



**Carrie Mae Weems to Premiere New Multidisciplinary Commissions
Reflecting on the Last Five Years in America
in Park Avenue Armory's Drill Hall**

**Weems' Largest Exhibition in the Last Decade, *The Shape of Things* Features
Multimedia Installations, a Performance Series, and a Public Convening**

December 2 – December 31, 2021

New York, NY – October 13, 2021 –One of the most eminent image makers and social commentators in America, MacArthur Fellow **Carrie Mae Weems** returns to the Armory this fall with a major new commission and the largest, most significant exhibition of her multidisciplinary artistic practice in the last decade. Throughout her career, Weems has produced a prolific and complex body of work, pushing the boundaries of photography and blurring the line between art and activism. Her new work, *The Shape of Things*, builds on the convening of the same name and accompanying public programming that Weems hosted at the Armory during her residency in 2017, using art as a lens to probe the political and social issues of the day. Reflecting the “circus-like” quality of contemporary American political life, Weems conjures a dark setting in the Armory’s Wade Thompson Drill Hall with an exhibition that encompasses the breadth of her artistic output—including new multimedia installations and iconic works from the past decade, as well as a performance series and convening of artists. This timely project, which will be situated in the Drill Hall from December 2 through December 31, 2021, was conceived as a platform for collective investigation and reflection on the complexity of the American experience.

“I am fascinated by 19th century media, so for the Drill Hall I created a cyclorama that contains a new film that pits the rise of the right along with its puppeteers, clowns, jokers and two-faced speakers & spies, charlatans & prophets of fake news, conspiracy theorists against the emerging forces of progress. In this world, ‘normal’ is turned on its head and all bets are off,” said **Carrie Mae Weems**. “It is a time of murder, mayhem and mass protest and when covert operators of corruption bear their heads for all to see. My work centers on what happens when all facades are stripped away, and the people are left standing face to face with the realities of our time.”

Celebrated for her insightful photography, investigations of social dynamics, and ability to convene leading thinkers and artists through her work, Weems presents major new works alongside existing works that explore the circus of politics and, in Weems’ words, “the push for a just society, along with the starts and stops on the long slow road towards progress.” At the center of the exhibition is a new, large-scale video installation evoking a 19th-century cyclorama that offers new film material by Weems with original music by **Jawwaad Taylor**. Other installation elements include a large-scale photographic installation; a memorial wall dedicated to victims of anti-Black violence; *Lincoln, Lonnie, and Me* (2012), a “Pepper’s Ghost” illusion with music by **Jason Moran**, the longtime curator for the Armory’s Artists Studio Series; and additional sculpture and installation works suggestive of a 19th-century side-show, including a peep show and dioramas.

“Carrie Mae Weems has been a dynamic partner of Park Avenue Armory since her residency in 2017, which culminated in her convening (also called *The Shape of Things*) of fellow artists and cultural thinkers working at the intersection of art and social practice. It is a full-circle moment to have her now take over the Drill Hall to bring such a significant body of work to fruition and extend her acute commentary on the social and cultural

developments that have played out since her last major engagement here,” said **Rebecca Robertson, Founding President and Executive Producer of Park Avenue Armory.**

“Park Avenue Armory has long sought to empower artists who, like Carrie Mae Weems, push and break the boundaries within their chosen milieu. This major solo exhibition takes her practice another step forward as she makes full use of the expansive Drill Hall, in which she can realize her vision with no rules,” said the Armory’s **Marina Kellen French Artistic Director Pierre Audi.** “Cultivating these kinds of long-lasting and evolving relationships with artists has been a cornerstone of the Armory’s work since its founding.”

Building on the convening and public programming developed as part of the 2017 collaboration between Weems and the Armory, *The Shape of Things* incorporates a weekend-long convening in a nod to what has become a trademark of Weems’ practice. This two-day gathering of performers, thinkers, and activists, entitled *Land of Broken Dreams* will explore what it is to be American in this time of turmoil and disruption through conversation, interventions, and engagements throughout the exhibition and the building. Spanning two full days, the convening will feature a robust line up of discussions and performances. Additional details and a full schedule will be announced at a later date.

