

The Lure of the Dark: Contemporary Painters Conjure the Night

Featuring paintings — including new commissions — by a diverse group of over a dozen contemporary artists



Jeronimo Elespe, *Invitaciones peligrosas*, 2017
 Mixed media on panel, 39 x 25.5 in.

NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS — From Rembrandt and *The Night Watch* to Georges de La Tour's candlelit scenes of the seventeenth century, James McNeill Whistler's woozy *Nocturnes*, Vincent van Gogh's dizzying *Starry Night*, and Edward Hopper's lonely *Nighthawks*, artists have sought to capture the mood of the night. Featuring paintings — including new commissions — by a diverse group of over a dozen contemporary artists, including Patrick Bermingham, William Binnie, Cynthia Daignault, Noah Davis, TM Davy, Jeronimo Elespe, Cy Gavin, Josephine Halvorson, Shara Hughes, Sam McKinniss, Wilhelm Neusser, Dana Powell, Kenny Rivero, and Alexandria Smith, ***The Lure of the Dark*** opens on **Saturday, March 3**, with a members opening reception on **Saturday, March 24**, at **5:30pm**.

Sex, death, romance, magic, terror, wonder, alienation, and freedom — the night invites a myriad of often contradictory associations. For centuries, painters have been drawn to the mysteries and marvels of the night and its perceptual and poetic possibilities.

Of course, an exhibition about the night is also about the light that illuminates the darkness, from the moon and the stars, to candles, cigarettes, and the glow of cell phones. Many of the artists in *The Lure of the Dark* look back to predecessors, capturing the night en plein air, sometimes completing a painting in a single sitting or night. The exhibition illustrates the ways in which the hours of darkness continue to provoke the contemporary imagination, providing apt metaphors for the diversity and intersections of human experience along with the anxious tenor of the day.

Patrick Bermingham has been painting the night for over two decades, both inside his studio and outside under the moonlight. The muted palette of his massive 8x16 ft. work, *Midway on our path of life* (2017) approximates the limited gray, black, and white hues that we see at night. The shift that occurs as night vision and the rods take over also happens with Bermingham's paintings, which are exhibited in

very low light. With patient looking, the rather sketch-like appearance of the large high-contrast painting becomes more clearly defined, and the work appears to glow with moonlight.



William Binnie, *Black Blizzard*, 2016
Acrylic and gesso on canvas, collection of Jordan and Dorianne Passman

Texas-raised, Williamstown resident **William Binnie** pictures the racial terror associated with night with his recent work *The Vine that Ate the South* (2018). In his hyperrealist style, he examines the myth surrounding kudzu, a non-native species that lives large in the Southern imagination as a monstrous weed that enshrouds millions of acres in land under its dark tangled mass. A burning torch on the same canvas evokes the frightening images of the white nationalist rally in Charlottesville.

Outside a small, remote cabin in nearby Stockport, New York, **Cynthia Dagnault** spent a winter alone, painting *40 Days / 40 Nights* (2014). Working en plein air, she painted two paintings each day over the

course of 40 days, spending four to six hours painting a view through the trees in daylight and then another four to six hours painting the view after the sun set. Painting the same patch of forest and sky night after night, Dagnault beautifully captures the dramatic changes in light and color — from the pinks and oranges of sunset to the deep blues and blacks of the witching hours.

Painted after his father's death, **Noah Davis'** *Painting for My Dad* (2011) taps into night's close association with death — the sleep that does not end. Depicting a lone figure carrying a lantern into the dark in what looks like a deep cave or an infinite starry night sky, the painting has become even more poignant in the wake of the artist's own death in 2015.

In an homage to Henri Rousseau's *The Sleeping Gypsy* (1897), **TM Davy** has created the monumental *Fire Island Moonrise*. Painted in his masterful, traditional style, the 11x11 ft. self-portrait with his husband transports viewers to the transcendent, erotically charged beach scene. Looking up at the work, you can almost feel the light on your face and the domed sky above your head.

Jeronimo Elespe paints dreamlike scenes based on autobiographical details, lingering between myth and the mundane. The artist's pointillist-like application of paint often evokes the illusion of night, creating atmospheric images that suggest the dark. In *Hesperides* (2017) the maidens of the evening from Greek mythology emerge like ghosts from a crepuscular mist wearing head scarves and carrying goblets.



TM Davy, *Portrait of Darkness*, 2012
Oil on canvas, 59.05 x 51.18 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Van Doren Waxter



Sam McKinniss, *Northern Lights*, 2017
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 96 x 84 in.

