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## **First Exhibition To Examine the Intertwined Histories of American Sculpture and Race Opens Nov. 8 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum**

“The Shape of Power: Stories of Race and American Sculpture” at the Smithsonian American Art Museum examines for the first time the role of sculpture in understanding and constructing the concept of race in the United States over nearly three centuries. Featuring 70 artists whose work crosses time, scale and media, the exhibition brings together American sculpture in its many forms to explore the ways in which it has shaped and reflected attitudes and understandings about race, and has served as an expression of resistance, liberation and a vital means for reclaiming identity. The exhibition includes 82 sculptures created between 1792 and 2023 ranging in size from palm-sized coins to monumental statues created from diverse media such as bronze, marble, shoes, paper and hair.

Judith Baca, Rina Banerjee, Ed Bereal, Huma Bhabha, Sanford Biggers, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Sonya Clark, Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Nicholas Galanin, Raven Halfmoon, Luis Jiménez, Simone Leigh, Yolanda López, Roberto Lugo, Pepón Osorio, Betye Saar, Alison Saar and Nari Ward, among other contemporary artists, have work displayed alongside works by artists who were active in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including Daniel Chester French, Sargent Johnson, Edmonia Lewis, Isamu Noguchi, Hiram Powers, Frederic Remington and Augusta Savage.

“The Shape of Power” will be on view from Nov. 8 through Sept. 14, 2025. The Smithsonian American Art Museum is the sole venue for this groundbreaking exhibition.

“As stewards of the largest collection of American sculpture in the world, SAAM has a vital responsibility to foster conversations about the role sculpture has played in shaping our ideas of race in the United States, from its historical roots to contemporary perspectives by leading artists of the times in which these works were created,” said Jane Carpenter-Rock, acting director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. “The presentation of the artworks in ‘The Shape of Power’ exhibition are an

SI-317-2024

invitation to think deeply and openly to engage with ideas that are crucial to our understanding of the past and our present.”

“American sculpture remains an understudied area of art history with the last major publication to survey the medium’s development in the United States dating back more than 50 years ago,” said Karen Lemmey, the Lucy S. Rhame Curator of Sculpture at the museum. “‘The Shape of Power’ and its accompanying publication offers new scholarship that provides a fuller picture of American art history and a more nuanced understanding of our nation’s past and present.”

The exhibition is organized to allow for juxtapositions of historical and contemporary works that invite dialogue and reflection on notions of power and identity. This includes works ranging from Edmonia Lewis’ “Hagar in the Wilderness” (1875) that depicts the biblical story of an enslaved woman, to Roberto Lugo’s life-size self-portrait “DNA Study Revisited” (2022) painted head to toe in patterns representative of his ancestors and proportional to the percentage in his family’s heritage. Taken together, the works on view express the special capacity of sculpture to give palpable physical form to how concepts of race have been reflected, defined and redefined in the United States.

“The Shape of Power” draws extensively on works from the museum’s collection, which is the largest collection of American sculpture in the world. The exhibition includes key loans from private and public collections, including the American Numismatic Society; Chrysler Museum of Art; El Museo del Barrio; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

The exhibition is organized by Lemmey; Tobias Wofford, associate professor of art history at Virginia Commonwealth University; and Grace Yasumura, assistant curator at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Planning the exhibition included an unprecedented collaborative effort that engaged a range of scholarly and community partners who provided insights that helped guide the themes and interpretive elements. The curatorial team engaged with colleagues at museums across the Smithsonian Institution to provide an interdisciplinary perspective on the exhibition’s theme, including the National Museum of African American History and Culture, National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian; the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience; students and faculty at Howard University and members of George Mason University’s student organization the Native American and Indigenous Alliance; as well as nearly all 39 living artists participating in the show.

Members of the exhibition's advisory council, composed of interdisciplinary scholars who teach in different regions across the country, contributed to the catalog. A free exhibition audio guide features the voices of artists, university students and curators.

The exhibition extends beyond the traditional suite of galleries to include monumental sculptures on long-term view at the museum, including the recently unveiled installation "Bridge" (2013–2014) by Los Angeles-based artist Glenn Kaino, which pays tribute to Olympian Tommie Smith's historic gesture at the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games; and Luis Jiménez's work installed outside the museum entrance, "Vaquero" (modeled 1980, cast 1990), which translates to cowboy in Spanish and emphasizes the Spanish and Mexican roots of this classic American icon. A printed gallery guide is available to orient visitors to these spaces.

### **Public Programs**

Ahead of the exhibition opening, the museum will present a screening of the 2020 documentary *With Drawn Arms* followed by a panel discussion Wednesday, Oct. 9, at 6:30 p.m. as part of its programming related to the recently installed aerial sculpture "Bridge" (2013–2014). The program features Olympian Tommie Smith, the filmmaker and artist Glenn Kaino and sports journalist and professor Kevin Blackstone, in conversation with Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III. A staff-led conversation about the sculpture will take place Wednesday, Oct. 23, at 6 p.m. in the museum's Luce Foundation Center.

To mark the opening of the exhibition Friday, Nov. 8, the museum will host an open house with gallery talks by the organizing curators as well as selected artists from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Additional information about related programming will be available on the museum's website as details are confirmed.

### **Publication**

This exhibition catalog is co-published by the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Princeton University Press. It is written by Lemmey, Wofford and Yasumura with contributions by Renée Ater, Jacqueline Francis, Elizabeth Hutchinson, Tess Korobkin, Jami Powell, James Smalls and Claudia E. Zapata. The book is available for purchase (\$65) in the museum's store and online.

## **Credit**

“The Shape of Power: Stories of Race and American Sculpture” is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Generous support is provided by the Ford Foundation, Raymond J. and Margaret Horowitz Endowment, the Henry Luce Foundation, The Lunder Foundation—Peter and Paula Lunder Family and the Terra Foundation for American Art. Major support is provided by the Fisher Arts Impact Fund, Jack and Marjorie Rachlin Curatorial Endowment and Smithsonian Scholarly Studies Awards. Additional support is provided by the Elizabeth Broun Curatorial Endowment, The Henry Moore Foundation, Jacquelyn and William Sheehan and the C.K. Williams Foundation. The exhibition received federal support from the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative pool, administered by the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum.

## **About the Smithsonian American Art Museum**

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is the flagship museum in the United States for American art and craft. It is home to one of the most significant and inclusive collections of American art in the world. The museum’s main building, located at Eighth and G streets N.W., is open daily from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. The museum’s Renwick Gallery, a branch museum dedicated to contemporary craft, is located on Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th Street N.W. and is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Check online for [current hours and admission information](#). Admission is free. Follow the museum on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#). Smithsonian information: (202) 633-1000. Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Website: [americanart.si.edu](http://americanart.si.edu).

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**Note to editors:** Selected high-resolution images for publication are available only through the museum’s Dropbox account. Email [AmericanArtPressOffice@si.edu](mailto:AmericanArtPressOffice@si.edu) to request the link.