

UMMA to Open Major New Project Developed in Partnership with Acclaimed Artist Cannupa Hanska Luger and the Nonprofit Monument Lab on September 22

You're Welcome Features Site-Specific Exterior Commission, In-Gallery Exhibition, and Public Classroom, Exploring Memory, History, Land and Cultural Sovereignty

Ann Arbor (September 18, 2023)—On September 22, the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA) will open *Cannupa Hanska Luger: You're Welcome*, a three-part project developed in collaboration with multidisciplinary artist Cannupa Hanska Luger (enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold) and the nonprofit public art and history studio Monument Lab. *You're Welcome* examines the history of the land on which the University of Michigan sits—and its relationship to broader dialogues about land sovereignty, colonialism, memorialization, and the cultural perspectives of and implications for Indigenous communities. The project features a commissioned installation by Luger for the exterior of one of the museum's buildings as well as an in-gallery exhibition that creates a dynamic interplay between several of the artist's sculptural installations and works selected from UMMA's expansive collection. The project also includes the Monument Lab: Public Classroom, which offers a space for dialogue and further contemplation of key themes within *You're Welcome*, especially the central curatorial question: "How do we remember on this campus?"

Cannupa Hanska Luger: You're Welcome is curated by Ozi Uduma, UMMA's Assistant Curator of Global Contemporary Art, and Dr. Paul Farber, Director and Co-founder of Monument Lab and Curator in Residence for the University of Michigan Arts Initiative. It will remain on view through February 18, 2024.

At the core of *You're Welcome* is Luger's experimental, commissioned installation for the exterior of Alumni Memorial Hall, a neoclassical building that opened in 1910 to commemorate U-M students and staff who served in the Mexican American, Civil, and Spanish-American wars and is today one of UMMA's two adjoined buildings. The installation, titled *GIFT*, takes its point of departure from the 1817 Treaty of Fort Meigs, in which it is stated that Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi tribes "gifted" land to the University, which used it to establish its endowments and create its campus. To explore the meaning of "gifting" within both the contexts of colonialism and Indigenous communities, Luger will paint the word "GIFT" in white porcelain clay slip on the columns of the building. In the days following, Luger and a team of collaborators will continue to paint around the letters, covering the entire historic facade with a layer of white clay and eventually covering the letters themselves. Eventually rain, wind, sun, and snow will interact with the clay slip, slowly removing it and returning it to the land. UMMA plans to capture the entire creation and degradation process in videos that will be available in the galleries and online.

With *GIFT*, Luger activates weather and time as co-conspirators, challenging perceptions of permanence in memory, history, and even physical structures. At the same time, the installation responds to dominant historical narratives, expanding our understanding of the “gift” beyond the lens of colonialism to embrace the meaning of gifting within Indigenous communities, where it signifies the giver’s success, abundance, and ability to offer something of value. In this way, *GIFT* prompts critical thinking about cultural perspectives and encourages more nuanced thinking about storytelling and mythmaking. UMMA is also implicated in this essential process, as museums stand as stewards of cultural history and heritage. The use of the white clay slip and its slow dissolution signifies an invitation to dismantle the existing white-centric structures that guide many museum practices.

“The stone of the building is sandstone from Ohio that was quarried and extracted, and rebuilt into a Greek and Romanesque story here in Michigan,” Luger said. “The architecture itself embeds a history into the campus that was never here. It is a monument to civilization and thought and enlightenment; but it is also an imposition and an extraction from the very land that we’re standing on. With *GIFT*, I want to do the same thing, present an imposition drawn from an extraction. Using Kaolin, a white clay from North America, I’m going to resurface the exterior of the Museum, presenting it as white as I think it is.

And then in cooperation and relationship with the environment, the weather will remove that thin exterior and re-expose the indigenous stone of the land.”

The in-gallery exhibition will feature Luger’s sculptural installation *This is Not a Snake*, made from riot gear, ceramics, fiber, steel, oil drums, concertina wire, ammunition cans, trash, beadwork, and other found objects. Luger, who was born and raised on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, created the serpentine-like work following the 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests. At UMMA, the sculptural installation will interact with artworks from the museum’s collection, including Randolph Rogers’ *Bust of George Washington after Jean-Antoine Houdon* (1868); Thomas Eakins’ plaster relief, *Small House-Skeleton* (1878); Imogen Cunningham’s print *Northwest Native* (1934), and Pope L.’s installation *Flint Water* (12-pack) (2017), among others. The exhibition will also feature Luger’s *The One Who Checks and The One Who Balances*, an installation comprised of two defiant figures, dressed in futuristic regalia with beadwork by the artist’s mother, Kathy Elkwoman Whitman. Together, the works in the exhibition reflect on cultural destruction and displacement, especially as it relates to Indigenous communities. As with the exterior commission, the role of museums in collecting and presenting objects detached from their original contexts is questioned and examined.

“As we work together with our communities on creating relevant and meaningful artistic experiences, we necessarily need to examine how museums both produce and disseminate shared cultural history—both as it was once told and also as it is being retold today,” said Christina Olsen, UMMA’s Director. “Our collaboration with Cannupa Hanska Luger allows us to reshape the narrative of a building central to our museum and to our campus to reflect a broader, more nuanced, and more accurate history that embraces different perspectives and lifts up diverse cultural experiences.”

The Monument Lab: Public Classroom is the third element of the *You're Welcome* project. This space offers a poetic exploration of memory and considers how memory has shaped and continues to shape the University's campus. The classroom includes examples of personal, collective, ancestral, institutional, and speculative approaches to memory that visitors will be able to interact with and add their own perspectives. The space will also feature archival photographs of scenes within and nearby Alumni Memorial Hall, historic documents and books, an ambient soundscape remixing archival sounds from the University's history, and ephemera from Luger's *GIFT*.

"Working in collaboration with Cannupa Hanska Luger, UMMA, and the U-M Arts Initiative over the last several years has been incredibly meaningful," says Ozi Uduma and Paul Farber, co-curators. "*You're Welcome* offers both a historical reflection and an open-air experiment with monumental architecture that pushes us to consider how we mark and measure the passing of time on land we now call the 'campus.'"

About Cannupa Hanska Luger

Cannupa Hanska Luger is a multidisciplinary artist and an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara and Lakota). Through monumental installations and social collaborations that reflect a deep engagement and respect for materials, the environment, and community, Luger activates speculative fiction and communicates stories about 21st century Indigeneity.

Luger is a [2022 Guggenheim fellow](#), recipient of the [2021 United States Artists Fellowship Award for Craft](#), and was named a [Grist 50 Fixer](#) for 2021, a list that includes emerging leaders in climate, sustainability, and equity from across the nation. He is the recipient of numerous other awards, including the [Creative Capital Fellowship](#) (2020), the [Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship](#) (2020), the [A Blade Of Grass Artist Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art](#) (2020), the inaugural [Center For Crafts Craft Research Fund Artist Fellowship](#) (2020), [Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grants](#) (2019), [Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Honoree](#), and the [Museum of Arts and Design's 2018 inaugural Burke Prize](#). Luger has exhibited internationally, including at such venues as the Denver Art Museum, Gardiner Museum, Kunsthal KAdE, Washington Project for the Arts, Art Mûr, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, among others. His work is held in numerous public collections, and he often lectures around the globe. Luger holds a BFA in studio arts from the Institute of American Indian Arts.

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 and follow on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).

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