

# WHITNEY

Whitney Museum  
of American Art  
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## PRESS RELEASE



Derek Fordjour (b. 1974), *Half Mast*, 2018. Acrylic, charcoal, oil pastel, and foil on newspaper mounted on canvas, 60 x 100 in. (152.4 x 254 cm), reproduced as vinyl print on billboard. Collection of the artist; courtesy Night Gallery, Los Angeles

### PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION BY DEREK FORDJOUR DEBUTS THIS FALL

**NEW YORK, August 28, 2018** – *Half Mast*, a new work by Derek Fordjour, will be the eighth work in the ongoing series of public art installations on the façade of 95 Horatio Street, located directly across from the Whitney Museum of American Art and the High Line. The installation marks the artist's first museum solo exhibition.

Fordjour works primarily in the realm of portrait painting to create vibrant scenes that subtly address subjects of systemic inequality, race, and aspiration, particularly in the context of American identity. *Half Mast*, a 2018 painting reproduced as a 17 x 29 foot vinyl print, will be unveiled this fall on the southwest corner of Gansevoort and Washington Streets.

*Half Mast* considers the recent national conversation around gun violence, speaking in particular to the surge of school shootings and to the everyday atrocities impacting Black and Brown communities in the United States. The piece offers a portrait of this complex moment in U.S. history by presenting many figures that are part of this conversation in one compressed, shared space. Seen in the crowd are law enforcement officials and civilians, including students, as well as absent figures, bodies marked with targets, and teddy bears and balloons reminiscent of street side memorials.

Printed brightly in Fordjour's signature graphic style, *Half Mast* retains a disquietingly buoyant quality while reflecting on loss and the abuse of power. In *Half Mast* and other work, the artist draws on the language of games, sports, and the carnivalesque, layering the canvas with humble materials—such as newspaper, oil pastels, and charcoal. His palette and use of pattern alludes to Americana and Pop Art as well as the visual culture of his Ghanaian heritage.

"The work speaks to the sense of unease and gross neglect that colors much of contemporary life in the United States and serves as a public acknowledgment of loss. Yet the meaning of Derek's image can also flip. *Half Mast*

alludes to possibilities of a civic movement or celebration and is a reminder of the power of individuals to resist and shape their everyday conditions,” says Allie Tepper, the curatorial project assistant organizing the installation.

Fordjour’s practice frequently engages with the use of public space, and *Half Mast* is one of two current commissions of major public work. The artist is also the recipient of a 2018 MTA Commission for a permanent installation at the 145<sup>th</sup> Street subway station in Harlem.

*Half Mast* is the eighth work to be featured in this series of public art installations, organized by the Whitney in partnership with TF Cornerstone and High Line Art. The series featured works by Alex Katz (2014), Michele Abeles (2015), Njideka Akunyili Crosby (2015–2016), Torbjørn Rødland (2016–2017), Puppies Puppies (2017), Do Ho Suh (2017–18), and Christine Sun Kim (2018).

### About the Artist

Derek Fordjour (b. 1974, Memphis, TN) has exhibited in numerous venues including the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Sugarhill Children’s Museum, and the Taubman Museum. He is a graduate of Morehouse College, and earned a Master’s Degree in Art Education from Harvard University, and an MFA in Painting at Hunter College. He currently serves as a Core Critic at the Yale University School of Art. Fordjour is the recipient of a 2018 MTA Commission for the entire 145<sup>th</sup> Street subway station in Harlem. He was awarded a 2018 Deutsche Bank NYFA Fellowship, and was a 2017–18 artist-in-residence at the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program in New York. He will present a solo exhibition at Night Gallery in Los Angeles in winter 2019.

### Curatorial Credit

*Derek Fordjour: Half Mast* is organized by Allie Tepper, curatorial project assistant.

### Exhibition Support

*Derek Fordjour: Half Mast* is part of Outside the Box programming, which is supported by a generous endowment from the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation.

### About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

### Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Eckhaus Latta: Possessed	Until October 8, 2018
Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art	Until September 30, 2018
David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night	Until September 30, 2018
Mary Corse: A Survey in Light	Until November 25, 2018
Derek Fordjour: Half Mast	Opens Fall 2018
Programmed: Rules, Codes, and Choreographies in Art, 1965 – 2018	September 28, 2018 – April 14, 2019
Andy Warhol – From A to B and Back Again	November 12, 2018 – March 31, 2019
Kevin Beasley	Opens Fall 2018
An Incomplete History of Protest:	
Selections from the Whitney’s Collection, 1940–2017	Until August 27, 2018
Christine Sun Kim: Too Much Future	Ongoing
Where We Are: Selections from the Whitney’s Collection 1900–1960	Ongoing
The Face in the Moon: Drawings and Prints by Louise Nevelson	Ongoing

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Museum hours are: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday from 10:30 am to 6 pm; Friday and Saturday from 10:30 am to 10 pm. Open Tuesdays in July and August. Adults: \$25. Full-time students, visitors with disabilities, and visitors 65 & over: \$18. Visitors 18 years & under, and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).