REQUEST TO AWARD AN HONORARY DEGREE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Iowa to award an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Mr. Charles Ray at Spring 2024 commencement.

Details of Mr. Ray’s Accomplishments: The University is pleased to nominate the sculptor Charles Ray for an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from the University of Iowa for his sustained contributions to creative work and arts education. Mr. Ray is internationally recognized for his historically inspired, provocative sculptures, a number of which are of unusual size and scale and make use of materials ranging from ink, wire and fiberglass to steel, bronze, and wood.

Ray received his BFA from the University of Iowa in 1975 and the MFA from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University in 1979. His work has been the subject of extended essays in The New Yorker (2015 and 2019) and The New York Times (2022) and in 2022 he showed his most recent work in solo exhibitions at Glenstone in Washington, the Centre Georges Pompidou and Bourse de Commerce in Paris, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Ray is recognized as one of the preeminent sculptors of the past 50 years. Over his career, Ray’s practice has ranged from performance to minimalist pieces and more recently precision-made works exploring the figure. His current work examines classical sculpture through a contemporary lens. His artwork transcends and challenges boundaries and always makes one question the bodies space and place. In a recent review of Ray’s retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY author Peter Schjeldahl of The New Yorker describes Ray as “America’s most enthralling contemporary sculptor”. His work is internationally recognized in prominent Museum collections, including: Tate London, Art Institute of Chicago and Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Ray’s work has been included in premiere exhibitions around the globe. He represented the USA in the Venice Biennale of 1993 and 2003 and has been in the Whitney Biennial a handful of times. One opportunity in any of these shows would be a career defining event for other artists. Ray has written more than 30 articles that examine artists, art theory and practice, and has been the subject of many more articles and books.

An inspiration to over four generations of young artists, Ray joined the faculty of the University of California-Los Angeles, where he now is a professor emeritus, in 1981. His private studio is based in the Los Angeles area, and he has exhibited at the Orange County Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, The Broad, the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, the Kunstmuseum Basel, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Venice Biennale (three times), to name a few. His pieces further are part of numerous permanent collections including in The Broad, the Glenstone, the Orange County Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art in Los Angeles, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Pinault Collection in Paris, the Tate in London, the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He has been the recipient of the awards and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Art Matters, the Canadian Arts Council, and the Larry Aldrich Foundation.
In 2019 Ray returned to the University of Iowa as an Alumni Fellow in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. During his tenure he gave a public lecture entitled “My Soul is an Object” and led a campus sculpture walk with Lauren Lessing, Director of the Stanley Museum of Art. The catalogue of his works on the Matthew Marks Gallery website reveals an artist of tremendous range who has been innovatively reconceiving sculptural form, style, and function for five decades.

An honorary doctorate from the University of Iowa will be a fitting recognition of Charles Ray's continuing cultural contributions and outstanding career accomplishments.