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June 21, 2018

Artist Betsabeé Romero Creates First Commissioned Works for New York Avenue Sculpture Project | Opens Sept. 28

*Human migration explored in group of
sculptures titled Signals of a Long Road Together*

WASHINGTON—Mexico City-based sculptor Betsabeé Romero (b. 1963) has been selected as the artist for the fourth iteration of the New York Avenue Sculpture Project, the only public art space featuring changing installations of contemporary works by women artists in Washington, D.C. Organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts ([NMWA](http://nmwa.org)), the New York Avenue Sculpture Project is a collaboration among the museum, the DowntownDC Business Improvement District (BID), the DC Office of Planning and other local agencies. The Sculpture Project demonstrates the



museum's long-term commitment to the artistic beautification of New York Avenue, fostering a vibrant new identity for the neighborhood just east of the White House. *New York Avenue Sculpture Project: Betsabeé Romero* will be on view from Sept. 28, 2018, through Sept. 20, 2020.

"There is a great deal of traditional public sculpture in D.C., however, only a few of these monumental works are contemporary or created by women," said NMWA Director Susan Fisher Sterling. "The Sculpture Project helps redress this imbalance. Romero's work demonstrates yet again women artists' inspiring vision and technical innovation in large-scale sculpture."

For this site-specific installation, the first commissioned expressly for the Sculpture Project and its urban environment, Romero has created four sculptures of carved and painted tires that are assembled into totemic structures and speak to the theme of human migration. Romero's art stimulates viewers to discuss and explore issues that are in the news on a daily basis. The

experience of migration in Mexico informs Romero's art directly, but she also sees her work as emblematic of humanity's broader impulses. "All of us are migrants between life and death. It is a migration that is inevitable and real," stated Romero. Her sculptures also symbolize humankind's profound connection to cultural traditions, as well as a yearning to keep families safe and thriving. Her collective title for this group of sculptures—*Signals of a Long Road Together*—speaks poetically to this universal condition, and the car-based imagery and themes of migration and movement resonate with the hum of activity at this busy D.C. intersection.

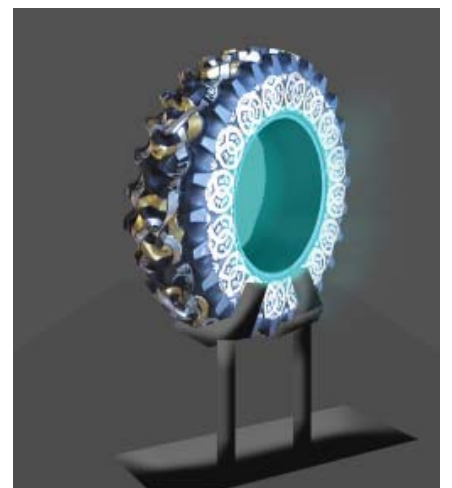
Romero's sculptures are the first works in the Sculpture Project to incorporate interior lighting, increasing their visibility within the site's busy urban setting on New York Avenue between 12th and 13th Streets, NW. Lights arranged inside many of the tires give each sculpture an otherworldly glow. For Romero, light signifies the power of ancestral customs and principles to illuminate the path forward. She embraces materials and techniques related to popular culture, and frequently transforms cars and automotive components because cars have a broad cultural appeal. Romero's tire sculptures reflect a method similar to body tattooing, through which the artist carves figures and intricate patterns into tires' sidewalls and treads before filling in the motifs with metallic paint.



Since the beginning of her career, Romero has worked with non-conventional mediums—rubber, textiles, plastics and even chewing gum—because she views painting and sculptures made from precious materials as objects intended for the enclosed spaces of art galleries. For her, art does not belong in a world situated behind closed doors—it must play an active role in the human community.

Inaugurated in 2010, the Sculpture Project has presented sculptures by Niki de Saint Phalle (1930–2002), Chakaia Booker (b. 1953) and Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930–2017). NMWA's partner organizations have provided integral support for the project's ongoing success.

"The sculptures along New York Avenue have become a must-see public art installation in Washington, D.C.," said Neil O. Albert, executive director of the DowntownDC BID. "We are thrilled to be a part of the New York Avenue Sculpture Project and herald its ability to be at the forefront of placemaking



projects and programs in downtown.”

The BID is one of the museum’s public-private partners on the Sculpture Project. It managed the preliminary design and engineering, shepherded the project through the approval processes of seven agencies and took the lead in managing the construction project, including lighting, landscaping and signage. The DowntownDC BID Safety/Hospitality and Maintenance employees (SAMs) will again help maintain the landscaping once plantings are installed around Romero’s work.

A Community Open House, celebrating Betsabeé Romero’s work in the New York Avenue Sculpture Project, will take place Friday, Sept. 28. Romero will be in attendance.

INSTALLATION ARTWORKS

Romero’s installation comprises four separate sculptures.

