PRESS RELEASE
Minneapolis Institute of Art Organizes Aliza Nisenbaum’s First Solo Museum Exhibition

‘A Place We Share’ Features Three Large-Scale Group Portraits Created During Three-Month Residency at the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Minneapolis, September 7, 2017—The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) is organizing the first solo museum exhibition of Aliza Nisenbaum’s work. The exhibition features three new works, commissioned by Mia, created by the Mexico City–born, New York City–based artist during her three-month Mia residency. Over the summer, Nisenbaum invited individuals from the local community to a painting studio provided by Mia. From these face-to-face portrait sessions and the friendship and mutual trust that grew from them, Nisenbaum created three large-scale group portraits, which probe the politics of representation by bringing often-marginalized immigrant communities to the fore. ‘A Place We Share’ is on view September 28, 2017, through February 4, 2018.

During Nisenbaum’s stay in Minneapolis, she worked closely with three groups in Mia’s Whittier neighborhood and in the adjacent Phillips neighborhood: Centro Tyrone Guzman, Hope Community, and Mia’s own security guards. The resulting paintings represent a snapshot of the people, many of them Latino and Somali immigrants, who live and work near Mia.

“At Mia, a commitment to accessibility is at the core of who we are, and we strive to represent stories from the range of our diverse communities,” said Gabriel Ritter, Mia’s curator of contemporary art. “Aliza was an amazing ambassador for Mia’s museum-wide initiative dedicated to cultivating empathy through art. Her socially engaged painting practice embraced the social fabric of Mia’s surrounding community, and questioned how the act of painting can embody the attention and care needed to foster close and meaningful relationships between an artist, their subjects, and the institution as a whole. Her work seeks to empower her sitters and visitors alike, instilling in them an expanded sense of ownership and belonging to the museum, which is a rare talent.”
The first community Nisenbaum engaged with in Minneapolis was the tight-knit security guards at Mia. Like them, she kept early and late hours in the galleries, which encouraged the hallmark camaraderie Nisenbaum is known for with her subjects. Morning Security Briefing at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, basement door open onto the Guard Lounge Pet Wall depicts six Mia security guards at rest in the lounge, a private space where they take breaks between shifts. Each of the guards’ distinct personalities shines through, and she humanizes them not as a faceless security force for the museum, but as members of their own often-overlooked community. Over the course of her residency, Nisenbaum befriended a number of guards, learning about their hobbies, pets, and life stories during their time together in her studio.

She also taught several portrait-drawing classes for senior citizens at Centro Tryone Guzman, the oldest and largest multi-service Latino organization in Minneapolis. Centro Tyrone Guzman's Wise Elders Program provides culturally and linguistically responsive services to support the holistic health and independent living of Latino seniors. Elders play an important role in their community, transmitting their wisdom and Latino culture to younger members.

The resulting painting, Wise Elders Portraiture Class at Centro Tyrone Guzman with En Familia hay Fuerza, mural on the history of immigrant farm labor to the United States, shows eight of her students pictured with the drawings they made in her classes. Here, the Wise Elders are shown with their own artistic creations against a mural depicting the history of migrant laborers in the Midwest. The painting is a testament to the Wise Elders' unique character as individuals, their life experiences, and the collective wisdom they impart to their community.

Nisenbaum also spent time in the Hope Community Garden, an initiative of the place-based community development organization that is entrenched in the Phillips Neighborhood, one of the most economically challenged and diverse neighborhoods in Minneapolis. As part of Hope Community's Land Stewardship Project, gardening and agriculture classes are offered to local residents. Their three communal gardens and hands-on workshops engage people of all ages in food-related activities promoting health, culture, community, and land stewardship. The artist joined one of these classes, where she met three young Somali leaders who care for the community garden. Her painting Nimo, Sumiya, and Bisharo harvesting flowers and vegetables at Hope Community Garden depicts these women—a mother, her daughter, and her daughter's friend—as they tend their plot. Surrounded by symbols of sustenance and self-sufficiency, these women embody the bonds of care between family, friends, and community.

"I am really excited to see a painting of me because I never had that before...My eyes, my mouth, my nose - it's exactly like me," said Nimo Mohamed of Hope Community.

