



BMA Presents *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration*

Twelve newly commissioned works capture the personal and communal significance of the Great Migration, which still resonates in Baltimore

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BALTIMORE, MD (June 24, 2022)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) is proud to present *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration*, a groundbreaking exhibition that explores the profound impact of a pivotal time in American history through the perspectives and works of 12 acclaimed Black contemporary artists. Featuring new commissions by Akea Brionne, Mark Bradford, Zoë Charlton, Larry W. Cook, Torkwase Dyson, Theaster Gates Jr., Allison Janae Hamilton, Leslie Hewitt, Steffani Jemison, Robert Pruitt, Jamea Richmond-Edwards, and Carrie Mae Weems, the presentation is both communally resonant and deeply personal. Each of the artists researched and reflected on their connections to the South, migration, ancestry, and land, resulting in an extraordinary range of artistic endeavors across media, including painting, sculpture, drawing, video, sound, and immersive installations. The exhibition is particularly meaningful for Baltimore, which was and continues to be shaped by this critical migration of people, and several of the artists have connections to the city. *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration* is co-organized by the BMA and Mississippi Museum of Art (MMA) and co-curated by Jessica Bell Brown (she/her), BMA Curator and Department Head of Contemporary Art, and Ryan N. Dennis (she/her), MMA Chief Curator and Artistic Director of the Museum's Center for Art and Public Exchange. It is a ticketed exhibition on view at the BMA from October 30, 2022 to January 29, 2023, having debuted at the MMA in April 2022.

The historic phenomenon known as the Great Migration saw more than six million Black Americans leave their homes in the rural South for cities across the United States between 1915 and 1970. This incredible movement of people transformed the economic, cultural, social, political, and ecological makeup of the country. The impact of the Great Migration spurred a flourishing Black culture and also established a new cadre of artists, writers, musicians, and makers. Co-curators Brown and Dennis believe that the story of the Great Migration is neither complete in its current telling nor finished in its contemporary unfolding.

"We invited artists whose practices engage with personal and communal histories, familial ties, the Black experience, and the ramifications of land ownership and environmental shifts to consider how we can expand our understanding of this essential moment in American history," said Brown and Dennis. "The research, explorations, and dialogue have resulted in an exhibition that primarily underscores reflections on family. It posits migration as both a historical and political

consequence, but also as a choice for reclaiming one's agency as the works examine individual and familial stories of perseverance, self-determination, and self-reliance. We hope viewers will experience the incredible variety of artistic expression in *A Movement in Every Direction* as a meditation on ancestry, place, and possibility," added Brown and Dennis.

All of the artists engaged with new and ongoing research, examining this history through the lens of contemporary life. Several realized incisive parallels across time in abstract forms. **Mark Bradford's** *500* (2022), an installation of 60 individually painted and oxidized panels, is inspired by a Black settlement in New Mexico that the artist discovered during research for the exhibition. The advertising for "Blackdom" billed it as a safe and self-reliant community for Black people. **Torkwase Dyson** pursued archival research at Tougaloo College in Mississippi for *Way Over There Inside Me (A Festival of Inches)* (2022), a monumental sculpture of glass and steel trapezoidal shapes that correspond to "the magnitude of accelerated movement in America" and the ways in which Black people have had to historically "bend space to have life." **Leslie Hewitt's** sculptural intervention, of which *Untitled (Slow Drag, Barely Moving, Imperceptible)* (2022) is part, positions three low-profile sculptures made of steel, red oak, and inherited glass objects that represent her family's migration from Georgia to Chicago.

Familial experiences are central to the entire exhibition with several artists creating particularly personal works. In her immersive video installation, titled *Leave! Leave Now!* (2022), **Carrie Mae Weems** explores the journey of her grandfather Frank Weems, a prominent tenant farmer and union activist who was presumed dead after being attacked by a white mob in 1936, but who survived and made his way to Chicago. Weems evokes the figure of her grandfather with a Pepper's ghost, a late 19th-century form of illusion first used in theater. A series of digital prints reflecting on Weems' northward journey titled *The North Star* (2022) accompanies the installation. For *An Ode to (You)'all* (2022), Baltimore-based artist **Akea Brionne** reproduced her family's archival photographs in six Jacquard textiles, then hand-sewed embellishments onto their surfaces to pay homage to her great-grandmother and three great-aunts who worked to improve the lives of their descendants. Maryland-based artist **Larry W. Cook's** *Let My Testimony Sit Next to Yours* (2022) comprises six large-scale landscape photographs that trace his paternal lineage in Georgia and the Carolinas, along with letters and heirloom photographs that narrate generations of father-son relationships in his family.

