

Press Release

Exhibition *Nari Ward: We the People* August 16–November 30, 2019



Nari Ward, *We the People*, 2011. Shoelaces, 96 × 324 inches. In collaboration with the Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Collection Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky; Gift of the Speed Contemporary, 2016.1. © The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky.

#NariWard
#atCAMH
@camhouston

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HOUSTON, TEXAS (July 08, 2019)—Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) is pleased to present *Nari Ward: We the People*, the first museum survey in Texas of the work of artist Nari Ward (b. 1963, St. Andrew, Jamaica). The exhibition brings together works spanning Ward's 25-year career. A public opening reception will take place on the evening of Thursday, August 15, 2019 from 6:30–9PM, with the exhibition remaining on view through Saturday, November 30, 2019. As always, admission to CAMH is free.

Since the early 1990s, Ward has produced sculptures by accumulating staggering amounts of humble materials and repurposing them in surprising ways. His approach draws from a variety of art historical and folk traditions and reflects the textures of Harlem, where he has lived and worked for the

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Nari Ward
Amazing Grace, 1993
Baby strollers, fire hose, and audio component
Dimensions variable
Private collection
Installation view at New Museum of Contemporary
Art, New York, New York, 2019
Photo by Maris Hutchinson / EPW Studio



Nari Ward
Iron Heavens, 1995
Oven pans, ironed sterilized cotton, and burned
wooden bats
140 x 148 x 48 in
Collection Jeffrey Deitch
Image courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New
York, Hong Kong, and Seoul

past 25 years. Seeking out the personal and social narratives embedded in materials, he conceives of his sculptures as tools for articulating relationships between people. Over the past three decades, he has addressed topics such as historical memory, political and economic disenfranchisement, racism, and democracy in an effort to express both the tenuousness and the resilience of the artist's Harlem community—a struggle that remains relatable in communities across the United States.

Ward first rose to prominence in the early 1990s after attending art school in New York, New York and participating in The Studio Museum in Harlem's prestigious residency program. Upon completion of the program, Ward installed *Amazing Grace* (1993) in the deserted Harlem firehouse that is now his studio. In this installation, recreated at CAMH, viewers walk atop a pathway made of fire hoses nailed to the floor in a dimly lit space. The path is surrounded by rows of discarded baby strollers while "Amazing Grace," sung by Mahalia Jackson, loops overhead. As with other early works, Ward created *Amazing Grace* from raw materials scavenged in his neighborhood. Accumulated and transformed, these materials evoke the physical and socioeconomic realities of Harlem in that time. More broadly, the work conveys a sense of presence and absence suggested through its patinas of use and abandonment and its engagement of spiritual content.

Ward's burgeoning career as an artist also coincided with a proliferation of international group shows in the 1990s, many of which included his work. Owing to its explorations of historical patterns of migration and displacement—particularly those tied to chattel slavery—and the rhetorics of inclusion and exclusion that form this country's foundation, Ward's work was poised to address this global expansionism. With the increased policing of national borders today, Ward's work gains further relevance.

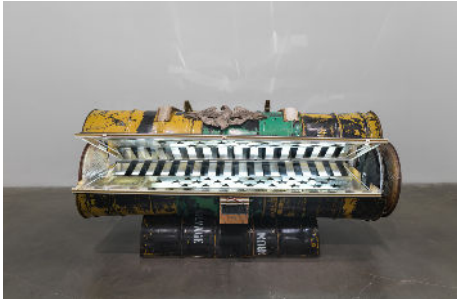
Ward has long probed concepts of identity, displacement, and belonging through his sculpture. He moved to New York from Jamaica as a child, and his work frequently refers to the migratory and diasporic experiences so many United States citizens share. His participatory work *Naturalization Drawing Table* (2004) offers museum visitors an opportunity to experience a bureaucratic environment that mirrors the potentially intimidating process of applying for citizenship.

We the People (2011) is the namesake work of the exhibition. This familiar phrase is taken from the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, which describes the core values the Constitution exists to achieve: effective and democratic governance, justice, freedom, and equality. Ward spells this phrase out in Old English lettering outlined with thousands of multicolored shoelaces. In doing so, he raises a fundamental question: Who is "we"? Multiple

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Nari Ward
Glory, 2004
Oil barrel, fluorescent and ultraviolet tubes, computer parts, DVD, parrot, audio recording, Plexiglas, fan, camera casing elements, paint cans, cement, towels, and rubber roofing membrane
Dimensions variable
Image courtesy the artist; Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul; and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and Havana

answers emerge: “we” may be people fractured by divisive partisan politics, but “we” are also resilient, creative, and democratically engaged. Ward’s work demonstrates how a gathering—whether of people or objects—can be a catalyst for transformation.

