

KARBA WAI KER LINIMANNED DRONE 10 23 25-05 03 26



**OZYMANDIAS**  
**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Front cover:  
**Charles Keck (1875–1956)**  
Stonewall Jackson sculpture  
bronze and granite  
Charlottesville, Virginia  
Dedicated 1921, decommissioned 2021.

Rear cover:  
**Kara Walker (b. 1969)**  
*Unmanned Drone*, 2023  
Bronze statue made from Charles  
Keck's decommissioned statue of  
Stonewall Jackson.  
Photograph: Ruben Díaz

**KARA WALKER**  
**UNMANNED DRONE**  
**10.23.2025 – 5.3.2026**  
**THE BRICK**

**INTRODUCTION**

In 2021, Kara Walker was deeded a decommissioned Confederate monument from which to make a new work of art. The monument was an equestrian statue of "Stonewall" Jackson that stood next to the Albemarle County Courthouse in Charlottesville, Virginia. Unveiled in 1921, it was a work by Charles Keck. At thirteen feet high, and sixteen feet long, the bronze statue portrayed Jackson spurring his steed, "Little Sorrel," into the heat of battle.

For her new work, titled *Unmanned Drone*, Walker dissected Keck's statue into discrete fragments, reshuffling them in Hieronymous Bosch-like fashion. Altered beyond recognition, it is, however, still horse and rider. Instead of charging into battle, Walker's headless horseman wanders in Civil War purgatory, dragging its sword over a ruined battlefield.

*Unmanned Drone* is part of MONUMENTS, an exhibition concurrently presented here and at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA. MONUMENTS is an unprecedented pairing of decommissioned historical monuments and powerful works by nineteen artists. A unique collaboration between The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (MOCA) and The Brick, the exhibition responds to fundamental and ongoing histories of the post-Civil War United States.

## ONLY NOBLE FEELINGS

### Kara Walker in Conversation with Hamza Walker

September 11, 2025

**Hamza Walker:** Well, thank you for agreeing to do this.  
I wrote down questions to keep it succinct.

**Kara Walker:** Okay, great. And I wrote down answers.

**HW:** The work is very straightforward, in my opinion.  
I think the sculpture is really direct. That's its power.  
You could go down a Civil War rabbit hole if you want  
to—I mean, I sent you that copy of Stonewall's biography.

**KW:** Mhmm. It is a doorstop [Laughter]. It has been  
catalogued, and it sits on the shelf with the other, lesser  
biographies of Stonewall Jackson.

The approach that I was taking had more to do with  
the fact of the sculpture, not the myth of the man. We  
can go into the legacy of the man and make all kinds of  
biographies and sculptures and paintings and what have  
you, but this is less about his specificity—as a Christian,  
as a soldier, as a legendarily stoic and awkward man.

**HW:** The amputated arm...

**KW:** Yeah, friendly fire was the cause of his downfall. It  
seems like he was always misinterpreted somehow.

**HW:** He was also shot in the hand. Was that friendly fire as  
well?

**KW:** I'm not sure if that was friendly fire. We should read  
that book [Laughter].

**HW:** It's interesting to ask Black artists to deal with these  
[Confederate] figures. Walter Price had a very similar  
approach as you; he didn't want to get into the myth of  
the man.

**KW:** Well, the myth of the man is the thing that created the  
sculptures, right? And they're all about these sometimes  
misapplied desires—a desire for heroism in a time of  
poverty and abysmal lack of faith. I wanted to deal with  
the material in a way that was also about the act of  
separation- separating man from horse and man from  
myth.

**HW:** When we visited the storage site to look at the  
monument, you brought your sketchbook and were fast  
at work. If you could go back in your mind's eye, what  
were your initial impressions of the monument when you  
first encountered it?



**KW:** I was thinking Beaux Arts, influenced by a late 19th century classicism. As an equestrian [sculpture], it's got movement. We see a lot of those—the horse is there, the man is there. This one has a lot of angles to it, which I thought made it—in the realm of that kind of statuary—beautiful. It's aiming towards a kind of lyricism. *Beautiful* is not the right word, but I think I'm prone to that kind of romanticism, of the destroyed monument anyway. This was "Ozymandias," the Percy Bysshe Shelley poem—the ruins of empire [Laughter]. We're surrounded by all this detritus from the other monuments coming down...

**HW:** The ruins of civilization.

**KW:** The ruins of—well, I don't know if it's *civilization*. It is definitely the ruins of an idea of completeness that those sculptures were holding down. I don't know what I was thinking about. It's like, oh man, I'm going to have to do this... I'm going to have to think about this. Shoot. I was just ready to retire, be lazy.

**HW:** [Laughter].

**KW:** Yes, yes, always. Well, maybe not always, but the pandemic had its impact...

**HW:** You, of all people, know how much work there is to do [Laughter].

**KW:** I could never stop [Laughter].

**HW:** Keck's statue was subject to a violent remixing. As a result, the work appears expressionist in bearing. Yet, where you chose to make cuts follows a certain logic. Could you tell me about the process of disassembly?

**KW:** Going back to the question of how much historical research is important to me, in this moment, with this piece, I did read about [Jackson's] horse. The horse is a major part of the dynamism of the piece. I was thinking about cutting it up and butchery, that, in some regards, this act of reclaiming the sculpture required an act of butchery. So, what are the proper cuts that one makes if one was to butcher a horse? I was looking up diagrams that you have in slaughterhouses and what have you, for the best cuts.

**HW:** Right.

**KW:** So, I used that initially, thinking of collage. How am I going to think about this horse, first of all? I didn't find so much relevant material on how to butcher a man, but I'm sure that there are people who have thought it out.

The other thing that I used—for a half a second—was the AI imaging program [Dall-E]. Everybody was having a panic attack about it because you could put in prompts and it would spit out what it thought you were talking about. Those were very uncanny and disturbing images, with too many fingers and too many eyes. I had, at one point, done a few monuments in that program to see what those would look like, and they were awful in the way that the computer can make them awful, a melding of distorted forms and shapes.

Although I didn't use that directly, it was part of the process. I still feel like I'm a very two-dimensional girl, so when I go into these 3D spaces and have to think about the piece in the round, especially a piece that I don't have immediate access to. It was in storage, then it was moved to the foundry, so in the interim, I had to try and think about it. First, I was cutting out two-dimensional representations of it. And I was like, is this a collage? But I needed to see what it looked like in 3D. So, I used the AI program, and that was also still flat. And then I had [fabricator] Mike Koller make the 3D model in the computer so that I could actually use those cuts, take it apart, and reconfigure it in multiple different ways. We did a lot of puzzling.

The 3D rendering started to make the most sense to me because it rendered one-hundred different iterations of the sculpture. So then, which one actually conveys something beyond it just having been reconfigured? Where does it begin to take on a new life that embodies this question of its use value as a monument, as a holder of white supremacist desire, as a relic of the Lost Cause? It's holding all these ideas that don't work in the republic that we live in.

**HW:** Right, right. I like "use value" no longer operating, its disassembly, the monument no longer functioning as a symbol.

**KW:** To being no longer functional, but not, unfortunately, no longer present. The monument is no longer functional, but it's still very much walking among us, perhaps louder than it had been in quite some time.

**HW:** Yes, exactly. We have four monuments from Baltimore

[in the exhibition at MOCA] and I grew up with those things. One of them was right behind my middle school. The things were dormant.

**KW:** Mm-hm, yes.

**HW:** But at the same time, I knew because of Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Confederate flags and all that stuff, that it was always there. So, it could be stirred up, you know?

**KW:** Yes.

**HW:** Even though nobody even paid attention to these things anymore; they were just fixtures, urban fixtures.

**KW:** Right. It's part of a park. You might sit on the base of it and have chips while you're waiting for your mom [Laughter].

**HW:** Exactly. Meet me at the statue, the one with the wings on it [Laughter]. So, what you were saying about them speaking louder than they have before, it's like, oh yeah, the hornet's nest just got kicked in this moment.

**KW:** Exactly. I had kind of forgotten, in the ensuing years, that the Unite the Right rally happened *because* the city council was going to take the monuments down. It wasn't that they took them down because of what happened at the rally—it's that the hornets were whipped up into a fury.

**HW:** Absolutely. It's interesting to remind people of the timeline. New Orleans' monuments came down so that when the Charlottesville City Council voted to take theirs down, monument defenders were like, "holy shit, this is actually going to happen." It hadn't happened before. The Unite the Right rally happened in advance of what had been voted on as the fate of the monument.

**KW:** The *thought* of them coming down, yes. Fear is so operative. It is symbolism—the fear of a loss of symbolic power.

**HW:** Completely. One of the places I've tried to stay out of—but at the same time cannot avoid—is some kind of Freudian rabbit hole, a psychological dimension of the Lost Cause, about where this stuff comes from and who has some power and authority to maintain it. But the issue of loss and mourning—you can't suddenly say all these [Confederate soldiers] died for nothing.

