
THE SHED **Press Release**

THE **BLOOMBERG** BUILDING
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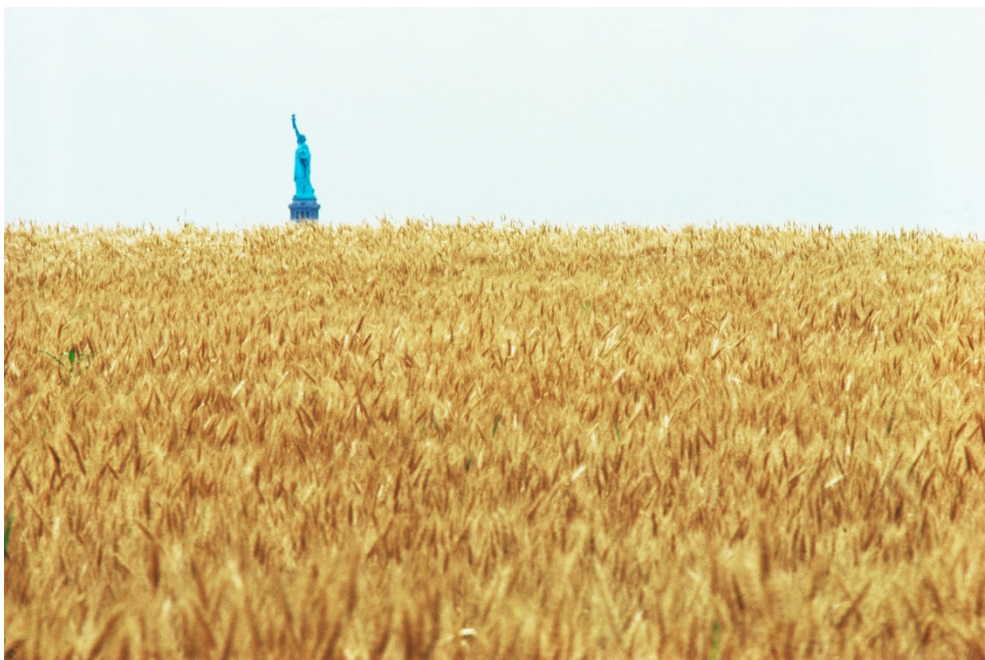
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Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield—A Confrontation*. Two acres of wheat planted and harvested by the artist on the Battery Park landfill, Manhattan, Summer 1982. Commissioned by Public Art Fund. Courtesy the artist and Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects.

The Shed Presents The Most Comprehensive Retrospective Exhibition To Date Of The Pioneering Work Of Agnes Denes

Spanning Denes’s Wide-Ranging 50-Year Career at the Forefront of Conceptual and Environmental Art

Agnes Denes: Absolutes and Intermediates On View
October 9, 2019 – March 22, 2020

Press Preview [UPDATED]: Tuesday, October 8, 2019, at 11:00 am - 2:00 pm

NEW YORK, NY, September 5, 2019 —This fall, The Shed will present the most comprehensive retrospective exhibition to date of the work of **Agnes Denes** (b. 1931), a leading figure in Conceptual and environmental art. On view October 9, 2019 to March 22, 2020 across both of The Shed’s expansive galleries, *Agnes Denes: Absolutes and Intermediates* will bring together more than 150 works in a broad range of media spanning Denes’s 50-year career, including three new works commissioned by The Shed. Denes rose to international attention in the 1960s and 1970s, creating work influenced by science, mathematics, philosophy, linguistics, ecology, and psychology to analyze, document, and ultimately aid humanity. Her theories about climate change and life in an ever-changing, technologically-driven world demonstrate a deeply prescient understanding of society today.

“A pioneer and a polymath, Agnes Denes is long overdue for a comprehensive exhibition,” said **Alex Poots**, Artistic Director and CEO of The Shed. “Denes’s practice epitomizes our vision at The Shed—a career spanning many mediums, interdisciplinary modes of thinking, experimentation, and pushing boundaries—and we are so proud to bring her visionary work together for the first time in New York City, her longtime home.”

Highlights of *Agnes Denes: Absolutes and Intermediates* include selections from her drawing series, which began in the late 1960s: the “Philosophical Drawings”, “Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections,” and “Pyramid Series,” the eco-conscious sculpture *Pyramids of Conscience* (2005); documentation of her realized monumental public works, including the iconic *Wheatfield—A Confrontation* (1982), which transformed the land that became New York’s Battery Park City into a two-acre wheat field; and a presentation of unrealized works, including three models commissioned by The Shed that expound and expand on ideas that have been ever-present throughout Denes’s career. Organized by **Emma Enderby**, The Shed’s Senior Curator, with **Adeze Wilford**, Curatorial Assistant, *Agnes Denes: Absolutes and Intermediates* is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue.

“Agnes Denes was ahead of her time. She saw the coming of an ecological crisis, and in the 1960s started working with land, mathematics, philosophy, language, and technology to consider and offer solutions to the challenges facing humanity,” said Emma Enderby, Senior Curator of The Shed. “She alerted us to humanitarian and environmental issues through beautiful, sensual visual forms combined with a deeply researched and scholarly philosophy. Her vision was radical, and in retrospect, terrifyingly prophetic.”

“Agnes Denes not only anticipated the man-made destruction of natural habitats at a moment when few people were paying attention, but much of her work features solutions to ecological crises that we are now facing,” said **Hans Ulrich Obrist**, The Shed’s senior program advisor. “Her preparatory drawings and plans are amazingly detailed and aesthetically beautiful. *A Model for A Forest for New York* is one such unrealized monumental project that this exhibition helps to advance to the next level, to help further a visionary idea that she has been developing throughout her career.”

Exhibition Highlights

The exhibition is organized into the main groupings of Denes’s work throughout her career: drawings, sculptures, monumental public works, and unrealized projects. Denes envisioned the “Philosophical Drawings” as ways to “visualize knowledge... [which] wasn’t easy, because I tried to visualize things that have never been visualized before, like logic, mathematics, thinking processes, and so on.” Examples on view include *Dialectic Triangulation: A Visual Philosophy* (1983), which analyzes and visualizes humanity’s achievements, paradoxes, and follies in a highly complex blueprint, including factors like ethics, logic, emotions and

passions, and astronomy. In her “Map Projections,” Denes represents the Earth in a technical sketch, maintaining the planet’s dimensions but reforming it as a cube, a snail, and a hot dog, among other shapes.

Denes’s “Pyramid Series” uses beautifully detailed drawings employing mathematical theory to create shifting pyramid forms that address environmental and philosophical concepts. The series also includes a group of drawings under the title “Future City,” jewel-like works that are actual plans for future cities to cope with impending ecological stress, including space stations and a floating city that supports life on or under water. Denes explores the pyramid form in sculpture as well, as in the four-part *Pyramids of Conscience* (2005): three Plexiglas pyramids are filled with clean water, polluted water, or crude oil, and the fourth has a mirrored surface to reflect viewers and their complicity in environmental issues.

Denes is best known for her monumental public artwork *Wheatfield—A Confrontation* (1982), which featured a two-acre wheat field planted on the land which became New York’s Battery Park City as a comment on mismanagement of world hunger, food, waste, energy, commerce, trade, land use, and economics. Photographs and other documentation of *Wheatfield* will be on view, as well as of other public works such as *Rice/Tree/Burial*, thought to be the first-ever site-specific work with ecological concerns, in which Denes planted rice, chained trees, and buried haiku poetry in Sullivan County, NY (1968) and later at Artpark, Lewiston (1977 – 79); and *Tree Mountain – A Living Time Capsule—11,000 Trees, 11,000 People, 400 Years* (1992 – 96), a planting of 11,000 trees in Finland in the pattern of the golden ratio.

The exhibition will debut three new Shed commissions of works that feature ideas and themes that Denes has explored throughout her career. *A Forest for New York* (2014–ongoing) is a proposal by Denes to turn a 120-acre landfill in Far Rockaway, Queens, into a park for all New Yorkers, planting 100,000 trees to help address respiratory health issues in the area and turn a barren space into a thriving forest. The Shed commissioned a model of the park to illustrate Denes’s continued cultural and environmental vision. *Model for Probability Pyramid—Study for Crystal Pyramid* (2019) is a variation of a 1976 drawing of a monumental, theoretical superstructure that would measure 50 by 50 meters and be constructed from 160,000 glass blocks. For this exhibition, The Shed commissioned a variation of the pyramid that measures 22.5 feet long by 30 feet wide by 17 feet high, comprised of nearly 6,000 3-D printed bricks made of compostable corn-based plastic, and is illuminated from within.

The Shed also commissioned *Model for Teardrop—Monument to Being Earthbound* (2019), a working proposal for a future monument featuring a 3-D printed teardrop floating above its base, kept in place by a magnetic field and glowing like a candle, as Denes proposed in her original 1984 drawing.

A scholarly publication will accompany the exhibition, edited by Emma Enderby and featuring a conversation between Agnes Denes and Hans Ulrich Obrist, as well as essays by Enderby, Giampaolo Bianconi, Lynn Gamwell, Renee Gladman, Caroline A. Jones, Lucy R. Lippard, Timothy Morton, and Klaus Ottmann.

About Agnes Denes

Agnes Denes was born in Budapest, raised in Sweden, and educated throughout the United States. She has participated in more than 600 exhibitions at galleries and museums internationally. Her solo shows have been presented at venues including Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1979) and Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (1974), among retrospective surveys at Firstsite, Colchester, United Kingdom (2013); *The Living Pyramid*, Socrates Sculpture Park (2015); Ludwig Museum, Budapest (2008); Samek Art Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA (2003); and Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY (1992).

Denes's work has also been featured in *Programmed: Rules, Codes, and Choreographies in Art, 1965 – 2018*, The Whitney Museum of American Art (2018); *Thinking Machines: Art and Design in the Computer Age, 1959 – 1989*, The Museum of Modern Art (2017); *documenta 14*, Kassel (2017); *SITelines: New Perspectives on Art of the Americas – Unsettled Landscapes*, SITE Santa Fe (2014); *Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph: 1964 – 1977*, Art Institute of Chicago (2012); *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2012); *Materializing Six Years: Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art*, Brooklyn Museum (2012); *Erre: variations labyrinthiques*, Centre Pompidou-Metz (2011 – 12); *Systems, Actions & Processes: 1965 – 1975*, PROA Foundation, Buenos Aires (2011); 38th Venice Biennale (1978); *documenta 6*, Kassel (1977); and the 2nd Biennale of Sydney (1976). Her works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Art Institute of Chicago; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Nuremberg; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and 28 other major art institutions worldwide.

Denes has completed public and private commissions in North and South America, Europe, Australia, and the Middle East, and has received numerous honors and awards including four fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, four grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, the DAAD Fellowship (1978), the American Academy of Arts and Letters Purchase Award (1985), the prestigious Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts at MIT (1990), the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome (1998), the Jill Watson Award for Transdisciplinary Achievement in the Arts from Carnegie Mellon University (1999), the Anonymous Was a Woman Award (2007), and the Ambassador's Award for Cultural Diplomacy (2008) from the American Embassy in Hungary. Denes received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2015.

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About The Shed

Located on Manhattan's west side, where the High Line meets Hudson Yards, 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.