



**PARK AVENUE ARMORY PRESENTS *ASSEMBLY*,  
A NEW COMMISSION BY RASHAAD NEWSOME**

**February 18–March 6, 2022**

**New York, NY** – January 20, 2022 – *Assembly*, a new multi-experiential work by interdisciplinary artist Rashaad Newsome, commissioned by Park Avenue Armory, will transform the Armory’s expansive Wade Thompson Drill Hall into an exhibition space, performance hall, classroom, and theater. Upon entering the Drill Hall, visitors will be teleported to an extradimensional universe and greeted by the artist’s artificial intelligence (AI) progeny, Being, The Digital Griot, who models and instructs audiences in reflection, contemplation, movement, and dialogue.

Encompassing many facets of Newsome’s practice, *Assembly* will conjure a monumental immersive environment within the Drill Hall. Visitors will encounter video-mapped walls that pulsate with projected imagery of computer-generated diasporic fractals, inspired by Ron Eglash’s scholarship on the use of fractal geometry within traditional and indigenous African culture. These walls will encircle a 30-foot-tall hologram sculpture of vogue performers morphing and transforming into one another between dance moves. An adjacent 350-seat theater will serve simultaneously as a classroom, arena, and art object, bordered on its south side by Newsome’s collage and sculptural works that merge and mutate images of Black and Black Queer culture, fashion, West African sculptures, textiles, and masks with 19<sup>th</sup>-century ebony Dutch-style frames.

The nexus of *Assembly* is Being, Newsome’s nonbinary, non-raced AI progeny, who transcends categorizations while invoking African aesthetics and myth. Being is likened to a Griot—a West African cultural figure who serves as a historian, librarian, performance artist, and healer. Each day, Being will lead three hour-long participatory workshops that teach decolonization through a combination of lecture, critical thinking, dance, storytelling, conversation, and mindfulness meditation. Being’s active approach to education brings new possibilities for reflection and action, and an enhanced academic experience for all people. When not teaching workshops, Being will continuously generate and recite poetry based on the work of queer poet Dazié Rustin Grego-Sykes. Being’s recitations will be backed by a soundscape composed by Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe.

The work flows into nightly performances that investigate and celebrate the many facets of vogue culture in our world, featuring an international collective of dancers, singers, musicians, and MCs alongside Being. Newsome’s residency at the Armory will culminate with the seventh edition of his King of Arms Art Ball, a semi-annual live performance event and competition that brings together renowned figures from the LGBTQIA+ vogue community and luminaries from the worlds of art, fashion, music, literature, and activism.

In speaking about his commission, Newsome noted:

*Assembly* will offer audiences a new way of thinking about rights, liberty, and humanity, using the so rarely explored paradox of the Black experience and the advancement of technology as a jumping-off point. As visitors walk through the exhibition, they will be compelled to consider their relationship to technology and its connections to the culture of domination. They will be given a new lens to see how, historically, the medium of artificial intelligence promises a utopian future, but in reality, serves racial hierarchies and biases.

Despite its apparent suspicion of technology and the future, *Assembly* is a message of hope and a vehicle for well-being. Technology is our friend and, at best, will only be a mirror for everything we need to

update. Through explorations into the connections between quantum energy, Black sociality, and Black liberation movements, one thing becomes clear: the only way we will get to the future is together. This type of beloved togetherness starts with a real reboot.

Political revolution requires processing: we cannot begin to build togetherness without the bandwidth to embrace the moments of tension and conflict as part of the struggle.

Added **Rebecca Robertson, the Armory's Founding President and Executive Producer**, "We are proud to present this multifaceted work by Rashaad Newsome, an artist who fearlessly explores institutionalized power structures, the place of AI in the future of humanity, the complexities and glories of African heritage, and Black and Queer culture and the phenomenon of voguing as an act of resistance. His is an entirely modern vision that offers a better future through critical thinking and dialogue."

