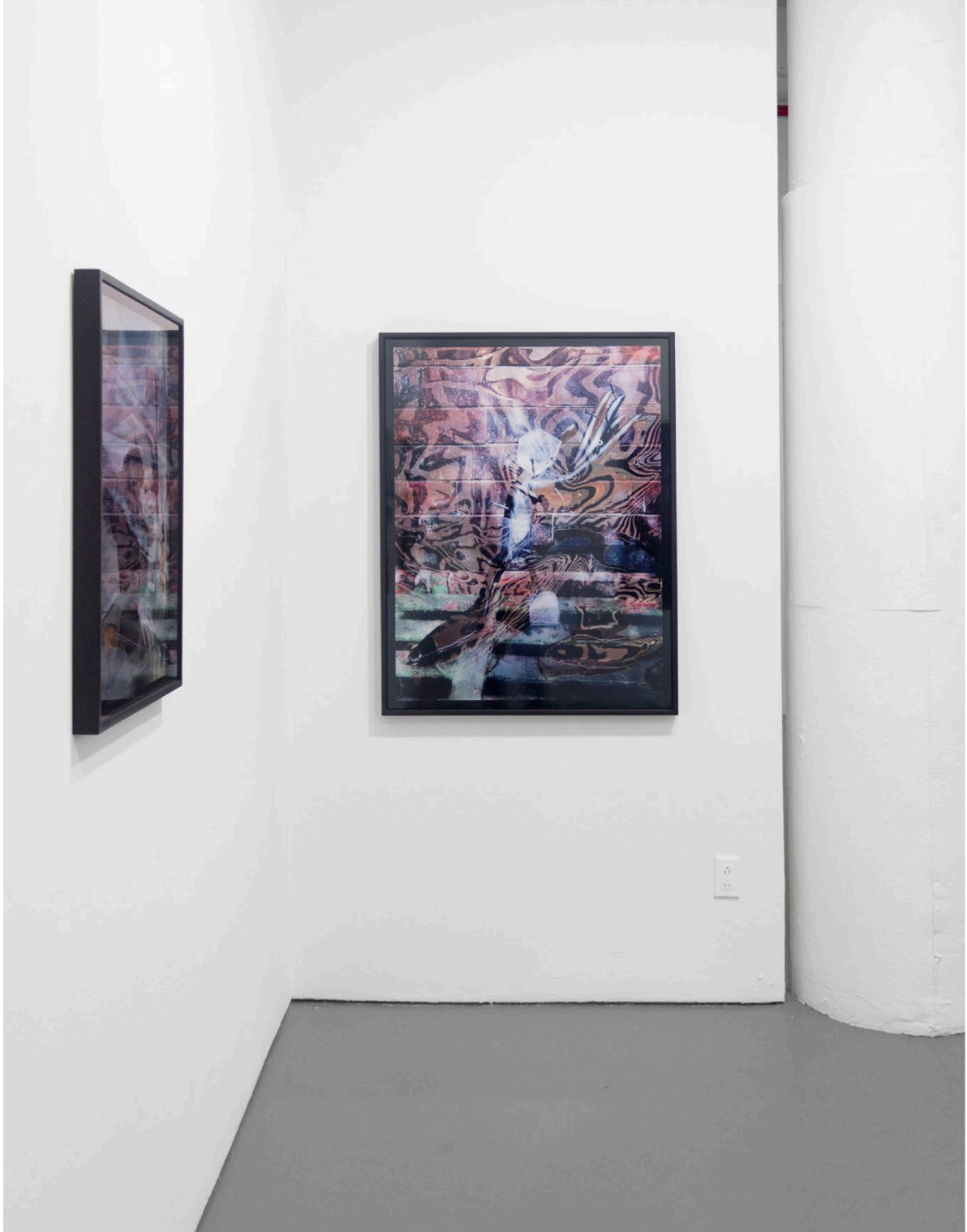


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60 Walker St., New York, NY 10013

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*White Room* installation view at White Columns, New York, 2015.  
Courtesy: the artist and White Columns, New York

60 Walker St., New York, NY 10013



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## PSYCHIC JUNKYARDS L. CORNELL

### LAUREN CORNELL

Your exhibition at Chapter NY marks a departure from previous works where you've frozen, charred or submerged photographs or otherwise developed them in atypical elements. Can you describe this new approach and why you gravitated towards it?

### WILL NASATIR

In these new larger works, I photographed prints through a spot-lit screen which I made from plexiglass and latex. I have two somewhat oppositional goals within all of my processes: on the one hand, I want to make images that are materially felt and tactile; at the same time, I want to posit photography as a medium for capturing the immaterial and the intangible—light, reflection, and shadow. Those earlier gestures can be read as performative; there's a funny violence to scratching off the surface of an image of a body, or setting it on fire, but I'm thinking less about the action there and more about how, when photographed, these processes are transformed from something very legible to a less recognizable, more affective tool.

### LC

Several aspects of the works are hard to read for the viewer, including the objects portrayed. For instance, in *Untitled (Candle #2)*, the candles are extended by spoons stuck into their bases and what looks, at first, like brittle leaves appear, on a second glance, to be flattened mopheads. Do you intend to make the objects in the photographs partially indiscernable?

### WN

I think of photographs as naturally distorting the "truth" of their subject. Photographic effect often complicates one's understanding of a subject and its environment, rather than clarifies it. I'm not trying to obscure information necessarily, but to emphasize the idea that, formally, this is a depiction rather than a document. At the same time, we've been conditioned to cycle through images really rapidly, and I hope to make work where the experience of viewing is extended, and new meaning occurs with time.

### LC

I think the elusive aspects of the work do extend the experience of viewing. I, for one, felt transfixed by these new works. There is a certain kind of otherworldliness to them. They recall, to me, the opulent palette of Jack Smith's films or the surreal portraiture of Jimmy de Sana. Rather tangentially, I thought of Flawless Sabrina, her iconic, sumptuous drag, even the interior rooms of her apartment as depicted in photographs by Zackary Drucker. Do these references connect with you at all?

