

# Morgan Presents



## Rebecca Ness: Inheritance

September 10<sup>th</sup>—October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Opening September 10<sup>th</sup>, 5–8pm

537 W 27th Street, New York, NY 10001

Inheritance is a slippery concept. The difficulty begins at inception, with the fact of its condition as a byproduct of generationality that is only occasionally indexical to it. What is inherited is never quite the same as it was at its source; and it is only ever a small fraction of all that has come before.

Rebecca Ness investigates both the processes and products of inheritance.

Major preexisting themes in Ness's practice come together in two new large paintings that mark a similarly scaled evolution for the artist. In *Abe's winning punch*, which moves off of George Bellows's famous *Dempsey and Firpo* (1924) that captures the moment the latter fells the former with a single, decisive blow, Ness recasts Dempsey as an ancestor from the Lower East Side who was an amateur boxer, using a canonical referent as scaffolding to describe the attenuated nature of relating to a murky hereditary past.

The tenuous nature of persistence and the precarity of inheritance are recurring themes in Ness's ongoing series of portraits of a dwindling number of gay bars. Following in the footsteps of the likes of Kerry James

# Morgan Presents

Marshall and Salman Toor, Ness takes up Manet's *A Bar at the Folies Bergère* to work through shifts in the terms of gender, sociality, and desire. *A seat at Cubbyhole* processes these shifts through the iconic West Village bar to describe sympathetic, overlapping genealogies that include but exceed individual lives, and connect across eras.

Ness's signature style draws on a long tradition of queer realists such as Paul Cadmus and Fairfield Porter. But a new series of wall works, made in the American image board tradition of William Harnett and John F. Peto, attends to what is lost or retained as something is passed down or picked up. Each is an iconological enticement to detective work—including the backgrounds, which catalogue a vast array of abstract mark-making practices. But to sleuth out their sources reveals little about either referent or reference. In appearing to tell us with precision where they come from, this series instead describes the profound imprecision of inheritance, what gets lost despite efforts to combat that through memory, collecting, and other mechanisms developed to sustain the illusion of control, and how what is retained changes.

The illusory nature of control is also analogized in *Transfer*, which positions the viewer across the tracks from the frenzied exchange of a subway stop at rush hour. Ness looks to the horror vacui to describe the intersection of the baroque machinery of the New York City subway and the humanity it moves. But whereas all gaps would traditionally be filled with a density that seems retaliatory for the audacity of emptiness, Ness uses the sides of the subway car to create a tension between what can and cannot pass on. In figuring something as universal and impersonal as the Subway as being as much a part of her inheritance as the European canon or her own family archive—and doing so on her largest canvas to date—Ness proposes a way of conceiving of inheritance that is as expansive as it is illusory, and the small fragments she paints into, changed though they are, are ineluctably her own.

—Cat Dawson

---

**Rebecca Ness (b. 1992, Salem, MA)** received her MFA from the Yale School of Art and her BFA from Boston University. Major examples of the artist's work are held in the collections of Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; SFMoMA, San Francisco; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden; Albertina Museum, Vienna, Austria; Long Museum, Shanghai, China; Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker, Norway; The High Museum of Art, Atlanta; The Speed Art Museum, Louisville; SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Orange County Museum of Art, Santa Ana; Zuzeum Art Centre, Rīga, Latvia; JP Morgan Chase Art Collection. Paintings by the artist have also recently been included in exhibitions at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, GA, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Miami, FL and the Akron Art Museum in OH.

The Ogunquit Museum of American Art will mount a survey exhibition of paintings by Rebecca Ness opening April 23rd 2027. This exhibition will be accompanied by a new monograph of the artist's work published by Monacelli Press.

For press inquiries, please contact Lauren Lee at [lauren@morgan-presents.com](mailto:lauren@morgan-presents.com)

Image: Rebecca Ness, *Morning Wall*, 2026, oil on linen, 40 x 30 inches (101.5 x 76 cm)