

**ART IN OUR MIDST:
COLUMBUS -
AFRICAN AMERICAN
SCULPTORS TO KNOW**

Presented by
The Sculpture Center
Curated by
Destyni Green

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INTRODUCTION

Destyni Green

Historically, African-Americans have been left out of the canon of art history. Eurocentric art history might include a few recognized African American artists and movements such as Jacob Lawrence of the Harlem Renaissance and contemporary artist Kara Walker. In the 1970s, African American artist, Kerry James Marshall, was struck by the lack of black artists in the canon. The history of art is rich in diversity, however textbooks and other educational resources have lightened black people in paintings, removed them during restorations and cropped out of text book images. Kerry James Marshall has spent his career as an artist fighting erasure and doing his best to correct the absence of black artists in western art history. It is my goal as the curator of this tour to correct the absence in the Ohio Outdoor Sculpture database.

This tour highlights the works of the following African American sculptors: Omar Shaheed, Queen Brooks, Chief Baba Shongo Obadina, Andrew F. Scott, Charles McGee, and Melvin Edwards. Each artist in this tour not only celebrates the African American culture, but also goes beyond this subset. These sculptors contribute heavily to the progression of the arts by also engaging young African Americans to make their own contributions to their communities and/or art history.

Please note, driving to the multiple locations on this tour is recommended. However, some works are in walking distance, such as the Andrew F. Scott pieces at King Arts Complex. An important work on the tour, "Noah's Ark: Life Force," is located in Wilberforce, OH, a short distance from Columbus.

MAP OF THE TOUR





BAOBAB TREE AND ADINKRA FENCE

Andrew F. Scott

**LOCATED AT THE KWANZAA PLAYGROUND
IN FRANKLIN PARK COLUMBUS, OHIO**

1277 BRYDEN RD, COLUMBUS, OH 43205

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The "[Baobab Tree and Adinkra Fence](#)" are two of artist Andrew F. Scott's contributions to the Kwanzaa Playground. According to Scott's artist site: "The Kwanzaa playground was developed in 1995 as a joint effort between the community and the City of Columbus. Seven local artists and sculptors contributed to the design and construction. The park is designed in the shape of a human which represents a first ancestor. The park focuses on positive African-American images based on the concept that, "it takes a whole village to raise a child."

Andrew F. Scott is a multimedia artist and sculptor whose work falls at the intersection of digital fabrication technologies, traditional fine arts practices, and collective cultural ideals. He finds inspiration from African American art and culture and views his work through the spirit of "Sankofa," a word in the Twi language of Ghana that literally translates to "go back and get it." Metaphorically, "Sankofa" expresses the importance of reaching back to knowledge gained in the past and bringing it into the present in order to make positive progress.



AFRICAN PORTAL

Queen Brooks

LOCATED AT THE KWANZAA PLAYGROUND IN THE FRANKLIN PARK COLUMBUS, OHIO

[1277 BRYDEN RD, COLUMBUS, OH 43205](#)

Queen Brooks was one among seven original artists, Bill Agnew, Barbara Chavous, Andrew Scott, Larry Winston Collins, Pheoris West, and LaVerne Brown, who contributed to the Kwanzaa Playground which was developed in 1995 as a joint effort between the community and the City of Columbus. It is designed in the shape of a human figure, which represents the first ancestor and it focuses on positive African American images. Brooks work symbolizes peace and tries to bring a sense of welcoming and calm to all visitors. Brooks's current "African Portal" is constructed out of steel to ensure its longevity as a beautiful architectural piece for decades to come.

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Queen Brooks is a Columbus native. Her gallery and place of residence, Blue Haven Art Studio is where she does most of her creative work. She is the recipient of the Ohioana Career Award the highest recognition bestowed on an artist in the state of Ohio. She works with a diverse range of media from wood burning, drawing, painting, print making, mixed media, and digital photography. Her work is often colorful, patterned and textural and she focuses on subject matter surrounding her culture, human issues and spirituality. Her artwork has been shown nationally and internationally and is held in the collections of the Ohio Dominican and Ohio Otterbein Universities, the King Arts Complex, and the Columbus Museum of Art.



