

# SmackMellon

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jessica Segall, *Human Energy*

[Gallery One]

September 23-November 19, 2023

Opening Reception: Sat. September, 6-8PM



Jessica Segall, *Human Energy* (video still), 2023.

[Public Programs]

Artist-Led Tour

Sun. October 8, 2pm

Screening and conversation with Macarena Gómez-Barris  
at e-flux Screening Room, 172 Classon Avenue, Brooklyn

Tues. November 7, 7PM

# Smack Mellon

Smack Mellon presents a new commission by Jessica Segall, unfolding as a multi-channel video installation featuring sound design by DJ, producer, and Berghain resident Steffi, and sculptural elements that mimic the design of oil field pipeline expansion loops. Exploring humanity's addictive and intimate relationship with oil, the videos document the largest extractive zones in the US—the oil fields in Kern County, California, as well as Soviet-era spas in Naftalan, Azerbaijan—where crude oil is used medicinally and the claims of its healing properties date back centuries. The installation situates Segall's research within Smack Mellon's aging architecture—a nineteenth-century boiler space—which once provided fuel and power for the entire neighborhood.

Using drone and Steadicam footage, Segall captures the sprawl of the Southern Californian oilfield, encompassing 22 miles of evenly-spaced pumpjacks. She transforms this dusty milieu by staging erotic encounters in and around the equipment, paying homage to its actual history as a queer cruising site. The videos convey a simultaneous blend of bleakness, playfulness, intimacy, and illicitness. Drones circle the sites with militaristic precision, frontal camera lights expose Leather Daddies, and Segall rides the pumpjacks as if they were mechanical bulls.

Set within the crude oil spas, the final video delves into oil as a material through slow, fetishistic encounters between oil and flesh. While today the extraction of crude oil directly symbolizes climate change, war, corporate greed, and pollution, it was once used as a medicinal salve in Ancient Persia, France, and indigenous Americas dating back to the 12th century. Segall extends oil's utility back into a timescale before combustion engines, creating a fluid universe where oil serves as personal lubricant, healing ointment, and destroyer of land and communities.

Segall's artistic practice draws inspiration from inhospitable environments, many of which she has personally encountered. These experiences include places like the Global Seed Vault in the high Arctic circle and the wildfire-stricken landscapes of California, where she explores the boundaries of human vulnerability. The project *Human Energy* delves into various facets of perversion, ranging from the capitalist exploitation of natural resource extraction to queer relationships, which are banned on screen in Azerbaijan and increasingly endangered in the United States.

Through montage and the aesthetics of slow cinema, Segall builds upon the legacy of queer filmmakers such as Barbara Hammer and Kenneth Anger, incorporates influences from land art interventions by Nancy Holt, and draws inspiration from the ecosexual performances of Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens. This installation employs fantasy as a means to comprehend the expansive global network of oil production that spans across time and space. It accentuates the process through which billions of years of fossils are extracted into billions of barrels of oil, shaping both the geology of a capitalist nation and the petro-masculine identities that bolster it, as well as those that exist within its shadows.

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*Human Energy* is part of Smack Mellon's *Close Readings* exhibition series. In this series, Smack Mellon presents a new commission by an under-recognized, early- to mid-career artist in Gallery One, accompanied by an exhibition in Gallery Two that employs the central commission as the curatorial framework.

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**Jessica Segall** is an artist that needs discipline based in Brooklyn, NY. Hostile and threatened landscapes are the sites for her work. While embedded in these sites, she plays with both the risk of engaging with the environment and the vulnerability of the environment itself, examining a queer ecology. Jessica's work is built on a foundation of research that often includes cross-disciplinary collaboration and collaboration with scientists, activists and non-human beings. She exhibits her work internationally, including at COP 26, The Fries Museum, The Coreana Museum of Art, The Havana Bienal, The Queens Museum of Art, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, The National Museum of Jewish American History, The Inside Out Museum, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Vojvodina, The National Gallery of Indonesia, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Split, Croatia, The Mongolian National Modern Art Gallery and The National Symposium for Electronic Art. Jessica is a 2023 Guggenheim Fellow and received grants from The Pollock Krasner Foundation, The Rema Hort Mann Foundation, New York Foundation for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, The Harpo Foundation, The Virginia A Groot Foundation, The FST Studioprojects Fund, The Puffin Foundation, The Arts Envoy Program and Art Matters. She attended residencies at Van Eyck Academie, MacDowell, Skowhegan, Art Omi, The Sharpe / Walentas Space Program and The Two Trees Space Program among others. Her work has been in Cabinet Magazine, The New York Times, Sculpture Magazine, Mousse Magazine and Art in America. Her work is in the collections of the Museum de Domijnen and The Manetti Shrem Museum of Art. She received her MFA from Columbia University and her BA from Bard College.

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

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