



Media Contact:
Billy Cook
billy@enroutemarketing.com
239-734-5150 (m)

NATIONAL LIBERTY MUSEUM CONTINUES *THE YEAR OF FREE SPEECH* SERIES WITH THE SECOND OF THREE EXHIBITIONS, *WORD POWERED: EXPLORING FREE SPEECH THROUGH ART*

Exhibition features works by 15 leading artists demonstrating how art can spark vital conversations across political and cultural divides

Photos: [HERE](#)

Philadelphia, PA | January XX, 2024 – On February 7, the [National Liberty Museum](#) (NLM) (321 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106) continues its ongoing 2024-2025 initiative, [The Year of Free Speech](#), unveiling the second of three exhibitions exploring freedom of speech as a cornerstone of democracy. In [Word Powered: Exploring Free Speech Through Art](#), NLM assembled a juried exhibition of art by 15 leading artists exploring the dynamic relationship between censorship, freedom of expression, and diverse perspectives. The collection of work illustrates these themes through a variety of mediums, including sculptures, paintings, video installations, and more. The exhibition is on display in NLM's Second Floor Gallery from February 7 to September 8, 2025.

In *Word Powered: Exploring Free Speech Through Art*, NLM brings together a range of artistic voices, mediums, and subject matter to challenge visitors to reflect on their role in safeguarding the right to free speech and better understand how language can be manipulated, suppressed, or celebrated. The works on display invite audiences across the political and cultural divide to engage with the potency of words, demonstrating how art can spark vital conversations and illuminate our collective voice.

"For the second exhibition of *The Year of Free Speech*, NLM and an exhibition jury panel selected powerful works by a diverse group of artists that delve into the multi-faceted and evolving challenges the First Amendment faces in the modern age," said **Dr. Elaine K. Arnett**, President & CEO of NLM. "*Word Powered* is an invitation for the public to explore contemporary issues and questions through the perspectives of 15 artists from around the world. NLM wanted to present these differing viewpoints to challenge our visitors to reconsider what they know about free speech, how it enriches our society, and the dangers that currently threaten this foundational right."

The exhibition opens with artwork reflecting on the current landscape and tensions that exist within our culture of free speech. In response to the recent polarized election season, Columbus, Ohio-based artist **Shelley Brenner Baird**'s piece "**First Amendment**" cuts and reassembles political signs into a collage of the text of the First Amendment. For her series *Banned Book Bandolier*, New York-based artist **Micki Watanabe Spiller** outfits a brigade of "Reading Outlaws" with sashes featuring a hip pocket to hold banned books such as *The Color Purple*, *Animal Farm*, and *Brave New World*.

The next group of artwork demonstrates the long and complicated history of free speech in media, from the days of print to the age of A.I., and evoke technology's massive impact on society's incessant exposure to the spread of information. In *Machine Series*, New York-based new media artist **Cassandra Zampini** developed a video installation and paintings based on memes and viral conspiracy theories. In her video installation, the artists set a grid of noisy memes that lure the viewer into #flatearth and

other fringe conspiracies. Displayed alongside the video installation is a series of paintings, which includes “**M3 Gold**,” where Zampini uses gold paint overlay to quiet a grid of static memes and symbols from propaganda.

Continuing through the exhibition, viewers are invited into more intimate and personal expressions of free speech, with a reminder that the culture of free speech is one of speaking and listening. Here on display are entries from *I Wish to Say* by international performance artist **Sheryl Oring**. The installation is part of her series showcasing personal messages from the public addressed to the future President of the United States, composed by Oring on a typewriter.

Word Powered concludes with a reminder of our responsibility to protect free speech. “**Discarded Documents**” by intermedia artist **Darryl Lauster** features three bronze sculptures that simulate crumpled versions of key documents in American history: the 14th Amendment, the Oath of Office, and a Letter of Indenture. Lauster’s work reminds us of our democracy’s past foundations, asks us to consider society’s present values, and encourages the public to face what has been disregarded so they can decide what to uphold or revise. Pennsylvania-based painter **Furong Zhang’s “Windows,”** inspired by his experience growing up in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution, depicts symbolic objects and human “puppet masters” who control movements and monitor activity through a grid of surveillance screens, which serve as the titular windows. Through Iranian multidisciplinary artist **Elyana Shams’s** installation “**Cheshmee**,” visitors are invited to look through a peephole surrounded by black fabric – evoking a Muslim woman’s hijab – to view films of Iran before the country’s revolution in the late 1970s and consider the impact of this pivotal moment on freedom of speech, dress, and assembly.

Word Powered also features artwork from Buffalo-based multimedia artist **Becky Brown**, Seattle-based interdisciplinary artist **Mary Coss**, Dutch installation artist **Marcia Haffmans**, Philadelphia-based artist and maker **Kelly Lawler**, interdisciplinary artist and educator **Paul Travis Phillips**, Philadelphia-based mixed-media sculptor **Carol Cole**, Argentinian artist **Lucia Warck-Meister**, and Delaware-based artist **Merrill R. Smith Jr.**

The artists for *Word Powered* were selected from a national call by a panel of jurists that included: **Chenoa Baker**, independent curator; **Talia Barnes**, Multimedia Designer at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE); **Fisher Derderian**, Founder and Executive Director of the Roger Scruton Legacy Foundation; and **Danielle Marino**, Director of Programming at First Person Arts.

The Year of Free Speech at NLM continues with a third exhibition set to debut in May 2025. The first exhibition of the series, ***Free Speech: Our Right, Our Responsibility***, remains on display in the Flame Gallery and Lower Level Gallery through July 28. The first exhibition allows visitors to trace freedom of speech’s historical and philosophical roots to the present, demonstrating how free speech fosters civil discourse while fueling societal progress. Through interactive displays, images and text, ***The Year of Free Speech*** exhibitions and related [public programming](#) invite visitors to reflect on the vital role of free speech in shaping our collective future, challenging us to navigate its freedoms with commitment and care.

The Year of Free Speech is part of a new vision for NLM’s visitor experience, **Past Present, Future, Always**. The new strategy allows the museum to present and explore a single theme surrounding liberty through various exhibitions taking place over a year. In *Year of Free Speech*, NLM presents three parts of the series each exploring the past, present, and future of our First Amendment rights.

NLM is open Wednesday through Monday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. General admission is \$12 for adults, \$10 for Seniors (65+), and \$6 for youth ages 5 to 17. NLM members and children under 5 receive free admission. Additionally, NLM offers a range of on-site and virtual [guided and group tour opportunities](#) and can customize them on request based on areas of interest and connections to exhibition themes. All tours last approximately one hour and are suitable for adults, seniors and college students. To keep up with the museum's upcoming programming and events, visit www.libertymuseum.org.

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About the National Liberty Museum

From its home in historic Philadelphia, the cradle of American democracy, the National Liberty Museum (321 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106) offers a contemporary perspective on the boldest, most innovative concept in American history: Liberty. For over two decades, the museum has served as a safe space for nuanced interactions around liberty, helping visitors build key knowledge and skills through meaningful conversations and exploration. Throughout its four floors, the National Liberty Museum hosts permanent galleries and rotating exhibition spaces to explore the boundaries of liberty and what it means to us today. The museum collaborates with scholars, artists, and community partners to present dynamic and interactive exhibitions to enrich how visitors think about Liberty, what it means, and how it is expressed in our modern society. Visit www.libertymuseum.org or follow National Liberty Museum on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#) to learn more.