VARIOUS SCULPTURES

Chief Baba Shongo Obadina

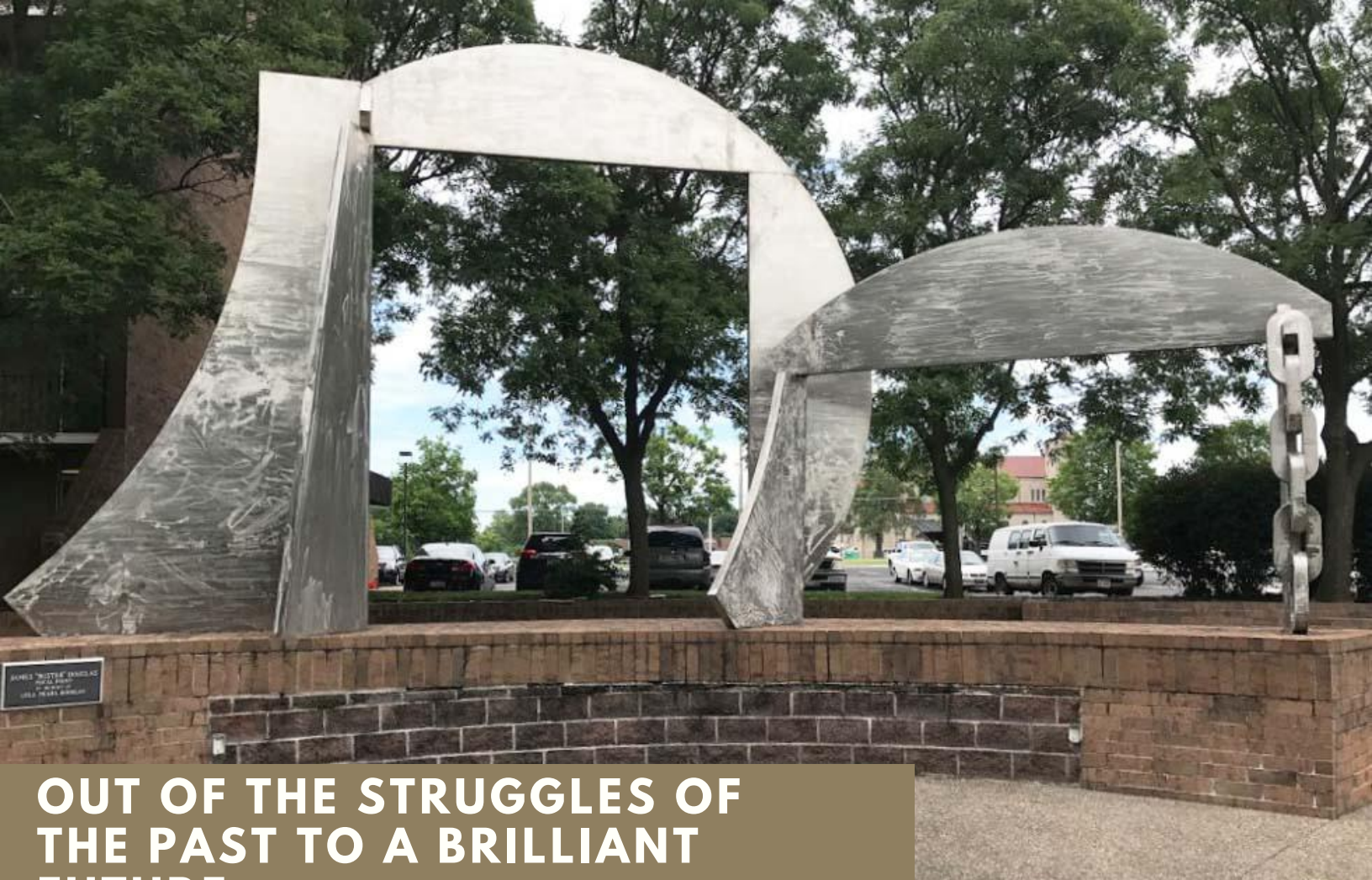
LOCATED AT THE WILLIAM H THOMAS GALLERY

1270 BRYDEN RD, COLUMBUS, OH 43205

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“Dragon” and “Pythagorus” are two outdoor sculptures by Chief Baba Shongo Obadina. Both of these pieces are located on the William H. Thomas Gallery property. “Pythagoras,” the series of copper rectangular geometric shapes, greets gallery visitors in the front garden while the “Dragon” guards other community made artwork in the back. Chief Baba Shongo Obadina founded the William H. Thomas Gallery in 1976. He spent 13 years renovating it with the help of many friends to create the gallery that promoted artists of color. He explains that the gallery was “built by the people, for the people.”

Chief Baba Shongo Obadina is an artist, curator and founder of the William H. Thomas Gallery and Urban Cultural Arts Foundation. In 1976, he founded his gallery, affectionately known as the “art gallery in the hood,” as a space “for artists to showcase and appreciate cultural expression without being limited by ‘mainstream’ galleries.” Chief Baba Shongo Obadina's artworks reflect his love of African culture and dedication to the Yoruba tradition of telling stories of important events, places, and time throughout history.



