

**LMCC PRESENTS ONYEDIKA CHUKE'S  
*THE FOREVER MUSEUM*  
*ARCHIVE\_CIRCA 6000BCE* AT THE  
ARTS CENTER AT GOVERNORS  
ISLAND JUNE 12–OCTOBER 31**

INSPIRED BY THE ARTIST'S WORK ON RIKERS ISLAND,  
EXPANSIVE SITE-RESPONSIVE EXHIBITION ADDRESSES  
U.S. CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM  
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



Images L-R: Onyedika Chuke, *The Forever Museum Archive: The Untitled/Circa\_1968\_Part 1*, Spring Break Art Show, 2018; Onyedika Chuke, *Open Session 6* (installation view), The Drawing Center, 2015; Onyedika Chuke, *The Forever Museum Archive: The Untitled Various Objects* (installation view), Bronx Museum, 2019; All images courtesy of the artist.;

April 26, 2021—**Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC)** is proud to present **Onyedika Chuke's** site-responsive exhibition, *The Forever Museum Archive\_Circa 6000BCE*, at **The Arts Center at Governors Island** from **June 12–October 31**. The exhibition is curated by **Gabriel Florenz**, Pioneer Works' Founding Artistic Director, and co-presented by LMCC and Pioneer Works.

Chuke's ongoing *The Forever Museum Archive* project utilizes sculpture as an archival form of investigation, orphaning and rehoming mythological, religious and historical visual markers exposing the less visible but often deeper psychological meanings that they shroud.

For this latest iteration, Chuke turns his focus to the criminal justice system in the United States—circling the present penal code back to antiquity, through the Renaissance and onto the colonial birth of American incarceration. Co-commissioned by LMCC and Pioneer Works, *The Forever Museum Archive\_Circa 6000BCE* places Chuke's newly created sculptures alongside collected artworks and artefacts within a labyrinth of Quaker church pews and plastic tubes that pump a solution of liquid soap throughout the installation space. Taken as a whole, the objects on display point towards the interconnectedness of the seemingly disparate chapters that have culminated in our contemporary mode of governance.

The pews point towards the Christian movement's involvement in establishing the first institution for the punishment of criminals in the United States, while a Renaissance painting, originally commissioned as a tool to organize and propagate around a singular belief system and said to have been removed from a church that was demolished to make way for Rome's largest prison, further draws attention to the ways in which patronage, capital and religion intersects with the carceral system. Chuke's hand sculpted works replicate the decapitated head and dismembered feet, respectively, of Greco-Roman deities Hercules and Hermes, as a way of subverting the mythologized notion of heroism in Euro-American philosophy. Another sculpture, molded to resemble the human body's thoracic spine, becomes the point of origin for the liquid soap that circulates throughout the installation. This commercial cleaning product is in fact produced by Corcraft Industries—the "brand name" for New York State's Division of Correctional Industries, which currently employs approximately 2,100 incarcerated individuals at a starting wage of sixteen cents per hour. Used by the artist as a critique on the exploitation of prison labor, the network of tubes and soap, conceptually modelled after our central nervous system, snakes through the installation space to evoke the insidiousness and never-ending cycles of oppression and injustice.

The installation is inspired in large part by Chuke's research on Rikers Island as a New York City Public Artist-in-Residence from 2018 through 2019. During this time, he collaborated with incarcerated individuals who faced extreme challenges, to create access to art and open dialogue between New York City policymakers and those in custody. Additionally, he utilized the Department of Corrections' archives to research the architecture and historical landscape that have shaped the city's penological system. For this presentation at The Arts Center on Governors Island, Chuke has also collaborated on the production of new works with two graduates from Young New Yorkers, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing arts-based diversion programs to court-involved young people.

"Onyedika Chuke's practice has intrigued me even before his residency with us back in 2016. His work immediately stands out on a visceral level and once you start to look closer you realize there are layers and layers you can peel back. One of those artists that you can't quite place into any category because his practice is constantly evolving as it draws connections that are often hidden and brings them to the surface. When LMCC asked us to propose some ideas for an exhibition, he was the first artist that came to mind. I'd been waiting for years for the opportunity to do something big with him and I knew this was that moment for him to be able to present his work at the scale and level it needed to be within to be able to be presented at its full potential," comments **Gabe Florenz**, Curator, Pioneer Works.

"We are thrilled to be partnering with Pioneer Works on this evolving project by Onyedika Chuke, a visionary artist whose work brings to light the often unseen systems of power that we live within," says **Lili Chopra**, LMCC's Executive Director, Artistic Programs. "As the site of *The Forever Museum Archive\_Circa 6000BCE*, Governors Island is a potent stage for these layered and interconnected dynamics, as the land and home of the Lenape, the Island's original inhabitants; in its later colonization and use as a military base; and presently as a space for public life and social engagement."

*The Forever Museum Archive\_Circa 6000BCE* is one of three exhibitions and installations at The Arts Center at Governors Island, opening June 12 and running through the end of the Island's 2021 public season on October 31. Visit [LMCC.net](https://www.lmcc.net) for details. Additional 2021 public programming will be announced soon, including signature Open Studios events and the return of

LMCC's popular Take Care series, which furthers ideas presented in The Arts Center's art installations and reframes engagement in artistic and curatorial processes as a mindful practice stemming from embodied participation and care. **All programming and events at The Arts Center are free and open to the public, and all are welcome.** Appropriate COVID-19 public health protocols will be in place.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

### **Onyedika Chuke**

*The Forever Museum Archive\_Circa 6000BCE*

**Co-presented by LMCC and Pioneer Works**

June 12–October 31, Thursday–Sunday, 12–5 p.m.

