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Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis Statement on *Kelley Walker: Direct Drive*

September 26, 2016 (St. Louis, MO) – Today, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis Executive Director Lisa Melandri and the museum’s Board of Directors released the following statement:

For the past week, the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) has engaged in a necessary and meaningful dialogue with the community about the exhibition *Kelley Walker: Direct Drive*, the controversial artist talk regarding the exhibition, and the concerns regarding racial insensitivity both the show and the talk have generated.

First and foremost, CAM would like to reiterate our apology to the community for the anger and pain we caused. Our mission as an institution is to be a place where all can experience contemporary art in a space free from discrimination, judgment, and disrespect. It is clear, from the community’s response to Kelley Walker’s artist talk on September 17, that we failed to provide a place where all voices could be heard.

Throughout our dialogue with community activists and leaders, we have listened to their requests to remove *Kelley Walker: Direct Drive* from the museum. In accordance with CAM’s steadfast commitment to free speech and freedom of expression, we have concluded, after lengthy and thoughtful deliberations, to keep the exhibition on view. Taking down the show would violate the Museum’s core principles and end the productive dialogue that this work has initiated. CAM has a history of showing controversial artists; we have shown works that have challenged common sensibilities and presented work that has critiqued, in a difficult way, misogyny, patriarchy, homophobia, and the military industrial complex, among other issues. Despite the debates and discomfort these exhibitions generated, we never removed them.

We must, however, note that the deep community concern surrounding *Kelley Walker: Direct Drive* is different and deserves a different response. The show will remain on view in its entirety, but with modifications designed to welcome dialogue and dissent. Additionally, the museum will explore further ways to engage the community in an ongoing and constructive dialogue on the issues the exhibition has raised. Finally, CAM will ensure that the exhibit is properly identified as potentially painful, so that visitors who wish to avoid particularly difficult works may do so.

Learning and engagement are at the very core of CAM’s values. From this experience—from the voices raised within the community—we ourselves have learned. With these modifications and with ongoing discussions, we will maintain our commitment to meaningfully engage with the public through art.

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About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) presents, supports, and celebrates the art of our time. It is the premier museum in St. Louis dedicated to contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, CAM provides a thought-provoking program that reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape. Through the diverse perspectives offered in its exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives, CAM actively engages a range of audiences to challenge their perceptions. It is a site for discovery, a gathering place in which to experience and enjoy contemporary visual culture. CAM is located in Grand Center, a world-class arts and entertainment district in the heart of St. Louis.

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