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FORMAN ARTS INITIATIVE, MURAL ARTS AND THE FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA PRESENT
KARYN OLIVIER'S *SIT WITH IT*
DECEMBER 9, 2026 – MARCH 14, 2027

An ambitious public artwork highlighting Philadelphia's championing of the right to knowledge and free expression.



Karyn Olivier, image credit: Ryan Collerd

Philadelphia, PA (Wed, Sept 9, 2026) – Forman Arts Initiative (FAI), Mural Arts Philadelphia (MAP) and the Free Library of Philadelphia (FLP) are pleased to announce ***Sit With It***, a new public art piece that will serve as an interactive sculpture and video projection celebrating Philadelphia's commitment to free speech and liberated knowledge. Created by Philadelphia-based artist **Karyn Olivier**, this is the third annual project from FAI and MAP's **Public Works** program, a residency program embedding artists within Philadelphia civic agencies. Presented in FLP's Parkway Central Library lobby, *Sit With It* will be accompanied by a series of public programs, workshops, and panel discussions. The project's centerpiece, a site-specific sculpture and video projection constructed from historically-banned books throughout history, will be on display in the Parkway Central lobby for visitors to enjoy and will be **on view through the winter months, with an opening date of Wednesday, December 9th.**

“As a Philadelphian and a lifelong library user, imagining a public art work for the Free Library of Philadelphia has been one of my favorite projects. The modern library is about so much more than borrowing books—it is a place of community, sanctuary, and learning. Members can borrow musical instruments and games; gain financial literacy skills; learn computer coding; research their genealogy; digitize analog photos; read rare books and manuscripts... Under all this—the sheer volume, diversity and importance of the library's offerings—I felt that *access to knowledge for everyone* is its core mission, and it is one we can never afford to take for granted.” -

Karyn Olivier, Public Works Artist-in-Residence

Sit With It is a site-specific installation erecting a whimsical staircase out of book titles that have been banned at some point in history across the world. The sculpture mimics and inverts the Parkway Central Branch's iconic staircase by constructing a temporary monument to knowledge that is or has historically been at risk. Viewers are invited to sit on the sculpture and view a video projection presenting a slow cascade of text down the building's marble stairs—the first line of every banned book represented in Olivier's installation is mapped along the rise of each step on the staircase. Olivier has been in residence with the Free Library for over a year, meeting with a range of staff from all over the library system's 50+ branches. This installation brings form and a space to contemplate the devotion each of those library staff members embody in their work everyday.

“No books are banned at our city's libraries, but across the United States there are libraries where residents are denied the right to read certain works. I wanted this public artwork to reference the beauty and power of these words that have already been denied to some fellow readers, and remind us that freedom of expression is the foundation on which our democracy sits.” - Karyn Olivier

“Generations of Philadelphians have begun their artistic journeys in their neighborhood public libraries, where inspiration and learning are at the core of our mission,” said **Kelly Richards, President and Director of the Free Library of Philadelphia**. “At the Free Library, our collections and staff support artists in pursuing artistic excellence. We are thrilled to welcome an artist of Karyn Olivier's caliber into our library system and to support her in creating new work that demonstrates the vital role the freedom to read plays in an artist's craft, imagination, and growth.”

In collaboration with the Free Library of Philadelphia, Olivier connected with different staff groups at library branches around the city through a series of internal roundtable discussions, speaking with librarians, library assistants, security and maintenance staff. Her engagement provided intentional moments for staff to step out of their everyday workflows and share reflections on the library, both as staff and as Philadelphians. What drew them to working at the library? Where do they find the most joy as well as the biggest challenges in their work? What anecdotes can they share about stewarding people through the pursuit of knowledge? These questions became a backdrop for Olivier's own confrontation with the state of literature and history at the federal level, with books being banned, histories being erased, and knowledge related marginalized identities and cultures being politicized. *Sit With It* reflects on these questions in the larger context of the United States in the immediate aftermath of the nation's 250th anniversary.

"Forman Arts Initiative is proud to continue Public Works alongside Mural Arts and the Free Library with an artist as thoughtful as Karyn Olivier. Through deep listening over a year with Free Library staff, she has created a piece that feels especially timely, one that asks us to sit with the role our public libraries play in protecting knowledge," said Sunanda Ghosh, Executive Director of Forman Arts Initiative.

“Mural Arts is thrilled to continue our partnership with the Free Library of Philadelphia and Forman Arts Initiative in exploring the power of public art through Karyn Olivier's interactive work. There's real beauty in how Karyn's piece transforms a whimsical staircase of banned book titles into sharp commentary on the freedom to pursue and access knowledge, and the vital place our public libraries hold within our communities,” said **Jane Golden, Founder of Mural Arts Philadelphia.**

Throughout its presentation at the Free Library's Parkway Central Branch, *Sit With It* will host public programs, workshops, and other activations that celebrate the Free Library's mission to build an enlightened city devoted to lifelong learning, and to provide a window into the state of libraries today across the country. Programming will begin with a public artist talk between Olivier, artist, Cauleen Smith, and curator, Anthony Elms on Wednesday, September 16th at Parkway Central Library, more information on the talk can be found [here](#).

About Public Works

Created in partnership with Mural Arts, Public Works is a residency program that places artists in Philadelphia government agencies or organizations to develop artwork that forges new connections between the agency's work and the communities they serve.

About the Artist: Karyn Olivier is a Trinidadian-born, Brooklyn-raised artist whose practice spans sculpture, large-scale installation, and public art. She is currently serving as the Public Works Artist in Residence at the Free Library of Philadelphia and is currently presenting a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit. Her recent projects include a 2026 memorial dedicated to civil rights icon Vel R. Phillips. Her work has been featured in the Whitney Biennial, the Malta Biennale, and the Prospect.6 Triennial. In 2024, she completed *Right Here*, a memorial at Stenton House, and a year-long commission at Rice University. Her recent history includes exhibitions at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, Documenta 15, and a permanent installation for Newark Liberty International Airport. For more information on the artist, visit <https://www.karynolivier.com/>

About Forman Arts Initiative: Forman Arts Initiative (FAI) is a 100,000 square foot arts and culture campus opening in Kensington in 2027. FAI connects and supports artists and cultural organizations both locally and globally through accessible, welcoming, and engaging programs, spaces, and initiatives that invite greater connectivity, dialogue and creative innovation, expanding the role of contemporary art in communities. For more information, visit www.formanartsinitiative.org.

About Mural Arts: Mural Arts Philadelphia is the nation's largest public art program, dedicated to the belief that art ignites change. Mural Arts has united artists and communities through a collaborative and equitable process, creating over 4,300 artworks that have transformed public spaces and individual lives. For more information, call 215-685-0750 or visit muralarts.org.

About the Free Library of Philadelphia: The Free Library of Philadelphia system, with 54 locations, advances literacy, guides learning, and inspires curiosity with millions of digital and physical materials; 22,000 yearly programs and workshops; free public computers and extensive Wi-Fi; and rich special collections, including those at the Parkway Central Library. With more than 3 million in-person visits and 3 million more online annually, the Free Library is one of the largest public library systems in the United States. For more information visit <https://www.freelibrary.org/>.

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