

Institute of Contemporary University Art of Pennsylvania

118 S. 36th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104
(215) 898-7108, icaphila.org

NEWS RELEASE

First Major Institutional Exhibition of Michelle Lopez Opens Fall 2019 at Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania

*Site-Specific Installation Ballast & Barricades Reduces a City
to Ruin in Artist's Most Ambitious Work to Date*

May 28, 2019
Philadelphia, PA

Opening on September 13, 2019, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA) will present the first major institutional exhibition of Philadelphia-based artist Michelle Lopez. *Michelle Lopez: Ballast & Barricades* (on view through May 10, 2020) employs a fragmented architectural language to critique systems of power and consumption through a large, site-specific installation that builds a decrepit cityscape both reduced to and suspended by rubble. Marking her most ambitious work-to-date, the presentation builds on Lopez's previous body of work *House of Cards* (2018), weaving together earlier works with new pieces that formally allude to protest, human migration, ecological crises, and the ongoing impact of rampant gentrification. The resulting installation presents a sculptural terrain that harbors political discord, teetering on the brink of collapse.

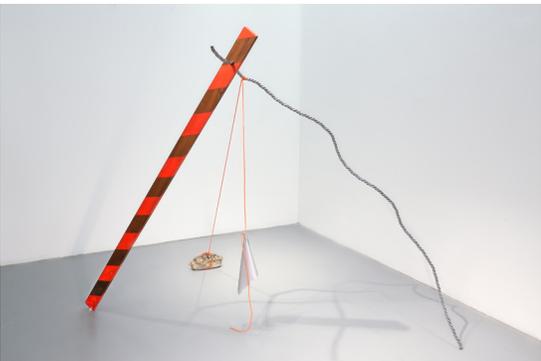
"We are thrilled to present bold, new, and recent work conceived by local interdisciplinary sculptor and installation artist Michelle Lopez. Her experimental approach to processes, intricately reimagined use of industrial materials, and deft craftsmanship will create a space inside ICA that interrogates the human condition, challenging our audiences to think critically about pressing social issues, including gentrification, race, and representation" said Amy Sadao, ICA Director. "In Philadelphia, these very concerns, along with questions examining the impact of displacement, are particularly relevant. Through this ambitious program we invite the local community to engage in dialogue and be inspired."



Michelle Lopez, *House of Cards*, 2018, exhibition view, Simon Preston Gallery, New York. Courtesy of the artist and Simon Preston, New York.



Michelle Lopez, *Blue Angel*, 2011, aluminum and powder-coated aluminum, 120 x 24 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Simon Preston, New York.



Michelle Lopez, *Barricade*, 2018, walnut, paint, steel, reflective fabric, paracord and rubble, 57 x 80 1/2 x 62 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Simon Preston, New York.

Known for creating sculptural works that subvert histories of minimalism through a feminist lens and deconstruct symbols of nationalism, power, and identity through a process of formal reduction, alchemy, and violence, Lopez transforms the ICA gallery into a meditation on our fraught political moment through *Ballast & Barricades*. Blockades, borders, flags, and natural elements meticulously crafted by hand bleed together as distinct yet interconnected symbols within the space. Fragments of construction sites, scaffolding, large boulders, and architectural structures are positioned within the wider work to create a delicate system of counterweights and counterbalances, permeating the immersive installation with a sense of precariousness. The aggressive sound of a flag and its rope hitting a flagpole from the artist's earlier work *Halyard* (2014) enhances the sensory nature of the experience and heightens the sense of disorder presented through sculptural means.

"My practice has evolved to examine debris and the aftermath of violence, while my process continues to build inversions of cultural iconography in order to investigate notions of human failure," reflects Lopez. "I've explored abject forms of violence and entropy through subcultures ranging from skateboards to epic-related action figures and models; monolithic Minimalism to national flags. I'm invested in the history of sculpture and what it means to make objects and figures in these uncertain times. My installations have become spare structures which bodies may have traversed, so my work suggests the history of bodies and of violence in the absence of figuration."

"Lopez imbues her formalistic approach with symbolism, creating visually striking works that are infused with multiple meanings," said Alex Klein, the Dorothy and Stephen R. Weber (CHE '60) Curator at ICA. "*Ballast & Barricades* offers a range of interpretations rooted in histories of sculptural practice to explore political and social issues within a built environment, drawing on the local Philadelphia landscape to raise questions around displacement, gentrification, urban decay, and the dangers implicit in the construction of borders, both physical and imagined, within our increasingly nationalistic context."

Concurrent with the exhibition, ICA will present a series of programs that will draw upon the themes of the exhibition. These will include dialogues with contemporary artists working across film and performance around issues of race and representation in the museum; an intergenerational discussion on the legacies and politics of Minimalist sculpture; and an examination of gentrification and urbanism in the context of Lopez's explorations of themes of displacement and borders. ICA is also producing the first publication devoted to the artist's work in conjunction with the exhibition. *Michelle Lopez: Ballast & Barricades* is organized by Alex Klein, Dorothy and Stephen R. Weber (CHE'60) Curator.



Michelle Lopez, ink drawings on paper for "Ballast & Barricades", 2018-2019, 14 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Photography taken by Michelle Lopez in Philadelphia at Christian Street and 11th Street, Summer 2018.

ABOUT MICHELLE LOPEZ

Michelle Lopez is an interdisciplinary sculptor and installation artist. Her work examines collapsed political and social structures by inverting cultural tropes through her process of building. Her research and exploitation of industrial materials within her work exposes the finite and sometimes invisible boundaries of our own embedded societal constructions. She was recently a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2019 and will launch an interdisciplinary project of sound and animation in the Fels Planetarium of The Franklin Institute in conjunction with Cole Akers, curator at The Glass House.

Lopez earned her MFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York and BA from Barnard College, Columbia University, New York. Recent solo exhibitions include: *House of Cards*, Simon Preston Gallery, 2018; *Halyard*, Alt, Istanbul, 2016; *Angels, Flags, Bangs*, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Connecticut, 2014; Galerie Christophe Gaillard, Paris, 2012; Simon Preston, New York, 2015, 2011 and 2009; *The Year We Made Contact*, LA><ART, Los Angeles, 2008, among others. She participated in *Greater New York*, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York 2000; Public Art Fund, Metrotech Center, New York, 2000 and the California Biennial, OCMA, Orange County, CA, 2004.

Formerly a faculty member at Yale School of Art, Sculpture, she is now faculty in the Fine Arts Program at the University of Pennsylvania Stuart Weitzman School of Design where she leads the Sculpture Division.

ABOUT ALEX KLEIN

Alex Klein is the Dorothy and Stephen R. Weber (CHE'60) Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, which she joined in 2011. Recent exhibitions at ICA include *Suki Seokyeong Kang: Black Mat Oriole* (2018, co-curated with Kate Kraczon); *Broadcasting: EAI at ICA* (2018, co-organized with Electronic Arts Intermix); Nathalie Du Pasquier's first museum survey *BIG OBJECTS NOT ALWAYS SILENT* (2017, co-organized with the Kunsthalle Wien); *Myths of the Marble* (2017, co-organized with the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Norway) and accompanied by a critical reader published by Sternberg Press; *Barbara Kasten: Stages* (2015), the first major survey of the artist's work; and *Julia Feyrer and Tamara Henderson: Consider the Belvedere* (2015). She is currently working on a multifaceted website and exhibition initiative, *I is for Institute*, which includes collaborations with RAW Material Company, Senegal and Kunsthalle Lissabon, Portugal. From 2013 to 2015 she served as an agent in the Carnegie Museum of Art's Hillman Photography Initiative where she co-curated the exhibition *Antoine Catala: Distant Feel* (2015, with Tina Kukielski) and co-edited the publication *Shannon Ebner: Auto Body Collision* (CMOA, 2015). She has lectured widely and her writing has been published in numerous collections, including *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good* (MIT Press, 2016), *The Human Snapshot* (Sternberg Press/ CCS Bard, 2013), *How Soon Is Now?* (LUMA, 2012), and the critical volume on photography *Words Without Pictures* (LACMA/Aperture, 2010), which she also edited. Before joining the ICA in 2011 she held positions in the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Roski School of Fine Arts at the University of Southern California, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

MEDIA CONTACTS

Claire Hurley, Resnicow and Associates,
212-671-5169, churley@resnicow.com
Racheal Campbell, Resnicow and Associates,
212-671-5157, rcampbell@resnicow.com
Jill Katz, Institute of Contemporary Art
Philadelphia,
215-573-9975, katzj@ica.upenn.edu

GENERAL INFORMATION

ICA IS LOCATED AT:
118 SOUTH 36TH STREET AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
(215) 898-7108
WWW.ICAPHILA.ORG
[@ICAPHILADELPHIA](https://FACEBOOK.COM/ICAPHILADELPHIA)

MUSEUM HOURS

WEDNESDAY, 11AM–8PM
THURSDAY- SUNDAY, 11AM–6PM

ICA IS ALWAYS FREE. FOR ALL.

FREE ADMISSION IS COURTESY OF
AMANDA AND GLENN FUHRMAN.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania is a non-collecting institution presenting exhibitions at the forefront of contemporary practice and culture that challenge audiences to think in new ways. The ICA is free for all to engage and connect with the art of our time. Since its founding in 1963, ICA has served as a laboratory for the new, introducing and supporting the production of urgent and important contemporary art, beginning with ICA's inaugural show of paintings by Abstract Expressionist Clyfford Still, followed by the first museum show of works by Andy Warhol in 1965. Throughout its history, ICA has been instrumental in identifying and developing many promising artists before they attained prominence within the international art world, some of whom include—in addition to Warhol—Laurie Anderson, Richard Artschwager, Vija Celmins, Karen Kilimnik, Barry Le Va, Glenn Ligon, Robert Mapplethorpe, Agnes Martin, Pepón Osorio, Tavares Strachan, and Cy Twombly.