

Institute of Contemporary University Art of Pennsylvania

118 S. 36th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104
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NEWS RELEASE

Major Solo Exhibition by Artist Jessica Vaughn Opens Winter 2021 at the Institute of Contemporary Art

*Featuring new and recent work that investigate intersections
between labor, race, and workspace environments*

January 15, 2021

Philadelphia, PA

The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania is pleased to present *Jessica Vaughn: Our Primary Focus Is To Be Successful*, a major survey of new and recent work, on view February 26 through May 9, 2021. Within this exhibition Vaughn considers the intersections between late twentieth- and twenty-first-century work culture, modular architecture—its promise of malleability and universality—and the marginalized workers who have been rendered invisible within these workspaces. Vaughn (b. 1983, Chicago, IL; lives Brooklyn, NY) transforms and repurposes employee training videos, career exploration tools, government occupational reports, and workplace lighting fixtures into photographs, sculptures, paintings, and video that urge us to reconsider the systems that shape the spaces where work is conducted.

The works on view are grounded in the political and social relations that make up workspaces particularly affirmative action, legislation that was implemented in the 1960s to integrate the government workforce; minimalism, an art movement that prioritized industrial materials; and the development of the office cubicle that would come to revolutionize how and where we work. These three seemingly disparate moments that have been historicized as distinct are in fact intertwined and, for Vaughn, of great critical focus. Presented here are the material legacies of these histories not only as they existed in the past, but as they persist today.



Jessica Vaughn, *Our Primary Focus Is To Be Successful*, 2019, 2-channel, color digital video installation, sound, loop, 7 minutes, 37 seconds. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON, Chicago, IL. Photo by Aron Gent.



Jessica Vaughn, *Our Primary Focus Is To Be Successful* (still), 2019, 2-channel, color digital video installation, sound, loop, 7 minutes, 37 seconds. Courtesy of the artist and Martos Gallery, NYC.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

ICA is located at:
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The museum is open to the public
Wed-Sun, 11AM-6PM.

Entry is by timed ticket registration
only. Please visit us online at
icaphila.org for the latest on safety
protocols in place and new visitor
guidelines, as well as the most up-to-
date information on the university’s
COVID-19 response plan.

ICA is always Free. For all.
Free admission is courtesy of
Amanda and Glenn Fuhrman.

EEOACS 1978 REPORT



Jessica Vaughn, *Problem Sets*, 2020,
acrylic paint on wall. Courtesy of the
artist and and Martos Gallery, NYC.

“Vaughn’s practice is centered around an interrogation of materials that make up our world, but often go unnoticed: the fabric scraps from public transit, empty postal bins, and office lighting fixtures, and how these objects are inscribed with the history of American labor practices” said Meg Onli, Andrea B. Laporte Associate Curator. “We are on the precipice of new ways of working if/when we return to the spaces we work. This survey will be an opportunity to reflect not only on the shift that we are about to take, but the many changes that have occurred throughout America’s labor history.”

Among the highlights of the exhibition is *Problem Sets*, a series of wall paintings of illustrations from US Government Labor reports on equity and inclusion, and the video installation *Our Primary Focus Is To Be Successful* (2019), a two-channel video of found workplace training tutorials, footage of office spaces, animated text and generic hold music. Vaughn has produced her largest work to date, a site-specific LED-light sculpture, *Irrational Rest*, that visualizes occupational lighting patterns over a twenty-four-hour rotation.

The exhibition takes place at a moment of radical change of how and where we work. Vaughn’s work encourages us as viewers to consider the complex histories and, most importantly, the people who have created the objects and environments that we live with.

Our Primary Focus Is To Be Successful is organized by Meg Onli, Andrea B. Laporte Associate Curator. Related programming includes a film screening, conversation, and curator-led tour, for which dates are to be announced. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication to be released in summer 2021.

Support for this exhibition has been provided by the Inchworm Fund. The Inchworm Fund is an endowment created to respond to ICA’s spirit of exploration, supporting artists and curators in their quest to uncover the unknown through multiyear research, exhibition, publication, and conversation. In naming the fund, visionary Philadelphia patron Daniel W. Dietrich, II wished to attract fellow contributors, encouraging ICA to reach and expand toward new possibilities.

Additional support has been provided by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Martos Gallery, Danielle Mandelbaum Anderman, Dorothy & Martin Bandier, Julie & Lawrence Bernstein, Cheri & Steven Friedman, Kirk Kirkpatrick, Josephine Magliocco, Patricia & Howard Silverstein, and Meredith & Bryan Verona.

**ABOUT INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART |
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA**

The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania is a non-collecting institution presenting exhibitions at the forefront of contemporary practice and culture that provoke our multiple audiences to think in new ways. ICA is free for all to engage and connect with the art of our time.

Since our inception in 1963, we have welcomed the challenge of the current moment to continually evolve as a responsive institution. We are committed to and advocate for the artists, research, and dialogues that resonate today.