The Arts Center at Governors Island

Curated by Gabriel Florenz, Pioneer Works' Founding Artistic Director, and co-presented by LMCC and Pioneer Works

The Arts Center at Governors Island

110 Andes Rd, New York, NY 10004, Building 110

Google Maps: [The Arts Center at Governors Island](#)

The Arts Center at Governors Island is accessible by ferries operating to and from Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn. It is a 2-minute walk from the Soissons Landing pier (ferries from Manhattan). For the Governors Island ferry schedule, please visit <https://govisland.com/visit-the-island/ferry>

## **ABOUT ONYEDIKA CHUKE**

Onyedika Chuke is a New York-based American sculptor and archivist born in Onitsha, Nigeria. Often intrigued by international politics, his analysis of history and media are pertinent reminders of social constructs that characterize our collective memory. From 2016 to 2018 Chuke was a fellow at The Drawing Center. In the years 2013 to 2015 he participated in Queens Museum Studio Program. From January 2018 to 2019, Chuke served as New York City Public Artist in Residence (P.A.I.R). The position placed him in the offices of Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) and Department of Corrections (DOC) Rikers Island. He has also held fellowships at Sculpture Center, Socrates Sculpture Park and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. His archive has received support from organizations such as The Artist Alliance Inc and The American Academy in Rome. Chuke is a graduate of The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art (2011).

## **ABOUT PIONEER WORKS**

Pioneer Works is an admission-free 501(c)(3) non-profit cultural center in Red Hook, Brooklyn with a mission to build community through the arts and sciences to create an open and inspired world. Since its founding by artist Dustin Yellin in 2012, Pioneer Works has hosted over 250 residents in the arts and sciences, mounted over 60 original exhibitions and held over 600 interdisciplinary public programs and performances. <https://pioneerworks.org>

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## **ABOUT GOVERNORS ISLAND**

Governors Island is a 172-acre island in the heart of New York Harbor nestled between Lower Manhattan and the Brooklyn waterfront. Eight minutes from the energy and excitement of the City, the Island is a popular seasonal destination open to the public May 1–October 31. An award-winning new park is complemented by dozens of unique historic buildings, educational and cultural facilities, a rich arts and culture program and a 22-acre National Monument managed by the National Park Service. Looking forward, the Island is envisioned to be accessible year-round, with extraordinary open space, arts and culture, and education and research opportunities focused on climate solutions.

For more information, visit [govisland.org](http://govisland.org).

## **ABOUT THE ARTS CENTER AT GOVERNORS ISLAND**

Curated and presented by LMCC, The Arts Center at Governors Island is an incubator for creative experimentation and a gathering place for dialogue. Year-round residency programs that provide artists with studio and presenting space to develop their work are featured alongside a broad range of public events to convene artists and audiences in an exchange of ideas and creative practices. Work developed and presented at The Arts Center focuses on sustainability and equity.

The 2021 public season at The Arts Center at Governors Island pushes audiences to examine the fixity of the world around us, questioning the real and perceived narratives that, over time, have coalesced to create our current social, environmental and personal structures of justice and understandings of sustainability. In this exploration, water becomes the undercurrent of the exhibited works at The Arts Center: physically, as the vital life source with which we nourish and grow; and metaphysically, as the ever shifting entity whose flows inform new ways to interact with and reimagine the world around us. Each project comprises its own universe of source material, subjects and information, while its simultaneous placement within the unique context of The Arts Center—on Governors Island, within New York City—unlocks the potential for cross-pollination of ideas such as systems of ecological growth and decay, knowledge creation and evolution, power and punishment and care and maintenance.

Through direct participation and embodied engagement, the season seeks to create avenues for the public to re-imagine the framework of our existence, both individually and collectively.

## **ABOUT LMCC**

Founded as Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, LMCC serves, connects and makes space for artists and community.

LMCC Serves Artists through:

- [Residencies](#) that enable artists to experiment and develop their work and ideas, with professional development, financial training and networking opportunities
- [Grant funding](#) to artists that support local/neighborhood projects
- [Presentation opportunities](#) that allow artists to share their work and creative process with the public

LMCC Serves Community through:

- [Free public programs](#) in Lower Manhattan that activate neighborhoods and bring people together through performances and rich artistic experiences
- [Access to artists and the artmaking process](#) to build connections and dialogue between artists and audiences
- [Grant funding](#) for neighborhood arts and community-based organizations

Since 1973, LMCC has been the quiet champion for independent artists in New York City and the cultural life force of Lower Manhattan.

[LMCC.net](#)

## SUPPORTERS

The 2021 season of programming at The Arts Center at Governors Island is made possible, in part, by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and Con Edison.

Onyedika Chuke: *The Forever Museum Archive\_Circa 6000BCE* is presented in partnership with Pioneer Works.

Onyedika Chuke: *The Forever Museum Archive\_Circa 6000BCE* is supported in part by the Art for Justice Fund, the ForGood Fund, Foster Pride, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and Young New Yorkers.

Meg Webster: *Wave* is underwritten by UGG®. Special thanks to Paula Cooper Gallery and GrowNYC.

Meg Webster's *Pollinating Garden*, presented by LMCC in partnership with GrowNYC's Teaching Garden, is part of the exhibition *Wave* presented at The Arts Center at Governors Island.

The Arts Center Residency program is supported, in part, by Cowles Charitable Trust, The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, Jacques and Natasha Gelman Trust, The Willem de Kooning Foundation, May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, Inc., The Norman & Bettina Roberts Foundation, Mertz Gilmore Foundation, Milton & Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), Teiger Foundation, and YoungArts.

The Arts Center Residency is also supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

LMCC is also grateful to our many capital supporters. For a list of capital supporters, please visit [LMCC.net](#).

LMCC additionally acknowledges our partnership with the Trust for Governors Island.

For more information, please contact  
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