

## MoMA PS1 PRESENTS MAJOR OUTDOOR INSTALLATION BY ARTIST YTO BARRADA OPENING APRIL 25

**LONG ISLAND CITY, New York, January 31, 2024**—Artist Yto Barrada (Moroccan-French, b. 1971) will transform the MoMA PS1 courtyard with a large-scale installation titled *Le Grand Soir*, a two-year commission that continues PS1’s history of inviting artists to respond to its unique campus. Opening April 25, Barrada’s first major outdoor work is composed of colorful concrete blocks stacked into pyramidal towers whose lower levels visitors can sit on and explore, providing an interactive experience in the courtyard and a setting for PS1’s signature summer music series Warm Up. The sculptures’ formations draw inspiration from multiple histories of surmounting barricades and retooling architectures: the construction of human pyramids in Morocco, Moroccan Brutalism, and Barrada’s family lore. As Barrada states, “I am thrilled to be presenting my first large-scale outdoor sculpture in the courtyard at MoMA PS1. We increasingly live in a world of walls, the ones built by the powerful to exclude or contain. As someone who has long researched strategies of resistance, I have centered this project on another form: the pyramid, which instead of walls offers steps, games, secrets, and possibilities. I wanted to combine the reliability of geometry with the precarity of body structures, celebrating forms of solidarity and escape.”

Barrada often mines the hidden histories embedded within architectural and geometric forms, revealing the intersections of material, political, and personal narratives. For *Le Grand Soir*, Barrada looks to the long tradition of human pyramids in Morocco, whose distinctive applications ranged from acrobatics and martial arts to spiritual practices. Human pyramids were first used by warriors as ladders to peer over fortifications and surmount enemy walls. Fifteenth-century Sufi mystic Sidi Ahmed Ou Moussa of Tazerwalt—now the patron saint of acrobats and dancers—led the defense of southern Morocco against Portuguese incursions, fusing mysticism and warrior ethos. By the nineteenth century, European and American impresarios began inviting Moroccan acrobats to perform in circuses, offering orientalist entertainment for Western audiences. Today, centuries later, the “children of Sidi Ahmed ou Moussa”—as Moroccan acrobats have become known—carry on the tradition of presenting human pyramids in town squares, and his memory is still invoked in folk songs and stories. For this installation, each of Barrada’s structures takes inspiration from a different acrobatic formation traditionally used by the performers: *tqal* (weight), *bourj tarbaite* (tower of four), and *bourj benayma ou chebaken* (tower lift with net).

Translating these precarious acrobatic formations into thirty-inch modular concrete blocks balanced atop one another, the forms of *Le Grand Soir* also nod to the legacy of Moroccan Brutalist architecture. Concrete Brutalist buildings proliferated after the country’s independence from France and Spain in 1956; the style’s utopian aspirations were embedded in elementary schools, street markets, civic buildings, and baths, among other public works of the postcolonial era. Barrada’s choice of colors reflects those of the CIAM Grid, a visual method of analyzing urban zones that uses four hues: green (housing), red (labor), yellow (leisure), and blue (mobility).

The work’s title, *Le Grand Soir* (The Big Night), borrows a popular French phrase with roots in early 20th century anarcho-syndicalist culture that connotes a future revolutionary moment when a new world might be born. The work also finds inspiration in Barrada’s personal history; in the summer of

1963, her father was condemned to death for his political activism as the head of UNEM (Union Nationale des Etudiants Marocains), the Moroccan student union. With her mother's help, he escaped from Morocco, becoming a fugitive and crossing borders in disguise. He remained in exile until the 1970s. Drawing on generational memory, Barrada's work obliquely converges this familial feat of escape with the history of acrobatics in Morocco, an evolving tradition that also traces broader cultural transformations.

Yto Barrada (b. 1971, Paris) is an artist recognized for her multidisciplinary investigations of cultural phenomena and historical narratives. Engaging with the performativity of archival practices and public interventions, Barrada's installations reinterpret social relationships and uncover subaltern histories. In 2006, Barrada founded the non-profit Cinémathèque de Tanger, one of North Africa's first art house cinemas and archives, and in 2021 founded The Mothership, an eco-feminist research center and residency in Tangier, Morocco. Her work has been exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Renaissance Society, Chicago; Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam; Haus der Kunst, Munich; Whitechapel Gallery, London; and the 2007 and 2011 Venice Biennale. As part of The Artist's Choice series at MoMA, she organized the exhibition *A Raft* (2021–22). Barrada's works are held in public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and Tate Modern, London. Recent awards include the Mario Merz Prize (2022), the Queen Sonja Print Award (2022), and the Soros Arts Fellowship (2023).

The exhibition is organized by Ruba Katrib, Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, and Jody Graf, Assistant Curator, MoMA PS1.

## SUPPORT



*Yto Barrada: Le Grand Soir* is made possible by Allianz.

Generous support is provided by the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation.

## ABOUT MoMA PS1

MoMA PS1 champions art and artists at the intersection of the social, cultural, and political issues of our time. Providing audiences with the agency to ask questions, access to knowledge, and a forum for public debate, PS1 has offered insight into artists' diverse worldviews for more than 40 years. Founded in 1976 by Alanna Heiss, the institution was a defining force in the alternative space movement in New York City, transforming a nineteenth century public schoolhouse in Long Island City into a site for artistic experimentation and creativity. PS1 has been a member of New York City's Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) since 1982 and affiliated with The Museum of Modern Art since 2000.

**Hours:** MoMA PS1 is open from from 12 to 6 p.m. Thursday, Friday, Sunday, and Monday, and 12:00 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Saturdays. Closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

# MoMA PS1

22-25 Jackson Ave  
Long Island City  
NY 11101  
momaps1.org

**Admission:** \$10 suggested admission; \$5 for students and senior citizens; free for New York State residents and MoMA members. Free admission for New York State residents is made possible by The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation. Tickets may be reserved online at [mo.ma/ps1tickets](http://mo.ma/ps1tickets).

**Visitor Guide:** Discover even more from MoMA PS1 with the Bloomberg Connects app. Read wall text, hear directly from artists, and uncover the building's history with this multimedia visitor guide. This digital experience is made possible through the support of Bloomberg Philanthropies.

**Directions:** MoMA PS1 is located at 22-25 Jackson Avenue at 46th Ave in Long Island City, Queens, across the Queensboro Bridge from midtown Manhattan. Traveling by subway, take the E, M, or 7 to Court Sq; or the G to Court Sq or 21 St Van Alst. By bus, take the Q67 to Jackson and 46th Ave or the B62 to 46th Ave.

**Information:** For general inquiries, call (718) 784-2084 or visit [moma.org/ps1](http://moma.org/ps1).

**Press Contacts:** Julia Fesser, (845) 625-9041 or [julia\\_fesser@moma.org](mailto:julia_fesser@moma.org)

**General Press Inquiries:** [press\\_momaps1@moma.org](mailto:press_momaps1@moma.org)

For downloadable high-resolution images, visit [moma.org/press](http://moma.org/press)