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PUBLIC ART FUND DEBUTS PHYLLIDA BARLOW'S FINAL SERIES OF LARGE-SCALE FREESTANDING SCULPTURES IN CITY HALL PARK



***PRANK* Features Signature Forms from Barlow's Career, Reanimated with New Materials and Contexts**

Phyllida Barlow: PRANK

June 6–Nov 26, 2023 City Hall Park

City Hall Park, Lower Manhattan

June 5, 2023, NEW YORK, NY—Public Art Fund debuts *PRANK*, the late British artist Phyllida Barlow's final series of large-scale freestanding sculptures. This exhibition of seven new steel and fiberglass sculptures in City Hall Park offers the opportunity to experience her rich artistic legacy in the public sphere. As Barlow's first series of outdoor sculptures made

from robust long-lasting materials, *PRANK* marks a notable departure from the artist's typical use of materials suitable for indoor display, extending her highly influential practice into the realm of public art.

The sculptures in *PRANK* adapt everyday forms such as domestic furniture stacked in unexpected, gravity-defying compositions. Each is precariously surmounted by a different variation on the form that has become known as Barlow's "rabbit ears". The artist first created this form in her 1990s *Objects for* series, which consisted of unusually shaped sculptural forms installed in relationship to familiar household items, such as the armchair, the ironing board, and the piano. Barlow developed the series from her home and installed the works temporarily in living rooms and on street corners around London. Perched on the family's television, the peculiar and oversized rabbit ears in *Object for the television* (1994, Collection Tate) are a visual pun sculpted in plaster. The rounded, oblong shapes simultaneously recall art historical examples like the Venus of Willendorf, and the cartoons that might have been playing on the television below. In its original conception, *Object for the television* defied the hierarchy of art historical traditions by bringing sculpture into the domestic space.

In *PRANK*, Barlow revisits the *Objects for* series, evolving her comically defiant rabbit ears from the home to the public park in the artist's first series of sculptures made from outdoor materials. With her signature sense of surprise, mischief, and playfulness, Barlow has created complex works that are both formally arresting and broadly accessible. Presented in City Hall Park—a historic public space that connects a civic building and a park where people stroll and relax—the exhibition invites the public to pose their own questions about work versus play, their surroundings, and art.

"With Phyllida Barlow's characteristic ambition, rigor and irreverence, *PRANK* upends sculptural tradition with captivating invention," said **Public Art Fund Artistic & Executive Director Nicholas Baume**. "It feels both apt and poignant that this body of work revisits an earlier motif, adding complexity and embracing the public context. Phyllida takes her iconic 'rabbit ears' on a gravity-defying journey of sculptural acrobatics: scaling stairs, grasping edges, and balancing atop improbably accumulated objects to survey their City Hall Park domain."

Over an artistic career spanning almost 60 years, Phyllida Barlow drew inspiration from her surroundings to create sculptures and installations that could be simultaneously menacing and playful. Her anti-monumental sculptures were typically constructed from inexpensive industrial materials such as cardboard, fabric, plywood, scrim, and cement, created through layered processes of accumulation, removal, and juxtaposition. Barlow's eccentric invented forms push against limits of mass, volume and height, challenging sculptural conventions and material hierarchies while bringing new awareness to an artwork's environment.

Inhabiting City Hall Park with whimsy and mischief, the seven sculptures in *PRANK* continue Barlow's daring exploration of what art objects look like and where they belong. The series

expresses Barlow's distinctive artistic language—exuding irreverence while pushing conceptual and formal boundaries by fusing disparate elements to create surprising synergies.

“What happens if the art object isn't a polite object, but rather an unwelcome guest? For a long time I've been considering where art ends up and who it is for—*PRANK* continues this line of inquiry,” said **artist Phyllida Barlow** of the exhibition, before her passing in March 2023.