### WN

Flawless Sabrina helped build a drag world that allows for transgression through radical shifts in persona and affect, and through make-believe. I don't feel that my work is directly about that culture, but on a personal level I'm attracted to social movements in which people aesthetically self-define. This is apparent in drag cultures, like those Flawless Sabrina participated in, but also in the work of someone like Smith or Alvin Baltrop, both of whom use photography to illustrate other worlds, even underworlds, imagined and real. More specifically, I'm drawn to the relationship that drag performers have to hand-made or approximated versions of glamorous objects and accessories.

### LC

In our recent studio visit, I was delighted when you answered a few of my questions with "I don't know." It's so tempting to over-theorize when answers aren't readily apparent (and people do it so often!). It was refreshing that you admitted to not having an explanation for every facet of your work and that, in itself, seemed productive. Does this attitude—this confidence in not knowing everything—connect to your desire to make room for the unconscious or unknown in your work?

### WN

Artists using photography have, for a long time, employed hyper-theoretical methodologies in order to advocate the seriousness of their work, and the labor behind it. I think this comes from a desire to legitimize the medium as a form of critical thought, to distance it from trade or documentation. I feel protective over the space I have in my studio to do things that I can't explain. Similarly, I believe it's important to preserve the space of viewing an artwork before it's mediated by language. To me, the best work comes out of people examining their own subjectivity, which extends to their unconscious instincts or desires.

### LC

The artist Carroll Dunham referred to the scenes in your photographs as "psychic junkyards." Does this notion—of a space where subconscious desires or fears are deposited and piled up haphazardly—resonate with you?

### WN

Yes, I feel like the subconscious, in its many different forms, can be a key to the broader cultural landscape. Photography has historically been used as a categorical, anthropological tool, whereas something like abstract painting is seen as a window into the unconscious, or right brain thinking. There is not one stable, universal reality, it's highly subjective. Photographs also have the potential to access or show that unknown space and I try for that in my own work.

### LC

Often the body feels like an "unknown space" in your photographs. You've said that you prefer to depict the "experience of the body" or a "trace of it." Does this more transitory, latent form of portraiture feel more true to you?

### WN

I don't think it's more true, but when photographing a human body, the relationship of the photographer to the subject has a different weight. When someone poses, their experience of the world and their individual identity is as present in the work as the photographer's agenda. It's extremely collaborative—which can be incredible but you're forced to relinquish control to a degree. I like the idea of creating a contained world in my studio where the subject doesn't exist outside of the pictures. By looking at the photographic gestures and filmic tropes we use to imbue a subject with violence, nostalgia, or sex appeal, and then applying those to a composition of objects, I feel closer to a world of fantasy.

### LC

You told me that you've exhaustively researched 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs of séances in which spirits were supposedly exorcised and captured with gauze. I imagine this captivates you because of your interest, as you describe above, in photography "as a medium that posits the immaterial or intangible." How could you compare this process of materializing a spirit to your own work, if at all?

### WN

When we look at those images now, the "smoke and mirrors" image manipulation is obvious, and almost quaint. But I am interested in them as a record of a transaction, where people were contracting amateur photographers to provide them with material proof of some mental discomfort that they felt, whether depression, schizophrenia, mania that couldn't be explained in their waking life. Often times, people were complicit in these staged portraits, meaning they were aware of the mechanics behind the pictures and yet they suspended disbelief. Our collective desire for a visualization of psychological unrest is incredibly compelling to me.

### LC

Would you say abstraction, as it appears in your work, is a productive retreat from the constant bombardment of representative images, advertising or self-promotion?

### WN

I wouldn't say I'm explicitly interested in abstract photography as a respite, but I would say I'm interested in decoupling photography from some notion of documentation based in reality.

### LC

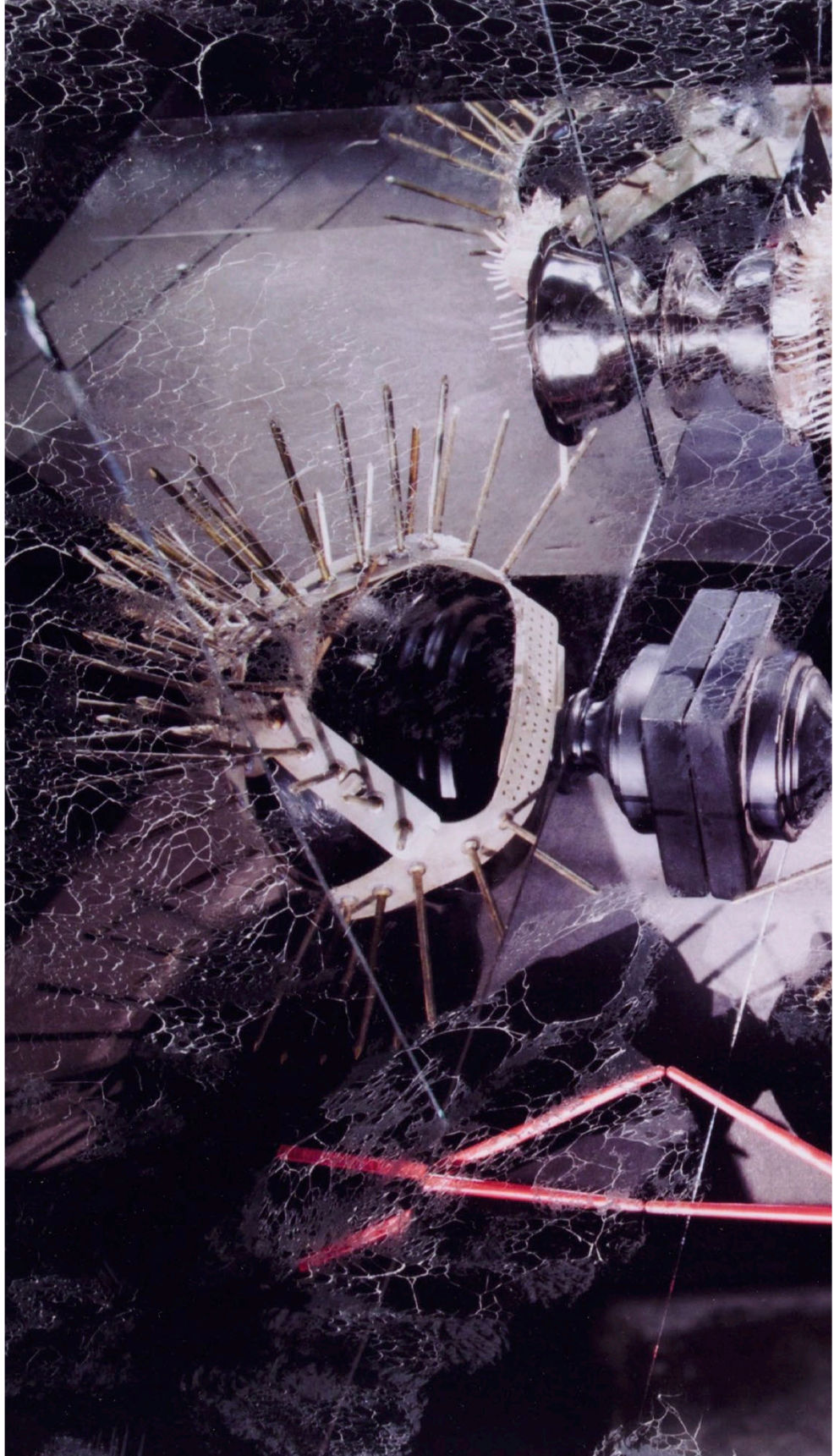
As a last question then, I'd ask about the limits of fine art photography and its potential to visualize. I never worry about the death of painting, but I do sometimes wonder if photography as an artistic medium could become a moot point. What do you think?

