



Press Release

Leonardo Drew

Chapel

18 March – 29 October 2023

Brooklyn-based artist Leonardo Drew presents newly commissioned, site-specific work at Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) this spring.



The artist Leonardo Drew, with *Number 341*, 2022, Art Basel: Unlimited, Switzerland. © the artist. Photo © Jon Cancro. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery, Galerie Lelong & Co. and Anthony Meier Fine Arts.

Living and working in Brooklyn, New York, Leonardo Drew's abstract works, made from an outpouring of chaotic elements, create installations that express immense tension and turbulence. The artist's new work, *Number 360* (2023), commissioned for YSP's 18th-century Chapel, is a powerful reflection on the weight of collective experience, memory, and the cycles of life and death, decay and regeneration. This resonates within a historic building where many lives have been played out for centuries – unknown to us, yet somehow conveyed by the atmosphere of the space.

Drew joins several artists in responding to the Chapel, which was built in 1740 and is a singular, contemplative place. Projects here set out to connect emotionally with a wide humanity and to be welcoming to everyone. Previous artists include Ai Weiwei, James Lee Byars, Kimsooja, Rachel Kneebone, Shirin Neshat, Yinka Shonibare, Chiharu Shiota and Bill Viola.

The basic material of *Number 360* is plywood, either blackened or covered with textured coloured paint, which has been ripped apart and splintered to form the building blocks of a conical monolith that surges

to over five metres in height. Unusually for Drew, *Number 360* is a vertical installation, responding to the height and width of the chapel nave.

Like an explosion held in time, *Number 360* conveys ferocious energy as well as trauma and rupture. Drew's fractured surfaces create their own language, embodying the laboured process of writing the artist's experience into history. An African American artist born in Tallahassee in 1961 and raised in the infamous Bridgeport housing projects in Connecticut, Drew has often alluded to socio-political issues in his work, using such symbolically charged materials as cotton, rope, rags and rust that relate to the antebellum South, the African American experience, and America's industrial past. He is, however, adamant in his resistance to impose explicit meaning, and chooses to title his pieces only with numbers in order, "to give the viewer enough room to find themselves in the work".

In his youth, Drew excelled in draughtsmanship yet gave it up so that he could discover his own, true visual voice. Although both Marvel and DC comics were interested to recruit the young artist, by this time he had come across the work of Jackson Pollock and the impact was sufficient to compel him into taking a radically different path. In 1982, he stopped drawing and painting to remove the possibility of reverting to the habitual, and to allow himself to forge ahead with unfamiliar materials. Drew began working with the bones and skins of dead animals: the matter and remnants of death held so much residual potency and poetry as materials that they set the tone for all that was to follow. His seminal *Number 8* (1988), which he describes as 'the mother', steered his practice. Featuring an abundance of objects held within a dense mass of black rope – detritus, wood, birds' wings, skulls, animal hides – it is emotionally heavy and black as though weathered by experience itself. The overpowering sense of writhing decay, of an inevitable process in temporary stasis, undoubtedly feeds into *Number 360*. Although the materials have changed, that same pervasive language remains.



Leonardo Drew, *Number 8*, 1988. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co. Photo © Frank Stewart.

Drew is driven by relentless curiosity, which he feeds through travel. From 2015, for four years, he made numerous visits to Jingdezhen in China, known for over 1,700 years for porcelain production, where he was fascinated by the 'alchemy' of the making process. Inspired by, but also working against the tight parameters of the tradition, he experimented with abstracting from conventional ceramic forms by smashing them into fragments and firing them together to see how the pieces fused in the kiln. These shattered pieces informed his work in other materials and directly contributed to the treatment of the plywood seen in *Number 360*. Critically, through his experience of ceramic glazing, surface design and working with different types of clay and earth in Jingdezhen, colour began to seep into Drew's previously largely monochrome work. In *Number 360*, the coloured elements are covered with acrylic paint mixed with sand to give a rough, dry texture. Persian rugs provide the visual origins for the work's colour palette and its painted patterns.

Often Drew repurposes material from previous pieces to make new ones and much of the wood for *Number 360* at YSP comes from *Number 341* (2022) made for *Art Basel: Unlimited* in Switzerland. As a child the artist lived near the city dump and he has described it as his playground and treasure trove, collecting discarded objects from the rubbish, making things from them, and finding creativity amidst adversity. There is an overwhelming sense of accumulation and revisiting in the way he works, of avid collecting and recycling, both through lived experiences and the tactile experience of materials.

"Leonardo Drew's new work will have an incredibly impactful presence in YSP's Chapel, creating a magnetic relationship between the meditative character of the space and the emotionally charged nature of the piece. This intensity and poignancy of the installation will resonate deeply with the often troubled times in which we live." - Sarah Coulson, Senior Curator at Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

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Installation view: *Leonardo Drew*, Galerie Lelong & Co., New York, May 16 – August 2, 2019. Photograph courtesy of Galerie Lelong & Co.



Leonardo Drew in his studio, 2021. Photo © Christopher Garcia Valle, courtesy of Anthony Meier Fine Arts and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York.



Leonardo Drew, *Number 82S* (2021), at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut. Photograph courtesy of Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.



Installation view: Leonardo Drew, *Number 341*, 2022, Art Basel: Unlimited, Switzerland. © the artist. Photo © Jon Cancro. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery, Galerie Lelong & Co. and Anthony Meier Fine Arts.

Notes for editors

Press enquiries

Elise Hammond, Sutton: +44 (0)20 7183 3577 / elise@suttoncomms.com

Kirsty Young, Head of Marketing and PR, YSP / +44 (0)1924 832 515 / comms@ysp.org.uk

Download images at ysp.org.uk/press

Listings information

Yorkshire Sculpture Park, West Bretton, Wakefield WF4 4LG

Near Wakefield and Barnsley – M1 Junction 38

+44 (0)1924 832631 | ysp.org.uk | @YSPsculpture

Open seven days a week, except Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Book tickets at ysp.org.uk

Social media

Instagram and Twitter: @YSPsculpture

Facebook: @YorkshireSculpturePark

LinkedIn: Yorkshire Sculpture Park

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About Leonardo Drew

Leonardo Drew's works have been shown internationally and are included in public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; and Tate, London. Recent acquisitions include The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art, Bloomington, Indiana; and New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana.

Drew was commissioned for a new outdoor project *City in the Grass* for Madison Square Park in summer 2019, marking the Madison Square Park Conservancy's 38th public commission and the artist's first major public outdoor art project. *City in the Grass* was presented as a solo exhibition in three museums, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut (2021); Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson (2020); and North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh (2020). Other solo exhibitions include Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California (2020); University of Massachusetts Amherst (2019); de Young Museum, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, California (2017); Palazzo Delle Papesse, Centro Arte Contemporanea, Siena, Italy (2006); and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (2000). Drew's mid-career survey, *Existed*, premiered at the Blaffer Gallery at the University of Houston in 2009, and travelled to the Weatherspoon Art Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Drew was also commissioned for two major site-responsive works permanently installed at San Francisco International Airport, Harvey Milk Terminal 1, and at the Facebook Headquarters, Menlo Park, California respectively. In 2022, Drew was elected as a National Academician by the National Academy of Design.

Drew was born in 1961 in Tallahassee, Florida, and he grew up in Bridgeport, Connecticut. He currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Current and Upcoming Projects

What's Going On, Rubell Museum, Washington DC, USA, ongoing

Louise Nevelson And Leonardo Drew within the display *Materials And Objects*, Tate Modern, London, UK, ongoing

Leonardo Drew, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 27-July 1 2023

Leonardo Drew, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas, USA, June 2023-June 2024

About Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) is the leading international centre for modern and contemporary sculpture. Welcoming around 400,000 visitors each year, YSP is an independent charitable trust and registered museum situated in the 500-acre, 18th-century Bretton Hall estate in West Yorkshire.

Founded in 1977 by Sir Peter Murray CBE and since 2022 led by Clare Lilley, YSP is the largest sculpture park of its kind in Europe. It is the only place in Europe to see Barbara Hepworth's *The Family of Man* in its entirety, alongside a significant collection of sculpture, including bronzes by Henry Moore, important pieces by Phyllida Barlow, Roger Hiorns, Damien Hirst, Studio Morison, Hemali Bhuta and Ai Weiwei, and site-related works by Katrina Palmer, Andy Goldsworthy, Alfredo Jaar, David Nash, Sean Scully and James Turrell.

YSP mounts a year-round temporary exhibitions programme including some of the world's leading artists across six indoor galleries and the outdoors. Recent highlights include exhibitions by Fiona Banner, Anthony Caro, Tony Cragg, Robert Indiana, Amar Kanwar, KAWS, Joan Miró, Henry Moore, Annie Morris, Giuseppe Penone, Jaume Plensa, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Sean Scully, Yinka Shonibare CBE, Chiharu Shiota, David Smith, Joana Vasconcelos, and Bill Viola.

Across its 45-year history, YSP has worked with over 1,000 artists from more than 40 countries, on varied projects from short-term residencies to major surveys. YSP supports artists at vital stages in their careers and is rare in having the accommodation, workshops and expertise to enable open-ended and risk-taking practice, giving artists space, time and support to think and to develop new ideas.

Over this time, YSP has sought to ignite, nurture and sustain interest in and debate around contemporary art and sculpture, especially with those for whom art participation is not habitual or familiar. It enables open access to art, situations and ideas, and continues to re-evaluate and expand the approach to considering art's role and relevance in society. Supporting 40,000 people each year through YSP's learning programme, this innovative work develops ability, confidence and life aspiration in participants.

YSP's core work is made possible by investment from Arts Council England, Wakefield Council, the Liz and Terry Bramall Foundation and Sakurako and William Fisher through the Sakana Foundation. YSP was named Art Fund Museum of the Year in 2014 and awarded VisitEngland's gold accolade in 2021-22 for an outstanding visitor attraction.

Creative Case for Diversity

Yorkshire Sculpture Park was founded in 1977 to enable fairer cultural access and opportunity and we are committed to being part of the change towards a fairer world. We do not tolerate discrimination in any form and are proactive in our programme, policies and behaviours to address inequalities locally, nationally and internationally. We recognise that economic, social and cultural disadvantage is complex and intersectional and shape our activity accordingly. Diversity and equality are crucial to the arts because they release the true potential of our nation's artistic talent – from every background. At YSP, we support Arts Council England's mission – great art and culture for everyone. We share ACE's commitment to promote and embed diversity in our workforce and cultural programme.

The exhibition is supported by Galerie Lelong & Co., Goodman Gallery, Sakana Foundation, and the Leonardo Drew Supporters Circle.

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