Showing two new works, including one that measures nearly 15 feet, **Cy Gavin** often paints the night. Drawn to the darkness when color is difficult to discern, he lets his imagination take over. His fantastic hues — acid greens and fluorescent pinks — are inspired in part by the vivid colors of Bermuda by day: pink hibiscus, green ferns, turquoise water, and the purple iris-like Bermudiana flower. They also impart the intense emotions embedded in the land and the legacies of slavery that linger on the island. For MASS MoCA Gavin painted a monumental image of Bash Bish Falls under ice, paying homage to the landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich.

Josephine Halvorson, who is based in nearby New Marlborough, MA, created her “Night Window” works during a residency at the French Academy at the Villa Medici in Rome between 2014 and 2015. Each painting in the series is a unique iteration of a single view of the window in her atelier and the night sky beyond. They are

titled with the date on which they were painted, a cue that each is a distinct portrait of a particular experience. Together the works are a study of nuance and the passage of time on both human and cosmological levels.

Shara Hughes’ vibrant, invented landscapes pay homage to a pantheon of early 20th-century painters, including Henri Matisse and the Fauves, Vincent van Gogh, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Marsden Hartley, and Arthur Dove. Hughes often allows confusion between the illusion of moonlight and sunlight in her paintings, as is true in *Spins from Swiss* (2017). The work was inspired by the artist’s experience of driving through the mountains of Switzerland. Moving in and out, up and down, between dark and light, the painting recreates the dizzying feeling of the circuitous roads and soaring peaks.

Known for paintings based on images he sources online, from animals and flowers to celebrity portraits (he was commissioned to paint the musician Lorde for the cover of her 2017 album *Melodrama*), **Sam McKinniss** is showing a new work based on an image of singer Lana Del Rey. Another new work, *Northern Lights* (2017), an ecstatic vision of the Aurora Borealis that suggests the technicolor light displays and drug-induced hallucinations of urban nightclubs.

A recent artist-in-residence in MASS MoCA’s studio program, **Wilhelm Neusser** looks to the legacy of Caspar David Friedrich and German Romanticism in his enigmatic landscapes which seem to be as much a psychological terrain as a specific geography. In *Nocturne/Doublemoon*



Wilhelm Neusser, *Nocturne/Tower*, 2017
Oil on linen, 20 x 12 in.
Courtesy of the artist

(2017), he merges the mysterious atmosphere of Romantic painting with elements of Haruki Murakami's novel *1Q84*, named for George Orwell's dystopian vision of 1984. The intense, green glow of Neusser's painting gives it a futuristic feel while reminding us that at night, it is the light with the shortest wavelengths — green — that can be seen best.

Dana Powell began her series of night paintings in the aftershocks of the 2016 presidential election. Conveying the anxious tenor of the time, images of desolate roadways — like *Ghost Drive* (2017) — are filled with the suspense of an Alfred Hitchcock film. The dark scene, and the hazy apparition visible on the side of the road, invite any number of imagined scenarios as we wonder what might be waiting around the next bend.



Alexandria Smith, *The Uncertainty of It all*, 2014
Acrylic/glitter on panel, 24 x 24 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Kenny Rivero's new work was begun at the nearby Buxton School where the artist, formerly a student, was in residence in August 2017. The work recalls the dramas of his Washington Heights neighborhood and both the excitement and fears inspired by a nocturnal New York lit by street lamps, car lights, fires, and the warm glow emanating from apartment windows.

Alexandria Smith's paintings frame the body as something slightly wild and unruly — a foreign terrain to be explored like the night. Her cartoon-like images suggest a child's point of view, while evoking images from fairy tales, which often articulate social taboos that twist the formation of identity and ideas about race, gender, and sexuality. In *The Skin We Speak* (2017), the night offers a refuge for two young women — or the self and a reflection — to explore a language spoken by the body, undeterred by the narratives of others.

About the Artists

Patrick Bermingham (b. Hamilton, Ontario) lives between Toronto and Dundas, Ontario. He received a BFA from Central St. Martins, London. He also apprenticed with printmaker David Blackwood and sculptor Elizabeth Holbrook and worked in the studio of Anthony Caro. Since 1995, he has been making night paintings in locations including Guatemala, Morocco, and Canada's Georgian Bay. Recent exhibitions include installations at Hughes Room, Toronto (2015), and in the No Vacancy Art Festival in conjunction with the Art Gallery of Burlington (2016). His work is on view at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C. In 2014 he won a commission to design a large-scale monument to workers by the United Operating Engineers Union in Oakville, Ontario.