### WN

I don't believe that it's possible for a medium to die. To my knowledge, there have been no instances where something has actually died, ever, outside of artisans being outmoded. The intense absorption of photography into our culture has exploded the medium, and it's history, but I see that as allowing for a freedom and flexibility in the way that images are read, which is unprecedented. Photography was invented about two hundred years ago; in the scheme of human history, it is still in its most nascent stages as a medium.



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*Untitled (Candle #2) (detail), 2016. Courtesy: the artist and Chapter NY, New York.  
Photo: Jason Mandella*



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60 Walker St., New York, NY 10013



di Lauren Cornell

La fotografia di Willa Nasatir è difficile da definire: mette in conversazione approcci allo still life e al ritratto visti, ad esempio, nel lavoro di Eileen Quinlan o di R.H. Quaytman. I soggetti sono modificati al punto di divenire iriconoscibili. Il suo lavoro è stato anche accostato a Lee Bontecou per le qualità tattili, i contorni netti e le texture inorganiche derivanti dall'estetica queer. In mostre recenti – da White Columns e Chapter, a New York – Nasatir ha esteso il proprio percorso allontanandosi dalla violenza con cui trattava le foto, bruciandole o immergendole in liquidi; ed è arrivata a produrre elaborate composizioni scultoree di retro-fotografia. In questa conversazione, discutiamo il suo metodo, la sua riflessione sulla "giovane" storia della fotografia e del modo in cui l'inconscio si manifesta nella sua opera.

**LAUREN CORNELL** La mostra da Chapter NY segna un distacco dai lavori precedenti in cui hai congelato, carbonizzato e sommerso le foto o le hai invece sviluppate in soluzioni non convenzionali. Puoi descrivere questo nuovo approccio e perché ne hai subito l'attrazione gravitazionale?

**WILLA NASATIR** In questi nuovi lavori di formato più grande, ho fotografato le stampe attraverso uno schermo illuminato a macchie, che avevo realizzato in plexiglass e latex. Perseguo obiettivi in una certa misura divergenti in tutti i miei processi: da una parte voglio realizzare immagini che siano percepibili nella loro materialità, che siano tattili; allo stesso tempo voglio presentare la fotografia come medium in grado di catturare l'immateriale e l'intangibile – luce, riflesso e ombra. I gesti che li hanno preceduti possono essere letti come performativi; c'è una violenza curiosa nel graffiare la superficie dell'immagine di un corpo o incendiare, ma ora penso meno all'azione e più a come, quando vengono fotografati, questi processi subiscano una trasformazione da qualcosa di realmente leggibile, a uno strumento meno riconoscibile e più emotivo.

**LC** Diversi aspetti delle tue opere risultano di difficile lettura per un osservatore, compresi gli oggetti raffigurati. Per esempio in *Untitled (Candle #2)*, le candele sono prolungate da cucchiaini conficcati alla base, e ciò che in un primo momento sembra una foglia friabile, a un secondo sguardo appare una parrucca schiacciata. È una tua volontà rendere gli oggetti delle fotografie parzialmente indistinguibili?

**WN** Penso che le fotografie siano per loro natura in grado di distorcere la "verità" di un soggetto. L'effetto fotografico spesso complica la comprensione che uno ha del soggetto stesso e del suo ambiente, piuttosto che chiarirla. Non cerco necessariamente di confondere l'informazione, ma voglio porre l'accento sull'idea che, formalmente, siamo in presenza di un ritratto più che di un documento. Siamo stati condizionati a scorrere rapidamente tra le immagini e io spero di realizzare opere in cui l'esperienza del vedere sia espansa, dove con il tempo possa darsi un significato nuovo.

**LC** Gli aspetti elusivi dell'opera espandono l'esperienza del vedere. Io, per esempio, sono rimasta folgorata da questi nuovi lavori. Hanno qualcosa di trascendentale. Mi riportano alla mente la ricca tavolozza dei film di Jack Smith o la ritrattistica surreale di Jimmy de Sana. Secondariamente, ho pensato a Flawless Sabrina, al suo drag iconico, sontuoso, persino alle stanze del suo appartamento immortalate nelle fotografie di Zackary Drucker. Pensi che questi riferimenti ti si addicano?

