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# Janet Biggs

**A RILEY CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS PROJECT GALLERY EXHIBITION**

Now through September 10 at Joslyn Art Museum

(Omaha, NE) – Over the last ten years, Janet Biggs has traveled to some of the most extreme environments in the world, including the remote arctic Norwegian archipelago Svalbard, the Taklamakan Desert in western China, and, most recently, a contested territory in northern Ethiopia known as the Danakil Depression. Through moving image, photography, and performance, Biggs studies the human response to physical and psychological demands. Her Riley CAP Gallery exhibition grapples with this theme through the lens of three video works that examine how individuals push themselves to the limit and the body's remarkable ability to adapt when confronted with adversity. On view at Joslyn June 3 through September 10, *Janet Biggs* is included in free general Museum admission.

For her 2012 video *A Step on the Sun*, Biggs trekked to Kawah Ijen, a volcano in Java, Indonesia, known for its stunning turquoise lakes and rich sulfur stores. The video follows a miner tasked with harvesting sulfur crystals, a dangerous endeavor that requires enduring the poisonous sulfur-dioxide gas streaming out of fissures

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Janet Biggs at Joslyn Art Museum

in the volcano's walls. Pitting these harsh working conditions against a pristine landscape, Biggs offers startling, and often haunting, visual juxtapositions. As with all of her work, audio is an essential component of *A Step on the Sun*. Pairing the sounds of the mine – hissing gas, the miners' coughs and moans, creaking baskets weighted down with crystals – with forlorn Javanese vocal music and a melodic string composition, the disjointed soundtrack enhances the eerie, otherworldly quality of the video's setting.

*Vanishing Point*, 2009, and *Written on Wax*, 2015, both contemplate the complex physiological and emotional effects of Alzheimer's, a topic Biggs began exploring after her grandfather was afflicted with the disease. In *Written on Wax*, 2015, Biggs turns the camera on herself to create a two-channel video focusing on how memories are formed, retained, and morph over time. On one screen, viewers watch as Biggs submits herself to electric shock therapy, while the other screen cycles through a variety of moving images – a synchronized swimmer, ocean kayakers, a young girl ice skating. With the appearance of one particular image – a close-up of horses' hooves as they rhythmically beat against pavement – the artist receives a shock, causing her face and hands to momentarily spasm. Through this process, Biggs learns to associate horses with negative emotions, even though she has happy memories of years spent riding during her youth. At the end of *Written on Wax*, we see the artist mounting a horse, tentatively at first, and then with confidence, as she attempts to reclaim her positive associations with the animal.

*Vanishing Point* immerses the viewer in an unusual landscape – Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats, a vast desert terrain that has been the site of automobile and motorcycle racing since the early 1900s. Leslie Porterfield holds three motorcycle world speed records, titles she claimed in 2008, just one year after a crash on the Salt Flats left



her battling for her life. Biggs filmed a determined Porterfield during those record-breaking runs. She intersperses this footage with scenes of Harlem's Addicts Rehabilitation Center (ARC) Gospel Choir as it performs a piece that Biggs and composer Barney McAll wrote for the project. Founded in 1975, the ARC choir combats drug addiction through the power of music. In stitching together these disparate narratives that confront the struggle to maintain physical,

mental, and emotional self-identity, Biggs connects Porterfield's shattered body and the downward spiral of addiction to the loss of memory and crumbling ability to communication that accompany Alzheimer's.

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Janet Biggs at Joslyn Art Museum

### About the Artist

Janet Biggs (American, b. 1959) received her BFA from Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, in 1982, before completing graduate studies at the Rhode Island School of Design. In addition to hundreds of screenings, site-specific installations, and live performances Biggs has executed around the world, her work has recently been featured in exhibitions at Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (2012); Tampa Museum of Art and Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany (both 2011); and Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC, and McNay Art Museum, San Antonio (both 2010).

### About Joslyn's Riley CAP Gallery

A 500-square-foot space in the Scott Pavilion suite of galleries, the Riley CAP Gallery showcases nationally- and internationally-recognized artists, as well as emerging talent, selected by Joslyn curators. A rotating schedule of carefully focused exhibitions will examine how artists engage with the world and respond to the issues that challenge them creatively, bringing new perspectives on contemporary art to Nebraska. Riley CAP Gallery artists will be invited to Joslyn for lectures and other public programs, giving audiences the opportunity to gain insight into creative processes and contribute to an expanded dialogue about new art. The first Joslyn gallery dedicated exclusively to living artists, the Riley CAP Gallery represents an important step in making contemporary art an even more integral component of the Museum's exhibition programming.

PICTURED: (PAGE 1) Janet Biggs (American, born 1959), *A Step on the Sun*, 2012, single-channel HD video, 16:9 format, 9:05 minutes, edition 2 of 5 + 2 AP, © Janet Biggs, Courtesy the artist and Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York; (PAGE 2) Janet Biggs (American, born 1959), *Vanishing Point*, 2009, single-channel HD video, 16:9 format, 10:32 minutes, edition of 5 + 2 AP, © Janet Biggs, Courtesy the artist and Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York

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**JOSLYN**  
Art Museum

**Our Mission** — Joslyn Art Museum collects, preserves, and interprets the visual arts of the highest quality, fostering appreciation and enjoyment of art for the benefit of a diverse audience.  
**Our Vision** — To be cherished and respected as a premier art museum.

Joslyn Art Museum showcases art from ancient times to the present. The Museum was a gift to the people of Omaha from Sarah Joslyn in memory of her husband, George, who made his fortune as president of the Western Newspaper Union. The Museum's original 1931 building is one of the finest examples of Art Deco architecture in the nation, with 38 types of marble from seven countries. The Walter and Suzanne Scott Pavilion, a 58,000-square-foot addition built in 1994, was designed by renowned British architect Norman Foster as his first U.S. commission. The Museum features galleries, a 1,000-seat concert hall, fountain court, education technology gallery, lecture hall, classrooms, sculpture garden, café, shop, and Art Works, an interactive space for art exploration.

**General Museum Admission:** Free (the *Janet Biggs* exhibition is included in free general Museum admission).

**Regular Museum Hours (includes exhibition):** Tuesday through Sunday, 10 am–4 pm; late 'til 8 pm on Thursday; closed Monday and major holidays.

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