

MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA launches new interactive community space with Shaun Leonardo's *You walk...* on May 29

Participatory installation promotes self-reflection and cross-cultural dialogue

North Adams, MA, April 28, 2021 – MASS MoCA announces Shaun Leonardo's *You walk...* as the inaugural exhibition in its newly established community engagement space. Located within the Hunter Mezzanine, the project space was established with two-year funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and will serve as a convening area for individual visitors, groups, staff, and artists. *You walk...*, on view May 29 through Spring 2023, applies the Brooklyn-based artist's renowned performative social practice to the space through the use of visual cues, written prompts, and facilitated programming that encourage self-reflection and cross-cultural dialogue.

You walk... marks Leonardo's first time transposing his "physical embodiment" practice onto a functional space. Using visual elements like two-way mirrors and mock windowscapes, Leonardo creates a space that both reflects a shared physical present but also alludes to the singular differences that can affect one's perspective.

Text prompts throughout the space encourage visitors to relive memories of simple movements and gestures – walking down the street, averting one's gaze from a stranger, holding someone's hand. These deliberate reflections are aimed at drawing awareness to experiences that can't be articulated as much as felt. In unlocking those physical narratives, Leonardo offers an opportunity to reflect on the ways we perceive ourselves and engage with others.

"What I want to communicate is how something as simple as a walk, or the gesture of a hand, or a gaze, or breathing, can be highly personal and embodied," says Leonardo. "In the simplest of gestures, there's also familiarity that someone else can identify with. Whether it's freedom or fear or curiosity – whatever that emotional core is – there is something universal to be found. At the heart of our disparate personal narratives is something we can all locate ourselves within."

Leonardo collaborated onsite with community members, artists, and staff to create the prompts, implementing a collective ownership of the space and the ways in which it will be activated. After a year of the global health crisis and heightened civic unrest, *You walk...* offers a space to reflect and re-engage. Public submissions to the prompts will be added and displayed throughout the exhibition, and Leonardo will co-curate performative gallery tours, artist interventions, and hands-on workshops over the next two years. QR codes located throughout the museum will produce additional prompts that relate to social themes found within other exhibitions and performance work.

Leonardo's *The Breath of Empty Space* was on view at MASS MoCA from August 26 through December 22, 2020. He will also be a featured artist along with Bruno Miguel in the museum's Kidspace *Defining Moments* exhibition in 2022.

Major support for *You Walk...* is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

MASSACHUSETTS MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
1040 MASS MoCA WAY
NORTH ADAMS MASSACHUSETTS 01247
PH 413 664 4481 FAX 413 663 8548
www.massmoca.org

About Shaun Leonardo

Shaun Leonardo's multidisciplinary work negotiates societal expectations of manhood, namely definitions surrounding black and brown masculinities, along with its notions of achievement, collective identity, and experience of failure. His performance practice, anchored by his work in Assembly – a diversion program for court-involved youth at the Brooklyn-based non-profit Recess, of which he is the co-director – is participatory and invested in a process of embodiment. Leonardo is a Brooklyn-based artist from Queens, New York City. He received his MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, is a recipient of support from Creative Capital, Guggenheim Social Practice, Art for Justice and A Blade of Grass, and was recently profiled in the New York Times and CNN. His work has been featured at The Guggenheim Museum, the High Line, and New Museum, with a solo exhibition, *The Breath of Empty Space*, recently presented at MICA and MASS MoCA, and currently at The Bronx Museum.

About MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest centers for making and enjoying today's most evocative art. With vast galleries and a stunning collection of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace all forms of art: music, sculpture, dance, film, painting, photography, theater, and new, boundary-crossing works of art that defy easy classification. Much of the work we show in our light-filled spaces, on our technically sophisticated stages, and within our lovely network of late 19th-century courtyards is made here during extended fabrication and rehearsal residencies that bring hundreds of the world's most brilliant and innovative artists to North Adams all year round. For more information about MASS MoCA, visit massmoca.org.

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For more information, please contact:

Christian Barclay
Communications Manager, MASS MoCA
cbarclay@massmoca.org