

*The Sea, the Sky, a Window*

A Project by Sarah Crowner

Hill Art Foundation

Opening September 22, 2023



Studio photography courtesy of Sarah Crowner. Photo: Charles Benton

The Hill Art Foundation is pleased to present *The Sea, the Sky, a Window*, a project by Sarah Crowner opening September 22, 2023. The exhibition will place site-specific works by Crowner in dialogue with sculptures and paintings from the Hill Collection, as well as key loaned works.

The centerpiece of the exhibition will be three site-specific paintings created by Crowner in direct response to sculptures by Cy Twombly, an artist whose sculptural output consisted of intimate, corporeally scaled works. The Twombly/Crowner couplings modulate between spectator and subject, foreground and background, addressing each other across medium and time. In conversation with Levi Prombaum for the accompanying catalogue, Crowner elaborates: “These blue monochromes might be

staged as backdrops, but they are more than backgrounds. They are paintings that replace windows, and that act as windows. What if we think about a sculpture looking at one, or looking through one, onto the city?”



Cy Twombly, *Untitled*, 2009. Bronze, 94 5/8 x 15 7/8 x 12 3/8 in. (240.3 x 40.3 x 31.4 cm).  
© Cy Twombly Foundation

Windows as architectural elements, framing devices, and portals are key to the project. Crowner explains: “I’ve been thinking about the window not only as a metaphor for painting, like that classic Renaissance view of the painting as a window *onto* the world. Paintings and windows are also a kind of staging ground. Through them, we learn so much *about* the world. We pay attention to what’s around it, to what’s through it... We negotiate presence, tension, and embodiment.”

Crowner’s dialogues with Twombly open outward in a polyvocal, intergenerational exchange across two and three dimensions—a dynamic that is deepened by the inclusion of a range of works in the Hill Collection by other artists, including

Beatrice Caracciolo, Spencer Finch, Louise Giovanelli, Jennie C. Jones, Claude LaLanne, and Henri Matisse.

Another animating throughline in *The Sea, the Sky, a Window* is the concept of “set and setting.” In his essay, Prombaum expands on this idea:

A psychedelic experience, according to a body of research developing since the 1950s, can be understood as the interplay between the feelings and perceptions that you bring to your trip (your mindset, or “set”), and your relation to the physical, social, and cultural environments in which your trip takes place (your “setting”). As a way of describing an intentional exchange between your body and its surroundings, the concept of set and setting may also be applied to the art experience. It helps explain how what you bring to an artwork is as impactful as what an artwork brings to you. In Crowner’s art, there is an additional sense of

flux, because her settings strive to be as active as the viewers that experience them. Put another way: Crowner's sets bring a mindset that's all their own.

Crowner's exploration of the interplay between painting and sculpture extends to her focus on the relationship between viewer and artwork, which is further inflected by her interest in set design and the proscenium stage. An example of this is another site-specific work created for the exhibition, *Platform (Sky Blue Pentagon)*, which will cover the floor of one of the Foundation's galleries. The work offers an additional interpretation of the stage, as visitors to the exhibition will be invited to step onto the tessellating tiles and experience the work in direct relation with their bodies. As viewers activate *Platform*, *Platform* activates the space of the gallery; Probaum observes, "At certain times of day, it will reflect in the window and extend, with a sense of endlessness, parallel to the bustling pedestrian walkway. Or, the platform's glossy tiles will refract the sun and bathe the space in subtle glows that recast it in many variations."

Between the site-specific paintings, which are sized precisely to the walls of the Foundation, and *Platform (Sky Blue Pentagon)*, which intervenes directly in visitor's movement through the gallery, *The Sea, the Sky, a Window* responds to the Hill Art Foundation's Peter Marino-designed building and Chelsea surroundings. With nods to architects Carlo Scarpa and Lina Bo Bardi, and guided by archival photography of Twombly's studio, Crowner investigates how architecture, art, and viewer interact with and elevate each other.

### **Hill Art Foundation**

The Hill Art Foundation is a nonprofit organization founded with the goals of amplifying the artist's voice, deepening the relationship between art and the viewer, and connecting the dots between artistic movements through meaningful juxtapositions. The Foundation is committed to prioritizing education through programs for NYC teens, and commissioning original scholarship for Foundation publications. Visitors to the Foundation can experience rotating selections from a world-class collection that is always free and open to the public.

The Foundation uses the nearly 500-object Hill Collection as a springboard for each guest artist or curator to mine unexpected relationships between its contemporary, modern, and Renaissance holdings. Some of the most compelling exhibitions staged

since the Foundation's inauguration have been direct partnerships with contemporary artists, who have drawn from the collection and key loans to illuminate their work with new art-historical inflections. Recent artist-collaborators include Christopher Wool, Charles Ray, Kevin Beasley, Spencer Finch, and David Salle.

*The Sea, the Sky, a Window* is the culmination of a long and productive relationship between the Hill Art Foundation and Sarah Crowner. The Hills have been collecting Crowner's work since 2009, and provided a key loan of *Rotated Stretched Stems* (2016) to *Sarah Crowner: Beetle in the Leaves* at MASS MoCA in 2016. Margot Norton included three Crowner paintings from the Collection in *No Forms*, the 2022 exhibition she curated at the Foundation highlighting women and nonbinary artists responding to the legacy of Minimalism.

### **Sarah Crowner**

Sarah Crowner (b. 1974, Philadelphia) earned a BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1996 and an MFA from Hunter College, City University of New York in 2002. In September 2023, the Pulitzer Arts Foundation will host *Sarah Crowner: Around Orange*, an exhibition of three new site-specific artworks responding to the architecture of the Pulitzer's Tadao Ando building and Ellsworth Kelly's monumental wall sculpture, *Blue Black*. Other significant recent projects include a 2022 solo exhibition at Museo Amparo in Puebla, Mexico, which was accompanied by a catalogue, as well as a 2022 commission by the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, TX for a site-specific tile installation that will remain on view into 2024. In 2016, Crowner was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA; a major monograph was produced on the occasion of that exhibition. Crowner's work has also been featured in a number of group exhibitions, including the Whitney Biennial 2010, New York; *Abstract Generation: Now in Print*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013); *Excursus IV: Primary Information*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2013); *Painter Painter*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2013); *Conversation Piece*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2014); and the Carnegie International Exhibition, 57th Edition (2018). Her work is in the collections of major international institutions including Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; The Contemporary Austin, TX; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.