

ARTIST PROFILE

DECLARATION
APRIL 21st –
SEPTEMBER 9th

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Installation view, *Edifice and Mortar* Institute for Contemporary Art, Richmond, Virginia, 2018. Photo: Terry Brown

SONYA CLARK

Sonya Clark describes *Edifice and Mortar* as a wall, a flag, and a document. It asks us to think about a fundamental question: who laid the foundations of the United States? Each brick is hand-stamped with a maker's mark and a word. Together they form an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. The lines of text are interspersed with African American hair gathered from Richmond salons—the hair of people whose ancestors might have been legally enslaved and whose life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were cut out of Jefferson's Declaration. The blue panel is intentionally placed at an angle to reflect the viewer, making each of us a part of the work.

Edifice and Mortar extends Clark's ongoing material and conceptual reworking of icons of America's racially divided past and present.



Installation view, *Edifice and Mortar*, Institute for Contemporary Art, Richmond, Virginia, 2018. Photo: Terry Brown



ON VIEW

Edifice and Mortar, 2018
Mixed media including
embossed bricks, mortar,
hair, plexiglass, and steel

Courtesy of the artist

LOCATION

Gallery 1
Beverly Reynolds Gallery

RELATED PROGRAM

STAFF PICK

Enjoli Moon
Adjunct Assistant
Curator of Film
August 30 2018, 12:30 pm

Visit ICAVCU.ORG for
event details and ticketing
information. All events are
free and open to the public.

MOBILE TOUR

 icavcu.org/exhibitions/declaration/#mobile-tour

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Each brick in "Edifice and Mortar" is stamped with a maker's mark akin to ancient Roman crescent-shaped brick stamps but altered to resemble a Black Power Afro [with] the Italian word for slave, schiavo. The stamp acknowledges slavery's legacy [and] is meant to make visible the invisible labor of our forebears and remind us the exploitation continues in innumerable ways...If slavery becomes invisible to us it will lurk in the shadows and continue to breed injustice. –Sonya Clark

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU AS AN ARTIST?

I like to think I'm in dialogue with those unknown forebears who manipulated materials into quotidian objects. I rely on substance, form, and methods of making to carry the weight of my queries and thoughts. Simple silent objects possess a subversive monumentality. What fades to the background also looms in the subconscious. Like a shell held to the ear, these things are full of the language of the ocean. I am motivated to tap into the depths of this kind of language.

ARE THERE DETAILS ABOUT IN THE WORK THAT YOU'D ESPECIALLY LIKE AUDIENCES TO PAY ATTENTION TO?

Chattel slavery is culturally entrenched in so many insidious ways. I was in Italy investigating parallels between Richmond and Rome. I routinely said hello and goodbye to people daily with a casual ciao. I studied ancient Roman bricks made by enslaved people and compared them to Virginian bricks made by enslaved people. One day, an Italian friend told me about the etymology of ciao and I discovered I had essentially been saying, "I am your slave."

WHAT DOES THE WORD DECLARATION MEAN TO YOU, IN RELATION TO YOUR WORK?

When I think of a declaration, I like to consider where it takes place. Is it on a piece of paper? Is it housed in a structure or a monument? Or does it live in the collective memory? Do the words live in the body? Where are those words felt? Do they press into the mind? Do the words weigh in the heart? Can you feel the declaration in your hands? Do you feel it in your gait? Can you dance it? Sing it? Does it get lodged in your throat? Or does the declaration exist outside your grasp because it was never meant for you? Can you breathe it in and own it nonetheless. Can you press yourself into its words and make your mark to shape it into a better version of itself?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE SHOWING YOUR WORK AT THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY?

