

Monumental Concerns

A gathering convened by acclaimed interdisciplinary artist Carrie Mae Weems and co-organized by Syracuse University and The Museum of Modern Art.

Friday, March 21, 2025
10:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.
MoMA, Floor T2/T1, Theater 1
The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1



Carrie Mae Weems, *Monument Series - Baltimore*, 2018-19.
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Schedule:

10:00 a.m.	Welcome by Leah Dickerman
10:15 a.m.	Paul Farber introduced by Leah Dickerman
10:45 a.m.	Sherrilyn Ifill and Bryan Stevenson in conversation moderated by Leah Dickerman
11:30 a.m.	Performance by Samora Pinderhughes and Carrie Mae Weems introduced by Thomas Lax
12:05 p.m.	Nona Hendryx <i>They All Came Stumbling Down</i> (video) introduced by Thomas Lax
12:15-1:15 p.m.	LUNCH BREAK
1:15 p.m.	Carl Hancock Rux <i>These Buildings</i> introduced by Leah Dickerman
1:30 p.m.	Kendall Phillips and Melissa Yuen
1:40 p.m.	Eto Otitigbe and Mabel Wilson in conversation moderated by Kendall Phillips
2:15 p.m.	Delali Kumavie and Christina Zhang in conversation moderated by Melissa Yuen
2:50 p.m.	Karin Goodfellow and Roeshana Moore-Evans in conversation moderated by Kendall Phillips
3:25 p.m.	Esther Armah <i>Look Up</i> (video) introduced by Melissa Yuen
3:50 p.m.	Tim Phillips and Timothy Ryback in conversation moderated by Leah Dickerman
4:40 p.m.	Wrap up by Melissa Yuen and Carrie Mae Weems
5:00-6:00 p.m.	BREAK
6:00 p.m.	<i>Defiant Life</i> : Vijay Iyer and Wadada Leo Smith

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About the participants:

Leah Dickerman is Director of Research Programs, one of MoMA's newest departments building an infrastructure to support and strengthen the museum's many research activities, amplify their impact, and share insight and resources. From 2018 to 2021, Dickerman was the Director of Editorial and Content Strategy and co-head of the Creative Team at the Museum, developing digital platforms and programs to carry content about art and ideas beyond the gallery walls, including the online publication *Magazine*. She also had a long curatorial career in MoMA's Department of Painting and Sculpture (2008-2018), and previously at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (2001-2007), organizing exhibitions that offer new perspectives on modern art, including *Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends; One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series and Other Visions of the Great Movement North; Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925; Diego Rivera: Murals for The Museum of Modern Art; and Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity*. She has served on the editorial board of the journal *October* since 2001.

As Director and Co-Founder of Monument Lab, **Paul Farber** is among the nation's thought leaders on monuments, memory, and public space. Farber is author and co-editor of several publications including *A Wall of Our Own: An American History of the Berlin Wall* (2020), *Monument Lab: Creative Speculations on Philadelphia* (2020), and the *National Monument Audit* (2021). His forthcoming book, *After Permanence: The Future of Monuments*, will be published with the University of North Carolina Press. Farber's curatorial and collaborative work includes *Beyond Granite: Pulling Together* with Salamishah Tillet, the first curated multi-artist public art exhibition on the National Mall in Washington D.C. (2023), and *Declaration House* in Philadelphia's Independence National Historical Park (2024) with Anna Arabindan-Kesson and Yolanda Wisher. Farber is the host and creator of *The Statue*, a podcast series from WHYY/NPR. Farber is Senior Research Scholar at the Center for Public Art & Space at the University of Pennsylvania and holds a PhD from the University of Michigan in American Culture. He currently serves on the Board of Trustees of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Board of Directors of A Long Walk Home.

