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PRESS RELEASE

New Monument Honoring Dr. Maya Angelou To Be Installed At San Francisco Main Library in Fall 2024

“Portrait of a Phenomenal Woman” by artist Lava Thomas honors Dr. Maya Angelou (1928-2014) in recognition of her many accomplishments as a literary artist and a civil rights leader. This will be the first monument commemorating a Black woman in San Francisco’s Civic Art Collection.



(Digital rendering of Dr. Maya Angelou monument Portrait of a Phenomenal Woman by Lava Thomas, SFPL Main Branch Larkin Street Entrance. Courtesy of the Artist.)

SAN FRANCISCO, July 24, 2024 – The San Francisco Arts Commission, in partnership with the San Francisco Public Library, is thrilled to announce the upcoming installation of *Portrait of a Phenomenal Woman*, a new monument honoring Dr. Maya Angelou by artist Lava Thomas in **September 2024**.

The monument will be sited outside the Larkin Street entrance of the San Francisco Main Library, at 100 Larkin Street, between Grove and Fulton streets.

A community celebration is planned for Thursday, **September 19, 2024**, from **10 a.m. to 2 p.m.** at the Main Library. The unveiling of the monument and a speaking program, featuring remarks from elected officials, Director of Cultural Affairs **Ralph Remington**, City Librarian **Michael Lambert**, and the artist, **Lava Thomas**, will take place from **11 a.m. to noon**.

Members of the public are also invited to attend and may **RSVP** and register for free tickets starting on July 24, 2024 on Eventbrite: [mayaangeloumonumentunveiling.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/maya-angelou-monument-unveiling-tickets-758484444444)

“We are thrilled that this monumental project, honoring one of San Francisco’s most iconic and beloved literary artists and activists, is nearing completion,” said **Ralph Remington**, Director of Cultural Affairs. “I’d like to thank Lava Thomas for her continued partnership and work on this phenomenal sculpture that helps us advance our goal of increasing the representation of iconic women in our city’s Civic Art Collection.”

About the Monument:

[*Portrait of a Phenomenal Woman*](#) will be sited just outside the Larkin Street entrance to the Main Library.

The monument, fabricated in bronze, measures 96” high x 72” wide x 26” deep, will be set atop a 12” high x 80” wide x 30” deep basalt stone base, standing at a total height of nine-feet.

The bronze sculpture is being fabricated by Walla Walla Foundry in Walla Walla, WA, and its basalt base by American Soil and Stone in Richmond, CA. The total estimated weight of the monument installation is approximately 6,900 lbs.

The project budget for the monument is approximately \$293,000.

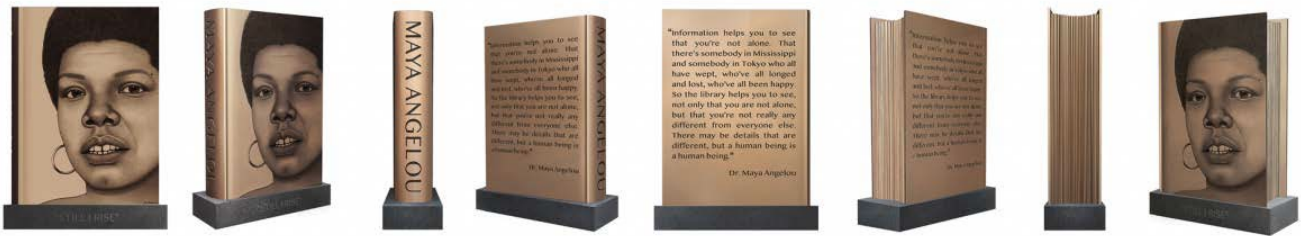
“Dr. Maya Angelou was, simply, a phenomenal woman who remains a vital San Francisco icon today,” said **Michael Lambert**, City Librarian. “This monument will welcome all visitors to the Main Library as a symbol of community, connection, and the power of poetry.”

Styled in the form of a book, the front of the sculpture features a portrait of Dr. Angelou drawn by Lava Thomas, based on an image still from [a 1973 interview](#) of Dr. Angelou in conversation with **Bill Moyers**. The monument also features the quote “*Still I Rise*” along the front base, and a secondary quote on the back:

“Information helps you to see that you’re not alone. That there’s somebody in Mississippi and somebody in Tokyo who all have wept, who’ve all longed and lost, who’ve all been happy. So the library helps you to see, not only that you are not alone, but that you’re not really any different from everyone else. There may be details that are different, but a human being is a human being.” - Dr. Maya Angelou

“*Portrait of a Phenomenal Woman* has been a labor of love over the past few years, and its upcoming installation has been a long time coming. My hope for this monument is that it is a beacon for the ideals that defined Dr. Maya Angelou’s life: courage, faith, justice,

perseverance, artistic freedom, and triumph over trauma,” said **Lava Thomas**. “It is an extraordinary honor and privilege to commemorate the remarkable life and legacy of Dr. Angelou with this monument and I am excited to celebrate its unveiling to the public this September. I’d like to thank the public art staff at the Arts Commission who collaborated with me to make my vision a reality.”



(360-degree view digital renderings of Portrait of a Phenomenal Woman by Lava Thomas. Courtesy of the Artist.)