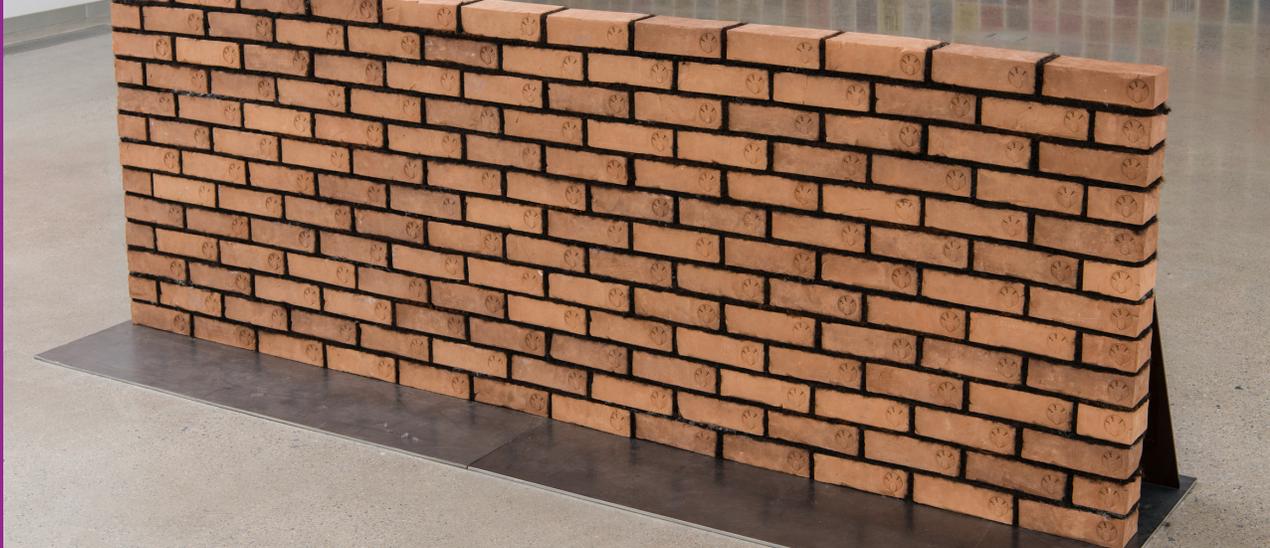
Richmond's story is not just a southern story. It is not even just an American story. It is a global story. Given what is happening in this nation as our troubled democracy is undermined, tested, and tried, I can think of no better time to exhibit this work in this location at this moment in history.

DO YOU BELIEVE ART HAS SOCIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE POWER?

My twitter handle reads "Child of Caribbean immigrants, professor/artist, thinking thru materials, deep belief in art's ability to affect change." So, yes, I believe art can transform. That is the root of its power. Rebecca Solnit in her article *Easy Chair: Occupied Territory*, wrote: "There are two kinds of borders: those that limit where we can go and those that limit what people can do to us." The power and privilege of artists is the access we have to move across borders that define cultures, disciplines, class, and nations. We create imagery that burrows into the psyche. Not only is there is power in this privilege, there is responsibility.

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BIOGRAPHY



Installation view, *Edifice and Mortar*, Institute for Contemporary Art, Richmond, Virginia, 2018. Photo: Terry Brown

Born 1967, Washington, DC; between Amherst, Massachusetts and Richmond, Virginia

Sonya Clark is a fiber artist, known for her use of unconventional materials, including hair and combs, to create sculptural works that address race, culture, class, and history.

Clark received her BA from Amherst College, Massachusetts, her BFA from the School of The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, her MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and her Doctor of Arts (honoris causa) from Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts. Select solo exhibitions: A.D Gallery, University of North Carolina in Pembroke, North Carolina (2017); Contemporary Craft in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2017); Welsh Galleries, Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia (2016-17); Taubman Museum in Roanoke, Virginia (2016); Institute of Humanities Center at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan (2014); University of Delaware (2013); Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin (2006); Galerie Göttlicher in Krems-Stein, Austria (2002); Museum of Decorative Art in Montreal, Canada (1998).

Select group exhibitions: Dowse Art Museum in Wellington, New Zealand (2018); Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia (2017); LAXART in Los Angeles, California (2017); Blanton Museum in Austin, Texas (2016); Mixed Green Gallery in Brooklyn, New York (2015); Spelman Museum of Fine Art in Atlanta, Georgia (2014); Arsenale in Venice, Italy (2013); Museum of Arts and Design in New York (2010); Mead Art Museum in Amherst, Massachusetts (2001); and American Craft Museum in New York (1999).

Collections include: Blanton Museum, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Musees d'Angers, France, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Art. Select Awards: Commonwealth Professor, highest distinction, ArtPrize for Southern Contemporary Art, Smithsonian Research Fellowship, Pollock Krasner Grant.

She is currently a visiting artist at in the department of Art and Art History at Amherst College in Massachusetts. Prior she served as Chair to the Department of Craft and Material Studies and Distinguished Research Fellow in the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.