



## BMA Debuts Newly Commissioned Works by Baltimore/ Washington Area Artists Jackie Milad and Nekisha Durrett

*Histories Collide: Jackie Milad x Fred Wilson x Nekisha Durrett* presents new works in dialogue with Fred Wilson's *Artemis/Bast*

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BALTIMORE, MD (March 6, 2023)—On Sunday, April 26, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) debuts newly commissioned works by Jackie Milad and Nekisha Durrett created in dialogue with Fred Wilson's powerful sculpture, *Artemis/Bast* (1992). The extended loan of *Artemis/Bast*, an iconic sculpture that sets the feline head of Egyptian goddess Bastet on the body of Greek goddess Artemis, inspired the BMA to invite artists in this region to submit ideas for new works that responded to the provocation: "What images and thoughts emerge when myths and histories collide?". The resulting exhibition, ***Histories Collide: Jackie Milad x Fred Wilson x Nekisha Durrett***, explores critical questions integral to Milad's and Durrett's practices, while also examining the complex and unresolved legacies in Wilson's art. Contemplative and immersive, the experience invites visitors to unpack the myths and histories through which we understand ourselves and our societies. *Histories Collide* is on view in the two galleries adjacent to the John Waters Rotunda from April 26, 2023, through March 17, 2024.

The commissions and exhibition are co-curated by Cecilia Wichmann, BMA Associate Curator of Contemporary Art, and Dave Eassa, BMA Director of Public Engagement. The open call initiative was designed to engage and support emerging and mid-career artists in the region. At the end of May 2022, the BMA announced the open call for artists based in Maryland and its contiguous states. BMA staff narrowed 104 submissions to six finalists who were invited to submit a detailed proposal. The final selection of two proposals was made by a panel of four independent jurors with curatorial experience and deep ties to Baltimore—Angela N. Carroll, Teri Henderson, Ashley Minner, and Ginevra Shay—with consulting advisor George Ciscle, Maryland Institute College of Art's (MICA) Curator-in-Residence Emeritus.

"We are delighted to support the work of Nekisha Durrett and Jackie Milad, two immensely talented artists based in the Baltimore/Washington area. Their commissions offer compelling lenses through which to consider multifaceted identity and moments of historical significance, while providing new insight into Wilson's deeply layered work," said Asma Naeem, the BMA's Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. "*Histories Collide* also reflects the museum's priorities to bring more visibility to artists in our community and to challenge preconceived notions of art and history through a diversity of voices and practices."

Nekisha Durrett is a Washington, DC-based mixed-media artist whose work leverages unexpected materials to make visible the historical connections and connotations that places and materials embody but that are often overlooked. For this commission Durrett was inspired by a well-known historic photograph of Harriet Tubman to create *Frontier*, a sculpture that imagines the vastness of Tubman's mind. It is comprised of a dark reflective lens divided by a horizontal line of white light and framed with soil gathered at the foot of a tulip poplar Witness Tree on a farm near where Tubman was born. The circumference of the work echoes the rings of growth within the tree trunk. *Frontier* represents the interiority of the acclaimed abolitionist, the continuities of time and space, and the ways in which histories are brought into focus. As both the viewer and *Artemis/Bast* are reflected through the dark reflective surface—bridging past, present, and future—new images and thoughts of Tubman may emerge.

Jackie Milad is a Baltimore City-based artist whose mixed-media abstract paintings and collages blend an exuberant array of disparate imagery and language from her Egyptian Honduran American family upbringing to address the complexities surrounding multi-ethnic identity. Her installation encompasses two large-scale collaged works on canvas, *Shabti Emerge* and *Unwrapping Unrolling*, with a related smaller scale collage, *To Destro (Birth 3)*, and a bronze sculpture, *Wadjet*. Simultaneously addressing past labor, history, myth, and dispersed heritage, Milad's vibrant new works create an immersive environment that encompasses fragments of previous works, renderings of antiquities printed on chiffon, marks inserted by Milad's young son, and gleaming charms cast by her goldsmith father. These personal and material references connect ancient and contemporary Egypt and symbolically relate Baltimore's diasporic communities to relatives around the world.