- A 16-foot tall sculpture on the site, *Huellas y cicatrices (Traces and scars)*, comprises four tires stacked vertically, their sidewalls engraved with repeating figures of mothers and children running hand in hand, symbols of families trying to survive together. They move “away from their history and their ancestral culture,” the artist says. Theirs is an experience shared by families in peril or despair around the world. Although Romero grounds her work in Mexican history and culture, she invites a contemporary and global interpretation of her imagery.
- Romero develops motifs that derive from pre-Columbian or medieval Spanish art. A second 16-foot tall sculpture, titled *Movilidad y tensión (Mobility and tension)*, comprises eight half-tires engraved with intricate symbols that resemble Mudéjar designs. The Mudéjar style developed in medieval Spain as a synthesis of Islamic artistic traditions and various contemporary European styles, particularly the Gothic.
- Also in homage to Mexican cultural heritage, Romero created *En cautiverio (In captivity)*. In this work, two tractor tires, held aloft by slim steel columns, seem to hover above the ground. The knobby tread of each tire is painted with intertwined silver and gold serpent-like forms. The images allude to Mexican and other global mythologies describing the stealth and power of the snake.
- Romero created the fourth sculpture, *Movilidad en suspenso (Mobility in suspense)*, by threading four tractor tires across a horizontal bar, a format she nicknames “the rolling pin.” The imposing form alludes to farm work and the cycles of cultivation. Romero used previous versions of her “rolling pin” sculptures to create outsized, working stamps that she rolled across paper, sand and fabric to make immense prints. In this sculpture made for NMWA’s site, the tread of each tire is painted with bold decorative bands that derive from traditional patterns in Mexican decorative art and architecture.

New York Avenue Sculpture Project: Betsabeé Romero is made possible with funding provided by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, which receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding is provided by the Sue J. Henry and Carter G. Phillips Exhibition Fund. The exhibition is organized with assistance from the Embassy of Mexico's Cultural Institute.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Betsabeé Romero (b. 1963) lives and works in Mexico City. Her sculptures and installations have been featured in more than 40 one-person exhibitions at museums and contemporary art spaces across the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia. Her previous U.S. projects include presentations at the Neuberger Museum of Art and the Phoenix Art Museum. Her work is part of important public collections, including those of the Neuberger and Phoenix museums, the British Museum, Daros Latinamerica Collection in Switzerland and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Embracing a highly collaborative studio practice, Romero frequently works with local artists, including tattoo artists, to execute her designs. Gaining expertise from her numerous residencies and sculpture installations created for international biennials, Romero is renowned for her public art. Her illuminated installation *Canto al Agua* filled Mexico City's grand central square in fall 2016. Romero completed a Master of Fine Arts degree at the Academia de San Carlos, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and a Master of Art History degree at UNAM in 1994. She also studied at École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

DOWNTOWNDC BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

The DowntownDC Business Improvement District (BID) is a private nonprofit organization that provides capital improvements, resources and research to help diversify the economy and enhance the Downtown experience for all. This special district, where property owners have agreed to tax themselves to fund services, encompasses a 138-block area of approximately 825 properties from Massachusetts Avenue on the north to Constitution Avenue on the south, and from Louisiana Avenue on the east to 16th Street on the west. As a catalyst, facilitator and thought leader, the DowntownDC BID promotes public/private partnerships to create a remarkable urban environment. For more information, visit www.DowntownDC.org or follow on Twitter @downtowndcbid.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS

The National Museum of Women in the Arts ([NMWA](http://www.nmwa.org)) is the only major museum in the world solely dedicated to championing women through the arts. With its collections, exhibitions, programs and online content, the museum seeks to inspire dynamic exchanges about art and ideas. NMWA advocates for better representation of women artists and serves as a vital center for thought leadership, community engagement and social change. NMWA addresses the gender imbalance in the presentation of art by bringing to light important women artists of the past while promoting

great women artists working today. The collections highlight painting, sculpture, photography and video by artists including Louise Bourgeois, Mary Cassatt, Judy Chicago, Frida Kahlo, Shirin Neshat, Faith Ringgold, Pipilotti Rist, Amy Sherald and Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun.

NMWA is located at 1250 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. It is open Mon.–Sat., 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sun., noon–5 p.m. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for visitors 65 and over and students, and free for NMWA members and youths 18 and under. Admission is free the first Sunday of each month. For information, call 202-783-5000, visit nmwa.org, [Broad Strokes Blog](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#).

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IMAGES

New York Avenue Sculpture Project installation rendering; Courtesy Betsabeé Romero Art Studio

Betsabeé Romero, *Huellas y cicatrices (Traces and scars)* (rendering), 2018; Four tires with engraving and gold leaf and steel support, approx. 192 1/2 x 86 5/8 x 9 3/4 in.; Courtesy Betsabeé Romero Art Studio

Betsabeé Romero, *En cautiverio (In captivity)* (rendering), 2018; Two tractor tires with engraving, gold leaf, and silver leaf and steel support, each approx. 78 3/4 x 51 1/4 x 19 5/8 in.; Courtesy Betsabeé Romero Art Studio