

NARI WARD

I'll Take You There; A Proclamation

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Nari Ward in his Harlem, New York studio, 2022. Photo by Daniel Kukla

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Lehmann Maupin announces *I'll Take You There; A Proclamation*, an exhibition of new work by acclaimed New York City-based artist Nari Ward. Ranging in scale from the monumental to the domestic, Ward creates sculptures and installations composed from discarded material found and collected in his Harlem neighborhood, including repurposed objects such as baby strollers, shopping carts, bottles, keys, cash registers, and shoelaces, among other materials. Ward re-contextualizes these found objects in thought-provoking juxtapositions that create complex, metaphorical meanings and confront social and political issues surrounding race, gentrification, and community, intentionally leaving the meaning of his work open to allow viewers to construct their own interpretations. For this exhibition, the artist's sixth solo presentation with Lehmann Maupin, Ward has created four text-based works constructed from shoelaces, two large-scale sculptural installations, a video work, and a series of new copper panels.

Perennial themes of memorial, remembrance, and societal relationships have permeated Ward's practice—from his early, now iconic installation *Amazing Grace* (1993), composed of discarded fire hoses and hundreds of abandoned baby strollers, to the work he is creating today. In *I'll Take You There; A Proclamation*, ideas of commemoration, community, and the reclamation of public space are explored through the medium of public streets. Inspired by the many sidewalk memorials that sprang up during the Covid-19 pandemic in the absence of places where people traditionally mourn, which were closed or restricted due to public health concerns, many pieces incorporate the candles, teddy bears, and liquor bottles often found at these sites. In each work, Ward nimbly combines elements of the artist studio, the art world, and street life to invite reevaluations of these spaces and emphasize the inherent fluidity and interconnection that exists between them.

Anchoring the exhibition is the expansive *Still Lives with Step Ladders*, a large-scale installation comprised of bottles, candles, milk crates, suitcases, and step ladders filled with cement, all covered with dark landscaping cloth often used to separate good soil from bad. Inspired by Giorgio Morandi's muted still lifes of bottles and jugs (echoed in the compositions on top of each ladder), Ward set out to create a deeply intentional composition, bringing these disparate elements together to form a cohesive landscape. The austere work is evocative, suggesting aerial views of a city skyline or the somber outlines of a graveyard, yet it remains abstract

enough to trigger the imagination of the viewer, allowing us to superimpose our own meanings and making the work at once more personal and more universal. Despite its immersive scale, the work cannot be entered—instead, it is meant to be reflected on like any other still life, its exact topography continuously evolving as viewers shift their vantage point by walking around the installation.

Many of the bottles and candles in *Still Lives with Step Ladders* are arrayed in the form of the Congolese cosmogram, an ancient prayer symbol representing the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth and used by Ward across his *Breathing* series. Another throughline from previous bodies of work is seen in the large copper *Peace Walk* panels, which are patterned after sidewalk squares to create a cross in the center of each composition. To make these works, Ward collected flowers, spent candles, empty liquor bottles, and other objects from various street memorials in his neighborhood (always bringing fresh replacements for anything removed) and arranged them on the copper panels in new configurations. Ghostly outlines of each object were created by applying patina to the copper surface, with the unpredictability of the oxidation creating a dialogue with the material and leaving room for chance to play out across the structure of the sidewalk grid. Ward describes these works as being “all about the emanation of light,” and the striations from the candles and reflections and refractions from the liquor bottles allude to spirits, both spiritual and alcoholic.

Throughout *I'll Take You There; A Proclamation* Ward identifies streets and sidewalks as belonging to local communities. While the works in this exhibition reclaim these public spaces as sites of grief and consolation, they also nod to their role as a stage for protest, both recent and historical. The artist's choice of the series title *Peace Walk* comes from protest terminology, referring to people coming together to walk or march against an injustice, while one part of the exhibition's title, *I'll Take You There*, references the 1972 number one hit of the same name by the Staple Singers, which asks listeners to imagine a better, more just world. Ward noted that almost every street memorial he visited while working had the phrase “Rest in Peace” incorporated in some way. Taken together, these influences point to the importance of gathering—in a period filled with incredible loss, Ward focuses on those of us who remain, and the communities we continue to nurture and create.

