SHEDDING A LIGHT

The Shed, a dynamic cultural center, opens in New York’s Hudson Yards development on April 5. Its objective is to commission innovative works by risk-taking artists of all genres, including the talent in this portfolio, who will headline the inaugural year.

The year-one program builds on that momentum with new work by internationally recognized artists, musicians, dancers, composers and writers, from Gerhard Richter to Trisha Donnelly to Arvo Pärt. Sharing the limelight will be a crop of emerging names, including a group of artists and collectives participating in the Open Call program.

What all the far-reaching commissions have in common, aside from being world première, is a theme of collaboration, whether among several artists, among a long list of co-creators or simply between maker and space. As part of the inaugural events, poet Anne Carson will debut a theater piece, Norma Jean Baker of Troy, directed by Kat Mitchell and starring the actor Ben Whishaw and the opera singer Renée Fleming, while musician Björk will collaborate with director Larissa Marolt on Cornucopia, a show running May 6 to June 1.

“We want to be a platform for the creation of art, one where artists are unconfined by the physical environment or the institutional program,” says Dan Doctoroff, chairman of The Shed’s board of directors. Doctoroff, who was deputy mayor for economic development and rebuilding under Bloomberg, has been involved with the project since its infancy. A panel between Doctoroff and Poots underscores The Shed’s mission of inclusivity, which will manifest through a series of outreach initiatives. “It was important that this not be a temple of culture that you have to ascend into. This [is meant] to be a home for everybody,” says Doctoroff.

The Shed’s physical space—named the Bloomberg Building, thanks to a $75 million donation from the former mayor’s foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies—has made flexibility its guiding principle. Designed by Bjarke Ingels Group in collaboration with Rockwell Group, the building houses a 500-seat theater, 25,000 square feet of gallery space, a rehearsal room and an artist lab. The much-discussed shed, which sits on six-foot-tall wheels, moves over the building when not in use, but it can be deployed in a matter of minutes to create the McCourt: an enclosed 17,000-square-foot hall complete with light, sound and temperature control.

Elizabeth Diller, a founding partner at Diller—Sheldrake and the firm that was also behind the resurrection of the nearby High Line—refers to the architectural approach as a “space-on-demand” strategy. “Rather than thinking of the building as an object, we thought about it as infrastructure,” says Diller. “It’s a big machine for making art in—it’s not intimidating; you can kick it around.”

So far, The Shed has raised about $488 million of its $550 million goal, including a recent $27.5 million gift from Jonathan and Lizzie Tisch. The project has come a long way from its days as a hypothetical speck on a redevelopment map. “We commission, take risks and offer artists the chance to create unrealized projects,” says Poots. “We let them explore ideas that even they don’t know where [the ideas] will go—and there is no enough of that opportunity in any city.”

BY NATALIA RACHLIN   PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEREMY LIEBMAN
SOUNDTRACK OF AMERICA

“This show is about the now, about the future,” says artist and director Steve McQueen of Soundtrack of America, which will inaugurate The Shed’s performance program on April 5. The five-night concert series, which McQueen developed in partnership with producers Quincy Jones and Dion “No I.D.” Wilson, NYU music professor Maureen Mahon and others, will capture the impact of African-American music on contemporary culture.

Each evening will feature different emerging artists, from Moses Sumney to Kelsey Lu to Smino, all representing the next generation of torchbearers for blues, jazz, gospel, R&B, rock ‘n’ roll, and hip-hop. “You’ll experience the new, fresh talents of today, but also how they carry on a tradition from the past,” McQueen says.

A QUIET EVENING OF DANCE

American dancer and choreographer William Forsythe is considered one of the preeminent dance makers of his generation, and his work has been performed by leading ballet companies around the world. In collaboration with London’s dance-specialized Sadler’s Wells Theatre, The Shed will bring one of Forsythe’s latest productions—A Quiet Evening of Dance, which premiered in London last fall—to New York this year.

