

WASSERMANPROJECTS

**Internationally Acclaimed Artist Michele Oka Doner
To Present New Work at Wasserman Projects,
Inspired by an Installation Created in Detroit Almost 40 Years Ago**

Exhibition Highlights the Significance of the Artist's Time Spent in Detroit on Her Practice

On View February 16 – May 5, 2018

DETROIT—December 18, 2017—With her upcoming self-titled exhibition at Wasserman Projects, renowned artist Michele Oka Doner revisits for the first time the large-scale floor installation *Pages I and II*, which she created almost 40 years ago for her first solo museum show in 1978 at the Detroit Institute of Arts. For *Michele Oka Doner*, which opens on February 16, 2018, the artist will recreate the original installation and add *Pages III and IV*, extending the scope and experience of the work and re-contextualizing it within her career's long engagement with organic forms and the evolution of language. The installation will be complemented by a selection of her recent *Relics* and ink drawings. Together, the works offer a lens into Oka Doner's dynamic practice, shaped in part by her studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and her time spent living in Detroit, between 1969-1981. The exhibition will be on view through May 5, 2018.

Oka Doner's work has been guided by a passion for the natural world and a fascination with the history held within the remnants of living things, such as twigs, leaves, seeds, shells, pods, and stones. In her diverse installations, public works, sculptures, photographs, and drawings, these organic fragments are integrated, replicated, and reimagined in new contexts that speak to the ephemeral yet enduring nature of life. Oka Doner's works exist within a captivating tension between spiritual meditation and scientific study, as she explores the universality and interconnectedness of our world and the human desire to organize and categorize it.

This relationship, between the intangible and concrete, is encapsulated in *Pages I and II*, which was inspired by the first impulses of ancient civilizations to establish a system of writing. To create the work, Oka Doner began to explore more deeply the organic materials that she had been collecting since childhood. Born and raised in Miami Beach, Florida, she has spent a lifetime looking for similarities in size, shape, color, and other markings that also inherently connote sounds and letters. The study resulted in the development of a set of clay "glyphs" that came to represent the origins of written language, drawn from and created to better understand and communicate about the environment in which one existed. Presented on the floor as a set of two pages at a time when art still primarily lived on the pedestal and wall, the installation invited viewers to physically and intellectually step into it and to connect with a very core human desire and behavior—at once primal and evolved.

The creation of *Pages I and II* sparked an ongoing engagement with intuitive languages and the use of the floor as a presentation vehicle for Oka Doner, resulting in such major public works as the *Celestial Plaza* (1987), which features 200 cast bronze forms that suggest spiral galaxies, stars, and planetary orbits at the American Museum of Natural History, and the much-acclaimed, *A Walk on the Beach* (2010), a one-and-a-

quarter mile long bronze in terrazzo floor installation at the Miami International Airport, seen by over 40 million travelers annually. With her upcoming exhibition, Oka Doner returns to the original source and site of these works, examining them through a new contemporary lens—one that takes into account the trajectory of her practice and the profound changes in art over the last four decades.

Pages III and IV, which are being created especially for the exhibition at Wasserman Projects, will feature a more evolved object-based alphabet, developed over many years from the organic forms produced by the ocean and beach. The new *Pages* will be akin in scale to the original works, which measured 120 by 168 inches each, and will visually underscore the changes in Oka Doner's approaches to the subject. At the same time, the work offers a joyful sense of discovery, as shells become letters and stones convey sounds. Together, the *Pages* ground our own experience of language in history, the origins that we so rarely consider, and inspire an engagement with our own connection to nature, at a time when that relationship often feels distant.

“When I created *Pages I and II* for the DIA I stepped into new territory. The notion of laying out hundreds of glyphic images on the floor, without a stand or plinth, was challenging for the museum. This was in the mid 1970s, and the convention of a pedestal was still stuck in the minds of many curators and installers. When I finally saw the exhibition with my own version of a Rosetta Stone, *Pages I and II*, laid out in the old North Court, along with other more sculptural objects that comprised the exhibition, I understood I had been seeking a connection between nature and language that is ancient—the initial neural pathways traveled by remote ancestors,” said Oka Doner. “Returning to this notion, now ripened after many decades of investigation, it is truly wondrous to be able to both recreate the early work, stored for many years with the understanding that the moment for its return would present itself, and add *Pages III and IV*.”

The exhibition will also feature several of Oka Doner's *Relics*, large-scale objects made in some instances of cast bronze and in others of wax and organic materials. Appearing as found stones and driftwood, the *Relics* highlight Oka Doner's mastery of materials, and play with the boundaries between and fusion of the natural and manmade. The inclusion of these works, along with several ink drawings, further illuminates the diverging formal investigations within Oka Doner's practice, while also placing them within a single, ongoing body of work, spurred by her childhood engagement with the Miami landscape and her studies and early work in Michigan.

“We are privileged to have the opportunity to collaborate with Michele Oka Doner on the presentation of her seminal work, *Pages I and II*, and to provide the platform for her to expand on it now, almost 40 years later. This exhibition is also an expression of Detroit, as a place that throughout its history has served as a site of creative experimentation and a great source of inspiration,” said Gary Wasserman. “For Michele, the region and city was formative to the development of her early work and to the artistic approaches she has taken throughout her career. As part of this presentation, we look forward to fostering a dialogue on the significant impact that Michele established here in Detroit through her numerous public installations and exhibitions, the influence of place on her work, and how this city has been a fertile ground for so many artists, musicians, designers, and other creative producers.”

More About Michele Oka Doner

Michele Oka Doner's artistic production encompasses large-scale public works, sculpture, photography, drawing, furniture and functional objects, jewelry, video, artist books, and costume and set design. Her

practice is fueled by a lifelong study and appreciation of the natural world, which forms the foundation of her aesthetic and conceptual vocabulary. She is known for creating such acclaimed public installations as *Radiant Site* at New York City's Herald Square subway station, *Flight* at Washington's Reagan International Airport, and *A Walk on the Beach* at Miami International Airport. Oka Doner has been the subject of many solo exhibitions, including recently *Into the Mysterium* at Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami (2017) and *How I Caught a Swallow in Mid-Air* at the Perez Art Museum Miami (2016). Her work is held in the collections of such renowned institutions as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, among many others. Oka Doner lives and works in New York City.

About Wasserman Projects

Wasserman Projects was conceived by Michigan-native Gary Wasserman, and opened its doors in a former firehouse in Detroit's historic Eastern Market, one of the oldest and largest year-round markets in the U.S., in fall 2015. Wasserman Projects is guided by a spirit of collaboration, recognizing that artist projects are best realized and most meaningful when they engage a broad range of cultural organizers, community leaders, and the dynamic and diverse populations of Detroit. The organization works with artists from across disciplines and around the world, presenting exhibitions and performances that will spark a discourse on art, but also cultural, social, or political issues, which are particularly active and timely in Detroit. Wasserman Projects is nimble in its approach, operating in part as a for-profit gallery as well as a presentation space, and helps artists bring to fruition new projects that may not otherwise be possible.

###

For further information, please contact:

Alina E. Sumajin

PAVE Communications & Consulting

Co-founder and Principal

alina@paveconsult.com / 646-369-2050