

INTERVIEWS

## TYREE GUYTON

Tyree Guyton discusses his monument *The Times* in Philadelphia



**Tyree Guyton, *The Times*, 2017, Philadelphia. Rendering.**

## MARTOS GALLERY

*What is a monument? The Detroit-based artist Tyree Guyton has long asked this question, beginning with his ongoing site-specific installation The Heidelberg Project, 1986–, which has entailed transforming his childhood neighborhood into a living museum. Now, for Philadelphia’s citywide public art and history project Monument Lab, Guyton is creating The Times, 2017, a massive mural of caricature-styled timepieces on a former factory in the city’s Kensington neighborhood. The work will be on view at the Impact Services building on A Street and East Indiana Avenue from September 16 through November 19, 2017.*

**THROUGHOUT MY CAREER**, I have explored the concept of time from a visual perspective by playing with clocks. As caricatures, these clocks often have no hands, or the numbers are traveling backwards, or are mixed up, or the clocks have no numbers at all. My goal is to help people explore how time factors into our lives and how it sometimes hinders our ability to progress, or accelerates our anxiety about not being productive at all. Both are centered on the illusion of time, to do and not do.

Plato said, “Time is the moving image of reality.” What this means to me is that everything we do revolves around time and yet the only time that we ever really have is the very moment we are in. My challenge with this project is to help people to appreciate the present time as a time to act, think, be, and do, here and now. Yesterday lives only in our minds, and tomorrow is not promised. I believe that we must make the most of time, and the time to do that is now.

In response to the question of what an appropriate monument for the city of Philadelphia would be, I proposed broadening that question to ask, What is an appropriate monument for our country and our world? I’m offering *The Times*, a project designed to explore the concept of time in our lives. Now is the time to move towards positive change. Often we hear these familiar clichés: I don’t have enough time; time is running out; I don’t have time; I need more time; time is on our side; I wish I could go back in time; etc. Through this work, I’m challenging us to think consciously about what we’re saying.

People publicly claim to be offended by certain monuments that stand today, but I’m not so sure that this is the case. Social media is a vehicle where people can hide their true feelings while presenting another face to the public. Our current political climate feels like we are living in a pre-civil rights era. What I am asking with this particular work is, What time is it? Kensington, the community where I am working in Philadelphia, has one of the worst drug epidemics in the country, but it’s just one of many distractions. What about being drunk or high on artificial enhancements, prescription medication—or hate, greed, or power? So the question I am asking is not only to the folks in this community, but also to all people. It’s time to challenge the norm. To create a spectacle that is so striking and offbeat that it forces you to look, see, and think.

— *As told to Lauren O’Neill-Butler*