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AMANDA WILLIAMS

AN IMPOSING NUMBER OF TIMES

2020–2022

Commissioned Art Banners Unfurled at Smith College Museum of Art



An Imposing Number of Times, by Amanda Williams, Elm Street view, Northampton, MA (Photography by Laura Shea for SCMA)

Northampton, MA—July 6, 2021: Two black-and-white banners by artist Amanda Williams have been unfurled on the Elm Street and campus-facing facades of the [Smith College Museum of Art](#) (SCMA). The banners represent the first part of Williams’ *An Imposing Number of Times*, a series of site-specific campus installations commissioned by the museum. Further installations are scheduled for fall 2021 and spring 2022.

The banners' design and composition were inspired by student-made Black Lives Matter banners displayed on several residential houses on campus. First created by Smith students in 2017 and redone each fall, the house banners prompted Williams to reflect on language and self-determination at Smith College, a place where campus traditions and the house system play a large role in student life. Williams built the abstract composition of her banners emphasizing the texture, materiality and painterly qualities of the house banners. In one of her banners, Williams layers six words over details of three faded house banners. It reads: "live / matterful / black / lives / allies / matter."

According to Williams, "Unfolding over space and time, *An Imposing Number of Times* transforms the legibility of the glyphs of the handmade BLM banners into something unrecognizable as a means of establishing their potency and liberatory potential.

"The meaning of the phrase 'Black Lives Matter' seems straightforward at first, yet it is elusive, ephemeral and shifting. The recitation, fragmentation and deconstruction of this phrase and its physical presence on campus via a series of installations will produce a collective bearing witness to how Blackness is navigated and valued in the specific institutional context of Smith."

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Williams' commission is an outgrowth of her 2019 campus residency, when she inaugurated SCMA's Artist-in-Residence Program. Williams has exhibited widely, including at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Venice Architecture Biennale, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. With Olalekan Jeyifous, she was awarded She Built NYC's inaugural commission, a large-scale, permanent monument to Shirley Chisholm in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. In June 2021, she opened "What Black Is This, You Say?" a year-long public artwork at Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York City.

A visual artist who trained as an architect, Williams employs color as a way to draw attention to the complexities of race, place and value in cities. Her installations, paintings and works on paper seek to inspire new ways of looking at the familiar and, in the process, raise questions about the state of urban space and citizenship in America.

An Imposing Number of Times explores and intends to provoke conversation about such questions as: How do public declarations conflict with what occurs inside the buildings on which they appear? For whom do traditions create belonging? How is the idea—versus the reality—of Blackness valued at Smith? What happens when a tradition arrives before a place is fully ready to receive it?

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In fall 2021, the next component of *An Imposing Number of Times* will be introduced, toward stimulating further dialogue about Black Lives Matter and related issues among members of the campus community, through the use of tea sets designed by Williams. The sets refer to a longstanding Smith tradition of Friday afternoon tea. The final installation will be a constructed landscape of black and white tulips that considers desired or remembered paths, to be planted in fall 2021 and bloom the following spring.

Under banners, alongside tulips and over tea, *An Imposing Number of Times* extends an invitation, in Williams' words, "to (re)infuse power into a phrase like 'Black Lives Matter' that was indirectly rendered powerless by its unplanned and ubiquitous insertion in an environment that wasn't wholly ready to receive it."

Related publication

In collaboration with Amanda Williams and Candor Arts, SCMA co-published *the other option is to slow down: Amanda Williams* (2021), a limited-edition artist book about Williams' artist residency at Smith College. Designed by Matt Austin and Melanie Bohrer, it includes essays by Emma Chubb and Grace Deveney.

Additional background on Amanda Williams

Williams has been recognized as a Joan Mitchell Foundation grantee, a USA Ford Fellow, an Efroymsen Arts Fellow and a Leadership Greater Chicago Fellow. Her work is in several permanent collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago and MoMA. In 2017, Williams was commissioned to create a public art work at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation in St Louis, MO. In October 2020, she was one of three artists to win the Next Level/Spare Room Award, her second award from the Chicago-based non-profit 3Arts. A member of the Obama Presidential Center's Museum Design Team, Williams also sits on the boards of the Graham Foundation, Garfield Park Conservatory, Hyde Park Art Center, and Pulitzer Arts Foundation. Williams lives and works on the south side of Chicago.

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An Imposing Number of Times has been organized by Emma Chubb, Charlotte Feng Ford '83 Curator of Contemporary Art in collaboration with SCMA's campus partners: The Botanic Garden of Smith College; Facilities Management; Office for Equity and Inclusion; College Archives; Residential Life and the Art Department. Isabel Cordova '19, Raven Fowlkes-Witten '17 and Lexie Casais '23 provided key research and knowledge.

The residency, commission and publication are made possible by the trust and support of Robin Villa; the bequest of Jane Herb Rinden in honor of Thor Rinden; the Maxine Weil Kunstadter, class of 1924, Fund and the Carlyn Steiner '67 and George Steiner Endowed Fund in honor of Joan Smith Koch.

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About SCMA:

[The Smith College Museum of Art](#) (SCMA) is committed to connecting people to art, ideas and each other. SCMA is recognized as one of the leading academic museums in the United States, contributing meaningfully to the mission of Smith College: To educate women of promise for lives of distinction and purpose. SCMA's collection of nearly 28,000 artworks spans from antiquity to the present and supports teaching and learning across the curriculum of the college. To learn more about the collection, as well as current and upcoming virtual programs and exhibitions, visit scma.smith.edu and follow the museum on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

SCMA remains closed to the general public as part of the Smith College "Culture of Care" plan that prioritizes the health and safety of Smith students and the Smith campus community while the COVID-19 pandemic continues. SCMA is committed to offering free access to a broad range of digital content, with the museum's website as the main hub and entry point. Visit: scma.smith.edu.

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Photography by Laura Shea for SCMA: *Amanda Williams: An Imposing Number of Times* | Elm Street banner

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