



Donald R. and Jean F. Beall
Center for Art + Technology
University of California, Irvine

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Monday – Saturday 12 p.m. – 6 p.m.

ARTFORUM

lauren woods

Beall Center for Art + Technology

University of California, Irvine

By Kavior Moon

February 2020

For the past several years, lauren woods has been investigating public space, historical memory, and social consciousness through what she calls “inter-media monuments.” Unlike traditional monuments, towering and seemingly permanent, woods’s are interactive and scaled to the human body. Take, for example, her *Drinking Fountain #1*, 2013, located beneath a worn “WHITE ONLY” sign in the Dallas County Records Building. The Jim Crow-era sign had reappeared some years earlier when the metal plate covering fell off. Instead of



repressing the city’s history of segregation by erasing the words, woods altered the drinking fountain beneath them to commemorate the civil rights movement and its legacy of political resistance in the present. Now, before they take a sip, visitors must view projected 1960s newsreel footage of policemen in Birmingham, Alabama, aiming water cannons at African American protestors.

American Monument, 2018 –, on view at the Beall Center for Art + Technology at the University of California, Irvine, is woods’s most complex inter-media monument to date. It functions as a space within which to grieve, and critically reflect on, the disproportionate number of black lives taken by police officers. At its center is *Archive I*, 2018 –, a sound sculpture composed of twenty-two records on turntables displayed on individual white pedestals. Each audio recording represents events surrounding the death of a black civilian, most at the hands—or while in the custody—of the police, in the past six or so years. Visitors can activate the work by playing one or more of the records (some of them are blank, indicating the absence of audio documentation in those cases), thus temporarily filling the low-lit gallery with sounds of indignity and violence. The audio includes that taken from a bystander’s cellphone video of Eric Garner being put in a choke hold, from Sandra Bland’s own cellphone video of being pulled over during a traffic stop, and from the dashboard camera of the police



officer who shot Terrence Crutcher. While some visitors may hesitate to publicly replay those aural testimonies (is the artist's use of them sensationalizing, and will their amplifications here revictimize the person represented?), the fact that many of the recordings were made by alarmed bystanders, the victims themselves, or police cameras intended to increase accountability suggests that to *not* listen—to not engage—might in fact symbolically represent a worse offense: the refusal to acknowledge and attend to such violence.

In an adjacent space is *Archive II*, 2018 –, twenty-two metal boxes holding copies of juridical documents pertaining to the death of each person memorialized in *Archive I* (if available—some boxes are empty). The documents were assiduously gathered through Freedom of Information Act requests and include use-of-force reports, prosecutor reports, autopsy reports, witness testimonies, and transcripts of 911 calls. Encouraged to sit by the presence of tables and stools, visitors can examine multiple cases to see, in detail, how police violence has been repeatedly rationalized and legitimized.

Intended to be inaugurated at the University Art Museum at California State University, Long Beach, in September 2018, *American Monument* remained silent during its three-month run there; six days before the opening, the university fired the museum's director, Kimberli Meyer, citing "a longer-term process" that had led to the decision, and leading woods to request, in an act of protest, that the work be "paused." (Meyer claims that university provided no clear explanation for her termination and has filed an appeal.) The Beall Center's presentation is therefore *American Monument's* first full iteration; as part of the artwork, woods and Meyer, whom the artist considers the project's coleader, have planned public events with scholars, lawyers, community activists, students, artists, and others. "This is not an exhibition of objects. This is not a show of conceptual play," woods has remarked. "*American Monument* is a transformative process that wants to tackle the culture of police brutality through cultural production." The work is intended to be nomadic, to be "unveiled" at universities, museums, community centers, and churches across the country. A pedagogical tool and a catalyst for social change, *American Monument* holds participants (who are, in a more literal gesture, given a sticker that reads "WITNESS" upon entry) accountable in this collective effort to reconsider the relationships between race, violence, structural power, and public memory.

Los Angeles Times

Art on police killings got pulled at Cal State Long Beach. Now UCI takes it on.