**KW:** Right.

**HW:** You mean, all these [Confederate soldiers] died for Black people they thought they were going to maintain control over? That's just not acceptable. People psychically could not deal with this and so they created an entire mythology around why all of these people died.

**KW:** Yeah, exactly. It was really fucking dark and depressing. Everything got burned. There was some attempt to get order, and some really opportunistic, unscrupulous people who came through and took advantage of [the South's] loss. You needed something to rally around. And the reason I'm thinking about this right now—and the reason I'm even giving the Lost Cause softer treatment than it deserves, really—is that I had this encounter with someone recently, talking about where we are, right now, politically with Trump in power and this march towards fascism. But, yeah, it's grievance.

**HW:** But back to your work. I said to somebody yesterday that the work appears violent, but there is a logic to how you've chosen to dissect this thing. You wanted to remove the rider from the horse.

**KW:** I mean, I thought about the head removal as an act of depersonalization. Taking the Stonewall Jackson effigy out of the equation for a little while. This is equestrian; it's heroic: soldier body, healthy horse body walking atop the broken wagon wheels and cannonballs of war. The work rights the horse in a way. The horse becomes more of an upright figure.

**HW:** Right, but there are areas where you made decisions that weren't aesthetic choices, but driven by the logic of disassembly, like the legs. When you took the rider off the horse—cutting his feet out of the stirrups—it looks like you cut the feet off, but again, that was simply to remove him.

**KW:** Yes, so we had to take [Jackson] off, and then take him apart, and take the parts of the horse that could be removed. I still needed three points of contact in order to make the whole thing stand; and the hooves were already attached to the ground. Some of those points have remained and some have not. It was an effort to move everything up into a human standing position.

**HW:** That was my next question; the work is decidedly totemic, yet you kept the footprint of the original base, with three points of contact between the hooves and



Dedication ceremony for Stonewall Jackson monument in Charlottesville, VA, October 19, 1921. The statue was unveiled during a Confederate reunion.





the ground. Could you tell me about your compositional choices? Or put another way, could you tell me about reassembly?

**KW:** Like I said, we did a fair amount of assemblage on the computer initially, with a 3D program. We determined what parts were going to be coming off and identifying, this is a saddle, this is a saddlebag, this is a foot, stirrup, rein. There are some extra things that were harder to account for that would be more improvisational in real time and space.

There were a fair amount of aesthetic decisions. If we maintain these points of contact, so the whole thing doesn't topple over or crush somebody, what are the options? And there were a lot of different iterations. I had a few of them floating around because they were interesting. I think some of my initial versions were more narrative. Things were moving across laterally and it would sort of create a story.

**HW:** You took it off of the X-axis and you went to the Y-axis.

**KW:** Yeah, I'm not trying to make another story necessarily. I'm not trying to tell the story of what happened to it somehow by having identifiable parts, like say, the sword is reaching across from the hand, and the hand is attached to the sword. It creates a kind of physicality, but it also starts to tell a story that you could read linearly. I wanted to avoid that.

I think that the stuff we're parsing through—the Lost Cause, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, these symbolic assertions of white supremacy—it's in the bloodstream, in a way. That's really a horror [Laughter] and it shouldn't look like a horror. It should *become* a horror. You know? [Laughter]

**HW:** I like that [Laughter].

**KW:** When it started to take shape, I was like, this is something that is actually terrifying to me. It isn't just this benign horse and rider who symbolize these things, but it is this horror that has been enacted over our shared history, and our grandparents' shared history, our great-grandparents, and our great-greats. It looms.

**HW:** That's beautiful. It's a beautiful work of art. I mean, first of all, it really is a masterpiece. I mean, I feel weird even saying that.

**KW:** Mistresspiece.

**HW:** A *mistresspiece*, a *massapiece* [Laughter].

**KW:** Don't say that [Laughter].

**HW:** Kara and her massapieces. Bad children, we're bad.

**KW:** Bad, bad, bad.

**HW:** Bad children. Our great-great- our great-greats are just like what did you just...

**KW:** Upside the head! [Laughter]

**HW:** But I'm describing it as that because of what it communicates. It's visceral. And to have a work that is sudden, it's visceral, but at the same time legible as harboring something that you knew was there, but to which there was no form given.

**KW:** Right, and who could give that form? Charles Keck could never have given that form to that thing. He was the consummate sculptor of statuary. There were only noble feelings and we haven't got many of those.

