Institute of Contemporary Art
University of Pennsylvania

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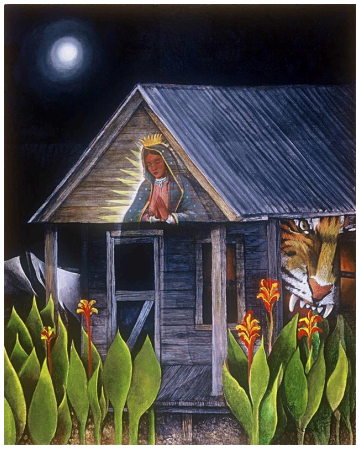
# Major Group Exhibition Traces Lineage and Legacy of Yard Art, Adding New Perspectives and Establishing Impacts on Contemporary Art

## Curated by Artist and Art Historian Josh T Franco, *Where I Learned to Look: Art from the Yard* Opens This July at ICA Philadelphia



*Left: Wendy Red Star's Rez Pop K, J, E, G. Image is Courtesy of the artist and Sargent's Daughters.*
*Right: Title: Nuestra Señora Artist: José Esquivel. Media: Acrylic on Canvas. Size: 16" x 20" in. Year Completed: 1995. Photo Credit: Mario Esquivel.*

**Philadelphia, PA (May 9, 2024) —** Opening this summer at the Institute for Contemporary Art Philadelphia, *Where I Learned to Look: Art from the Yard* counters the assumption that artistic production is bound to the studio, gallery, or museum. The exhibition explores artwork inspired by or created and presented in yards, the transitional space between the home and wider world that function as spaces for making, interpreting, and sourcing materials for art. In over 30 works ranging across media and geographies, the exhibition presents artists from the past five decades whose practices deploy utilitarian and elaborate aesthetics, found and handmade materials, and references to the sacred, the familial, and popular culture. By proposing a lineage of yard art made by both community and academically taught artists, *Where I Learned to Look: Art from the Yard* invites conversations about class, accessibility, and impermanence. The exhibition is curated by artist and art historian Josh T Franco and organized by ICA.

On view from July 12 through December 1, *Where I Learned to Look: Art from the Yard* features over 30 works by artists, including Beverly Buchanan, David Driskell, Donald Judd, Noah Purifoy, and vanessa german, among others, as well as new works by Franco and a site-specific commission by Finnegan Shannon. The exhibition is part of ICA's Sachs Guest Curator Program, which brings artists and non-traditional curators to guest curate exhibitions that push the boundaries of ICA's space and offer new perspectives on emerging artists and underrecognized artistic practices.

"ICA has a rich legacy of supporting artists who emerge from beyond the conventional academic system. This curatorial practice is evidenced in our presentation of *Where I Learned to Look: Art from the Yard*, and traces back to our beginnings. Since our founding in 1963, we've invested in launching the careers of under-recognized artists by not only offering them a platform but curating exhibitions that provide pivotal context for their work within the wider field of art," remarks Zoë Ryan, Daniel W. Dietrich, II Director. "We're excited to have Josh T Franco join visionary artists like Kara Walker and Nayland Blake in curating exhibitions from their unique vantage point as part of our Sachs Guest Curator program. Stemming from Josh's personal and familial dedication to this aesthetic tradition, *Where I Learned to Look: Art from The Yard* will highlight his important work underscoring yard art as a key influence in the contemporary art world."

In *Where I Learned to Look: Art from The Yard*, the yard serves as an intermediary space between public and private which artists employ for self-expression. The exhibition examines its various forms and places works by renowned artists in a new conversation with luminaries across mediums and geographies. Raised in West Texas, and influenced by both the "yard art" of Donald Judd as well as that of his own grandfather, Franco brings a deeply personal and multifaceted approach to his curation of the exhibition, which encompasses both new scholarly inquiry and artmaking.

