

COURTNEY PUCKETT

# Courtney Puckett

## Sapphire Eye

November 8 - December 13, 2018

Essay by Lilly Wei

Flecker Gallery

Suffolk County Community College

Ammerman Campus, Selden, NY

On the cover: "Sapphire Eye", 2014, fabric on canvas 48 x 48 inches

## Director's Foreword

Flecker Gallery is delighted to host this solo exhibition of recent work by Courtney Puckett. I have known Courtney for several years, in two separate but related capacities. We are professional peers in the New York art world and see one another at openings on a regular basis, and I was excited to interview her for a teaching post. She came highly recommended and her work held immediate and strong appeal; I was an instant fan. We talked and I was very pleased to persuade her to come on board and teach a class for us, which she continues to do. Now, some years later I am pleased to be able to work with her to produce this solo exhibition and catalogue of her recent "Calendar Series" fabric wall panels and a selection of mixed media and fabric sculptures.

Artists who make decisions in their work that embody ideas and values, as opposed to representing, them have always impressed me the most. To make a work that IS the thing, not about it - that is the real trick. It comes from fluency in the language of materials. To re-claim, re-arrange, re-purpose carefully selected items from the sea of objects and materials left behind by consumer culture and excess speaks to the point in Puckett's work more authentically in art than any other means provides. Puckett brings this kind of embodiment to the fore in her work, not only in the re-use, but also in the very notion or re-assessment, as we are re-assessing the hierarchies and power structures of our society vis-à-vis gender, race, identity, and class. Her choice to work consistently with fabric-scrap surfaces in her wall panels and sculptures allows her to reconstruct elements of utilitarian detritus into totemic forms with a figurative, if not mystic presence. She then wraps these with fiber surfaces, intersecting these sampled and re-mixed forms with craft traditions and domestic arts, re-framing and re-claiming the historically male dominated arenas of abstract painting and sculpture.

Although her work is a clear channel for her critical voice, there is no hint of the abject in her work. Despite the social, political, and cultural discord embodied in her work, she seems intent on elevating the discourse from prosaic to poetic. In his canonical, "Concerning the Spiritual in Art," Wassily Kandinsky proposes two fundamental hypotheses about art - that every work of art is the child of its time, and that the artist is a cultural shaman helping to guide humanity's evolution. I am a firm believer in both and find evidence in the work of Courtney Puckett.

Lilly Wei brings her inimitable prowess and grace to the exhibition through her elegant and eloquent catalog essay: *Puckett's Blues*. Wei is a highly respected New York-based independent critic and curator who has written widely on international contemporary art and is a long-time contributor to *Art in America*, a Contributing Editor at *Art News*, and a regular contributor to *Sculpture Magazine*. Like Puckett's work in the exhibition, it is worth savoring and visiting more than once.

Matthew Neil Gehring  
Director

Über der Geistige in der Kunst, [Munich, Germany], 1912, translation published as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, [London, England], 1914, translated by Michael Sadleir as *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover (New York, NY), 1977.

## Puckett's Blues By Lilly Wei

Courtney Puckett studied painting when in art school but soon after, she tells me, she (mostly) put down her brush and picked up needle and thread. Fabric is her great love, her "natural material" from her earliest years, a predilection nurtured by the example of her mother, an interior decorator/designer. Fabrics of all kinds in all kinds of textures abounded in her home, heaped into piles, as well as the trove of other paraphernalia that designers would have at hand. I like to imagine that Puckett secretly possesses a Mary Poppins-like magic carpetbag that when she reaches into it, yields up everything she needs. That might be yarn, string, plastic tubing, tinsel, scraps of cloth, and assorted cast-offs and found objects. She will then sew, bind, wrap, cut, collage, and assemble them together, her practice unapologetically, obsessively based on the domestic arts, on a labor-intensive practice that has something to do with solacing, comforting, protecting, her touch fortifying, one that is in no hurry to speed up the process or production, preferring the increasing rarity of the one-off and the hand-made in an age of infinite digital replication.

Welcomed at the door of her studio by her hospitable rescue dog, it seems no accident that she named it Penelope. Puckett often takes names from Greek and Roman mythology, this one of course after the faithful wife of the long absent Odysseus who, in one of her best known ploys, puts off the many unwanted suitors clamoring for her hand (and his kingdom, believing him to be dead) by promising to choose a new husband from among them after she finishes weaving a shroud for her father-in-law. Like Odysseus, she's clever in devising escapist tactics, each night unraveling what she had accomplished during the day, a metaphor of sorts for women's unending work and the achievements and failures of artistic practice—which is completed only to begin again.

Puckett, in this appealing, purposefully feminized exhibition of recent work, is showing sculptures and wall pieces from her ongoing "Calendar Series." She calls the latter fabric panels to distinguish them from fiber art and craft, identifying them as aesthetic objects. The majority of the sculptures and fabric panels here are in a wide range of blues, based on the theme of water that was part of a recent residency on Governor's Island, although there are deviations, including supports painted orange or yellow. But the blues are there to remind us, among other things, about the precarious state of our most precious natural resource. As one consequence of that focus, she is also now much more mindful of where her materials come from, recycling and repurposing objects stringently in order not to contribute to the ever fattening mountains of waste, a pressing global concern.



"Janus 1," 2014, fabric on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



Loretta Pettway, "Log Cabin"—Single Block "Courthouse Steps" Variation (Local Name: "Bricklayer"), cotton, twill, printed corduroy, denim, 87 x 72 inches; Photo: Stephen Pitkin/Pitkin Studio 1958; Collection of: Souls Grown Deep Foundation - soulsgrowndeep.org

Her "Calendar Series" is site-specific in the sense that she installs the panels depending upon the particularities of the venue. There is no predetermined order; her timeline is nonlinear, her universes parallel. Each panel refers to a specific month, which acts as a catalyst and organizing structure for the composition, using such attributes as the color of the month's birthstone or the shade or shape of the flower associated with it—and she springboards from there. She is not a representational artist, although like many artists in our multidisciplinary times, she doesn't have an ideological objection to it (she was a representational artist to begin with) working in both modes with ease. However, she has come to prefer abstraction as more expansive and expressive, more suited to her practice.

I see the panels as a tribute to the anonymous works—among them quilts, clothing, wall hangings, rugs and much more—created by women over the centuries that have never been properly paid attention to and honored. Feminists have insistently denounced this lack of validation, this balkanization of media, citing the brilliant achievements of women artists such as Lenore Tawney, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Anni Albers, Mary Lee Bendolph, Loretta Pettway, and Arlonzia Pettway (the last three all Gee's Bend artists), Faith Ringgold and the many gifted practitioners of the Pattern & Decoration movement—and some headway has certainly been made. But more attention must be paid. It is these genres that have made the world immeasurably less harsh, more gracious, sheltering, civilized, integrating art into life, as the Russian

Constructivists demanded more than a hundred years ago, embracing the glamour of the quotidian.

Abstract painting, as is wonderfully evident, informs her work, even though she consciously chooses not to use paint, finding in her materials a challenge that is more satisfying. Her fabric panels are complex constructions, and compositionally as sophisticated as paintings, laced by a deceptive naiveté, a certain outsider, self-taught quality that blesses them with a beguiling intimacy and an improvised immediacy and freshness. The patches and strips of material are stitched together, representing a kind of brushwork, from large strokes (the cut fabric) to the more refined and delicate (the thread) although the components at times also suggest pixilation and digitalized imagery—and how removed they are from it.

The panels have the force of abstract expressionist paintings—and in aggregate, a similar scale—visually punching the eye. Among the most explosive is the whimsically titled *May Day's Eye Flower*, 2014. However, it advances more like a supernova, its yolky yellow center ringed by a thin corona-like yellow band, while behind it are radiating streamers of blooming petals, say, or shafts of brittle light. Another galactic-looking forma-

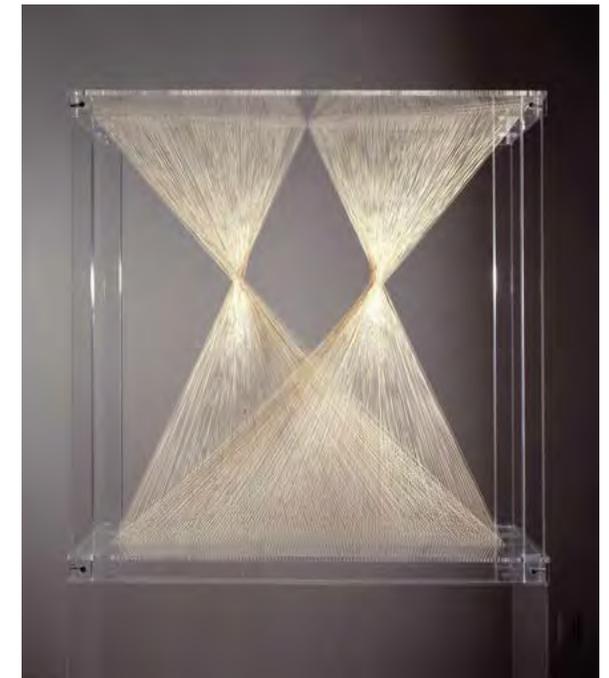
tion is called *Juno*, 2014, for the month of June, named, it is believed, after the stately queen of the gods in Roman mythology. A vortex of blue and earthen colored fabric strips stitched onto canvas, a star at its heart, it might also suggest the fanned tail of Juno's sacred animal, the peacock. *Janus 1*, 2014, and *Janus 2*, 2016, represent the month of January, believed to be named after the double-faced Roman god of transitions. They are primarily in shades of blues, whites, blacks and greys, and patterned in bands, in which a landscape might be seen, or a face, a pattern, a pure abstraction, or more. Interpretations are fluid, the changing readings of the imagery particularly apt for Janus. In *Janus 2*, in another take on transience, the small patches of bright blue that suggest tape also suggest a temporary manner of holding the strips together, underscoring the notion of change, of possible collapse, which is the natural state of things. In essence, Puckett is recounting stories of metamorphoses.

Other works are less elaborate, more simply grids but their empty squares are to be activated, inviting viewers, if so inclined, to project the events of their own lives, their schedules, into the blank spaces, taking possession of it.

Her freestanding sculptures are more figurative. For all their charmingly homespun, even whacky semblances, they evince a surprising regality, like a series of statues of saints or other sacred, totemic beings. Puckett mentioned that she was raised Catholic and the blue that appears so frequently in this show is also a color that is closely associated with the Virgin Mary. One work, *The Seraph*, 2017, might allude to a VIP angel or might be Mary herself. In shades of deep to light blue paling to white at the bottom, the "head" of the filigreed form is encircled as if by a halo radiating shafts of dark energy outward. Another figure that might be a dysfunctional chair also could be a kneeling figure. Puckett calls it *The Kneeler*, 2016, a knight in shining armor. Perhaps he is gallantly bowing to his lady—or perhaps to the Virgin Mary. And, while made before the pose became controversial and politicized, I also can't help but think of Colin Kaepernick and any one of numerous African American athletes—and not only African American—who have "taken a knee" during the playing of the national anthem to protest the police shootings of black Americans.

What characterizes Puckett's work, both two- and three-dimensional, is its extraordinarily vivid presence. The attentiveness and empathy she lavishes on a kind of making and materials once associated with drudgery, has burnished them into something more sublime, an *ars poetica* of the domestic. Like Penelope, Puckett shows us whose in charge—and who should be.

Lilly Wei is a New York-based critic and independent curator whose focus is global contemporary art.