For more information about the Dr. Maya Angelou monument project, visit: sfartscommission.org/mayaangeloumonument

Community Engagement

To coincide with the community celebration and unveiling of the new monument, and to honor Dr. Maya Angelou’s legacy through support for literary arts, the Public Library and Arts Commission awarded two Special Project Grants (SPX) to the **African-American Shakespeare Company** and **Youth Speaks** to facilitate and organize a series of artistic workshops for adults and youth, host community events and support the creation of a new stage production celebrating Maya Angelou’s life and work.

The African-American Shakespeare Company will celebrate Maya Angelou through the creation of a performance piece titled “*From One to Another: Homage to the Legacy of Maya Angelou.*” The new choreopoem directed by Devin A. Cunningham, written by Leelee Jackson, with original composition by DeVante’ Winn, and choreography by Ashli Fisher, features a curation of monologues and poetry inspired by and connected to pivotal moments and the great works of Maya Angelou. *From One to Another* will be taken on tour and performed at various libraries and community events and programs throughout San Francisco.

As part of their community engagement, Youth Speaks hosted a series of writing workshops, “*Maya did it First,*” and performance showcase, “*Still I...*” in early 2024 with local poets to highlight and center the legacy of Black women and femmes in publishing.

Participants explored and performed Maya Angelou's famous works and a selection of participants took part in an advanced workshop, "*Still I Rise*," to create new works in conversation with, and in direct response to, her works and literary descendants.

Both African-American Shakespeare Company and Youth Speaks participants will be part of the community celebration and unveiling this fall at the Main Library.

Project History & Background

In June 2017, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a resolution recognizing that although 51% of the population is female, women are woefully underrepresented in sectors of public and private leadership roles, and their historical contributions are inadequately recognized in public statues and memorials.

The Board passed legislation in October 2018 requiring at least 30 percent non-fiction female representation in the public realm through works of art on City property, plaques, names of streets and right-of-ways, parks, public buildings and department websites and publications, mirroring a national movement to increase female representation in the public realm to 30 percent. As most of the sculptures and monuments in the City's collection honoring individuals recognize white men, the monument of Dr. Maya Angelou will begin to redress this gender imbalance by honoring a woman, and moreover, a woman of color.

Existing works of art honoring women in the City's collection include a bust of the late former Mayor and Senator, **Dianne Feinstein** inside City Hall, and a statue of **Florence Nightingale** located at Laguna Honda Hospital in Forest Hill.

The Arts Commission aims to rectify this imbalance with the installation of "*Portrait of a Phenomenal Woman*," the first commissioned artwork dedicated to a Black woman in San Francisco's Civic Art Collection.

The Arts Commission will continue this effort through a multi-year equity-focused initiative called **Shaping Legacy** that will involve critically evaluating the 98 monuments and memorials in the Civic Art Collection and engaging with communities and artists to help reimagine the future of monuments and memorials in San Francisco. To learn more about this initiative, visit sfartscommission.org/shapinglegacy.

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About the Artist

[Lava Thomas](#) is a multi-disciplinary artist whose work is grounded in acts of reverence, memorialization, and commemoration. Her portraits, sculptures, paintings, and site-specific installations draw from her family's southern roots, African-American devotional and protest traditions, intersectional feminism, and socio-political events. Her work is held in museum collections nationwide, including the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, The Studio Museum in Harlem, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, the Cantor Art Center at Stanford University, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Spelman

College Museum of Fine Art, and the United States Consulate General in Johannesburg, South Africa. Among her awards are a Joan Mitchell Foundation Award for Painters and Sculptors, an American Arts and Letters Purchase Prize, a San Francisco Artadia Award, and a Lucas Artists Fellowship. Thomas studied at UCLA's School of Art Practice and received a BFA from California College of the Arts (CCA). She serves on CCA's Presidential Advisory Committee and is a former trustee of the Djerassi Resident's Artists Program and the Alliance of Artists Communities. She is represented by Rena Bransten Gallery in San Francisco, CA.

About the San Francisco Arts Commission

The San Francisco Arts Commission is the City agency that champions the arts as essential to daily life by investing in a vibrant arts community, enlivening the urban environment and shaping innovative cultural policy. Our programs include: Civic Art Collection, Civic Design Review, Community Investments, Public Art, SFAC Galleries, and Art Vendor Licensing. Learn more at sfartscommission.org.

About the San Francisco Public Library

San Francisco Public Library is dedicated to free and equal access to information, knowledge, independent learning and the joys of reading for our diverse community. The library system is made up of 27 neighborhood branches, the San Francisco Main Library at Civic Center and four bookmobiles. Learn more at sfpl.org.

About the African-American Shakespeare Company

African-American Shakespeare Company was introduced in 1994 to open the realm of classic theatre to a diverse audience. African-American Shakespeare Company provides an opportunity and place for actors of color to hone their skills and talent in mastering some of the world's greatest classical roles by producing work from the canon of classical theatre including Shakespeare and great American and world playwrights that is lively, entertaining and relevant. Learn more at african-americanshakes.org.

About Youth Speaks

Founded in 1996 in San Francisco, Youth Speaks is a leading presenter of Spoken Word performance, education, and youth development programs. Trailblazers of local and national youth poetry slams, festivals, and more, Youth Speaks offers a comprehensive slate of literary arts education programs and provides numerous opportunities for youth to be published and heard. Youth Speaks has worked with hundreds of thousands of youth and has helped create partner programs in 47 cities across the United States. Learn more at youthspeaks.org.