



For Immediate Release

Public Art Fund Presents *Monira Al Qadiri: First Sun* at Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Central Park

An Iridescent, Monumental Sculpture Explores Myth, Mystery, and Humanity's Evolving Relationship with the Natural World



Monira Al Qadiri: First Sun

September 3, 2025 – August 2, 2026

Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Central Park, NYC

August 5, 2025 - New York, NY - **Public Art Fund** is pleased to present ***First Sun***, a new large-scale sculpture by Berlin-based Kuwaiti visual artist **Monira Al Qadiri**, on view at **Central Park's iconic Doris C. Freedman Plaza** from **September 3, 2025**, through **August 2, 2026**. Al Qadiri's first public artwork and first institutional presentation in New York City also marks the launch of a new cultural partnership between Public Art Fund and Toronto's **Lassonde Art Trail**.

First Sun is a majestic painted aluminum sculpture of a hybrid human-scarab figure that reimagines the ancient Egyptian deity Khepri—the god of the rising sun—as a modern monument. The figure's face is a dazzling iridescent scarab beetle, rendered in shimmering crystal-based pigments that shift in color depending on the light and time of day. The scarab,

whose appearance at dawn was associated with the daily rebirth of the sun, is the protagonist, inviting viewers to reconsider humanity's reverence for nature and the creatures we often ignore, fear, or exterminate. At a towering 17 feet tall atop its base and resplendent in purple and green hues, the sculpture reflects Al Qadiri's interest in how humanity explores the unknown through science, religion, mythology, and art.

"I hope that this work will prompt people to reflect on how we value nature and embrace the unknown," said **Al Qadiri**. "The scarab was once revered for its mysterious origins. Today, insects are feared or ignored, despite being vital to our survival. *First Sun* encourages us to recognize the divine in what we might otherwise overlook."

Al Qadiri was inspired by a painting inside the Tomb of Ramses I in Luxor, Egypt, which depicted a figure with a scarab beetle face. This stunning image led the artist to explore the blending of human and insect forms as a symbol of the complex relationship between humanity and the natural world.

The title *First Sun* evokes the sun's dual representation across cultures—sometimes male, sometimes female, reflecting on the intersection of gender and power, and often tied to nature's unpredictable force. With long, flowing hair, Al Qadiri's sculpture is androgynous, its hybrid form transcending traditional categories of gender and species. Thus, the work integrates recurring themes in Al Qadiri's practice, including imagining a post-oil future, gender fluidity, ecological interdependence, and mysticism.

"*First Sun* is a bright and bold intervention at Doris C. Freedman Plaza, an iconic site that serves as a threshold between the bustling city and the reprieve of the first naturalistic park in the United States," said **Melanie Kress**, Senior Curator at Public Art Fund. "It invites viewers to consider how our relationship to nature is always evolving."

The sculpture's iridescent pigments, derived from crystallized plastic – a material often used in automotive paints – reflect Al Qadiri's long-standing interest in materials that are both alluring and contradictory. As with the artist's prior work centering on the Arabian Gulf pearl diving industry and subsequent oil economy, *First Sun* employs aesthetic seduction to raise questions of power, spirituality, and consumption. Rooted in both historical myth and futuristic visual language, *First Sun* stands as a beacon in New York City's urban environment—reminding us that reverence, beauty, and divinity might still be found in the unknown or unexpected.

First Sun also marks a new cultural partnership between Public Art Fund and Toronto's Lassonde Art Trail, a major new destination for public art located along 4.2 kilometers of walking paths overlooking Lake Ontario. As a co-commissioned work, *First Sun* will travel to Toronto following its New York presentation, where it will be on view as part of the Lassonde

Art Trail's opening season in fall 2026. The first of its kind in Canada, the Lassonde Art Trail will be a dynamic public art experience offering artworks by Canadian and international artists, open year-round, and completely free to the public.

"Public Art Fund is committed to sharing the powerful work of visionary artists with the public, and our partnership with Lassonde Art Trail furthers this mission, sharing Monira Al Qadiri's work with many new audiences," said Kress. "This collaborative co-commissioning process offered a groundbreaking opportunity for the artist to create a work that responds to both Central Park and the site of the Lassonde Art Trail, connecting these two parks with her ideas around nature, urban industry, and historical cycles."

"We are delighted to be launching this cultural partnership with Public Art Fund through Al Qadiri's vibrant work. It marks the first co-commissioned artwork between Public Art Fund and a Canadian cultural organization, allowing us to unite in bringing art to broader audiences across North America," said **November Paynter**, Artistic Director and Chief Curator, Lassonde Art Trail. "Lassonde Art Trail and Public Art Fund share in the belief that art is an essential building block for great public spaces and that the dynamic relationship between nature and the built environment is a valuable inspiration for artists and their communities."

First Sun was conceived by Al Qadiri with both sites in mind – connecting these two distinct urban parks that reconnect people with nature. The gleaming sculpture highlights the deep ties between human and natural worlds, where even the most humble insects play an essential role in sustaining all life on Earth—including our own.

Monira Al Qadiri: First Sun is curated by Melanie Kress, Senior Curator, Public Art Fund and November Paynter, Artistic Director and Chief Curator, Lassonde Art Trail.

@PublicArtFund #MoniraAlQadiri

About the Artist

Monira Al Qadiri (b. 1983) is a Kuwaiti visual artist born in Senegal, educated in Japan, and currently based in Berlin. Her work spans sculpture, film, and performance, exploring themes of history, petro-cultures, science fiction, and the divine. Her practice often bridges personal narrative and cultural critique, employing unexpected materials and forms to reframe global conversations on identity, industry, and the natural world. Concurrent with *First Sun*, Al Qadiri will debut her first solo exhibition first with Perrotin in New York City on September 4, 2025.

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. www.publicartfund.org

About Lassonde Art Trail

On pace to launch in 2026, the Lassonde Art Trail will be unique in Canada - a world-class, dynamic art destination showcasing a rotating program of artworks from leading international, national and regional artists. The open- air cultural experience will unfold over 4.2-kilometres of walking paths within a massive new public waterfront park system overlooking Lake Ontario in Toronto's Port Lands. Situated on Ookwemin Minising, a new island in the Toronto harbour archipelago, it is at the heart of a massive \$1.4 billion project that reroutes the mouth of the Don River and builds flood protection for downtown Toronto. www.latfoundation.org

Related Free Programming

Opening Celebration

September 3, 2025

6-7pm

Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Central Park

Visiting the Exhibition

Location: Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Central Park (Fifth Avenue at 60th Street)

Dates: September 3, 2025 – August 2, 2026

Free and open to the public, 365 days a year.

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

Supports

Bloomberg Philanthropies is the presenting sponsor of *Monira Al Qadiri: First Sun*.

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