

## DRAFT TOUR

On view July 11 through November 7, 2021, *Tomashi Jackson: The Land Claim* is a multi-part exhibition of newly created work *in painting, sound, photography, and archival materials*. *The Land Claim* centers on the experiences—past and present—of communities of color on Long Island’s East End.

### **Background:**

Tomashi Jackson is a multimedia artist investigating historical and present-day disenfranchisement and displacement of people of color. Her research-based practice often interrogates local sites and highlights the untold histories of marginalized communities. Born in Texas, Tomashi Jackson grew up in South Los Angeles and now splits her time between New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts where she serves as Visiting Lecturer on Art, Film, and Visual Studies at Harvard University.

When Corinne Erni, Senior Curator of ArtsReach and Special Projects at the Parrish invited Jackson to present an exhibition at the museum, she asked, “What’s going on in the Hamptons among communities of color?” Jackson visited the Hamptons in January 2020 and met with members of the Shinnecock, Black, and Latinx communities. Shortly after her visit, the pandemic lockdown forced Jackson to pivot, conducting many more interviews virtually on Zoom. Throughout the process, Jackson worked with Parrish Art Museum curatorial fellow Lauren Ruiz, artist and educator Martha Schnee and research scholar K. Anthony Jones to process and analyze the interviews as well as the archival photographs provided by families, historical societies, libraries, and news sources. As the team conducted these interviews, they learned about the community members’ hardships—issues of housing, transportation, livelihood, migration, and agriculture- and the commonalities between these lived experiences.

In May of 2021, Tomashi began her residency as Inga Maren Otto Fellow at The Watermill Center where she completed the seven paintings, the window installation in the lobby, and, along with her research team, continued working on her manuscript--the collection of interviews and archival images gathered over the past several months of research. For Jackson, the research is a crucial component of the exhibition. The information gathered, the conversations shared, and the photographs collected encompass the work and provide the foundation for her paintings.

In collaboration with sound artist Michael J. Schumacher, *The Land Claim* exhibition opens with an audio piece composed of the audio excerpts from the conversations between Tomashi Jackson and the community members interviewed. The sound installation is featured near the outdoor lobby of the museum, greeting visitors, and providing a moment of respite and intimacy with the voices of the interviewed contributors as they share their struggles, memories, and triumphs of living on the East End.

Three themes emerged from the interviews, which are central to the project:

The generational experiences of LABOR

The importance and sacred nature of the LAND

The integral role of WOMEN in family life

Jackson processed these themes that she found through her research and incorporated them in her paintings.

Tomashi Jackson considers herself an *abstract painter*. Her process includes preparing the canvas, creating a ground of geometric forms and abstract gestures, projecting images in half-tone lines, and hand painting them onto the canvas. The paintings also include locally found material such as potato bags, wampum dust from a Shinnecock wampum carver, and soil from nearby potato fields. She then overlays the painted images with transparent vinyl strips that have images printed onto them, creating a juxtaposition of imagery and histories. The paintings' protruding wood frames, handcrafted by Ruben Palencia, are reminiscent of storefront awnings and allow colors and silhouettes to be cast onto the walls. The dynamic compositions reflect how the themes that emerged from Jackson's research—such as the sacredness of land, generational experiences of labor, and integral role of women in family life—are intricately interwoven and reproduced throughout history.

The importance of Josef Albers's *Interaction of Color* to Jackson is evident in her work. In her past research projects, which include reexamining the *Brown v. Board of Education II* court case fought by Marshall Thurgood she found that the language Albers used to describe the interaction between colors can be seen as a parallel to the historical language used to describe racial segregation. This led Jackson to learn how to use properties of color perception to reference the stories and histories embedded in her paintings.

## **Exhibition:**

### **The Three Sisters**

**2021**

Acrylic, Shinnecock wampum dust, and soil from a local potato field on canvas, cotton textiles, and paper bags with archival prints on PVC marine vinyl mounted on a handcrafted walnut, Douglas fir, and redwood awning structure with brass hooks and grommets

Image painted on substrate: Eastville residents, between 1880-1915, tintype photos. Courtesy of Eastville Community Historical Society

Images on vinyl strips: Loretta Hunter-Silva, Dorothy Dennis, Denise Silva-Dennis, Pauline Kirby, and Jeremy Dennis gathered at the Hunter-Silva home (Ma's House), 1992. Photo: Avery Dennis, Jr. Courtesy Silva-Dennis Family Archive

### **Among Gardens**

**2021**

Acrylic and soil from a local potato field on canvas, cotton textiles, and paper bags with archival prints on PVC marine vinyl mounted on a handcrafted Douglas fir and redwood awning structure with brass hooks and grommets.

Image painted on substrate: Steven Molina Contreras, *Mi Familia Inmigrante, in my Mother's Salon, New York, USA, 2020*. Courtesy Steven Molina Contreras.

Image on vinyl strips: Marvin Dozier and students of the Bridgehampton Childcare & Recreational Center, ca. 1970. Courtesy the Southampton Youth Association.

### **Among Fruits (Big Shane and the Farmer)**

**2021**

Acrylic, Shinnecock wampum dust, and soil from a local potato field on canvas, cotton textiles, and paper bags with archival prints on PVC marine vinyl mounted on a handcrafted walnut awning structure with brass hooks and grommets.

Image painted on substrate: Shane Weeks with hen of the woods mushroom. Courtesy Shane Weeks.

Image on vinyl strips: A worker in a South Fork potato field, ca. 1950. Courtesy Express News Group.

### **Among Harvests (Aserrin de colores)**

**2021**

Acrylic and soil from a local potato field on canvas, cotton textiles, and paper bags with archival prints on PVC marine vinyl mounted on a handcrafted walnut awning structure with brass hooks and grommets.

Image painted on substrate: Puerto Rican immigrants working on a potato farm, ca. 1950. Courtesy the Migration Division Collection at the Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York.

Image on vinyl strips: "Most migrant workers now coming to Long Island are from Guatemala, México, El Salvador and Colombia," according to a state Department of Labor spokesman, 2013. Courtesy *The Suffolk Times* / Barbara Ellen Koch (file photo).

### **Among Sisters and Brothers (Three Families)**

**2021**

Acrylic and soil from a local potato field on canvas, cotton textiles, and paper bags with archival prints on PVC marine vinyl mounted on a handcrafted redwood awning structure with brass hooks and grommets.

Image painted on substrate:

The Wingfield sisters (standing, left to right) Alice Wingfield, Louise Barnard, Roxanne Dozier, Florence Brown, and Blanche Cherry (seated), 2001. Courtesy Richard "Juni" Wingfield.

Image on vinyl strips:

Group on Azurest Beach, Sag Harbor, NY, date unknown. Courtesy Eastville Community Historical Society Collection.

### **Among Protectors (Hawthorne Road and the Pell Case)**

**2021**

Acrylic and Shinnecock wampum dust on canvas, cotton textiles, and paper bags with archival prints on PVC marine vinyl mounted on a handcrafted Douglas fir awning structure with brass hooks and grommets.

Image painted on substrate: Doreen Dennis sits in front of a bulldozer to protect against illegal development on the Shinnecock Neck territory, 1996. Courtesy Express News Group.

Image on vinyl strips: Chenaë Bullock sings a song to ask for protection of the ancestors and for help from the universe to protect sacred Shinnecock burial sites in the Shinnecock Hills, 2018. Courtesy *Newsday* / Thomas A. Ferrara.

Jackson named the exhibition, *The Land Claim*, after a conversation she had with one of the members of the Shinnecock Indian Nation, Kelly Dennis, a lawyer involved in the ongoing land disputes, who helped her understand that the story of the Hamptons is directly related to land appropriation. The exhibition gives insight into many underrecognized narratives of this land, including the parcel the Parrish Art Museum sits on.

### **Among Heirs (Niamuck and Azurest)**

**2021**

Acrylic and Shinnecock wampum dust on canvas, cotton textiles, and paper bags with archival prints on PVC marine vinyl mounted on a handcrafted walnut awning structure with brass hooks and grommets.

Image painted on substrate: Ethan Smith, Kelly Dennis, Peter Smith Jr., gathered at the Hunter-Silva home (Ma's House), 1991. Photo: Denise Silva-Dennis. Courtesy Silva-Dennis Family Archive.

Image on vinyl strips:

Group on Azurest Beach, Sag Harbor, NY, date unknown. Courtesy Eastville Community Historical Society Collection.

### **Gallery 7:**

The Study Room invites visitors to explore Jackson's artmaking process and her research methodology, which she often describes as meaningful generosity. The South Wall in this gallery features notes and enlarged portraits drawn by artist Martha Schnee, who composed portraits of the interviewees during Zoom sessions where she notated quotes of each interviewee as they were speaking. The East Wall presents archival photographs provided by families, historical societies, libraries, and news sources—many of which are clearly visible in Jackson's paintings. They were sourced from the Eastville Historical Society, Southampton Historical Society, Sylvester Manor Education Farm, and Express-News Group among many others. Testifying to past and present lived histories, they depict Black and Latinx migrants working on potato farms; Shinnecock Indian Nation members protesting to protect sacred land; remembrances of enslaved people at Sylvester Manor in Shelter Island; and intimate and celebratory family gatherings. The North Wall of the Gallery invites all museum visitors to take part in the project by sharing images, stories, and drawings of their reflections of the project or their personal connections to land, labor, and the East End. You are invited to spend some time reading through the materials and reflecting on your experience at the study table.

## **Interviewee quotes:**

### Richard “Juni” Wingfield:

Richard “Juni” Wingfield, a community liaison and athletic coach in the Southampton school district for 35 years, speaks about the history of his family’s migration and the important role women played in the resettling. He also talks about his respect for women after growing up in a family with many strong women to look up to.

*“Who was the most important influence in my life? The women. They were the ones—they were free. They were strong, and giving strength, and they were so important to so much of the development and to so much of the community. Like on the Shinnecock Reservation. It’s the women there who contributed so much of the powerful work in that community.”*

### Tele Loretta Troge, Esq.

Tele Loretta Troge, Esq. is an attorney and counselor at law, a member of the Shinnecock Indian Nation and Hassanamisco Nimuc Tribe, and is involved in multiple economic development projects for Shinnecock Nation. She talks about how the Shinnecock people want their land back because it is sacred to them, and it is not as valued by others. Being an activist, she played an important role in the Warriors of the Sunrise Sovereignty Camp in 2020, which brought awareness to the plight of the Shinnecock people.

*“There’s some kind of huge disconnect here between these people who are not from here and us, and the way that we treat the environment, and the way that we value the land, and the way that we’ll fiercely protect our ancestors and our children and our elders, in ways I don’t think they can comprehend because it’s about survival for us.”*

### Jeremy Dennis:

A fine art photographer and member of Shinnecock Nation and a Parrish collection artist. He speaks about the importance of being able to call a place home.

*“I think that home represents the Land. I think it brings a great feeling when you have a landscape that you can call home. The idea that you belong to a certain place on Earth is really special. The whole theme of the Land Claim is very much linked to that idea of home.”*

### Bonnie Cannon:

Bonnie Cannon is the executive director of the Bridgehampton Child Care & Recreational Center, the Chair of the Town of Southampton Housing Authority, and Cofounder of the Southampton African American Museum. Her goal is to help provide important resources to children and teens in communities of color along the East End. She talks about the advantages and obstacles of growing up in Hillcrest, a traditionally Black neighborhood in Southampton. She also touches on how expensive and unaffordable living in Southampton is.

*“We gotta come up with something to keep everything at a balance, because you can’t just have all wealthy people and no other people that are here; it has to be a community. When we were coming up, you had a lot of rentals that were available because everybody, especially young people or new couples, can’t start out by just buying a home.”*

Georgette Grier-Key:

Georgette Grier-Key is the inaugural executive director and chief curator of the Eastville Community Historical Society of Sag Harbor, a cultural partner of Sylvester Manor Educational Farm on Shelter Island, and the president of the Association of Suffolk County Historical Societies. In her interview, she explains the historically rich narratives of the Eastville and SANS communities on the East End. Her goal is to protect and preserve those local landmarks.

*“We see matriarchal community patterns coming out of Eastville because the men were whalers, they were away. Women owned land before they were legally allowed to own land. The women were normally encouraged to marry. Nope! The sisters didn’t marry, they accumulated wealth together, they bought things together. You see these patterns, the strength, and the growth out of Eastville.”*

Donnamarie Barnes:

Donnamarie Barnes is a curator and archivist as well as the co-director and chair of the Plain Sight Project, which acknowledges and researches individuals enslaved on the East End. Having ancestors from the Caribbean, West India, and Barbados she feels very connected to the area because of the sugarcane plantations. She explains the timeline of the sugar industry.

*“This is the most breathtakingly beautiful place, but it’s also a place of imprisonment, of enslavement, of being held on this land. That memory for me, and for all of us who work or visit there, is infused in the very soil. It’s something we tangibly feel and celebrate.” (53)*

Minerva Perez:

Minerva Perez is the executive director of OLA (organización Latino-Americana) of Eastern Long Island. She advocates for the protection, empowerment, and celebration of the regional Latinx community. talks about how she is helping Suffolk County better itself by advocating for more transportation, making sure people have food and necessities during COVID.

*“It was very important that simple policies and procedures with local law enforcement don’t have to result in someone being taken from their home. We are not talking about life and death, we are talking about a traffic stop.”*

Kelly Dennis:

Is an attorney who specializes in Federal Indian Law, public programs and residency coordinator at The Watermill Center, and secretary of the Council of Trustees of the Shinnecock Indian Nation. She represented the Shinnecock Indian Nation when related to land rights, civil rights, and cultural and natural resource protection. She talks about the Shinnecock Nation’s movement to reclaim stolen land.

*“The Land Claim boils down to what happened in the year 1859, when New York state passed legislation to authorize Southampton to illegally get rid of the thousand-year lease promising us the Shinnecock Hills, which was over 4,000 acres of land. They promised that to us for a thousand years in 1703 and they broke that promise in 1859.”*

Steven Molina Conteras:

Steven Molina Conteras is a lens-based artist born in El Salvador but grew up in Long Island. His work focuses on immigrant families that reclaim their land. He talks about the role his mother plays in his life with her examples of strength when faced with adversity and how the empowered women in his life are what have motivated him.

*“Matriarchs have become this kind of religious thing for us. It’s like the belief that keeps most of us going. It’s the belief that keeps me going, seeing my mother’s labor, my aunt’s labor, my great-grandmother’s labor, and their persistence to continue.”*