



# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Rendering of John Wesley, *Nine Female Inmates of the Cincinnati Workhouse Participating in a Patriotic Tableau*, 1976 / 2014. Courtesy the artist, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, and Fredericks & Freiser, New York.

**HIGH LINE ART PRESENTS**

## **JOHN WESLEY NINE FEMALE INMATES OF THE CINCINNATI WORKHOUSE PARTICIPATING IN A PATRIOTIC TABLEAU**

**16<sup>th</sup> INSTALLMENT ON HIGH LINE BILLBOARD**

**DECEMBER 1, 2014 – JANUARY 2, 2015**

**New York, NY (November 21, 2014)** – Presented by Friends of the High Line, High Line Art has commissioned acclaimed artist John Wesley for the latest installment on High Line Billboard. Located within the Edison ParkFast parking lot next to the High Line at West 18th Street and 10th Avenue, Wesley's *Nine Female Inmates of the Cincinnati Workhouse Participating in a Patriotic Tableau* (1976 / 2014) will be on view from December 1, 2014 through January 2, 2015. This will mark the sixteenth installment on High Line Billboard, which has previously featured works by John Baldessari, Louise Lawler, Allen Ruppersberg, Gilbert & George, Thomas Demand, and Faith Ringgold, among others.

Situated at the intersection of Pop Art, Minimalism, and Surrealism, American artist John Wesley is renowned for his sparse, graphic illustrations that bring to mind classic American cartoons of the 1950s, Japanese ukiyo-e wood block printing, patterned textile design, and fashion magazines. Utilizing a limited pastel color palette, Wesley repositions these recognizable figures into sometimes humorous, sometimes compromising positions. Having begun painting in 1953 while employed as an illustrator at Northrop Aircraft, like so many Pop artists Wesley was strongly influenced by commercial art practices and his visual vocabulary would continue to reflect these commercial beginnings throughout his career. At times the artist's explicitly erotic imagery is tempered by its deadpan depiction, in reduced pink, cream, and brown flesh tones, and saturated blue backgrounds that lack any





specificity of context. While often referred to as a surrealist, Wesley's erotic subjects and their luxuriant depiction tend more toward a Rococo sensibility, albeit infused with updated 20<sup>th</sup> century characters.

For the High Line, Wesley reimagines his 1976 painting *Nine Female Inmates of the Cincinnati Workhouse Participating in a Patriotic Tableau*, a composition featuring nine women costumed to depict the "Betsy Ross" thirteen-star American flag. The women, adorned in the stars and stripes of the flag, can be viewed alternatively as clothed in the stripes of a prison uniform – a suggestion perhaps of the equation of national borders with the walls of a prison. Exemplary of Wesley's ultimately ambiguous humor, this work was originally created in commemoration of the bicentennial celebration of the United States Declaration of Independence.

"The American flag is not only an icon of Pop Art: it is perhaps a form of public art on its own. It's an abstract image usually displayed in public spaces, onto which people project different emotions and values, like they do when they encounter a work of art outdoors," says Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Curator & Director of High Line Art. Wesley's piece makes this even more apparent, and I hope each viewer and passer-by will bring to it their own interpretation. Wesley's work is a portrait of America, but one that is not simply patriotic but reminds us of the many individual stories that are hidden in a nation."

### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

John Wesley (b. 1928, Los Angeles) lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include Fondazione Prada, San Giorgio Maggiore Island, Venice (2009); Waddington Galleries, London (2008); Krefeld Kunstmuseum, Germany (2005); Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge (2001); and PS1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, NY (2000). Recent group exhibitions include *Disturbing Innocence*, The FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2014); *Alice in Wonderland* at Tate Liverpool, United Kingdom (2011); *Deep Comedy* at Le Consortium, Dijon (2011); *Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2009); *Collection: MOCA's First Thirty Years*, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2009); and *Two Years* at The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2007). Wesley's work was featured in Documenta 5 in Kassel, Germany (1972), and a permanent gallery of his work was inaugurated at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, TX, in 2004. His work is in the public collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, among others.

### **ABOUT HIGH LINE ART**

Presented by Friends of the High Line, High Line Art commissions and produces public art projects on and around the High Line. Founded in 2009, High Line Art presents a wide array of artwork including site-specific commissions, exhibitions, performances, video programs, and a series of billboard interventions. Curated by Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Curator & Director of High Line Art, and produced by Friends of the High Line, High Line Art invites artists to think of creative ways to engage with the uniqueness of the architecture, history, and design of the High Line and to foster a productive dialogue with the surrounding neighborhood and urban landscape.

Major support for High Line Art comes from Donald R. Mullen, Jr. and The Brown Foundation, Inc. of Houston, with additional support from Vital Projects Fund, Inc. High Line Art is supported, in part, with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the New York City Council and from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. Space for High Line Billboard is donated by ParkFast.com. In-kind support provided by Maharam.

### **ABOUT THE HIGH LINE AND FRIENDS OF THE HIGH LINE**

The High Line is an elevated freight rail line transformed into a public park on Manhattan's West Side. It is owned by the City of New York, and maintained and operated by Friends of the High Line. Founded in 1999 by community residents, Friends of the High Line fought for the High Line's preservation and transformation at a time when the historic structure was under the threat of demolition. It is now the non-profit conservancy working with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to make sure the High Line is maintained as an extraordinary public space for all visitors to enjoy. In addition to overseeing maintenance, operations, and public programming for the park, Friends of the High Line works to raise the essential private funds to support more than 90 percent of the park's annual operating budget, and to advocate for the transformation of the High Line at the Rail Yards, the third and final section of the historic structure, which runs between West 30th and West 34th Streets.

For further information on High Line Art, please visit [art.thehighline.org](http://art.thehighline.org).

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