

Imagining Black Diasporas: 21st-Century Art and Poetics

This supplement is produced in conjunction with the publication for the exhibition *Imagining Black Diasporas: 21st-Century Art and Poetics* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, December 15, 2024–August 3, 2025. It contains gallery photography, interpretive content, press clippings, and additional materials about the exhibition's installation that were unavailable at the time the catalogue went to press in July 2024.

Exhibition catalogue published by Los Angeles County Museum of Art and DelMonico Books • D.A.P. Available at thelacmastore.org

Exhibition Introduction

“Diaspora” is a word typically associated with displacement. People move and are forcibly moved and their cultures disperse. But diasporas also provoke creative acts of survival, as people reinvent their heritage through art. *Imagining Black Diasporas* finds aesthetic connections among the work of sixty Black artists based in Africa, Europe, and the Americas, illuminating their historically sidelined insights.

Distance is an integral feature of diasporic experience. There are few accounts of the transatlantic slave trade written by Africans, forcing descendants of the enslaved to imagine their ancestors’ experiences. Artists in this exhibition interpret their heritage through the stylistic clues and motifs their ancestors left behind. Some reflect on the impact of the slave trade, while others respond to migrants’ experiences in this century.

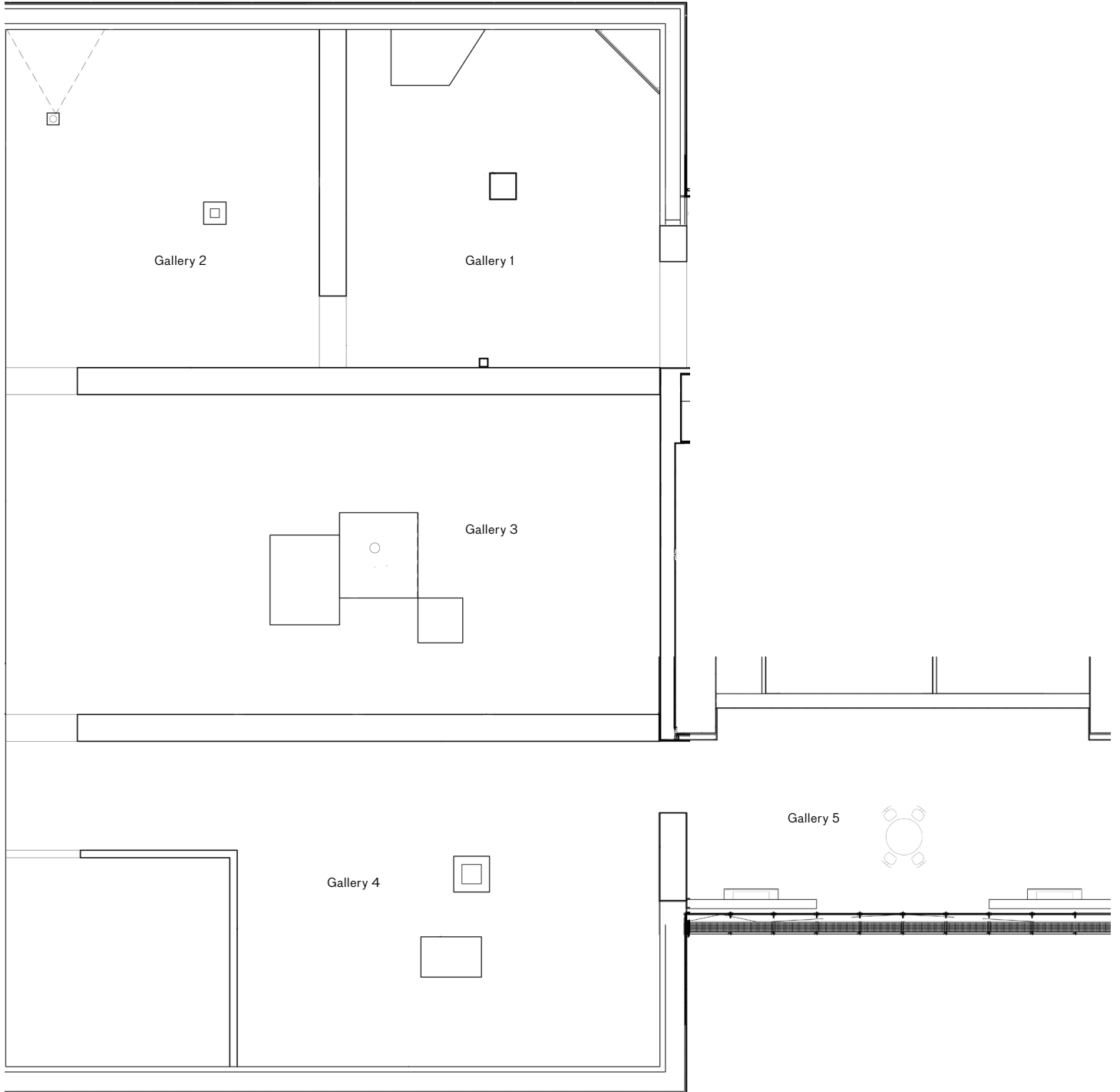
Pan-African ideas are founded on the premise that Black people share a vulnerability to racism no matter where they live. “Black is beautiful” echoed across the Atlantic in the mid-twentieth century: as Black Americans marched for equality, countries throughout Africa achieved independence. In this century, Pan-African networks of artistic exchange and solidarity have spread online and in a rising number of Black artist-led residencies and exhibitions. Several of the artists in *Imagining Black Diasporas* have founded or participated in such programs.

