

Since the early 1990s, Nari Ward (b. 1963, St. Andrew, Jamaica) has produced sculptures by accumulating staggering amounts of mundane materials and repurposing them in surprising ways. His approach draws from a variety of art historical and folk traditions and reflects the material textures of Harlem, where he has lived and worked for the past twenty-five years. Ward researches specific histories and sites to uncover connections among disparate communities and to explore the tension between tradition and transformation. Seeking out the personal and social narratives embedded in materials, he conceives of his sculptures as tools for articulating relationships between people. Over the past three decades, he has addressed topics such as historical memory, political and economic disenfranchisement, racism, and democracy in an effort to express both the tenuousness and the resilience of community.

This floor brings together several works from the early 1990s, when Ward first rose to prominence as a young artist. He had recently moved to New York, where he attended art school

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Special thanks to Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul; and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and Havana.

Nari Ward We the People

and participated in the Studio Museum in Harlem's prestigious residency program. Ward created these early works from everyday objects discarded by their owners and then salvaged from the streets around his home. Shopping carts, strollers, garbage bags, fire hoses, bits of furniture, and debris from crumbling buildings reflect the physical and socioeconomic realities of Ward's neighborhood at that time. He transforms these quotidian materials into intricate, haunting objects and environments that draw on a diverse lineage of forms, from American folk art to Post-Minimalist painting and assemblage sculpture by African-American artists of the 1960s and '70s. Evoking spiritual traditions and places of worship as well as the ongoing trauma of the AIDS crisis and crack epidemic in New York, these works powerfully capture the landscape of Harlem at a moment of profound change.

"Nari Ward: We the People" is curated by Gary Carrion-Murayari, Kraus Family Curator; Massimiliano Gioni, Edlis Neeson Artistic *Director*; and Helga Christoffersen, Associate Curator.

Additional support is provided by Ron and Ann Pizutti, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, Scott C. Mueller, Bernard I. Lumpkin and Carmine D. Boccuzzi, and Joshua and Sara Slocum.

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Education and community programs are supported, in part, by the American Chai Trust.

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3rd Floor

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Throughout his career, Ward has probed notions of identity, displacement, and belonging through his sculpture. He moved to the United States from Jamaica as a child and frequently articulates his experience of migration—as well as the diasporic experiences of many other New Yorkers—in his work. The beginning of Ward's career in the early 1990s, moreover, coincided with an expansion of the global art world and a proliferation of international biennials. As a young artist, Ward participated in the 1993 Venice Biennale with *Exodus* (1993), an ambitious installation with roots in the social changes he observed in Harlem, which nonetheless echoes the reality of refugees around the world. As Ward has embraced an international context for his sculpture, he has increasingly reflected on historical patterns of migration and displacement, particularly those tied to slavery, and on the rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion that forms the foundation of America.

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4th Floor

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Ward's first museum exhibition took place at the New Museum in 1993, where he presented the large-scale sculpture *Carpet Angel* (1992). Like other works from this period, *Carpet Angel* employs discarded objects to create a sense of renewal or transcendence from humble material origins. This presentation marks the first time the work has been exhibited since its debut. Ward has continued to look to Harlem for inspiration in the years following, even as the neighborhood undergoes dramatic changes. Gentrification has intensified inequality in Harlem and across many communities, rendering housing, safety, and financial stability inaccessible for longtime residents, particularly people of color. Ward's recent works address this reality, exploring the complicated collisions of past and present within contemporary urban life.

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