Karin Goodfellow oversees all strategy and programming related to public art for the City of Boston. Ms. Goodfellow builds and directs new programs, including the creation of public memorials, murals, sculptures, and social practice projects that reflect the diversity and cultural values of the City and its people. Ms. Goodfellow operates as the director of the Boston Art Commission and thereby oversees all daily operations and duties related to the commission and approval of artwork intended to be placed on City property, as well as the care and

custody of the City of Boston's existing art collection. She has reinvigorated the City's portfolio of artworks to engage in contemporary trends and dialogues with an emphasis on the diversity and values of Boston's neighborhoods. Ms. Goodfellow also directs Boston Artists-in-Residence, a program in which a multidisciplinary cohort of artists collaborate with City of Boston partners to explore, critique, and re-imagine City initiatives. Ms. Goodfellow is a graduate of Dartmouth College, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Sherrilyn Ifill is a renowned legal scholar and civil rights activist who for a decade led the nation's premier civil-rights legal organization, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF). Her 2008 book *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the 20th Century* helped to lay the foundation for contemporary conversations about lynching and reparations. Ifill was appointed to President Biden's Supreme Court Commission in 2021. She is a recipient of the Radcliffe Medal, the Brandeis Medal, the Thurgood Marshall Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Bar Association, and honorary doctorates from Georgetown Law School, New York University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Bard College, among others. Since stepping down from the presidency of the LDF in 2022, Ifill has served as a senior fellow at the Ford Foundation, was a 2023-24 MoMA Scholar in Residence, and is completing the manuscript for a book titled *Is This America?*. She is the inaugural Vernon Jordan Endowed Chair in Civil Rights at Howard Law School, where she is launching the 14th Amendment Center for Law & Democracy in the spring of 2025.

Vijay Iyer is a composer and pianist and has released two dozen albums, including seven on ECM Records, and has collaborated with Amiri Baraka, Wadada Leo Smith, Carrie Mae Weems, Teju Cole, Tyshawn Sorey, Pamela Z, Henry Threadgill, Jennifer Koh, Matt Haimovitz, Brentano Quartet, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and many other artists across disciplines. He received a MacArthur Fellowship, a United States Artists Fellowship, the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, the Alpert Award in the Arts, two German Echo Awards, and was the four-time Jazz Artist of the Year in the DownBeat International Critics' Poll. At Harvard University, he holds a joint appointment in the Department of Music and the Department of African and African American Studies, and he founded the Department of Music's doctoral program in Creative Practice and Critical Inquiry. His recent writings appear in *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Concepts in Music Theory*, *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*, *Sounding Together: Collaborative Perspectives on U.S. Music in the 21st Century*, and the journal *Jazz and Culture*. He earned a PhD from UC

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Berkeley in an interdisciplinary program in Technology and the Arts.

Delali Kumavie is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Syracuse University. Her research and teaching interests are in African and African Diasporic literature, Studies in Transportation, Studies in Migration, Globalization, and Transnationality. Her current book project, *Aerial Imaginaries: Flight and Aviation in Global Black Literature*, examines imaginaries of air and actual technology and infrastructure of aviation in Global Black literature. The book contends that Black literature and culture indexes a continued unease between the legacies of slavery and colonialism and the seemingly unimpeded mobility of globalism. Kumavie's work has been published in *PMLA*, *Feminist Africa*, *Substance*, *Qui Parle*, *Propter Nos*, and *Postcolonial Text*. She is the co-editor for a special issue of *English Language Notes* on "Expanding Black and Indigenous Ecologies."

Thomas (T.) Jean Lax is a writer and curator specializing in Black art and performance. They curated the exhibition *Just Above Midtown: 1974 to the Present* (2022) with Lilia Rocio Taboada in collaboration with JAM's founder, Linda Goode Bryant. Their other collaboratively organized exhibitions at MoMA include *Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done* (2018), with Ana Janevski and Martha Joseph; the Projects Series for emerging artists, co-led with Lanka Tattersall; *Unfinished Conversations* (2017), inspired by John Akomfrah's installation on the cultural theorist Stuart Hall; and the contemporary art survey *Greater New York* (2015). Previously, they worked at the Studio Museum in Harlem. A native New Yorker, Lax holds degrees in Africana studies and art history from Brown and Columbia universities and is a PhD candidate in performance studies at New York University, where they are working on a project about mothers.

