

**MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM OF ART AND BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART
ANNOUNCE A MOVEMENT IN EVERY DIRECTION: LEGACIES OF THE GREAT MIGRATION**

Thirteen artists with ties to the South commissioned to create new works across media



May 10, 2021—The Mississippi Museum of Art (MMA) and the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) today announced the co-organization of a major exhibition that will unveil newly commissioned works by 12 of the most acclaimed African American artists working today examining the profound impact of the Great Migration on the social and cultural life of the United States. Co-curated by Ryan N. Dennis (she/her), MMA Chief Curator and Artistic Director of the Museum’s Center for Art and Public Exchange, and Jessica Bell Brown, BMA Associate Curator of Contemporary Art, the project will include new works across media by the following artists:

Mark Bradford
Akea Brionne Brown
Zoë Charlton
Larry W. Cook
Torkwase Dyson
Theaster Gates

Allison Janae Hamilton
Leslie Hewitt
Steffani Jemison
Robert Pruitt
Jamea Richmond-Edwards
Carrie Mae Weems

The resulting exhibition, titled *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration*, will open at the MMA in April 2022 and at the BMA in October 2022.

The historic phenomenon known as the Great Migration saw more than six million African Americans leave the South for cities across the United States at the start of the 20th century and well into the 1970s. This incredible movement of people transformed nearly every aspect of Black life, in both rural towns and urban metropolises. The impact of the Great Migration spurred a flourishing Black culture and also established a new cadre of artists, writers, musicians, and makers. With this project, the co-organizing institutions bring together a group of intergenerational artists with ancestral ties to the South to research and reflect on their personal histories and migration narratives through the lens of their contemporary practices.

“We asked artists to journey with us to explore their connections to the South, and to ruminate on migration, ancestry, land, and how such themes influence their movement in the world as artists. The project is grounded in a key prompt: *‘What would happen if today’s leading artists were given the space to think about the intersections of the Great Migration in a wholistic, expansive, and dynamic way?’* The exhibition will attend to and complicate histories of racial violence, trauma, and socio-economic exigency, while also examining the agency seized by those who fled as well as those who stayed behind,” said Dennis and Brown. “In many ways, the story of the Great Migration is neither complete in its current telling nor finished in its contemporary unfolding. We invited artists, whose practices deal with personal and communal histories, familial ties, the Black experience, and the ramifications of land ownership and environmental shifts, among so much more, to consider how we can expand our understanding of this essential moment in American history. We look forward to considering further the Great Migration through their vibrant stories of resilience, self-determination, and transformation.”

In addition to the exhibition, the project will include the creation of a two-volume publication, the first which will encompass a critical reader highlighting pivotal scholarly work around all aspects of the Great Migration, from the shaping of American cities to its impact on Black spirituality, music, art, and culture. The second volume will have a capsule-like focus on the exhibition content, including curatorial essays, artist entries, and newly commissioned essays by leading writers Kiese Laymon, Jessica Lynne, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, and Dr. Willie J. Wright.

Betsy Bradley, Executive Director of the Mississippi Museum of Art, said, “The concept for this project evolved from MMA colleagues in conversation with African American artists around the country who noted that some of their forebears came from Mississippi or that their families still own land here. Their curiosity about family stories synced with the Museum’s desire for an honest investigation of the state’s history and to engage with artists who have a relationship, even metaphorically, with the state. We discovered that either the memories or stories are imprinted on many artists’ imaginations, and that this rings true about other Deep South states as well. Ultimately, it’s about our desire to form connections of shared experience and the making of new memories through the creative processes of these eminent artists. It is clear that we will understand ourselves better as a result of these artists’ investigations. And the works that result will inspire more truth-telling and connections and reveal new narratives about the Great Migration and its ongoing impact. We look forward to continuing to work with our BMA colleagues to celebrate the South as a vital and enduring source of artistic expression and achievement.”

“This project offers an opportunity to re-consider the history of the Great Migration as we know it and to tell a more multifaceted and nuanced narrative through the voices and work of some of the most influential artists of our time. It is also a particularly meaningful project for our community in Baltimore, which was and continues to be shaped by this critical migration of people,” said Christopher Bedford, the BMA’s Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. “I am delighted to work with the MMA, our brilliant curators, and the infinitely talented group of participating artists on this project, and look forward to the ways in which the exhibition will teach us more about the past, further contextualize our present, and illuminate new paths for the future.”

The MMA and BMA will also create a range of digital assets tied to the exhibition for their websites, allowing visitors unable to see the show in person to experience the depth and scope of this project remotely. Additional presenting venues are also currently under discussion and will be announced at a later date.

Artist Biographies:

Mark Bradford (b. 1961, Los Angeles, CA) has a wide-ranging conceptual practice and is best known for his multimedia abstract paintings and collages with scavenged materials and weathered and incised surfaces that often reveal the atrocities and struggles of race and poverty. His profound insight and inventiveness have established him as one of the most significant and influential artists of his generation. Bradford has been widely exhibited internationally and is the recipient of numerous awards, including the U.S. Department of State's Medal of Arts in 2014 and a MacArthur Fellowship in 2009. In 2017, Bradford represented the U.S. at the 57th Venice Biennale with *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, co-organized by the BMA and Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University. Other major projects include *Pickett's Charge*, a monumental, site-specific installation for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC., and *We The People*, a commission for the U.S. Embassy in London comprised of 32 10-foot-by-10-foot panels featuring select text from the United States Constitution. Bradford received his BFA and MFA from the California Institute of the Arts and lives and works in Los Angeles.