Fred Wilson is a conceptual artist whose work investigates museological, cultural, and historical issues that are largely overlooked or neglected by museums and cultural institutions. His connections to Baltimore include his *Mining the Museum* exhibition—organized by The Contemporary through the pathbreaking work of George Ciscle and Lisa Corrin—at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992, and his *Objects and Installations 1979–2000* retrospective organized by the Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in 2000. *Artemis/Bast* (1992) juxtaposes two mythological characters from divergent cultures of origin: The Egyptian cat goddess Bast and the Greek goddess Artemis the huntress, exposing their shared symbolism of protection and fertility. The sharp contrast of a deep ebony feline head and a white, heavily draped Neoclassical body, combined with the shards of plaster at the feet of Wilson's creation, shatters perceived knowledge of the ancient world, and reminds us that Africa was a present and equally compelling source of intellectual, philosophical, and social advancement in the time of antiquity.

“The BMA and these three artists share the conviction that history is a work in progress, continually being shaped in the process of being told. *Histories Collide* explores the deeply personal within conventional historic narratives, finding oneself and one's place in larger stories through examining the past, present, and future,” said exhibition co-curators Eassa and Wichmann. “We hope this exhibition will inspire visitors to explore their own histories, myths, and memories and challenge the ways their stories are eclipsed or unfurled in spaces of museum, of public history, and memory.”

## Artist Bios

**Nekisha Durrett** (born 1976, Washington, DC) has exhibited her work throughout the region and nationally. Recent installations include *Up 'til Now*, a solar-powered sculpture that evokes the history of Washington, DC's landscape and architecture; *Messages for the City* in collaboration with For Freedoms in New York's Times Square; a wall-mounted public sculpture in Miami, Florida made in collaboration with Hank Willis Thomas; and a permanent installation in the renovated Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in Washington, DC. Durrett's current works in progress investigate individual and collective histories and instances of erasure in the man-made and natural environments in Arlington, Virginia and West Palm Beach, Florida. A three-dimensional, wall-mounted text-based installation opens at the Duke Gallery at James Madison University in fall 2022. Durrett earned her BFA at The Cooper Union in New York City and MFA from the University of Michigan School of Art and Design as a Horace H. Rackham Fellow. Her work is included in numerous public and private collections, including The National Museum of African American History and Culture and The Phillips Collection in Washington, DC.

**Jackie Milad** (born 1975, Baltimore, Maryland) has participated in numerous group and solo exhibitions nationally and internationally. Select exhibitions include Harvey B. Gantt Center in Charlotte, NC; Arthur Ross Gallery University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA; Loyola University Maryland, The Walters Art Museum, and Baltimore Museum of Art in Baltimore, MD; Academy Art Museum in Easton, MD. Milad is a multi-year recipient of the individual Artist Grant from the Maryland State Arts Council. In 2019, she was named a Janet & Walter Sondheim Prize Finalist and a Robert W. Deutsch Foundation Ruby Grantee. In 2022, Milad received an Artist Travel Prize from the Municipal Art Society of Baltimore City to research ancient Egyptian objects held at the British Museum. Milad received her BFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University, and her MFA from Towson University. Her work is included in private and public collections, such as The Academy Art Museum, Baltimore Museum of Art, Pizzuti Collection, GLB Memorial Foundation Collection, The Sheridan Libraries at Johns Hopkins University, and Robert W. Deutsch Foundation.

**Fred Wilson** (born 1954, Bronx, New York) has been the subject of more than 40 solo exhibitions around the globe since his groundbreaking exhibition *Mining the Museum* opened at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992. His work can be found in several public collections, including The Museum of Modern Art, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Long Museum, Shanghai, Japan; Tate Modern in London; and National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia. Wilson presented his exhibition *Afro Kismet* at the 2017 Istanbul Biennial, Turkey, which traveled to London, New York, and Los Angeles. Since 2008, Wilson has been a member of the Board of Trustees at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He represented the U.S. at the Cairo Biennale (1992) and Venice Biennale (2003). His many accolades include the prestigious MacArthur Foundation's "Genius" Fellowship (1999), Skowhegan Medal for Sculpture (2006), the Ford Foundation's Art of Change fellowship (2018), and Brandeis University's Creative Arts Award (2019).

## **Baltimore Museum of Art**

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 97,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world’s largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation’s finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

## **Visitor Information**

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended hours on Thursdays until 9 p.m. Timed reservations are required for all visitors to the galleries. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year’s Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit [artbma.org](http://artbma.org).

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