

SFMOMA ANNOUNCES MAJOR COMMISSION BY ARTIST KARA WALKER, OPENING JULY 2024

**Site-Specific Installation Created for Museum’s Expansive,
Admission-Free Roberts Family Gallery**



SAN FRANCISCO, CA (May 23, 2023)—The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) today announced that it has commissioned artist Kara Walker to create the first site-specific installation for its admission-free, street-level Roberts Family Gallery. Walker has long been recognized for her incisive examinations of the dynamics of power and the exploitation of race and sexuality. Leveraging expressions of fantasy, Walker confronts the troubling histories that have shaped the American psyche, repossessing control with a keen but disconcerting humor. With an imagination fueled by rage, sorrow and compassion, Walker has extended her practice beyond her signature cut-paper silhouettes and drawings to include monumental installations that challenge the narratives that are commemorated and memorialized institutionally by the state, museum and church. For her SFMOMA commission, Walker will create a large-scale installation that responds to the glass-enclosed Roberts Family Gallery and plays with strategies of engagement and preservation inspired by historical museum displays. The exhibition is organized by Eungie Joo, SFMOMA’s curator of contemporary art, with whom Walker has collaborated multiple times over the past 25 years. Currently in formation, the commission will open to the public in July 2024.

“Informed by the fear and loss experienced as a global society during the COVID-19 pandemic, Walker’s new commission helps us consider the memorialization of trauma and the objectives of technology. Facing Howard Street and the world, her striking installation will allow us to move towards wonder and healing,” said Joo.

With floor-to-ceiling windows wrapping two sides and wide Roman steps on a third, the Roberts Family Gallery serves as an essential beacon for the museum, establishing vibrant connections with the neighborhood and encouraging passersby on Howard Street to engage with the art on view. The space has been home to a wide range of significant installations, including Richard Serra's steel sculpture, *Sequence*; JR's digital mural, *The Chronicles of San Francisco*; and Diego Rivera's monumental fresco, *Pan American Unity*. Walker’s commission marks the first time that an artist will create a site-specific installation for the space, responding to the gallery’s relationship to the city and creating a porousness between happenings inside and outside the museum. The commission is part of SFMOMA’s vision to present work that relates to its communities as well as broader national and international dialogues. Walker is the first woman artist whose work will be featured in the Roberts Family Gallery since the space was established as part of SFMOMA’s 2016 expansion.

“Kara Walker’s work engages with subjects of deep global resonance and encourages long looking and connection in its intricate details. We are thrilled to be working with her on a major commission for one of the museum’s most prominent public spaces,” said Christopher Bedford, SFMOMA’s Helen and Charles Schwab Director. “The commission is part of our vision to present work that is at once formally innovative and inextricably connected to topics of meaning in our daily lives. At the same time, we are working to increase the spectrum of arts experiences available in our free spaces, to ensure that SFMOMA is welcoming and accessible to as many people as possible. We look forward to sharing this compelling new work with our community.”

The new commission also builds on SFMOMA’s long-standing relationship with the artist. Her 1997 SFMOMA exhibition *Kara Walker: Upon My Many Masters—An Outline* featured remarkable watercolors and drawings as well as two black-paper silhouette installations—allegorical tableaus that suggest figures engaged in macabre, violent and sexual interactions. Part of the museum’s ongoing *New Work* series, it marked Walker’s first solo museum exhibition on the West Coast. Since then, SFMOMA has presented the artist’s work in group exhibitions and acquired her work for its collection. In 2018, the museum awarded Walker its Contemporary Vision Award, which celebrates creators, innovators and changemakers whose work foregrounds contemporary art as a vital part of public life. The forthcoming installation is the culmination of years of the artist’s research into 19th century visual culture, technologies and methods of display—research that has manifested as shadow puppetry, cycloramas and a steam-powered organ in the artist’s previous works.

About Kara Walker

New York-based artist Kara Walker is best known for her candid investigations of race, gender, sexuality and violence through silhouetted figures that have appeared in numerous exhibitions worldwide.

Born in Stockton, California, in 1969, Walker was raised in Atlanta, Georgia, from the age of 13. She studied at the Atlanta College of Art (BFA, 1991) and the Rhode Island School of Design (MFA, 1994). She is the recipient of many awards, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Achievement Award in 1997 and the United States Artists Eileen Harris Norton Fellowship in 2008. In 2012, Walker became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her major survey exhibition, *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*, was organized by The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, where it premiered in February 2007, before traveling to ARC/Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris; The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; The Hammer Museum in Los Angeles; and the Museum of Modern Art in Fort Worth.

In spring 2014, Walker's first large-scale public project, titled *A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant*, was on view at the abandoned Domino Sugar refinery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Commissioned and presented by Creative Time, the project—a massive sugar-covered sphinx-like sculpture—responded to the troubled history of sugar and reclaimed this burdened site with a majestic marker of self-possession. Other commissions by the artist include *The Katastwóf Karavan*, a steam-powered calliope wrapped in silhouetted tableaux depicting scenes of dehumanizing violence. First presented at Algiers Point for Prospect.4 in New Orleans in 2017, the steam organ's wail conjured the ghosts of thousands of enslaved humans held as they awaited the auction block. In 2019, Walker was selected for the Hyundai Commission at the Tate Modern. She responded with the four-tiered fountain, *Fons Americanus*. Directly alluding to the Victoria Memorial at Buckingham Palace, Walker's sculpture stands as a "counter-memorial," that she has described as "a gift ... to the heart of an Empire that redirected the fates of the world."

Walker's work can be found in numerous museums and public collections, including The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Tate Gallery, London; the Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo (MAXXI), Rome; and Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt. She lives and works in New York.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

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The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is one of the largest museums of modern and contemporary art in the United States and a thriving cultural center for the Bay Area. Our remarkable collection of painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, design and media arts is housed in a LEED Gold-certified building designed by the global architects Snøhetta and Mario Botta. In addition to our seven gallery floors, SFMOMA currently offers more than 62,000 square feet of free art-filled public space open to all.

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