Nari Ward: We the People is organized by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, New York, and is curated by Gary Carrion-Murayari, Kraus Family Curator; Massimiliano Gioni, Edlis Neeson Artistic Director; and Helga Christoffersen, Associate Curator. The exhibition’s presentation at CAMH is coordinated by Dean Daderko, Curator.

Publication

A fully illustrated catalogue co-published by the New Museum and Phaidon Press accompanies the exhibition. The catalogue includes an interview with Nari Ward conducted by Lowery Stokes Sims, an interview with Okwui Enwezor conducted by Massimiliano Gioni, and newly commissioned essays on the artist’s work by Bennett Simpson, Lauren Haynes, and Gary Carrion-Murayari.

Support

Major support has been provided by The Ed Bradley Family Foundation, Katherine Farley and Jerry Speyer, Erica Gervais and Ted Pappendick, Dakis Joannou, Noel E. D. Kirnon, Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, Dorothy Lichtenstein, Jody and Gerald Lippes, Jennifer McSweeney, The Robert Lehman Foundation, and Vilcek Foundation. Additional support has been provided by Ron and Ann Pizutti, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, Scott C. Mueller, Bernard I. Lumpkin and Carmine D. Boccuzzi, and Joshua and Sara Slocum. Special thanks to Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul; and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and Havana.

Major support for Contemporary Arts Museum Houston’s presentation has been provided by Leslie and Brad Bucher in honor of Jereann Chaney, Phoebe and Bobby Tudor, and an anonymous donor in honor of Dillon Kyle. Additional support has been provided by Joe and Johanne Gatto, Dillon Kyle and Sam Lasseter, Mary Hale Lovett McLean, Gary Mercer, Betty Moody, Scott and Judy Nyquist in honor of Jereann Chaney, and Nicole Longnecker and David Pesikoff.



Exhibition catalogue available for purchase in the CAMH Museum Shop.

About Nari Ward

Nari Ward received a BA from City University of New York, Hunter College in 1989, and an MFA from City University of New York, Brooklyn College in 1992. Selected solo exhibitions of his work include at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts (2017); Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, New York (2017); The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2016); Pérez Art Museum, Miami, Florida (2015); Louisiana State University Museum of Art, Baton Rouge (2014); The Fabric Workshop and Museum,

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Public Programs

These events are free, open to the public, and take place at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Seating is limited. Please check camh.org for a complete list of Museum programs relating to this exhibition.

Opening Reception | *Nari Ward: We the People*
Thursday, August 15, 2019 | 6:30-9PM

Performance | *Re/Written in Stone: Ideas on the 28th Amendment* with Urban Souls Dance Company
Thursday, August 29, 2019 | 6:30-7:30PM

Talk | Valerie Cassel Oliver
Saturday, August 31, 2019 | 2-3PM

Open Studio | *Assemblage Messages*
Saturday, September 7, 2019 | 2-4PM

Performance | *Musiqá*
Thursday, November 14, 2019 | 6:30-7:30PM

Naturalization Drawing Table will be activated on select Saturdays throughout the exhibition. Check camh.org for more details. Please note that we recommend arriving early and participation is not guaranteed.

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, at the corner of Montrose and Bissonnet, in the heart of Houston's Museum District. Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 10AM-7PM, Thursday 10AM-9PM, Saturday 10AM-6PM, and Sunday Noon-6PM. Admission is always free. For more information, visit camh.org or call 713.284.8250.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2011); Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams (2011); and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota (2001, 2000). Selected group exhibitions featuring his work include *Objects Like Us*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut (2018-19); *UPTOWN: nastywomen/badhombres*, El Museo del Barrio, New York, New York (2017); *Black: Color, Material, Concept*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, New York (2015); *The Great Mother*, the Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy (2015); *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Illinois (2015); *NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, New York (2013); *Contemplating the Void: Interventions in the Guggenheim Rotunda*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York (2010); *2006 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York (2006); *Double Consciousness: Black Conceptual Art Since 1970*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Texas (2005); *Landings, Documenta XI*, Kassel, Germany (2002); *Passages: Contemporary Art in Transition*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; *Projects: How to Build and Maintain the Virgin Fertility of Our Soul*, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York; *1995 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York; and *Cardinal Points of the Arts*, 45th Venice Biennial, Italy.