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MARBLE HOUSE HOSTS NICOLAS PARTY ART INSTALLATION

Contemporary Art mixes with Gilded Age splendor at Marble House in Newport this summer from July 7 to September 22. An art installation of works by critically acclaimed Swiss artist Nicolas Party injects his unique 21st-century vision into Alva Vanderbilt's version of 19th-century avant-garde décor sparking a dialogue between two centuries and inviting visitors to ponder this dialogue.

"Alva Vanderbilt and Richard Morris Hunt made a bold statement when they built this house," said Preservation Society CEO/Executive Director Trudy Coxe. "Nicolas Party's work makes an equally bold, and fun, counter statement."

Curated by Dodie Kazanjian and jointly presented by The Preservation Society of Newport County and ART&NEWPORT, the installation Nicolas Party at Marble House is a site-specific installation by Nicolas Party. On the front lawn and throughout the interiors spaces, Party unites the past with the present through a selection of new works, each of which was created in reaction to his own interaction with Marble House.

"Nicolas' playful spirit infuses everything he does," says Dodie Kazanjian. "And when applied to the ancient art of portraiture — in which Newport's mansions are richly endowed — the result, at first glance, can be perplexing and definitely weird. But look again, step into his vivid and dreamlike world, and you'll be riveted by images you've never seen before — and you may never forget."

Nicolas Party is Swiss-born, best known for his conceptual approach to the ideas surrounding portraiture. The installation reflects Party's own interaction with the space, his fascination with Alva Vanderbilt Belmont (the original owner of Marble House), and his experience working with marble as a material. Party finds much of his influence within the Surrealist movement, paring elements generally considered "mismatched" in an attempt to draw the viewer's attention to visual details often overlooked.

Built between 1888 and 1892 for Mr. and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Marble House was a social and architectural landmark that set the pace for Newport's subsequent transformation from a quiet summer colony of wooden houses to the legendary resort of opulent stone palaces. The house was designed by the architect Richard Morris Hunt, inspired by the Petit Trianon at Versailles and made of 500,000 cubic feet of marble. Mr. Vanderbilt gave the house to his wife Alva, a leading hostess in Newport society who envisioned Marble House as her "temple to the arts" in America, as a 39th birthday present. Alva would later have the Chinese Tea House built on the seaside cliffs, where she hosted rallies for women's right to vote.

The Preservation Society of Newport County, Rhode Island, is a non-profit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and dedicated to preserving and interpreting the area's historic architecture, landscapes, decorative arts and social history. Its 11 historic properties—seven of them National Historic Landmarks—span more than 250 years of American architectural and social development.