

Art21 Enters Julie Mehretu's Harlem Church Studio to Document a Monumental Museum Commission

The new film follows a year of exclusive access to the artist's process



Artist Julie Mehretu at work on "HOWL, eon (I, II)" (2017). Production still from the Art21 *Extended Play* film, *Julie Mehretu: Politicized Landscapes*. © Art21, Inc. 2017.

(NEW YORK — September 13, 2017) — Art21 announced today the premiere of a new short film chronicling artist **Julie Mehretu** during the making of the artist's monumental commission for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). Over the course of a year, Art21 was granted **exclusive access** to film the artist and her team as they worked on the paintings in a disused church in Harlem. The film, titled *Julie Mehretu: Politicized Landscapes*, is the latest from Art21's recently rebranded digital series, *Extended Play*.

The paintings, titled "HOWL, eon (I, II)" (2017), were installed in the atrium of SFMOMA's newly expanded and renovated building in late August and unveiled to the public in early September 2017.

Continuing a nearly two-decade-long tradition of offering rare glimpses into the working processes of contemporary artists, Art21 documented many hours of work throughout the cavernous Harlem studio space. The resulting footage provides an intimate look at the making of these landmark paintings, capturing moments from the stretching of the canvases, to the development of the underpaintings, to visits from composer and friend **Jason Moran**.

Art21 has a long-standing history with Julie Mehretu, initially featuring the artist in the 2009 season of the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* television series. Over the last eight years, Art21 has produced **six films** delving into different aspects of the artist's work. "Mehretu's work is a staple of our film and education programming especially as it applies to conversations about contemporary painting," said Tina Kukielski, Art21 executive director and chief curator. "She is a visionary artist and as such, we are thrilled to have been given the opportunity to follow her year-long process and excited to share it with the rest of the world."

Influenced by artists that have captured the vastness of the American West in their paintings like Albert Bierstadt and others from the Hudson River School, Mehretu was inspired to create her own take on an American landscape painting complicated by layers of meaning. Embedded into the layers of her gesso and paint are enlarged photographs taken from the news media of recent protests, riots, and conflicts addressing the racial politics of our day, and yet visible only as digitized ground. "The discomfort of being a person living and working in the United States is a place that these paintings were being made from," says the artist in the film.

Composer Jason Moran joins Mehretu in the film, working in parallel with the artist in an almost call-and-response-like manner. Moran is shown composing music on a Fender Rhodes electric piano from the choir of the church while Mehretu paints from atop a scissor lift on the ground floor. "Every once in a while, [I] look up and see where Julie was in her work," says Moran in the film. "Then slowly, I started to look at my sheet of paper not as a place that had a start and a finish, but that all of it could be composed on at different moments."

Art21 first filmed with Julie Mehretu in 2008. Based out of a Berlin studio space, the artist and her assistants were working concurrently on two projects: a series of seven 10-by-14-foot paintings for a show at the Deutsche Guggenheim and a single 21-by-85-foot commission for Goldman Sachs. Similar to the 2017 SFMOMA commission, the artist needed to work out of an unconventional space in order to be able to accommodate the scale of the works.

All six of Art21's films featuring Julie Mehretu are available to **watch free of charge** on Art21.org.

Extended Play: an original Art21 film series

Art21's *Extended Play* provides a behind-the-scenes look at critical moments in artists' processes and lives. Recently renamed, *Extended Play* is a refreshed version of the organization's longest-running digital series. Through process-revealing footage and



intimate interviews, *Extended Play* uncovers the provocative ideas and biographical anecdotes that inspire an artist's work from conceptualization, to creation, to presentation.

The series launched in March 2008 under the title of *Exclusive* and was initially introduced as a digital complement to Art21's award-winning television series, *Art in the Twenty-First Century*. The series has featured over 100 artists to date, including **Sarah Sze, William Kentridge, Do Ho Suh, Cindy Sherman, Nancy Spero, Gabriel Orozco, Jeff Koons, Mike Kelley, Andrea Zittel, and Carrie Mae Weems**, among others.

Extended Play is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council; and by the Art21 Contemporary Council.

Julie Mehretu: Politicized Landscapes was produced and directed by Ian Forster, producer, Art21.

About Art21

Since 1997, Art21 has been a celebrated global leader in presenting thought-provoking and sophisticated content about contemporary art. It is the go-to place to learn firsthand about some of the most interesting working artists today—from the artists themselves—and is responsible for introducing millions of people to contemporary art and artists. Founded on the belief that artists are role models for creative and critical thinking, Art21's mission aims to inspire a more creative and tolerant world through the works and words of contemporary artists.

Art21.org provides an unparalleled year-round, always-on look at working artists, a continuous digital presence for an organization that is widely recognized for a biennial television series. The Art21 video library houses over 50 hours of original video content—over 500 videos all open and free to the public. Reaching audiences of over 5 million a month, Art21's digital initiatives continue the organization's long-standing tradition of using the power of digital media to inspire audiences worldwide by exposing them to contemporary artists.

To date, Art21's short form films have had over 50 film festival acceptances across the world and have been nominated for a Webby Award and won a Cine Golden Eagle.