



Press Contact: Meg Strobel  
Director of Marketing & Community Engagement  
Sculpture Milwaukee  
(920)427-0900  
mstrobel@sculpturemilwaukee.com

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### **THEASTER GATES AND MICHELLE GRABNER TO CURATE SCULPTURE MILWAUKEE'S 2021 EXHIBITION**

[MILWAUKEE, WI, February 16, 2021—] Sculpture Milwaukee announced today that its 2021 exhibition will be co-curated by artists Theaster Gates and Michelle Grabner. The show will launch in June 2021 and run through autumn of 2022. Now in its fifth year, Sculpture Milwaukee is one of the largest annual outdoor exhibitions to focus on contemporary sculpture and public art practices.

The announcement of Gates and Grabner as co-curators continues the Guest Curator Program which began last year with Mary Jane Jacob, Professor and Director of the Institute for Curatorial Research and Practice, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Lisa Sutcliffe, the Herzfeld Curator of Photography and Media Arts at the Milwaukee Art Museum. Their contributions expanded the structure of the exhibition by introducing a technoscape film by Leslie Hewitt and a video by Amy Yoes into the structure of the exhibition.

"We're excited about the new ways in which Gates and Grabner will shape the exhibition," said Sculpture Milwaukee's Board Chair, Wayne Morgan of Baker Tilly. Adding, "Theaster Gates, and Michelle Grabner are two influential artists and educators who make their home in the American Midwest where they have dedicated themselves to supporting artists and the artistic imagination in local, regional, and national cultural communities. They will bring their unwavering spirit towards building Sculpture Milwaukee's 2021 exhibition, sharing their vision and foregrounding artists and artwork from around the world."

Michelle Grabner, whose *Untitled* sculpture appeared in Sculpture Milwaukee's inaugural exhibition in 2017 stated, "It is exhilarating to co-curate Sculpture Milwaukee with Theaster, knowing that the process will result in wholehearted and attentive conversations between two artists who are deeply invested in sculptural form, materiality,

and the urgent political and aesthetic issues embedded in a large-scale public exhibition.”

The works selected by Gates and Grabner will be explored through programming and educational initiatives. Last year’s exhibition included various artist talks including a conversation between Courtney J. Martin, Director of the Yale’s Center for British Art and London-based artist Thomas J. Price, whose sculpture, *Within the Folds, (Dialogue I)*, 2020 made its international debut in Milwaukee. This year, the organization will continue with virtual artist talks, and, if conditions improve around the ongoing pandemic, in-person programming may resume as well.

Free, public, and outdoors, Sculpture Milwaukee will continue to celebrate sculpture by knitting together an offering of artwork that imparts artistic perspectives, material imagination, and creative expressions within a city-landscape that foregrounds civic engagement and diverse cultural histories.

“Through pandemic-era cancelations and closures, Sculpture Milwaukee was a bright spot last year. A cultural respite and a true spark of joy in our downtown landscape,” remarked Milwaukee Downtown’s CEO, Beth Weirick. “We can’t wait to see what Sculpture Milwaukee brings this year!”

A complete list of artists and artworks will be released in Spring 2021.

## **ABOUT THE CURATORS**

**Theaster Gates** lives and works in Chicago. Gates creates works that engage with space theory and land development, sculpture and performance. Drawing on his interest and training in urban planning and preservation, Gates redeems spaces that have been left behind. Known for his recirculation of art-world capital, Gates creates work that focuses on the possibility of the “life within things.” His work contends with the notion of Black space as a formal exercise – one defined by collective desire, artistic agency, and the tactics of a pragmatist.

In 2010, Gates created the Rebuild Foundation, a nonprofit platform for art, cultural development, and neighborhood transformation that supports artists and strengthens communities through free arts programming and innovative cultural amenities on Chicago’s South Side.

Gates has exhibited and performed at Gagosian Gallery, NY (2020); Tate Liverpool, UK (2020); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2020); Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis (2019); Palais de Tokyo Paris, France (2019); Sprengel Museum Hannover, Germany (2018); Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland (2018); National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., USA (2017); Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada (2016); Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy (2016); Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2013); Punta della Dogana, Venice, Italy

(2013) and dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany (2012). He was the winner of the Artes Mundi 6 prize and a recipient of the Légion d'Honneur in 2017. In 2018, he was awarded the Nasher Prize for Sculpture, and the Urban Land Institute, J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development. Gates received the 2020 Crystal Award for his leadership in creating sustainable communities.

Gates is a professor at the University of Chicago in the Department of Visual Arts and the Harris School of Public Policy, and is Distinguished Visiting Artist and Director of Artist Initiatives at the Lunder Institute for American Art at Colby College.

**Michelle Grabner** is an artist, writer, and a curator based in Wisconsin. She is the Crown Family Professor of Art and the Senior Chair of the Painting and Drawing Department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she has taught since 1996. In addition, Grabner has also held teaching appointments at The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Cranbrook Academy of Art; Milton Avery Graduate School of Arts—Bard College; Yale University School of Art; and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine.

Grabner co-curated the 2014 Whitney Biennial and the 2016 Portland Biennial. She was the Artistic Director for the inaugural 2018 exhibition, FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art. Grabner is a National Academician in the esteemed National Academy of Design and her work is represented by James Cohan in New York City and the Green Gallery, in Milwaukee; among other galleries. The Indianapolis Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland have each hosted large-scale survey exhibitions of Grabner's work. Her writing is regularly published in *X-tra* and *Artforum*. In 2010 Grabner co-edited *THE STUDIO READER*, published by the University of Chicago Press.

With her husband, Brad Killam, they founded the artist-run project space The Suburban in 1999. In the Oak Park suburb of Chicago, the space hosted a range of international contemporary art including a site specific installations by Katharina Grosse, Nate Young, Rodney McMillian, and Dana DeGiulio in addition to hosting exhibitions by over 300 artists including Luc Tuymans, Lesley Vance, Angela Dufresne, and Mary Heilmann. After 16 years in the Chicago vicinity, The Suburban continues its exhibition programming in Milwaukee's Walker's Point neighborhood. In 2009 Grabner and Killam opened The Poor Farm in rural Waupaca County, Wisconsin as an exhibition space and artist residency. In 2020 the Poor Farm in collaboration with The Open established the Open Fund, a grant for visual artists living in Milwaukee County with the support of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts.

## **About Sculpture Milwaukee**

Sculpture Milwaukee is an annual outdoor exhibition of public sculpture in downtown Milwaukee that serves as a catalyst for community engagement, economic development, and creative placemaking. The exhibit creates a free, open-air art gallery, which captivates residents, tourists, downtown employees, students, and art lovers alike. Sculpture Milwaukee is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization funded through private grants, in-kind donations, and sponsorships. All of the artworks are available for purchase. For more information, visit [www.sculpturemilwaukee.com](http://www.sculpturemilwaukee.com)