**WN** Flawless Sabrina ha contribuito a costruire un mondo drag che permette la transgressione attraverso cambiamenti radicali

nell'immagine del personaggio e nel sentimento, e attraverso la finzione. Non percepisco il mio lavoro direttamente collegato a quella cultura, ma a un livello personale mi sento attratta dai movimenti sociali in cui gli individui si autodefiniscono su un piano estetico. È evidente nelle culture drag, come quelle che hanno visto la partecipazione di Flawless Sabrina, ma anche nell'opera di Smith o di Alvin Baltrop: entrambi usano la fotografia per rappresentare mondi altri, anche il mondo criminale, reali e immaginari. Nello specifico, sono attratta dalla relazione che i performer drag intrattengono con le versioni artigianali o al limite somiglianti degli oggetti e degli accessori glamour.

**LC** In un recente studio visit con te, ho provato una certa soddisfazione quando hai risposto ad alcune delle mie domande: "non lo so". È così facile fare della teoria quando le risposte non sono facilmente esplicabili (la gente lo fa così spesso!). È stata una boccata di aria fresca quando hai ammesso di non avere una spiegazione per tutti i risvolti del tuo lavoro e che questo ti sembrava in se stesso produttivo. Questa attitudine – questa sicurezza di non sapere tutto – si connette al desiderio di lasciare spazio all'inconscio e all'ignoto nel tuo lavoro?

**WN** Gli artisti che usano la fotografia hanno per lungo tempo impiegato metodologie iper-teoriche, allo scopo di propugnare la serietà della propria opera e il lavoro che ci sta dietro. Penso che derivi da un desiderio di legittimare il medium come forma di pensiero critico, di porre una distanza tra il medium e il mestiere o la documentazione. Mi sento protettiva nei confronti della libertà nel mio studio, di fare cose che non so spiegare. In modo analogo, credo che sia importante preservare lo spazio di visione di un'opera d'arte prima che sia mediata dal linguaggio. Per me, il lavoro migliore viene fuori dalle persone che esaminano la propria soggettività, diventando l'estensione dei loro inconsci e desideri.

**LC** Carroll Dunham, l'artista, ha definito le scene nelle tue fotografie "discariche psichiche". Ti identifichi in questa concezione – di uno spazio in cui i desideri provenienti dal subconscio e le paure si depositano e si accatastano a caso?

**WN** Sì, ritengo che il subconscio possa, nelle sue svariate forme, diventare la chiave di un paesaggio culturale più vasto. La fotografia è stata storicamente usata come uno strumento di categorizzazione, uno strumento antropologico, mentre una cosa come un dipinto astratto viene vista come una finestra aperta sull'inconscio o sul pensiero dell'emisfero destro. Non esiste una realtà stabile, universale, è altamente soggettiva. Anche le fotografie hanno il potenziale per potere accedere o per mostrare quello spazio ignoto, e io provo a farlo nel mio lavoro.

**LC** Spesso il corpo si percepisce come uno "spazio ignoto" nelle tue fotografie. Hai detto che preferisci rappresentare "l'esperienza del corpo" o una "sua traccia". Questa forma più transitoria, più latente di ritratto ti sembra più vera?

**WN** Non penso che sia più vera, ma quando fotografi un corpo umano, la relazione tra il fotografo e il soggetto ha un peso diverso. Quando qualcuno posa, la sua esperienza del mondo e la sua identità di individuo sono tanto presenti nel lavoro quanto ciò che si propone di fare il fotografo. È estremamente collaborativo – e ciò che può sembrare incredibile, sei costretto a cedere il controllo, fino a un certo punto. Mi piace l'idea di creare un mondo contenuto nel mio studio in cui il soggetto cessa di esistere al di fuori delle fotografie. Guardando ai gesti fotografici e alle figure retoriche cinematografiche, che impieghiamo per permeare il soggetto di violenza, nostalgia o

di sensualità, e poi applicandoli alla composizione di oggetti, mi sento più vicina a un mondo di fantasia.

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**LC** Mi dicevi di avere compiuto una ricerca approfondita tra le fotografie di sedute spiritiche del Diciannovesimo secolo, in cui gli spettri erano apparentemente esorcizzati e catturati per mezzo di garze. Immagino che ciò ti affascinasse per via del tuo interesse, come lo descrivi più sopra, nella fotografia "come medium in grado di catturare l'immateriale e l'intangibile". In che modo puoi paragonare il processo di materializzazione di uno spettro con il tuo lavoro, eventualmente?

**WN** Quando oggi guardiamo quelle immagini, la manipolazione del tipo "spettro" per le allodole" è scontata, quasi pittoresca. Ma mi interessano in quanto registrazioni di una transazione in cui le persone ingaggiavano i fotografi amatoriali per fornire loro la prova materiale di un qualche disagio psichico che avvertivano – fosse depressione, schizofrenia o mania – che non poteva essere spiegato razionalmente. Molto spesso le persone erano complici di quei ritratti assemblati, erano consapevoli dei meccanismi che stavano dietro le fotografie, sospendevano la propria incredulità. Per me, il desiderio collettivo di una visualizzazione dell'inquietudine psicologica è incredibilmente interessante.

**LC** Puoi affermare che l'astrazione, così come è nel tuo lavoro, sia una difesa produttiva dal consueto bombardamento di immagini rappresentative, pubblicitarie o autopromozionali?

**WN** Non direi che sono esplicitamente interessata alla fotografia astratta come a una "tregua", direi che mi interessa scollegare la fotografia da una certa nozione di documentazione basata sulla realtà.

