



BMA Names **abdu mongo ali** as the Inaugural Alice and Franklin Cooley Composer in Residence

Residency culminates with a performance on January 22, 2026

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BALTIMORE, MD (November 19, 2025)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) has named multi-disciplinary artist, musician, and poet **abdu mongo ali** as its inaugural **Alice and Franklin Cooley Composer in Residence**. Ali will respond to a creative prompt using the museum's collection and exhibitions as a site of exploration and inspiration. The residency began in September and will culminate on Thursday, January 22 with a performance of ali's completed work, *between every breath, there is atmosphere*. This sonic and visual performance considers how Maryland's southern Atlantic atmospheric and ecological conditions affect contemporary Black Baltimoreans. The title is derived from a collection of ali's poems that speak to the interconnectedness of Blackness, gay life, and the afterlives of slavery.

Throughout cultural history, writers and composers have drawn creative inspiration from the visual arts. Whether Keats' poetic praise of a Grecian urn, or Beyoncé's powerful encounter with Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, these cross-disciplinary connections resonate across audiences and provide a lens to see art from a new perspective. As a catalyst and creative incubator for these transdisciplinary connections, the BMA's prompt centers around ecology, the study of the relationships between living beings, as part of the museum's *Turn Again to the Earth* initiative focusing on art and the environment.

The Composer in Residence is given a stipend for their participation, special access to the collections, and a space within the museum to write or work, if they choose. The residency culminates with a public presentation/performance of the artist's completed work, an in-gallery resource for visitors to access the collection or exhibition-inspired work, and a BMA Stories interview with the artist sharing their residency experience.

"I was prompted to create this residency as a result of some of the cross-disciplinary artistic presentations that have inspired me the most," said Asma Naeem, BMA Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. "Baltimore has a rich artistic community that both connects and transcends traditionally defined genres, and I could think of no one more fitting to be our inaugural Composer in Residence than abdu ali, whose life and work creatively crosses boundaries of all kinds."

abdu mongo ali

abdu mongo ali is a musician, poet, and cross-disciplinary artist who works through sound, video, text, and performance. They see their work as poetic inquiries of identity, often deconstructing binary ideas of race, gender, and sexuality. Ali has performed and exhibited work at many institutions such as MoMa PS1, Carnegie Museum of Art, Baltimore Museum of Art, Andy Warhol Museum, and the Kennedy Center. They have participated in residencies with Red Bull Music Academy and Pioneer Works and was recently a visiting artist at the Brown Arts Institute. They have also presented lectures and talks at Harvard University, Stanford University, and Towson University, and their writing has been supported by Bread Loaf and published in *Pin Up Magazine*, *NiiJournal*, *Art Papers*, and the *Little Patuxent Review*. Ali is a recipient of the 2023 Mary Sawyers Baker Prize and is a 2023 USA Fellow. They hold an MFA in Literary Arts from Brown University.

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 97,000 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., with extended hours 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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