

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AWOL ERIZKU TO PRESENT NEW SUITE OF PHOTOGRAPHS FOR
350-SITE EXHIBITION ACROSS NEW YORK CITY AND CHICAGO
OPENING FEBRUARY 24, 2020**



Awol Erizku: New Visions for Iris
JCDecaux Bus Shelters
Citywide: New York, New York & Chicago, Illinois
February 24, 2021—June 20, 2021

February 19, 2020, NEW YORK, NY—On February 24, Public Art Fund will debut *New Visions for Iris*, a 350-site photography exhibition by multidisciplinary artist Awol Erizku. On view at 200 JCDecaux bus shelters across New York City and 150 in Chicago, this is the first time Public Art Fund will stage an exhibition concurrently in these two cities. This body of 13 photographs will present a new visual lexicon that explores the liminal space between imagination, spirituality, and image making, and was inspired by the recent birth of Erizku’s daughter—Iris—as a starting point for future dialogue with her about identity and our challenging times. Comprising still-lives, portraits, and depictions of birds, the suite of new work challenges the traditional Western canon and alludes to genre painting and pictorial styles in contemporary advertising. Made inside Erizku’s studio during the past year, the still-lives are composed of a multitude of objects such as African masks, Egyptian motifs, Islamic religious texts, and everyday items like candles and flowers. The portraits, shot in the studio and at a local park, feature intimate moments of men in prayer and contemplation, evoking the introspection often demanded by the challenges of our

current moment. Birds such as falcons appear throughout the series, signifying both freedom and control over one's destiny. Developed with the language of advertising and consumerism in mind, these large-scale images expand on the glossary of motifs the artist has explored in past work. Creating visual poems, Erizku imagines an inclusive reinvention of our shared public spaces that challenge the status quo of typical commercial images. ***New Visions for Iris* is Erizku's first solo public exhibition and will be on view from February 24 through June 20, 2021.**

"My image-making process is a reflection of how I encounter the world. It allows me to explore alternate possibilities and novel ways of engaging with the world around me," **says artist Awol Erizku.** "These works function as both propositions and questions about what else is in dire need of invigoration, which also come with a great deal of responsibility when displayed in public space. As a father, I think about how to raise a daughter in this world and explain cultural parameters and gray areas; I want my daughter Iris to grow up with these images so they're the norm for her. With *New Visions for Iris* I want to reflect a less fixed, rigid, institutional understanding of the spaces we occupy."

Erizku's multidisciplinary practice spans photography, painting, and sculpture. He is known for creating images that bring together colorful, attention-grabbing compositions with meditative underpinnings. Erizku, who was born in Ethiopia and grew up in a Muslim household in the Bronx, adapts visual styles of marketing, while reflecting on his own world view with references to texts, encounters, ideologies, and spirituality. Inspired by pre-colonial and oral African history, for this body of work, Erizku has brought together objects such as Nefertiti busts, cowrie shells, wax casts of African masks, and Ethiopian letterforms that transcend the Western, post-colonial perspective. Falcons appear perched on lone arms and can be found among the men featured in the portraits playing chess, praying, and reflecting. The thoughtful quietude of these subjects capture stoic, personal moments that foster the power of connection and dialogue. The images in *New Visions for Iris* approach layered issues of our time, including identity, faith, and fatherhood.

"*New Visions for Iris* is a highly personal selection of new work by Awol Erizku that addresses a number of resonant themes and weighty issues of our complex times," **says Public Art Fund Curator Daniel S. Palmer.** "The suite of images are Erizku's 'new visions' for this moment. They establish a current vernacular of picture making to spark dialogue among all audiences and generations. Addressing significant lacunae in the history of photography and advertising, the images Erizku has created incorporate a myriad of personally meaningful signs and symbols in surprising, compelling, and evocative ways."