The performance features Forsythe’s latest work alongside select repertory pieces, with only the dancers’ own breathing for accompaniment. “The Shed offers artists the space to be creative, to make new work on their own terms,” says Forsythe. “We would allow artists to be creative, to stay creative, to never stop, as creativity is our hope in a troubled world.”

AGNES DENES: ABSOLUTES AND INTERMEDIATES

Hungarian-born, New York–based conceptual artist Agnes Denes made a name for herself in the 1960s and ’70s with large-scale projects that address environmental and ecological issues. In the fall, The Shed will host the largest New York City survey to date of Denes’s oeuvre, including A Forest for New York, which was conceived in 2013 and features 100,000 trees meant to clean the air and ground water.

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Below: William Forsythe at the Samuel B. & David Rose Building at Lincoln Center.
MAZE
Co-directed by the street-dance pioneer Reggie Roc Gray and theater artist Kaneza Schaal, Maze will be a politically charged dance performance combined with innovative set and lighting design. “The 21st century has demanded and provided new models for how humans can successfully coexist, and Maze will entertain the whirlpools, complexities and impasses that lie there within,” says Schaal.

The performances, running July 23 to August 17, will feature dancers and teaching artists from FlexNYC, Gray’s citywide dance-activism program, which has been in partnership with The Shed for the past three years. “I think basically The Shed is leading by example: They’re saying, OK, let’s not be afraid, let’s move forward, let’s bolster diversity,” says Gray. “You just never know what you’re going to create when you gather all these people. That’s when the magic happens.”

IN FRONT OF ITSELF
The Shed's first visual-arts commission was formalized in the planning phase, when Alex Poots and senior program adviser Hans Ulrich Obrist—the curator and critic who directs London’s Serpentine Galleries—asked artist Lawrence Weiner to create a permanent installation. The result: In Front of Itself, a 20,000-square-foot text-based work embedded into the ground out front. “This building, by its own nature, is in front of itself,” says Weiner. “When you ask me text-based things about being inside/writing/language/making sculptures, it’s like you say what you mean.” Weiner will continue to help shape the institution’s visual-arts programming, which also includes The Shed’s first visual-arts commission.

In Front of Itself

JOAN JONAS AND HÉLÈNE GRIMAUD
Slated to debut in the fall is a newly announced, as-yet-unnamed collaboration between pioneering American video artist Joan Jonas and French classical pianist Hélène Grimaud. A trailblazer in the genre of video art, Jonas will combine projected video imagery with a live performance by Grimaud. “The Shed connected us, and it was an interesting choice to put the two of us together,” says Jonas. “It’s one of those things that people never know what will happen when you gather all the people. That’s when the magic happens.”

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—REGGIE ROC GRAY
“We wanted it to be flexible without being indecipherable, a memory machine of a space that offers a whole range of experiences.”
—David Rockwell

**Powerplay**
Powerplay will mix hip-hop, spoken word, dance and moving image into a woman-centered show, organized under the direction of rising multimedia artist Latasha Alcindor. “The performance is really about how we can transform radical joy into power,” says Alcindor. Participants will include student artists from The Shed’s Dis Obey program for high schoolers, who explore protest and creative action through writing, storytelling and visual art workshops. “Our performance is the [same week as] Björk’s,” notes Alcindor. “To be able to say I’m on the same stage as someone that iconic, it’s just insane—and it says everything you need to know about The Shed’s point of view.”

**The Architecture**
From the start, The Shed’s home—the Bloomberg Building—has stood as a symbol of the institution’s ambitions toward a bold, flexible, unfixed venue. “We wanted it to be flexible without being indecipherable, a memory machine of a space that offers a whole range of experiences,” says David Rockwell, whose firm, Rockwell Group, collaborated with the project’s lead architects, Diller Scofidio + Renfro. Elizabeth Diller, founding partner of DS+R, recalls feeling a sense of urgency when the firm responded to The Shed’s request for proposals at the height of the financial crisis in 2008. “It was precisely because the economy was so bad that it became more important than ever to think about how culture needs to be protected, because it’s always the first thing to go when budgets get cut,” she says. Elizabeth Diller and David Rockwell at the Bloomberg Building.

