



ARTS & CULTURE

Simone Leigh: 1st Black Woman to Represent US at Biennale

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Simone Leigh is known for creating large art works that represent and celebrate the experiences of Black women. Now she will be the first Black woman to represent the United States at the highly-respected arts **festival**, the Venice Biennale.

The State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) announced the decision Wednesday.

Leigh lives in New York City and rarely speaks to reporters. However, she told *The New York Times* newspaper that the country's bad racial climate, "doesn't **distract** me from the fact of how amazing it is to be a Black artist right now."

Jill Medvedow is director of the Boston museum. She said in a statement: "At such a **crucial** moment in history, I can think of no better artist to represent the United States." She praised Leigh's work for the past twenty years "that centers the experiences and histories of Black women," calling them "**probing**, timely and urgent."

The museum said Leigh is creating new **sculptures** to be shown at the 59th Biennale from April 23 to November 27, 2022. Leigh's works were to appear at next year's Biennale, but the coronavirus crisis delayed the festival by a year.

The Biennale was founded in 1895. It has become a place for artists to call attention to current issues concerning the world. At the Biennale in 2019, Swiss artist Christoph Buechel presented a ship that had broken up in the Mediterranean Sea, causing 700 migrants to die.

Leigh is known for large sculptures that use materials and forms connected with African art. Her work “Brick House” is a 5-meter-tall **bronze** sculpture of a Black woman. The work sits on the High Line greenway, looking down Tenth Avenue in New York City.

Other works are included in the collections of The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and The Art Institute of Chicago, among others.

Leigh’s new works for the Biennale will include a large bronze sculpture in front of the U.S. Pavilion. Inside, the Pavilion will have works showing the human body, created from several materials.

Eva Respini is the ICA’s chief **curator**. She said Leigh’s sculptures for the Biennale will represent Black female forms and thinking and serve as “a **beacon** in our moment.”

I'm Caty Weaver.

Hai Do adapted this story for Learning English based on reports from the Associated Press and the Institute of Contemporary Art. Susan Shand was the editor.

Words in This Story

festival – n. an event when people gather to celebrate something

distract – v. to take attention away from something

crucial – adj. extremely important

probing – adj. asking questions in order to find hidden meaning

sculpture – n. a piece of art that is made by molding clay, stone, metal ...

bronze – adj. made out of metal that combines copper and tin

curator – n. a person in charge of artworks in a museum

beacon – n. someone or something that guides or gives hope to others