"Drawing in Air XVII", 1998, linen, plexiglas, 48 x 48 x 24 inches, Lenore G. Tawney Foundation – lenoretawney.org



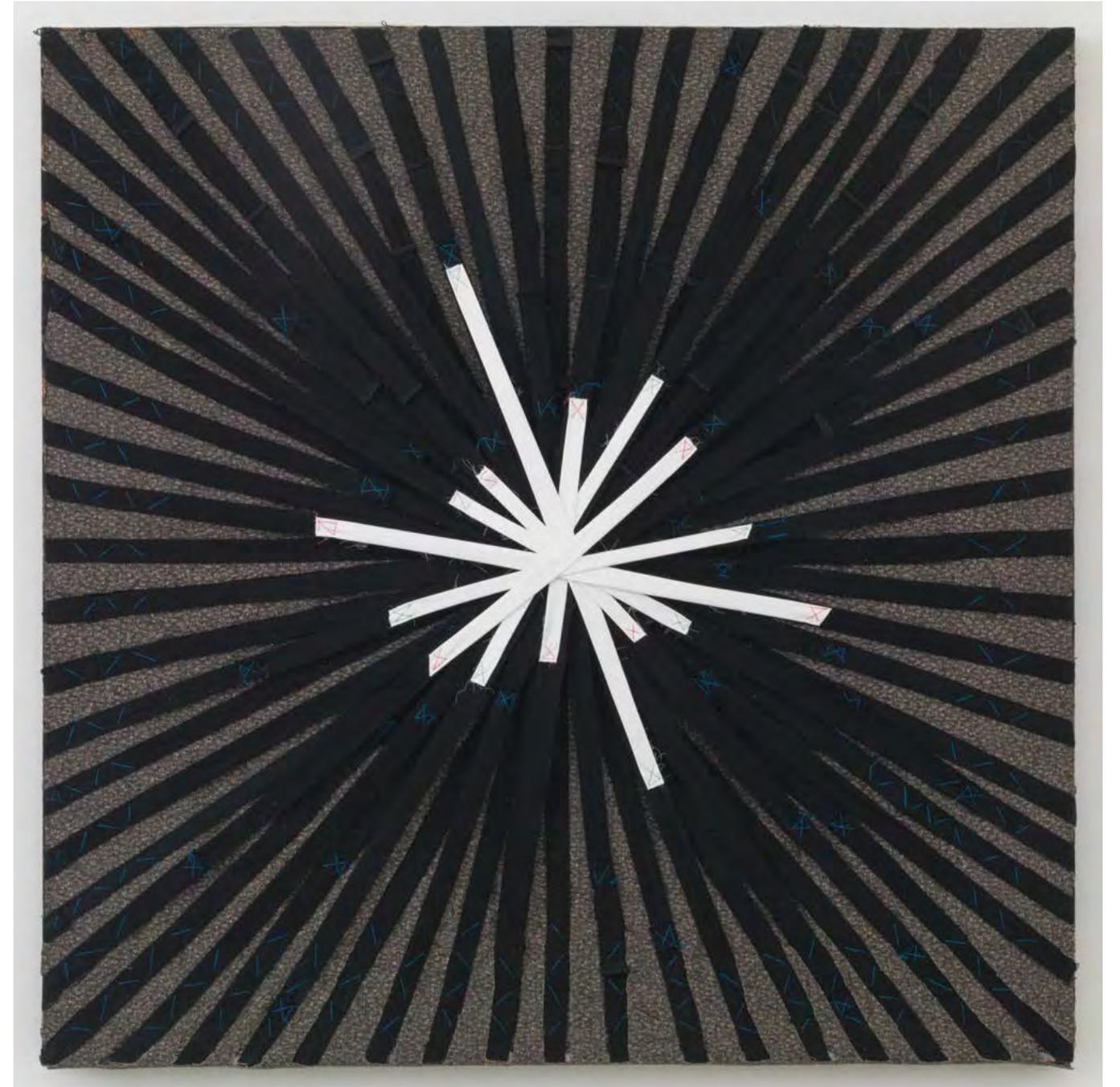
"May Day's Eye Flower", 2014, fabric on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



"Janus Page", 2014, fabric on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



"Juno 1", 2014, fabric on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



"December Star", 2014, fabric on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



"Janus 2", 2016, fabric on canvas, 42 x 42 inches



"Juno 2", 2017, fabric on canvas, 42 x 42 inches



"Opalattice Page," 2018, fabric on canvas, 36 x 36 inches



"Aster Eye," 2016, fabric on canvas, 42 x 42 inches



Top row, left to right: "December Star," 2014, 48 x 48 inches; "Juno 1," 2014, 48 x 48 inches; "May Day's Page," 2014, 48 x 48 inches.  
Bottom row, left to right: "Janus 1," 2014, 48 x 48 inches; "May Day's Eye Flower," 2014, 48 x 48 inches; "Sapphire Eye," 2014, 48 x 48 inches. Calendar Series wall-panels are all fabric on canvas.