Akea Brionne Brown (b. 1996, New Orleans, LA) is a photographer, writer, curator, and researcher who investigates the implications of historical racial and social structures in relation to the development of contemporary black life and identity within America. Focusing on the ways history influences the contemporary cultural milieu of the American black middle class and the history of urban and suburban planning, she explores current political and social themes related to historical forms of oppression, discrimination, segregation, and black identity. Brown received the Visual Task Force Award from the National Association of Black Journalists. Her work is featured in the Smithsonian's Ralph Rinzler Collection and Archives and Duke University's David M. Rubenstein Library. She was the 2018 Documentarian of Color by Duke, and her series, *Black Picket Fences*, was acquired for their permanent collection. Brown was also named the 2019 Janet & Walter Sondheim Winner. In 2019, Brown co-founded Shades Collective. She received her BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art and she currently lives in Baltimore, MD.

Zoë Charlton (b. 1973, Eglin AFB, FL) creates figure drawings, collages, and installations that depict her subject's relationship to culturally loaded objects and landscapes. She participated in residencies at Artpace (TX), the McColl Center for Art + Innovation (NC), and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (ME). Charlton received a Pollock-Krasner grant (2012) and Rubys Artist grant (2014) and was a 2015 Janet & Walter Sondheim Prize finalist. She co-founded 'sindikit, an artist project space in Baltimore and holds a seat on the Maryland State Arts Council. Charlton received her BFA from Florida State University (1993) and MFA from University of Texas at Austin (1999). She is an Associate Professor of Art at American University and resides in Baltimore, MD.

Larry Cook (b.1986, Silver Spring, MD) is a conceptual artist working across photography, video, and installation. Based in Washington, DC, Cook received his MFA from George Washington University (2013) and his BA in Photography from SUNY Plattsburgh (2010). Cook has exhibited his work nationally at MoMA PS1 (2020), UTA Artist Space (2020), the National Portrait Gallery (2019), and internationally at Weiss Berlin in Germany (2020). Cook has held artists-in-residences at Light Work and The Nicholson Project, among others. Cook is currently an Assistant Professor of Photography at Howard University.

Torkwase Dyson (b. 1973, Chicago). Working in multiple mediums, Dyson describes herself as a painter whose forms address the continuity of ecology, infrastructure, and architecture. She merges ideas such as site and built environments and nature and culture under the rubric of environmentalism. Fascinated with transformations,

ambiguities, and environmental changes that place these subjects in relation to each other, her practice investigates our connections to imagination, materiality, geography, and belonging. In 2016, Dyson was elected to the board of the Architecture League of New York as Vice President of Visual Arts. She received a BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University (1999) and an MFA from Yale School of Art in painting and printmaking (2003). Dyson is now based in New York.

Theaster Gates (b. 1973, Chicago, IL) lives and works in Chicago. Gates creates works that engage with space theory and land development, sculpture, and performance. Drawing on his background in urban planning and preservation, Gates redeems spaces left behind. His work contends with the notion of Black space as a formal exercise defined by collective desire, artistic agency, and the tactics of a pragmatist. In 2010, Gates created the Rebuild Foundation, a nonprofit platform for art, cultural development, and neighborhood transformation on Chicago's South Side. Gates has exhibited and performed internationally at major museums including, most recently, Tate Liverpool, UK (2020); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2020); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2019); and Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2019). Recent honors include the Nasher Prize for Sculpture; Urban Land Institute's Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development; and a World Economic Forum 2020 Crystal Award for his leadership in creating sustainable communities. He is a professor at the University of Chicago, Department of Visual Arts and Harris School of Public Policy and Distinguished Visiting Artist and Director of Artist Initiatives at the Lunder Institute for American Art at Colby College.

Allison Janae Hamilton (b.1984 Lexington, KY) is a multi-disciplinary artist working in sculpture, installation, photography, and video who fuses land-centered folklore and personal family narratives into mythologies that address the social and political concerns of today's changing Southern terrain. The artist's commitment to the land is driven by her own migrations from Kentucky to Florida, Tennessee, and New York, where she currently lives. Hamilton's work connects the landscape with the lived experience it carries, positioning it as critical to understanding both history and contemporary culture. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally including monographs at MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA (2018) and Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA (2018). Hamilton has also participated in fellowships and residencies, including with the Whitney Independent Study Program, New York, NY; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; and Fundación Botín; Santander, Spain. She is the recipient of the Creative Capital Award and the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant. Hamilton holds a PhD in American Studies from New York University and an MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University.