**HW:** Oh, my God. Kara, I don't know. Sometimes I feel like, can we start a band?

**KW:** Sure, I've got the synthesizers.

**HW:** Our first album we call "Only Noble Feelings Allowed." It doesn't matter what the album sounds like [Laughter].

So, true/false: while the Stonewall Jackson monument has been subjected to a violent remixing, it is a violence already inherent to the monument. Celebrating figures who fought to maintain a white ethnostate, Confederate monuments were erected during the advent of legislation denying African Americans their civil rights. In this respect.

**KW:** True [Laughter]. Sorry, go on.

**HW:** In this respect, they represent a campaign of sustained and violent oppression, masquerading as virtue. All you've done is make that which is implicit, palpably explicit.

**KW:** That is true. And I guess that's what I was trying to get at a minute ago in saying that it was all horror. Why should it look like it was anything other than?

**HW:** Why should it look like anything other than it *is*.

**KW:** Yes, and I think in some way, what's true of horror—although I don't really partake in that genre very much—but I think the thing that makes it affecting is that it's a horror for everybody involved. I've been listening to a fair amount of Flannery O'Connor; [her writing is] not so much the horror genre, but psychologically, the knots people are tying inside of themselves to adhere to a belief they think is true and right. And the wrongness of their thinking, the illogic, and the wrong that they do to one another... It's so fascinating, especially in the Southern Gothic landscape. It's Gothic because of the stiffness that people hold on to, an idea of place itself.

**HW:** You said the horse, Little Sorrel, is a very important part of what is going on in this statue. Can you tell me a little bit about your—can I call it a fascination or interest in Little Sorrel?

**KW:** Sure. Little Sorrel's history was just so linked to ours, let's say [Laughter]. A trusted, non-human entity. There was a Big Sorrel and then Little Sorrel was the gelding. Jackson preferred the little horse because it was more stoic and didn't get freaked out in battle. But he was six-foot-three or something. He was a big guy, so he apparently looked awkward on the horse. It didn't really factor in [the monument] so much, but I think it's interesting that people remarked on the horse because the horse was small for him.

After Stonewall Jackson died of his injuries—the amputation and everything—the horse was sent back to live with Jackson's widow, but she couldn't take care of the horse. So, she sent the horse to pasture, to retirement, a veteran's home or something. Everybody loved this celebrated horse of Stonewall Jackson, so they would take bits of his mane and his tail as relics. He'd get trotted out to these veterans' events and Memorial Day parades, and people would take his hair so he was looking threadbare already.

Little Sorrel lived to an old age, and someone built a harness for him to keep his back legs upright so he could be trotted out. I don't know if this is fact or if this is apocryphal, but somebody either shot-off a gun or

did something that caused the horse to bolt with this harness and break his back. He had to be put down.

This beloved animal is then treated to a last indignity, which is to preserve his skin by taxidermy. His taxidermied, threadbare, hair-picked hide is in the Virginia Military Institute in a vitrine *still*. He doesn't look noble, I just want to say [Laughter]. He's a bit mangy, as horses go.

**HW:** I mean, the photographs I've seen—not pretty. Not how I'd want to be remembered.

**KW:** Not at all. I think there was some issue about where the horse's bones were. There was an issue about where Stonewall Jackson's left arm is. It was lost, buried and unearthened, and then reburied, and nobody knows where it is. There's this weird, zombie-like presence of this horse and rider, like floating around in the psyche of Americans who are interested in this kind of thing. So again, *that* horror show... This desperate need to hold on to the piece of history, even if it's depriving this horse of any shred of dignity. This hunger, this voraciousness. The horse becomes the object again.

**HW:** What you were saying about the bones of the horse and Stonewall Jackson's arm—reliquary of man and horse? What does that symbolize?

**KW:** It's so pre-Christian. He was such an upstanding Christian man, apparently [Laughter].

**HW:** I think of it as supremely Christian: reliquary, making pilgrimages to the saints. You have the finger of the saint, the hair of the saint, the bits and pieces.

**KW:** I guess it's just not Protestant [Laughter]. It's very Christian but not Protestant.

**HW:** It speaks to the human impulse in general. The relics are stand-ins. We want fetish objects. That's a normal impulse, Christianity or no.

Last question: could you tell me about the title *Unmanned Drone*?

