

locustprojects

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

PAULA WILSON'S *ON HIGH* REFLECTS ON THE PAST, PRESENT AND THE LIFE FORCE OF THE MOMENT

Locust Projects presents
PROJECT ROOM I

Paula Wilson: *On High*

Exhibition Dates:

November 21, 2020-

February 13, 2021

Public Hours:

Wednesday-Saturday,

11am-5pm

BY APPOINTMENT; walk-
ins as capacity permits.

[Link to make
appointments](#)

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Paula Wilson, Still from *Living Monument* (2017), Two-channel video, 1 min. Directors of Photography/Editors: Vashni Korin and Paula Wilson (left and right channels, respectively); Sound: "Speaking in My Native Tongue" by Jamel Henderson

[Miami, FL] *On High* at Locust Projects features Paula Wilson's 2017 video *Living Monument*, a one-minute, two-channel video. On one screen is footage compiled from online sources of the confederate [General Beauregard Equestrian Statue's removal in New Orleans](#) in April of 2017. On the second, is video of a covert performance by the artist, in which she dances at dawn atop the plinth before she was forced to leave the premises by law enforcement. Inspired by the vibrant jazz funeral tradition of Second-Line Parades in New Orleans, Wilson uses the empty base as a pedestal to be acted upon—celebrating, in a hand-painted costume, the creative forces required for transformation. The tunic the artist created and is wearing in the video is also featured in the exhibition.

In the wake of Black Lives Matter protests this summer sparked by the murder of George Floyd, there has been a renewed focus on symbols of white supremacy embodied in the Confederacy and a demand for their removal. The debate over Confederate symbols is not new. In 2015, after the mass shooting at the Emanuel

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African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina, the Confederate battle flag was removed from the State House after more than 50 years. Other cities started considering taking down Civil War and colonialist monuments from public grounds, including New Orleans, which removed four in April 2017. A few months later in Charlottesville, the violence during the Unite the Right rally would be the catalyst for the removal of dozens of monuments across the country. Now, some three years later, the urgency of the current moment brings Wilson's *Living Monument* forward for reflection. The artist's pre-dawn performance is hypnotic, ritual-like, seemingly coming from "on high," linking past and present, ushering in the potentials of the future. Wilson highlights black joy, moving us away from static effigies of Western power, demanding a creative and triumphant orientation to the now.

The performance was shot by filmmaker Vashni Korin with a powerful soundtrack, "Speaking in My Native Tongue" by Jamel Henderson.



Paula Wilson, Still from *Salty & Fresh* (2014), video, 8 mins 30 secs

Also featured is the video *Salty & Fresh* from 2014 accessed via a QR code as a nod to the act of looking through screens, which are ubiquitous as it is, but have predominated our lives since the start of the pandemic. Screens, cell phones, windows—the things we look at or experience things through, including each other—have been an ongoing theme in the artist's work. Here and now, it serves to remind us of the elusiveness and intangibility of the virtual experience versus IRL, but also the intangibility of capturing the essence of something wonderful, such as art and the creative act.

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Wilson's [Salty & Fresh] is a wondrous testament to the central narrative of the artistic process, a declaration that the essential, unbreakable story of the human creative act is one of which we, whether as spectator, creator, participant, are all a part." - Sarah Lewis, Associate Professor of History of Art and Architecture and African and African American Studies, Harvard University



Paula Wilson, Stills from *Salty & Fresh* (2014), video, 8 mins 30 secs

Made on Miami's historic Virginia Key Beach, in 2014, *Salty + Fresh* playfully takes on Western art historical tropes and patriarchy with the artist appearing as a massive, towering goddess, rising from the sea draped in a long, turret-like colorfully painted skirt. She uses her giant palette and brush to paint three figures who resemble Grecian clay vases. As the Poseidon-like goddess paints faces onto the three nude derrières, picnickers—in a restaging of Manet's "*Déjeuner sur l'herbe*"—observe and try to capture the scene through their cell phone cameras. Sarah Lewis, Associate Professor of History of Art and Architecture and African and African American Studies at Harvard University, describes the encounter, "The beach dwellers saw a colossal painter with brushes and palette fit for a giant emerging from the sea to fill her canvas, the most primeval one of all—our bodies, our very selves. They tried, endlessly, to photograph what they were witnessing—Paula Wilson's performative painting, *Salty & Fresh*—just as we do when we come to see the essence of the creative act—we stand mesmerized that it is always around, this fertile, eternal story. Wilson's piece is a wondrous testament to the central narrative of the artistic process, a declaration that the essential, unbreakable story of the human creative act is one of which we, whether as spectator, creator, participant, are all a part."

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Wilson's expansive multimedia practice includes video, print, painting, and textiles. Unfolding through many layers and operating on many levels, her work is characterized by lush patterns, vibrant colors, and illuminous representations. Looking at Wilson's role in our contemporary culture, the artist considers it as a mash-up of traditional and contemporary visual forms. Aware of technology's role in altering the way we see and alluding to it with prevalent imagery of cell phones, headphones, and virtual reality, Wilson reimagines art historical tropes such as Grecian vessels, monuments, self-portraiture and still life. Many of the works play with light as in interior

scenes with windows bisecting rooms to illuminate multiple viewpoints. Wilson asks, "What do we turn our attention to?", and thereby reveals her own multifaceted reality.

Paula Wilson received an MFA from Columbia and a BFA from Washington University in St. Louis, MO. Wilson first exhibited with Denny Dimin Gallery in a group exhibition called *The Unhomely* in 2017. Wilson's most recent solo exhibitions were *Spread Wild: Pleasures of the Yucca at Smack Mellon* (2018), *FLOORED* at Williamson | Knight (2018), *Salty & Fresh* at Emerson Dorsch Gallery, Miami FL (2017) and *The Backward Glance* at Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, Omaha, NE (2017). She has been included in four exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem, exhibitions at Skidmore College (2015), Inside-Out Art Museum in Beijing (2014), Postmasters Gallery (2010), Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC (2010), Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (2009), Zacheta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw (2007), Sikkema Jenkins & Co. (2013 and 2006), just to name a few. She has been featured in publications such as *Hyperallergic*, *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, *the New York Observer*, and *The New Yorker*. Wilson's artwork is in many prestigious collections including The Studio Museum in Harlem, the New York Public Library, Yale University, Saatchi Gallery, and The Fabric Workshop. The artist is represented by Denny Dimin Gallery and Emerson Dorsch Gallery, Miami.

Photo above: Paula Wilson in her solo exhibition *FLOORED* at Williamson | Knight. Image © Mario Gallucci Studio

ABOUT LOCUST PROJECTS

Founded by artists for artists in 1998, Locust Projects is Miami's longest running nonprofit alternative art space. We produce, present, and nurture ambitious and experimental new art and the exchange of ideas through commissioned exhibitions and projects, artist residencies, summer art intensives for teens, and public programs on contemporary art and curatorial practice. As a leading incubator of new art and ideas, Locust Projects emphasizes boundary-pushing creative endeavors, risk-taking and experimentation by local, national and international artists. We invest in South Florida's arts community by providing artists with project grants and empower creative careers by supporting the administrative work of being an artist through an onsite artist resource hub and access to pro bono legal services.

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ART HAPPENS HERE.