

# THE SHED Press Release

THE **BLOOMBERG** BUILDING  
545 West 30th Street  
New York, NY 10001

THE SHED PRESENTS THE POWERFUL WORK OF HOWARDENA PINDELL IN  
A SOLO EXHIBITION EXAMINING RACISM IN AMERICA

Featuring Pindell's First Video Work in 25 Years, Commissioned by The Shed  
*Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water*  
On View October 16, 2020 – March 28, 2021

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Howardena Pindell, *Four Little Girls*, 2020. Mixed media on canvas. 108 x 120 inches. Courtesy the artist and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York.

**NEW YORK, NY** – September 21, 2020 – The Shed reopens October 16 with a solo exhibition, nearly four years in the making, featuring new work by **Howardena Pindell** that examines the violent, historical trauma of racism in America and the therapeutic power of art. With enhanced health and safety protocols, The Shed will welcome back visitors Thursdays through Sundays, with free admission to the exhibition through October 31. *Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water*, organized by **Adeze Wilford**, Assistant Curator at The Shed, is on view through March 28, 2021 and includes Pindell's first video work in 25 years, as well as new large-scale paintings and several abstract paintings from earlier in her career.

"Working on my commission for The Shed has been a very rewarding and healing experience," said Howardena Pindell. "It allowed me to conceptualize an idea as a result of an experience I had as a child. I put it forth as a performance piece to a group of white women artists at the A.I.R. Gallery, where I was a founder in the early 1970s. They turned it down. (I was the only nonwhite member of the gallery.) The now-realized concept is the film *Rope/Fire/Water*, the centerpiece of the exhibition."

"When we began speaking with Howardena in 2017, she told us that since the 1970s she has wanted to showcase a difficult memory in the form of a film but there had been resistance," said **Alex Poots**, The Shed's Artistic Director and CEO. "Now, at this momentous time in America amongst the resounding calls for justice and equality for Black lives, the work will premiere at The Shed where we encourage artists to respond to the urgent issues of our time. We are incredibly honored to have commissioned Howardena to create this work and hope it enables us all to continue necessary conversations during this time."

“Bringing together Howardena Pindell’s painting and video practice has increasingly gained importance as our current circumstances have progressed,” said **Adeze Wilford**, Curatorial Assistant at The Shed. “Her intention to bring attention to historical events that have shaped this country through her video, paired with the beauty of her abstract paintings offered as care for the viewer, is vital for this moment. While we cannot turn away from the past, the artist has provided a means to bring us peace as we face the painful legacy of racism in this country.”

Over her nearly 60-year career, Pindell has created richly textured abstract paintings while engaging with politics and the social issues of her time. The powerful new video *Rope/Fire/Water* is a work that Pindell has wanted to create since the 1970s, inspired by a traumatic experience in her youth when she saw a shocking image of racial violence: “As a child, I was visiting a friend whose mother was cooking dinner consisting of cooking meat. On their living room table they had a recent issue of *Life* magazine. In it there was a picture of an African American man who was lying on his back on a log, who was burning from the inside out. White men surrounded the gruesome scene bubbling over with self-congratulatory smiles seeing what they had done. The smell of the meat cooking made it impossible for me to eat, and I could not eat meat for about a year,” said Pindell.

In the 19-minute video, Pindell recounts narratives and anthropological and historical data related to lynchings and racist attacks in the United States. Accompanying Pindell’s voiceover are brutal archival photos of lynchings and the Children’s Crusade of nonviolent protests by young people in Birmingham, Alabama, in May 1963. The sound of an unceasing, ticking metronome adds to the ominous atmosphere. A coda lists the names of Black people who died due to police brutality, and the work is dedicated to the late civil rights leader Congressman John Lewis.

Pindell will also debut a pair of large-scale black paintings, companion pieces to *Rope/Fire/Water* that are related to global atrocities of imperialism and white supremacy. *Columbus* (2020) features traced hands attached to the canvas with layers of black paint, with text about Columbus’s interactions with Indigenous people and King Leopold’s imperialistic reign over what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. The painting is accompanied by gruesomely lifelike silicone hands displayed on the ground. *Four Little Girls (Birmingham, Alabama, 1963)* (2019 – 20) explores the destruction of Black prosperity, with burned objects referencing the razing of the Black communities of Tulsa and Rosewood, as well as the 1963 Birmingham Baptist Church bombing that killed four girls. A related work on view, *Slavery Memorial: Lash* (1998 – 99), features three connected circles about the history of the transatlantic slave trade. A central image of tangled chains is flanked by circles with the names of West African tribal groups and images of masks. A list of African American inventors and their patents is shown on an adjacent screen.

Several abstract paintings also on view demonstrate a through line in Pindell’s practice: after working on traumatic historical projects, the artist decompresses by creating meticulously produced, large-scale abstract works on unstretched canvas. Dating from the mid-1970s to 2020, these works include three new abstract works that expand on the artist’s traditional use of paper hole punches through layers and shapes. Shown in tandem with earlier paintings, the assembled works highlight the evolution of Pindell’s practice from her early forays into large-scale abstraction to the present day.

