

**SFMOMA Announces New Details Regarding
Major Commission by Kara Walker
Installation Opens July 1 in SFMOMA’s Admission-Free Roberts
Family Gallery,
Encouraging Broad Visitation and Engagement with the
Significant Installation**



SAN FRANCISCO, CA (May 7, 2024, updated August 13, 2024)—The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) today announced additional details for its forthcoming installation by artist Kara Walker in the museum’s admission-free, street-level Roberts Family Gallery. The complete title for the presentation is *Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine) / A Respite for the Weary Time-Traveler. / Featuring a Rite of Ancient Intelligence Carried out by The Gardeners / Toward the Continued Improvement of the Human Specious / by Kara E-Walker*. It will open to the public on July 1, 2024, and remain on view through spring 2026. The presentation marks the first time that SFMOMA has commissioned an artist to create a site-specific installation for the Roberts Family Gallery, following other major exhibitions in the

space including Diego Rivera's *Pan American Unity*, JR's digital mural *The Chronicles of San Francisco* and Richard Serra's *Sequence*. The presentation will be accompanied by a broad range of public programs inspired by ideas introduced in Walker's work, as well as a publication designed by the New York-based studio, Pacific, and featuring newly commissioned texts.

Walker has long been recognized for her incisive examinations of the dynamics of power and the exploitation of race and sexuality. Her work often leverages expressions of fantasy and humor to confront troubling histories and dominant narratives, repossessing control in the process. In the last decade, Walker has extended her practice beyond her signature cut-paper silhouettes and drawings to embrace monumental installations that further challenge communal memory as shaped and concretized through the institutions of state, museum and church. Featuring a complex landscape of mechanized sculptures and elaborate displays, *Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)* marks Walker's most ambitious large-scale public project to date.

Organized by Eungie Joo, SFMOMA's curator and head of contemporary art, with whom Walker has worked multiple times over the past 27 years, *Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)* is inspired by a wide range of sources, from antique dolls to Octavia Butler's novel *Parable of the Sower*, to Bunraku puppetry and historical ephemera. Through Walker's singular vision, these disparate references come together to examine the fear and loss we experienced as a global society during the COVID-19 pandemic and to address more broadly the memorialization of trauma, objectives of technology and how we might transcend the ills that plague contemporary society. Automaton serve as stand-ins for human experience, situated within a vast garden of black obsidian—a volcanic glass with deep spiritual and material history thought to repel negative energies and heal past traumas. The work offers an energetically charged environment for reflection, healing, respite and hope, transforming the Roberts Family Gallery into a would-be natural history museum of the future. To create the elaborate presentation, Walker is collaborating with technical lead Noah Feehan, the design and engineering studio Hypersonic, couturier Gary Graham and fabrication company New Project.

"*Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)* emerges out of the abject loneliness of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ominous depopulation of our once thriving downtown San Francisco," explains Joo. "With her towering composition of Black automatons enacting ritual and witness amidst a sea of gleaming obsidian—evidence of our geologic and cosmic past—Walker has created a fantastical space of reflection, memorialization and possibility. I look forward to spending many hours with the work thinking about our shared future."

The commission is part of SFMOMA's vision to present work that has strong resonance for its communities and offers opportunities to foster dialogue on meaningful subjects in contemporary culture. The Roberts Family Gallery is a free space at SFMOMA, ensuring a broad and diverse public can engage with the groundbreaking work, and the floor-to-ceiling

windows that wrap two sides of the space offer significant opportunity to engage passersby with the installation. *Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)* is the first commissioned site-specific work for the Roberts Family Gallery since it was established as part of the museum's 2016 expansion.

“Kara Walker’s profound installation grapples with critical subjects relating to our shared humanity, the rapidly expanding role of technology and our aspirations and fears for the future. These topics find fresh life and meaning through the distinct lens of her practice, which has for decades confronted challenging histories and realities through formal experimentation and innovation,” said Christopher Bedford, SFMOMA’s Helen and Charles Schwab Director. “We very much look forward to engaging our audiences with this exciting and important work and to the many conversations that it will inspire. We are also gratified to offer this experience in one of our major free spaces, aligning with our mission of increased accessibility.”

SFMOMA AND KARA WALKER

This new commission builds on SFMOMA’s long-standing relationship with the artist. Walker’s 1997 SFMOMA exhibition *Kara Walker: Upon My Many Masters—An Outline* featured remarkable watercolors and drawings as well as black-paper silhouette installations. 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.

CATALOGUE

The publication, designed by the New York–based design studio, Pacific, will include extensive documentation of the artist’s process of creating the commission alongside comprehensive installation views and images of the public experience of the work. The book will also feature newly commissioned texts and a conversation between Eungie Joo and Kara Walker. The publication is slated for release in November 2024.

PROGRAM

In advance of the opening of Walker’s monumental commission at SFMOMA, the artist will be joined in conversation by Doreen St. Félix for a City Arts & Lectures talk on Thursday, June 6, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. The talk is co-presented with SFMOMA and will be later broadcast on KQED. For tickets and additional information, visit cityarts.net.

ORGANIZATION

Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine) is organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) and curated by Eungie Joo, curator and head of contemporary art, with Alison Guh, curatorial associate of contemporary art.

SUPPORT

Major support for *Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)* is provided by Roberta and Steve Denning Commissioning Endowed Fund and Sir Deryck and Lady Va Maughan.

Significant support is provided by Mary Jane Elmore, Agnes Gund, Pamela J. Joyner and Alfred J. Giuffrida, Jessica Moment, Diana Nelson and John Atwater Commissioning Fund, Deborah and Kenneth Novack, Sonja Hoel Perkins and Jonathan Perkins, and SFMOMA Contemporaries.

Meaningful support is provided by Alka and Ravin Agrawal, Ethan Beard and Wayee Chu, Agnes Cowles Bourne Bay Area Contemporary Arts Exhibition Fund, Davis/Dauray Family Fund, Patricia W. Fitzpatrick Commissioning Endowed Fund, Girlfriend Fund, Lydia Shorenstein, Sheri and Paul Siegel Exhibition Fund, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., and Denise Littlefield Sobel Commissioning Endowed Fund.

This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. In-kind production support provided by Kvadrat and Obsidian Wine Co.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

151 Third Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

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