OUT OF THE STRUGGLES OF THE PAST TO A BRILLIANT FUTURE

Melvin Edwards

LOCATED AT THE MOUNT VERNON PLAZA CAMPUS

1035 ATCHESON ST, COLUMBUS, OH 43203

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"Out of the Struggles of the Past to a Brilliant Future" by Melvin Edwards features a large abstract metal structure composed in an arch formation including flat pieces of metal and oversized stylized chain links. "Out of the Struggles of the Past to a Brilliant Future" features imagery of chains, which are strongly associated with captivity and oppression of African American people, yet the sculpture holds hope for a brighter future. Its title seems to echo sentiment of the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing" which was adopted by the NAACP as its official song and often referred to as the Black National Anthem.

Melvin Edwards is known for his work in metal. He is highly respected as a pioneer in the history of contemporary African-American art and sculpture. His work has been shown nationally and internationally at major galleries and museums. His 1970 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, was the first solo exhibition at the Whitney to feature an African American sculptor.



JAZZ DUETS

Omar Shaheed

LOCATED AT LINCOLN CAFE
740 E LONG ST, COLUMBUS, OH 43203

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"Jazz Duets" by African American sculptor Omar Shaheed depicts a male saxophone player back-to-back with a singing woman. This piece pays homage to the great influence of jazz music and its importance to Black culture and references the Jazz Era in Columbus. Though many associate the Jazz Era with its origins in New Orleans or major cities where it flourished such as New York and Chicago, Ohio was also influential in the development of Jazz music. Many artists would stop through Ohio on their way to play in other parts of the country.

Artist Omar Shaheed is a Columbus native who works primarily in stone and bronze. As he explains, "when you carve different stones, it generates a rhythm – music. It's like you're dancing with the stone, and you and the stone become one," bringing even more life to his piece, "Jazz Duets." Shaheed's abstract sculptures often reflect the life of African Americans with themes such as family, love, musical influence and the "ghetto." His large scale work can be seen internationally. Each piece vibrates with pride, comfort and awareness to the Black experience and expands upon the themes of love and community.