By Makeda Easter

October 4, 2019

Artist lauren woods was en route to complete the installation of her exhibition protesting police brutality against black people at the Cal State Long Beach University Art Museum when she received a flurry of calls and texts. Her key collaborator, Kimberli Meyer, the museum's director, had been abruptly fired.

Meyer and woods (who uses all lowercase) had worked with students for a year to compile documents related to police violence acquired through the Freedom of Information Act for the exhibition "American Monument."



Its centerpiece was an interactive sound installation — a grid of 25 turntables that played audio related to black people who died after altercations with police. The cases included [Michael Brown](#), the unarmed 18-year-old killed by Ferguson, Mo., police Officer Darren Wilson in 2014, and [Sandra Bland](#), the 28-year-old pulled over in a routine traffic stop, whose death in a Texas jail cell was ruled a suicide in 2015.

But as woods worked to finish installing "American Monument," she realized it was impossible to do the work without Meyer, and the opening turned into a [protest](#). The artist silenced the audio installation and halted programming for the duration of its run in Long Beach.

More than a year later, the work will officially be "unpaused."

"American Monument" finally opens with its turntables intact on Saturday, this time at a different institution: UC Irvine's Beall Center for Art + Technology.

Woods has made a few changes to the new iteration of "American Monument," she said during a preview Wednesday.

The project now highlights 22 cases of police or state-sanctioned violence against black people instead of 25, but the exhibition still features boxes filled with legal documents for each case and enlarged transcripts of testimony from Wilson and George Zimmerman, who shot and killed 17-year-old [Trayvon Martin](#) in 2012.



The centerpiece sound installation is reconfigured in the Beall Center’s rectangular space.

Once a needle is dropped on any of the 22 spinning turntables on pedestals, jarring recordings from dashboard cameras, bystander audio, and readings of police reports and court transcripts interrupt the music playing in the background.

Inside the exhibition’s workspace — a room where woods plans to host workshops with the academic community, activists and grass-roots organizations — the artist addressed the Cal State Long Beach conflict, calling Meyer the “architect” of “American Monument.”

“When things happened last year, part of the problem was that it was a complete non-understanding of the project and the process to believe that you can take any component out,” woods said. “So that’s why I’m really excited to be able to come here ... and work with this brilliant community.”

Beall Center Artistic Director David Familian was in the audience at the Long Beach opening last year.

That’s when woods introduced the work, played a short excerpt of the Facebook Live recording of Philando Castile’s death, then [announced](#) she was pausing the work. And with the help of a few others, she switched off all the installation’s turntables.

“When lauren played 30 seconds of the work, it etched in our minds,” Familian said.

Meyer said Familian reached out the next day, saying, “I hope you guys get this figured out at Cal State Long Beach, but if you don’t, let me know, because the Beall would love to take it on.”

Meyer, who came to Long Beach museum in 2016 after serving as director of the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in West Hollywood, envisioned a more social-justice-oriented program at Long Beach. She said her firing was unexpected, and she appealed the university’s decision. Near the end of 2018, “it became clear that that was not going to happen,” Meyer said.

The university still will not give a full explanation of why Meyer was fired. It has indicated the decision was “part of a longer-term process” and not related specifically to woods’ show.

Woods said she had a contentious relationship with Long Beach administration while working on “American Monument” and that firing Meyer was an attempt to suffocate the work.

Paul Baker Prindle, director of Meyer’s former museum, now called the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum, said the university was “very pleased to see the exhibition continue in its new iteration and offer Ms. Woods and UC Irvine our congratulations.”

At UCI, getting approval for “American Monument” was a smooth process.

“In every meeting, from faculty all the way up to the chancellor’s office, they go, ‘What’s the problem?’” Familian said. “The chancellor considers us a free speech space, so they were just perplexed what Long Beach had a problem with.”



Although woods received offers from institutions across the U.S., “it was important to keep it in Southern California and in the L.A. region, because we had started building the relationships with different organizations, people and also the students at CSULB,” she said.

Meyer, who now works as an independent curator, is “still continuing to process what happened at Cal State.” She said she was excited for the project to have a life at UCI.