“The Shape of Things represents an insightful, thought-provoking reflection on recent social and political events, as seen through the lens of Weems’ distinctive vision and expansive, multidisciplinary approach,” said exhibition curator **Tom Eccles.** “By inviting the public to experience the work through media spanning video, performance, and music, she embraces the concept of community as a path forward through these turbulent times. And by presenting a more holistic view of Weems’ expansive and incisive practice, *The Shape of Things* will be a monumental display of her artistic prowess and keen powers of observation.”

ABOUT CARRIE MAE WEEMS

Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953, Portland, OR) is widely renowned as one of the most influential contemporary American artists living today. Over the course of nearly four decades, Weems has developed a complex body of work employing text, fabric, audio, digital images, installation, and video, but she is most celebrated as a photographer. Activism is central to Weems’ practice, which investigates race, family relationships, cultural identity, sexism, class, political systems, and the consequences of power. Over the last 30 years of her prolific career, Weems has been consistently ahead of her time and an ongoing presence in contemporary culture. Her work is organized into cohesive bodies that function like chapters in a perpetually unfolding narrative, demonstrating her gift as a storyteller. *The Kitchen Table Series* (1990), one of Weems’ most seminal works, is widely considered one of the most important bodies of contemporary photography. Through her work, Weems tackles a number of complex contemporary issues, demanding reconsideration of predominant narratives throughout our history.

Weems has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions at major national and international museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Frist Center for Visual Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo in Seville, Spain. She is represented in public and private collections around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Museum of Modern Art, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and The Tate Modern, London.

INSTALLATION DATES AND SCHEDULE

The Shape of Things is on view at Park Avenue Armory December 2 through December 31, 2021.

Showings

Thursday, December 2– Friday, December 31, 2021

Tuesdays – Thursdays 12:00pm-7:00pm, Fridays 12:00pm-9:00pm, Saturdays and Sundays 12:00pm-6:00pm

Open Monday, December 27 from 12:00pm-7:00pm

Check website for special holiday hours

Tickets at \$18 and free for Armory members

Health & Safety Protocols

The health and safety of the public is of paramount concern to the Armory. All ticket-holders must be **fully vaccinated**. “Fully vaccinated” means that you received your final dose at least 14 days before your performance date. At check-in, ticket-holders will be required to show **proof of full vaccination** (the [New York State Excelsior Pass](#) or a hard copy or photo of your vaccination card) and a government-issued photo ID. Masks must be properly worn inside at all times. Park Avenue Armory surpasses CDC and New York Standards for ventilation, observes strict cleaning and disinfecting protocols, and provides disinfecting stations throughout the public areas.

SPONSORSHIP

Citi and Bloomberg Philanthropies are the Armory’s 2021 Season Sponsors.

Support for Park Avenue Armory’s artistic season has been generously provided by the Charina Endowment Fund, The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, the Howard Gilman Foundation, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, The Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Foundation, the Marc Haas Foundation, the Juliet Lea Hillman Simonds Foundation, the Leon Levy Foundation, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, the Richenthal Foundation, and the Isak and Rose Weinman Foundation. The artistic season is also made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature. Additional support has been provided by the Armory’s Artistic Council.

The Shape of Things is supported by generous grants from the Ford Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the VIA Art Fund, Ken Kuchin and Tyler Morgan, and the Robert Lehman Foundation. The production is also supported in part by public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT PARK AVENUE ARMORY

Part palace, part industrial shed, Park Avenue Armory fills a critical void in the cultural ecology of New York, supporting unconventional works in the performing and visual arts that cannot be fully realized in a traditional proscenium theater, concert hall, or white wall gallery. With its soaring 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall and an array of exuberant period rooms, the Armory enables a diverse range of artists to create, students to explore, and audiences to experience epic, adventurous, relevant work that cannot be done elsewhere in New York.