Leslie Hewitt (b. 1977, St. Albans, NY) uses a hybrid approach to photography and sculpture to revisit the still-life genre from a post-minimalist perspective. Hewitt's assemblages often include personal mementos as well as books and vintage magazines that reference the Black literary and popular culture ephemera of her youth. Interested in the mechanisms behind the construction of meaning and memory, she challenges both by evoking connections and meaning in her juxtapositions. Hewitt earned a BFA from the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York (2000) and an MFA in sculpture from Yale University (2004).

Steffani Jemison (b. 1981, Berkeley, CA) is an interdisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn, NY. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions and special projects at LAXART, Los Angeles (2013); RISD Museum, Providence (2015); the Museum of Modern Art, NY (2015); Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA (2016); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2017); Nottingham Contemporary (2018); the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2019); and the Contemporary Art Center Cincinnati (2021), among others. Her work is in numerous public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum, New York; the Stedelijk Museum, Netherlands; and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. Since 2016, Jemison has been a part of the musical collaborative Mikrokosmos with Justin Hicks.

Robert Pruitt (b. 1975, Houston, TX) is known for his drawings, videos, and installations examining the historical and contemporary experiences of African Americans and the Black body and identity. Using references to hip hop, science and science fiction, technology, comic books, Black political struggles, and traditional cultures, he creates a series of fictional portraits with an ambiguous but shared narrative that suggests a radical black past, present and future. Pruitt was a participating artist in the 2006 Whitney Biennial and has had solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston (2006), The Studio Museum in Harlem (2013), and the California African American Museum (2019). Pruitt received his BA from Texas Southern University (2000) and MFA from the University of Texas at Austin (2003) and lives and works in New York City.

Jamea Richmond-Edwards (b. 1982, Detroit, MI) is an interdisciplinary artist that creates monumental scale assemblages and immersive installations. Invested in exploring the materiality of collage and improvisational gestures, her recent works include self-portraiture that dwells within the realm of imagination and mythos. Born and raised in Detroit, she draws inspiration from her childhood growing up during the crack and aids epidemic that created devastating and lasting effects in Black and Indigenous American communities across the US. “I didn’t have to visit a museum to understand art. My generation inherited the artistic and cultural legacy of the Motown Era that our parents experienced firsthand in the city”. Richmond-Edwards received her BA from Jackson State University (2004) and MFA in painting from Howard University (2012). Her works are included in the collections of the United States Embassy, The Rubell Family Collection, and Studio Museum of Harlem.

Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953, Portland, OR) examines issues of race, class, and gender identity. Primarily working in photography and video—but also exploring everything from verse to performance—Weems has said that regardless of medium, activism is a central concern of her practice; specifically, looking at history as a way to better understand the present. She rose to prominence with her “Kitchen Table Series” in the early 1990s, examining tropes and stereotypes of African American life. The recipient of numerous honors and awards, she was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow in 2013. Weems received her BFA from the California Institute of the Arts (1981) and MFA from University of California, San Diego (1984). She currently lives and works in Syracuse, NY, and is Artist in Residence at Syracuse University.

Sponsors

The Great Migration is co-organized by MMA and BMA with support provided by the Ford Foundation. Its presentation in Jackson, Mississippi is sponsored by the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Trustmark National Bank.

About the Baltimore Museum of Art

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 95,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world’s largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation’s finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art. For more information, visit artbma.org

About the Mississippi Museum of Art

Established in 1911, the Mississippi Museum of Art is dedicated to connecting Mississippi to the world and the power of art to the power of community. The Museum's permanent collection includes paintings, photography, multimedia works, and sculpture by Mississippi, American, and international artists. The largest art museum in the state, the Mississippi Museum of Art offers a vibrant roster of exhibitions, public programs, artistic and community partnerships, educational initiatives, and opportunities for exchange year-round. Programming is developed inclusively with community involvement to ensure a diversity of voices and perspectives are represented. Located at 380 South Lamar Street in downtown Jackson, the Museum is committed to honesty, equity, and inclusion. The Mississippi Museum of Art and its programs are sponsored in part by the City of Jackson and Visit Jackson. Support is also provided in part by funding from the Mississippi Arts Commission, a state agency, and in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. For more information, visit msmuseumart.org.

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Image Captions

Top row, left to right:

Zoë Charlton, Photo: E. Brady Robinson Photography

Allison Janea Hamilton, Photo: Frankie Alduino

Leslie Hewitt, Photo: Richard Renaldi

Torkwase Dyson, Photo: Gabe Souza

Akea Brionne Brown, Photo: Akea Brionne Brown

Mark Bradford, Photo: Sim Canetty-Clarke, © Mark Bradford, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Robert Pruitt, Photo: Autumn Knight, 2020

Bottom row, left to right:

Steffani Jemison, Photo: Nottingham Contemporary 2017

Larry W. Cook, Photo: Nakeya Brown

Jamea Richmond-Edwards, Photo: Jamea Richmond-Edwards

Carrie Mae Weems, Photo: Audoin Desforges, 2020

Theaster Gates, Photo: Sara Pooley

Jessica Bell Brown, Photo: Michael Avedon

Ryan N. Dennis, Photo: Charles Williams, 2020