

**NEW**  
**235 BOWERY**  
**NEW YORK NY**  
**10002 USA**  
**MUSEUM**

**NEW MUSEUM PRESENTS**  
**“GRIEF AND GRIEVANCE: ART AND MOURNING IN AMERICA,”**  
**AN INTERGENERATIONAL EXHIBITION OF WORKS FROM**  
**THIRTY-SEVEN ARTISTS, CONCEIVED BY**  
**CURATOR OKWUI ENWEZOR**

**Exhibition Brings Together Works that Address Black Grief as a National Emergency in the Face of a Politically Orchestrated White Grievance**



**New York, NY...**The New Museum is proud to present **“Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America,”** an exhibition originally conceived by Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019) for the New Museum, and presented with curatorial support from advisors Naomi Beckwith,

Massimiliano Gioni, Glenn Ligon, and Mark Nash. On view from February 17 to June 6, 2021, “Grief and Grievance” is an intergenerational exhibition bringing together thirty-seven artists working in a variety of mediums who have addressed the concept of mourning, commemoration, and loss as a direct response to the national emergency of racist violence experienced by Black communities across America. The exhibition further considers the intertwined phenomena of Black grief and a politically orchestrated white grievance, as each structures and defines contemporary American social and political life. Included in “Grief and Grievance” are works encompassing video, painting, sculpture, installation, photography, sound, and performance made in the last decade, along with several key historical works and a series of new commissions created in response to the concept of the exhibition.

The artists on view will include: **Terry Adkins, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kevin Beasley, Dawoud Bey, Mark Bradford, Garrett Bradley, Melvin Edwards, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Charles Gaines, Ellen Gallagher, Theaster Gates, Arthur Jafa, Daniel LaRue Johnson, Rashid Johnson, Jennie C. Jones, Kahlil Joseph, Deana Lawson, Simone Leigh, Glenn Ligon, Kerry James Marshall, Tiona Nekkia McClodden, Julie Mehretu, Okwui Okpokwasili, Adam Pendleton, Julia Phillips, Howardena Pindell, Cameron Rowland, Lorna Simpson, Sable Elyse Smith, Tyshawn Sorey, Diamond Stingily, Henry Taylor, Hank Willis Thomas, Kara Walker, Nari Ward, Carrie Mae Weems, and Jack Whitten.**

In 2018, the New Museum invited Okwui Enwezor to organize “Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America.” Around that time, Enwezor was also developing a series of public talks for the Alain LeRoy Locke Lectures at Harvard University focused on the intersection of Black mourning and white nationalism in American life as articulated in the work of contemporary Black American artists. The argument put forth in this series—which he unfortunately was unable to deliver—informed the ideas Enwezor would use as the basis for “Grief and Grievance.” Between the fall of 2018 and March 2019, Enwezor tirelessly worked on “Grief and Grievance,” drafting his thesis for the exhibition, compiling lists of artists and artworks, selecting the catalogue contributors, and speaking with many of the invited artists. In January 2019, Enwezor asked the artist Glenn Ligon to serve as an advisor to the exhibition. Given the advanced state of planning and the importance of the exhibition, following Enwezor’s death on March 15, 2019, and with the support of his estate and of many of his friends and collaborators, the New Museum established an advisory team, comprised of longtime collaborators and friends of Enwezor including Glenn Ligon; Mark Nash, Professor at the University of California in Santa Cruz, and co-curator of many of Enwezor’s projects, including *The Short Century* and *Documenta 11*; and Naomi Beckwith, the Manilow Senior Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, whom Enwezor had chosen as one of the jurors of his 2015 Venice Biennale. With the assistance of Massimiliano Gioni, *Edlis Neeson Artistic Director* at the New Museum, this curatorial advisory group worked together to realize and interpret Enwezor’s vision for “Grief and Grievance.” The curatorial advisors and the New Museum also see this exhibition as a tribute to Enwezor’s work and legacy.

Since he began work on the project, Enwezor had expressed a desire to open the exhibition in proximity to the American presidential election, as a powerful response to a crisis in American democracy and as a clear indictment of Donald Trump’s racist politics. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the opening of the exhibition, the works included in the exhibition speak powerfully to America’s past and present.