Roeshana Moore-Evans is the Founder and Principal Consultant of Equity Empowerment Consulting, specializing in strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and advancing equity-centered initiatives across public and private sectors. Previously, as the inaugural Executive Director of Harvard's Legacy of Slavery Initiative, she led efforts to build trust between Harvard University and descendant communities, launched a reparative grant program, and advocated for community-driven memorialization. She also designed and led a two-day symposium, including a gathering at the historic African Meeting House in Boston, to deepen dialogue on the lasting impacts of slavery. Roeshana is currently working with King's Chapel on its Reconciliation and Repair efforts, including the unveiling of a memorial that acknowledges the church's historical ties to slavery. She will play a key role in shaping community engagement strategies and

ensuring descendant voices are centered in this process. A Boston native, she is deeply committed to justice and community empowerment. She holds a Bachelor's degree and an M.B.A. from UMass Boston.

Eto Otitigbe is a polymedia artist whose interdisciplinary practice uses sculpture, performance, installation, and public art to intersect history, community engagement, and biophilic design. Otitigbe's recently completed public works include *Peaceful Journey*, a permanent sculpture that pays tribute to the rapper Heavy D in Mount Vernon, NY; Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at The University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA where he contributed to the creative expression on the memorial's exterior surface; and *Invasive Species: Eco/Systems Land Based Initiatives*, a mixed reality installation and performance that crosspollinates urban plant life with narratives of cultural and physical migration. Otitigbe's fellowships and awards include the 2023 Augustus St. Gaudens Fellowship, The CEC Artslink Project Award for travel and cultural projects in Egypt, and The Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship at the National Museum of African Art where he explored the intersection of Urhobo language and historical objects. He is an Assistant Professor of Sculpture in the Art Department at Brooklyn College.

Kendall R. Phillips is a professor of communication and rhetorical studies and director of the Lender Center for Social Justice at Syracuse University. His work engages rhetorical dynamics within public memory, popular film and popular culture. He has published several books, including *Framing Public Memory* (2007), *Global Memoriscapes: Contesting Transnational Remembrance* (2011) and *A Cinema of Hopelessness: The Rhetoric of Refusal in 21st Century Popular Culture* (2021). His essays have appeared in journals such as *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Communication Monographs* and *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. Phillips previously taught at the University of Central Missouri. He is an honorary fellow in the School of Art Whiti o Rehua in the College of Creative Arts at Massey University in New Zealand and honorary director of the Center for Rhetorical Studies at Shanghai University. He previously served as president of the Rhetoric Society of America.

Tim Phillips is a pioneer in the field of conflict resolution and reconciliation and founder of Beyond Conflict, a global nonprofit that is internationally recognized for contributions to the field of transitional justice in post-communist Europe and South Africa. Using the unique approach of shared experience, Beyond Conflict has helped catalyze the peace and reconciliation processes in several nations, including Northern Ireland, El Salvador, Bosnia, Kosovo and South Africa. Under Mr. Phillips' leadership, Beyond Conflict launched a partner-

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ship with several leading universities to conduct cutting-edge research on the relationship between brain and behavioral science and social conflict, including “America’s Divides Mind: Understanding the Psychology that Divides Us,” and “Renewing American Democracy: Navigating a Changing Country.” Mr. Phillips serves on the board of the Frameworks Institute, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and the Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution. He received an Honorary Degree from Suffolk University in 2018.

Samora Pinderhughes is a composer/pianist/vocalist known for large multidisciplinary projects and for his use of music to examine sociopolitical issues. Pinderhughes has performed in venues including Carnegie Hall, MoMA, the Sundance Film Festival, and the Kennedy Center, and toured internationally with artists including Branford Marsalis, Christian Scott, Common, and Emily King. He received the Chamber Music America’s 2020 Visionary Award, and was a 2019 Creative Capital grantee. He is the artistic and executive director of The Healing Project, a community arts organization that creates narrative change to build a world based around healing rather than punishment. He is also the 2025 Adobe Creative Resident at MoMA where he is proposing the creation of sonic healing rooms to facilitate the grieving needs of people who have experienced high levels of structural violence, including poverty, environmental racism, policing, detention, and the carceral system.

Carl Hancock Rux is an American poet, playwright, novelist, essayist, recording artist, actor, theater director, radio journalist, as well as a frequent collaborator in the fields of film, modern dance, and contemporary art. He is the author of several books including the Village Voice Literary Prize-winning collection of poetry, *Pagan Operetta*, the novel, *Asphalt*, and the Obie Award-winning play, *Talk*. His music has been released internationally on several labels including Sony/550, Thirsty Ear, and Giant Step. Mr. Rux is also co-Artistic Director of Mabou Mines and Associate Artistic Director/Curator In Residence at Harlem Stage. Recent works include Rux’s three-part poem *The Baptism* (2020), a tribute to the legacies of civil rights leaders John Lewis and C.T. Vivian, commissioned by Lincoln Center, was made into a short abstract film directed by Carrie Mae Weems; *I Dream a Dream that Dreams Back at Me*, a site-specific Juneteenth celebration as part of Lincoln Center Restart Stages program; *Archer Aymes Lost and Found Retrospective: A Juneteenth Exhibition* at the Park Avenue Armory and *San Juan Hill: A New York Story* (2022) at Geffen Hall with Etienne Charles.

Timothy W. Ryback is co-founder and director of the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation, in The Hague, and a Task Force member of Contested Histories,

an online resource in development that will provide more than 600 case studies on contested commemorative and toponymic sites in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Ryback is co-editor of *Contested Histories in Public Spaces: Principles, Processes, Best Practices*, a digital publication of the International Bar Association, in London. Ryback has written on complex historical legacies for *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the *Financial Times*. He is author of several books on the National Socialist era, most recently, *Takeover: Hitler’s Final Rise to Power* (Knopf, 2024). Ryback has served as a lecturer in the Concentration of History and Literature at Harvard University.

Wadada Leo Smith is a trumpeter and composer, working primarily in the field of creative music. He was an early member of Chicago’s legendary AACM and co-founded the Creative Construction Company, a trio with Leroy Jenkins and Anthony Braxton in the late ‘60s. He received formal training from the composer guitarist Alex “Little Bill” Wallace, a pioneer of electric guitar in Delta Blues, and was further educated through the U.S. Military band program at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri (1963); Sherwood School of Music (1967-69); and Wesleyan University (1975-76). Smith has researched a variety of music cultures, including African, Japanese, Indonesian, European and American. He developed a music theory and notation system to express this music which he calls “Ankhrasmation,” the scores of which have been exhibited in numerous American museums. Smith was a finalist for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Music for *Ten Freedom Summers—Defining Moments in the History of the United States of America*, a collection of compositions inspired by the Civil Rights Movement. He has been a major force in contemporary jazz for over 40 years and performs frequently throughout the world.

Bryan Stevenson is a widely acclaimed public interest lawyer who has dedicated his career to helping the poor, the incarcerated, and the condemned. He is the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, a human rights organization in Montgomery, Alabama. Under his leadership, EJI has won major legal challenges eliminating excessive and unfair sentencing, exonerating innocent death row prisoners, confronting abuse of the incarcerated and the mentally ill, and aiding children prosecuted as adults. Mr. Stevenson has argued and won multiple cases at the United States Supreme Court, and together with his staff has won reversals, relief, or release from prison for over 140 wrongly condemned prisoners on death row. He led the creation of EJI’s highly acclaimed Legacy Sites, including the Legacy Museum, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, and Freedom Monument Sculpture Park. These new national landmark institutions chronicle the legacy of slavery,

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lynching, and racial segregation, and the connection to mass incarceration and contemporary issues of racial bias.

Carrie Mae Weems is a conceptual artist who unpacks and confronts constructions of race and femininity in the pursuit of new models to live by. Grounded in the specificity of her lived experience as a Black woman but universal in its explorations of family relationships, cultural identity, power structures and social hierarchy, her artistic practice is primarily photographic but also incorporates text, fabric, audio, installation and video. Informed by narrative storytelling, folkloric traditions and the observational methodologies of the social sciences, her approach to image-making ranges from staged and serialized narrative photography to the appropriation and adaptation of archival and ethnographic imagery. While Weems addresses a wide array of issues, her overarching commitment is to help us better understand our present moment by examining our collective past. Weems has won numerous awards and fellowships, including the National Medal of the Arts, the MacArthur Award, the National Endowment of the Arts and the Hasselblad Award, among many others. She has had major solo exhibitions at Studio Museum in Harlem, the Guggenheim Museum, the Luma Foundation and the Barbican. She is represented in public and private collections around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tate Modern, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

