

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS ST. PETE

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG PRESENTS *NEVER THE SAME SONG*,
THE FIRST INSTITUTIONAL EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO THE WORKS OF
LIZZI BOUGATSOS AND LONNIE HOLLEY

May 18 - September 15, 2024



ST. PETERSBURG, FL (APRIL, 23 2024) — The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg announces [*Never the Same Song*](#), the first institutional exhibition dedicated to the works of **Lizzi Bougatsos** and **Lonnie Holley**. *Never the Same Song* spans artworks from the 1990s to the present, including the debut of works made by the artists in March 2024 at Holley’s studio in Atlanta, and works from the collection of the MFA. This exhibition is guest curated by Viva Vadim, an independent curator, photographer, and textile artist, and Katherine Pill, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art. *Never the Same Song* is centered around thematic commonalities in both artists’ practices including improvisation, the use of found objects, sustainability, and environmental conservation. *Never the Same Song* will be on view to the public May 18 - September 15, 2024, accompanied by a complementary brochure featuring an interview with curator and writer

[Alison Gingeras](#) as well as a rich program of events.

Guest curator Viva Vadim grew up surrounded by the [Souls Grown Deep Collection](#), the groundbreaking organization founded in 2010 by her grandfather William S. Arnett, which is dedicated to stewarding the largest and foremost collection of works by Black artists from the Southern United States, encompassing more than 1,000 works by more than 160 artists. Souls Grown Deep Collection and Vadim advocate for the inclusion of Black artists from the South in the canon of American art history and foster economic empowerment, racial and social justice, and educational advancement in the communities that gave rise to these artists. Vadim brings her deep knowledge and singular proximity to the works of Lonnie Holley, her godfather, to her curation of this collaborative exhibition.

“I’m extremely grateful to be the third generation of my family to be mentored by Lonnie. He has taught me invaluable lessons about the transformative powers of art and consistently reiterated the importance of caring for our planet,” says Vadim. “Lizzi’s work is intertwined with Lonnie’s through a mutual dedication to the healing and unifying power of art. Lizzi provides an intimate view into her relationships and artistic process through her personal archive. In contrast, Lonnie speaks about universal struggles, using his experiences to shed light on broader human suffering. The exhibition showcases early-career and recent works by both artists, addressing themes of climate, labor, and performance.”

“I’m so proud to present *Never the Same Song* at the Museum of Fine Arts. It has been revelatory to observe these artists in collaboration and in process as a curator and also to work alongside Viva who has grown up with Lonnie Holley and his work. This is a highly personal exhibition, grounded in the longstanding relationships of its participants,” says Katherine Pill, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art. “*Never the Same Song* also offers an important extension - or antithesis - to the history of the readymade; the work on display is composed almost entirely of reclaimed objects, found on the street or in the family home. The artists use these found materials to different ends, but remind us of the power that resides in objects given a second life.”

NEVER THE SAME SONG: A COLLABORATION AND FRIENDSHIP

After meeting ten years ago, Bougatsos and Holley have maintained a connection through a shared artistic vision that spans music, improvisation, environmental protection, social justice, and a practice of repurposing found objects. The exhibition title, *Never the Same Song*, references Holley’s intense improvisational performance style: he pens lyrics right before performing and never plays the same song twice. While both artists have collaborated together in the past, this exhibition marks a new chapter in their artistic relationship and the first time the pair have collaborated on a series of new sculptures. Both artists are steadfastly dedicated to the transformative potential and power of found materials, seeing in these items a second life and soul beyond their initial usage. Environmental sustainability is a theme throughout *Never the Same Song*. The works explore various forms of reuse, implicitly critiquing our mass consumer culture.

Holley’s career as an artist began after a tragic fire took the lives of his sister’s two young children, and he carved headstones from discarded sandstone-like material, thus beginning his artistic practice of breathing new life into rejectamenta. His work now frequently incorporates wood, scrap metal, artificial flowers, textile scraps, antiques, and other quotidian objects. Similarly, Bougatsos’ work has been deeply impacted by fire, having been burned during a 2001 performance, which inspired her recent solo exhibition *Idolize the Burn, An Ode to Performance* at Tramps in New York City. Her work likewise

repurposes ephemera imbued with deep meaning, including bandages, ballet slippers, antique chandeliers, clothing, jewelry and other material.



“Working alongside Lonnie has introduced me to new ways to approach making my sculptures; this illuminated to me how my work differs from others. My favorite part of working and collaborating with Lonnie is our unique language with each other based on a long-term friendship. We speak in poetics,” states Bougatsos. “There is mutual respect and trust between us, and we share each other’s values. The formal elements in our work relate in the sense that we know when a work is completed; all of this is reflected in this exhibition.”

“Every time I come to Florida I feel like I’m a doctor checking up on a patient: rising tides, changing temperatures, increasing population. When I visited last year with Lizzi, we spent a lot of time talking about water and the coastal areas, and realized it was something we both think about deeply. So to do this show together allows us to explore some of those ideas, and it’s the first opportunity we’ve had to show our work together,” Holley states. As for the personal nature of the exhibition, he says, “I’ve known Viva her entire life. I have a long and deep relationship with her family for generations and I’ve watched her develop into a very thoughtful human concerned deeply with the arts and the environment. Because of her relationship with me and Lizzi and our art, she really is the perfect person to help bring this show to fruition.”

