



Courtesy Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL

ABOUT THE ARTIST

For nearly 30 years of an internationally recognized career, Nari Ward's practice has centered on the accumulation of overwhelming amounts of modest, everyday items, repurposing them in consistently astonishing ways. His methods emanate from a variety of folk traditions from Jamaica, his birthplace, that are centered on the recycling of non-traditional art materials as well as found materials from Harlem, where he has lived and worked for the past 25 years. More importantly though, Ward has drawn many of his ideas from research into specific histories and places, often revisiting the ideas and struggles of immigration and displacement as an American tradition. In this

endeavor, Ward's work makes viewers aware of commonalities that link geographically and culturally disparate communities providing insight into the strains between tradition and transformation.

Ward's career has seen exhibitions at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA, The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, The Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis, MN, and The Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL. His career retrospective opened at The New Museum, NY in February 2019 and has since traveled to The Contemporary Arts Center Houston, TX, and The Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, CO.

NARI WARD: *We the People*

Nari Ward's work, *We the People*, was originally realized as a special project at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 2011. At that time, like much of the work Ward was making, it was more of a meditation on the idea of the experience of immigration—ideas of diaspora and the combining of cultural identities and traditions in its most positive and most arduous aspects.

While this work still remains concerned with these very important ideas, it has taken on new meaning over the last couple of years and certainly during this, one of the most important election cycles of our lifetime.

In its original inception, Ward, who himself immigrated with his family from Jamaica to New York City as a child, collected shoelaces from the inhabitants of his neighborhood in the Bronx, many of whom had experienced or were in the midst of experiencing the process of immigration or at very least integration into neighborhoods largely made up of immigrants. This collection process took place over the better part of the year and many of the shoelaces were dyed to achieve color while retaining their patina of utility, use, and age. In the interim, the work has taken on a new meaning regarding consumer identity in which very diverse and colorful commercial shoelaces are purchased to install the work. It is this version of the work that is presently at The Contemporary Dayton.

The words are of course instantly recognizable and yet the material makes viewers think twice.

Hand-dyed shoelaces bring to mind the ideas of domestic labor and the outsourcing of production jobs around the globe. As Americans, *We the People* consume items produced abroad, while within our borders economic trouble is clearly afoot (pun intended).

This recalibration includes the global production of what we might consider the most quotidian of products, the lowly shoelace. In combining this particular item with one of the loftiest and enduring ideas in human history, Ward invites us to consider the spectrum of human experience as broadly as it might be imagined.

When The Co approached Nari Ward about the idea of presenting this work, we also discussed the idea of turning part of our gallery into a voter registration point. The artist agreed immediately and was excited that we might encourage participation in this upcoming election cycle which, again, seems to point to a potential sea change in our culture. The work is presented courtesy of The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, to whom we are very grateful.

Beyond presenting the work larger than its normal 30 to 35-foot-wide scale, we have also dedicated ourselves to keeping the work fully lit 24 hours a day until the end of the exhibition and through the November 3rd election. Our hope is that this will—through the large plate glass windows at the front of The Co—act as a beacon for the Dayton community that promotes a reckoning with how important participating in the election process is and how devastating apathy can be to this: the beating heart of our democracy.



NARI WARD
***We the People*, 2010**
Shoelaces embedded in wall
Dimensions variable
Installation image courtesy of
The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston