

# EJ HILL: BRAKE RUN HELIX

MASS MoCA Building 5

October 29, 2022 – January 2024

For *Brake Run Helix*—opening at MASS MoCA on October 29, 2022—EJ Hill will create a sprawling exhibition that incorporates freestanding sculptures, paintings, a stage for performances, and a rideable sculptural installation inspired by the form and function of roller coasters. Filling MASS MoCA’s famed 100-yard-long Building 5 gallery, the exhibition is Hill’s first solo museum exhibition and will be his largest installation to date.

Hill’s practice focuses on experiences that intermingle public struggle, endurance, trauma, and joy, whether within athletics, religion, the American education system, or amusement parks. Hill has often performed as part of these projects, explaining that “my body holds the echo or remnant of something.” He works towards a future that elevates those who are frequently not seen and heard.

In the United States, amusement parks were contested sites throughout Jim Crow-era desegregation efforts for equitable access to pleasure, leisure, and recreation. For Hill, roller coasters are public monuments to the possibility of attaining joy—which, as he notes, is “a critical component of social equity.”

Since he was young, Hill has been obsessed with rollercoasters. He recalls, “When I was little, I had these notebooks and they’d all be covered with roller coaster drawings.” He had always dreamed of building a roller coaster. He adds, “This image has always shown up, time and time again: this idea of the up and down and the round and round of a closed circuit.” In recent years, he has made two installations that used coasters’ forms on a model-like scale, first at the Studio Museum, New York, in 2016, and later in Venice in 2017. At MASS MoCA, for the first time, members of the public will be invited to participate in an activation of the exhibition by riding the sculptural roller coaster at its center.

A constellation of large-scale sculptures—made during Hill’s upcoming summer 2022 residency at MASS MoCA—riff on the form of wooden roller coasters: the twists of the track, the shapes of the carts, the geometry of the supports. Underneath the mezzanine is an installation of works providing a retrospective look at his decades-long fascination with coasters and how it has manifested in his practice, including a new series of paintings commissioned for this exhibition.

Fueled by MASS MoCA’s commitment to commingling visual and performing art, Hill’s expansion in scale will be accompanied by an expansion in performance, which has long been central to his practice. Over the course of the exhibition, the installation’s stage will be activated by musicians, thinkers, and community groups. Alexandra Foradas, Curator at MASS MoCA, notes, “EJ’s exhibition is an offering to our community—not only to experience the individual and collective joy of the sculpture’s activation by participants who choose to ride the coaster, but also to activate the space as a whole with conversations, performances, and gatherings. Our Visual Arts, Performing Arts, and Education departments are excited to be working with EJ and

with partners in the Berkshires and around the world to convene live events in the exhibition in the spirit of joy.”

Artist and roller coaster enthusiast Robert Cartmell—whose drawings inspired a number of Hill’s own drawings and paintings—once said that “a roller coaster is the most musical architecture ever built.” Hill’s installation builds on this notion, transforming the usual terror-streaked individual pleasure of riding a roller coaster into a collective experience of contemplation and joy.

*Brake Run Helix* will open at MASS MoCA on October 29, 2022. It is curated by Alexandra Foradas, Curator of Visual Art at MASS MoCA. Makayla Bailey is the Co-editor and Interpretation Consultant. Design consultation by Christopher Torres, Agency Artifact.

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## **BIOS**

**EJ Hill** (b. 1985) has held residencies at OXY ARTS, Occidental College (2021), Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University (2019), and The Studio Museum in Harlem (2016). Hill’s work is currently featured in the 2022 Whitney Biennial, *Quiet as It’s Kept*, and has previously been exhibited at OXY ARTS, Occidental College, Los Angeles (2022); Prospect 5, New Orleans (2021); Made in LA, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); The Underground Museum, Los Angeles (2017); The Future Generation Art Prize at the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2017); and the Studio Museum in Harlem (2016). Hill studied at the University of California, Los Angeles (MFA) and Columbia College, Chicago (BFA). His recent work addresses the status of the education system as a site of joy and trauma. Much of what he knows, he has learned from: Estelle Thompson, Karen Thompson, Ernest Hill Jr., Margaret Nomentana, Joan Giroux, Adam Brooks and Mat Wilson (*Industry of the Ordinary*), Andrea Fraser, Mario Ybarra Jr., Matt Austin, Young Chung, Jordan Casteel, TLC, Lauryn Hill, and Augie Grahn. He is forever indebted to these educators and thanks them endlessly. He lives and works in Los Angeles. [ejhill.info](http://ejhill.info)

**Makayla Bailey** (Co-editor and Interpretation Consultant) is a writer and curator based in New York. Bailey has held positions at Rhizome, MoMA, LAXART, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, where she organized the museum’s first digital exhibition, *Hearts in Isolation*.

**Alexandra Foradas** (Curator) has curated exhibitions at MASS MoCA including *Bibliothecaphilia* (2015) and *Kissing through a Curtain* (2020; catalogue 2021), and solo exhibitions of work by Jenny Holzer (2017, 2019), Janice Kerbel (2017), and Taryn Simon (2018, 2021), among others.

**Christopher Torres** (Design Consultant) is founding principal of Agency Artifact, an urbanism and landscape studio in Los Angeles, CA. His studio creates projects of all scales from garden to masterplan, delivering bold ideas for a more equitable public realm.

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## IMAGES

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### **About MASS MoCA**

MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest centers for making and enjoying today's most evocative art. With vast galleries and a stunning collection of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace all forms of art: music, sculpture, dance, film, painting, photography, theater, and new, boundary-crossing works of art that defy easy classification. Much of the work we show in our light-filled spaces, on our technically sophisticated stages, and within our lovely network of late 19th century courtyards is made here during extended fabrication and rehearsal residencies that bring hundreds of the world's most brilliant and innovative artists to North Adams all year round. For more information about MASS MoCA, visit [www.massmoca.org](http://www.massmoca.org).

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