

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Alan Michelson's *The Oyster* Transforms Governors Island's Waterfront

**A New Sculptural Installation Commissioned by More Art in Partnership with the Billion Oyster Project and Governors Island Arts**

*On View July 18 – November 30, 2026 • Western Shore, Governors Island, New York*

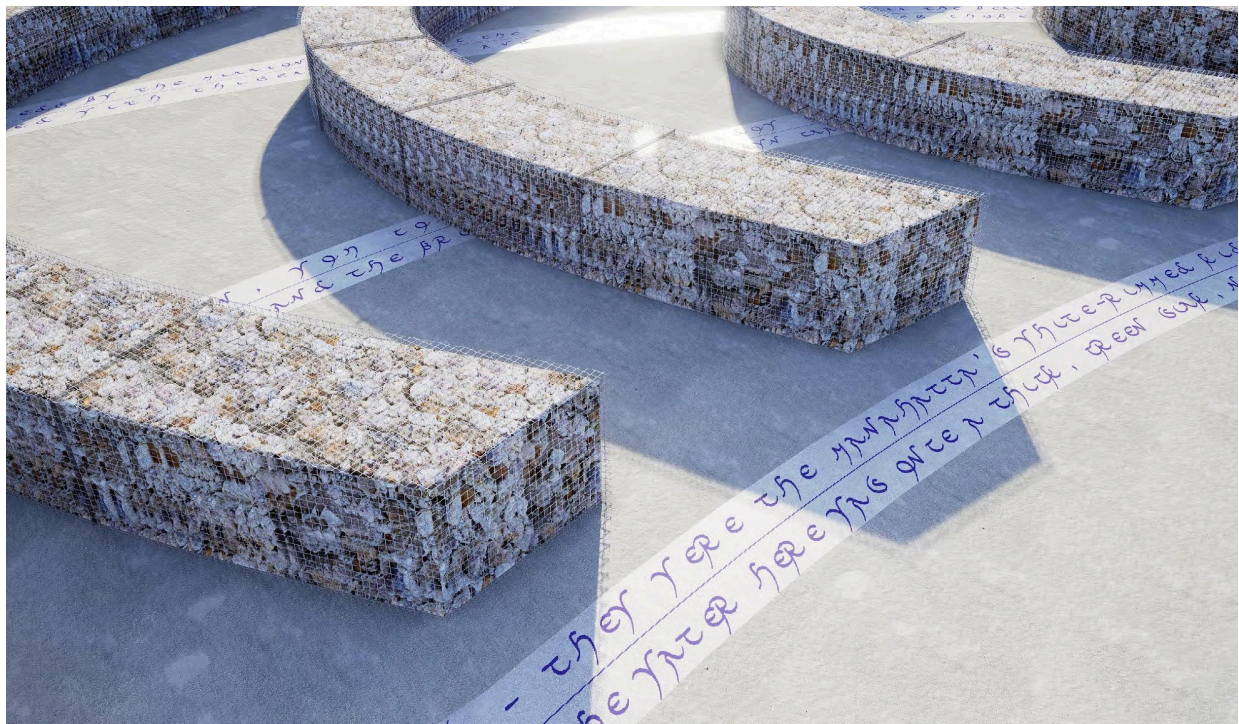


Image Courtesy Alan Michelson, Rendering of *The Oyster*

More Art announces the opening of *The Oyster*, a monumental outdoor sculptural installation by acclaimed Mohawk artist Alan Michelson (Six Nations of the Grand River), on view on Governors Island from July 18 through November 30, 2026.

*The Oyster* is presented as part of *Reframing 1776: Land, Water, and the Work of Repair*, More Art's 2026 program marking the U.S. Semiquincentennial. The initiative brings together three

commissions that respond to the nation's 250th anniversary through projects grounded in Indigenous perspectives and environmental histories. Developed in partnership with the Billion Oyster Project, Michelson's installation draws on pre-colonial Lenape oyster middens and shell rings—vast accumulations that reflect long histories of habitation and stewardship in the region. Using salvaged shells and steel mesh gabions, the artist builds a structure that operates simultaneously as habitat, monument, and gathering place.

Taking place on the western shore of Governors Island, facing New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty, *The Oyster* is designed as an amphitheater—inviting public assembly at the water's edge as both sculptural environment and gathering space. The installation reflects on the parallel erasures of Indigenous lifeways and oyster ecologies in the harbor, while pointing toward the possibility of their restoration and return.

Its form draws from the logic of reef restoration—reimagined here as both monument and memorial. Visitors encounter a landscape shaped by long histories of Indigenous knowledge and ecological interdependence and are invited to consider what restoration—of land, water, and relationships—might look like in the years ahead.

Encircling the sculpture, a large-scale text installation featuring reflections on oyster ecology gathered from the Governors Island community is painted directly onto the ground in purple and white, referencing wampum—the shell beads historically used by the Lenape for exchange, diplomacy, and record-keeping.

Throughout its presentation, *The Oyster* serves as a platform for public programming, including boat tours, walking performances, conversations, and commissioned works that activate the installation as a site for collective engagement.