THE FAMILY

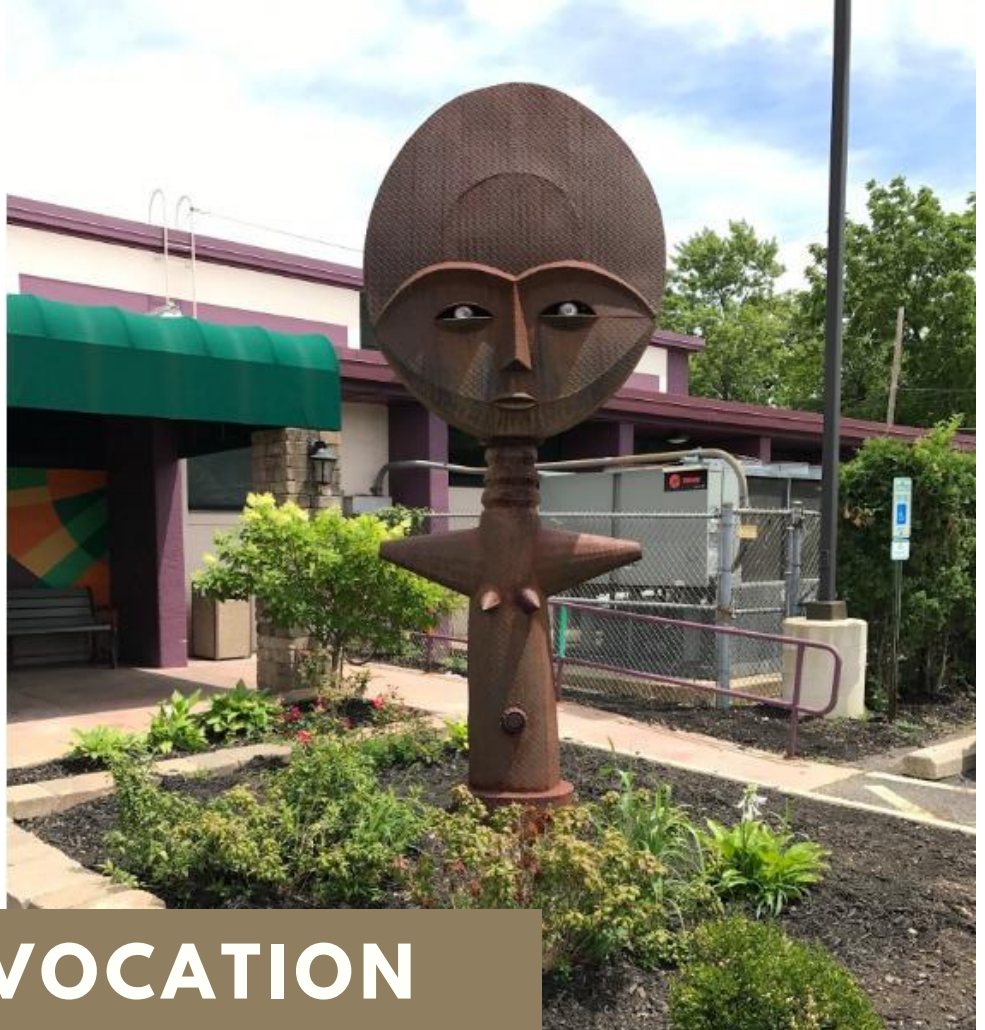
Omar Shaheed

LOCATED AT THE KING ARTS COMPLEX
867 MT VERNON AVE, COLUMBUS, OH 43203

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Omar Shaheed's "The Family" is a limestone sculpture featuring an African American family engaged in a loving and protective embrace. This sculpture shows Shaheed's continued appreciation of the black body as a faceless mother, father, sister and brother turn to each other holding hands and forming an abstracted rectangular shape together. Shaheed explained that this sculpture refers to the black family in the ghettos as the "cornerstone of our community," and a symbol of the power of love.

Omar Shaheed is a Columbus native who works primarily in stone and bronze. Shaheed's abstract sculptures often reflect the life of African Americans with themes such as family, love, musical influence and the "ghetto." Shaheed began his career as an artist by using his work as a means to leave behind his struggles with poverty. Today his large scale work can be seen internationally across the US, in Negril, Jamaica, and in the west African nation of Burkina Faso. Each piece vibrates with pride, comfort and awareness to the Black experience and expands upon the themes of love and community.



AKUA'BA INVOCATION FIGURE

Andrew F. Scott

LOCATED AT THE KING ARTS COMPLEX

867 MT VERNON AVE, COLUMBUS, OH 43203

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“Akua'ba Invocation Figure” is one of eight Invocation Figures by Andrew F. Scott. The fertility figure has historically been used by the Akan women of West Africa to aid in conception. Traditionally, akua'ba figures are carved from wood and consecrated by priests although Scott's comparatively massive sculpture is constructed out of steel. The figures are carved with characteristics of ideal Akan beauty such as a flat disklike head and rings around the neck to replicate rolls of fat which are signs of beauty, health, and prosperity. The akua'ba figures are one of the most recognizable forms in African art.

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NKONDI INVOCATION FIGURE

Andrew F. Scott

LOCATED AT THE KING ARTS COMPLEX
[867 MT VERNON AVE, COLUMBUS, OH 43203](#)

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“Nkondi Invocation Figure” is one of eight Invocation Figures by Andrew F. Scott. The nkisi nkondi figure comes from the Kongo people of Africa. The nkisi nkondi is an oath taking image. It is brought in to resolve disputes, heal the sick, avenge wrongdoing, or act as a guardian if evil sorcery has been committed. Nkondi figures are recognizable by the many sharp objects inserted into their skin. Traditionally, a blade is driven into the figure to compel the spirit to help. Nkondi figures are also known to have reflective surfaces attached to their bellies. The reflection represents the ‘other world’ of the dead.

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HELPING HANDS

Omar Shaheed

LOCATED AT THE OHIO HEALTH GRANT MEDICAL CENTER

[111 S GRANT AVE, COLUMBUS, OH 43215](#)

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“Helping Hands” by Omar Shaheed depicts a family gathering together outside of the Grant Medical Center in Columbus, Ohio. The figures are faceless, though they look toward each other and engage in a loving embrace. “Helping Hands” was given to the medical center by Dr. Craig W and Deborah Anderson and their family as a gift representing the importance of family. The dedication plaque reads, “This limestone work is dedicated to the families of the Grant Medical Center - the caring staff, the patients, and those who support them.” This sculpture is a visualization of Black family, love, comfort, care, and the community itself.

Omar Shaheed is a Columbus native who works primarily in stone and bronze. Shaheed’s abstract sculptures often reflect the life of African Americans with themes such as family, love, musical influence and the “ghetto.” Shaheed began his career as an artist by using his work as a means to leave behind his struggles with poverty. Today his large scale work can be seen internationally across the US, in Negril, Jamaica, and in the west African nation of Burkina Faso. Each piece vibrates with pride, comfort and awareness to the Black experience and expands upon the themes of love and community.



GAVEL

Andrew F. Scott

**LOCATED IN THE SOUTH REFLECTING
POOL AT THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO**
[145 S FRONT ST, COLUMBUS, OH 43215](#)

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"Gavel" by Andrew F. Scott is a massive rendition of the symbolic tool. Early renderings of the artwork include the phrase "NO JUSTICE NO PEACE" inscribed along the base of the sound block. Including the rallying cry around the sound block would have functioned as a reminder to those in power of their responsibility to rule justly. Although the phrase is absent from the finished piece, the overwhelming gavel made by an African American man continues to serve as a symbolic reminder to the Ohio Supreme Court to uphold justice for all and protect society's most vulnerable.

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NOAH'S ARK: LIFE SOURCE

Charles McGee

LOCATED AT CENTRAL STATE UNIVERSITY
1400 BRUSH ROW ROAD WILBERFORCE, OH
45384

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COORDINATES](#)

"Noah's Ark: Life Source" was inspired by the quote, "big is the head that thinks and drinks deep from the spigot of eternal knowledge and quenches the thirst of inquisitive minds with life sustaining freshwater." Life Source encourages curiosity and a continuing desire to learn more about our world and others who share it. As McGee explains, his art is about "the power of togetherness. It's all connected just like we are all connected." This statement embodies the very hope for this tour; to bring people together and connect them by crossing the bridge of communication and culture.

Charles McGee is a Detroit native. He is beloved in his community for his artwork and activism. In 1969, McGee put together the first show of all Black artists in Detroit. He also founded Gallery 7 as a place to promote Black artists and serve as a forum for art in his neighborhood. He went on to teach at Eastern Michigan University and subsequently became the director of the university's Sill Gallery. His work can be seen regionally and nationally and his actions are known to have significantly influenced the Detroit arts community and contributed even more generally to the broadening inclusivity of American art in the late-20th century.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Destyni Green



Destyni Green is a fiber artist and creative writer living in Cleveland, Ohio. Her artwork consists of fiber/textile works and jewelry work dedicated to the cultural history of Black and Puerto Rican people. She works through the process of writing personal essays and/or poems and creating pieces of art based off of the written worlds.

Destyni's work branches further into the art community of Cleveland. She is the Chair of Youth Advisory with Graffiti Heart, a non-profit arts organization dedicated to revitalizing the community and funding the artistic education of youth. In 2019 she worked with the Sculpture Center as an intern to manage and expand the Ohio Outdoor Sculpture database.

The curator wishes to thank the King Arts Complex for their assistance. The Sculpture Center wishes to thank the numerous individuals that have helped make this tour possible: Queen Brooks, Jami Goldstan of the Greater Columbus Arts Council, Bill Barrow, Izzy Ostrowski, Emma Risley, and Aleksa Sorgatz.

Photo Credits

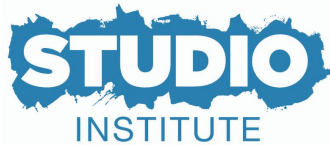
Baobab Tree and Adinkra Fence: Andrew F. Scott; Kwanzaa Playground: Andrew F. Scott; Gallery in the Hood; Pythagorus: Kaleb Akers; Out of the Struggles of the Past to a Brilliant: The Sculpture Center; Jazz Duets: The Sculpture Center; The Family: King Arts Complex; Akua'ba Invocation Figure: The Sculpture Center; Nkondi Invocation Figure: The Sculpture Center; Helping Hands: Kaleb Akers; Gavel: Andrew F. Scott; Life Source: Margie FitzSimons



The Sculpture Center (TSC) celebrates ideas, risk-taking, and creative expression which provide cultural experiences that enhance the understanding of art of our time. TSC provides a nurturing and professional environment where early and mid-career sculptors of Ohio and the greater region are encouraged to create new work. Through exhibitions and education programs, TSC prompts a broad cultural dialogue with an inclusive community of artists, educators, and audiences in the Ohio region.

In 2000 TSC founded the Ohio Outdoor Sculpture (OOS) database following its participation in Save Outdoor Sculpture!. OOS is the largest online collection of images, historical data and condition information of a growing list of 1,500 publicly accessible outdoor sculptures in Ohio. OOS encourages communities to recognize, appreciate, and preserve their outdoor public sculpture.

The Sculpture Center graciously thanks its generous sponsors who make this project possible with their ongoing support.



The George Gund Foundation

