

# NIGHT GALLERY

2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021

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David Carrier, "Tomashi Jackson Rediscovered Long Island's Beleaguered Past," *Hyperallergic*, September 15, 2021.

## HYPERALLERGIC

Art   Reviews

### Tomashi Jackson Rediscovered Long Island's Beleaguered Past

Jackson's exhibition *The Land Claim* began an extensive dialogue with local Indigenous, Black, and Latinx families on Long Island's East End.



Installation view, *Tomashi Jackson: The Land Claim*, Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY, July 11–November 7, 2021. "Among Protectors (Hawthorne Road and the Pell Case)" (2021) (Photo by Dario Lasagni)

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WATER MILL, NY — Until recently, artists and vacationers lived inexpensively in many parts of the Hamptons and the surrounding communities. Now, of course, that situation has dramatically changed. Thanks, however, to zoning regulations, there still are considerable areas devoted to farming, which bring in farm workers who often have to commute by bus. But real estate prices have skyrocketed, and many upscale stores and restaurants have moved in. In response to gentrification and, more recently, to the urban exodus prompted by COVID-19, there also are numerous pop-up sites organized by the major New York galleries. As always, the art business follows the money. This is a familiar situation; it's not so different from what happened in the East Village of Manhattan in the 1980s, where the art galleries paved the way for posh real estate and other forms of gentrification.

The Parrish Museum, whose large present building opened in 2012, has a special interest in presenting the many American artists who have lived and worked in the East End of Long Island. And Tomashi Jackson's *The Land Claim* presents work by a visitor who has studied and responded critically to the recent history of this region. Starting in January 2020, Jackson, who was invited by the museum, began an extensive dialogue with local Indigenous, Black, and Latinx families on Long Island's East End. Conversation with a Shinnecock Nation member about land appropriation inspired the title.



Installation view, *Tomashi Jackson: The Land Claim*, Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY, July 11-November 7, 2021. Left to right: "The Three Sisters" (2021); collaborative work: "Vessels of Light (From Jeremy, Juni, and Steven)" (2021), pigmented, archival ink on polycarbonate sheets. Window installation with photographs by Jeremy Dennis; Richard "Juni" Wingfield; and Juntos, New York, USA, 2020, by Steven Molina Contreras (Photo by Dario Lasagni)

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The exhibition has four distinct parts: an outdoor audio recording of these interviews (“The Interviews,” 2021); a vinyl window installation, and one painting, in the museum lobby; six more large paintings in the first gallery; and, finally, in the next gallery, archival materials such as photographs and books. The audio and archival materials are the basis for her window and paintings. The window, “Vessels of Light (From Jeremy, Juni, and Steven)” (2021), is composed of enlarged photographs from Jackson’s interview subjects, including images of Shinnecock children and descendants of Black farm workers. The brightly colored panes cast violet, blue, and yellow shadows onto the lobby floor; through them, the Parrish’s large sculpture garden can be seen. The painting, “Three Sisters” (2021), which hangs adjacent to “Vessels of Light,” has photographs visible underneath reddish translucent sheets, which partially obscure the women’s faces.

Jackson’s paintings employ locally sourced fabrics, potato bags, ground shells from a Shinnecock wampum carver, and soil from the museum’s site; potatoes were grown at the site, which was once a farm employing Black and Latin migrants. She paints historical photographic images in halftone lines and overlays them with images printed on transparent vinyl strips, the paintings framed in wood constructions by Ruben Palencia that extend out from the wall at the bottom.



Installation view, Tomashi Jackson: *The Land Claim*, Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY, July 11–November 7, 2021. Left to right: “Among Harvests (Aserrin de colores)” (2021); “Among Protectors (Hawthorne Road and the Pell Case)” (2021); “Among Gardens” (2021) (Photo by Dario Lasagni)

The works are complex constructions. “Among Protectors (Hawthorne Road and the Pell Case)” (2021), for example, recreates a photograph of a woman standing in front of a bulldozer; she is protesting a Hamptons development on sacred Shinnecock land. The piece also includes an image of another activist, Chenae Bullock, leading a Shinnecock prayer service at a construction site where the remains of what was most likely a member of the Shinnecock Nation were discovered. To these layers, Jackson has added the local soil, dust from the studio of a Shinnecock wampum carver, and burlap potato sacks.



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Installation view, Tomashi Jackson: *The Land Claim*, Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY, July 11–November 7, 2021. "Among Fruits (Big Shane and the Farmer)" (2021) (Photo by Dario Lasagni)

I usually focus on the work on display, not paying much attention to the wall labels and other auxiliary information that can be found online. And so, I confess, initially I didn't pay much attention to Jackson's archival materials. Her exhibition had, so I believed, two obviously competing goals: to make convincing paintings and to document the political and social history of the Hamptons. The paintings seemed transparently indebted to Robert Rauschenberg's 1960s silkscreens, but where his combinations of photographs of Old Master art and contemporary news images often responded only tangentially to politics, Jackson aspires to make a critical statement by using local photographs. Yet, set in the magnificent, very high-ceilinged, white-walled Herzog & de Meuron galleries, her works risk becoming luxuries, like all art in such settings. And that is an uneasy position for a political artist.

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But first impressions can be misleading. When I looked further and thought more, I realized that I had completely misunderstood *The Land Claim* because I had misidentified Jackson's artworks. Far from being mere paintings, they are two-part artifacts: paintings plus archival supplements. Without her audio and archival presentation, which highlight the presence of communities that are in danger of being marginalized or even disappearing, these paintings would remain incomplete.

The museum website advises: "Visitors are encouraged to add images, anecdotes, and experiences to the narrative by attaching their own family photos and written accounts to the North Wall," which is in the second gallery devoted to the exhibition. That is an important statement, for many of the museum's visitors come from a relatively privileged position and so we need to consider the social costs of our lifestyles. The very titles of her paintings "Among Fruits," "Among Heirs," and "Among Protectors" (all 2021) emphasize the importance of this beleaguered social history, which needs to be preserved. And if the claims of her art will be heeded, that is one powerful step toward making that happen.

*Tomashi Jackson: The Land Claim* continues at the Parrish Art Museum (279 Montauk Highway, Water Mill, New York) through November 7.