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A NEW LANDMARK: MONUMENT TO LABOR INSTALLED IN PHILADELPHIA

The Labor Monument: Philadelphia's Tribute to the American Worker by artist John Kindness

PHILADELPHIA, PA. **The Fairmount Park Art Association** announces the installation of ***The Labor Monument: Philadelphia's Tribute to the American Worker*** by artist John Kindness. Philadelphia's newest permanent public artwork is one of the first monuments in the United States to commemorate the significant contributions of organized labor nationwide. Located in a city with a renowned and celebrated working class history, *The Labor Monument* is located in Elmwood Park at 71st Street and Buist Avenue in Southwest Philadelphia. The artwork was commissioned by the Fairmount Park Art Association, a Philadelphia based nonprofit public art organization, as part of its program **New-Land-Marks: public art, community, and the meaning of place**, and was completed in cooperation with the Friends of Elmwood Park and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation.

The Labor Monument: Philadelphia's Tribute to the American Worker transforms a 7-acre city park into a community gathering space and an outdoor history lesson honoring the American labor movement. Workers of earlier generations often wore blue denim clothing, with metal work buttons that bore a variety of images and slogans. Inspired by these buttons, artist John Kindness created seven large-scale bronze ***Work Button Tables***. Each bronze relief sculpture represents an important person or event in labor history, from Eugene Debs' organization of the first industrial union to the courageous whistleblowing of Karen Silkwood. Located in the center of Elmwood Park, the *Work Button Tables* are installed in a circle surrounded by seven custom built concrete and wood benches. Blue aggregate paving and brick detailing around the seating elements suggest the denim and stitching on workers' clothing.

With his characteristic high level of craftsmanship and attention to detail, John Kindness's 36-inch diameter *Work Button Tables* were created using traditional art making techniques. He worked closely with Polich Tallix Fine Art Foundry and their artisans to carve, cast, and patinate each of the seven bronze relief sculptures. The bronzes simultaneously reference the relief sculptures of the Renaissance as well as the social messaging of WPA artworks, while presenting a fresh and contemporary perspective on the idea of monumentality. *The Labor Monument* continues the artist's use of narrative and story telling, which makes his artwork accessible to the general public while also imbuing it with multiple layers of meaning. As a son of a Belfast shipbuilder, Kindness was sensitive to the struggles of the working class and developed an affinity with the blue-collar neighborhood as they worked together over several years to complete the project. *The Labor Monument* is also featured as part of the Art Association's **Museum Without Walls™: AUDIO**, an innovative and interactive outdoor sculpture interpretive program for Philadelphia's preeminent collection of public art. Museum Without Walls™: AUDIO is available for free by cell phone, audio download, iPhone and Android app, and on the web. To listen to the artist, community organizer Cathy Brady, and labor historian Tom Paine Cronin, **dial 215/399-9000 and press stop #100.**



The Labor Monument: Philadelphia's Tribute to the American Worker

One *Work Button Table* was created to honor the Industrial Workers of the World (The Wobblies). Kindness explains, "They used music to get their message across and sometimes a song can get through the barriers that a speech can't penetrate. That is how I learned quite a lot about the labor movement, through singing and music." The relief also honors organizer Joe Hill. Kindness continues, "I come from Ireland where a lot of tragedies have turned into victories. A lot of deaths have turned into turning points in a struggle, and Joe Hill's death was one of those."



Artist John Kindness was born in Belfast, Ireland and currently lives and works in London, England. Kindness has completed a number of major art projects in his native Ireland. He has exhibited extensively in Europe and the United States, and his artworks are included in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Irish Museum of Modern Art; National Gallery of Ireland; Imperial War Museum London; Ulster Museum; and the Victoria & Albert Museum. He has completed residencies at the British Academy in Rome, The Fleisher Art Memorial in Philadelphia, and PS1 in New York. In 1997, Kindness was featured in a solo exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania. The artist has collaborated with writer Wendy Steiner on *The Loathly Lady*, an animated opera performed at the University of Pennsylvania's Irvine Auditorium, which featured projections of Kindness' original artwork.

Elmwood Park is a 7-acre city park located on 71st and 72nd Streets between Buist and Dicks Avenues in Southwest Philadelphia. From the late nineteenth century through much of the twentieth, Southwest Philadelphia prided itself on its thriving working class neighborhoods. Many thousands of Philadelphians raised their families there. They worked for major industries such as the Hog Island Shipyard, Fels Naptha, General Electric, and Westinghouse. Elmwood Park was originally developed as a centerpiece for the community, a gathering place where workers and their families could relax, socialize, and enjoy the park's natural resources. Today, the park has been revitalized and is a fitting site for *The Labor Monument*. The revitalization efforts have been led by the Friends of Elmwood Park, a community organization chartered in 1995 to secure and beautify the park.

***The Labor Monument: Philadelphia's Tribute to the American Worker* was made possible through the generous support of:** the Fairmount Park Art Association, William Penn Foundation, Claneil Foundation, Samuel S. Fels Fund, Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development; and through donations from many local, national, and international trade unions including Service Employees International Union (SEIU); International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT-PATCH); Sheet Metal Workers International Association; United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW); and United Steel Workers (USW), among others.

New•Land•Marks: public art, community, and the meaning of place was developed by the Fairmount Park Art Association to bring together artists and communities to plan and create new works of public art. *New•Land•Marks* encourages projects that celebrate community identity, commemorate untold histories, inspire civic pride, respond to the local environment, and invigorate public spaces. *The Labor Monument: Philadelphia's Tribute to the American Worker* is the fifth project to be commissioned through this groundbreaking program.

The Fairmount Park Art Association is the nation's first private, nonprofit organization dedicated to integrating public art and urban planning. Founded in 1872, the Art Association works to promote the appreciation of public art through programs and advocacy efforts that commission, interpret, and preserve public art in Philadelphia. We serve hundreds of people directly through our commissioning and educational programs, and thousands indirectly, as they benefit from the accessibility of public art that is one of Philadelphia's hallmarks and a key contributor to its quality of life.

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High-resolution images are available upon request. Phone interviews with the artist can be arranged. Please contact Susan Myers at 215.546.7550 or smyers@fpaa.org for more information.

**The Labor Monument:
Philadelphia's Tribute to the American Worker**
by artist John Kindness

HI-RESOLUTION IMAGES AVAILABLE - Contact Susan Myers at smyers@fpaa.org or 215/546-7550.



Above: *The Labor Monument: Philadelphia's Tribute to the American Worker* by artist John Kindness (b. 1951)
Elmwood Park, 71st Street and Buist Avenue, Southwest Philadelphia. Central Circular Seating Area is 56' in diameter.

Below: Detail of cast bronze *Work Button Tables (Bread & Roses and I AM A MAN)*. Each tabletop is 36" in diameter. Photography: Greg Benson



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Above: The Elmwood Park community enjoying *The Labor Monument*. Photography: Caitlin Martin

Below: (Left to Right) Unveiling of the Work Button Tables at *The Labor Monument* dedication; Members of the Friends of Elmwood Park with artist John Kindness. Photography: JMS Visual Communications