**LC** Come ultima domanda, ti chiederei dei limiti della fotografia d'arte e del suo potenziale di immaginazione. Non mi preoccupa mai della morte della pittura, però talvolta mi domando se la fotografia come medium artistico potrebbe diventare una questione puramente accademica. Cosa ne pensi?

**WN** Non credo possibile che un medium muoia. Per quanto ne so, non è mai accaduto che qualcosa sia morto davvero, in ogni tempo, al di fuori delle creazioni artigianali passate di moda. L'intensa assimilazione della fotografia nella cultura ha fatto esplodere il medium, e questo è storia, ma vedo che questo ha permesso una libertà e una flessibilità nei modi di leggere le immagini che non ha precedenti. La fotografia è stata inventata circa due secoli fa; sul piano della storia umana è ancora al suo stadio nascente, come medium.

## DOCUMENT

SPRING 2016

Portfolio 2

# Surface and Depth

## Artwork *Willa Nasatir*

Text by Drew Sawyer

Willa Nasatir's photographs defy easy categorization and readability. They are often abstract yet maintain references to things in the world: model trains, glasses, or nails, for example. They imply a narrative but do not cohere into a fully legible subject or scene. They appear to be digitally manipulated but are made with analog means. Such resistance to the conventions of photography is perhaps a response to the overabundance of images in our Internet Age.

"Because we live in such an image-saturated culture, our eyes have become in many ways inured to the physical properties of photography," the New York-based artist says.

In this regard, while Nasatir's work feels utterly contemporary, it is also firmly rooted in a long tradition of artists using photography. In the 20s and 30s—with the perfection of the halftone process that resulted in more photographs in newspapers, magazines, and advertisements—artists used darkroom techniques and collage to disrupt and obscure the photographic image. With the further expansion of mass media via television in the 70s, artists once again attempted to decontextualize the photograph through rephotography. Nasatir's work has clear

connections to these earlier moments—from the French Surrealist Roger Parry's photograms to Pictures Generation artist Sarah Charlesworth's photomontages of found images.

Today, a number of artists are exploring abstraction in photography through old and new processes. Yet, Nasatir's work does not fit easily within this trend. Rather than exploring the chemicals, papers, and physical materials of the medium, she produces her pictures by building layers and using light, shadow, and reflections to otherworldly effects. The works reproduced here, a *Document Journal* exclusive, seem to allude to objects trapped behind a screen, a layer of broken glass casting shadows into a three-dimensional space and extending over a black frame as if one were viewing the inside of a deteriorating iPad. Swipe with your finger, and you might get cut. "We are constantly handling pictures, literally touching images—magazines, touch screens, subway advertisements," the artist says. "Pictures have lifespans. I'm thinking about the visual language of decomposition and accrual and how those ideas relate to photography." Nasatir's pictures are sure to have a lifespan of their own as they accrue new meanings with each viewing. ♦



## CHAPTER NY

Willa Nasatir

Untitled (Subway Car), 2016, C-Print.

