



WAVE HILL SUNROOMPROJECTSPACE

July 19 – September 1, 2025 **JENNIFER TOBIAS** *Fish Tank*

JENNIFER TOBIAS

Born in Maryland
Lives and works in New York, NY

Conceptual sketch for the
exhibition *Fish Tank*, 2025,
corrugated cardboard.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

Jennifer Tobias is a scholar, artist, and illustrator. In her Sun Porch installation *Fish Tank*, Tobias draws on Wave Hill's history—particularly the legacy of Bashford Dean (1867–1928), an American polymath who specialized in ichthyology (the scientific study of fish), as well as medieval and modern armor.

Dean lived in Wave Hill House from 1909 to 1928, during which time he built Armor Hall as an addition to the estate to display his extensive armor collection. In 1912, he became the founding curator of the Arms and Armor Department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and during World War I, Dean applied his expertise to the design of protective gear for mechanized warfare.

In Tobias' installation, suspended figures blend animal and armor forms, evoking an aquarium, diorama, or museum display. Constructed from corrugated cardboard, the figures incorporate elements common to fish and armor that were researched by Dean. Helmets and body armor closely follow his prototypes, merging with the bony plating of fossilized species such as *Dunkleosteus* and *Coccosteus*. One figure—a pig-headed fish—references a hanging sculpture from the 1920 Berlin Dada exhibition, which critiqued the violence of World War I. In that work, *Preußischer Erzengel* (*Prussian Archangel*) by John Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter, a German soldier's uniform was topped with a papier-mâché pig's head and accompanied by the sardonic message: "To understand this work of art completely, one should drill daily for twelve hours...in full marching gear..."

Corrugated cardboard, made from tree pulp, is a sustainable material typically used to protect objects in transit—essentially, a plant-based form of armor. Among Wave Hill's gardens, the Atlas poppy (*Papaver atlanticum*) recalls the wild poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*) that grew on World War I battlefields. Like the tree pulp and flower, Tobias' installation symbolizes both fragility and resilience in the face of natural and human-made threats—an apt metaphor for our current era, in which overlapping crises intensify one another's impact.

Tobias' illustrations are published in *Design and Baking* (Mixam); *Extra Bold: A Feminist, Inclusive, Anti-Racist, Nonbinary Field Guide for Graphic Designers* (Princeton Architectural Press); and *Design is Storytelling* (D.A.P.), all authored by Ellen Lupton. She earned a BFA from Cooper Union, an MLS from Rutgers University, and a Ph.D. in art history from the CUNY Graduate Center.

PUBLIC PROGRAM: August 2, 1:15 PM, *Meet the Artist: Conversation and Corrugated Cardboard Bird Feeder Workshop*, for all ages

Organized by Curator of Visual Arts Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, the Sunroom Project Space provides an opportunity for emerging artists in the New York City area to develop and present a site-specific project as a solo exhibition. The 2025 season features Sonja John, Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, SuRan Song & William M. Weis III, Monica Duncan, Jennifer Tobias, Caroline Garcia, and Magdalena Dukiewicz, consecutively.

THE SUNROOM PROJECT SPACE IS SUPPORTED BY THE MILTON AND SALLY AVERY ARTS FOUNDATION AND POLLOCK-KRASNER FOUNDATION. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS PROGRAM IS PROVIDED BY THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS; NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR AND THE NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE; AND BY THE CATHY AND STEPHEN WEINROTH COMMISSIONING FUND FOR THE ARTS.



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Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger
Design: Melanie Roberts
Printing on recycled paper:
Prestone Printing