



**CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts presents:**

***Abbas Akhavan: cast for a folly***

May 9 through July 27, 2019

Curated by CCA Wattis Institute curator Kim Nguyen

***Akosua Adoma Owusu: Welcome to the Jungle***

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Above: Abbas Akhavan, *Study for a Garden: Fountain* (installation view, Delfina Foundation, London), 2012. Oscillating water sprinkler, pump, hose, pvc pond liner, water, dimensions variable. Courtesy of Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. Photo: Christa Holka. Below: Akosua Adoma Owusu, *Split Ends, I Feel Wonderful*, 2012 (still). 16mm film transfer to video, 4 mins. Courtesy of the artist.

**San Francisco, CA—March 12, 2019—**CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts proudly presents two new solo exhibitions, ***Abbas Akhavan: cast for a folly*** and ***Akosua Adoma Owusu: Welcome to the Jungle***. For multi-disciplinary artist **Abbas Akhavan**, this exhibition is his first U.S. solo show

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and the culmination of his year as the **2018–2019 Capp Street Artist-in-Residence**. Ghanaian-American filmmaker **Akosua Adoma Owusu** will present a medley of her films in an installation format—new territory for Owusu—in which two of her films will have their institutional premiere at CCA Wattis. Although these are two independent shows, both artists navigate histories, identities, politics, and materiality through distinct international lenses.

“We are thrilled to present the newest works by each of these incredible artists,” says Kim Nguyen, CCA Wattis Institute curator and head of programs. “Abbas Akhavan’s time and attention to place made him a perfect fit for the Capp Street residency, where he can really delve into the ethos of San Francisco and its communities. For Akosua Adoma Owusu, she is stretching her practice into the gallery, where she can re-envision the presentation of her films outside of a traditional film screening.”

For ***cast for a folly***, Akhavan’s residency and exhibition uses as its departure point an obscure photograph of the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad. Looted during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the museum lost nearly 15,000 objects in a span of 36 hours in what remains one of the worst acts of cultural vandalism in the modern era. Akhavan’s source photograph depicts the museum lobby in an eerily frozen state, its doors barricaded with empty vitrines and furniture in disarray, the room covered in a veneer of dust from the bombings. At the Wattis, Akhavan will re-create this image in a new installation that will include sculpture, wall works, and fabricated furniture.

Conceptually driven and material agnostic, Akhavan’s practice ranges from site-specific ephemeral installations to drawing, video, sculpture, and performance. Bronze casts, greenhouses, taxidermy animals, hot-air balloons, and gold leaf have all appeared in his varied practice, and more recent works have shifted focus, wandering onto spaces and species just outside the home—the garden, the backyard, and other domesticated landscapes. The direction of his research is deeply influenced by the specificity of the sites where he works: the architectures that house them, the economies that surround them, and the people that frequent them. Often categorizing his works as “studies” or “variations” in order to foreground their speculative, ephemeral, and open-ended qualities, his work often relies on displacing benign domestic objects to highlight that they are imbued with meaning—as cultural markers, indicators of power relations, and mechanisms of control.

For her solo exhibition ***Welcome to the Jungle***, Owusu will adapt a selection of her films to premiere in a brand new installation. In addition to the institutional debuts of *White Afro* (2019) and *Pelourinho, They Don’t Really Care About Us* (2019), Owusu will present for the first time together the three works that comprise a hair trilogy, which are manifestations of what she describes as her “warring consciousness.” In addition to *White Afro*, these include *Split Ends, I Feel Wonderful* (2012) and the award-winning *Me Broni Ba* (2009). The exhibition marks a significant new direction for Owusu, as the filmmaker brings her acclaimed films into the context of an exhibition.

Owusu’s uniquely visceral style of filmmaking and storytelling possess a rhythmic quality that dismantles monolithic, reductive, and Western-centric

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renderings of exoticism and otherness in identities. She employs various production techniques to visualize a state of “triple consciousness,” a concept that extends sociologist and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness to a third cinematic space. She describes the triple consciousness as experienced in: the African diaspora having to assimilate to white American culture in order to succeed in American society; the African immigrant often being grouped and identified with black Americans in the eyes of others, mostly due to a shared skin color; and many Africans not necessarily identifying with black American culture and history, their distinct culture rendered marginal. Trafficking in the complex contradictions of blackness, displacement, and memory, her films extrapolate the greater cultural anxieties surrounding her racial legacy. Owusu is, at once, “too” Ghanaian in America and “too” American in Ghana, and she seeks to locate a space between the two worlds that she can call home.

### **About Abbas Akhavan**

Abbas Akhavan was born in 1977 in Tehran. He received his BFA from Concordia University, Montreal, in 2004 and his MFA from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, in 2006. Working with drawing, installation, sculpture, performance, and video, his work is rooted in site-specificity, which he frames in terms of the network of architectural, economic, natural, and social forces that shape the conception and experience of art within a given space.

Akhavan has had solo exhibitions at The Power Plant, Toronto (2018); Museum Villa Stuck, Munich (2017); Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2017); Artspeak, Vancouver (2015); and Delfina Foundation, London (2012). Recent group exhibitions include Liverpool Biennial (2018); GAMEC, Bergamo (2018); SALT Galata, Istanbul (2017); Prospect New Orleans (2017); Sharjah Biennial 13, United Arab Emirates (2017); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2016); Witte de With, Rotterdam (2015); Beirut Art Centre, Beirut (2015); 10th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2014); and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2011).

