Santa Barbara Museum of Art

PRESS RELEASE

SANTA BARBARA MUSEUM OF ART TO PRESENT INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS FRIENDSWITHYOU IN TWO EXHIBITIONS APRIL 17, 2027 TO JANUARY 2, 2028

Commissioned Sound Piece *Sonarium* and Accompanying Exhibition of Work by LA-based FriendsWithYou Marks Their First Dedicated Museum Survey



SANTA BARBARA, Calif. – November 19, 2026 – The Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA) is pleased to announce *FriendsWithYou: Sonarium & We Are FriendsWithYou* a monumental, two-part presentation that promises a bold reimagining of the Museum's galleries set to open April 17, 2027 and run through January 2, 2028. This

will be the first major solo and survey museum exhibition in the United States for Samuel Borkson and Arturo Sandoval III—FriendsWithYou. The Santa Barbara Museum of Art has commissioned from the duo a still-to-be-completed music-making sculpture that will be displayed in the museum's grand entrance space, Ludington Court. The artists are bringing their message of community and fun to Santa Barbara. Accompanying this large sculpture will be a survey exhibition, *We Are FriendsWithYou*, that includes artwork from 2011 to 2026, conveying the breadth of their practice and presenting the underlying thematic continuity across their visually distinctive works.

"We are thrilled to be sharing the work of FriendswithYou with our Santa Barbara communities," says Amada Cruz, Eichholz Foundation Director of SBMA. "Their messages of joy, connection, and reflection are welcome in an increasingly complex world."



The focus of FriendsWithYou is the cultivation of joy and connection. They challenge the assumption that critical exploration requires a solemn style. It is through an almost childlike perspective that FriendsWithYou ignites a sense of wonder and desire to engage with the world, combating modern-day isolation and anomie by fostering a shared humanity and cosmic unity. True to its name, FriendsWithYou champions empathy, understanding and friendship. For the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the artists have an ambitious, inclusive and positive vision. "Our goal," FriendsWithYou tells us, "is to create a serious, awe-inspiring spectacle that unifies us under the cultural and symbolic umbrella that is existence; one that transcends our perceived experiences in this Sonarium."

Behind the signature fun of their characters, such as *Little Cloud* and *Frog God* lies the human instinct to use stories and heroes to give shape and meaning to our lives and collective experiences. As the artists state, "Since its inception, FriendsWithYou has been reimagining and creating modern rituals as art." The artists do not believe such rituals and stories are relegated to the past. They consider contemporary popular

culture as seen in cartoons, movie characters, and toys as a shared source for 21st-century myths and stories. Drawing from comparative religion, academic studies of fairy tales and myths, animism, and Jungian archetypes, FriendsWithYou explores deep patterns of human meaning, uniting present and past.

“When archeologists centuries from now explore our era, they might very well puzzle over all the characters many people easily identify from toys, movie franchises, and video games,” says James Glisson, SBMA Chief Curator. “FriendsWithYou constructs stories, myths, and archetypes from this shared background we carry with us, and suggest ways these stories bring us together through a collective empathetic experience.”

The first component of this two-part exhibition explores the collective’s multifaceted practice through an array of sculptures and paintings. This survey highlights their universal themes of compassion, honesty, and charity that transcend specific religious or cultural boundaries, proving that deep conceptual rigor can coexist with lightness and play. Their materials range from painted bronze in *Frog God* to molded colored plasticine clay for *It Was All a Dream*. FriendsWithYou’s most iconic character, *Little Cloud*, who is shown sitting crossed legged meditating, is wholly absorbed his own thoughts and tuning out the world. *E.V.A. - Evolved Virtual Archetype* is a new 3D sculpted/printed and hand painted sculpture—an altar to time, memory, and culture. This new work is an interactive piece imbued with timeless form, creating an analog emotional playscape that is constantly becoming in the same way each visitor is that stands before it. The viewer is brought to an internal visualscape, allowing each person to align their presence in real time.







The second component debuts a new, highly anticipated, and in-progress commission that FriendsWithYou have conceptualized for years: *Sonarium*. The sculpture will be a robot with a yet-to-be-determined musical component. The music, meditative and thoughtful, will transform Ludington Court into a space for reverie and contemplation.

The artists share their inspiration: "*Sonarium* is based on the idea that all reality is a manifestation of some form of wave—from the physical to the metaphysical, all of culture, and everything that has ever been or will be, is an infinite wave." From sound to light to atomic vibrations to the systole and diastole of heartbeats, waves describe their underlying patterns.

Waves and wave-forms course through everything around us, and this sculpture will act as an antenna that picks up and broadcasts them for humans to perceive. "*Sonarium*," say the artists, "is playing all the songs that have ever been written; it is playing the music that is reality." By mixing technology and mindfulness, *Sonarium* offers a provocative counternarrative to current anxieties about the incompatibility of technology with empathy, thoughtfulness, spirituality, and sustained attention. *Sonarium* is an experiment to catalyze the broader context of a world ever more enveloped by digital technologies and reeling from their ill effects on social bonds and the environment. As the artists put it with hope and glowing candor, "digital technologies can bring people together for an uplifting collective experience in real life."

The Major Sponsor of the FriendsWithYou exhibitions is the SBMA Ambassadors, along with Significant Sponsor Leslie Thomas, and generous support provided by Betsy Atwater, Robin and Daniel Cerf, The Earl and Shirley Greif Foundation Trust, and Christian and Angie McGrath.

About FriendsWithYou

Los Angeles artists Samuel Borkson and Arturo Sandoval III have collaborated on installations, performances, and sculptures since 2003. Bridging the gap between the entertainment industry and the fine art world, they have built an international reputation through widely publicized projects, including collaborations with pop star Pharrell Williams, Hello Kitty, and the creation of the hit three-season Netflix cartoon *True and the Rainbow Kingdom*. Their innovative contemporary artwork has been featured in solo presentations globally at institutions including the Seattle Art Museum, PARCO Museum Tokyo, The Momentary, Crystal Bridges, Covent Garden, Telfair Museum, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Dallas Contemporary, Museum of Contemporary Art (North Miami), and Haus der Kulturen der Welt Museum (Berlin).

Their latest creative venture, *Happy World*, is a whimsical, musical world centered on two tiny best friends, Hug Bug and Peanut Butter, whose gentle adventures celebrate kindness, friendship, and the simple joys of nature and life. Happy World has generated 1.7 million views to date, and can be found at https://www.youtube.com/@HappyWorld_OfficialChannel

Image captions and credits

In order of appearance:

FriendsWithYou, *Little Cloud*, 2020. Bronze, acrylic paint; 24 × 36 × 20 in. Edition of 10 plus 3 APs (#10/10).

FriendsWithYou, *Frog God and the Flaming Sword of Truth*, 2023. Bronze, acrylic paint; 48 × 38 × 40 in. (wingspan × depth, including sword).

FriendsWithYou, *E.V.A. - Evolved Virtual Archetype*, 2025. 3D Printed resin, acrylic paint. 60" H x 53.5" W x 10.5” D.

FriendsWithYou, *Little Cloud’s Dream*, 2021. Fiberglass and automotive paint; 47.5 × 32 × 22 in. Edition of 6 plus 3 APs.

FriendsWithYou, *It Was All a Dream*, 2025. Plastiline clay in plexi frame; 60 × 54 × 2.5 in.

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About SBMA

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a dynamic cultural institution dedicated to integrating art into everyday life. Through internationally recognized exhibitions, thoughtful stewardship of a distinguished permanent collection, and immersive arts learning experiences for all ages, SBMA connects historic and contemporary perspectives in meaningful ways.

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