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Contact: Blake Zidell | blake@blakezidell.com

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GOVERNORS ISLAND ARTS ANNOUNCES 2026 SEASON

In works ranging from large-scale sculpture to site-responsive performance, the season considers the idea of movement while anchored by the history, nature, and architecture of its striking setting

Programming includes work from Bahar Behbahani, Chakaia Booker, Alan Michelson, Sweat Variant (Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born), Anna Valdez, and more

NEW YORK (April 29, 2026) – **Governors Island Arts**, the public arts and cultural program presented by the **Trust for Governors Island**, announces its 2026 season. A dynamic meditation on the theme of movement, the season explores the Island as a site of arrival, departure, and continual transformation. Rooted in response to this singular setting, the works activate and bring new meaning to sites spanning the island and beyond: from Colonels Row to the Island’s public orchard to New York’s first hybrid electric ferry. The programming, featuring works by **Bahar Behbahani, Chakaia Booker, Alan Michelson, Sweat Variant (Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born), Anna Valdez**, and more, from reflects both the sweep of the Island’s story and ever-changing landscape and seeks to gather visitors around the rare marvel it is today: a vast public resource between New York’s busy boroughs, brimming with art and opportunities for both invigorating gathering and tranquil reflection.

Movement is considered through numerous art forms and thematic variations in an eclectic multidisciplinary season that looks toward everything from movement of people—whether migration, movement of the body, or movement within ourselves—to movement of goods, of food, of birds. With works ranging from large-scale outdoor sculptures to site-responsive and intimate durational performances, the season invites audiences to consider movement not just as physical travel, but as growth, change, and the ongoing process of becoming.

“Public art has been central to Governors Island’s DNA, from the moment we first opened to the public more than 20 years ago,” said Trust for Governors Island President and CEO **Clare Newman**. “Whether you’re simply riding the ferry over or coming out for a performance, incredible encounters with the arts can be found in every corner of the Island. It’s a privilege to present this season’s calendar alongside our collection of long-term and permanent artworks, and we look forward to welcoming all New Yorkers to the Island this season.”

Governors Island Arts Associate Curator and Producer **Juan Pablo Siles** said, “This season honors the Island’s multifaceted history while creating something entirely new, something that

really can only be done in this extraordinary space. We are grateful to each and every artist, practitioner, and partner helping make this season come to life, and we can't wait to welcome New Yorkers and visitors from around the world to interact with these incredible works, right here in New York Harbor.”

In addition to a collection of long-term and permanent public artworks located throughout the Island's open space, Governors Island Arts will present several new public art commissions and short-term installations this season. Two of these works remind us of the Island's history and trace its transformations, asking what of the past we want to carry forward with us—while another pertinently asks how we can make beauty from that which is discarded. In multidisciplinary artist **Anna Valdez's** mural ***Spring Migration*** (debuting May 2026), the past and future merge within New York State's first hybrid electric ferry, **The Harbor Charger**. Inspired by the Island's verdant natural spaces, the mural depicts the migration of birds alongside the transitions between the Island's inhabitants—from the Indigenous Lenape people to early settlers to military personnel—as the ferry in turn moves passengers to and from the Island. Acclaimed Mohawk artist **Alan Michelson** (Six Nations of the Grand River)'s monumental outdoor sculptural installation ***The Oyster***, commissioned by **More Art** and co-presented with Governors Island Arts and Billion Oyster Project (running from July to November, 2026), will create an amphitheater-like artwork on the Island's Western Promenade that reflects on the parallel erasures of Indigenous lifeways and oyster ecologies in the harbor. Already on view is abstract sculptor **Chakaia Booker's** work wrought from salvaged tires, ***Brick House***, in Colonels Row through 2027 after having first been installed in “The 606” in Chicago.

Curated by **Juan Pablo Siles**, Associate Curator and Producer, Governors Island Arts's multidisciplinary performance series ***Interventions*** presents local, national, and international artists and invites audiences to experience work made and adapted for the immediate environment. With ***Damask Rose: A Gathering*** (May 16), **Bahar Behbahani**, whose research-based practice approaches landscape as a metaphor for politics and poetics, brings a participatory performance-gathering featuring storytellers, poets, musicians, discussions, and more, inspired by traditions surrounding Persian Gardens to Governors Island. **Okwui Okpokwasili** and **Peter Born's** collaborative performing arts practice ***Sweat Variant*** brings to Governors Island its first-ever outdoor iteration of ***my tongue is a blade*** (June 19 & 20), a three-hour-long durational movement work in and around a spinning mirrored structure that asks: What are the limits of our attention and how does that test the strength of our bonds? *my tongue is a blade* is co-presented with **Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC)** as part of their 2026 **River to River Festival**.

Every third Saturday from May through October, Governors Island Arts presents special free programming designed to build community and highlight the unique artistic ecosystem of the Island. This season will include:

- **Red Hook Art Project** and *Cabin's Imprints of Space*, surrounding **Rachel Whiteread's** concrete cast of a cabin facing the Downtown skyline, and inviting visitors to make their own small-scale casts of remembered spaces (June 20).
- **Sally Beati Twin's House Crawl & Parade**, the eco-luminary art parade concluding a day of art-making with participants showcasing costumes, puppets, lanterns, and more created throughout the day (August 15).
- **Sam Van Aken's Orchard Recipes**, sharing historical dishes using fruits harvested from the artist's permanent installation on Governors Island of 102 hybrid fruit trees of antique and heirloom varieties once grown wildly in New York (September 19).
- The closing of the season with **Public Service: Season Closing Dance Party**, with music by Brooklyn-based DJ, producer and instrumentalist **Toribio** and **Mickey Perez**—a DJ whose work combines African, Caribbean, South American & Black American rhythms—with sound powered by the mighty pink speakers of the **Karlala Soundsystem** (October 17).

