

# Smack Mellon

92 Plymouth Street @ Washington Street, Dumbo, Brooklyn, NY 11201  
Tel: 718.834.8761 | [smackmellon.org](http://smackmellon.org) | Hours: Wednesday-Sunday, 12-6pm  
Contact: Jessica Holburn [jholburn@smackmellon.org](mailto:jholburn@smackmellon.org)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Paula Wilson**

*Spread Wild: Pleasures of the Yucca*

**September 29–November 4, 2018**

Opening Reception: September 29, 6–8 PM

Artist Talk: October 4, 6:30–8 PM



Image: Paula Wilson, *Spread Wild: Pleasures of the Yucca*, video with sound, 2018, 6:00 minutes. Courtesy of the Artist.

Paula Wilson's work uses multimedia and multi-cultural references to create extravagant paintings, prints, videos, and sculptures that blend both naturalistic and otherworldly qualities. The layering of color, image, pattern, and material in her pieces act as a visual metaphor for the complex strata of histories and cultures that inform the work. With a style characterized by narrative, bold color and silhouette, Wilson's work often depicts interactions between female figures and lush, detailed scenes of nature, using sexual forms and decorative motifs to explore both the nature of femininity as construct and visual markers of identity. Raised in a mixed race family, her background has fostered a belief in combining and melding disparate materials to create dynamism. Wilson describes her mixed media process as "perpetually seeking to capture and conjoin elements that I never saw as being 'one' [which] is very exciting to me. It is a titillating romance."

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Drawing on Carolyn Finney's book Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors, Wilson re-frames the paradigm of the naturalist, a role often imagined as white, young, fit, and male. As a biracial African American woman living in New Mexico, she is interested in drawing connections between the human rights and environmental movements. Wilson's mixed-media installation transforms Smack Mellon's industrial space into a landscape resembling the high desert plains of New Mexico. Central among the flora and fauna depicted are the yucca plant and yucca moth. Their pollination ritual represents a quintessential example of mutualism, which Wilson reimagines as a love scene. A video shows naturalists manifesting the pollinating dance, while printed wall hangings illustrate larger than life figurative representations of embodied stages of the yucca plant: blossom, pod, seed. By portraying an untold narrative of black and brown environmentalists, Wilson offers a paradigm for how embracing the natural world can engender harmony.

Born and raised in Chicago, Wilson currently lives and works in Carrizozo, New Mexico. Her work has been featured in group and solo exhibitions both nationally and internationally at such venues as the Studio Museum in Harlem, Sikkema Jenkins & Co. and Bellwether Gallery in New York, Emerson Dorsch Gallery in Miami, The Bemis Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha, Nebraska, The Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, Center for Contemporary Art Santa Fe, Johan Berggren Gallery in Malmö, Sweden, and Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland. Wilson has received numerous grants and awards including a Joan Mitchell Artist Grant, Art Production Fund's P3Studio Artist-in-Residency at the Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas, and the Bob and Happy Doran Fellowship at Yale University. Her work is included in the collections of The Studio Museum in Harlem, Yale University Art Gallery, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, and Saatchi Gallery. Wilson received an MFA from Columbia University in New York.

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