RELATED PROGRAMMING

Saturday, May 18, 2024 | Gallery Talks with Lonnie Holley and Viva Vadim

Hough Galleries

1:00-1:30pm: Gallery Talk

3:00-3:30pm: Gallery Talk

Exhibiting artist Lonnie Holley and co-curator Viva Vadim will be conducting two gallery walk-throughs of *Never the Same Song*, discussing the works on view and Lonnie's practice. Pre-registration is required; please note that the galleries will be monitored for capacity levels during these times.

<https://mfastpete.org/event/gallery-talks-lonnie-holley-and-viva-vadim/>

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 | Listening Party at In Between Days

2340 1st Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL

No cover, but pre-registration is required, with seatings taking place at 6:00pm, 7:30pm, and 8:45pm

St. Pete's Tokyo-style listening bar In Between Days is hosting a series of listening sessions to allow for a better understanding of the musical backgrounds of Lonnie Holley and Lizzi Bougatsos. Both share an improvisational quality in their visual and musical practices; Holley through vocals and keyboard on his solo albums, and Lizzi through vocals and drums on albums with bands I.U.D., Angelblood, and Gang Gang Dance.

<https://mfastpete.org/event/listening-party-1/>

Sunday, September 15, 2024 | Discussion with Lizzi Bougatsos and Viva Vadim

Marly Room

1:00-2:00pm

On the exhibition's closing day, Lizzi Bougatsos and Viva Vadim will return to the Museum of Fine Arts to discuss *Never the Same Song* with Senior Curator of Contemporary Art Katherine Pill.

Image Credits (left to right, top to bottom):

Lonnie Holley, *Without Skin*, 2023, Fire hose, wooden chairs, and nails, Courtesy of the artist, BLUM Gallery (LA/NYC/Tokyo), and Edel Assanti Gallery (London). Photo Truett Dietz.

Lizzi Bougatsos, *The Pillar*, 2022. Metal, wood, and burn suits. Courtesy of the artist and James Fuentes Gallery, NY.

Lizzi Bougatsos, *Idolize the Burn*, 2022, Brass chandelier, red wax, silver, candles, resin dipped toe shoes, and wood. Courtesy of the artist and James Fuentes Gallery, NY.

Lonnie Holley, *Water Line (Made in America)*, 2020, Glass jar, metal statue, and water. Courtesy of the artist, BLUM Gallery (LA/NYC/Tokyo), and Edel Assanti Gallery (London). Photo Truett Dietz.

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG

The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (MFA) has an encyclopedic collection of art from around the globe and across the centuries, with almost 5,000 years of civilization represented in over 20,000 objects extending from antiquity to the present. The collection includes works by Georgia O'Keefe, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Auguste Rodin, Kehinde Wiley, Jacob Lawrence, and many others, as well as ancient Greek and Roman, Asian, African, Art of the Americas and Native American art. The Museum's photographic collection is one of the largest and most well-respected in the Southeast. The museum's rotating exhibition galleries feature a diverse selection of temporary exhibitions from all over the world, as well as exhibitions curated from the museum's extensive collection. In addition to its robust exhibition program, the MFA engages the community through exciting public programs and events and serves students through youth programs and a partnership with the Pinellas County School System. For more information, please visit mfastpete.org and follow @mfastpete on social.

ABOUT LIZZI BOUGATSOS

Lizzi Bougatsos (b. 1974, Queens, NY) is an internationally recognized visual artist and experimental musician. Known for her unique, ethereal vocal style, often referenced as shamanistic, she equates her sculptures and installations to performances. Her work has been described as an act of healing, evoking, and alchemically metamorphosing, rather than capturing, the earth's elements. Bougatsos' legendary band Gang Gang Dance, active for over two decades, was included in The Whitney Biennial (2008). Bougatsos is included in the collections of the Brant Foundation, New York and Greenwich, CT; The Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo, Norway; The Dikeou Collection, Denver, CO; and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY. Selected performances include Concert for Yoko Ono, Washington and the World at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, D.C., and an adaptation of John Cage's 4'33 in conjunction with John Cage: There Will Never Be Silence at the Museum of Modern Art in 2014. Her 2023 solo exhibition Idolize the Burn, an Ode to Performance at TRAMPS in New York City, was acclaimed in reviews by Artforum, Frieze, Vogue, and The New York Times. She is represented by James Fuentes Gallery, NY

ABOUT LONNIE HOLLEY

Since 1979, Lonnie Holley (b. 1950, Birmingham, AL) has devoted his life to the practice of improvisational creativity. His art and music, born out of struggle and hardship, but perhaps more importantly, out of furious curiosity and biological necessity, has manifested itself in drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, performance, music, and filmmaking. Holley's sculptures are constructed from found materials in the oldest tradition of African American sculpture. Already imbued with cultural and artistic metaphor, objects are combined into narrative sculptures that commemorate places, people, and events. His work is now in collections of major museums throughout the world, including The Museums of Fine Arts, San Francisco; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Philadelphia Museum of Art; The Smithsonian American Art Museum; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and many others. His works are also permanently displayed in the United Nations and exhibited in the White House Rose Garden.

ABOUT VIVA VADIM

Viva Vadim is a photographer, textile artist, metalsmith, and curator based in Brooklyn, NY. Her work has been shown in museums and galleries in the U.S., and she received the American Visions Award for Visual Arts. Vadim comes from a long line of progressive activists and patrons of the arts, whose passion for art and the environment are woven into her DNA. She was conceived under a Gee's Bend quilt and has spent time in juvenile detention for protesting America's lack of action on climate change. Vadim received the Women's March Generational Courage Award for climate activism. She is currently a student at Pratt Institute and has worked and collaborated previously with both Lizzi Bougatsos and Lonnie Holley.