

MMFA

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONTGOMERY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS PRESENTS A SITE OF STRUGGLE: AMERICAN ART AGAINST ANTI-BLACK VIOLENCE

This powerful exhibition demonstrates the capacity of visual art to instigate change.



Darryl Cowherd, *Stop White Police from Killing Us – St. Louis, MO*, c. 1966-67. Gelatin Silver Print. Image: 15 x 19 in., mat: 20 x 24 ¼ in., paper: 16 x 20 in. © Darryl Cowherd image courtesy of the artist and the Museum of Contemporary Photography

grappled with anti-Black violence from the anti-lynching campaigns of the 1890s to the founding of Black Lives Matter in 2013. The current national reckoning on racial violence continues to inform this project.

“Montgomery, Alabama is a city with a deep civil rights history that currently acts as a national and international forum on racial injustice. Since the 1980s, the MMFA has offered exhibitions and programs meant to push the institution in the direction of diversity and inclusion. More recently, the MMFA has aligned its priorities to address engagement and sustainability along with the Museum’s new DEAI initiatives,” said Angie Dodson, MMFA’s director.

Montgomery, AL, July 15, 2022 – The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) will deeply consider how art has been used to protest, process, mourn and memorialize racially motivated attacks against African Americans in *A Site of Struggle: American Art against Anti-Black Violence*, on view August 13 through November 6. Organized by The Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University, the exhibition includes more than 50 works in a wide range of media that span more than a century.

Conceived in 2016, *A Site of Struggle* takes a new approach to looking at the intersection of race, violence and art by examining how American artists have



Elizabeth Catlett, *Civil Rights Congress*, 1949. Linocut on cream wove paper. Image: 310 x 180 mm, sheet: 462 x 325 mm © 2021 Catlett Mora Family Trust/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago

Among the artists included in *A Site of Struggle* are Laylah Ali (b.1968), George Bellows (1882–1925), Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012), Darryl Cowherd (b. 1940), Ernest Crichlow (1914–2005), Melvin Edwards (b. 1937), Theaster Gates (b. 1973), Ken Gonzales-Day (b. 1964), Norman Lewis (1909–1979), Kerry James Marshall (b. 1955), Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988), Howardena Pindell (b. 1943), Carl and Karen Pope (b. 1961), Paul Rucker (b. 1968), Alison Saar (b. 1956), Lorna Simpson (b. 1960), Dox Thrash (1893–1965), Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953), Pat Ward Williams (b. 1948), and Hale Woodruff (American, 1900–1980).

A Site of Struggle is curated by Janet Dees, the Steven and Lisa Munster Tananbaum curator of modern and contemporary art at The Block, with the assistance of Alisa Swindell, associate curator of photography at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, and former curatorial research associate at The Block.

The exhibition explores how art history can help inform the understanding of the deep roots of racial violence. “From realism to abstraction, from direct to more subtle approaches, American artists have developed a century of tools and creative strategies to stand against enduring images of African American suffering and death. Contemporary artists taking on this subject are doing so within a long and rich history of American art and visual culture that has sought to contend with the realities of anti-Black violence,” Dees said.

In the creation of *A Site of Struggle*, Dees convened a national group of established and emerging scholars and museum professionals to consult on the themes, content, and format of the exhibition. Critical discussions about the gallery installation of the exhibition centered around how to responsibly present this challenging material and offer a structure of care for audiences. These best practices include limiting the number of works in the space to provide visual and psychological rest, controlling the sight lines to the most graphic works, and offering numerous opportunities for respite and quiet reflection. Additional resources will provide information about community support and access to social justice organizations.

Partnerships with various community groups and leaders along with planned actions allow the MMFA to engage with the community at its heart and to have them involved more fully in the life of the Museum. Projects like *A Site of Struggle* reflect the core values of the MMFA: generating partnerships, elevating voices that



Melvin Edwards, *Selections from Lynch Fragments* *Ida W.B.*, 1990. Welded Steel, 13 x 14 x 10 in. © 2021 Melvin Edwards/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Courtesy of the artist and Alexander Gray Gallery

express multiple points of view, and uncovering different stories through new interpretations of American art.

“We are grateful to The Block Museum of Art for creating—so very thoughtfully—*A Site of Struggle* and for their above-and-beyond commitment to bringing it to Alabama to inform southern audiences' understanding and inspire our active reflection,” said Dodson. “Our intention is that this transformative exhibition serves as an important stepping stone in the institution's social justice journey, one that creates opportunities to strengthen our ties to the community and unite our work with that of other kindred organizations engaged in equity and inclusion.”

RELATED PROGRAMS

Opening Reception and Conversation

Saturday, August 13; 2–4 PM

In Person at MMFA

Free

Join us for a conversation with Janet Dees, the Steven and Lisa Munster Tananbaum curator of modern and contemporary art at The Block Museum of Art and curator of *A Site of Struggle*, to learn about the process behind the exhibition and its themes. Following the conversation, a reception will be held in the Rotunda.