William Binnie (b. 1985, Dallas, TX) lives and works between New York and Williamstown, MA. He holds a BA from Pitzer College, Claremont, CA, and an MFA from SMU Meadows School of the Arts. He has had solo exhibitions at LMAKgallery, New York (2017); Paul Loya Gallery, Los Angeles (2016); The Public Trust, Dallas (2013); and Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle (2013). Binnie's work has been included in group shows at UNO-St. Claude Gallery, University of New Orleans (2017); HWW8, Los Angeles (2016); the University of Texas at Dallas (2016); Dallas Contemporary, Dallas (2014); and Ballroom Marfa, Marfa,

TX (2013). In 2014, Binnie participated in the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Artist Residency program in Captiva, Florida.

Cynthia Daignault (b. 1978, Baltimore, MD) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She earned her BA from Stanford University. She has had solo exhibitions at The Sunday Painter, London (2017) The FLAG Art Foundation (2017); Rowhouse Project, Baltimore (2015); and White Columns, New York (2011). Her work has been included in numerous group shows at venues including the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art, Portland, ME (2017); Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY (2017); the Brooklyn Museum, NY (2014, 2015); the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver (2015); and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (2014). Awards include a Rema Hort Mann Foundation grant (2011) and a MacDowell Colony fellowship (2010).

Noah Davis (b. 1983, Seattle, WA; d. 2015, Ojai, CA) was a painter and installation artist who primarily worked out of Los Angeles. He studied at Cooper Union School of Art in New York. In 2012, he and his wife Karon Davis co-founded the Underground Museum in the working-class neighborhood of Arlington Heights in Los Angeles. He had solo shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA (2015); Papillion Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2014); Roberts and Tilton, Culver City, CA (2013), James Harris Gallery, Seattle, WA (2012), and Tilton Gallery, New York, NY (2011). In 2017 the Frye Art Museum, Seattle, featured his paintings in a two-person show with the work of his brother, Kahlil Joseph. His work has also been included in exhibitions at the Studio Museum of Harlem, New York, NY (2012); Torrance Art Museum, Torrance, CA (2012); the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C. (2011); and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA (2010).

TM Davy (b. 1980, New York, NY) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, and holds a degree from the School of Visual Arts He has had solo exhibitions at 11R, New York (2017) and Exile, Berlin (2011); his work has also been featured in LISTE Art Fair, Basel, Switzerland (2012). Davy's work has been included in group exhibitions at the FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2017); The LeRoy Neiman Gallery, Columbia University, New York (2016), the 10th Gwangju Biennale (2014); the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2013); Tate Modern, London, (2010); and Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela (2010). His paintings have been featured in Sarah Michelson's performance projects at the Whitney Biennial, New York (2012); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); and The Kitchen, New York (2011).

Jeronimo Elespe (b. 1975, Madrid, Spain) lives and works in Madrid. He holds a BFA from the School of Visual Arts and an MFA from Yale University. He has had numerous solo exhibitions at 11R, New York (2011, 2013, 2015); LABOR, Mexico City (2015); Ivorypress, Madrid (2014); Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga, Spain (2012); and the University Museum of Contemporary Art, UMass, Amherst, MA (2004). Elespe's work has been included in group shows at institutions such as Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Coruña, Spain (2013); Museo de Arte Moderno y Contemporáneo de Santander, Spain (2013); and the Tang Museum, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY (2006).

Cy Gavin (b. 1985, Pittsburgh, PA) lives outside Poughkeepsie, New York. He received a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University and an MFA from Columbia University. He has had recent solo exhibitions at Various Small Fires, Los Angeles (2017); and Sargent's Daughters, New York (2015, 2016), as well as group shows at JTT Gallery, New York (2017); Callicoon Fine Arts, New York (2017); Carl Kostyál

Gallery, Stockholm (2017); and the Rubell Family Collection, Miami, where he was an artist-in-residence in 2016.

Josephine Halvorson (b. 1981, Brewster, MA) lives and works in western Massachusetts. She earned a BFA from Cooper Union and an MFA from Columbia University. She has had solo exhibitions at Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, NY (2016); Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York (2015); the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina (2015); and Fondation des États-Unis, Paris, France (2008). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2017); Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska, Lincoln (2016); Fondazione Memmo Arte Contemporanea, Rome (2015); High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2014); and the School of Visual Arts, New York (2010). Awards and residencies include a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant (2009); a Rome Prize from French Academy at the Villa Médicis, Italy (2014-15); and the Rauschenberg Residency in Captiva, FL (2016).

Shara Hughes (b. 1981, Atlanta, GA) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She earned her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. She has had solo exhibitions at Rachel Uffner, New York (2017); Gallery Met, Metropolitan Opera, New York (2017); Marlborough Chelsea (2016); MOCA GA, Atlanta (2014); the Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta (2013); and Metroquadro, Rivoli, Italy (2011, 2009). Her work was included in the Whitney Biennial, New York (2017), and in numerous group exhibitions at venues such as Brand New Gallery, Milan (2016), and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2015). Hughes has also been an artist-in-residence at the Atlantic Center for the Arts (2013) and the Working Artist Project at MOCA GA (2012), and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture (2011).

