

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

At the Pulitzer, a Contemporary Minimalist Creates a Maximalist Effect

Sarah Crowner: Around Orange

On View September 8, 2023 – February 4, 2024; Pulitzer is only venue

ST. LOUIS, MO, June 20, 2023—A bold red, orange, blue, and black abstract painting installation nearly as long as a tennis court, glazed red terracotta tiles, and a pale birchwood floor structure are among the building blocks of a major three-part commission project by the artist Sarah Crowner (b. 1974) that will transform the ground level of the Pulitzer Arts Foundation this fall. On view **September 8, 2023, through February 4, 2024**, *Sarah Crowner: Around Orange* is organized by Stephanie Weissberg, Curator, Pulitzer Arts Foundation.

As specially commissioned by the Pulitzer, the three-part installation represents an intergenerational visual dialogue between Crowner—an artist whose buoyant abstractions engage the history of art—and the late Ellsworth Kelly (1923–2015)—painter, sculptor, and printmaker—whose wall sculpture *Blue Black* (2000) hangs permanently in the main gallery of the Pulitzer and has become an emblem of the museum.

“Through subtle placement and the strategic selection of color and tactility of material, Sarah illuminates core elements of the Pulitzer’s identity. Her choices derive from careful research into the Pulitzer’s own architecture, designed by Tadao Ando, and to Ellsworth Kelly’s *Blue Black*,” notes Pulitzer Executive Director Cara Starke.



Sarah Crowner, *Untitled (Around Orange)*, 2023

Starke continues, “The Pulitzer has a tradition of commissioning works of art and presenting exhibitions responding to the museum’s architecture and collection. In 2017, *Blue Black* was the inspiration for an exhibition of the same title organized by the artist Glenn Ligon.”

“*Around Orange* is both refined and exuberant,” suggests Weissberg. “Sarah draws attention to the nuanced decisions that Ellsworth Kelly made in responding to Tadao Ando’s interior. She also retains evidence of her own production process by leaving visible the stitching of sections of canvas or the color variations between tiles.”

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Even before the visitor enters the museum, they will notice a tile mural work affixed to the outer wall of the entrance courtyard off Washington Boulevard. This seventeen-foot long by 6-foot tall tile mosaic is composed of handmade, red and orange glazed terracotta tiles with natural variations in glazing and shape that contrast with the museum’s concrete exterior. By echoing the dimensions of Ando’s architecture, the patterned slab hints at how Crowner will visually repeat, transpose, and flip shapes and proportions within the museum for *Around Orange*.



Ellsworth Kelly, *White Plaque: Bridge Arch and Reflection*, 1955

As the visitor proceeds to the Entrance Gallery, a low, curved birchwood platform extends out from the corner of the gallery without quite touching a wall. The visitor is invited to ascend onto this stage to view one small, white-on-white collage of curves and an early painted wood relief by Ellsworth Kelly. The geometry of the platform echoes the geometry of the Kelly, *White Plaque: Bridge Arch and Reflection* (1956), wherein two part-circles abut. Simple geometry, yes, but magical as the eye’s optic process automatically supplies the missing length of perimeter to mentally complete the circles. In a similar manner, the eye registers the arc of the gallery platform as but a fraction of an implied full circle extending beyond the wall architecture into the sculpture court.

Leaving the Entrance Gallery and its subtle palette of whites and creams, the visitor approaches the Main Gallery and encounters a 75-foot long canvas field of bold red, orange, blue and black arabesques, Matisse-like in its lyricism and *joie de vivre*.

As the project keystone, this installation of paintings stretches the entire length of the long East Wall, wraps around the North Wall, and appears to jump to the exterior where it transitions into the glazed orange tile encountered in the entrance courtyard. Its 10 panel parts are fitted together with gaps of varying lengths, each segment sewn together from cut sections of painted canvas. The work’s dimensions, vivid color, and handmade quality set in motion a kind of visual dance with Kelly’s *Blue Black*, located at the end of the gallery.



Sarah Crowner, *Untitled (Around Orange)*, 2023



Ellsworth Kelly, *Blue Black*, 2000

Kelly's towering wall sculpture was itself a site-specific commission. The artist determined its monumental proportions after careful consideration of the surrounding spatial environment developed by Ando: the high gallery wall; descending staircase; and parallel horizontal zones set up by a concrete bridge form and an unbroken span of window running along an interior courtyard wall.