Art+Letters: A Peculiar Indifference

Saturday, September 3; 10 AM

In Person at MMFA

Free

MMFA Curator Jennifer Jankauskas will hold a Zoom discussion with Elliott Currie, an acclaimed criminologist and author of *A Peculiar Indifference: The Neglected Toll of Violence on Black America*, a novel that explores the causes and consequences of the “everyday” violence that plagues African American communities and offers an urgent plea for long-overdue social action to end it.

Arts+Activism: Museums as Spaces for Dialogue

Saturday, September 10; 3 PM

Online via Zoom

Free; Registration Required

MMFA Director Angie Dodson will open this Zoom conversation with museum professionals advocating for museums to be places for difficult conversations. Participants include Janet Dees, the Steven and Lisa Munster Tananbaum curator of modern and contemporary art at The Block and curator of *A Site of Struggle*; Ashley Rogers, director of museum operations for the Whitney Plantation in Wallace, La; and Dietrah Taylor, public historian.

PUBLICATION

A Site of Struggle: American Art against Anti-Black Violence will be accompanied by a fully illustrated companion publication of the same title with major contributions by established and emerging scholars from the fields of African American studies, art history, communications and history. Co-published by The Block Museum of Art and Princeton University Press, the book features a foreword by Huey

Copeland and original essays by Sampada Aranke, Courtney R. Baker, Janet Dees, Leslie M. Harris, and LaCharles Ward.

SUPPORT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lead support for the exhibition is generously provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Major support is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. The project is also supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Bernstein Family Contemporary Art Fund, the Myers Foundations, the Block DEAI Fund and the Block Board of Advisors. Generous support is contributed by William Spiegel and Lisa Kadin, the Alumnae of Northwestern University, the David C. and Sarajejan Ruttenberg Arts Foundation, the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation, the Illinois Arts Council Agency and Lynne Jacobs. The related publication is supported by Furthermore, a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, and the Sandra L. Riggs Publication Fund.

Local support for the exhibition was provided by lead sponsors Alabama Power Foundation and Lamar with additional support from sponsors Mr. Will Hill Tankersley and Dr. Kristin Tankersley and co-sponsors AmeriFirst Bank; Balch & Bingham, LLP; Captrust; Mr. and Mrs. Marvin H. Campbell II; Ms. Camille Elebash-Hill and Mr. W. Inge Hill, Jr.; Mr. and Mrs. L. Daniel Morris, Jr.; Dr. and Mrs. Alfred J. Newman, Jr.; River Bank & Trust; Valley Bank; and Warren Averett, LLC.

ABOUT THE MMFA

The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts was founded in 1930 by a group of local artists as a place for both exhibiting art and a space for art education. The original intentions of the founders—to exhibit and teach—continue to inspire and inform every action and activity at the Museum. Since 1988, the MMFA has shared the 175-acre Blount Cultural Park with partners across the lake at the celebrated Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

Today's MMFA visitors stroll through art-studded grounds and permanent collection galleries. They see compelling changing exhibitions and learn about art by playing in the interactive gallery, ArtWorks; making art in the bustling studios, and by participating in other engaging events and programs. In addition, MMFA visitors can relax and recharge in the serenity of the Museum's stunning three-acre John and Joyce Caddell Sculpture Garden.

While the Museum's collection is still home to the art of many of the regional artists who first established it, over time, it has become known for its strengths in American art and Old Master prints. Recent, important acquisitions of art made by African American and Asian American artists and works inspired by images and themes related to the experiences of these groups represent the breadth and depth of the lives and concerns of those who call Montgomery and the River Region home. Through the exhibition of these works and the programs and events that help connect our communities with it, the MMFA has become recognized as a leading arts and cultural resource here in the state and Southeastern region.

The MMFA is a department of the City of Montgomery and is supported by funds from the City of Montgomery, with additional funds from the Montgomery County Commission and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Association. Programs are made possible, in part, by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

ABOUT THE MARY AND LEIGH BLOCK MUSEUM OF ART

The Block Museum of Art believes deeply in the capacity of art encounters to catalyze thinking about what is at stake for us in our lives today. The museum dynamically serves its Northwestern University, Evanston and regional Chicagoland audiences through exhibitions and programs that bridge perspectives, examine assumptions and serve as a springboard for urgent dialogue. With 6,000 artworks in its growing collection – primarily works on paper and global modern and contemporary art in all media – The Block fosters innovative interdisciplinary teaching and learning experiences. The museum is home to one of the region’s most innovative cinemas and reaches national and international audiences through its traveling exhibitions, scholarly publications and digital projects. The Block has achieved national acclaim for exhibitions that focus on overlooked, understudied or suppressed narratives and histories.

GENERAL INFORMATION

WHAT: *A Site of Struggle: American Art against Anti-Black Violence*

WHEN: August 13 through November 6, 2022

WHERE: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts
Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park
One Museum Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117

INFORMATION: mmfa.org
334.625.4333
@MontgomeryMFA

HOURS:
Galleries, Mondays, Closed
Sculpture Garden, Tuesdays–Sunday, 10 AM–5 PM
Terrace, and Store: Last entry at 4:45 PM

ADMISSION: Free! With ample, free parking.

###

MEDIA CONTACT

Stephen Hayes: shayes@mmfa.org | 334.625.4347