



For Immediate Release



Rendering courtesy of the artist and the High Line.

DEREK FORDJOUR PARADES NEW *BACKBREAKER DOUBLE* MURAL COMMISSION ONTO THE HIGH LINE

New York, NY (December 11, 2025) — The High Line today announced the presentation of *Backbreaker Double*, a vibrant new mural by multidisciplinary artist Derek Fordjour, on a wall adjacent to the park at 22nd Street. On view for a year and visible to millions of visitors marching by, *Backbreaker Double* showcases the acrobatic flex of two regally uniformed Black drum majors at monumental scale, bringing Fordjour's signature style and iconography to new heights.

"It's a pleasure to light up the pathway and seating area of the High Line at 22nd Street with the joy of Derek Fordjour's illustrious drum majors," said Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director & Chief Curator of High Line Art. "Within *Backbreaker Double*, Fordjour captures and extends an exquisite moment within a marching band's performance, allowing the procession of parkgoers to consider the wonder and pomp of that tradition anew."

Backbreaker Double depicts two Black marching band drum majors performing the "drum major backbend." This iconic salute is an athletic stunt in which the drum major bends all the way backward, so that the shako headdress nearly grazes the ground. The gesture is a recurring motif in Fordjour's work, embodying the pride and ritual rooted in the traditions of historically Black colleges and universities. The drum major, commanding and magnetic, personifies both extreme effort and quintessential Black showmanship. On the High Line, the vibrant background and the figures' matching red and white uniforms radiate unity and jubilation. Their contorted bodies, teetering on the edge of physical possibility, also highlight the tension

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between performative glamour and backbreaking labor. The title, *Backbreaker Double*, suggests both the physical form and psychological strain of expectation and hypervisibility.

This artwork strongly exemplifies Derek Fordjour's practice, which spans painting, sculpture, installation, and performance to explore the intertwined histories of power, labor, representation, and the African American experience. Best known for his vibrant paintings layered with everyday materials such as cardboard, newspaper, aluminum foil, and glitter, Fordjour pockmarks and reveals textured surfaces that embody material history and repurpose practices. Through this collage-based process, he constructs exuberant yet introspective scenes often populated by athletes, musicians, and other performers, archetypes of spectacle, commerce, and symbolic representation. Figures are often depicted mid-action, highlighting both the vitality and vulnerability of the human form. Fordjour places these figures within lively scenes where their interactions with one another underscore his exploration of race and systemic inequity, juxtaposing individual achievement against the broader structural challenges historically faced by Black individuals and communities. His works oscillate between celebration and critique, evoking emotions that range from joy to melancholy, where effortless grace and conspicuous effort coexist and reveal the tension between personal striving and collective expectation.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Derek Fordjour (b. 1974, Memphis, Tennessee) lives and works in New York, New York. Fordjour has presented his work in solo exhibitions at institutions around the world, including Pond Society, Shanghai, China (2021), and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri (2020). Notable and recent group exhibitions include *Flight into Egypt: Black Artists and Ancient Egypt, 1876–Now*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York (2024–2025); *Get in the Game: Sports, Art, Culture*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California (2024); *Reverberations*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California (2024); *Day for Night: New American Realism*, Palazzo Barberini, organized by the Aïshti Foundation, Rome, Italy (2024); *Abstraction after Modernism: Recent Acquisitions*, The Menil Collection, Houston, Texas (2024); *Windrush: Portraits of a Pioneering Generation*, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, Scotland (2023); *NGV Triennial*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2023–2024); *The Slipstream: Reflection, Resilience, and Resistance in the Art of Our Time*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (2021); *Present Generations: Creating the Scantland Collection of the Columbus Museum of Art*, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio (2021); *100 Drawings from Now*, The Drawing Center, New York, New York (2020); and *Plumb Line*, California African American Museum, Los Angeles, California (2019). His work is held in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas; the Royal Collection, London, England; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, Florida; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, Illinois; and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, New York. Fordjour is the recipient of the Gordon Parks Foundation Artist Fellowship (2025) and the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Spirit of the Dream Award (2023). He served as the 2020 Alex Katz Chair of Painting at The Cooper Union, New York, and is currently a core critic on the faculty of the Yale University School of Art, New Haven, Connecticut. Fordjour is also the founder of Contemporary Arts Memphis.

SUPPORT

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Derek Fordjour's mural, *Backbreaker Double*, is made possible, in part, by an in-kind donation from Meadow Partners and Canvas Property Group, and painted by the team at Overall Murals.

ABOUT HIGH LINE ART

Founded in 2009, High Line Art commissions and produces a wide array of artworks on the High Line, including site-specific commissions, exhibitions, performances, video programs, and a series of billboard interventions. Led by Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director & Chief Curator of High Line Art, and presented by the High Line, the art program invites artists to think of creative ways to engage with the unique architecture, history, and design of the park, and to foster a productive dialogue with the surrounding neighborhood and urban landscape.

For more information on High Line Art, please visit thehighline.org/art.

ABOUT THE HIGH LINE

The High Line is a public park on the West Side of Manhattan operated, maintained, and funded by the nonprofit conservancy Friends of the High Line. Through our work with communities on and off the High Line, Friends of the High Line is devoted to reimagining public spaces to create connected, healthy neighborhoods and cities.

Built on a historic, elevated rail line, the High Line was always intended to be more than a park. You can walk through the gardens, view art, experience a performance, enjoy food or beverage, or connect with friends and neighbors—all while enjoying a unique perspective of New York City.

Nearly 100% of our annual budget comes through donations. The High Line is owned by the City of New York, and we operate the park under a license agreement with NYC Parks.

For more information, visit thehighline.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#), and [TikTok](#).

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