



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bronzeville Center for the Arts to Welcome Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III

Bunch to headline inaugural From The Ground Up speaker series presented in collaboration with Milwaukee Art Museum, Chipstone Foundation

MILWAUKEE – The Bronzeville Center for the Arts (BCA) today announced the launch of From The Ground Up, a new national speaker series bringing prominent leaders who have built some of the world's most significant cultural institutions to Milwaukee for candid conversations about vision, resilience and legacy. Presented in collaboration with the Milwaukee Art Museum and the Chipstone Foundation, the series positions the BCA in dialogue with world-class cultural institutions as it builds Milwaukee's future Black Arts and Culture Museum.

The BCA is transforming the 3.4-acre parcel of land once occupied by the Department of Natural Resources building at the northeast corner of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and North Avenue in preparation for the redevelopment that will include a major new museum of Black art, original landscaping for public programming and neighborhood beautification. Through this project, the BCA is expanding Bronzeville's legacy as a vibrant artistic hub of the Midwest and making experiences with Black artists and art accessible to everyone.

The series will kick off on Wednesday, September 16, 2026, with a conversation featuring **Lonnie G. Bunch III**, the 14th Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and founding director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. Secretary Bunch will join BCA Executive Director Ra Joy for a fireside conversation at the Milwaukee Art Museum's Lubar Auditorium, reflecting on his journey building a museum widely regarded as a national masterpiece and on his book, "A Fool's Errand: Building the National Museum of African American History and Culture in the Age of Bush, Obama and Trump."

"From the Ground Up is a recurring platform designed to connect our journey to build a new art museum in Milwaukee to a history of institution builders who have created and sustained some of the nation's most remarkable cultural institutions," said Ra Joy, Executive Director of the Bronzeville Center for the Arts.

"Secretary Bunch is proof of what vision and persistence can build. We couldn't ask for a more fitting leader to launch a series that speaks directly to where the BCA is headed."

Event Details

What: From The Ground Up — Series Kickoff with Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III

When: Wednesday, September 16, 2026 – 5 p.m. reception, 6 p.m. program

Where: Lubar Auditorium, Milwaukee Art Museum, 700 N. Art Museum Drive, Milwaukee, WI 53202

Tickets: Free with registration. Seating is limited. Visit bcamke.org/fromthegroundup for more information and registration.

Each installment of From The Ground Up will spotlight a leader who has successfully navigated questions of race, identity, and power to build a sustainable, nationally significant institution. Additional speakers in the series will be announced in the coming months.

About Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III

Lonnie G. Bunch III is the 14th Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, appointed in 2019 as the first historian and the first African American to lead the world's largest museum, education and research complex. He previously served as founding director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, which he built starting in 2005 with one staff member, no funding, no collection and no site. Under his leadership, the museum opened on the National Mall in 2016 to widespread acclaim. Bunch chronicled that journey in his book, *A Fool's Errand*. He previously served as president of the Chicago Historical Society and held curatorial leadership roles at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

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ABOUT BRONZEVILLE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Established in 2020, the Bronzeville Center for the Arts (BCA) centers the art, culture, and history of the African Diaspora. Located in Bronzeville – a historically African American neighborhood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin – the BCA invites audiences of all ages to engage with dynamic exhibitions and enriching educational programming. The BCA seeks to advance institutional equity, connect intergenerational audiences, and provide a place for people to experience intellectual and cultural exchange.

The Center promotes current and future artists and art professionals by opening a lens to the history and heritage of Black artists. Central to the BCA's mission is removing barriers from the enjoyment of art and forging a future that is more creative, connected, and historically informed. Bronzeville's bustling entrepreneurial and artistic history serve as the foundation for the BCA, inspiring us to continue to honor and embody this multifaceted heritage. Learn more at www.BCAMKE.org.