Residencies include Fogo Island Arts, Fogo Island, Canada (2019, 2016, 2013); Atelier Calder, Saché, France (2017); and Flora ars+natura, Bogotá, Colombia (2015). He is the recipient of honors including the Fellbach Triennial Award (2017); Sobey Art Award (2015); Abraaj Group Art Prize (2014); and the Berliner Kunstpreis (2012).

### **About Akosua Adoma Owusu**

Akosua Adoma Owusu (b. 1984) is a Ghanaian-American filmmaker, producer, and cinematographer whose films address the collision of identities. Often combining personal ethnography and cultural representations of beauty in her work, Owusu transitions between avant-garde cinema, fine art, and African tradition to complicate the nature of identity. In her works, feminism, queerness, and African identities interact in African, white American, and black American cultural environments. Owusu aims to create a third cinematic space or consciousness.

Owusu’s films have screened internationally in festivals like International Film Festival Rotterdam, Locarno International Film Festival, Toronto International

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Film Festival, New Directors/New Films Festival, and the BFI London Film Festival. Her work is included in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Fowler Museum at UCLA, and the Black Film Center/Archive at Indiana University Bloomington. Named by *IndieWire* as one of six preeminent “avant-garde female filmmakers who redefined cinema,” she was a featured artist of the 56th Robert Flaherty Film Seminar programmed by renowned film curator and critic Dennis Lim. Her film *Kwaku Ananse* won the 2013 Africa Movie Academy Award.

Owusu has received fellowships and grants from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Knight Foundation, Creative Capital, the MacDowell Colony, the Camargo Foundation, and, most recently, from the Residency Program of the Goethe-Institut Salvador-Bahia. She holds MFA degrees in Film & Video and Fine Art from California Institute of the Arts and her BA in Media Studies from the University of Virginia. Currently, Owusu divides her time between Ghana and New York, where she works as a visiting assistant professor at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

### **About CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts**

Founded in 1998 at California College of the Arts in San Francisco and located a few blocks from its campus, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts is a nonprofit exhibition venue and research institute dedicated to contemporary art and ideas. As an exhibition space, it commissions and shows new work by emerging and established artists from around the world. Recent solo exhibitions include *Diamond Stingily: Doing the Best I Can*; *Rosha Yaghmai: Miraclegrow*; *Adam Linder: Full Service* (which traveled to Mudam Luxembourg); *Ken Lum: What's Old is Old for a Dog*; *Henrik Olesen: The Walk*; *Melanie Gilligan: Parts-wholes*; *Howard Fried: Derelicts*; *Laura Owens: Ten Paintings*; *Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys: Tram 3* (which traveled to MoMA PS1); *Josephine Pryde: Lapses in Thinking by the Person I Am* (which traveled to ICA Philadelphia and earned Pryde a 2016 Turner Prize nomination); *K.r.m. Mooney: En, set*; *Sam Lewitt: More Heat Than Light* (which traveled to Kunsthalle Basel and the Swiss Institute, New York); and *Ellen Cantor: Cinderella Syndrome* (which traveled to Künstlerhaus Stuttgart). A recent group exhibition, *Mechanisms*, traveled to Secession in Vienna in an expanded form entitled *Other Mechanisms*.

As a research institute, the Wattis dedicates an entire year to reflect on the work of a single artist, which informs a regular series of public programs and publications involving the field's most prominent artists and thinkers. The 2018–2019 season is dedicated to the writer Dodie Bellamy; past seasons featured Joan Jonas, Andrea Fraser, David Hammons, and Seth Price.

The Wattis also hosts an annual Capp Street Artist-in-Residence, one of the earliest and longest-running artist-in-residence programs in the country, founded in 1983 by Ann Hatch as Capp Street Project, and incorporated into the Wattis Institute in 1998. Each year, an artist comes to live and work in San Francisco for a semester, teaches a graduate seminar at CCA, and presents an exhibition. Recent participants include contemporary (2017–2018), Melanie Gilligan (2016–2017), Carissa Rodriguez (2015–2016), Nairy Baghramian (2014–2015), Claire Fontaine (2013–2014), Ryan Gander (2012–2013), Harrell

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Fletcher and Kris Martin (2011–2012), Paulina Olowska and Renata Lucas (2010–2011), and Abraham Cruzvillegas (2009–2010).

For more information, visit [wattis.org](http://wattis.org).

### **About California College of the Arts**

Founded in 1907, California College of the Arts (CCA) educates students to shape culture and society through the practice and critical study of art, architecture, design, and writing. Benefitting from its San Francisco Bay Area location and a faculty of expert practitioners, the college prepares students for lifelong creative work by cultivating innovation, community engagement, and social and environmental responsibility. Graduates are highly sought-after by the world's cutting-edge companies, architecture and design firms, cultural and arts organizations, and more. CCA is currently expanding its San Francisco campus with new student housing and a new building by award-winning firm Studio Gang.

For more information, visit [cca.edu](http://cca.edu).

### **CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:**

CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts presents ***Abbas Akhavan: cast for a folly*** and ***Akosua Adoma Owusu: Welcome to the Jungle***

Opening reception: Thursday, May 9, 2019, 6:30–8:30pm

Location: 360 Kansas Street (between 16th and 17th streets), San Francisco

Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 12–6pm; closed Sunday and Monday

Admission: Free

Information: 415.355.9670 or visit [wattis.org](http://wattis.org)

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### **MEDIA CONTACT**

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