In Barlow's exhibition, seven different “rabbit ear” forms balance atop accumulated and stacked pieces of furniture and everyday structures: workbenches piled up at odd angles, cabinets accumulated with doors akimbo, a stack of chairs that forms a wonky column. Rendered in steel and fiberglass, the sculptures defy expectations of structural precarity. Whereas the cheeky exhibition title *PRANK* is written in uppercase, each individual artwork title is a single evocative word spelled out in lowercase: *antic*, *hoax*, *jape*, *jinx*, *mimic*, *stunt*, and *truant*. Together, the titles suggest that the collective attributes of *PRANK* are forms of disruptive behavior, serving as a perfect analog for Barlow's generative artistic methodology. Capping a career spent challenging the preciousness of art, Phyllida Barlow's body of sculptures confirms her extraordinary practice as one of enduring vitality and invention.

Phyllida Barlow: PRANK is curated by Public Art Fund Artistic & Executive Director Nicholas Baume with initial development by former Public Art Fund Curator Daniel S. Palmer.

@PublicArtFund #PhyllidaBarlow

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Phyllida Barlow (1944–2023, Newcastle, England) lived and worked in London. Influenced by the early 1960s New Generation Sculpture exhibitions at Whitechapel Gallery in London, Barlow began experimenting early in her career with the sculptural potential of materials unassociated with traditional sculpture. Prior to receiving exhibitions in major museums and galleries, Barlow utilized public and temporary spaces to show her work, developing her exploration of physical space and challenging conventional notions of where sculpture could exist. For forty years, Barlow also worked as a teacher, fostering some of Britain's most distinguished artists. Since 2009, she worked exclusively on her art practice and exhibited her work widely in the United Kingdom and internationally.

Barlow studied at Chelsea College of Art (1960–1963) and the Slade School of Art (1963 – 1966). She later taught at both schools and was Professor of Fine Art and Director of Undergraduate Studies at the latter until 2009. Major awards include receiving the Aachen Art Prize (2012) and being named a Royal Academician (2011). She has had major exhibitions at Royal Academy of the Arts, London, England (2019); Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh, Scotland (2018); Turner Contemporary, Margate, England (2017); Venice Biennale, Italy (2013, 2017); Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas (2015); Tate Britain, London, England (2014); and New

Museum, New York (2012), among others. She was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the Queen's Birthday Honors in 2021.

WHEN & WHERE: *Phyllida Barlow: PRANK* is on view throughout City Hall Park in Lower Manhattan now through November 26, 2023.

The exhibition can be explored anytime, anywhere, on the free **Bloomberg Connects** app.

VISITING THE EXHIBITION

City Hall Park is located in Lower Manhattan, and is bordered by Broadway, Chambers Street, Centre Street, and Park Row.

Hours: 6:00am–12:00am daily

Subways: A, C, E to Chambers Street; 4, 5, 6, J to Brooklyn Bridge-City Hall; R to City Hall; 2, 3 to Park Place

ABOUT PUBLIC ART FUND

As the leader in its field, Public Art Fund brings dynamic contemporary art to a broad audience in New York City and beyond by mounting ambitious free exhibitions of international scope and impact that offer the public powerful experiences with art and the urban environment.

SUPPORTS

Leadership support for *PRANK* is provided by Ellen & Andrew Celli; Jennifer Sykes Harris; Hauser & Wirth; Andrea Krantz & Harvey Sawikin; Elizabeth Fearon Pepperman & Richard C. Pepperman II; Allison & Paul Russo; and Karen & Sam Seymour with major support from the Bronzini Vender Family and Linda Lennon & Stuart Baskin. Additional support is provided by Linda Genereux and Timur Galen.

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IMAGE CREDITS:

Phyllida Barlow

PRANK: hoax; 2022/23

PRANK: mimic; 2022/23

2022–23

Corten steel, fiberglass, lacquer

© Phyllida Barlow

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Filip Wolak, courtesy Public Art Fund, NY

Artwork a part of *Phyllida Barlow: PRANK*, presented by Public Art Fund in City Hall Park, New York City, June 6, 2023–November 26, 2023.