"Working in Minneapolis has been a privilege and a pleasure," said artist Aliza Nisenbaum. "I've learned so much from my conversations with the Wise Elders from Centro Tyrone Guzman, the gardeners in the Hope
Community, and the guards at Mia. They've shared their community with me, and I'm grateful that they've allowed me to capture a small facet of their lives. I look forward to welcoming them to the exhibition's opening and revealing the paintings to them. And I'm particularly eager to witness how the exhibition will only fully take shape once the public programming organized by community members in the gallery itself unfolds."

Born in Mexico City in 1977, Aliza Nisenbaum is currently an assistant professor at Columbia University School of the Arts. Nisenbaum has dedicated her practice to creating intimate, vividly colored oil-on-canvas portraits of undocumented immigrants in the New York City area. Through her artistic process, Nisenbaum seeks to transform the traditional artist-sitter relationship; her lengthy portrait sessions allow her to deeply engage with the people and communities she paints to explore the ethical experiences of exchange, engage in new means for human connection, and shed light on immigrant groups too often left in the shadows. By representing individuals and communities that are under-represented in the history of art and have traditionally been underserved by public arts institutions, she seeks to empower her sitters and visitors alike, instilling in them an expanded sense of ownership and belonging to the museum.

Mia documented Nisenbaum's working process through photographs and video. The exhibition will feature video documentation of the painting process, providing the audience with an intimate window into the community groups portrayed. The Bush Foundation provided a generous grant that will support programming for the show, including the public discussion "Art as a Community Platform: Transforming Practices of Engagement," which will feature a roundtable with artists and local community organizers. In addition, Mia's Cargill Gallery will be reimagined as a platform for dialogue and community exchange for the duration of the exhibition, providing a flexible space for programming by community members themselves.

About Aliza Nisenbaum

Aliza Nisenbaum (b. Mexico City, Mexico) has presented her paintings in solo shows at Mary Mary, Glasgow; White Columns, New York; Lulu, Mexico City; Julius Caesar, Chicago; and Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago. She has had a range of two-person exhibitions, including with Kevin Kavanagh Gallery Dublin, Ireland; Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit; and at Golden Gallery, N.Y. In addition to prominent private collections, her work is held by the Whitney Museum of American Art, University of Chicago Booth School of Business, The Irish Arts Council, and The Progressive Art Collection. She is represented by Mary Mary, Glasgow. She is an assistant professor of professional practice at Columbia University School of the Arts.

Nisenbaum received her BFA and MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work was recently featured in the 2017 Whitney Biennial in New York. Other national and international group exhibitions have included the Biennial of the Americas, MCA, Denver; the Rufino Tamayo Painting Biennial, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City; Wilkinson Gallery, London; 68 Projects, Berlin; Slopes Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice; Princeton University School of Architecture; The Renaissance Society, Chicago; Green Gallery, Yale School of Art; The Poor Farm, Wisconsin; The University of Wisconsin; and The University of Texas at Taylor. She has been a resident at The Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program; artist-in-residence at the University of Tennessee; SOMA Summer, Mexico City; and participated in a seminar at the Jumex Collection, Mexico City.

Fellowships and grants include the Rema Hort Mann NYC award, and the Fellowship for Immigrant Women Leaders from NYC Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA). She has also been a participating artist at Immigrant Movement International, Corona Park, Queens. She lives in New York.

About Contemporary Art at Mia

In 2008, Mia launched an initiative to focus on the art of our times. Through its Department of Contemporary Art, the museum brings a fresh dynamism to its galleries by collecting and exhibiting works by living artists. This initiative emphasizes the relationships among historical art, diverse cultures, and contemporary art-making.

Contemporary art of the region continues to be represented by the Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program (MAEP) as well as by selected projects with local artists, architects, designers, and other creative thinkers. As part of its artist-in-residence program and in collaboration with other Mia curatorial departments, the Department of Contemporary Art invites local and global artists to engage with both the permanent collection and neighboring communities to create public and site-specific work at Mia.
Press Contacts

Michaela Baltasar  
+ 1 612 870 3280
mbaltasar@artsmia.org

Tammy Pleshek  
+ 1 612 870 3171
tpleshek@artsmia.org

Alison Buchbinder  
+1 646 688 7826
alison.buchbinder
@finnpartners.com

About The Minneapolis Institute Of Art

Home to more than 89,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest wide-ranging art collections in the country—Rembrandt to van Gogh, Monet to Matisse, Asian to African—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday 10am–5pm
Thursday, Friday 10am–9pm
Sunday 11am–5pm
Monday Closed

For more information, call + 1 612 870 3000 or visit artsmia.org