“American Monument” will evolve after its opening Saturday, as woods and collaborators continue to research about 200 cases and build the exhibition’s display. The completed project will be officially “unveiled” in February.

Although woods said she was ready to do the work, she didn’t feel particularly happy “because the reality is this is about police violence, and it feels really personal to me,” she said. “I shouldn’t have to be doing it.”

The updated project now includes Botham Jean, the Dallas man who was shot and killed in his own apartment in September 2018 by off-duty police Officer Amber Guyger.

On the day of the “American Monument” preview, Guyger was [sentenced](#) to 10 years in prison.

“When we added him in, the case was in progress. We thought it would actually go longer,” woods said.

Although the artist obtained the leaked 911 call, she felt it was too sensitive to include in the sound installation, so soon after Jean’s death. If you play his turntable, all you will hear is silence.



The Dallas Morning News

Twenty-two turntables memorialize black people slain by police in ‘American Monument

By Jeremy Hallock

October 12, 2019

Last Sept. 16, Dallas artist Lauren Woods abruptly walked out of the reception for her multimedia installation *American Monument* at California State University Long Beach’s University Art Museum. After the firing of the museum’s art director, Kimberli Meyer, five days beforehand, Woods decided to put her show about police brutality and the killing of African-Americans [on hold indefinitely, in an act of protest](#).

A year later, however, her exhibit has resurfaced at the Beall Center for Art + Technology at the University of California, Irvine.

Meyer was Woods’ chief collaborator on the exhibit in its original incarnation, and her dismissal, for which Cal State did not initially provide an explanation, led Woods to believe the university was attempting to kill *American Monument*. A statement released later by Cyrus Parker-Jeannette, who was dean of the university’s College of the Arts at the time, disputed this. (Meyer appealed the decision, but the university did not change its mind. She now works as an independent curator.)

2018 was a rough year for Woods even before the fallout from Meyer’s firing. As part of the process to create the work, she spent several months filing Freedom of Information Act requests in order to obtain court records and police documents. She then spent 36 grueling hours editing audio samples for the centerpiece of the exhibit, 25 turntables. Each one was equipped with a vinyl record that used audio from crime scenes, media reports and family interviews to capture the circumstances in which a black person was killed.

Gallerists all over the country reached out to Woods about *American Monument* after the initial debacle. David Familian, the artistic director of the Beall Center — who had attended the dramatic reception at Cal State Long Beach — was one of them.

“It was the structural support that sealed the deal,” Woods says. “David reached out to all the departments that could intersect with the project and everyone responded immediately. At the other school, it was difficult to get people to sign on to the project.”

Earlier this month on Oct. 2, the same day former Dallas police officer Amber Guyger was sentenced to 10 years for the murder of her neighbor Botham Jean, Woods previewed *American Monument* in Irvine, with help from Meyer once again.

Reconfigured for the new space, the exhibit now has 22 turntables, including one devoted to Jean. Each one of them is accompanied by a box of documents. Although Woods did obtain the 911 call from the



night of Jean’s murder, she chose to leave his record silent. “The trial was ongoing when I decided to put that in, and I didn’t want to make any fast decisions,” Woods says. “The idea was to hold a place for us to start looking at that case.”

For the duration of the exhibit, which runs until Feb. 8, 2020, Woods will continue working with collaborators to research hundreds of cases. She says the show is currently in its most bare-bones state and that much more information will be added to it as her research continues. Woods also plans to move it to new locations. “Finishing the first iteration in a university environment sets up the foundation of it functioning as a pedagogical tool,” Woods says.

The turntables and records serve as a kind of modern memorial. “We’re looking at narrative construction in these cases and how ideas of blackness formed in the white imaginary — which is a sociological concept used to describe the values, institutions and laws produced by a particular social group — manifest into material violence,” Woods says. “Law is culture,” she adds, “and when it comes to police violence, the killing of black people in this country is more than an interpersonal act.”