*Jeff Koons, Gazing Ball (Birdbath), 2013. plaster and glass. 45 1/4 x 27 1/2 x 27 1/2 inches / 114.9 x 69.9 x 69.9 cm. Artist Proof from an edition of 3 plus 1 AP. © Jeff Koons, Photo: Tom Powel Imaging*

“My grandfather’s evolving, elaborate environments were my earliest training grounds as an artist and art historian—and it’s where my passion for close looking and for the artistic process began,” comments Franco. “From my own backyard to the barrio to the reservation and beyond, this field of everyday artmaking that is evidenced in yard art demonstrates a persistent world-building impulse across diverse spaces, makers, and audiences.”

*Where I Learned to Look: Art from the Yard* is presented within ICA’s first-floor gallery and extends onto its outdoor terrace, where an installation of a major new work by Finnegan Shannon invites people to engage in a giant game of cornhole. Inside the exhibition, yard art is exemplified in various ways across media including painting, photography, video and installation. Visitors are invited to take a seat on *Wintergarden bench* by Donald Judd and admire a windmill made by Franco’s grandfather, while a site-specific snake of white marble rocks by Franco leads visitors to *Gazing Ball (Birdbath)* by Jeff Koons, as well as three monumental sculptures that incorporate bottles as references to bottle trees by vanessa german. Works by the Indigenous, all-women and non-binary collective BUSH raise the question of how the reservation shifts yard art discourse, including a film of the group learning to snare wild rabbits on the territory of the Secwépemc Nation and an installed wire fence from which feathers, a gardening glove, and a rabbit skin hang. Exhibition programming and events are forthcoming.

**About Josh T Franco**

Josh T. Franco is an artist and art historian from West Texas who believes that art history is made by hand. As an artist, Franco produces and exhibits at least one new body of work annually to ensure that his scholarship is informed by making and showing work. Franco’s primary medium is the discipline of art history itself. Using performance and a variety of materials, he transforms the components of being an art historian—reading, writing, annotating, archival research and so on—into artworks staged within museum and gallery settings. Franco’s art has been exhibited and supported by Esperanza Peace & Justice Center, WorkSpaceBrussels, Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Syracuse University Art Museum, and the Rubin Center for the Visual Arts, among others. In Franco’s forthcoming book with Duke University Press, *Marfa, Marfa: Rasquachismo and Minimalism in Far West Texas*, he reframes Donald Judd as a yard artist.

As an art historian, Franco has presented scholarly and critical work in venues including Stanford University, The Frick Collection, Joan Mitchell Foundation, Independent Curators International, *Latino Studies*, and *The Journal of Feminist Scholarship*. He has written exhibition-related text for Theaster Gates, Félix González-Torres, Charlotte Hallberg, Zoe Leonard, and Joshua Saunders among others. His dissertation about the town of Marfa, Texas was completed at Binghamton University (2016). Franco lives and works in Hyattsville, Maryland.

**Also on View at ICA**

- ***Joanna Piotrowska*** (July 12 - December 1, 2024): the first U.S. solo museum exhibition dedicated to the Polish artist, whose work examines the human condition through performative acts, photography, and film. Self-defense manuals and psychotherapeutic methods are used to explore intimacy, violence, control, and self-protection with an emphasis on gesture and touch. The exhibition features large-scale, silver gelatin prints and film that portray moments of care as well as hierarchies of power.
- ***Entryways: Nontsikelelo Mutiti*** (ongoing through December 1, 2024): a new artistic project for ICA's façade created in partnership with Maharam that reimagines traditional ironwork commonly found across the United States, including Philadelphia, and connects the design to histories of African hair braiding.

**About the Institute of Contemporary Art | University of Pennsylvania**

The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA Philadelphia) is a global hub for contemporary art and ideas. Free and open to all, ICA Philadelphia is dedicated to supporting artistic practices across disciplines and to serving as a laboratory for risk-taking, community-building, and knowledge-creation. Since 1963, ICA Philadelphia has championed the University's commitment to cultivating the next generation of imaginative creators and thinkers. Through commissions, exhibitions, programs, publications, and special projects, ICA Philadelphia fosters bold experimentation, curiosity, and discovery. Learn more at icaphila.org.

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