

Press Release

Exhibition

Wild Life: Elizabeth Murray & Jessi Reaves

May 1–August 9, 2020



Above left: Elizabeth Murray, *Tangled*, 1989-90. Oil on canvas on wood, 83 1/2 x 66 x 19 inches. Collection Dr. Robert Feldman, Cohoe, New York. ©2020 The Murray-Holman Family Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Above right: Jessi Reaves, *Twice Is Not Enough (Red to Green Chair)*, 2016. Wood, sawdust, steel, foam, silk, leather, and cotton, 39 x 28 x 32 inches. Collection Hope Atherton and Gavin Brown, New York, New York.

#MurrayandReaves
#atCAMH
@camhouston

Media Contact

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HOUSTON, TEXAS (February 5, 2020)—Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) is pleased to announce the upcoming exhibition *Wild Life: Elizabeth Murray & Jessi Reaves* which brings together drawings and paintings by Elizabeth Murray (b. 1940, Chicago, Illinois; d. 2007, Hebron, New York) and the work of New York-based artist Jessi Reaves (b. 1986, Portland, Oregon). Although Murray and Reaves are generations apart, this exhibition highlights each artist's simultaneously lyrical, playful, and rigorous engagement with the decorative, domestic, and bodily. The exhibition opens on the evening of Thursday, April 30, 2020 with a Member preview from 6–7PM and a public

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

5216 Montrose Boulevard
Houston, Texas 77006
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Jessi Reaves
Idol of the Hares, 2014
Oak, polyurethane foam, silk, cotton, aluminum, and ink
38 × 28 × 48 inches
Collection Sam and Erin Falls, Los Angeles, California



Elizabeth Murray
Night Empire, 1967-68
Oil on canvas
51 1/2 × 48 inches
Collection Arthur and Susan Murray Resnick
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opening from 7–9PM. The exhibition will remain on view through Sunday, August 9, 2020. As always, admission to CAMH is free.

Wild Life takes the form of both a survey and a two-person exhibition. Works by Murray spanning the 1960s to the 2000s will be presented alongside a selection of Reaves’s sculptural assemblages of the last five years, including her signature ottomans and a site-specific carpeted platform. In their raucous questioning of so-called “good taste,” Murray and Reaves each elevate and emphasize the aesthetic value of the “detail”—historically associated with the ornamental, domestic, and everyday, and thus the feminine—only to violently unsettle and explode such “bad objects.”

Murray is best known for her monumental, fractured canvases depicting cartoonish, domestic scenes and still lifes. Her earliest works from the late 1960s, in particular a series of small paintings of the Empire State Building featuring tromp l’oeil borders of rippling fabrics or leafy vines, reflect the influences of Surrealism and Pop, as well as the work of peers now associated with the Hairy Who and Bay Area Funk movements. Murray would soon turn to a reduced visual language of gestural and geometric abstraction. Yet, she never entirely abandoned representational imagery, nor was the domestic sphere far from the artist’s mind, as paintings such as *Up Step* and *White Down Step* (both 1973) attest. Over time, Murray’s shapes expanded beyond the surface of her compositions to form the frame. In 1980, the canvases—now massive in scale—cracked open into multi-paneled paintings depicting splintering cups, kitchen tables, and fragmented body parts, eventually leading to Murray’s signature, monumental constructions of overlapping and interpenetrating shaped canvases.

Despite the significant critical reception Murray received during her lifetime, her work remains an outlier of sorts—avoiding easy categorization and resisting affiliation with a singular historical movement or style. So too does her influence on recent generations of artists, as well as her significant impact on broader conversations regarding the daily and domestic, remain under-examined. Positioning the two artists’ work together both reveals Murray’s lasting influence and historically contextualizes Reaves.

Reaves’s eccentric, garish, and surreal sculptures made of ripped, recombined, and reupholstered amalgamations of couches and chairs—often by noted modernist designers such as Marcel Breuer, Herman Miller, and Isamu Noguchi—extend Murray’s own cartoonish plays into three dimensions. Sumptuous and grotesque in equal measure, Reaves’s work both literally and figuratively performs a process of undoing, a laying bare, or laying to waste, of the modernist ideal of form following function. Her often discomfiting assemblages occupy a space between sculpture and furniture, as they puzzle

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Jessi Reaves
Java Haunt Ottoman w/ Parked Chair, 2017
Plywood, foam, leather, fabric, paint, hardware,
and webbing
30 x 120 x 62 inches
Private collection



Elizabeth Murray
C Painting, 1980-81
Oil on canvas
109 x 114 inches
Collection Paula Cooper, New York, New York
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Rights Society (ARS), New York

out and defy a history in which ornament (or craft)—traditionally associated, and pejoratively so, with “women’s work”—and modernist design are assumed irreconcilable. Reaves, like Murray, irreverently plays with color and form, high and low cultural references, and notions of masculinity and femininity. In each artist’s work, we find a refusal of rigid categorizations and, instead, an embrace of the nuanced and often ambiguous conceptions of the body and the home, wherein both body and home are continuously coming together and falling apart.

Wild Life is the first institutional presentation of Murray’s work in Texas since the historic 1987 traveling exhibition *Elizabeth Murray: Paintings and Drawings* at the Dallas Museum of Art. It is the first presentation of Reaves’s work in the south, as well as the first exhibition to survey her work of the last five years.

Wild Life: Elizabeth Murray & Jessi Reaves is organized by Rebecca Matalon, Curator, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

Publication

Wild Life: Elizabeth Murray & Jessi Reaves will be accompanied by a full-color exhibition catalogue, co-published by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and Dancing Foxes Press. The illustrated publication will feature an essay by Matalon, a conversation between Reaves and writer and musician Johanna Fateman, as well as a reprinted conversation between Murray and editor and filmmaker Kate Horsfield, originally published in a 1986 issue of *Profile* magazine.

Support

Presenting Sponsorship for *Wild Life: Elizabeth Murray & Jessi Reaves* has been provided by Agnes Gund with additional support from Leah Bennett.

Public Programs

These events are free, open to the public, and take place at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Seating is limited. Please check camh.org for a complete list of Museum programs relating to this exhibition.

Exhibition Opening | *Wild Life: Elizabeth Murray & Jessi Reaves*
Thursday, April 30, 2020
Member Preview | 6–7PM
Public Opening | 7–9PM

In Conversation | Artist Jessi Reaves and CAMH Curator Rebecca Matalon
Saturday, May 2, 2020 | 2–3PM

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Open Studio | Nature's Texture
Saturday, May 2, 2020 | 2-4PM

Performance | Musiq̃a
Thursday, May 7, 2020 | 6:30-7:30PM

Talk and Screening | Julia Trotta and CAMH Curator Rebecca Matalon
Thursday, May 14, 2020 | 6:30-8PM

Open Studio | Everyday Objects
Saturday, June 6, 2020 | 2-4PM

Family Day
Saturday, July 25, 2020 | 1-4PM

CAMH Mission

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally.

General Information

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, at the corner of Montrose and Bissonnet, in the heart of Houston's Museum District. Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 10AM-7PM, Thursday 10AM-9PM, Saturday 10AM-6PM, and Sunday Noon-6PM. Admission is always free. For more information, visit camh.org or call 713.284.8250.