"We are so happy to welcome Rashaad back following his Armory debut in our Artists Studio series in 2017," said **Pierre Audi, the Armory's Marina Kellen French Artistic Director**. "Newsome's work is an ambitious invitation to upgrade our personal operating systems. Through dance, chorus, music, visual art, technology, and scholarship, he has created at the Armory a challenging and fascinating world full of beauty, complexity, and illumination."

In conjunction with *Assembly*, the Armory will present "Captcha: Dancing, Data, Liberation," a salon organized by Curator of Public Programming Tavia Nyong'o, that brings Newsome together with several of his collaborators on the project, alongside additional artists and scholars, for a performance showcase previewing the evening sessions and roundtable conversations about the pursuit of personal and collective liberation. The event, which digs deeper into Newsome's work, will include two roundtables exploring the issues of technology in addressing race, and feature panelists such as scholar and writer Saidiya Hartman; multidisciplinary artist Kiyani Williams; Stanford University professor Michele Elam, who also serves as Faculty Associate Director at the University's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence; artist, curator, and composer Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe; and Newsome himself. The performances at the salon will feature local and international voguers excerpting and offering a preview of their nightly performances.

## **ABOUT RASHAAD NEWSOME**

Rashaad Newsome's work blends several practices, including collage, sculpture, film, photography, music, computer programming, software engineering, community organizing, and performance, to create an altogether new field. Using the diasporic traditions of improvisation, he pulls from the world of advertising, the internet, Art History, Black and Queer culture to produce counter-hegemonic work that walks the tightrope between social practice, abstraction, and intersectionality. Collage acts as a conceptual and technical method to construct a new cultural framework of power that does not find the oppression of others necessary. Newsome's work celebrates Black contributions to the art canon and creates innovative and inclusive forms of culture and media.

Newsome lives and works between Brooklyn, New York, and Oakland, California. He was born in 1979 in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he received a BFA in Art History at Tulane University in 2001. In 2004, he received a certificate of study in Digital Post Production from Film/Video Arts Inc. (NYC). In 2005, he studied MAX/MSP Programming at Harvestworks Digital Media Arts Center (NYC). He has exhibited and performed in galleries, museums, institutions, and festivals throughout the world, including The Studio Museum in Harlem (NYC), the National Museum of African American History and Culture (DC), the Whitney Museum (NYC), Brooklyn Museum (NYC), MoMAPS1 (NYC), SFMOMA (CA), New Orleans Museum of Art (LA), Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), The Garage Center for Contemporary Culture (Moscow), and MUSA (Vienna).

His many honors and awards for his work include a 2021 Knight Arts + Tech Fellowship, 2020/2022 Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence residency, 2020 Eyebeam Rapid Response Fellowship, 2020 Minnesota Street Project Foundation Grant, 2019 LACMA Art + Technology Lab Grant, 2018 William

Penn Foundation Grant, the 2018/2019 New York Live Arts Residency, 2017/2018 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, and a 2016 Tamarind Institute Artist Residency.

## **INSTALLATION DATES AND PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE**

*Assembly* is on view at Park Avenue Armory February 18 through March 6, 2022.

### **Daytime Hours:**

Friday, February 18 – Sunday, March 6, 2022

Tuesdays – Saturdays: 12:00pm–7:00pm

Sundays: 12:00pm–6:00pm

Tickets at \$18 (plus fees); free for Armory members

### **Workshops:**

Friday, February 18 – Sunday, March 6, 2022

Tuesdays – Sundays: 1pm, 3pm, and 5pm

Workshops have availability at [www.armoryonpark.org](http://www.armoryonpark.org)

### **Performances:**

Friday, February 18 – Saturday, March 5, 2022

Tuesdays – Saturdays at 9:00pm

Tickets: \$40 (plus fees)