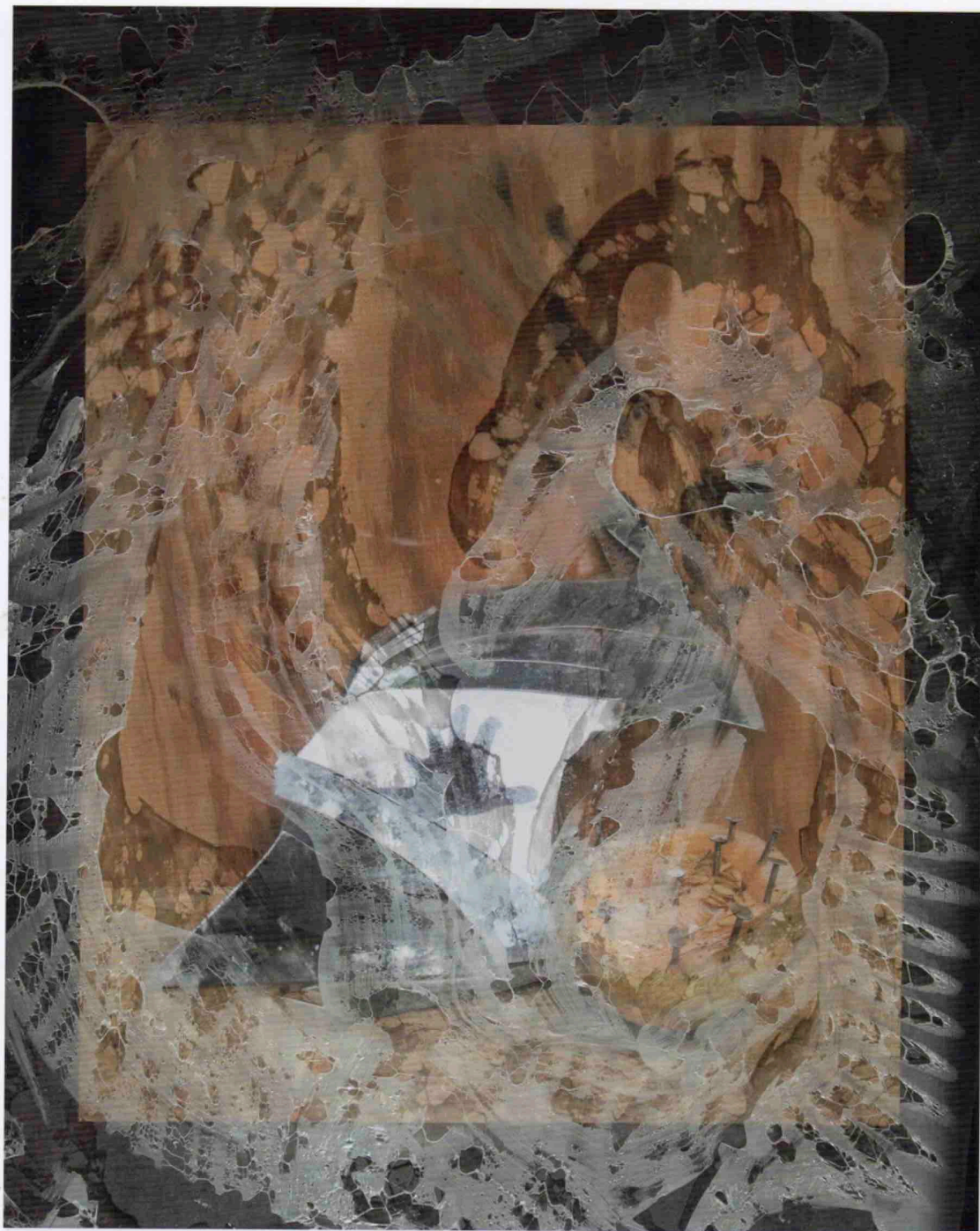


60 Walker St., New York, NY 10013



## CHAPTER NY

Portfolio 2



Untitled (Melon), 2016, C-Print.

# CHAPTER NY

Portfolio 2



*Untitled (Axe), 2016, C-Print.*



## CHAPTER NY

Willa Nasatir

Untitled (Skate), 2016, C-Print.





# CHAPTER NY

## ARTFORUM

April 8, 2016

### Willa Nasatir

CHAPTER NY

127 Henry Street

March 20–April 24

Over the past two decades, photography, like film, has suffered an identity crisis in the face of proliferating digital technologies. The situation has led to a rise in self-reflexive practices—photography about darkroom processing, for instance. This impulse, however, is waning, and photography seems ripe for experiments with narrative that fly in the face of objectivity and indexicality. Willa Nasatir is a young artist who steers away from the strictness of medium-specificity and embraces psychological subject matter in her work.

Nasatir's four glossy C-prints feel as though they've come out of an earlier group of works about crime photography—a “neutral” genre that is, at its core, anything but. Nasatir's characters here are *things*, not bodies: a singed fan, bloodred candles, a pair of open shears, and a crown made of wire. They function as items plucked from some violent, satanic rite, symbols we project all manner of visceral horror upon. Nasatir photographs her objects in front of disorienting mirrors and subjects her shadowy prints to various manipulations, including burning. To add a sense of temporal disjuncture, she rephotographs her original prints through cobwebby skeins of Plexiglas and acrylic. Her moody aesthetic seems indebted to the theatrical, prop-centric performance art of the 1970s seen in the 2013–14 Whitney Museum exhibition “Rituals of Rented Island,” featuring artists such as Jack Smith, Stuart Sherman, and Sylvia Palacios Whitman. The images also recall the quasi-Surrealistic scenarios of Jan Groover and, of course, Goth music videos of the 1980s and '90s.



View of “Willa Nasatir,” 2016.

— Wendy Vogel

# Flash Art

October 22, 2015

By Emily Rappaport

## Willa Nasatir *White Columns* / *New York*

It's easy to imagine a computer-generated art-speak press release for Willa Nasatir's debut solo exhibition at *White Columns* (<http://www.whitecolumns.org/>) in New York.

It would explain how her photographs — prop-filled base pictures taken in the studio onto whose surfaces she applies mineral oil, refracted light and other transformative substances before reshooting them outdoors — explore the intersection of digital and analog processes; how they play with the recurrence of images in the Internet era; how they make us rethink the discourse surrounding photography in contemporary art.

All of these statements are true, but Nasatir's show resists such didactic and formulaic analysis. For some artworks, articulated context is integral to a fulfilling encounter. But these serial photographs — in which manufactured objects, handmade articles and cinematic visual tropes are used repeatedly like symbols — are their own idiom. To introduce language through press materials or a review would even seem to run the risk of violating the viscerally arresting visual experience of the pictures. Beauty is the real code here, allowing viewers to access the work not by understanding its conceptual foundation but by meditating on their own memories, feelings and impressions.

None of this is to say that the conceptual ground isn't present and rigorous. The six photographs — five of which are from a set called "Crime" and the other from one called "Pink" — are inspired by evidence photographs, which represent an event without actually depicting it. Nasatir uses a pair of glasses, a heeled shoe, a paper suit, a fan, a pair of newspaper underwear, and different renderings of a hand (her own, it seems fair to say, given the elaborate manual process that each piece requires) to relay the personas of distinct characters without including actual body parts. (*Pink* #2, which portrays a human stomach and legs, is an exception.) She reflects the notion of criminality, which flattens morality into a binary of positive and negative, through her photographic practice, which entails using direct sunlight to record noir-style shadow and silhouette.

Commercial images have saturated every space in our lives; it is cathartic to see photographs that make us think not of advertising but of the dark magic and mystery of our own gaze.

by Emily Rappaport

CHAPTER NY

# DOCUMENT

September 21, 2015



[VIEW IMAGES \(/article/gallery/willa-nasatir/1266\)](#)

Willa Nasatir's Spectral Images

60 Walker St., New York, NY 10013



# CHAPTER NY

BY [DREW SAWYER](#) (@AUTHOR/6)

New York-based artist Willa Nasatir makes seductive still lifes in which objects, bodies, and their traces meld into otherworldly photographic images. For the launch of her show at White Columns, one of New York's oldest alternative art spaces, Drew Sawyer chatted with the artist about her work, photographic abstraction, Sarah Charlesworth, and spirit photography.

DREW SAWYER—You studied at Cooper Union in New York. What attracted you to that program?

WILLA NASATIR—I wanted to go to Cooper because of the school's radical mission: A merit-based free education for every student, which devastatingly is no longer the administration's policy as of September 2014. I became politicized through participating in such a unique program. American art schools typically market themselves as offering the legitimacy of professional training through payment. Cooper's structure was less transactional: learning as a form of collaboration rather than acquisition. I studied with Doug Ashford, Marlene McCarty, and Walid Raad—all of whom encouraged a critical relationship to traditional disciplines, and to identity and power as they affect the ways we both make and consume work.

DREW—Did you study photography there?

