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Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Shara Hughes first major solo museum exhibition in US
features more than thirty paintings from 2015–21**



Shara Hughes, *Just Another Pretty Face*, 2019. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 68 x 60 inches. Courtesy the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery.

May 5, 2021 (St. Louis, MO) - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) presents the first major solo museum exhibition of Shara Hughes in the United States, featuring work from the past seven years, including more than thirty paintings, drawings, and prints. The survey explores Hughes's re-imagining of landscape painting, offering a singular vision to a long historical tradition. This aspect of her work was commented on by the Whitney Museum of American Art when she was included in the 2017 Whitney Biennial. Her landscapes were described as "framed views of hallucinatory realms." *Shara Hughes: On Edge* offers an overview of her unworldly scenes, September 3, 2021 through February 20, 2022.

Hughes is referred to as a landscape painter, but for the artist, her paintings "are not really about landscapes" at all. Her wildly colorful paintings do not depict places, real or imagined. The work fits within a historical tradition of painting that includes the early Modernism of Matisse's Fauvist landscapes or the patterns found in Gustav Klimt's plein-air paintings. These references may serve as a point of departure for Hughes, but her paintings maintain a unique personal vision within truly compelling and singular compositions. Employing a variety of mark-making techniques, the artist loosely depicts floating moons, gnarled trees, and blazing sunlight, bridging the abstract and representational. Hughes places her emphasis on gesture, symbolism, and iconography. Her paintings are imbued with psychological complexity, bringing to life a world of elegant chaos infused with a vibrant harmony of the organic, the subjective, and the surreal.

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For Hughes, painting is intuitive and physical; she does not plan, sketch, or premix her color palette. All the works begin abstractly. Hughes dyes, spray paints, and applies color directly to the unprimed canvas. Her painting process is one of immediacy and instinct, balancing control and resigning to the unknown. She sets her own parameters, then lets the paintings inform her, establishing an individual relationship with each one.



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The paintings are of human scale, offering the viewer an immersive and bodily connection with the compositions. She makes them, she says, in accordance with her “wingspan.” Many of the paintings employ framing devices that engage with the edges of the canvas, creating portals or entryways into the works. “I like for you to be able to totally believe in the painting but then know that it stops at the edges.... I like being able to have that kind of back and forth of yes and no.”

In the most recent paintings, flowers take a central role. Similarly these works are not about flowers. Rather, Hughes’s paintings change the way we see flowers. Reflecting on the new work, Hughes says, “So many of them turned into portraits or multiple figures in the space. They often feel dramatic and sad and scary and ominous. I wanted the idea of flowers to twist into something that could be dangerous or ugly. It didn’t always turn out that way, and I think they can be both beautiful and scary or humanlike but also unfamiliar at the same time. I’m always interested in a subject that can be flexible in that way.”

Shara Hughes: On Edge is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator, and Misa Jeffereis, Assistant Curator.

Shara Hughes (b. 1981, Atlanta) most recently presented solo exhibitions at Le Consortium, Dijon, France; The Garden Museum, London; Newport Art Museum, Rhode Island; Gallery Met at the Metropolitan Opera, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Atlanta; among others. Forthcoming solo exhibitions include the Aspen Art Museum, Aspen Colorado, and Yuz Museum, Shanghai, in 2021; and the Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland, in 2022. Hughes has participated in numerous group exhibitions, at venues such as the Drawing Center, New York; MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts; and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Hughes’s work belongs to many prominent museum collections including the Dallas Museum of Art; Denver Museum of Art; Jorge M. Perez Collection, Miami; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; M Woods Museum, Beijing; Phoenix Art Museum; Rachofsky Collection, Dallas; Saint Louis Art Museum; Si Shang Art Museum, Beijing; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the Yuz Museum, among others. Hughes earned a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and later attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn.

About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis works to enrich lives and inspire curiosity, creativity, and learning through experiences with contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, the Museum reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape while engaging thousands of visitors through a wide array of public programs. CAM nurtures the creative minds of our city’s youth through free, in-depth art education, making a long-lasting impact on the community. We are a site for discovery, a welcoming space, free and open to all.

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