The displacement of thirty million African people over four centuries was a vast event with such wide-reaching implications that to refer to it as a singular concept—a diaspora—represents a failure of nuance in language. People reinvent their heritage by merging their impressions of the past with their presents. The Black diaspora is an idea created imaginatively.

Dhyandra Lawson

Associate Curator, Contemporary Art

Exhibition Floor Plan



Installation Images



Installation photograph, BCAM 2,
entrance to *Imagining Black Diasporas*



Edgar Arceneaux, *Blocking Out the Sun*

In the seventy-two 35mm color slides that comprise his series *Blocking Out the Sun* (2004), Edgar Arceneaux shows views of the Pacific Ocean at sunset from different locations in Santa Monica. When making some of the images, the artist inserted his thumb to cover the sun's light, a gesture that references a scientific technique used by astronomers to measure the clarity of the atmosphere. In these images, Arceneaux attempts to measure the unknown.

Blocking Out the Sun is shown by projecting the images on a wall; however, exposing color slides to light causes progressive and irreversible fading. Each exhibition of this work therefore requires the creation of duplicate sets of slides in order to preserve the original master set. When curator Dhyandra Lawson decided to include *Blocking Out the Sun* in *Imagining Black Diasporas*, I was charged with overseeing this process.

To better understand the color change taking place during projection, I ordered color slide duplicates and subjected them to a projector's light. I collected weekly color measurements, and after twenty-five weeks I compared the exposed duplicates to unexposed reference slides to assess the evolution of fading and staining. The measurement data showed that the primary color changes are a progressive fading of the magenta dye and an overall discoloration of the film. I also visually compared the slide samples projected for different periods and determined that the images seemed visibly faded and stained after twelve weeks. Ultimately, I hope that my measurements complement the measuring Arceneaux endeavors to achieve in *Blocking Out the Sun*.

Elsa Thyss

Associate Conservator, Photographs



Installation photograph of Edgar Arceneaux's
Blocking Out the Sun (far wall), in *Imagining Black Diasporas*

Sandra Brewster, *Blur*

One of the greatest challenges and thrills for a museum preparator is recreating an artist's work for an exhibition. When I learned I would have the opportunity to install Sandra Brewster's mural *Blur* (2020), I knew I needed to get to work right away. I began by thoroughly studying the installation instructions and sourcing the necessary supplies: photocopies, transfer medium, and squeegees. Then, along with two DAP apprentices, Calvin Coloma and Villano Gonzalez, I prepped the copies, trimming and numbering 144 sheets. Once we'd gathered the supplies, we tested the installation process, familiarizing ourselves with the materials and tools. Through trial and error, we grew confident in our technique.

On installation day, I began by pasting the center column of sheets, creating a clear reference point. My prep teammate Alex Garcia and I worked top down and center out, adding transfer medium to the trimmed pages and pasting them to the wall over a few days. Drying took twenty-four hours, and then, with water and rags, we wet the paper and carefully removed the pulp to reveal the image left behind. We patched some pigment loss and varnished the work. Completing *Blur* reminds me of how fortunate we are in my profession to have these opportunities for collaboration and creativity.

