

## ‘Fat Albert’-inspired controversial artwork lands at the Cressman Center on Wednesday

By [Sara Havens](#) | May 2, 2016 2:57 pm



Sanford Biggers' "Laocoon"

Artist Sanford Biggers' controversial artwork "Laocoon" has found a place to rest — and stir up debate — at the [Cressman Center for Visual Arts](#) starting Wednesday, May 4.

The piece is the inaugural work in the gallery's New Monuments series, and it's a large, inflatable version of the 1980s TV character "Fat Albert" that is named after the priest in the Greek myth "The Aeneid." Laocoon was killed by Greek gods for attempting to reveal the threat concealed in the Trojan horse, and the character is the subject of the famous ancient sculpture "[Laocoon and His Sons](#)."

By substituting the priest with “Fat Albert,” Biggers hopes to spark a debate about beauty and suffering. The exhibit also features quotes from books and essays about tragic characters, providing touchstones that relate the story to modern times.

“The touchstones are many, including reference to Eric Garner, who died of asphyxiation due to a combination of police chokehold, chest compression, his own weight and poor health,” said Chris Reitz, gallery director of the Hite Art Institute, in a press release. “‘Fat Albert’ is not off the hook. The enormous sculpture seems to wonder if the comedic hero will be able to maintain his integrity (to right himself) in light of the sex scandals of his inventor, Bill Cosby.”



The ancient statue “Laocoon and His Sons”

While Biggers’ sculpture touches on those various topics, it also poses some questions viewers can contemplate as they examine the enormous work of art.

“The sculpture leaves us with a set of questions, not least of which: Could there be a black American version of the Laocoon? If so, whom would it depict, and why would he suffer?” said Reitz.

Biggers is an assistant professor at Columbia University’s visual art program, and his award-winning multimedia work has been show in galleries from London to Chicago.

“Laocoon” will be on display at the gallery through July 2. There’s an opening reception scheduled for Thursday, May 12, from 6-8 p.m. The Cressman Center is located at 100 E. Main St.