

WHITNEY

Press Release

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THE WHITNEY TO PRESENT ALEKSANDRA MIR'S *THE SEDUCTION OF GALILEO GALILEI*

October 20, 2011–February 19, 2012



Aleksandra Mir (b. 1967), still from *The Seduction of Galileo Galilei*, 2011. Video, color, sound; 16:33 min. Commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto. Collection of the artist, Mary Boone Gallery, New York, and Galeria Joan Prats, Barcelona

NEW YORK, October 4, 2011 – Engaging in a dialogue with the seventeenth-century Italian “father of modern science,” the London-based artist Aleksandra Mir will present *The Seduction of Galileo Galilei* (2011) at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Mir’s new video work documents a Galileo-inspired gravitational experiment along with a selection of collages

from Mir's series *The Dream and the Promise* (2008–09), combining religious iconography with that of space travel. The exhibition is curated by Whitney curator Carter Foster. It will be on view in the Lobby Gallery from October 20, 2011 through February 19, 2012.

Mir's projects are typically interactive and draw on her interests in technology, religion, media, and concepts of distance and place. Her work on projects, performances, and publications takes her into communities and art spaces around the world; a dual citizen of the United States and Sweden, Mir has lived in New York City, Palermo, and London. In their ample scale, affinity for spectacle, and engagement with landscape, Mir's works often recall the site-specific land art of such artists as Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer.

In *The Seduction of Galileo Galilei* (2011), Mir conducts a dialogue with the seventeenth-century Italian scientist, mathematician, and philosopher. The documentary video on view, set to a Baroque soundtrack, takes the narrative of Galileo's achievement and historical authority as its starting point—complicating and extending the cultural myth with which Mir's playful, participatory experiment engages. The artist performs a gravitational experiment inspired by Galileo's apocryphal test of the law of falling bodies. Rather than dropping objects from the top of the Leaning Tower in Pisa, as Galileo is said to have done in his observations of gravity's effect on objects of differing masses, Mir and her team attempted to build their own tower. In the gravel pit of a go-kart track in Stouffville, Ontario, Mir worked with crane operators and volunteers to stack tires as high as possible in a precarious, liling spire.

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) was a devout Catholic; however, his investigations into astronomy and cosmology, particularly his advocacy of Copernicus's theory that the Earth orbits the sun, set him at odds with the Church and its doctrines, leading to a charge of heresy in 1633. As Sarah Robayo Sheridan, the curator who commissioned this work for Mercer Union, Toronto, described the artist's role: "A corrupting femme fatale, [Mir] solicits an intellectual affair with a man almost four centuries her senior, in order to explore, exploit, and liberate the void in the telling of the myth."

Also on view are collages from Mir's 2008–09 series *The Dream and the Promise*. Interweaving and juxtaposing depictions of religious figures and iconography with images of space and space travel, these works relate to the artist's question, "If angels and astronauts share the same sky, isn't it time they were introduced?" Her seamless melding of the parallel visual vocabularies of

science and faith alludes to the complicated relationship between the two traditions, and their different ways of understanding our world.

The Seduction of Galileo Galilei was commissioned by Mercer Union: A Centre for Contemporary Art, Toronto.

About the Artist

Aleksandra Mir was born in Lublin, Poland, in 1967, and is a dual citizen of Sweden and the United States. She received her BFA at the School for Visual Arts, New York in 1992, and from 1994 to 1996 studied cultural anthropology at the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research, New York. Mir currently lives and works in London, England. Since 1995 her work has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions in the United States and Europe including the Venice Biennale (2009) and the Whitney Biennial (2004). Mir has also published many artists' books. Her work is included in important public collections such as the Tate Modern, London, and Kunsthaus Zürich, as well as the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Mir's work can also be seen in *Singular Visions*, on the fifth floor of the Museum.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the world's leading museum of twentieth-century and contemporary art of the United States. Focusing particularly on works by living artists, the Whitney is celebrated for presenting important exhibitions and for its renowned collection, which comprises over 19,000 works by more than 2,900 artists. With a history of exhibiting the most promising and influential artists and provoking intense debate, the Whitney Biennial, the Museum's signature exhibition, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in the United States. In addition to its landmark exhibitions, the Museum is known internationally for events and educational programs of exceptional significance and as a center for research, scholarship, and conservation.

Founded by sculptor and arts patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930, the Whitney was first housed on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. The Museum relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and, in 1966, inaugurated its present home, designed by Marcel Breuer, at 945 Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side. While its vibrant program of exhibitions and events continues uptown, the Whitney is moving forward with a new building project, designed by Renzo Piano, in downtown Manhattan. Located at the corner of Gansevoort and Washington Streets in the Meatpacking District, at the southern entrance to the High Line, the new building, which has generated immense momentum and support, will enable the Whitney to vastly increase the size and scope of its exhibition and programming space. Ground was broken in May 2011, and the building is projected to open to the public in 2015.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Xavier Cha: Body Drama

Through October 9, 2011

Lyonel Feininger: At the Edge of the World

Through October 16, 2011

David Smith: Cubes and Anarchy

October 6, 2011–January 8, 2012

Real/Surreal

October 6, 2011–February 12, 2012

Three Landscapes: A Film Installation by Roy Lichtenstein

October 6, 2011–February 12, 2012

Aleksandra Mir: The Seduction of Galileo Galilei

October 20, 2011–February 19, 2012

SHERRIE LEVINE: MAYHEM

November 10, 2011 –January 29, 2012

Whitney Biennial
Singular Visions
Designing the Whitney of the Future

March 1–May 27, 2012
Through April 2012
On Continuous View

The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$18. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$12. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission to the Kaufman Astoria Studios Film & Video Gallery only: \$6. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.

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