In addition to programming announced today, two-dozen NYC-based arts and cultural nonprofit organizations will present free exhibits, workshops, public programs, and artist residencies in the Island's historic former military houses as part of Governors Island Arts' annual **Organizations in Residence** program (weekends, May 16-November 1).

Governors Island Arts 2026 Season Programming Schedule

[Public Art]

Chakaia Booker

Brick House, 2015 (short-term loan)

Currently on view

First installed on "The 606," an elevated park and trail in Chicago, Booker's striking sculpture is on view in Colonels Row through 2027. Installed outdoors, the sculpture's scale and durability reflect Booker's commitment to public art and environmental consciousness. By reusing old tires, she encourages viewers to reconsider what people throw away—and how something discarded can be turned into art full of beauty, history, and meaning.

[Public Art]

Anna Valdez

Spring Migration, 2026 (commission)

Debuting May 2026

The Harbor Charger, New York's first hybrid public electric ferry, marks another milestone this spring: the first mural commissioned specifically for a Governors Island ferry. *Spring Migration* explores the seasonal rhythms and transient histories of Governors Island, highlighting the enduring themes of arrival, departure, and sanctuary. From the Indigenous Lenape people who

utilized the land seasonally to the early settlers and generations of military personnel stationed here, the Island has been an ongoing site of transition. Like the birds that visit each spring, these inhabitants have played vital roles in the Island's history and legacy before moving on. Valdez employs illustrations of migratory and non-migratory birds, digitally manipulated photographs of Governors Island, and botanical details to invite viewers across New York Harbor to practice the act of looking closely, beckoning them to find the extraordinary within the temporary.

[Interventions]

Bahar Behbahani

Damask Rose: A Gathering

May 16, 1-5pm

Damask Rose: A Gathering is a spring celebration inspired by the traditions of Persian Gardens. The work centers Damask Rose, an immigrant flora from the East, and honors migration and hospitality. Guided by conceptual ideas of shade, wind, immigrant flora, and diasporic ecological and ancestral knowledge, this gathering brings together nonprofit organizations, food and drink storytellers, herbalists, tea practitioners, musicians, and many other like-minded communities and partners to share a moment of joy and resilience.

[Interventions]

Sweat Variant

my tongue is a blade

June 19 & 20

Co-Presented with Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC)'s River to River Festival

What are the limits of our attention, and how do those limits test the strength of our bonds? *my tongue is a blade* is a three-hour movement performance-practice rooted in relation, memory, and reflection. Four performers commit to remembering one another, holding one another, bearing one another, and sustaining the world that contains them. A rich visual and sonic landscape invites the audience to witness this shared practice and to resonate within it. Created by Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born; performed by Okwui Okpokwasili, Bria Bacon, Kris Lee and AJ Wilmore. Originally commissioned by the Irish Museum of Modern Art as part of Take a Breath, with support from the Sam Gilliam Foundation. Support for Sweat Variant is provided in part by the Mellon and Howard Gilman Foundations, as well as by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project with funding from the Doris Duke Foundation.

[Third Saturdays]

Red Hook Art Project x Cabin

Imprints of Space

June 20

Rachel Whiteread's *Cabin*, a permanent public artwork tucked into the foliage of Discovery Hill, uses a concrete cast of a cabin to prompt retreat and introspection in the viewer. On June's THIRD Saturday, Island visitors will be able to create small-scale casts or impressions of imagined or remembered spaces that hold meaning to them, ultimately forming a collective installation that serves as a shared map of community spaces.

[Third Saturdays]

Sally Beauti Twin

House Crawl & Parade

August 15

Sally Beauti Twin's signature eco-luminary art parade will take over Nolan Park and Colonels Row, with participants DIY-ing their own costumes, luminaries, and puppets before engaging in a house-to-house parade that honors the flora, fauna, and celestial bodies of Governors Island.

[Third Saturdays]

Sam Van Aken

Orchard Recipes

September 19

Sam Van Aken hosts a gastronomical afternoon gathering at his expansive Open Orchard permanent public artwork on Governors Island. The artist will share historical dishes using fruits harvested from the orchard itself, which contains hundreds of heirloom fruit varieties that were once grown widely throughout New York but have largely disappeared due to climate change and industrialized agriculture.

[Third Saturdays]

Public Service: Season Closing Dance Party

October 17

Close out the 2026 Governors Island Arts season with *Public Service*, a (primarily) outdoor dance party that's for the people, by the people. Featuring music by Toribio and Mickey Perez, with sound powered by Karlala Soundsystem.

Funding Credits

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About Governors Island Arts

Governors Island Arts, the public arts and cultural program presented by the Trust for Governors Island, creates transformative encounters with art for all New Yorkers, inviting artists and researchers to engage with the issues of our time in the context of the Island's layered histories, environments, and architecture. Governors Island Arts achieves this mission through temporary and long-term public art installations and exhibitions, an annual Organizations in Residence program in the Island's historic houses, and the curated multidisciplinary INTERVENTIONS performance series. Learn more at www.govisland.org/arts.