Enwezor saw “Grief and Grievance” as one of his most personal projects, and one of his

most political. Within “Grief and Grievance,” mourning can be seen as a distinct form of politics, one that refuses a singular melancholy in favor of multifaceted forms of critique, resistance, and care. As Enwezor wrote in his initial narrative for the exhibition, “with the media’s normalization of white nationalism, the last two years have made clear that there is a new urgency to assess the role that artists, through works of art, have played to illuminate the searing contours of the American body politic.” In Enwezor’s view, the works in this exhibition help illustrate the idea that mourning is a practice that permeates the social, economic, and emotional realities of Black life in America as it is experienced across the country by multiple generations of individuals, families, and communities.

Lisa Phillips, *Toby Devan Lewis Director*, New Museum, states: “‘Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America’ is a tribute to Okwui Enwezor’s courage, relentless focus, and fierce intelligence as a giant in our field and one of the most important curators of his generation. His presence remains vivid, as does his legacy to transform the history of art and exhibition-making. We are honored that Okwui embraced our invitation to present his exhibition at the New Museum, an exhibition that confronts the uncomfortable truths and ongoing pain of racial injustice in America. Okwui’s vision and the voices of the artists selected for this exhibition could not be more relevant.”

Comprising all three main exhibition floors of the New Museum, as well as the Lobby gallery, the South gallery, and public spaces, the works included in the exhibition represent cross-disciplinary approaches that incorporate methods of documentary film and photography, experimental filmmaking, performance, and social engagement alongside traditional artistic mediums like painting, drawing, and sculpture. The exhibition comprises diverse examples of artists exploring American history from the civil rights movement of the 1960s to issues of police violence in the United States in the 1990s and today. These works thoughtfully reflect upon what catalogue contributor Saidiya Hartman characterizes as “the afterlife of slavery,” as many of the participating artists reflect on the intersection of historical memory and the social and political realities of the present.

Although the overlapping themes of the exhibition are woven throughout the exhibition, each gallery floor builds off one of three historical cornerstones that link the experience of mourning to moments of political action and engagement across American history: Jack Whitten’s *Birmingham* (1964), Daniel LaRue Johnson’s *Freedom Now, Number 1* (1963–64), and Jean-Michel Basquiat’s *Procession* (1986). The presence of performance and music as spaces for community mourning and remembrance, as seen in the works of artists and performers including Rashid Johnson, Okwui Okpokwasili, and Tyshawn Sorey has also been vital to the conception of the exhibition.

Another key theme visible throughout the exhibition is the use of abstraction as a strategy for confronting or mediating moments of historical violence or social upheaval, as in the contributions of artists such as Mark Bradford, Ellen Gallagher, Jennie C. Jones, and Julie Mehretu. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, intensified discussions about the circulation of images of racial violence, death, and mourning in the digital age have also figured into the work of younger artists across a variety of forms. Many artists working today have built upon a tradition of confronting media representations of institutional violence and commensurate protest movements.

One important aspect of realizing Enwezor’s vision for the exhibition is the inclusion of Glenn Ligon’s major public work *A Small Band* (2015), which Enwezor had commissioned for his Venice Biennale in 2015 and which will be making its New York premiere. In this piece, Ligon presents three words—blues, blood, and bruise—rendered in white neon

tubes and black paint. These words were uttered by a young black teenager, Daniel Hamm, in 1964, when he and his friend Wallace Baker were arrested in New York for a crime they did not commit and beaten by the police. Emblazoned across the façade of the New Museum, Ligon's bright band of words will remain on view at the Museum for an entire year thanks to a collaboration with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Contextualizing the work of contemporary artists within an important legacy of political and aesthetic strategies which have defined the history of art and representation in America for decades, the exhibition stands as proof that many of the concerns driving the current debates around race, discrimination, and violence in America had been left unconfrosted for far too long. As Enwezor suggested, Black grief has been a national emergency for many years now, and many artists have consistently addressed it in their work.