These multidimensional compositions were created in and around Erizku's studio as recently as the fall of 2020. In conceiving them, Erizku focused on the public nature of these large-scale works, which will reach millions in New York and Chicago who pass the illuminated JCDecaux bus shelters in their communities or while traveling through the cities. By disrupting this typical advertising space, Erizku aims to pay homage to the past, while sharing fresh perspectives on

the present and future. *New Visions for Iris* will be presented in a diverse range of neighborhoods, and often installed in clusters near community centers and mosques that are central to Erizku's own experience. By using visual cues to pique viewers' interests and create multiple avenues of understanding, Erizku hopes his images will trigger moments of reflection, contemplation, and conversation.

Public Art Fund and JCDecaux's partnership began in 2017 with *Ai Weiwei: Good Fences Make Good Neighbors*. Since then, it has expanded to showcase topical new bodies of work, including solo presentations with photographers Elle Pérez and Farah Al Qasimi, and most recently this summer, *Art on the Grid: 50 artists' reflections on the parallel epidemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism* at 500+ locations across New York City. They build upon Public Art Fund's rich history of transforming the city's ubiquitous advertising spaces to bring artistic voices to street level, enabling the public to encounter remarkable works of art along their daily routes by bus or on foot.

"Providing services to city dwellers is a fundamental and founding principle of JCDecaux. Extending the benefit our amenities can offer through our partnership with Public Art Fund to include museum-quality artists made available to, and reaching throughout neighborhoods across New York City and Chicago, is a small but important and visible contribution to addressing the inequity of access to art," says **Alan Sullivan, co-Chief Executive Officer of JCDecaux North America, Inc.** "We are honored to continue this program with Public Art Fund and Awol Erizku, whose work speaks to the language of advertising and topical issues around race, identity, and spirituality that will undoubtedly resonate with local communities across both cities."

Awol Erizku: New Visions for Iris is curated by Public Art Fund Curator Daniel S. Palmer.

@PublicArtFund #NewVisionsForIris

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Awol Erizku (b. 1988, Gondar, Ethiopia) is a conceptual artist living and working in Los Angeles, CA. Erizku received his BA from Cooper Union in 2010 and his MFA from Yale in 2014. He has exhibited at institutions across the country including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. Recent solo exhibitions include *Mystic Parallax* at The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, *Slow Burn* at Ben Brown Fine Arts, Hong Kong, *Menace II Society* at Night Gallery, Los Angeles, *Make America Great Again* at Ben Brown Fine Arts, London, *New Flower | Images of the Reclining Venus* at The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, and *Bad II the Bone* presented at nomadic exhibition venue, Duchamp Detox Clinic, by Night Gallery.

VISITING THE EXHIBITION

Awol Erizku: New Visions for Iris is located on 200 JCDecaux bus shelters across New York City's five boroughs and 150 JCDecaux bus shelters in Chicago.

Public Art Fund exhibitions are always free and open to the public.

SUPPORT

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ABOUT PUBLIC ART FUND

As the leader in its field, Public contemporary art to a broad City and beyond by mounting exhibitions of international scope and impact that offer the public and the urban environment.



Art Fund brings dynamic audience in New York ambitious free

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Image captions:

Awol Erizku, *The Last Tears of the Deceased*, 2020

Commissioned by Public Art Fund for *Awol Erizku: New Visions for Iris*, an exhibition on 350 JCDecaux bus shelter displays across New York City and Chicago, February 24 to June 20, 2021
Courtesy of Awol Erizku

Awol Erizku, *Deep Shadow (Michael Brown Sr.)*, 2020

Commissioned by Public Art Fund for *Awol Erizku: New Visions for Iris*, an exhibition on 350 JCDecaux bus shelter displays across New York City and Chicago, February 24 to June 20, 2021
Courtesy of Awol Erizku

Awol Erizku, *Going Home*, 2020

Commissioned by Public Art Fund for *Awol Erizku: New Visions for Iris*, an exhibition on 350 JCDecaux bus shelter displays across New York City and Chicago, February 24 to June 20, 2021
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