

For Immediate Release

Regional Cultural and Educational Institutions Launch Berkshire Activation of Carrie Mae Weems' *Resist COVID / Take 6!* Campaign

Acclaimed Artist-Driven Public Awareness Initiative Comes to the Region as Part of Weems' Effort to Expand it to All 50 States

(Tuesday, February 9, 2021) -- A consortium of regional cultural institutions and colleges has launched a large-scale activation of MacArthur-winning artist Carrie Mae Weems' *Resist COVID / Take 6!* public awareness campaign across western Massachusetts and southern Vermont. Conceived by Weems as Syracuse University Artist-in-Residence, with Pierre Loving, and produced by THE OFFICE performing arts + film, the initiative seeks to raise awareness about the deadly virus, the measures necessary to prevent its spread, and, now, the importance of being vaccinated within Black, Latinx, and Native American communities, which are disproportionately impacted. This new Berkshires iteration of *Resist COVID / Take 6!* is part of a nationwide expansion, building upon recent activations in New York City, Syracuse, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Durham, Nashville, Dallas/Fort Worth, Atlanta, Sarasota, Savannah, Los Angeles, Boston, and Portland and Eugene, Oregon, as well as in the UK.

The museum members of the ArtCountry consortium—Bennington Museum, the Clark Art Institute, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), and the Williams College Museum of Art—have teamed with Usdan Gallery at Bennington College, the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), and the '62 Center for Theatre and Dance at Williams College, along with the Town of Williamstown, to launch the *Resist COVID / Take 6!* campaign in the Berkshires.

Resist COVID / Take 6! uses images drawn from Weems' vast body of work on billboards, posters, bus shelters, lawn signs, church fans, buttons, bookmarks, magnets, and reusable shopping bags, with messaging aimed at dispelling the myth of false cures, encouraging public discussion, and thanking frontline workers.

Initial installments of the Berkshires/Northern Vermont iteration of *Resist COVID / Take 6!* included a double billboard on River Street in North Adams, located across the street from MASS MoCA, featuring Weems' iconic photography with the text "Life is Beautiful" and "Don't Worry, We'll Hold Hands Again"; a large "Life is Beautiful" banner on the Visual and Performing Arts Center at Bennington College; another large banner installation at the Bennington Museum; and a kiosk poster installation in downtown Bennington.

Additional awareness efforts will be launched throughout Berkshire County and Southern Vermont, including banners posted at the Williams College Museum of Art, the Clark Art Institute, and the Bennington Museum. Posters, banners, and billboards will be prominent on campuses at Bennington College, Williams College, and MCLA and in locations throughout their communities, including several Berkshire Regional Transit Authority bus shelters in Williamstown.

In addition to expanding its on-campus awareness campaign with posters, in March the Usdan Gallery will distribute free reusable grocery bags carrying *Resist COVID / Take 6!* images and messages at farmers' markets, CSA stands, and food banks in Bennington and surrounding Vermont towns. MCLA's participation begins in mid-March with billboards of Weems' work placed in North Adams and Pittsfield and on-campus involvement led and organized by its Berkshire Cultural Resource Center and MCLA faculty members from several academic departments. MCLA will also

respond to *Resist COVID / Take 6!* with its own local campaign to amplify the voices of marginalized members of the MCLA community and develop ways to address their needs. The visual representation of the campaign will be designed by art students using Weems' work as a model to create their own designs. The Williams College Museum of Art is supporting several student-led campaign activations to spread the message campus-wide and to Williams community members around the world through postcards and tote bags.

Weems says the project "is meant to be a public service awareness campaign that in some small way helps to save lives, as a constant reminder of what needs to be done as we push through this pandemic and its extraordinary effect on us. We needed lawn signs; we needed posters to go into business windows; we used newspaper advertising circulars to deliver messaging directly into the home; we used grocery bags, shopping bags, paper, and reusable bags that we could give to food banks and pantries—because we know that with the unemployment crisis, this really hit in some of the poorest communities across the nation, where food lines are miles long. And inside the bags would be all kinds of material that could be used and serve as a constant reminder that this is serious, this is not a hoax, this is deadly real."

"What I've found heartening and surprising in equal measure is the way in which any number of cultural institutions have taken this project and are using this project to connect to their public and communities in ways they've never quite connected before," says Weems. "And that it is one of those projects that allows people to have an ongoing dialogue and a commitment of care about the community in which it's situated. These institutions are saying, we care about being in this community, we care about keeping you safe, and we care about keeping you whole."

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Images

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About Carrie Mae Weems

Widely renowned as one of the most influential living American artists, Carrie Mae Weems examines how our society structures power through deeply embedded stories, images, and ideas. A gifted storyteller who works porously between text and image, Weems has developed a revolutionary approach to the expression of narratives about women, people of color and working-class communities, "conjuring lush art from the arid polemics of identity" (*The New York Times*). With a complex body of work encompassing photography, text, fabric, audio, digital image, installation, performance, and video, Weems' work asks us to look deeply at the two-dimensional image, to explore complex realities and revisit unexamined perspectives. Weems has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions at major national and international museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Frist Center for Visual Art, the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo in Seville, Spain. Weems has received numerous awards and honors, including the MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship, the Rome Prize, the U.S. Department of State Inaugural Medal of Arts, BET Honors Visual Artist Award, and W.E.B. Du Bois Medal from Harvard University. She is represented in public and private collections around the world, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Whitney Museum, New York; Los

Angeles County Museum of Art; and Tate Modern, London. Weems resides in Syracuse and Brooklyn, New York. She is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery.

About ArtCountry

ArtCountry is a consortium of arts organizations located in the northern Berkshires of western Massachusetts and southern Vermont, including the Bennington Museum, the Clark Art Institute, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), Williams College Museum of Art, and the Williamstown Theatre Festival. The ArtCountry museum partners have joined the *Resist COVID / Take 6!* initiative in collaboration with the Usdan Gallery at Bennington College, the Berkshire Cultural Resource Center at MCLA, and the '62 Center for Theatre and Dance at Williams College, underscoring the region's diverse, vibrant, and welcoming reputation as a global destination for arts and culture.

About THE OFFICE performing arts + film

THE OFFICE performing arts + film produces a variety of Weems' projects, which include her multi-artist, multi-disciplinary performance works *Grace Notes: Reflections for Now* (premiered Spoleto Festival USA, 2016) and *Slow Fade to Black with Geri Allen* (premiered BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn! Festival 2012); *Resist COVID / Take 6!*, her COVID-19 public awareness project; *The Future Is Now and I Am It: A Parade to Mark the Moment* at the opening festival of the REACH at the Kennedy Center; and unique, expansive gatherings like *Carrie Mae Weems LIVE: Past Tense / Future Perfect*, a two-day series of presentations, performances, and conversations with artists, activists, curators and others held in association with her 2014 career retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

THE OFFICE performing arts + film is an independent performing arts and film curator and production company based in New York and London that works in ongoing partnerships with festivals, venues, and institutions to create cultural programming that is unique and mission-specific. THE OFFICE produces events locally, nationally, and internationally, and consults on programming with organizations ranging from museums to universities to libraries to performing arts centers to philanthropies. They work in both the nonprofit and commercial arts worlds and have a special focus on making art happen that has a positive impact on society. THE OFFICE works with artists across all disciplines who strive in their practice to illuminate and advance causes that move them, and partners with presenting organizations that bring meaningful (and fun!) work to the public.

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