Democracy inherently questions its own identity. It therefore allows public art to explore its values critically and to suggest new ones. But it also has fragile defenses against artworks, acts, organizations and attitudes that surreptitiously or fortuitously undermine democratic values. Today, as bigotry and authoritarianism rise and democratic movements combat them, the struggle over the values enshrined in the public arena takes on new urgency. In his book *Public Art and the Fragility of Democracy: An Essay in Political Aesthetics* (Columbia University Press, 2019), Fred Evans develops political and aesthetic criteria for assessing how public art can respond to the fragility of democracy. He calls for considering such artworks as acts of citizenship, pointing to their capacity to resist autocratic tendencies, reveal new dimensions of democratic society, and enliven their political intimations with aesthetic verve. Through close considerations of Chicago’s Millennium Park and New York’s National September 11 Memorial, along with Confederate monuments and those that celebrate diversity, Evans shows how a wide range of artworks participate in democratic dialogues.


Fred Evans will be in conversation with Terry Smith, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory, and Kirk Savage, Dietrich Distinguished Professor of Art History, both members of the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, and with long track records of engagement in these issues.