Mabel O. Wilson is the Nancy and George Rupp Professor of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, a Professor in African American and African Diasporic Studies, and the Director of the Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS) at Columbia University. Through her transdisciplinary practice Studio &, Wilson makes visible and legible the ways that anti-Black racism shapes the built environment along with the ways that Blackness creates spaces of imagination, refusal and desire. Wilson's practice Studio & has been a competition finalist for several important cultural institutions including lower Manhattan's African Burial Ground Memorial and the Smithsonian's National Museum for African American History and Culture (with Diller Scofidio + Renfro). She was a member of the architectural team designing the Memorial to Enslaved African American Laborers at the University of Virginia. Wilson has published two books: *Begin with the Past: Building the National Museum of African American History and Culture* (2016) and *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums* (University of California Press 2012). She is writing her third book *Building Race and Nation: Slavery and Dispossession Influence on American Civic Architecture*.

Melissa Yuen is the curator at the Syracuse University Art Museum, where she oversees the museum's exhibition program in addition to conducting research and expanding the institution's permanent collection. Trained in early modern Italian paintings, she has a secondary research interest in contemporary prints. Prior to her arrival at the SUart Museum in December 2021, she was the associate curator of exhibitions at Sheldon Museum of Art, University Nebraska-Lincoln (2019-2021) and the curatorial fellow of European and American art to 1900 at the Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University (2017-2019). She holds an MA and PhD in Art History from Rutgers University.

Christina Chi Zhang is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at Lehigh University's Department of Art, Architecture and Design, and the 2023-24 Harry der Boghosian Fellow at Syracuse University's School of Architecture. Her research, teaching, and built work explore memory-making, healing, and social justice in post-traumatic cities. Her recent exhibitions, *I found within me an invincible summer* (Syracuse University, 2024) and *Thank you for loving me till the end* (Yale University, 2022), weave together interdisciplinary research, storytelling, and space-making to create emotionally powerful projects. Zhang's broader work discusses community-driven architectural interventions in the face of war, violence, and displacement. She co-founded Ideation Worldwide, a non-profit organization through which she initiated and directed the construction of a refugee-run adult learning center in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. Zhang believes that architecture is a vessel for social discourse, and sees teaching as a platform to foster experimental explorations, address contemporary challenges, and imagine alternative futures.

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Suggested readings:

Robert Bevan, *Monumental Lies: Culture Wars and the Truth about the Past* (Verso Books, 2022)

Catherine Clinton, *Confederate Statues and Memorialization* (Georgia Press, 2019)

Karen L. Cox, *No Common Ground: Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Racial Justice* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2021)

Leah Dickerman, "Monumental Propaganda," *October* 165 (2018): 178-191. [Link.](#)

Leah Dickerman, Hal Foster, David Joselit, and Carrie Lambert-Beatty, eds., "A Questionnaire on Monuments," *October* 165 (2018): 3-177. [Link.](#)

Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair and Brian L. Ott, eds., *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique (University of Alabama Press, 2010)

Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2010)

Roger C. Hartley, *Monumental Harm: Reckoning with Jim Crow Era Confederate Monuments* (University of South Carolina Press, 2021)

Sherrilyn Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twentieth Century* (Beacon Press, 2007)

Thomas J. Lax, "Carrie Mae Weems and the Long History of Collective Self-Institutionalization Among Black Radicals," *Literary Hub*, June 11, 2021. [Link.](#)

Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Duke University Press, 1998)

James Reston Jr., *A Rift in the Earth: Art, Memory, and the Fight for a Vietnam War Memorial* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2017)

Timothy W. Ryback, "How Hitler Dismantled a Democracy in 53 Days," *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2025. [Link.](#)

Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (University of California Press, 2011)

Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton University Press, 1997)

Erin L. Thompson, *Smashing Statues: The Rise and Fall of America's Public Monuments* (W. W. Norton, 2022)

Harriet F. Senie and Cher Kraus Knight, *Memorials Now* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2025)

James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1994)

Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race and Nation* (Duke University Press, 2009)

Rebecca Zorach, *Temporary Monuments: Art, Land, and America's Racial Enterprise* (University of Chicago Press, 2024)