**Requiem**
Jonas Mekas, the pioneer of experimental cinema, was working on a commission for The Shed at the time of his death in January at age 96. Mekas’s new work will premiere this fall, accompanying Greek-Russian conductor Teodor Currentzis and his orchestra and chorus, MusicAeterna, which will perform Giuseppe Verdi’s Messa da Requiem as part of the group’s North-American debut. “Poignantly, Requiem was [Jonas’s] final work,” says Poots. “He and his Anthology Film Archives will continue to enrich our world.”

**The Shed**
Jane Alkins, the executive director of the Shed, is one of the visionaries behind the Bloomberg Building. “We wanted it to be flexible without being indecipherable, a memory machine of a space that offers a whole range of experiences,” says David Rockwell, whose firm, Rockwell Group, collaborated with the project’s lead architects, Diller Scofidio + Renfro. Elizabeth Diller, founding partner of DS+R, recalls feeling a sense of urgency when the firm responded to The Shed’s request for proposals at the height of the financial crisis in 2008. “It was precisely because the economy was so bad that it became more important than ever to think about how culture needs to be protected, because it’s always the first thing to go when budgets get cut,” she says. Elizabeth Diller and David Rockwell at the Bloomberg Building.

**Aquarium**
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**The American minimalist composer Steve Reich has collaborated with German artist Gerhard Richter in one of two immersive performances running April 6 through June 2. Reich’s original score will be played by a live ensemble in one of The Shed’s gallery spaces displaying works by Richter, including a film the artist made with director Corinna Belz. “When you work on something like this it forces you to think of new ways of composing,” says Reich. “I’m not a movie-music composer. I haven’t done this kind of thing before. But then again, working with Richter is not your usual kind of movie, either.” The other half of the series pairs Richter’s work with the music of the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt.**

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**MANUAL OVERRIDE**

As The Shed’s first guest curator, the writer and critic Nora N. Khan is the driving force behind Manual Override, a group exhibition opening in the fall that highlights the work of artist and filmmaker Lynn Hershman Leeson. The show, which pairs the Basel-based filmmaker Harvard Leson’s The Complete Electronic Diaries 1984–2018—a series that foreshadowed the interplay of personal history and digital identity—with Hershman Leeson’s The Complete Electronic Diaries 1984–2018, will feature the final installment of Hershman Leeson’s The Complete Electronic Diaries 1984–2018—a series that foreshadowed the interplay of personal history and digital identity—and showcase research from her collaboration with scientists and engineers. “I like to work on the edge, with projects and interfaces that have yet to be developed,” says Hershman Leeson. “In a way, working with The Shed was a bit like that.”

Taking inspiration from Hershman Leeson’s cross-disciplinary approach, the exhibition will also feature other artists who have been paired with programmers, artificial-intelligence experts and geneticists to create new work. Right, from left: The Shed’s senior curator, Emma Enderby, artist Lynn Hershman Leeson and writer and critic Nora N. Khan at New York’s Bridget Donahue gallery.

**DRAGON SPRING PHOENIX RISE**

Combining aerial choreography, martial arts and dance, the so-called kung fu musical Dragon Spring Phoenix Rise will burst onto the stage June 22 to July 27. The over-the-top, genre-defying production was co-created by Chinese-born, New York–based director Chen Shi-Zheng, long known for his multidisciplinary approach to commissions for the likes of London’s Royal Opera House—and the scion of Taiwanese martial arts legend Shi Zheng’s Dragon Spring Phoenix Rise. The show will also feature remixed versions of songs by the Australian pop sensation Sia and production and costume design by Tim Yip, who worked on Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. Below: Chen Shi-Zheng at scenic designer Meredith Ries’s Brooklyn studio, with an early model from Dragon Spring Phoenix Rise.

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—LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON