

REVIEW

Secrets Revealed at the Whitney Biennial

JENNIFER S. MUSAWWIR • 30 MAY 2022 • 10 MIN READ



Installation view of *Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet as It's Kept*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, USA, from left to right: Veronica Ryan, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 2022; Awilda Sterling-Duprey, . . . *blindfolded*, 2020–; Duane Linklater, a selection from the series *mistranslate_wolftreeriver_ininîmowinîhk* and *wintercount_215_kisepîsim*, 2022. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.

The return of the **Whitney Museum of American Art's Biennial exhibition** marked the opening of the New York spring art season. *Quiet As It's Kept*, the title chosen by co-curators David Breslin and Adrienne Edwards, is a common phrase uttered prior to the disclosure of a secret, an interaction that in the context of this exhibition promises to be open, intimate and unrestrained. The curators have brought together 63 artists and collectives for an exhibition that was conceived while thinking about lush conceptualism, ghosts and the dance floor, themes that emerged as reflexive

responses to the solitude, **trauma, and isolation** of the past two years. Designed to be dynamic, some of the artworks in this Biennial will change over the course of its run through September, one of many aspects intended to address the precarious uncertainty of these times. *Quiet As It's Kept* is revelatory, disruptive, and a bit disorienting but worthy of more than one visit.

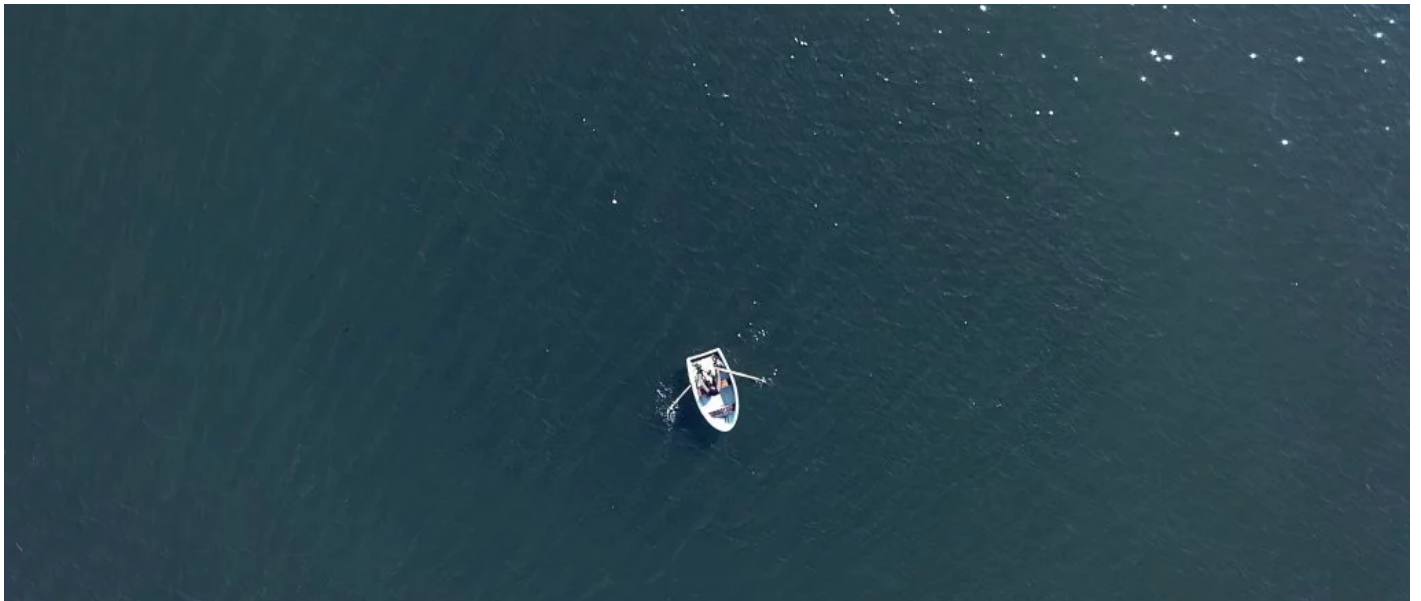
Summary

- The main concepts of *Quiet As It's Kept* are nation, state, land, human rights, the rights of nature, policing, colonization, and citizenship.
- Remembrance of those who passed away is present in the works of Coco Fusco, Rebecca Belmore, Alfredo Jaar.
- The topic of open borders can be found in the artworks of Lisa Alvarado, Duane Linklater, Monica Arreola, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.
- Attention to drug abuse is brought by Alejandro "Luperca" Morales, Andrew Roberts.

Water Is Life

The majority of the Biennial is concentrated on, but not limited to, two floors of the museum. One has been transformed into a dark labyrinth of galleries anchored on one end by an installation of the New York City apartment that served as the headquarters for *A Gathering of the Tribes*, a collective founded by the poet, playwright, novelist, and professor Steve Cannon (1935-2019).

This was a place of empowerment and collaboration for writers and artists, including **David Hammons**. What started out as a literary magazine blossomed into a gallery, and as the name implies, a space to gather and exchange ideas. Surrounding a small couch and floating red wall are shelves filled with books, walls plastered with posters from past events, and television monitors playing archival footage that together reimagine the intellectual and creative community of Cannon and his friends from 1991 until his death in 2019.



Coco Fusco, still from *Your Eyes Will Be an Empty Word*, 2021. HD video, Collection of the artist, and Alexander Gray Associates, New York. Image courtesy the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York.

New York artists **Coco Fusco's** (b. 1960) video *Your Eyes Will Be an Empty Word* pays homage to those who have been buried anonymously since 1869 on Hart Island, an unknown little island located in the New York Harbor. Off-limits to the general public and operated by the New York City Department of Corrections until very recently, the task of burying the unclaimed and unidentified during the pandemic fell to the inmates of Rikers Island, another controversial island in the same harbor.

The video itself is a vibrant depiction of deep blue waters and a sandy coastline on a beautiful day. Fusco is alone in a small rowboat laboriously maneuvering around the coast of Hart Island and tossing flowers into the water as a gesture of remembrance for those who were lost. It is a delicate balance between the peacefulness of the surroundings and the urgency of the artist to acknowledge and honor a grim reality. This video not only exposes the open secret of Hart Island but that of the unjust imprisonment, inhuman conditions, and unexplained deaths of the Rikers Island jail.