

UPCOMING EDITOR'S PICK EVENTS

JUL 2 **Jurassic World:
The Exhibition**
Fri, 12:00 PM CDT

JUL 4 **Sean Kenney's
Nature Connects
Made With Lego
Bricks**
Sun, 8:00 AM CDT

JUL 4 **Pop! by Snowday**
Sun, 11:00 AM CDT

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Twenty-two turntables memorialize black people slain by police in 'American Monument'

After pulling the plug on an earlier exhibition, Dallas artist Lauren Woods has found a new home for her work, a dark and deeply researched one.



Artist Lauren Woods, left, and curator Kimberli Meyer, right, stand for a portrait at the Beall Center for Art + Technology at the University of California, Irvine on Oct. 1, where their work is on display. (Dania Maxwell / Los Angeles Times)



By Jeremy Hallock

8:00 AM on Oct 12, 2019 CDT — Updated at 10:07 PM on Oct 12, 2019 CDT



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Last Sept. 16, Dallas artist Lauren Woods abruptly walked out of the reception for her multimedia installation *American Monument* at California State University Long Beach's University Art Museum. After the firing of the museum's art director, Kimberli Meyer, five days beforehand, Woods decided to put her show about police brutality and the killing of African-Americans **on hold indefinitely, in an act of protest.**

A year later, however, her exhibit has resurfaced at the Beall Center for Art + Technology at the University of California, Irvine.

Meyer was Woods' chief collaborator on the exhibit in its original incarnation, and her dismissal, for which Cal State did not initially provide an explanation, led Woods to believe the university was attempting to kill *American Monument*. A statement released later by Cyrus Parker-Jeannette, who was dean of the university's College of the Arts at the time, disputed this. (Meyer appealed the decision, but the university did not change its mind. She now works as an independent curator.)



Dallas artist Lauren Woods' work is pictured at California State University Long Beach's University Art Museum. Woods shut down the show after her collaborator was fired from the university. (Drew A. Kelley, / Los Angeles Daily News)

2018 was a rough year for Woods even before the fallout from Meyer's firing. As part of the process to create the work, she spent several months filing Freedom of Information Act requests in order to obtain court records and police documents. She then spent 36 grueling hours editing audio samples for the centerpiece of the exhibit, 25 turntables. Each one was equipped with a vinyl record that used audio from crime scenes, media reports and family interviews to capture the circumstances in which a black person was killed.

Gallerists all over the country reached out to Woods about *American Monument* after the initial debacle. David Familian, the artistic director of the Beall Center — who had attended the dramatic reception at Cal State Long Beach — was one of them.

"It was the structural support that sealed the deal," Woods says. "David reached out to all the departments that could intersect with the project and everyone

responded immediately. At the other school, it was difficult to get people to sign on to the project.”

Earlier this month on Oct. 2, the same day former Dallas police officer Amber Guyger was sentenced to 10 years for the murder of her neighbor Botham Jean, Woods previewed *American Monument* in Irvine, with help from Meyer once again.



Dallas artist Lauren Woods' work is pictured at California State University Long Beach's University Art Museum. Woods shut down the show after her collaborator was fired from the university. (Drew A. Kelley, / Los Angeles Daily News)

Reconfigured for the new space, the exhibit now has 22 turntables, including one devoted to Jean. Each one of them is accompanied by a box of documents.

Although Woods did obtain the 911 call from the night of Jean's murder, she chose to leave his record silent. "The trial was ongoing when I decided to put that in, and I didn't want to make any fast decisions," Woods says. "The idea was to hold a place for us to start looking at that case."

For the duration of the exhibit, which runs until Feb. 8, 2020, Woods will continue working with collaborators to research hundreds of cases. She says the show is currently in its most bare-bones state and that much more information will be added to it as her research continues. Woods also plans to move it to new locations. "Finishing the first iteration in a university environment sets up the foundation of it functioning as a pedagogical tool," Woods says.

The turntables and records serve as a kind of modern memorial. "We're looking at narrative construction in these cases and how ideas of blackness formed in the white imaginary — which is a sociological concept used to describe the values, institutions and laws produced by a particular social group — manifest into material violence," Woods says. "Law is culture," she adds, "and when it comes to police violence, the killing of black people in this country is more than an interpersonal act."

CORRECTION, 10 p.m., Oct. 12, 2019: An earlier version of this story incorrectly detailed a statement that Cyrus Parker-Jeannette, a former dean at California State University Long Beach, made regarding the dismissal of Kimberli Meyer. In her statement, Parker-Jeannette mentioned American Monument but disputed any connection between the exhibition and the decision to dismiss Meyer. Additionally, this story previously stated, incorrectly, that only certain turntables in the exhibit are accompanied by boxes of documents. All turntables in the exhibit are paired with boxes of relevant documents. Finally, a comment Woods made about the show, which had previously been quoted inaccurately, has been updated.



Jeremy Hallock