Sam McKinniss (b. 1985, Northfield, MN) lives and works in New York City. He holds a BA from the University of Hartford and an MFA from New York University. Solo exhibitions of his work have been shown at team (gallery, inc), New York (2016); team (bungalow), Los Angeles (2015); Proof Gallery, Boston (2010); New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT (2008) and Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT (2008). His work has been included in group exhibitions at JTT, New York (2017); Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, CA (2017); Robert Blumenthal Gallery, East Hampton, NY (2014); and Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA (2011). McKinniss received the New Boston Fund Individual Artist Fellowship from Greater Hartford Arts Council (2009) and was a GO!, Emerging Artist Contest Winner for Real Art Ways (2008).

Wilhelm Neusser (b. Cologne, Germany) studied at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Karlsruhe. He lived and worked in Cologne until his relocation to the United States in 2011. His work has been widely exhibited, and he has received numerous awards and fellowships, including ZVAB Phönix Art Prize, Tutzing am Starnberger See; Artist Research Trust (A.R.T.) Fellowship at the Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT. He has had residencies at Boots Contemporary Art Space, St. Louis, MO; and Vermont Studio Center. He also participated in MASS MoCA's residency program. Neusser lives and works in Cambridge, MA.

Dana Powell (b. 1989, Milwaukee, WI) graduated with a BFA from Cooper Union in 2015. She has had solo shows at James Fuentes' Allen & Eldridge, New York, NY; Sardine Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; and The Still House Group, Brooklyn, NY. Her work has been included in group shows at many venues including, Castledrone, Boston, and County Gallery, Palm Beach, and in 2017 her work was chosen as an Artforum Critic's Pick. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Kenneth Rivero (b. New York, NY) currently lives between New York City and New Haven, NY. He holds a BFA from the School of Visual Arts, NY, and an MFA from Yale University, New Haven, CT. He has had solo exhibitions at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, New York (2017) and Roswell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, NM (2016). Rivero's work has been included in group exhibitions at the Perez Art Museum, Miami, FL (2017); Zilkha Gallery at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT (2017); the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, MO (2015); Centro Cultural de España en Santo Domingo, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (2015); Bronx Art Space (2014); N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI (2014); El Museo del Barrio, New York (2013); and Pera Museum, Istanbul (2009). He was awarded residencies at Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture (2017); the Fountainhead Residency, Miami, FL (2016); the Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program, Roswell, NM (2015); and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace program, NY (2014).

Alexandria Smith (b. 1981, Bronx, NY) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She earned a BFA in illustration from Syracuse University and an MFA from The New School's Parsons School of Design. She also holds an MA in Art Education from New York University. She has had recent solo exhibitions at the Ark Gallery, University of Iowa (2016); Scaramouche Gallery, New York (2014); and Rush Arts Gallery, New York (2011); and has been included in group exhibitions at Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York (2015); The Schomburg Center, New York (2014); and Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York (2014). Smith is the recipient of numerous awards and residencies including, most recently, Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture (2015); the Virginia A. Myers Fellowship at the University of Iowa (2015), A.I.R. Gallery Fellowship, Brooklyn, NY (2014); and the Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown, MA (2013, 2014). She is an Assistant Professor of Art at Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

Sponsorship

Major exhibition support is provided by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the Barr Foundation, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Contributing exhibition support is provided by The Artist's Resource Trust (A.R.T.) Fund, a fund of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation.

Images

High-resolution images are available through this link: bit.ly/LureoftheDark.

About MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest (and largest) centers for making, displaying, and enjoying today's most important art, music, dance, theater, film, and video. MASS MoCA's more than 250,000 sq. ft. of gallery space includes partnerships with Laurie Anderson, the Louise Bourgeois Trust, Jenny Holzer, Anselm Kiefer with the Hall Art Foundation, Sol LeWitt, and James Turrell.

Gallery admission is \$20 for adults, \$18 for veterans and seniors, \$12 for students, \$8 for children 6 to 16, and free for children 5 and under. Members are admitted free year-round. The Hall Art Foundation's Anselm Kiefer exhibition is seasonal and will reopen on May 26, 2018. For additional information: [413.662.2111 x1](tel:413.662.2111) or visit massmoca.org.

Hours

MASS MoCA is open from 11am to 5pm, closed Tuesdays, through June 22. From June 23 through September 3, MASS MoCA's galleries are open seven days a week — from 10am to 6pm Sundays through Wednesdays and from 10am to 7pm Thursdays through Saturdays.