

# Planting Fields Foundation



**Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation**

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## **PLANTING FIELDS FOUNDATION LAUNCHES INAUGURAL COMMISSIONS PROGRAM WITH MARK DION AND DAVID BROOKS EXHIBITION: *THE GREAT BIRD BLIND DEBATE***

**Oyster Bay, New York – January 22, 2020** – Planting Fields Foundation (“Planting Fields” or “the Foundation”) and New York State Parks Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation are pleased to announce the exhibition, *The Great Bird Blind Debate* by artists Mark Dion and David Brooks, opening May 16 and on view through December 2020. The first of its kind at Planting Fields, the exhibition ushers in the Foundation’s new Catalyst program created to bring newly commissioned work by living artists to the site. The installations of Dion and Brooks will be composed within the Carl F. Wedell Bird Sanctuary and a corresponding exhibition including the artists’ renderings, works on paper and artists’ models for the project will be displayed inside Coe Hall. As part of the initiative, Mark Dion’s drawings for the project have been acquired and added to the Foundation’s permanent collection, expanding the scope of future collecting possibilities.

The Foundation and New York State Parks have collaborated over the past several months on the planning and execution of this unprecedented initiative. The work of both artists has looked at how the natural world is interpreted, organized, presented and preserved from the human perspective. In this new exhibition, Dion and Brooks will present two different interpretations of bird blind designs, complimenting each other while also reflecting on aspects of Planting Field’s history and architecture.

States Gina Wouters, Executive Director, Planting Fields Foundation, “A defining, yet often-overlooked characteristic of the site’s founders, the Coe family, is their embrace of arts

patronage. Leading designers and artists such as Robert Winthrop Chanler, Everett Shinn and Samuel Yellin were engaged for site-specific work at Planting Fields at the time of its making. We are continuing that legacy through our new *Catalyst* commission program and the thoughtful work of Mark Dion and David Brooks. While our mission to preserve underpins all aspects of our work here, we also want to ensure a strong sense of cultural vitality, bringing fresh perspective and relevance to our visitors.”

The site-specific, sculptural works will frame Dion’s and Brooks’ dueling views on birdwatching or “birding” as an activity and birders as a distinct community. Notes artist David Brooks, “In the spirit of the great scientific debates throughout modern history, we will debate the counterpoint notions of the birder, culturally and ecologically, on the one hand celebrating the unique character of the nature observer “eccentric” just as birding is becoming more mainstream, while, on the other hand, considering the unique character of the actual habitat that the nature observer will be observing within, at a time when animal habitats worldwide are reaching a critically vulnerable state.”

The Carl F. Wedell Bird Sanctuary was carefully selected as the site of the installations based on the artists’ mutual interest in ornithology and new perspectives that emerged out of the Cultural Landscape Report highlighting the environmental impact of the landscape of Planting Fields. Like the artists, both of whom have participated in numerous scientific expeditions, Planting Fields founder W.R. Coe was also a bird enthusiast and endowed the Professor of Ornithology position at Yale University, an appointment that historically has been filled by the world’s leading ornithologists, including today by Richard Prum, Ph.D. Planting Fields, while renowned for its collection of trees and plants, is also a hot spot for birdwatching, attracting numerous avid birders each season.

The opening preview reception will take place on Saturday, May 16. A complete schedule of exhibition programming will be announced in the coming weeks.

### **About the Artists**

Mark Dion has had major exhibitions at Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, New York, DOCUMENTA 13 in Kassel, Germany, MoMA PS1 in New York City, ICA Boston, British Museum of Natural History in London, Guggenheim Bilbao and the Tate Gallery in London and his work can be found in the collections of MoMA, Tate Gallery, Carnegie Museum of Art, Centre Pompidou and Seattle Art Museum.

David Brooks has had major exhibitions at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut, MoMA PS1 in New York City, Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, New York, along with exhibitions at the Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, Vizcaya Museum in Miami, Florida and major commissions from The Trust for Governors Island, Art Production Fund with the Time Square Alliance, and deCordova Museum, Massachusetts.

### **About Planting Fields Foundation**

Planting Fields Foundation preserves and interprets Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park as the premier public garden and Gold Coast estate for today and tomorrow while creating enriching experiences for the visiting public. Founded in 1952 by William R. Coe, the Foundation is a not for profit public educational foundation chartered by the New York State Board of Regents and tax exempt under the status for a 501C3 organization.

Located in Oyster Bay, New York and originally landscaped by the Olmsted Brothers of Brookline, Massachusetts, the Arboretum grounds feature 409 acres of greenhouses, rolling lawns, formal gardens, woodland paths and outstanding plant collections. The original historic estate buildings remain intact including Coe Hall, a 65-room Tudor Revival mansion designed by Walker & Gillette. The interior of the house is a showcase of artistry and craftsmanship and features a distinctly American aesthetic through original ironwork commissions by Samuel Yellin and murals painted by artists Robert Winthrop Chanler and Everett Shinn. Planting Fields is included in the National Register of Historic Places, the official list of the Nation's historic sites worthy of preservation.

To learn more about Planting Fields Foundation, please visit our website at [www.plantingfields.org](http://www.plantingfields.org).