INTRODUCTION

The dynamic collaboration between 2015 Kranzberg Series artists Ashley McQueen and Zlatko Ćosić reflects the hybrid nature of Laumeier Sculpture Park. Both artists use the performative nature of their professions—dance and video—and cross-pollinate them with the unique spaces of our grand landscape. While the “high” art forms of dance and video live within their respective traditions, it is McQueen and Ćosić’s focus on the honorable labor that goes into maintaining the public spaces of Laumeier that makes this project transformational.

McQueen and Ćosić, working with St. Louis County Parks staff members Andrew Brown, Sharon Brown, John Concoran, Pat Cotter, Gabe Cotton, Richard Edwards, Don Garling, Josh Garling, Tim Giffen, Yvette Lueldelle, Dave Miller, Bob Moritz, Rich Neal, Dan Sachsenheimer, Tom Schweiss, Bud Spindler, Jason White and AJ Brown, along with Laumeier’s Curator of Exhibitions Dana Turkovic and former Chief Curator Nick Lang, to celebrate the beautiful dance of our outdoor equipment—mowers, edges, clippers and mowers—that shape our manicured landscape. St. Louis County Parks staff diligently tame and shape our grounds in the way that humans have managed their landscape for thousands of years, using ingenuity and invention to produce food and flowers that sustain life.

McQueen and Ćosić’s work asks: What does this weekly dance of Laumeier’s lawn mowers mean in making public space?

Laumeier’s landscape is part of the “filling in” of the suburban sprawl of America’s cities. Interstate highways facilitated the abandonment of city cores in the 1950s and 1960s for the newer spaces of suburbia. Today, we are faced with the social and cultural isolation of these very same suburbs. Most Americans maintain their lawns as moats to protect them from their neighbors. Housing is no longer as affordable as promised and transportation to the far suburbs is restricted to those with cars, leaving an ever-widening gap between city and suburb. With the recent events in Ferguson, Missouri, one of Laumeier’s suburban neighbors in north St. Louis County, we can now ask if the dream of suburbia is a reality.

Like all government-sponsored parks systems throughout the country, St. Louis County Parks has grown to provide open social spaces that are the suburban equivalent of the Greek “agora” (social gathering place), where class, ethnic and political divisions dissolve. Ćosić and McQueen’s collaboration gives us a glimpse into the importance of green spaces in providing a diversity of dialogue and experience for our changing suburban audiences.

I want to thank our donors Nancy and Ken Kranzberg for their belief and investment in artistic experimentation in the public realm, and our colleagues at St. Louis County Parks for their willingness to look at their own work in the broad context of contemporary art.

Marilu Knode, Executive Director and Chief Curator

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

PUBLIC OPENING
Adam Aronson Fine Art Center
Thursday, October 15, 5:00–8:00 p.m.

COFFEE + CONVERSATION
Discussion with artist Zlatko Ćosic and Jesse Vogler.
Landscape Architect and Visiting Assistant Professor, Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Art at Washington University in St. Louis
Saturday, October 17, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
Adam Aronson Fine Art Center

HARMONY IN 3
“When men are rightly occupied, their amusement grows out of their work, as the colour petals out of a fruitful flower.”
—John Ruskin, Unto This Last

Art is a luxury product. Any higher cultural or spiritual claim for art is in perpetual conflict with art’s own grubby status as an expensive, rare commodity. Likewise, when there is no true business but the business of making money, we are obliged to dress up in false emotions as a salesman. Art always risks falling into this trap. Getting and spending, we lay waste to the environment, the dancer as movable kinetic sculpture and the worker and the “nature” that is Laumeier Sculpture Park. With combing and cross-pollinate them with the unique spaces of our contemporary art.

For the 2015 Kranzberg Exhibition Series, video artist Zlatko Ćosić and dancer and choreographer Ashley McQueen emphasize the labor that goes into the manicured landscape at Laumeier Sculpture Park. Through a series of dance performances in 2014 culminating in the short film Harmony in 3, Ćosić and McQueen explore the Park’s unique relationship with St. Louis County Parks, highlighting the joy and grit that go into the care and maintenance of our 105-acre landscape. Laumeier’s first “dance on camera” project, the performances of the dancers and the workers in the film mark our continued interest in representing a range of art forms in the Park that encompasses our mission to expand the boundaries of art and to embrace the purpose of our landscape.

Dance is often seen as an art form constrained to the stage; however, through this unique collaboration, the Park has provided a new stage for dance. Based on the principle of movement, dance—like cinema began as an art form centered on the human body, physical performance and communication through action and image. The film combines techniques of documentation and abstraction, pitting the real versus the performer and presenting a narrative that brings to the foreground that which is often overlooked. Harmony in 3 is a celebratory work, organized as a projected triptych that ebbs and flows, shifting among imagery of the dancer, the worker and the “nature” that is Laumeier Sculpture Park. With combing and interlocking views of the micro and macro worlds of the Park, art and nature are literally linked through the language of movement and the story behind (and meaning of) this acreage.

Within their collaboration, Ćosić and McQueen demonstrate the pervasive affinities between these two mediums through the play on the sounds of the environment, the dancer as movable kinetic sculpture and the worker as architect and builder.

Dana Turkovic, Curator of Exhibitions

1. Ruskin, John, Unto This Last and Other Writings (Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 9.