### **Salon: *Captcha: Dancing, Data, Liberation***

Sunday, February 20, 2022 at 3:00pm

Presented in conjunction with *Assembly*, the Armory will bring Newsome in dialogue with his collaborators and others also engaged in the freedom fight for personal and collective liberation. Through roundtable discussions and a performance showcase, paired with the opportunity to experience Newsome's world-building taken to new heights in the grand Drill Hall, this salon will take Black visual language on a quantum leap. In addition to Newsome, the salon will include MC and activist Ms. Boogie; dancer and capoeirista Puma Camillê; Michele Elam, Faculty Associate Director at Stanford University's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence; performance artist and poet Dazié Grego-Sykes; scholar and writer Saidiya Hartman; artist, curator, and composer Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe; Tavia Nyong'o, the Armory's Curator of Public Programming; and multidisciplinary artist Kiyani Williams, among others.

Tickets: \$25 (plus fees)

### **King of Arms Art Ball**

Sunday, March 6, 2022 at 7pm

King of Arms Art Ball, a semi-annual live performance event and competition that brings together renowned figures from the LGBTQIA+ vogue community and luminaries from the worlds of art, fashion, music, literature, and activism. In The King of Arms Art Ball Newsome stages a ball, a dance and performance competition, where all the categories are based on a specific artist's work or a particular movement within art history and contemporary culture. Through the King of Arms Ball Newsome creates a platform to celebrate queer artists of color, explore contemporary social justice issues, and provide space for emerging artists to showcase their work. Jack Mizrahi will host and Kevin Prodigy will participate.

## Health & Safety Protocols

Beginning January 29, 2022, **the Armory will require proof of a booster shot for all those for whom the timing of earlier vaccinations makes them eligible for a booster.** Those not yet eligible will be able to continue to enter provided they are two weeks past their second dose in a two-dose vaccine series or two weeks after receiving a single-dose vaccine.

In compliance with New York City's Key to NYC, effective January 29, 2022, all ticket holders above the age of 5 years old **must be fully vaccinated.** "Fully vaccinated" means that you received your final dose of an FDA or WHO-approved vaccine at least 14 days before your performance date. At check-in, ticket-holders will be required to show **proof of full vaccination** (the NEW YORK STATE EXCELSIOR PASS or a hard copy or photo of your vaccination card) and a **government-issued photo ID** (for ticket holders 18 years of age or older).

In addition to the precautions taken above, **all patrons and staff are required to wear N95, KN95 or KF94 masks** while inside the Armory.

To view additional COVID-19 Policies, please visit our [FAQS PAGE](#).

## SPONSORSHIP

Citi is the Armory's 2022 Season Sponsor.

Support for Park Avenue Armory's artistic season has been generously provided by the Charina Endowment Fund, The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, the Howard Gilman Foundation, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, The Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Foundation, the Marc Haas Foundation, the Juliet Lea Hillman Simonds Foundation, the Leon Levy Foundation, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, the Richenthal Foundation, and the Isak and Rose Weinman Foundation. The artistic season is also made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature. Additional support has been provided by the Armory's Artistic Council.

*Assembly* is supported in part by a generous gift from Ken Kuchin and Tyler Morgan. The program is also supported by Meta Open Arts.

Being was made possible in part with the generous support of the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence.

## ABOUT PARK AVENUE ARMORY

Part palace, part industrial shed, Park Avenue Armory fills a critical void in the cultural ecology of New York, supporting unconventional works in the performing and visual arts that cannot be fully realized in a traditional proscenium theater, concert hall, or white wall gallery. With its soaring 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall and an array of exuberant period rooms, the Armory enables a diverse range of artists to create, students to explore, and audiences to experience epic, adventurous, relevant work that cannot be done elsewhere in New York.

