

## University of Michigan Museum of Art Announces a New Partnership with Monument Lab to Explore Cultural and Social Impact of Historic Structures on the University's Campus

*Project to Emphasize Community and Curricular Engagement Built Around an Upcoming Commissioned Public Art Project*

*U-M alum and Monument Lab Director/Co-founder Dr. Paul Farber will also serve as the **University of Michigan Arts Initiative's** first Curator-in-Residence*

**Ann Arbor, MI—April 6, 2022—**The University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA) announced a partnership today with renowned nonprofit public art and history studio Monument Lab that will examine the role of historic structures at the University of Michigan (U-M) in upholding social and cultural systems and narratives. The initiative, which will include new research, community engagement, and the development of a newly commissioned art installation, will be led by Dr. Paul Farber, director and co-founder of Monument Lab, and Ozi Uduma, UMMA's Assistant Curator of Global Contemporary Art, both graduates of U-M. In conjunction with this partnership, Dr. Farber will also serve as the University of Michigan Arts Initiative's first-ever Curator-in-Residence.

The partnership between UMMA and Monument Lab supports critical dialogues about the responsibilities of public institutions as cultural history makers and stewards, and is part of UMMA's ongoing efforts to challenge its own history and approaches in order to create an institution more reflective of its community and honest in its explorations of art, culture, and society.

"We are thrilled to be working with Monument Lab and Dr. Farber to bring a project of this scale and importance to UMMA and the University of Michigan," said Christina Olsen, UMMA's Director. "Interrogating our past and being honest about our history is the only way we can make sure our Museum is truly able to make good on its promise to build a more just future. This initiative will serve as a source of great collective dialogue for years to come, and we hope to support new models of engagement between cultural institutions and the public."

Farber and Uduma will lead a team whose research focuses in particular on the history of UMMA's Alumni Memorial Hall, which opened in 1910. The neo-classical building was initially built to commemorate U-M students and staff who served in the Mexican American, Civil, and Spanish-American Wars. It later became home to the university's art collections, and eventually the home of a new university art museum (UMMA). It is now one of UMMA's two campus buildings. The history and multi-purpose nature of Alumni Memorial Hall provides a platform through which to explore Michigan's history and the ways in which it continues to reverberate in contemporary culture. As part of their work, Farber and Uduma will actively engage with the public, both the U-M community and residents of the region, to expand understanding of how societal structures are shaped and upheld through the design and development of buildings, communal spaces, and monuments.

The project will culminate in the creation of a newly commissioned art installation. The artist selection is currently in progress and will be announced at a later date. Together, UMMA, Monument Lab, the commissioned artist, as well as the broader public, will explore how Alumni Memorial Hall has commemorated the past and what role it can play in the future.

"With UMMA, we are building on the work Monument Lab has done in cities across the country and beyond," said Farber, who co-founded Monument Lab as he was finishing his PhD in American Culture ('13) at U-M, to facilitate critical conversations around monumentality, public art, and collective memory. "To return to the U-M campus as Curator in Residence, and have the opportunity to co-curate a major project with fellow alum Ozi Uduma, is a profound honor. It is also a call to action: to engage the power of public art and history to shape visions, grasp challenges, and render possibilities for transformation."

"The darker stories and histories of our structures and monuments can often be covered up by their facades," said UMMA's Ozi Uduma. "What we're trying to do in partnership with Monument Lab is reveal and unsettle these histories. It's our duty as a free, public museum to tell more complex and more honest stories about the choices made by artists or by builders or by university administrations because those choices often have direct impacts on our communities. To move forward, we must unpack this past."

Farber and the team at Monument Lab were the inaugural grantees of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's "Monuments Project," a \$250 Million initiative to "transform the way our country's histories are told in public spaces," including Monument Lab's landmark National Monument Audit and the opening of research field offices throughout the United States as part of this year's major *Re:Generation* national initiative.

In addition to UMMA's partnership with Monument Lab, Farber's tenure as Curator-in-Residence will include working with the U-M Arts Initiative to explore the role of public art and experience on the University's campus. The Curator-in-Residence is a pilot for an ongoing role on campus, which aims to integrate current thinking about public art in the U-M curriculum, catalyze the capacity of public art to weave together various campus communities around relevant topical issues, and showcase the opportunity to leverage art as a bridge between U-M and the SE Michigan community.

The Curator-in-Residence will also contribute to a course for U-M students using a project-based model with a U-M faculty (through the Department of American Culture; Kristin Hass), leveraging networks of artists and community partners from the commission work as course context for students. In addition, he'll meet with and steer a learning cohort of faculty, convened around conversations and interactions that build a network around the role of public art on our campus and region.

### **ABOUT UMMA**

The U-M Museum of Art puts art and ideas at the center of campus and public life. Welcoming more than 250,000 visitors each year, UMMA creates experiences that enrich our understanding of one another, foster joy, and build a more just future. Through exhibitions, programs, research, and community partnerships UMMA is redefining what a campus museum can be.

### **ABOUT MONUMENT LAB**

Monument Lab is a nonprofit public art and history studio headquartered in Philadelphia. Monument Lab works with artists, students, educators, activists, municipal agencies, and cultural institutions on participatory approaches to public engagement and collective memory. Founded by Paul Farber and Ken Lum in 2012, Monument Lab cultivates and facilitates critical conversations around the past, present, and future of monuments. As a studio and curatorial team, Monument Lab collaborates to make generational change in the ways art and history live in public. For more information, visit [monumentlab.com](http://monumentlab.com) and follow @monument\_lab.

### **ABOUT PAUL FARBER**

**Paul M. Farber** (he or they) is Director and Co-Founder of Monument Lab. He is author of [A Wall of Our Own: An American History of the Berlin Wall](#) (University of North Carolina Press, 2020) and co-editor of [Monument Lab: Creative Speculations for Philadelphia](#) (Temple University Press, 2019). He also co-directed Monument Lab's landmark *National Monument Audit*, produced in partnership with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Farber has co-curated

Monument Lab projects including its original Philadelphia City Hall prototype exhibition (Philadelphia, 2015), citywide public art and history exhibition (Philadelphia, 2017), *A Call to Peace* (Military Park Newark, 2019), *Public Iconographies* (Pulitzer Foundation, 2019-2020), and *Staying Power* (Village of Arts and Humanities, 2021). In addition to his work with Monument Lab, Farber served as curator for the inaugural Artist-in-Residence Program at the Office of the District Attorney of Philadelphia (2020), keynote speaker for the Americans for the Arts national conference (2020), and Scholar in Residence at Mural Arts Philadelphia (2015–2017). He serves as an advisor to numerous monument and memorial projects including for the City of Newark, the Emmett Till Interpretive Center, and A Long Walk Home.

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