



Artist Sonya Clark Launches “Solidarity Book Project,” a Racism, History & Social Justice Initiative

by Amherst College | 20 Nov 2020



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Newswise — (Amherst, Mass., November 20, 2020) — As Amherst College approaches its Bicentennial in 2021, Sonya Clark '89, award-winning professor of art and the history of art, has launched the Solidarity Book Project, a collaborative, community-based artwork and activist initiative that invites participants to stand in solidarity with Black and Indigenous communities. There are several ways to join the project, including by sculpting social- and racial justice-related books with the iconic raised fist symbol. The public will be invited to do so via an extensive social media campaign. The project will culminate in an exhibition of the books at the College in fall 2021.

The Solidarity Book Project (SBP) encourages each of us to think deeply about what solidarity means personally and to make that commitment material through art. In honor of those participating in the project, the College will make gifts of up to a total of \$100,000 to non-profit organizations that serve Black and Indigenous communities, with a focus on those that support access to book knowledge.

There are three ways to take part. First, participants may contribute brief audio recordings of themselves talking about what solidarity means to them. Second, they are invited to record short

readings from books they believe have something to teach us about solidarity. And third, as the centerpiece of the project, they are encouraged to sculpt “solidarity books” which will be exhibited at Amherst College in fall 2021 as part of an immersive art installation produced by Professor Clark.

“The Solidarity Book Project encourages us to think deeply about the books and experiences that have shaped our social and political perspectives and forms of solidarity,” said Amherst President Bidy Martin. “It also compels us more fully to realize Amherst’s educational ideals by ensuring that a 21st century Amherst education prepares our graduates to bring about a more just and equitable world.”

“Books transform lives; many books I read as a student at Amherst changed me,” said Clark. “Wielding that power, the Solidarity Book Project manifests as a sculptural and audible archive of book knowledge, a work of activism, and a fundraising model. It yields an opportunity to reflect on Amherst’s own place in the forms of Indigenous oppression, systemic racism, and anti-Blackness that have shaped the country as a whole. Together we can build solidarity, mark progress, and look to the future with an emphasis on reparative and restorative justice.”

Clark is a professor of art at Amherst College. Before that, she was Commonwealth Professor and Distinguished Research Fellow in the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her work has been exhibited in more than 400 museums and galleries worldwide and has received favorable reviews in *The New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *Sculpture*, *Hyperallergic*, *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *Time*, *Mother Jones* among other journals and newspapers. In addition to being the recipient of an honorary doctorate from Amherst College, she has received the Rappaport Prize, Jackson Pollock–Lee Krasner Grant, Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, United States Artist Fellowship, and Anonymous Was a Woman Award. She has worked alongside creative individuals at many international residencies from Red Gate in China to Bellagio Rockefeller Foundation in Italy to Yaddo in New York to the American Academy in Rome to Black Rock in Senegal.

The SBP will not be the first work of Clark’s to tackle the issues of race, oppression, history and justice. For *Black Hair Flag*, for example, she stitched black cotton thread through the Confederate battle flag with Black hair styling techniques to make the US flag. For her performance piece *Unraveling*, she invited viewers to pull a Confederate flag apart thread by thread with her and talk about the experience while doing it. And for *Monumental Cloth (sutured)* she reproduced the Truce Flag, the small white towel that the Confederate Army Gen. Robert E. Lee used to surrender at the end of the Civil War.

Clark encourages participants to purchase their books from independent bookstores, and bookstores owned by Black and Indigenous people as well as people of color. The sculpted books that are received will form an exhibition in the College’s Frost Library in fall 2021 as part of the Bicentennial commemoration.

The Solidarity Book Project is managed by Amir Denzel Hall ‘17 and Andrew Smith ‘18, and supported by a large community of Amherst alumni. The project is intended to be a replicable model that can be implemented across educational institutions, prisons and public libraries, and other places where book knowledge and collaborative art can serve to heal injustices perpetrated against marginalized communities.

Amherst College’s Bicentennial also marks the 50th anniversary of the Black Studies department’s formation and the fifth anniversary of Amherst Uprising, a sit-in protest led by Black women in the College’s Frost Library. For 200 years, the College has inhabited Indigenous land; as it heads into its third century, the Solidarity Book Project looks to acknowledge this historical moment with a call to stand in solidarity with Black and Indigenous communities.