

# Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

5216 Montrose Boulevard  
Houston, Texas 77006  
CAMH.ORG | @camhouston

Trust Artists.

Press Release

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Exhibition

## *Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow*

April 20–October 27, 2024



Olivia Erlanger, *Appliance* (video still), 2024. HD video: color, sound. Image courtesy the artist.

#OliviaErlanger  
#IfTodayWereTomorrow  
#TrustArtists

### Press Contact

For high-resolution images or  
media inquiries, contact:

Michael Robinson  
Communications and Marketing  
Manager  
mrobinson@camh.org  
713.284.8255

HOUSTON, TX (November 28, 2023) - Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) is excited to announce its newest exhibition, *Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow*, the artist's first solo museum presentation in the United States. Across an installation, a video, and a series of commissioned sculptures, Erlanger continues her decade-long investigation into what it means to call a planet home.

Informed by her interest in “closed worlds”—human-made, climate-controlled environments—the artist has produced all newly commissioned work for CAMH’s subterranean Nina and Michael Zilkha Gallery. Erlanger is converting the gallery into a sculptural landscape comprising distinct yet interrelated zones: a set showcasing her short film *Appliance* (2024); dioramas of off-world landscapes and impossible architectures; illuminated planet sculptures; and a constellation of arrows piercing the Museum’s brutalist staircase.

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Olivia Erlanger, Installation view of *Split Level Paradise* at Bel Ami, Los Angeles, California, 2020. Courtesy the artist and Bel Ami. Photo: Paul Salvesson.



Olivia Erlanger, Installation view of *Ida* at Mother Culture, Los Angeles, California, 2018. Image and work courtesy the artist. Photo: Iliia Ovechkin.

“The built environment is stranger than any fiction,” says artist Olivia Erlanger. “The sculptures, installations, and short film comprising *If Today Were Tomorrow* all take inspiration from my research into the semiotics of suburbia: the myths and symbols underpinning the banal promise of social mobility through property ownership. The project is in part inspired by the psychology of interiors—what we hide and what we display.”

In her practice, Erlanger builds on the definition of “home” as merely a building and expands it to encompass a neighborhood, a continent, a world, or even a feeling. Erlanger creates a sculptural landscape that extends the themes and concerns she explored in her previous bodies of work, such as the 20th-century myth of social mobility considered in the snowglobes *Split Level Paradise* (2020), as well as the interconnectedness of humans with the built environment in *Ida* (2018).

The exhibition starts in an exploded recreation of one of Erlanger’s film sets, riffing on the psychology of interior spaces as well as acting as a platform for watching her new short film, *Appliance*. The film dovetails Erlanger’s research into the history and cultural significance of domestic technologies (i.e. refrigerators, ovens), specifically focusing on how their operations have been considered interchangeable with human bodily functions. Cut-outs in the walls of the installation act as portals into an adjacent landscape containing large-scale planet sculptures. These works map an altered view of Interstate 95, the main thoroughfare of the Northeastern U.S., and its surroundings. Erlanger’s planet sculptures make visible the immense, often hidden infrastructures such as roadways and the electrical grid that connect suburbia to centers of capital and exchange.

The dioramas rely on an institutional language of display more typically found in natural history museums, where such enclosed scenes suggest what we see exists only in the past. Here, Erlanger proposes models of different speculative landscapes and futures. Erlanger’s stainless steel arrows suggest an internal conflict often evoked by home: the desires to both return and escape.

“Bridging humor and horror, Olivia Erlanger’s artistic practice provides singular responses to urgent issues of our time, notably witty worldbuilding in the face of climate chaos,” says Curator Patricia Restrepo. “Erlanger’s new body of work for CAMH speaks pointedly to the economic and social conditions of Houston—a sprawling metropolis and the self-declared energy capital of the world.

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Olivia Erlanger, *38.917310027627 N x -77.22183907758908 W*, 2021. Silicone, aluminum, LED Lights, transformer, and cables. Image courtesy Soft Opening. Photo: Theo Cristelis.

*If Today Were Tomorrow*, which debuts all commissioned work, also continues the Museum's long-standing charge to present new work by rising talents within the contemporary art landscape."

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue published by Hatje Cantz containing new texts about the artist's practice, as well as contributions from Lydia Kallipoliti, Chris Kraus, and Mark von Schlegell focusing on the interplay between architecture, psychology, and science fiction.

*Appliance* is executive produced by Jill Ferraro (*Adaptation*) and Andrea Longacre White (*C'mon, C'mon*), produced by Paradise Productions and Ani Schroeter (*This Closeness*), shot by Mia Cioffi Henry (*Invisible Beauty*), and stars Callie Hernandez and Sasha Frolova.

*Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow* is organized by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and curated by Patricia Restrepo, Curator.

### About the Artist

Olivia Erlanger (b. 1990, New York) lives and works in New York. Through her sculpture, writing, and filmmaking, Erlanger explores American dreams and delusions. Recent and forthcoming solo and two-person exhibitions include *If Today Were Tomorrow* at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (2024); *Humour in the Water Coolant* at ICA London (2024); *Appliance* at Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna (2022). Notable group exhibitions include *Nonmemory* at Hauser Wirth, Los Angeles (2023) and *Shell* at Del Vaz Projects, Los Angeles (2022).

Erlanger is the author of *Appliance* (Wild Seeds, 2022) and, with architect Luis Ortega Goveia, the co-author of *Garage* (MIT Press, 2018). Her writing has appeared in publications including *Tank Magazine*, *PIN UP*, *Flash Art*, and *Harvard Design Magazine*, and a forthcoming catalog essay through Spector Books in 2024. Erlanger's work is in the collection of the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas; KADIST, San Francisco, California; X Museum, Shanghai, China; among others.

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## About Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

Established in 1948, CAMH is one of the oldest non-collecting contemporary art museums in the country, and is internationally known for presenting pivotal and landmark work by artists recognized as the most important of the 20th and 21st centuries. CAMH's mandate is to be present, to connect artists and audiences through the urgent issues of our time, and to adventurously promote the catalytic possibilities of contemporary art. CAMH's programming, both in and beyond the Museum, is presented free to the public, and advocates for artists' essential role in society.

## Support

Major support for *Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow* is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and The Stolbun Family.



*Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow* has been made possible by the patrons, benefactors, and donors to CAMH's Major Exhibition Fund: Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Louise Jamail, Sissy and Denny Kempner, Dillon Kyle and Sam Lasseter, MD Anderson Foundation, Rea Charitable Trust, The Sarofim Foundation, The Stolbun Family, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is funded in part by the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance.



## CAMH Mission

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally.

## General Information

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, in the heart of Houston's Museum District.

## Hours

Wed 11AM-6PM  
Thu 11AM-9PM  
Fri 11AM-6PM  
Sat 11AM-6PM  
Sun 11AM-6PM

Admission is always free. For more information, visit CAMH.ORG or call 713.284.8250.