Programmatic highlights from the Wade Thompson Drill Hall include Ernesto Neto's *anthropodino*, a magical labyrinth extended across the Drill Hall; Bernd Alois Zimmermann's harrowing *Die Soldaten*, in which the audience moved "through the music"; *the event of a thread*, a site-specific installation by Ann Hamilton; the final performances of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company on three separate stages; an immersive *Macbeth* set in a Scottish heath with Kenneth Branagh; *WS* by Paul McCarthy, a monumental installation of fantasy, excess, and dystopia; a radically inclusive staging of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* staged by Peter Sellars and performed by Sir Simon Rattle and the Berliner Philharmoniker; eight-time Drama Desk-nominated play *The Hairy Ape*, directed by Richard Jones and starring Bobby Cannavale; *Hansel & Gretel*, a new commission by Ai Weiwei,

Jacques Herzog, and Pierre de Meuron that explored publicly shared space in the era of surveillance; *FLEXN* and *FLEXN Evolution*, two Armory-commissioned presentations of the Brooklyn-born dance activists group the D.R.E.A.M. Ring, created by Reggie “Regg Roc” Gray and Director Peter Sellars; Simon Stone’s heralded production of *Yerma* starring Billie Piper in her North American debut; *The Let Go*, a site-specific immersive dance celebration by Nick Cave; Satoshi Miyagi’s stunning production of *Antigone* set in a lake; Sam Mendes’ critically acclaimed production of *The Lehman Trilogy*; and the *Black Artists Retreat* hosted by Theaster Gates, which included public talks and performances, private sessions for the 300 attending artists, and a roller skating rink.

In its historic period rooms, the Armory presents more intimate performances and programs, including its acclaimed *Recital Series*, which showcases musical talent from across the globe within the intimate salon setting of the Board of Officers Room; the *Artists Studio* series curated by MacArthur “Genius” and jazz phenom Jason Moran in the newly restored Veterans Room, which features a diverse array of innovative artists and artistic pairings that reflect the imaginative improvisation of the young designers and artists who originally conceived the space; and *Interrogations of Form*, a public talks program that brings diverse artists and thought-leaders together for discussion and performance around the important issues of our time.

Among the performers who have appeared in the *Recitals Series* and the *Artists Studio* in the Armory’s restored Veterans Room or the Board of Officers Rooms are: Christian Gerhaher; Ian Bostridge; Jason Moran; Lawrence Brownlee; Barbara Hannigan; Lisette Oropesa; Roscoe Mitchell; Conrad Tao and Tyshawn Sorey; Rashaad Newsome; and Krecy Garcia (“El Prodigio”).

Highlights from the public programs include: symposiums such as Carrie Mae Weems’ day-long event called *The Shape of Things*, whose participants included Elizabeth Alexander, Theaster Gates, Elizabeth Diller, and Nona Hendryx; a day-long Lenape Pow Wow and Standing Ground Symposium held in the Wade Thompson Drill Hall, the first congregation of Lenape Leaders on Manhattan Island since the 1700s; salons such as the Literature Salon hosted by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, whose participants included Lynn Nottage, Suzan Lori-Parks, and Jeremy O. Harris, and a Spoken Word Salon co-hosted with the Nuyorican Poets Cafe; and most recently, *100 Years | 100 Women*, a multi-organization commissioning project that invited 100 women artists and cultural creators to respond to women’s suffrage.

Current Artists-in-Residence at the Armory include two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage; Obie winner and Pulitzer short-listed playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins and Carmelita Tropicana; Reggie “Regg Roc” Gray and the D.R.E.A.M. Ring; singer and composer Sara Serpa; Tony Award-winning set designer and director Christine Jones and choreographer Steven Hoggett; and Mimi Lien, the first set designer to receive a MacArthur Fellowship. The Armory also supports artists through an active commissioning program including such artists as Bill T. Jones, Lynn Nottage, Carrie Mae Weems, Michael van der Aa, Tyshawn Sorey, Raashad Newsome, Julian Rosefeldt, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, and others.

The Armory also offers creativity-based arts education programs at no cost to thousands of underserved New York City public school students, engaging them with the institution’s artistic programming and outside-the-box creative processes.

The Armory has undertaken an ongoing \$215-million renovation and restoration of its historic building designed by architects Herzog & de Meuron, with Platt Byard Dovell White as Executive Architects.

[www.armoryonpark.org](http://www.armoryonpark.org)

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