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Artforum, March 18, 2024.

ARTFORUM

NEWS

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Tschabalala Self and Andra Ursuta. Photo: Daniel Gurtory/Jorge Monedero.

The Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group has announced American artist Tschabalala Self and Romanian-born artist Andra Ursuta as the winners of its next two commissions, to occupy the vacant plinth at the northwest corner of London’s Trafalgar Square. Self’s sculpture *Lady in Blue*, depicting a confident Black woman captured midstride and imagined by the artist as paying “homage to a young, metropolitan woman of color,” will grace the pedestal in 2026. Two years later, Ursuta’s *Untitled*, a life-size, slime-green resin sculpture of a shrouded horse and rider that “points

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towards an uncertain future” and evokes the “hyper-fragmented, paranoid time” of its making, one when “public space, consensus and community continue to dissolve,” will occupy the space.

Self’s and Ursuta’s proposals were chosen from among a field that additionally included entries from Chila Burman, Gabriel Chaile, Ruth Ewan, Thomas J Price, and Veronica Ryan, all of whom largely shunned monumentalism in favor of a humanist perspective. The Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group, chaired by Ekow Eshun, made the decision following a round of public voting on the matter. Like their competitors, both the winning artists took place into consideration when conceiving their works.

“My work *Lady in Blue* will bring to Trafalgar Square a woman that many can relate to. She is not an idol to venerate or a historic figurehead to commemorate,” said Self in a statement. “She is a woman striding forward into our collective future with ambition and purpose. She is a Londoner, who represents the city’s spirit.”

Ursuta, for her part, focused on the history of the plaza itself. “Trafalgar Square is a place where multiple histories face one another in an open-ended standoff,” she said in a statement, noting, “It will never be finished. This is such a crucial, and beautiful, accident.”

Constructed in 1841, the Fourth Plinth was intended to support a statue of William IV astride a horse but remained empty for more than 150 years owing to lack of funding. In 1998, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) began commissioning temporary sculptures for the plinth, and in 2005, the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group was established to shepherd the commissions, on which the public votes. Past works have included Mark Wallinger’s 1999 *Ecce Homo*, a life-size Christ wearing little more than a barbed-wire halo, and Heather Phillipson’s *The End*, 2020, which portrayed a large fly determinedly scaling a massive soft-serve ice cream cone in what appeared to be an attempt to claim the maraschino cherry crowning it from a small but fierce-looking drone. At present, the plinth is occupied by Samson Kambalu’s *Antelope*; Teresa Margolles’s *Improntas* (Imprints), a sculpture featuring the faces of 850 trans people, will take its place in September.

Though the commission is considered one of England’s most prestigious arts honors, it is not uncontroversial. Turner Prize-winning artist Rachel Whiteread, whose *Monument*, an upside-down translucent resin replica of the plinth, sat atop the column in 2001, recently called for the commission to end, citing the near impossibility of finding homes for the works after their removal from Trafalgar Square.

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