Institute of Contemporary Art
University of Pennsylvania

118 S. 36th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104
(215) 898-7108, icaphila.org

Mavis Pusey's First Museum Solo Exhibition Provides Expansive Look into the Underrecognized Artist's Life and Work in Geometric Abstraction

Opening at ICA Philadelphia July 2025, *Mavis Pusey: Mobile Images*
Advances New Research and Preservation Efforts, Conducted in Partnership with the Studio Museum in Harlem

Philadelphia, PA (February 11, 2025) — For the first time, the life and work of Jamaica-born artist Mavis Pusey (1928-2019) will be fully explored in a major museum survey. Opening July 2025, ICA Philadelphia presents *Mavis Pusey: Mobile Images*, an extensive retrospective spanning the prolific artist's 50-year career. Featuring more than 60 works – including paintings, drawings, and prints – as well as archival materials, the exhibition explores the influences that led Pusey to develop her unique visual language

through experimentation with geometric abstraction. Tracing her journey from Jamaica to New York, London, Paris, Philadelphia, and Virginia, *Mobile Images* demonstrates the evolution of Pusey's work throughout her life, and offers a long-overdue reexamination of her impact on American abstraction and beyond.

On view July 12 through December 7, 2025, *Mavis Pusey: Mobile Images* is curated by Hallie Ringle, Interim Director and Daniel and Brett Sundheim Chief Curator of the ICA Philadelphia, with Kiki Teshome, Curatorial Assistant at the Studio Museum in Harlem, where it will travel in Spring 2027. The exhibition is supported by extensive research and preservation initiatives conducted in partnership with the Getty Research Institute and Getty Conservation Institute with significant support from the Mellon Foundation. Following the exhibition opening, ICA will host a two-day symposium, bringing together scholars, artists, community leaders, and the public to discuss Pusey's legacy and the continued relevance of her work today. Dates and details will be announced at a later date.

"It has been a monumental and collaborative process to bring this project to fruition. Culminating over a decade of partnership, working initially with the artist herself and collaborating alongside Thelma Golden and the Studio Museum, the exhibition marks the first time that Pusey's work will be on view publicly in a comprehensive manner," remarks Ringle. "Our goal is to enable audiences to appreciate the breadth and evolution of Pusey's work within a deeply researched framework, and for the public, scholars, and artists alike to be able to draw connections between her work and key art historical narratives and contemporary practices."

While Pusey's dedication to geometric abstraction earned her recognition from key curatorial voices during her lifetime, like Howardina Pindell, her work remains largely overlooked. Born and raised in Retreat, Jamaica, she created rich abstract paintings and works on paper inspired by her wide-ranging interests in fashion, print-making, and the urban environment of cities she lived in throughout her life. Pusey studied at the Art Students League under Will Barnet (1961–1965) and, later, worked at Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop (1969–1972), which was frequented by significant figures such as Emma Amos, Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, and Melvin Edwards, among others. A passionate educator, she taught for some time at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia as she continued to develop her own studio work.

Pusey resisted pressures to create figurative, overtly socio-political work and remained committed to working in abstraction, retaining a focused thematic vision of her work throughout her career. However, discriminatory hiring practices that barred her from tenured teaching positions, and a late-in-life illness further contributed to the fragmentation and near-loss of her artistic archive. Starting in 2015, Ringle, who at the time served as Assistant Curator at the Studio Museum, worked closely with the artist; Thelma Golden, Ford Foundation Director and Chief Curator of the Studio Museum; and the team at the Studio Museum to painstakingly reassemble her body of work before her death in 2019, including the acquisition of a large portion of Pusey's work for the Studio Museum's collection. With her appointment at ICA, Ringle continued to advance her research, prompting a close collaboration between ICA and the Studio Museum on comprehensive conservation and research initiatives to preserve the artist's legacy.

Golden said, “Mavis Pusey was a truly pioneering artist of the abstract movement who should be rightfully recognized for her formal precision and boundless curiosity. My immense gratitude goes to Hallie Ringle for her unwavering care and research throughout this process and to the entire team at ICA Philadelphia and the Studio Museum, especially Kiki Teshome, for their dedication and attention over the course of this exhibition’s planning.”

