

# SIKKEMA JENKINS&CO.

## MARLENE McCARTY *INTO THE WEEDS: SEX & DEATH*

June 22 – July 30, 2021

Sikkema Jenkins & Co. is pleased to present *Into the Weeds: Sex & Death*, an expansive, multi-dimensional installation conceived by Marlene McCarty. The project presents a series of new, large-scale drawings alongside an indoor garden and composting structures within the gallery space. The exhibition extends onto West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street with an outdoor garden sited in front of the gallery. *Into the Weeds* will be on view June 22 through July 30, 2021.

Using everyday materials such as graphite and ballpoint pen, McCarty's work often focuses on representations of the female body, femininity, and its position within familial and biological systems. Her subjects are depicted engaging in unorthodox or transgressive social formations, breaking down the traditional, accepted interactions among humans and other species, as well as between humans and nature. For *Into the Weeds*, McCarty turns to plants, and their complex ecocultural role within society to explore issues of reproductive health, physical autonomy, public space, and the symbiosis of growth and decay.

Throughout history, certain plants and weeds have been foraged and cultivated for a wide range of purposes, both curative and toxic. The alkaloids of the deadly nightshade, for example, have also been used to treat fevers and inflammation, while mugwort has been used to regulate menstruation and induce abortion. Seedlings have been cultivated and installed alongside McCarty's densely drawn compositions of plants, weeds, body parts, clothing, and abstract geometric forms. Meticulously shaded limbs and flowers interlace one another, mirroring each other's shape with the curl of a finger or the droop of a petal. This interplay of human body and plant are disrupted by various symbols alluding to a hegemony of white western culture: a Civil War ball gown, cowboy hat, and fragments of Modernist architecture, including the honeycomb-esque Vessel at Hudson Yards. Within these chimerical gardens lies a contentious ecosystem, constantly negotiating the power dynamics across gender, race, health, and history.

The external component of *Into the Weeds* features a garden installed in a low profile dumpster at the gallery's entrance on West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. As part of the original exhibition presented and organized by UB Arts Collaboratory, McCarty cultivated a composting site and permanent garden within the complex of decommissioned grain elevators at Silo City in Buffalo, NY. Like the paradoxical effects of botanical healthcare, the compost pile itself is a site of contradictions, fertilizing new life through decomposition. To take space for it in the public realm can be seen as a statement of reclamation, the recuperation of terrain in the name of local autonomy.

Marlene McCarty (born 1957, Lexington, KY) studied at the University of Cincinnati, College of Design, Architecture and Art 1975-77 and Schule für Gestaltung, Basel Switzerland from 1978-83. Since the 1980s, McCarty has worked across a variety of mediums, though drawing with everyday materials such as graphite or a ballpoint pen has become central to her work.

McCarty was a member of the AIDS activist collective Gran Fury and was the co-founder of the transdisciplinary design studio, Bureau, with Donald Moffett. A major survey exhibition, *Hard-Keepers*, was presented at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin in 2013. In addition to the presentation organized by UB Arts Collaboratory at UB Art Galleries and Silo City, other iterations of *Into the Weeds* were presented at Kunsthaus Baselland in Basel, Switzerland and Last Tango in Zurich, both in 2020. Her work is in the collection of major institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Brooklyn Museum; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

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**UPCOMING:**  
KAY ROSEN

SEP. 9 – OCT. 23

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