Various artists explore the connections between migration and landscape. **Jamea Richmond-Edwards'** epic mixed media collage, *This Water Runs Deep* (2022), reflects on the natural disasters that catalyzed her family's migration. She depicts herself and her extended family in a gilded boat protected by a mythical winged sea serpent and accompanied by a syncopated jazz sound installation. Baltimore-based artist **Zoë Charlton's** large-scale installation, *Permanent Change of Station* (2022) explores how military service for families like hers became pivotal for Black social advancement. The work comprises a multi-layered vignette of interlocking landscapes drawn from her family's homestead in Florida and interspersed with foreign landscapes reflective of places family members had served in the South Pacific. An accompanying wall drawing blurs the boundaries between the real and imagined as a Black American woman in high-ranking military dress prepares to launch a toy cargo plane on a segregated Whites-only suburb. **Allison Janae Hamilton's** haunting three-channel film installation, *A House Called Florida*

(2022) pays tribute to Black Floridians who stayed behind. Breathtaking views of Florida's Big Bend region are juxtaposed with musicians, dancers, motorists, and a Victorian house occupied by two ghost-like figures and connected with a resounding slow rhythm.

The development, strength, and resilience of Black communities and Southern culture also emerged in the research and creation of several works. **Robert Pruitt's** *A Song for Travelers* (2022) celebrates individual and Black collective experiences that have shaped the history of both rural East Texas and Houston's Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards. Inspired by an old family reunion photo, this colorful large-scale drawing shows 16 figures bringing gifts to a seated family member leaving on a journey. The figures reference aspects of Black life such as schools, social clubs, and religious spaces that remained and flourished in the South. **Theaster Gates Jr.** conjured memories of his childhood summers in Mississippi for *The Double Wide* (2022), an homage to the double-wide trailer owned by his uncle that had functioned as a candy store by day and a juke joint by night. Southern relics, shelves lined with canned and pickled foods, a bronze statue of a Black Madonna and child, and the improvisational gospel music of the Black Monks evoke the tastes, feelings, and sounds of the South. **Steffani Jemison's** video *A*ray* (2022) emphasizes the manifestation of dreams through language, movement, and expression with Alabama-based performer Lakia Black performing monologues of TikTok users amidst a painted backdrop representing Black's home and roving landscapes of Uniontown, Alabama.

Legacies of the Great Migration Interactive

Greatmigrationlegacies.org is a digital storytelling interactive that invites visitors to share stories of their "roots and routes." Envisioned both as an on-site engagement tool as well as an online platform that can be accessed from anywhere, the interactive will invite storytelling to illustrate moments of the many ways that migration and movement impact our lives. The Legacies of the Great Migration Interactive will travel to each of the exhibition venues. Central to the conceptualization of the platform is the agency of the storyteller. Rather than building a repository or archive, anyone who chooses to tell a story will be given full authority on how they participate, using a series of controls to determine how and when their story is shared. At the end of the exhibition, the online platform will be phased out and ownership of the story will rest entirely with the storyteller, who will be sent the digital file of their story via e-mail.

Publications

The exhibition is accompanied by a two-volume publication edited by Brown and Dennis and published by Yale University Press. The first volume is a critical reader highlighting pivotal scholarly work around aspects of the Great Migration, from the shaping of American cities to its impact on Black spirituality, music, art, food, and culture. The second volume offers a capsule presentation of the exhibition with curatorial essays, artist entries, and newly commissioned essays by leading scholars Kiese Laymon, Jessica Lynne, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, and Dr. Willie J. Wright.

Tickets

Tickets prices are \$15 for adults, \$13 for seniors, \$12 for groups of 7 or more, \$5 for students with ID, and \$5 for youth ages 7-18. BMA Members, children ages 6 and under, and student groups are admitted free.

Sponsors

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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.

Visitor Information

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Thursdays until 9 p.m. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year's Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and

Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

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Mississippi Museum of Art

Established in 1911, the Mississippi Museum of Art (MMA) 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 that 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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