**KW:** I mean, it just popped into my head, honestly. I thought I was going to construct the title, as I often do—make a wordy explanation of what all was happening here and how much you're going to love it that I am happy to give you an opportunity to experience this



amazing work, which we can still say [Laughter]. But I really felt what the object was intended to do—as an emblem, as a marker of a civil war that didn't have our best interests at heart—was a drone. It situated itself in our lives as a benign act of ongoing warfare. It's kind of an easy pun, in a way, because he's been unmanned, but there he is, again, a rejoinder to the initial force or meaning.

**HW:** There's what we now call a "drone," right, but the other drone is a continuous monotonous sound in the background, right?

**KW:** Yeah, ongoing. A constant hum. It made sense in the same way as the form the final sculpture has taken. When I saw it coming together, both digitally and then physically, we made some changes that needed to be made because it's tons of material versus a disembodied digital space. But I noticed the weight of it; it presses on you when you're looking up at it. I don't know, it made sense in a similar way. I liked the effect of it physically on my own body. It looms. Unmanned Drone. It's a little more poetic, maybe, than my usual titles.

**HW:** I mean, it could take you in so many directions at once, but it's a tight direction.

**KW:** I'm glad to hear it. I was having some internal conversation with an imaginary person in my head, and I was trying to remember this phrase. It had to do with the removal of the memory of somebody, or having somebody in ancient Rome stricken from the historical record. My internal interlocutor was questioning why I had not just stricken [Jackson] from the record altogether. The term was *damnatio memoriae*. That's something else. That's a different concept. It's a different word.

**HW:** That actually gets to something really great about the piece. Two [Confederate monuments] from Charlottesville are going to be in the show—your piece and the Robert E. Lee that is melted down. Somebody brought up the notion of you melting the Jackson monument down and I said, "no, Kara's piece is specifically still the object." To melt it down is an erasure that would have been a benevolent death, as opposed to the horror, right? There are far worse fates than melting it down [Laughter].

**KW:** This is one of them, I know. The worst fate sometimes of melting is making a worse sculpture out of this [Laughter]. Maybe I have also made a worse sculpture, but it's a different sculpture.

**HW:** People ask, "What is it like?" I'm like, "well, she reassembled it."

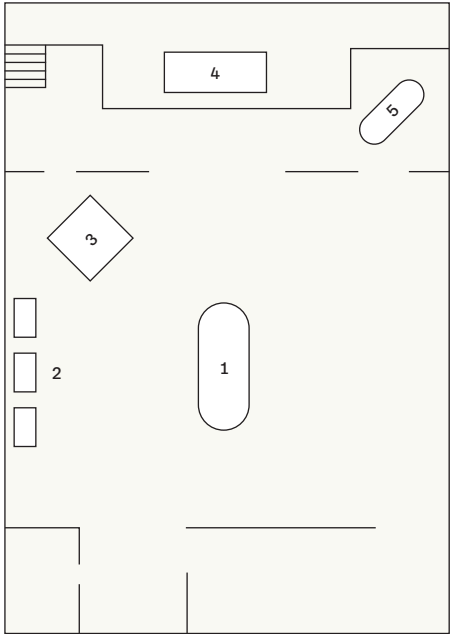
**KW:** Yes, it's reanimated. I think, in the world of voodoo, or maybe this is just from the *Serpent and the Rainbow* [the 1988 horror-fantasy film], but in the voodoo zombie myth, the idea of bringing a person into some half-life requires a controller. It requires somebody who not only has zombified them but is keeping them in a state of dependence. I don't know if I'm doing that with *Unmanned Drone*, but there's something about reanimating the parts that I need and doing away with the parts that have agency or something [Laughter].

Little Sorrel, taxidermied and displayed at the Virginia Military Institute.



Checklist

- 1. *Unmanned Drone*, 2023  
156 × 132 × 56  
Bronze statue made from Charles Keck’s 1921 statue of Stonewall Jackson, which stood in Charlottesville, Virginia and was decommissioned in 2021
- 2. *Preparatory drawings*, 2022–23  
Various dimensions (located in vitrines)
- 3. *Star Spangled*, 2023  
42 × 86 × 92  
Lithichrome paint on sandblasted granite, steel base
- 4. *Ghost*, 2023  
36 × 91 × 66  
Lithichrome paint on sandblasted granite, steel base
- 5. *Tread*, 2023  
14 × 122 × 50  
Lithichrome paint on sandblasted granite, steel base



*Unmanned Drone* is part of MONUMENTS, an exhibition co-organized by The Brick and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

October 23, 2025—May 3, 2026

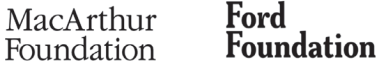
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