Unfolding across ICA’s first and second floors, *Mavis Pusey: Mobile Images* is organized in thematic sections that explore important motifs in her work, including the body, music, and demolition/construction. The exhibition will debut seven newly discovered paintings, on view for the first time alongside key works moving through each period of Pusey’s creative trajectory. Although some of Pusey’s works are over 50 years old, the themes addressed connect deeply to contemporary life. Her “Broken Construction” series (1960s–1990s) explores ideas of destruction and renewal as a metaphor for societal change. Her compositions, which show bricks and boards falling to the ground, are not dystopian realities but rather hopeful imaginings of the future. Another highlight are Pusey’s works created in reaction to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and student protests in Paris during the 1960s. After witnessing the student protests in Paris, Pusey created several prints inspired by the movement, including *Paris, Mars - Juin* (1968) that shows the city in flames. *Eric* (1968), named after a friend, was inspired by an encounter she had with the French police: the periphery of the print is minimalist in form and grows increasingly chaotic towards the center, representing the emotional turmoil Eric felt under his cool demeanor. These and other works are contextualized by the inclusion of photographs, notes, and

ephemera from Pusey's lifetime, which offer historical and personal insight into the artist's boundary-pushing body of work.

Conservation

Much of Pusey's work has needed conservation, and experts across the country have been working to restore her paintings and prints. As part of this initiative, ICA Philadelphia and the Studio Museum are working collaboratively with the Getty Research Institute and the Getty Conservation Institute to jointly conduct a thorough study of Pusey's work. The study includes focused technical analysis of the artist materials and conserving her works on paper. All of Getty's findings will be published so that the technical aspects of Pusey's practice will be made broadly accessible to the public.

Exhibition Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive publication documenting Pusey's creative practice. Designed by Miko McGinty, the catalog will include forewords by Thelma Golden and Hallie Ringle, an introduction by Ringle, guest essays, a roundtable on experimental music and its impact on Pusey's work, and an archive essay by Kiki Teshome. The publication is co-published by the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, and the Studio Museum in Harlem.

Exhibition Organization and Credits

Mavis Pusey: Mobile Images is curated by Hallie Ringle, Interim Director and Daniel and Brett Sundheim Chief Curator of the ICA Philadelphia, with Kiki Teshome, Curatorial Assistant, Studio Museum in Harlem. The exhibition is co-organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania and the Studio Museum in Harlem. The presentation of the artist's archival materials is curated by Teshome.

Major support for *Mavis Pusey: Mobile Images* has been provided by the Mellon Foundation. Additional support has been provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Support for curatorial research has been provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

The Terra Foundation for American Art, established in 1978 and having offices in Chicago and Paris, supports organizations and individuals locally and globally with the aim of fostering intercultural dialogues and encouraging transformative practices that expand narratives of American art, through the foundation's grant program, collection, and initiatives.

About the Institute of Contemporary Art | University of Pennsylvania

The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA Philadelphia) is a global hub for contemporary art and ideas. Free and open to all, ICA Philadelphia is dedicated to supporting artistic practices across disciplines and to serving as a laboratory for risk-taking, community-building, and knowledge-creation. Since 1963, ICA Philadelphia has championed the University's commitment to cultivating the next generation of imaginative creators and thinkers. Through commissions, exhibitions, programs, publications, and special projects, ICA Philadelphia fosters bold experimentation, curiosity, and discovery. Learn more at icaphila.org.

About Studio Museum in Harlem

The Studio Museum in Harlem is internationally known for its catalytic role in promoting the work of artists of African descent. The Studio Museum is now constructing a new home at its longtime location on Manhattan's West 125th Street. Designed by Adjaye Associates with executive architect Cooper Robertson, the building—the first created expressly for the institution's program—will enable the Studio Museum to better serve a growing and diverse audience, provide additional educational opportunities for people of all ages, expand its program of world-renowned exhibitions, effectively display its singular collection, and strengthen its trailblazing *Artist-in-Residence* program.

While the Museum is closed for construction, its groundbreaking exhibitions, thought-provoking conversations, and engaging art-making workshops continue at a variety of partner and satellite locations in Harlem and beyond. For more information, visit studiomuseum.org. Find us on Instagram, Facebook, X, and YouTube: @studiomuseum.

Image Credits (top to bottom)

1. Mavis Pusey with her work *Within Manhattan*. Image courtesy of Studio Museum in Harlem.
2. Mavis Pusey, *Paris, Mars – Juin*, 1968. Image courtesy of the Estate of Mavis Pusey.

Press Contacts

Resnicow and Associates
LeAnne Bugay / Shea Seery / Francesca Kielb
lbugay@resnicow.com / sseery@resnicow.com / fkielb@resnicow.com
212-671-5167 / 212-671-5173 / 212-671-5152