Top row, left to right: "Janus 2," 2016, 42 x 42 inches; "Juno 2," 2017, 42 x 42 inches; "Janus Page," 2014, 48 x 48 inches.  
Bottom row, left to right: "Heliotropic March," 2017, 42 x 42 inches; "Aster Eye," 2016, 42 x 42 inches; "Opalattice Page," 2018, 36 x 36 inches, Calendar Series wall-panels are all fabric on canvas.



"The Seraph"; 2017, fabric, metal,  
wood, wire, string, found objects,  
83 x 30 x 20 inches (left)

"The Overseer"; 2016, fabric, metal,  
wood, wire, string, found objects,  
70 x 20 x 12 inches (right)





"The Levitator (Flower)"; 2018, fabric, metal, wood, wire, string, found objects, 84 x 12 x 12 inches (far left)

"The Levitator (Green Eye)"; 2018, fabric, metal, wood, wire, string, found objects, 78 x 16 x 6 inches (left)

"The Kneeler"; 2016, fabric, metal, wood, wire, string, found objects, 55 x 17 x 17 inches (right)





"The Funneler", 2018, fabric, metal, wire, string, found objects, 42 x 22 x 22 inches (left)

"The Raincatcher", 2018, fabric, metal, wood, wire, string, found objects, 63 x 12 x 12 inches (right)

## COURTNEY PUCKETT

(b. 1979 in Winter Park, FL, lives and works in Brooklyn and Holmes, NY)

### EDUCATION

- 2007 MFA, Hunter College, New York, NY
- 2006 Glasgow School of Art, Hunter College Student Exchange Program, Glasgow, Scotland
- 2004 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM
- 2002 BFA, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
- 2001 Center for Art and Culture, MICA Student Exchange Program, Aix-en-Provence, France

### AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

- 2018 Underwater NY/Works on Water Incubator Residency, Governor's Island, NY
- 2016 Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Workspace Residency, New York, NY  
Vermont Studio Center, Full Fellowship Award, Johnson, VT
- 2010 Byrdcliffe Artist Colony, Artist-in-Residence and NEA recipient, Woodstock, NY  
Chashama NEA project grant, New York, NY
- 2006 Hunter College, Student Exchange Grant, New York, NY
- 2002 National Park Services, Artist-in-Residence, Buffalo National River, AK  
Vermont Studio Center, Artist-in-Residence, Johnson, VT

### SOLO AND 2 PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 Flecker Gallery, Courtney Puckett: Sapphire Eye, Suffolk County Community College, Selden, NY (solo)  
Field Projects, Sound and Vision: Courtney Puckett and Jessica Slaven, curated by Rachel Frank, New York, NY
- 2016 COOP Gallery, The Calendar Series, Nashville, TN (solo)
- 2011 Central Utah Art Center, Mountain High, Ephraim, UT
- 2010 Valencia College, Anita Wooten Gallery, Recycled, Wrapped, and Sewn, Orlando, FL (solo)  
Chashama 266 Window Space, Old and New, New York, NY (solo)
- 2006 Emerged Space, 10 Windows, Glasgow, Scotland (solo)  
Donkey Gallery, Makeshift: Courtney Puckett and Genevieve Chevalier, Albuquerque, NM



## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 White Columns Online, World Holes, curated by Jesse Greenberg, New York, NY
- 2017 East 4th St Community Garden, Park View, curated by Scott Reeds, Brooklyn, NY  
Pfizer Building, Form of Touch, SVA MA Curatorial Practice, curated by Becky Nahom, Brooklyn, NY  
Fine Art Gallery at Westchester Community College, HY-BRID, curated by Melissa Hall, Westchester, NY  
Shirley Fiterman Art Center, Text/ure, curated by Kristen Frederickson, New York, NY  
Knockdown Center, Nasty Woman, curated by Jessamyn Fiore, Brooklyn, NY
- 2016 Indianapolis Art Center, Weave Wars, curated by Kyle Herrington, Indianapolis, IN  
Lorimoto, Till Death Do Us Part, Brooklyn, NY
- 2015 Spring Break Art Show, Trust Fall, curated by Jennifer Sullivan, New York, NY  
The Parlour Brooklyn, Neo-Craftivism, curated by Robin Kang, Rachel Gorchov, Roxanne Jackson, Brooklyn, NY  
The Noyes Museum of Art at Stockton College, MICA Then and Now, Organized by Mikel Frank and Frank Hyder, Oceanville, NJ  
TSA, The Two States of W.W., curated by Andrew Prayzner, NY
- 2014 Rhombus Space, All Worked Up, curated by Katerina Lanfranco, Brooklyn, NY  
Side Effects Gallery, What the hand, dare seize the fire? Brooklyn, NY  
Brookfield properties, Bright, curated by Tom Kotik, New York, NY
- 2013 Wallspace, 10 Years, New York, NY  
Salisbury University Art Gallery, This Land, Salisbury, MD  
Kunsthalle Beacon and Ethan Cohen New York, MICA Then and Now, curated by Barry Nemet, Beacon, NY and New York, NY
- 2012 Art Connects New York & Big Deal Arts at The New York City Industry for the Blind, The Sixth Sense and Other Myths, curated by Ginger Shulick, Brooklyn, NY  
Spattered Columns, Here and Everywhere, curated by Colette Robbins and Micah Ganske, New York, NY
- 2011 Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, Studio LLC, curated by John L. Moore, Queens, NY  
Humanities Gallery, Long Island University, Radical Fabric, curated by Tom Kotik, Brooklyn, NY  
Vaudeville Park, Anomalistic Urge, curated by Courtney Tramposh, Brooklyn, NY
- 2010 Art Jail, Painting Comes Alive!, curated by Erik den Breejen, New York, NY  
Nolita Elementary School in conjunction with The New Museum's Festival of Ideas for the New City, School Night, curated by Amanda Schmitt, New York, NY  
Sara Meltzer Gallery, Tide Pool, curated by Ariel Dill and Denise Kupferschmidt, New York, NY
- 2009 Walsh Gallery Seton Hall University, Uncommon Threads, curated by Jeanne Brasile and Howard Hurst, South Orange, NJ

## COLLABORATIVE AND CURATORIAL PROJECTS

- 2016 Collaborator with Brenda Neville Dance Studio, CounterPointe: New Work by Women Choreographers and their Collaborating Artists presented by Norte Maar and The Brooklyn Ballet, The Actor's Fund Art Center, Brooklyn, NY  
Curator, TSA New York, Drawing for Sculpture, Brooklyn, NY

- 2013 Curator, 92Y Tribeca, MICAPAIRS, NYC MICA Alumni Exhibition, Co-Curated w/ Seth Cohen, New York, NY

## PUBLICATIONS

- 2018 Exhibition Catalog for Courtney Puckett: Sapphire Eye at Flecker Gallery, Suffolk County Community College, Selden, NY, essay by Lilly Wei  
Field Magazine, What To Make Of It, Interview by Jen Schwarting  
Drawings 2014-2018, self-published artist book, essay by Glen Adamson  
Stone Canoe, Journal of Arts, Literature, and Social Commentary, Vol 12., Visual Arts Editor: Rebecca Murtaugh
- 2016 Drawing for Sculpture, self-published zine for exhibition Drawing for Sculpture at TSA, NY

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<http://www.artsucks.com/blog/2010/sep10/painting-comes-alive-9-23-10.html>
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## Sapphire Eye

November 8 - December 13, 2018

Flecker Gallery

Suffolk County Community College, Ammerman Campus

533 College Road, Selden, NY 11784

<http://sunysuffolk.edu>

<https://facebook.com/fleckergallery?fref=ts>

Gallery Director and Curator: Matthew Neil Gehring

Essay by Lilly Wei

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Works of art by Courtney Puckett © 2018 Courtney Puckett

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