

# Wall Street International

## Paula Wilson, Spread Wild

29 Sep — 4 Nov 2018 at the Smack Mellon in Brooklyn, United States

27 OCTOBER 2018



Paula Wilson, Spread Wild. Courtesy of Smack Mellon

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.”

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.

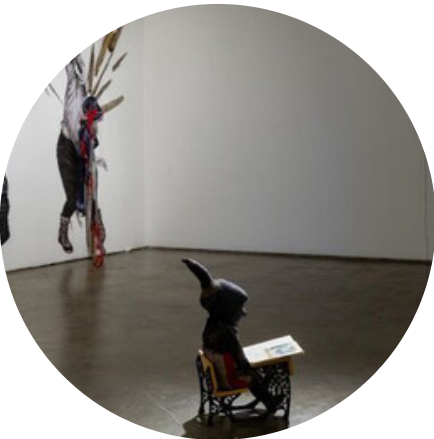
This exhibition is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, New York City Council Member Stephen Levin, and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and with generous support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Robert Lehman Foundation, Iorio Charitable Foundation, Select Equity Group Foundation, many individuals and Smack Mellon’s Members.

Smack Mellon’s programs are also made possible with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and with generous support from The New York Community Trust, The Edward and Sally Van Lier Fund of The New York Community Trust, The Roy and Niuta Titus Foundation, Jerome Foundation, The Greenwich Collection Ltd, Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation Inc., Brooklyn Arts Council, and Exploring The Arts.

Space for Smack Mellon’s programs is generously provided by the Walentas family and Two Trees Management.

The artist thanks the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant and Emerson Dorsch Gallery, Miami, for their support.

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# Smack Mellon

Smack Mellon is a nonprofit arts organization located in Dumbo, Brooklyn. Smack Mellon's mission is to nurture and support emerging, under-recognized mid-career and women artists in the creation and exhibition of new work, by providing exhibition opportunities, studio workspace, and access to equipment and technical assistance for the realization of ambitious projects.

Gallery profile

Location  
Brooklyn, United States

- 1. Paula Wilson, Spread Wild. Courtesy of Smack Mellon, phot by Etienne Frossard