WILLA—I took very few photo classes there but made a lot of photographs that were critiqued within a sculptural conversation, or as paintings and drawings. In conversations about photography, we talked a lot about what in our culture gets looked at versus what is looked away from—who gets to be a subject, what gets to be precious, and how those value systems are braided into capitalism.

DREW—Perhaps this interdisciplinary approach helps explain why your photographs don't look quite like photographs. Can you talk a little bit about your process?

WILLA—In the past, I've torched stacks of photographs; submerged prints in water, frozen them, and photographed them; stripped prints with acid and sanded them down. I use photographic effect (light, reflection, shadow, glow) to abstract the surface of a picture. Recently, I've been making large drawings on glass, and then mirroring the reflection of those drawing onto the surface of a print. This allows for the work of my hand to be present in image, even as the marks are abstracted into light—they're immaterial. The end product is a C-print from a single exposure. I'm less interested in photography as a medium for depicting the "real" than I am in its capacity to display the other-worldly. I love photographs of UFOs, or those double exposure prints that people used to prove the existence of haunting ghosts.

DREW—While your work is often abstract, it always maintains some form of reference to objects or bodies and many of them read as portraits, even in the absence of figures. Can you discuss your treatment of subject matter and the human figure, which you seem to be moving away from in your most recent work?

WILLA—The photographers who I was first drawn to took very sensual, emotive pictures of people—Peter Hujar's portraits or Jack Smith's scenes. It's difficult at this point though to make portrait photography without connotations of advertising and editorial work. I'm interested in depicting persona or character outside of that set of references. I think it's possible—if not more seamless—to depict the felt experience of the body without showing the form of the figure itself. I think I'm most successful at it when the figure is androgynous, faceless, abstracted, or even disfigured. I love filmic tropes—silhouette, hand or foot prints, traces that register the presence of an individual who the eye can't see.

“

I think younger artists gravitate towards abstraction as a means of evoking spirituality because readable pictures are associated so heavily with advertising or social media. But I'm interested in playing with the way our eye registers bodies: how much of a figure needs to be shown for something to register as human?

[@documentjournal](https://twitter.com/home?status=I%20think%20younger%20artists%20gravitate%20towards%20abstraction%20as%20a%20means%20of%20evoking%20spirituality%20because%20readable%20pictures%20are%20associated%20so%20heavily%20with%20advertising%20or%20social%20media.%20But%20I'm%20interested%20in%20playing%20with%20the%20way%20our%20eye%20registers%20bodies%3A%20how%20much%20of%20a%20figure%20needs%20to%20be%20shown%20for%20something%20to%20register%20as%20human%3F)

”

DREW—There seems to be a return to an interest in the body, and in particular limbs or the fragmented body, from virtual avatars to 3D prints—I think this was very apparent in the New Museum's 2015 Triennial. Why do you think that is? Or what specifically interests you in this motif?

WILLA—In my own work, I want to make images where there's the sense of a figure's presence, rather than total abstraction. I think younger artists gravitate towards abstraction as a means of evoking spirituality because readable pictures are associated so heavily with advertising or social media. But I'm interested in playing with the way our eye registers bodies: how much of a figure needs to be shown for something to register as human? I don't want to rely on documenting a body, but, rather, building persona through the emotional affects of the image. In this way, I use the body as a prop in the same way I use inanimate objects, even the surface of the image itself. They are all equally important to conveying character and subject.

DREW—You mentioned advertising and editorial photography. Over the past ten years or so, there has been a growing number of artists using photography who have explored the industrialized image in their work, such as Annette Kelm, Elad Lassry, and Christopher Williams, to name a few. An alternative to this approach has been process oriented work that often meditates on the analog or the digital. Your work doesn't quite fit with either of these trends or perhaps it combines them in a new way, although you seem less concerned with questions about the medium itself. I'm curious to know if you've thought about your own work in relation to these practices.

WILLA—I feel like the people whose work you mentioned use a sort of hyper-realized, mechanized image-making that carries the conversation away from the power of an individual image and towards a universal critique of photography. In that frame, individual photographs don't matter outside

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# CHAPTER NY

of a conversation about photography. Sarah Charlesworth is a good example of someone who was extremely skilled in photography as a technical process, but also maintained emotion and resonance in the actual subject matter of her work. *Objects of Desire*, for instance, it's both a system for producing the image of the object and about each specific object's resonance in the world. Process can be seductive, but I believe there should be a core to the work within that. Process is an effect for communicating emotion, but I don't want it to be the entirety of the image. In other words, I don't make work where process itself is the subject.

*Willa Nasatir is on view now through October 24, 2015, White Columns, 320 West 13th Street, New York.*