***CORRECTION, 10 p.m., Oct. 12, 2019:** An earlier version of this story incorrectly detailed a statement that Cyrus Parker-Jeannette, a former dean at California State University Long Beach, made regarding the dismissal of Kimberli Meyer. In her statement, Parker-Jeannette mentioned American Monument but disputed any connection between the exhibition and the decision to dismiss Meyer. Additionally, this story previously stated, incorrectly, that only certain turntables in the exhibit are accompanied by boxes of documents. All turntables in the exhibit are paired with boxes of relevant documents. Finally, a comment Woods made about the show, which had previously been quoted inaccurately, has been updated.*



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HYPERALLERGIC

Best of 2019: Our Top 20 Los Angeles Art Shows

By Renée Reizman

December 11, 2019

American Monument at Beall Center for Art + Technology, University of California, Irvine

In 2018, lauren woods made [headlines](#) when she pulled this project from California State University Long Beach, an act of solidarity and protest over the firing of former Museum Director Kimberli Meyer's firing. A year later, the University of California, Irvine has finally unveiled woods's ambitious [exhibition](#), a monument to Black lives lost to police brutality. The museum is filled with custom-made records spinning on turntables, each playing a recording of the victim's confrontation with police right before they were killed. The audio, doggedly gathered from FOIA requests, is constructed from witness recordings, police reports, and court testimonies. When *American Monument* makes its way to future venues it will grow larger because lauren woods will keep pace with the murders, adding new audio every time another death surfaces.



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LONG BEACH POST

Today, you should... analyze the complex relationship between race, power and violence

By Asia Morris

October 16, 2019

It's a strange feeling, reading a detailed description of what Sandra Bland's cell looked like, from the placement of the sink to the color of her bedding, in a report printed out and displayed in American Monument, artist lauren woods' and co-leader Kimberli Meyer's traveling installation examining the "cultural conditions under which African-Americans lose their lives to police brutality."

Never fully realized at Cal State Long Beach's campus museum (now called the Kleefeld Contemporary), American Monument opened at the Beall Center for Art + Technology at UC Irvine on Oct. 5. The turntables are on this time; the records that were paused for the duration of their stay last year in Long Beach can be played, you'll just have to drive 30-40 minutes down the 405 to hear them (that's sans traffic, mind you).

Though it's been a year since the Long Beach exhibit—you can learn more about why woods placed her own artwork on pause [here](#)—the installation's reason for being remains timely in the wake of another high-profile police shooting, this time the killing of 28-year-old Atatiana Jefferson, an African American woman shot while sitting inside a Fort Worth house, playing video games with her 8-year-old nephew.

The legal document on Bland—an African American woman found dead, hanged, in her Waller County, Texas jail cell three days after being arrested during a traffic stop—is just one of hundreds, maybe thousands of pages viewers can read at the Beall Center gleaned from an extensive Freedom of Information Act request process. This particular document read like a set design, sterile, emotionless, removed. A lot of us receive word of these deaths as news clips, Facebook videos, waves of angry tweets on a screen, a phone, computer, television, often from the comfort of our own homes; removed.

Perhaps the beauty of the artwork's main sound installation, each turntable representing a police killing, the audio materials from record requests, is that it takes you out of that comfort and creates an environment where you can choose, by placing down the needle, to allow sounds of fear and violence to play throughout the gallery. Maybe you'll feel less removed, more present, a modicum of what it was like to bear witness to any of the 22 deaths highlighted, from Alton Sterling to Philando Castile to Trayvon Martin to Bland.

Viewers are even given a sticker upon entrance to the space that reads, "WITNESS."



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The installation encourages contemplation of what woods found through close readings of use-of-force reports, prosecutor reports, witness testimonies, 911 calls and video footage, that “police use of white dominant cultural constructions and stereotypes of ‘Blackness,’ mined from pop culture, to justify fatal violence,” according to the press material. She wants you to “ponder how the law is created, interpreted, enacted and perpetuated.”

It’s likely you’ll want to stay awhile. Go alone, and pay for more than an hour of parking. You’ll want to listen, sit and read without having to worry if the friend you brought along with you wants to leave and you’re not ready to go yet. Fair warning, American Monument contains language and content that may be disturbing and traumatizing. Please be mindful.