

Tomashi Jackson: The Land Claim

STOP I:

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.

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.

STOP II:

The Interviews/Museum Entrance:

When Corinne Erni, Senior Curator of ArtsReach and Special Projects at the Parrish invited Jackson to present an exhibition at the museum, the artist began by asking, “What’s going on in the Hamptons among communities of color?”

Jackson first 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 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.

STOP III

Lobby:

The painting *Three Sisters*, which is on view in the lobby incorporates images of intergenerational groups of women and addresses the importance of matriarchy in these communities—a common theme that surfaced during Jackson’s conversations.

For example, one of the interviewees, Richard “Juni” Wingfield, a community liaison and athletic coach in the Southampton school district for 35 years, spoke 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.”

The Lobby also contains *Vessels of Light*, a photographic composition composed of three enlarged photographs contributed by Tomashi Jackson’s interviewees. They include an image of Shinnecock children dressed in regalia and gathered at Powwow grounds in 1993, provided by Jeremy Dennis; an image of female descendants of a Southampton family of Black migrant farm workers, provided by Juni Wingfield; and *Juntos*, New York, USA, 2020, a photograph by Steven Molina Contreras that shares an image of an immigrant family from El Salvador in a tight embrace, depicting familial moments within the three communities that Jackson worked with most closely.

STOP IV

Gallery 6:

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, which is 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.

Tomashi Jackson considers herself an *abstract painter*. As you can see in the works here, 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.

STOP V

Among Protectors (Hawthorne Road and the Pell Case)

2021

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. 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.”

Additionally, 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.

STOP VI

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 interviews included [Minerva Perez](#) 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 and talks about how she is helping Suffolk County better itself by advocating for more transportation, making sure people have food and necessities during COVID.

Another contributor is Steven Molina Conteras 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.”

The East Wall of this gallery 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.