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We Did Start The Fire

A Crowdsourced Public LED Artwork in New York City

New York, NY – **ACOMPI** and **the Honey Pump** have teamed up to produce a **Kickstarter Campaign** for *We Did Start the Fire*, the first major public artwork by NYC-based artist **Thomas Ray Willis**. Willis's installation consists of crowdsourced iconography rendered as LED sculptures. New Yorkers will be invited to answer the question "What are you working towards?" and submit a sketch representing their answer. The prompt is meant to collect a range of ideas—from the profoundly abstract to the very concrete—culminating in a collaborative monument to unity and perseverance amidst a shifting landscape of opportunities. Willis will transform these sketches into mesmerizing signs that will create a large spectacle regardless of participants' creative skills. After a year of uncertainty, this warm beacon will welcome back tourists and neighbors alike and empower participants by displaying their goals in lights united with others.

Thomas Ray Willis is an artist and conceptual designer whose practice ranges from light installations to brand management to book design. His hometown of Las Vegas—a dichotomy of community and spectacle, consumption and production, reenactment and reality— informs his outlook and work. Willis received his BFA in painting and drawing from the University of Nevada Las Vegas in 2009 and his MFA at New York University in 2019. He currently teaches at Rhode Island School of Design and College of Mount Saint Vincent. Willis's work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art Archives, the Whitney Museum Library, the New York Public Library, and the Art Production Fund of New York.

We Did Start the Fire is a nod to Billy Joel's song of 1989, "We Didn't Start the Fire." Joel's song details political and cultural highlights in each generation from the 50s through 80s: communism, JFK assassination, Marilyn Monroe, Watergate, Woodstock, Malcolm X, AIDS, and more. Joel shows the difficulties each generation faced and how the world has always felt overwhelmingly on fire. The song saw a resurgence in Twitter at the beginning of the pandemic, as it seemed to list one bad event after another. For all the events that led us to a pandemic and how we've coped during it, how do we move forward? What should we focus on? What will we look back and say was our fire?

Willis's recent sign projects explore how the social function of light has stayed the same for centuries—from fire to electric—by providing a transcendent space for sharing and connecting. By distilling visual narratives representing the workforce, his LED light installations suspend the typical hierarchies of a company and bring individuality back into a capitalist structure (both physically and systematically), becoming an experience of its own.

The **Kickstarter Campaign** will run from July 1 to July 31, 2021, and can be viewed here: <http://kck.st/3dAJrXY>

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