Taking *Blue Black* as the touchstone for her project, Crowner made her painting installation a similar size as Kelly's wall sculpture, but flipped on the side. Its height is a direct index of the six-foot width of *Blue Black*. Whereas Kelly's work is all extreme verticality, Crowner's is all extreme horizontality. The warm red and oranges of her painting invert the cool tones of Kelly's composition. The intentional gaps and variations on color she prizes as evidence of hand-work heighten the

effect of almost machine-perfection that Kelly achieved by using an aluminum surface. Her exploration of positive and negative space echoes a frequent Kelly preoccupation.

For *Sarah Crowner: Around Orange*, the artist collaborated with the Guadalajara-based ceramic studio Ceramica Suro to produce a particular handmade terracotta tile, in so doing indirectly referencing the rich history of terracotta and brickwork for which St. Louis is famous.



Sarah Crowner, *Untitled (Around Orange)*, 2023

About the Artist

In *Around Orange*, Sarah Crowner is extending her interest in excavating the intentions embedded in 20th-century American art and design. Earlier this year, she created a piece for Lina Bo Bardi's Casa de Vitro in São Paulo, Brazil, and last year, an installation for the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas.

The artist's work has been the subject of a number of solo exhibitions, including at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, Massachusetts (2016-17) and the Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico (2022-23). In 2016, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum commissioned the artist to create a site-specific installation for The Wright, the museum's restaurant, which has been on view for the last six years. Her work has also been featured in a number of group exhibitions, including the Whitney Biennial, New York (2010); *Abstract Generation: Now in Print*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013); *Excursus IV: Primary Information*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2013); *Painter*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2013); *Conversation Piece*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2014); *Repetition and Difference*, Jewish Museum, New York (2015); and *Space Between* at the Flag Art Foundation, New York (2015).

About the Pulitzer Arts Foundation

Located in the heart of St. Louis, the Pulitzer Arts Foundation presents art from around the world in its celebrated Tadao Ando-designed building and surrounding neighborhood. Exhibitions include both contemporary and historic art and are complemented by a wide range of free public programs, including music, literary arts, dance, wellness, and cultural discussions. Founded in 2001, the Pulitzer is a place where ideas are freely explored, new art exhibited, and historic work reimaged. Open and free to all, the Pulitzer is a cultural and civic asset to the St. Louis community and a popular destination for visitors from around the world.

In addition to the museum, the Pulitzer is home to several outdoor spaces, including Park-Like—a garden of native plants and pathways, the Spring Church—an open air stone pavilion and beloved landmark, and the Tree Grove—a shady picnic spot with oak and redbud trees. The museum is open Thursday through Sunday, 10am–5pm, with evening hours until 8pm on Friday. The outdoor campus is open daily, sunrise to sunset. Admission is free. For more information, visit pulitzerarts.org or @pulitzerarts on social media.

###

MEDIA CONTACTS

National:

Ennis O'Brien

Betsy Ennis: betsy@ennisobrien.com | +1 917-783-6553

Stephanie Markovic: stephanie@ennisobrien.com | + 1 347-628-4688

St. Louis:

Pulitzer Arts Foundation

Kristin Fleischmann Brewer: kfleischmann@pulitzerarts.org | +1 314-754-1850 ext. 207

Image Captions

Page 1

Sarah Crowner, *Untitled (Around Orange)*, 2023. Acrylic on canvas, sewn, 72 x 72 in. (182.9 x 182.9 cm). © Sarah Crowner; Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin, Mexico City and Stockholm. Photo: Farzad Owrang

Page 2

Ellsworth Kelly, *American, 1923–2015. White Plaque: Bridge Arch and Reflection*, 1955. Oil on wood, 64 7/8 x 47 7/8 x 1/2 in. (164.8 x 121.6 x 1.3 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fractional and promised gift of Emily Rauh Pulitzer; Vincent D' Aquila and Harry Soviak Bequest Fund, and Enid A. Haupt Fund, 1996. Photograph by Jean Paul Torno, © Ellsworth Kelly Foundation

Sarah Crowner, *Untitled (Around Orange)*, 2023. Acrylic on canvas, sewn, 72 x 144 in. (182.88 x 365.76 cm) © Sarah Crowner; Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin, Mexico City and Stockholm. Photo by Charles Benton

Page 3

Ellsworth Kelly, *Blue Black*, 2000. Painted aluminum panels, 336 x 70 x 2 1/8 in. © Ellsworth Kelly and Pulitzer Arts Foundation. Photograph by Jim Corbett

Sarah Crowner, *Untitled (Around Orange)*, 2023. Acrylic on canvas, sewn, 72 x 120 in. (182.88 x 304.8 cm). © Sarah Crowner; Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin, Mexico City and Stockholm. Photo by Charles Benton