The installation is co-presented with Governors Island Arts and the Billion Oyster Project.

### **About the Artwork**

Located on the western shore of Governors Island, the site offers an unobstructed view of New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty. This vantage point that reframes familiar national symbols through the lens of Indigenous presence and ecological loss. Michelson's sculpture bridges pre-colonial history and contemporary environmental practice, positioning the island itself as a site of both reckoning and possibility.

Using the building blocks of oyster habitat restoration, including salvaged shells and gabions of steel mesh, Michelson transforms Governors Island into a meeting ground between Indigenous knowledge, environmental justice, and collective action.

Surrounding the sculpture, a large-scale textual installation featuring reflections on oyster ecology sourced from the Governors Island community is painted directly onto the ground in purple and white, the colors of wampum, the shell beads long used by the Lenape as a medium of exchange, diplomacy, and memory.

Throughout the year, *The Oyster* will serve as a living stage for public programming, including boat tours, walking performances, conversations with leading thinkers in the field of more-than-human rights, and curated and commissioned performances that activate the sculpture as a gathering place.

### **About the Artist**

**Alan Michelson** is an internationally recognized New York-based artist, curator, writer, lecturer and Mohawk member of the Six Nations of the Grand River. For over thirty-five years, Michelson has been a leading practitioner of a socially engaged, critically aware, site-specific art grounded in local context and informed by the retrieval of repressed histories. Sourcing from both Indigenous and western culture, he works in a varied range of media and materials, among them painting, sculpture, photography, sound, video, glass, and stone.

Michelson's practice includes award-winning public art including *Mantle*, a large-scale monument honoring Virginia's Indian nations, which was recently dedicated on Capitol Square in Richmond. Michelson is co-founder and co-curator of the ground-breaking Indigenous New York series with the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School, on whose board he serves as Vice-Chair.

### **Reframing 1776: The Larger Program**

*The Oyster* is the central commission of *Reframing 1776: Land, Water, and the Work of Repair*, More Art's year-long program that considers the United States not as a fixed founding moment but as something shaped over time—like an oyster shell formed by tide, storm, and sediment. The program asks how sovereignty might be reimagined through repair, regeneration, and collective stewardship.

Alongside Michelson's installation, the 2026 program includes two additional commissions:

**Danielle Olana Jagelski** (Red Cliff Ojibwe and Oneida) will premiere *Holy Ground*, a site-specific choral and percussive composition on the waterfront that honors Lenapehoking through an immersive sonic memorial. Drawing from Lenape, Haudenosaunee, and Ojibwe traditions, the piece unfolds in outdoor settings, inviting passersby into a soundscape grounded in Indigenous presence. Through voice and rhythm, Jagelski creates a living encounter with ancestral and contemporary Indigenous tradition, calling audiences to recognize the land as a site of memory, reciprocity, and cultural renewal. Jagelski is More Art's 2026 Engaging Artist Commission..

**Patty Ortiz** (Nahuatl of South Texas) and **george emilio sanchez** (Valdivia of Ecuador) present *Acknowledgement & Reclamation*, a two-part public artwork that critiques settler-centered national myths. The first part, *The Acknowledgement*, consists of 574 silk ribbons, each inscribed with the name of a federally recognized Indigenous Nation, tied ceremonially and suspended in a public park—a landscape of names that becomes the stage for the second part, *The Reclamation*. In this live performance, Sanchez appears as his alter-ego Nahuavia, confronting a spectral Christopher Columbus in a dialogue that exposes the erasures embedded in American origin stories while affirming Indigenous endurance and sovereignty. Together, the three projects move from acknowledgment to assembly, and from remembrance to restoration.

## **Visitor Information**

On View: Saturday, July 18 – Monday, November 30, 2026

Location: Western Shore, Governors Island, New York (directly facing New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty)

Access: A 15-minute walk or 5-minute bike ride from the Governors Island ferry landing.

Hours & Ferry Information: Public hours vary throughout the season. For up-to-date hours and ferry schedules from The Trust for Governors Island, [visit moreart.org](http://visit.moreart.org).

## **About More Art**

More Art is a NYC-based nonprofit that commissions and produces ambitious public artworks and social practice projects that engage communities in urgent civic conversations. More Art believes that art is a catalyst for social change and a space for communities to gather, reflect, and reimagine the world around them.

## **About Governors Island Arts**

Governors Island Arts, the public arts and cultural program presented by the Trust for Governors Island, creates transformative encounters with art for all New Yorkers, inviting artists and researchers to engage with the issues of our time in the context of the Island's layered histories, environments, and architecture. Governors Island Arts achieves this mission through temporary and long-term public art installations and exhibitions, an annual Organizations in Residence program in the Island's historic houses, and the curated multidisciplinary INTERVENTIONS performance series. Learn more at [www.govisland.org/arts](http://www.govisland.org/arts).

## **About Billion Oyster Project**

The Billion Oyster Project is a New York City-based nonprofit organization with the goal of engaging one million people in the effort to restore one billion oysters to New York Harbor by 2035. Learn more at [www.billionoysterproject.org/](http://www.billionoysterproject.org/)

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