



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Blaffer Art Museum Presents Maria Gaspar: *We Press Our Hands to the Steel Curtain*

August 22–November 21, 2026

HOUSTON, TX — August 10, 2026 — Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston presents *Maria Gaspar: We Press Our Hands to the Steel Curtain*, an exhibition of recent work by Chicago-based artist Maria Gaspar. Bringing together installation, sculpture, sound, and performance, the exhibition considers how carceral architectures organize not only space, but time, memory, movement, and the body.

Gaspar's practice begins where the architecture ends—or, more precisely, where its boundaries become difficult to locate. For more than a decade, she has developed a body of work around incarceration and its material, social, and psychic afterlives. Her projects have drawn on the architecture and debris of Chicago's Cook County Correctional Facility, transforming materials associated with confinement into sites of listening, encounter, and collective action.

We Press Our Hands to the Steel Curtain takes time as both a medium and a tactic. In Gaspar's work, duration can become a form of pressure: the accumulated time of incarceration; the suspended time of waiting; the time required to listen, remember, gather, and act. Curated by Chicago-based independent curator Katja Rivera, the exhibition asks what happens when structures designed to contain movement are approached instead through touch, sound, attention, and collective presence.

The exhibition's title is adapted from Gloria Anzaldúa's poem and essay "The Homeland, Aztlán/El otro México." In dialogue with Anzaldúa's writing, Gaspar considers walls as structures that produce psychic, social, and cultural divisions. Yet a wall is never simply static. To press one's hands against it is to register its force—and to imagine what might exist on the other side. The gesture can be one of resistance, mourning, healing, or all three at once.

For Gaspar, the materials of imprisonment are not inert evidence. They carry histories. They can be sounded, touched, reconfigured, and activated. Her work refuses the distance that can make incarceration seem like an abstract social problem, instead asking viewers to encounter the systems that produce confinement as physical and intimate conditions.

“Maria Gaspar asks us to consider what a wall does—not only where it stands, but what it produces,” said Laura Augusta, Jane Dale Owen Director & Chief Curator of Blaffer Art Museum. “Her work makes visible the ways that confinement enters our experience of time, our bodies, our memories, and our relationships to one another. Maria’s work is powerful precisely because she does not merely re-present these architectures. Instead, she transforms the materials and conditions of these institutions into occasions for listening, gathering, and imagining otherwise.”

Presented at Blaffer, *We Press Our Hands to the Steel Curtain* takes on particular resonance within Houston, with its many histories and communities. The exhibition also situates Gaspar’s practice within the intellectual life of a public research university, where contemporary art can function not as an illustration of a problem, but as a method for thinking through it more deeply.

We Press Our Hands to the Steel Curtain is part of Blaffer Art Museum’s ongoing commitment to artists whose practices expand what an exhibition can do: produce knowledge, complicate inherited narratives, and create conditions for encounters that exceed the gallery.

The exhibition will be accompanied by performances, conversations, and other public programs developed in relation to Gaspar’s practice. Details available at <https://blafferartmuseum.org/upcoming-events/>

Admission to Blaffer Art Museum is always free.

About Maria Gaspar

Maria Gaspar is a Chicago-born, first-generation, interdisciplinary artist negotiating the politics of location through installation, sculpture, sound, and performance. She is a recipient of the Guggenheim Award for Creative Arts, the US Latinx Artist Fellowship, Creative Capital Award, and the United States Artists Fellowship, among numerous other national awards. She received her BFA in Painting from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY, and her MFA in Studio Arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

About Blaffer Art Museum

Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston is an artist-centered and research-driven contemporary art museum, centering experimentation, dialogue, and learning alongside

contemporary artists from around the world. Founded in 1973, Blaffer connects artists, students, scholars, and communities through exhibitions, commissions, publications, and public programs. As Houston's university art museum, Blaffer creates a space where contemporary art intersects with research, experimentation, and public life.

Blaffer Art Museum is located at 4173 Elgin Street on the University of Houston campus. Admission is always free.

Event Details:

What: Opening Reception *Maria Gaspar: We Press Our Hands to the Steel Curtain*

When: Saturday, August 22, 2026 at 1pm-4pm

Where: Blaffer Art Museum

About the University of Houston

The University of Houston is a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university recognized with a Phi Beta Kappa chapter for excellence in undergraduate education. UH serves the globally competitive Houston and Gulf Coast Region by providing world-class faculty, experiential learning and strategic industry partnerships. Located in the nation's fourth-largest city and one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse regions in the country, UH is a federally designated Hispanic- and Asian-American-Serving institution with enrollment of more than 47,000 students.

About Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts

The University of Houston's Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts is a premier institution for education, scholarship, and innovation in the arts, where every day we are cultivating the next generation of creative professionals and unlocking the potential of the arts to impact society and change the world. Our students are forging new frontiers and advancing the arts through academic excellence, innovative programming, and—together with our world-renowned faculty—ascending to the highest level of contemporary professional practice. Houston is a first choice for the arts. Houston is a city of culture and diversity, a quintessential arts destination, and a gateway to the international arts community. Steeped in the richness of diverse cultures, Houston and its engaging community network provide a citywide laboratory for research, education, and practice in the performing and visual arts.

Media Contact

Tony Evans, Design & Digital Resources Director
acevans@uh.edu

Blaffer Art Museum
713-743-9521

infoblaffer@uh.edu
blafferartmuseum.org