

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sonya Clark: *Edifice and Mortar*

On view May 24 – December 1, 2021

Goya Contemporary Gallery

Curator: Amy Eva Raehse

For Immediate Release: Baltimore- **Goya Contemporary Gallery** is pleased to present our fourth solo exhibition of artwork by textile and social practice artist **Sonya Clark**, whose work addresses the social and political impact of the African Diaspora through material-based objects that address race, heritage, language, visibility, and global Blackness.

Sonya Clark describes *Edifice and Mortar* as an impenetrable wall, a flag, and a document that asks us to consider a fundamental question: Who laid the foundations of the United States of America? In this work, each brick is hand-stamped with a traditional maker's mark and a word. Together the recto forms an excerpt from the *Declaration of Independence*, penned in 1776 by Thomas Jefferson. It reads: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Edifice and Mortar takes aim at unpacking the complicated history of independence. "Certainly, our history illustrates that these words were *not* a foundation intended to service a multiethnic, multi-racial, nor multigendered democracy" says Clark. "Rather, these foundational words were the first steps in freeing white men from British governance and rule."

Approaching the wall, one sees the inscribed bricks are interspersed with viscerally charged mortar made from human hair--specifically, African American hair gathered from Richmond barbershops and salons. This is the hair of people whose ancestors might have been legally enslaved and whose life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were cut out of Jefferson's Declaration. A strand of hair retains a person's DNA, standing in for the physical body as well as representing a person's lineage. Important to the work, the mortar is "meant to represent black people who are at once held under the weight of the system, but who are also holding this country together, economically."

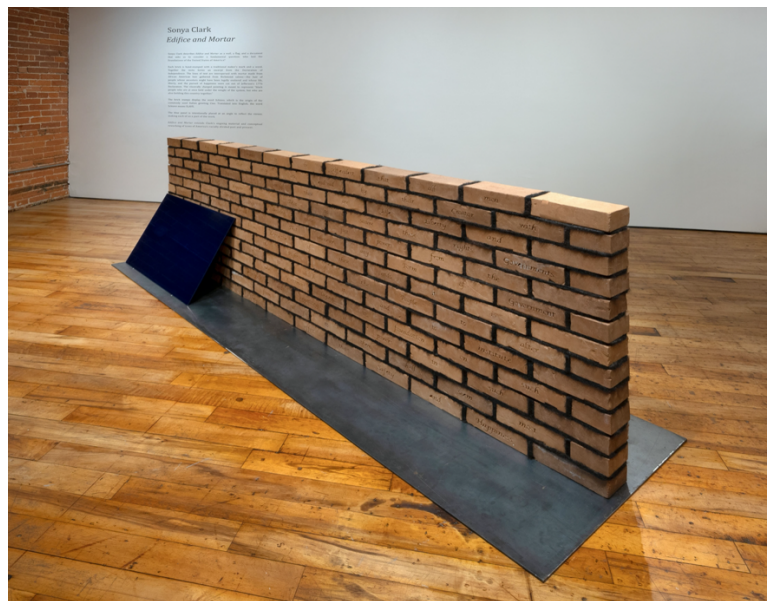
Edifice and Mortar stands at 13 bricks high, referring to the 13 stripes on the American Flag. A blue mirror is intentionally placed at the foot of the bricks. It refers to our flag, but turned upside down, and it engages the viewer by placing their own mirrored image into the work, challenging our connection to slavery. The verso is stamped reminiscent of an ancient Roman brick stamp pattern from the empire of 2AD. It illuminates America's relationship to the Roman empire. Brick stamps were used not only in Ancient Rome, but also in the United States as a way for people to mark their labor. This stamp is a potent reminder of labor's role in enslaving people. Typically, the outer edge would be impressed with the name of the person who owned the clay pit. The next ensuing ring would boast the name of the enslaver, and the center point would capture the name of the enslaved person, which shows how deeply rooted language and symbols of slavery are embedded in our own democracy. Clark's brick stamps are unique, however. When one looks closely, the concentric circles more so resemble the head of a female figure displaying a contemporary Afro hairstyle. Stamped within this figures headdress of hair is the word *Schiavo*, which is the origin of the commonly used Italian greeting *Ciao*. Translated into English, the word Schiavo means SLAVE.

Clark describes "mining" common objects, particularly those bound to identity and power, because "they have the mysterious ability to reflect or absorb us." *Edifice and Mortar* extends Clark's ongoing material and conceptual reworking of icons of America's racially divided past and present.

Born (1967) in Washington, D.C., Sonya Clark is professor of art and the history of art at Amherst College, and formerly a Distinguished Research Fellow in the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University. She earned an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art and a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She holds a BA from Amherst College, from where she also received an honorary doctorate (2015). She is the recipient

of the Rappaport Prize, United States Artists Fellowship, James Renwick Alliance Distinguished Educator Award, Anonymous Was a Woman Award, ArtPrize Juried Grand Prize Winner, Pollock Krasner Foundation award, and the 1858 Prize, among countless other accolades. Clark was one of 16 international artists selected to participate in the inaugural Black Rock Senegal residency program (2020) in Dakar, launched by the celebrated artist Kehinde Wiley. Clark's art has been presented in more than 350 museum and gallery exhibitions around the world, and her exhibitions have been reviewed in publications including *Artforum*, *Artnews*, *Art in America*, *The Art Newspaper*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *BBC*, and *The New York Times*.

The artist also has a 25- year, mid-career survey on view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) titled *Sonya Clark: Tatter, Bristle, and Mend*, which Goya Contemporary Gallery has proudly supported through the loan of many objects.



About Goya Contemporary: Goya Contemporary Gallery promotes the art and culture of our time by presenting ideas through exhibitions, curatorial practice, catalogues, print publishing, artist representation, and collections. The gallery builds private & public collections, assist in acquisitions, and facilitates auction activity. Goya Contemporary has earned international acclaim for its thought-provoking exhibitions, innovative programming, and unique collaborations with artists. Known as one of the most prestigious and long running galleries in the mid-Atlantic, Goya is dedicated to scholarly programming, and promoting the work of mid-career artists both internationally and locally.

Goya Contemporary is free and open to the public. Hours of operation: Tue – Fri, 10am – 6pm / Saturday, noon-5pm by appointment. FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Amy Eva Raehse, Executive Director, Partner, Exhibition's Curator at Goya Contemporary Gallery P: 410-366-2001 / amy@goyacontemporary.com / gallery@goyacontemporary.com #####

[*Goya Contemporary Gallery onsite COVID-19 Protocol as of June 2021:](#)

- Everyone who enters must wear a mask