Programmatic highlights from the Wade Thompson Drill Hall include Ernesto Neto’s *anthropodino*, a magical labyrinth extended across the Drill Hall; Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s harrowing *Die Soldaten*, in which the audience moved “through the music”; *the event of a thread*, a site-specific installation by Ann Hamilton; the final performances of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company on three separate stages; an immersive *Macbeth* set in a Scottish heath with Kenneth Branagh; *WS* by Paul McCarthy, a monumental installation of fantasy, excess, and dystopia; a radically inclusive staging of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* staged by Peter Sellars and performed by Sir Simon Rattle and the Berliner Philharmoniker; eight-time Drama Desk-nominated play *The Hairy Ape*, directed by Richard Jones and starring Bobby Cannavale; *Hansel & Gretel*, a new commission by Ai Weiwei, Jacques Herzog, and Pierre de Meuron that explored publicly shared space in the era of surveillance; *FLEXN* and *FLEXN Evolution*, two Armory-commissioned presentations of the Brooklyn-born dance activists group the D.R.E.A.M. Ring, created by Reggie “Regg Roc” Gray and Director Peter Sellars; Simon Stone’s heralded production of *Yerma* starring Billie Piper in her North American debut; *The Let Go*, a site-specific immersive dance celebration by Nick Cave; Satoshi Miyagi’s stunning production of *Antigone* set in a lake; Sam Mendes’ critically acclaimed production of *The Lehman Trilogy*; and the *Black Artists Retreat* hosted by Theaster Gates,

which included public talks and performances, private sessions for the 300 attending artists, and a roller skating rink.

In its historic period rooms, the Armory presents more intimate performances and programs, including its acclaimed *Recital Series*, which showcases musical talent from across the globe within the intimate salon setting of the Board of Officers Room; the *Artists Studio* series curated by MacArthur “Genius” and jazz phenom Jason Moran in the newly restored Veterans Room, which features a diverse array of innovative artists and artistic pairings that reflect the imaginative improvisation of the young designers and artists who originally conceived the space; and *Interrogations of Form*, a public talks program that brings diverse artists and thought-leaders together for discussion and performance around the important issues of our time.

Among the performers who have appeared in the *Recitals Series* and the *Artists Studio* in the Armory’s restored Veterans Room or the Board of Officers Rooms are: Christian Gerhaher; Ian Bostridge; Jason Moran; Lawrence Brownlee; Barbara Hannigan; Lisette Oropesa; Roscoe Mitchell; Conrad Tao and Tyshawn Sorey; Rashaad Newsome; and Krenicy Garcia (“El Prodigio”).

Highlights from the public programs include: symposiums such as Carrie Mae Weems’ day-long event called *The Shape of Things*, whose participants included Elizabeth Alexander, Theaster Gates, Elizabeth Diller, and Nona Hendryx; a day-long Lenape Pow Wow and Standing Ground Symposium held in the Wade Thompson Drill Hall, the first congregation of Lenape Leaders on Manhattan Island since the 1700s; salons such as the Literature Salon hosted by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, whose participants included Lynn Nottage, Suzan Lori-Parks, and Jeremy O. Harris, and a Spoken Word Salon co-hosted with the Nuyorican Poets Cafe; and most recently, *100 Years | 100 Women*, a multi-organization commissioning project that invited 100 women artists and cultural creators to respond to women’s suffrage.

Current Artists-in-Residence at the Armory include two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage; Obie winner and Pulitzer short-listed playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins and Carmelita Tropicana; Reggie “Regg Roc” Gray and the D.R.E.A.M. Ring; singer and composer Sara Serpa; Tony Award-winning set designer and director Christine Jones and choreographer Steven Hoggett; and Mimi Lien, the first set designer to receive a MacArthur Fellowship. The Armory also supports artists through an active commissioning program including such artists as Bill T. Jones, Lynn Nottage, Carrie Mae Weems, Michael van der Aa, Tyshawn Sorey, Raashad Newsome, Julian Rosefeldt, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, and others.

The Armory also offers creativity-based arts education programs at no cost to thousands of underserved New York City public school students, engaging them with the institution’s artistic programming and outside-the-box creative processes.

The Armory has undertaken an ongoing \$215-million renovation and restoration of its historic building designed by architects Herzog & de Meuron, with Platt Byard Dovell White as Executive Architects.

www.armoryonpark.org

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