



MONUMENTS NOW

Artists challenge representation in Socrates Sculpture Park for *MONUMENTS NOW*

By KATE MAZADE • February 28, 2020



Jeffrey Gibson in his studio with a model of *Because Once You Enter My House It Becomes Our House*. (Courtesy of the Artist; Socrates Sculpture Park; Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York; Kavi Gupta, Chicago; Roberts Projects, Los Angeles.)

Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens has commissioned three new ‘monuments’ for the first phase of *MONUMENTS NOW*, an outdoor exhibition set to open on May 16, 2020. The pieces, by artists Jeffrey Gibson, Paul Ramírez Jonas, and Xaviera Simmons question the traditional role of commemorative structures in society and aim to salute underrepresented groups.

“At a time when monuments are under intense scrutiny,” Kendal Henry, the director of Percent for Art Program at the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, said in a press release, “this exhibitions provides artists from diverse backgrounds a unique opportunity



Jeffrey Gibson (Courtesy of Socrates Sculpture Park)

to redefine the monument and its role in remembering our country's past, as well as its effect on our present and future. Socrates Sculpture Park, with its nimble approach, is a perfect incubator for artists who can influence the field of monument-creating and public art."

Jeffrey Gibson, an interdisciplinary artist based in Hudson, New York, will present his monument *Because Once You Enter My House, It Becomes Our House* as a tribute to the ingenuity of indigenous peoples. A recipient of a 2019 MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant, Gibson created a structure reminiscent of pre-Columbian Mississippian architecture shrouded in geometric posters that feature activist slogans. The piece ties North American indigenous history to contemporary activism

graphics and queer camp performance art to push audiences to see the intricacy of collective identity.

Gibson's work has previously been shown at the Denver Art Museum, the New Museum in New York, and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MassMoCA).

Because Once You Enter My House, It Becomes Our House will be exhibited alongside a communal grill monument called *Eternal Flame*, created by Brooklyn-based artist Paul Ramírez Jonas. The monument will explore the issues of immigration and identity as expressed through food and its preparation. Ramírez Jonas often uses everyday items in his work to challenge accepted societal values and behaviors.

During his 25-year career, the artist's work has been shown in solo exhibitions at the Museo Jumex in Mexico City, the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston, and the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas.



Paul Ramírez Jonas (Courtesy of Socrates Sculpture Park)



Xaviera Simmons (Courtesy of Socrates Sculpture Park)

MONUMENTS NOW will also include three monumental sculptures from interdisciplinary artist Xaviera Simmons. Her work, *Untitled 2020*, will use steel, wood, plaster, and paint to provoke conversations about racial disenfranchisement in the United States, citing historic documents and government policies that perpetuate racial discord.

“The entirety of the United States itself is a monument to European expansionism and white nation-state building,” Simmons told *AN*. “These monuments are another way into the American narrative, into the formal as it relates to sculpture, and also into a contemporary narrative both historically and creatively.”

A recipient of the 2018 Agnes Gund Art for Justice Award and the 2018 Denniston Hill’s Distinguished Performance Artist Award, Simmons’s photography, performance, and sculptural work investigates political and social histories and has been exhibited at the David Castillo Gallery in Miami, the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The second phase of *MONUMENTS NOW* will open in September and feature ten artists selected through an open call. The year-long exhibition will be completed in October with the opening of the *Next Generation* sculpture, created by high school students enrolled in the Socrates Sculpture Park’s educational program, Socrateens (the pieces from the first phase will remain up).

Enabled by the support of the Ford Foundation, VIA Art Fund, and the Andy Warhol Foundation, the exhibition was curated by Jess Wilcox, the director of exhibitions at the Socrates Sculpture Park, and aims to start conversations about monuments in society.

“As a forum for public art, and as a cultural anchor in the most diverse county in America—Queens, New York—Socrates is the ideal venue to present nuanced artist-driven perspectives on the controversial issue of monuments and to facilitate discussion about cultural values,” said John Hatfield, executive director of the park.