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Angelica Villa, "Whitney Biennial's \$100,000 Bucksbaum Award Goes to Nikita Gale, Whose Installation Meshed Sound and Mechanics," *ARTnews*, September 20, 2024.

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BY ANGELICA VILLA  September 20, 2024 2:35pm

    



Nikita Gale, *TEMPO RUBATO (STOLEN TIME)*, 2023–24, installation view, in "Whitney Biennial 2024: Even Better Than the Real Thing."

PHOTO RYAN LOWRY

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Nikita Gale, a Los Angeles–based artist best known for her installations that mesh unexpected elements, pairing video and sound equipment with industrial materials like concrete and metal barricades, has been named the winner of the Whitney Museum’s Bucksbaum Award, which goes to a participant in the Whitney Biennial and comes with \$100,000.

Gale is among the most closely watched artists today. For the 2018 edition of the Hammer Museum’s Made in L.A. biennial, the artist presented a sculptural and sound installation titled *PROPOSAL: SOFT SURROUND SYSTEM* (2018), dissecting the roles music and physical barriers play in galvanizing protest and mass detainments. In 2022, when Gale’s work was shown at 52 Walker Street, the *New York Times* argued she has become part of a distinct group of women artists of color applying new rules to minimalism that were set in place by an older generation of male predecessors.

For the 2024 Biennial, titled “Even Better Than the Real Thing,” Gale presented a player piano for her installation *TEMPO RUBATO (STOLEN TIME)*. But instead of playing its set tune, Gale has made it so the piano emits no sound, other than the clanking of the keys as they are activated. Additionally, the installation, presented in a black box, is dramatically lit, with the lights oscillating up and down as if on a dimmer.

“Works like *TEMPO RUBATO* decline to perform to the viewer’s liking,” *ARTnews* senior editor Alex Greenberger **wrote in his review** of the exhibition. “In doing so, they refuse their viewers’ gaze, mirroring an unwillingness by many artists here to participate in structures that seek to oppress them.”

Gale’s work, relating the body to technology, was selected as the winner by a six-person jury, that included the Biennials cocurators, Chrissie Iles and Meg Onli, as well as Whitney Museum director Scott Rothkopf, Hammer Museum curator Erin Christovale, University of Virginia art history professor David Getsy, and Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art chief curator Stamatina Gregory.

In a statement, Rothkopf said the judging panel believes Gale, who is the prize’s 12th recipient, fits the mold of artists who have been influential to American art, describing her work as taking different forms all at once. “Nikita Gale has an incredible knack for making work that is both conceptually rigorous and full of emotion, somehow disciplined and mysterious at the same time,” he said.

<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/nikita-gale-2024-whitney-biennial-bucksbaum-award-winner-1234718112/>