

HYPERALLERGIC

As Debates Over Monuments Continue, Artists Erect Their Own at a Sculpture Park in Queens

Starting in July, Socrates Sculpture Park will unveil works by Nona Faustine, Jeffrey Gibson, and more, injecting fresh energy into current debates surrounding public monuments in the US.

Dessane Lopez Cassell June 30, 2020

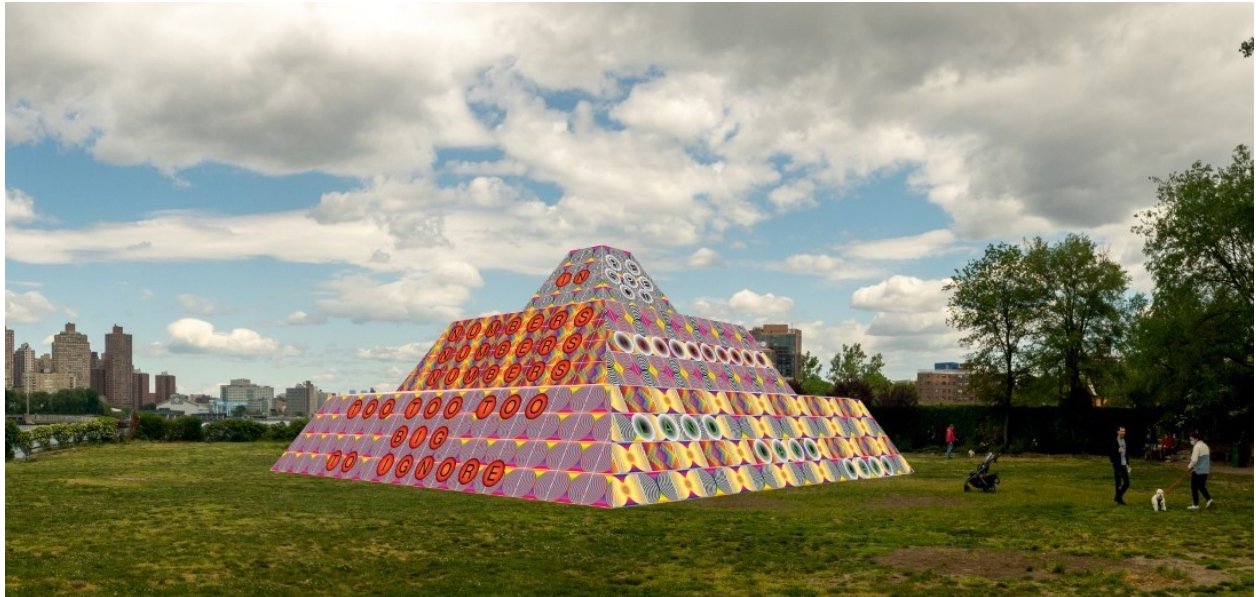


Nona Faustine, “In Praise of Famous Men No More” (2020) (image courtesy the artist and Socrates Sculpture Park)

As the Black Lives Matter Movement continues across the US and abroad, debates over what to do with monuments to (mostly) dead white men known for their racist and imperialist views have been reignited. In New York and elsewhere, such abhorrent public tributes to figures including Theodore Roosevelt and Christopher Columbus have been removed, defaced, and protested, echoing calls to better grapple with histories of racially motivated oppression often glossed over by public monuments.

On July 1, Socrates Sculpture Park will become home to a timely public artwork by New York-based artist Nona Faustine, which will be mounted on the billboard above the park’s main entryway in Long Island City, Queens. “In Praise of Famous Men No More” features photographic renderings of 19th-century monuments depicting Roosevelt and fellow US president Abraham Lincoln. The images are bisected by red and black lines, and act as

stark critiques of the fraught, yet often romanticized narratives upheld by such neoclassical sculptures. Faustine’s work is a continuation of her *My Country* series (2016–2020), which interrogates “selfhood, power, history, and who is left out” of traditional notions of the American dream, as the artist described to Hyperallergic.



Rendering of Jeffrey Gibson’s “Because Once You Enter My House It Becomes Our House” (2020), Socrates Sculpture Park (image courtesy the artist; Socrates Sculpture Park; Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York; Kavi Gupta, Chicago; Roberts Projects, Los Angeles)

“In Praise of Famous Men No More” is presented in conjunction with *MONUMENTS NOW*, a three-part outdoor exhibition that Socrates will unfurl throughout this summer and fall. The exhibition, which aims to address the role of public monuments in the US by centering underrepresented narratives and histories, will soon feature new sculptural commissions by artists Jeffrey Gibson, Paul Ramírez Jonas, and Xaviera Simmons as part of its first phase.

Gibson’s commission, a densely patterned, electric pink, gold, and red ziggurat titled “Because Once You Enter My House It Becomes Our House,” will debut on July 10. The sculpture pays tribute to the aesthetics of queer camp and pre-Columbian architecture and is meant to act as a “platform for voices from individuals and communities outside of the mainstream to project themselves and their own narratives on to,” Gibson described to Hyperallergic over email. The artist, who is a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, often makes work that explores themes of visibility, power, colonialism, and control in relation to his Indigenous heritage.

“I wanted to open up the idea of a monument to celebrate the ‘too many to count’ cultural narratives that are rarely embraced by the larger public and risk being erased,” he explained. Accordingly, Gibson will also present a series of virtual performances by Indigenous artists throughout the summer, including Laura Ortman (July 22) and Raven Chacon (August 5) — all of which will be accessible via Instagram.

As a public park, Socrates has remained open throughout the pandemic, so if you’re looking for a way to test the waters of seeing art in person again, rest assured knowing that they have plenty of space for socially distanced strolls and picnics. Just don’t forget your mask!

When: Faustine’s artwork will debut on July 1. Gibson’s will be unveiled on July 10 and remain on view through March 14, 2021.

Where: Socrates Sculpture Park (32-01 Vernon Boulevard, Long Island City, Queens)