“When Hans Ulrich Obrist and I were first discussing Pindell for our program at The Shed, we were drawn to the defining role she has played, not only as a visual artist, but as a curator, educator, and activist to expose racial injustices within the art world

and beyond,” said **Emma Enderby**, Chief Curator at The Shed. “Adeze Wilford, the exhibition’s curator, adeptly brings together Pindell’s visual and critical practice and the artist’s uncompromising presentation of American history as an activist force.”

An online gallery of paintings in the exhibition, along with explanatory texts and a digital reading room of supplementary resources, will be available online at [theshed.org](http://theshed.org). The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication with texts by Howardena Pindell; Adeze Wilford; Hans Ulrich Obrist, Senior Program Advisor at The Shed; and Ashley James, Associate Curator, Contemporary Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

The Shed’s multidisciplinary commissioning program is conceived by Artistic Director and CEO Alex Poots with the senior program team, including Emma Enderby, Chief Curator; Tamara McCaw, Chief Civic Program Officer; Madani Younis, Chief Executive Producer; and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Senior Program Advisor.

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### **Public Programs**

The Shed is programming a series of online multidisciplinary conversations and a self-guided tour by Black Gotham Experience’s Kamau Ware to further explore the themes of *Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water*. The first conversation series takes a deeper look at Pindell’s multifaceted legacy for new generations of Black creatives. The second series explores the connection between culture and policy addressing issues including policing and imprisonment, racial economic justice, representation, participation, and democracy. The conversations are free to the public and dates are to be announced.

Kamau Ware’s self-guided tour takes participants on an immersive site-specific exploration throughout the city that investigates the 1863 race riots in New York City as a consequence of the Civil War draft. Ware examines the layers of trauma that took place in a progressive city to give insight on lessons of resilience in the face of racial violence. The tour is presented in two formats: an audio-only version to accompany a self-guided tour through New York City and a video version that incorporates images from the historic moments. The tour is free and will be available on The Shed’s website.

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### **Ticketing and Visitor Experience**

Tickets for *Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water* are \$10, available at [theshed.org](http://theshed.org) or (646) 455-3494 beginning October 1, and must be reserved in advance for timed admission. The exhibition is on view Thursday to Sunday from 11 am to 6 pm. Admission is free through October 31.

A new entrance to The Shed for this exhibition takes visitors through The McCourt on the east side of the building (near the 7 train station at 34 St-Hudson Yards), offering direct entry to galleries and an expansive area for contactless ticketing, health screening, and restrooms. All visitors are required to wear a face covering or mask.

Please note that on-site public programs, tours, school groups, and group visits are suspended at this time in accordance with public health guidance on large gatherings. The coat check is closed, and large bags are prohibited. Cedric’s bar and McNally Jackson bookstore will open at a later date.

### **Member Access**

Shed Members have early access to timed ticket reservations starting September 28. Members are invited for a preview on October 15, from 4 – 7 pm. Reservations are required. For more information, please email [members@theshed.org](mailto:members@theshed.org) or call (646) 455-3494.

### **Ticket Access Program**

To date, over 4,000 individuals who are members of a partner organization—including children, seniors, and adults from New York City-based nonprofit, government, school, and social impact groups—have accepted our invitation to visit The Shed at low or no cost through our Ticket Access Program. For more information on tickets for this exhibition via the ticket access program visit our website at: <https://theshed.org/visit/ticket-access-program>

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### **About Howardena Pindell**

Born in Philadelphia in 1943, Howardena Pindell studied painting at Boston University and Yale University. She then worked for 12 years at the Museum of Modern Art (1967 – 79) as an exhibition assistant, an assistant curator in the Department of National and International Traveling Exhibitions, and finally as an associate curator and acting director in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. In 1979, she began teaching at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, where she is now a distinguished professor. In her work, Pindell often employs lengthy, metaphorical processes of destruction/reconstruction, addressing social issues of homelessness, AIDS, war, genocide, sexism, xenophobia, and apartheid. Pindell's work has been featured in many landmark museum exhibitions and is in the permanent collections of major international museums. Most recently, Pindell's work was the subject of the retrospective *Howardena Pindell: What Remains to Be Seen* (2018, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago).

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### **Support**

*Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water* is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

Membership at The Shed is supported by United Airlines.

The creation of new work at The Shed is generously supported by the Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Commissioning Fund and the Shed Commissioners.

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### **About The Shed**

Located on Manhattan's west side, The Shed commissions original works of art, across all disciplines, for all audiences. From hip hop to classical music, painting and sculpture to literature, film to theater and dance, The Shed brings together leading and emerging artists and thinkers from all disciplines under one roof. The building—a remarkable movable structure designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Lead Architect, and Rockwell Group, Collaborating Architect—physically transforms to support artists' most ambitious ideas. Committed to nurturing artistic invention and bringing creative experiences to the broadest possible audiences, The Shed, led by Artistic Director and CEO Alex Poots, is a 21st-century space of and for New York City