To respect Enwezor's wishes for the exhibition to coincide with the 2020 US presidential election, the exhibition catalogue published with Phaidon has been released ahead of the exhibition opening, and includes contributions from **Elizabeth Alexander, Naomi Beckwith, Judith Butler, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Okwui Enwezor, Massimiliano Gioni, Saidiya Hartman, Juliet Hooker, Glenn Ligon, Mark Nash, Claudia Rankine, and Christina Sharpe**. The exhibition catalogue was thoughtfully designed by Polymode—Silas Munro and Brian Johnson.

An exhibition narrative by Okwui Enwezor, "Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America," drawn from the exhibition catalogue, is now [available at the following link](#).

### **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

Prior to the opening, on Thursday, January 21, 2021, the Museum hosted a discussion on Okwui Enwezor's vision and life's work, titled "[Meeting Worlds](#)." This discussion featured **Ute Meta Bauer**, Founding Director of the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore and Professor, NTU School of Art, Design and Media; **Franklin Sirmans**, Director of the Pérez Art Museum Miami; **Terry Smith**, Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Pittsburgh; and moderator **Massimiliano Gioni**, *Edlis Neeson Artistic Director* of the New Museum. Expanding on critical themes in Enwezor's illustrious curatorial practice, this conversation explored the interdisciplinary nature of his work as it bridges contemporary art, architecture, global histories, and cultural exchange. Taking cues from Enwezor's expansive vision, this program sought to honor and reflect on the many ways his career has shaped and influenced contemporary art.

This is joined by a wide range of conversations with artists from the exhibition, including: [Theaster Gates](#) in conversation with Massimiliano Gioni on February 25; [Melvin Edwards](#) in conversation with Massimiliano Gioni on March 2; [LaToya Ruby Frazier](#) in conversation with Margot Norton on March 12; [Kerry James Marshall](#) in conversation with Massimiliano Gioni on March 18; [Dawoud Bey](#) in Conversation with Gary Carrion-Murayari on March 23; [Adam Pendleton](#) in conversation with Andrew An Westover on April 1; [Hank Willis Thomas](#) in conversation with Margot Norton on April 8; [Rashid Johnson](#) in conversation with Massimiliano Gioni on April 15; [Tiona Nekkia McClodden](#) in conversation with Margot Norton on May 3; with more to be announced.

On February 24, 2021, the Museum will host "[Workshop for Educators: Grief and Grievance: Art and Morning in America](#)." Designed for K-12 educators, this program will highlight and contextualize works in the exhibition with historic and contemporary social movements, and artists' concerns today. The workshop will focus on strategies of social justice community organizing that educators can draw from to co-create a safer and braver

learning environment—one that acknowledges students' lived experiences and prioritizes the well-being and dignity of marginalized people, while addressing difficult realities.

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## **ABOUT NEW MUSEUM**

The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum is a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding building on the Bowery designed by SANAA in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.

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## **SUPPORT**

**Lead support for this exhibition is provided by the Ford Foundation. Major support is provided by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and Agnes Gund.** The Façade Sculpture Program is made possible through an endowment established by the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation. Artist commissions at the New Museum are generously supported by the Neeson / Edlis Artist Commissions Fund. Generous support is provided by: Jon Stryker and Slobodan Randjelović, National Endowment for the Arts, The Ed Bradley Family Foundation, The Kenneth C. Griffin Charitable Fund, Richard Mumby, Louise and Leonard Riggio, The Robert Lehman Foundation, Pamela J. Joyner and Alfred J. Giuffrida, David Kordansky, and MAP Fund. Additional support is provided by: Rebecca and Martin Eisenberg, Noel E. D. Kirnon, Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins, Henry van Ameringen, Marilyn and Larry Fields, Hank Latner, and the Rubell Family. We extend our special thanks to the Jessica and Kelvin Beachum Family Collection, the Larry Fitzgerald Foundation, Keith Rivers, and Malcolm and Anissa Smith. We gratefully acknowledge the Artistic Director's Circle of the New Museum: Dakis Joannou, *Co-Chair*; Eugenio Lopez, *Co-Chair*; Gael Neeson, *Co-Chair*; Tom and Janine Hill, Elisabeth Karpidas, Elham and Tony Salamé, and Beth Swofford. Support for the accompanying publication has been provided by the J. McSweeney and G. Mills Publications Fund at the New Museum.

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