## CHAPTER NY

# KALEIDOSCOPE

Issue 24 S/S 2015

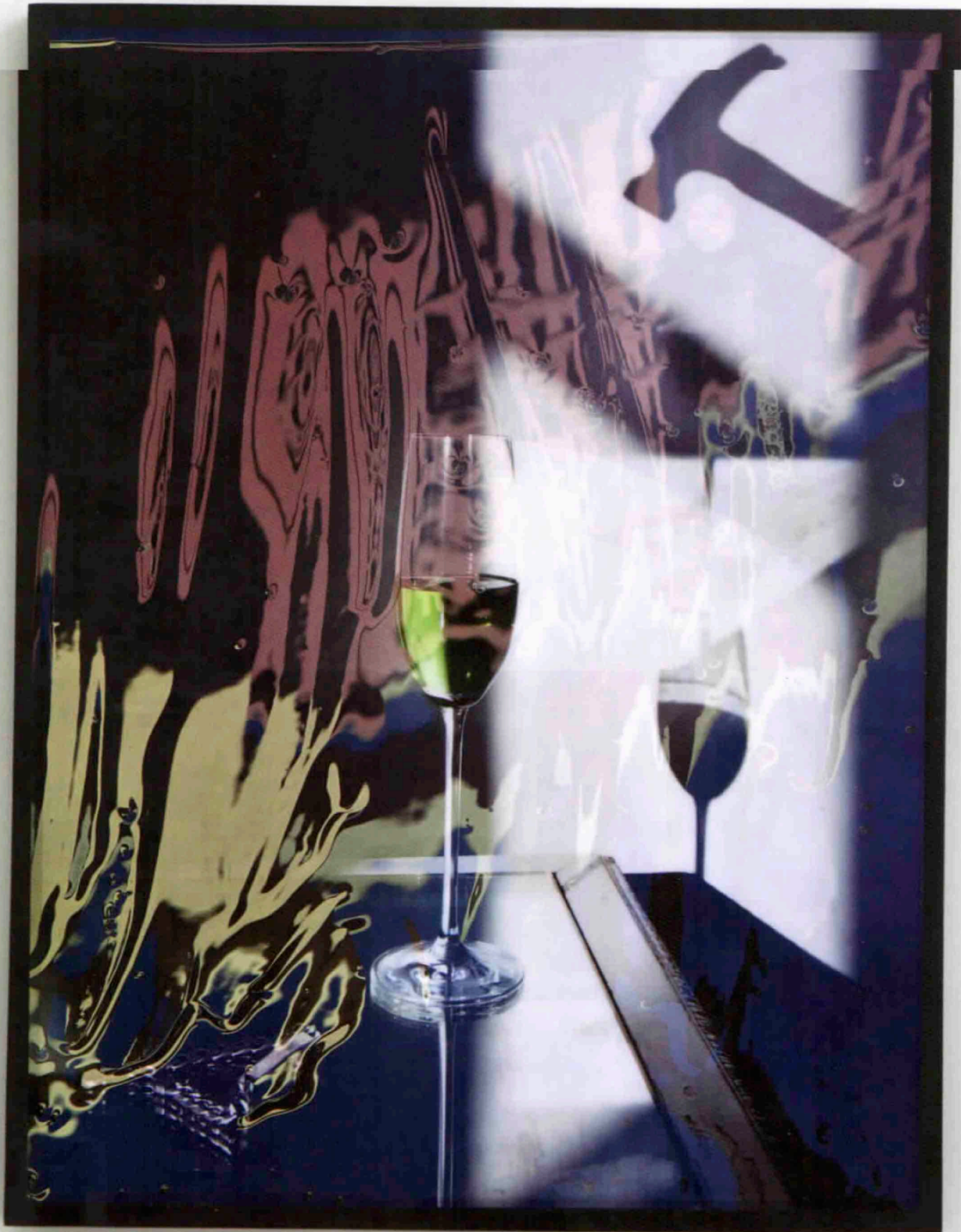
Willa Nasatir



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## CHAPTER NY



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## CHAPTER NY

I begin with a “traditional” photographic image which I then alter in the studio, rephotograph, reprint, and again, until settling on an image in which time and touch are layered and illegibly felt. Within these dreamscapes, the body—whether fractured, foreshortened, outlined, or silhouetted—is reduced to a set of androgynous symbols and material cues: succulents, newspapers, drinks, and the recursive presence of a single hand evoke a precariously embodied presence—there, just departed, or about to return. I hope that my work proposes a photographic world in which the making is the being.

Willa Nasatir (American, b.1985) lives and works in New York. Her work will be included in a summer show organized by Lumi Tan at Company, New York. She is working on an upcoming monograph to be released by Gottlund Verlag.

Works in order of appearance:  
*snake*, 2015; *green (grace)*, 2015; *boot (binding)*, 2015; *heels*, 2015; *red*, 2014;  
*smokey #2*, 2015. All images courtesy of the artist.

## CHAPTER NY



60 Walker St., New York, NY 10013



# Flash Art

Issue 302, March 2015

By Jared Baxter

## **Joshing the Watershed *Del Vaz Projects / Los Angeles***

A glass of absinthe, such as those as seen in two of Willa Nasatir's rephotographed photos on display in "Joshing the Watershed" at Del Vaz Projects, can evoke a certain nostalgia for a particular era in the life of a Western artist, roughly spanning the period from Impressionism to the Lost Generation of the '20s and '30s. The exhibition space itself, an unassuming two-bedroom apartment in a dense part of Westside, can then suggest the domestic settings of the artists' salons of Mallarmé or Stein. Yet perhaps a closer comparison could be made between the academic salons of the 19th century and our present-day art fairs. The challenge of navigating hundreds of canvases hung closely together has something in common with the bewilderment provoked by mazes of gallery booths, and our more democratic incarnation remains beholden to our schools of art. All this only highlights the contrast between the dying gasp of an idea of art as an imitation of life on one end of the timeline and a situation in which art claims its legitimacy as an imitation of art on the other.

Nasatir's work is especially keyed in to this conflict. The anxiety latent in the formal process of damaging or altering the surface of a photograph and photographing the results recalls the crisis provoked by the medium's emergence well over a century ago, when painting began to emphasize individual perception over mimesis and so approach the sort of self-referentiality that has become the hallmark of modern art. This quality being now thoroughly fetishized, the work seems imbued with a life of its own, entering a sort of society as a debutante, only to go to die in a domestic grave, the trophy of some collector.

Here, in an apartment that may as well stand in for this twilit space, a carnivalesque atmosphere takes hold, playing Jessica Williams's bittersweet, painterly portraits against the chrome, chains and key-ring charms of Dena Yago's *Human Applause*, while Math Bass's tortoise stages a lightly comedic encounter with Sam Davis's anthropomorphized mic-stand readymade. In the show's other room, a bedroom, the intimacy of the space invites a disarmingly empathetic relationship with Adrian Gilliland's camp male playing-card nudes, and Dwyer Kilcollin's vases, produced through what could be called an artisanal version of 3-D printing, address questions relating to technology, the human hand and failure. These are rooms that seem hardly fit to host a person's watershed moments, yet are much like many in which people come into the world and leave it.

by Jared Baxter

ISSUE 323