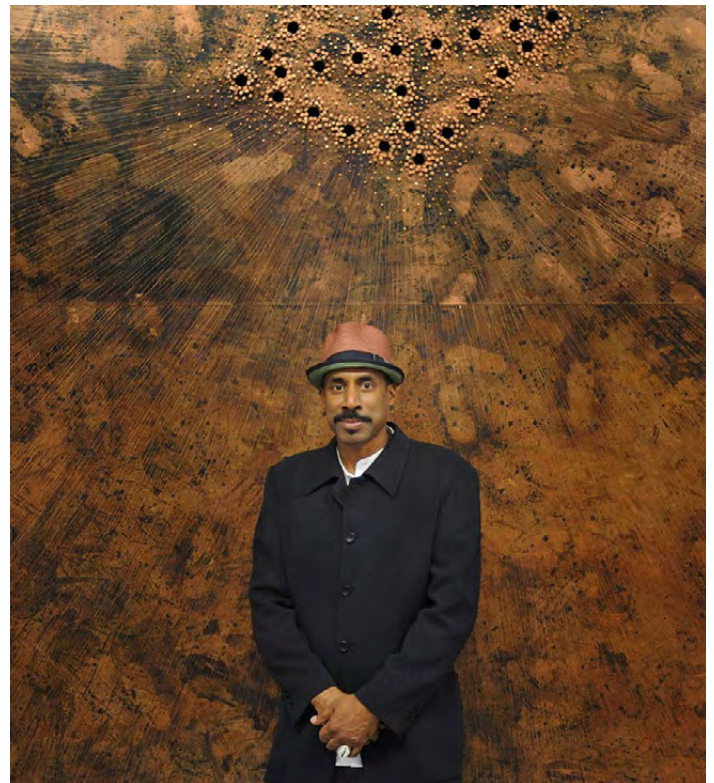
Nari Ward (b. 1963, St. Andrew, Jamaica; lives and works in New York) received a B.A. from City University of New York, Hunter College in 1989, and an M.F.A. from City University of New York, Brooklyn College in 1992. Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, CO (2020); Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston, TX (2019); New Museum, New York, NY (2019); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2017); Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, NY (2017); The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA (2016); Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL (2015); Savannah College of Art and Design Museum of Art, Savannah, GA (2015); Louisiana State University Museum of Art, Baton Rouge, LA (2014); The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, PA (2011); Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA (2011); Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA (2002); and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2001, 2000).

Select group exhibitions featuring his work include *Grief and Grievance*, New Museum, New York, NY (2021); *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse*, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA (2021); *Inalienable*, The Contemporary Dayton, Dayton, OH (2020); *NGV Triennial*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2020); *Objects Like Us*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2018-2019); *UPTOWN: nastywomen/badhombres*, El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY (2017); *Black: Color, Material, Concept*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2015); *The Great Mother*, Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Palazzo Reale, Milan (2015); *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL (2015); *NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star*, New Museum, New York, NY (2013); *Contemplating the Void: Interventions in the Guggenheim Rotunda*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2010); Whitney Biennial, New York, NY (2006); *Landings*, Documenta XI, Kassel, Germany (2002); *Passages: Contemporary Art in Transition*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (1999); *Projects: How to Build and Maintain the Virgin Fertility of Our Soul*, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY (1997); Whitney Biennial, New York, NY (1995); and *Cardinal Points of the Arts*, 45th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (1993).

Ward's work is in numerous international public and private collections, including the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX; Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; GAM,

Galleria Civica di arte, Torino, Italy; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, Turkey; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC; National Gallery of Victoria, Southbank, Australia; New York Public Library, New York, NY; Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

Ward has received numerous honors and distinctions including the Fellowship Award, The United States Artists, Chicago (2020); Vilcek Prize in Fine Arts, Vilcek Foundation, New York (2017); the Joyce Award, The Joyce Foundation, Chicago (2015), the Rome Prize, American Academy of Rome (2012), and awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1998), the Pollock-Krasner Foundation (1996); and the National Endowment for the Arts (1994). Ward has also received commissions from the United Nations and the World Health Organization.



Portrait of Nari Ward, 2016. Photo by World Red Eye

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has locations in New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, as well as a team in mainland China. In the past year with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.



Exterior of Lehmann Maupin, 501 West 24th Street, New York. Photo by Matthew Herrmann