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ARTS

## University of Houston to Unveil a New “Color Field” — Collaboration With Storied Museum Builds on School’s Art Power

An Exclusive Preview of a Jubilant Outdoor Wonderland

BY CATHERINE D. ANSPON // 07.07.20

One of the most positive art stories arriving in our inbox during COVID-19 looks forward to the fall — a new show that shares with college students and the public alike buoyant sculptures dialoguing with Mother Nature, all spun around the democratic concept “Exclusively for everyone.”

The venue for this much anticipated outdoor sculptural exhibition: the University of Houston. This is probably no surprise, as the ongoing Public Art Program at the University of Houston System is one of the most acclaimed and long-standing in the nation. Its diverse, stellar collection marked a 50-year milestone last fall, celebrating with an artful, deconstructed al fresco gala as well as the publication of *On Site*, a captivating, scholarly guide to the collection.

While the University of Houston System’s inaugural Temporary Public Art Program — the ambitious “Mobius Houston,” 2019, by New York-based Uruguayan artist Marta Chilindrón — remains on view through this summer, PaperCity has been made privy to the latest details of what’s next. And it’s a big, optimistic story.

This October, the traveling exhibition “Color Field” will unveil (and run through May 2021). The must-see, highly engaging show comes to the UH campus from its originating museum, the vaunted Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, in Bentonville, Arkansas, which this scribe likens to a Guggenheim of the South.

With a bow to the American “Color Field” masters of the 1960s — think Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Mark Rothko, Sam Gilliam, and Alma Thomas — the exhibition slated for the University of Houston taps seven contemporary artists, staging their expansive works informed by color in the great outdoors.

## MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

The group exhibition promises to transform the area around the Ezekiel W. Cullen Building, Butler Plaza, and Lynn Eusan Park, near University Drive, and extend to the campus' Arts District along Cullen Boulevard.

Its opening will inaugurate Public Art UHS's first curated exhibition of outdoor sculpture, thus unfurling an exciting node for its temporary public art program. But, perhaps more importantly, "Color Field" will introduce a new way of recasting the university's outdoor space as a large sculpture park.

Planned months before COVID-19, the exhibition is a prescient, perfect response to the pandemic, as social distancing and being in an open-air environment are givens to viewing "Color Field."

Led by María C. Gaztambide, Public Art UHS's curatorial team has carefully planned the siting of the artworks across some of UH's iconic spaces and pedestrian thoroughfares, offering interesting sight lines and dialogues between the pieces, the natural environment, and surrounding architecture.

Confirmed contemporary talents participating are six sculptors and a composer whose work engages the public with sight (and, in some cases, sound) to craft an immersive art experience. Propelling the viewer to think about color and its properties in their daily lives will be Sarah Braman, Jeffie Brewer, Sam Falls, Spencer Finch, Odili Donald Odita, and TYPOE — artists spanning generations and approaches. "Color Field Outside/In" and "Colorfield Inside/Out," a specially commissioned auditory and sensory experience by composer and sound artist Amos Cochran, will provide a multi-sensory backdrop for the artworks.

Of this group, Spencer Finch is perhaps the best known, recognized for his sensitive installation based on the morning sky for the national 9/11 Memorial & Museum in Manhattan. For "Color Field," Finch contributes "Back to Kansas," 2015, a billboard-shaped work featuring a Technicolor grid of pigments inspired by the artist's fascination with (and frequent viewing of) *The Wizard of Oz*.

Sam Falls' works, "Untitled (Wind Chimes)" and "Untitled (Maze)," both from 2014, are among the most interactive, presenting color via sight and sound. Sarah Braman's abstract cylinder "Here," 2019, pairs concrete with circular glass elements.



Sarah Braman's futuristic "Here," 2019, marries industrial material (a concrete drainage pipe) with powder-coated aluminum frames set with laminated glass of a buoyant blue hue. (Courtesy the artist and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas)

Odili Donald Odita's "Negative Space," 2019, continues his sociopolitical and figurative explorations of color in this series of 13 flags. And Miami-based graffiti painter-turned-sculptor TYPOE steps up with an installation of abstracted geometric forms that evoke association with the 1980s Post-Modernism movement.

Nacogdoches-based Jeffie Brewer rounds out the field with a menagerie of gargantuan animals and abstracted forms bearing simplified, droll features, each in its own palette. Expect innovative onsite and online programming to accompany "Color Field," including Public Art UHS's ongoing Public Art Studio Sessions, monthly art-making workshops.