Daniel Wheeler

Senior Art Preparator



Installation photograph of Sandra Brewster, *Blur*,
in *Imagining Black Diasporas*

Yazmin Monet Watkins, “Imagine”

Poet Yazmin Monet Watkins incorporated the title of every work featured in Imagining Black Diasporas into “Imagine.” She performed the work at LACMA on May 2, 2025.

We glitter in the shadows of those who’ve come before
Imagine our ancestors
Using art to get free, to connect
Seeking guidance and insight
Divining ritual from cowrie shells and clay
Blowing bubbles and play
Wrap our tongues around words
Destined to liberate ourselves
Our collective history un
Poésie graphique
Silent images screaming
Of a shared fight for equality
BAM! Another one gone
BAM! This one is for Yvette
This one is for Trayvon. My life matters.
We demand Justice for Oscar Grant! Justice for Gaza!
From the ghettos of Oakland and Palestine
This is a declaration of love
I solemnly swear from the altar of my heart,
This is what it’s like to be Black and alive
Are we destined to repeat our trauma?
Does this mirror have memory?
How many chants? How many cries?
How many more before we move?
Don this headdress, by way of revolution
All power to the people
Always!
This be a mass migration,
My folk too, fled from the south
There will be no room for advancement
No room for gold, lest we block out the sun
And shine, shine.
Don’t you know We are in this thing together
We must move! Transform.
From silence to transformation
Dancing in the street
Mining the future, remembering the past
Is an open door
Though caught between the two

Flowering in the possibility
The futility of repetition
Like a headless man trying to drink
This sound suit is resounding
This battle cry is homegrown
Fading like a scroll
We have the ability to transform everyday materials into gold,
Moved by spirit
Without title, up and out from the soil,
A Caravane through time
Dragging an intercontinental drawing 'cross the square
If everybody's work is equally important
Why are there so many still lifes cast in white?
When we actually shine brighter in the night?
Noctambules, we night owls
Flying from the yoke, breaking bindings
Don't you know I learned to dance on tightropes
Learned to break eggshells
In My Auntie Lovey's Kitchen
My kin taught me, "look, spit it out"
Quit your blue spiral
You got that self-generated magic
That's organic freedom at your spine
We need you to imagine better
Imagine deeper, father than we've ever swum
Across oceans land and time
Through the nightmare of colonial vision
See how we still float? See how our hands be boat?
Underwater and above
Celestial guides sparkling brightest
The space in which we travel
Is more psyche than the char
More blur than bird on wires
Butterfly that we be
In your absence, the skies are all the same
Yet and still we're coming
Headed True North
Even if we don't have title
Drawing through Ramadan and the howl
Growing up , ukulele, right before your eyes
Somehow, Springing to life
In the fountain of america
Detached from night,
Despite the white
We chart futures for the sky
Build our rocket ships from star clay

From New Jersey to the Vision in the garden, in Leimert
Y'all peep this bump and curl?
That's Legacy passed down
A self Portrait as my father
Rooted in a land of our own
This is seremoni, this is ritual
From the Maison des claves, to the door of no return
A descendant daughter returns
Straddling history and the psalms
Deliver us from harm
In the daylight of Black inquiry and desire
I dream of rivers, belonging to the sea
A thread or line that holds US together
We will wear the mask, no more
Though the past is still with us and despite the eons of distance from
our elders
We are connected to each other across seas, survival and all reason
We collage some kind of purpose
Craft our own reality.
We are healing and repairing
A pan African network of solidarity
This poem is A place for representation,
A place for speech from silence
For transformation from our movement
And how our movement work leads to liberation.
Imagine what that feels like? Imagine all of us free. Imagine?
Imagine all of us, finally home. Ase ase ase.
And so it is.

Selected Press Clippings

“A moving exhibition . . . rooted in bold expression and strong messages from Black experiences across generations and landscapes.”

—[LA Sentinel](#), December 18, 2024

“The exhibit displays evocative accounts of Black experiences throughout time in different parts of the world. . . . In the context of this exploration, the Black Diaspora is a dynamic concept constructed imaginatively.”

—[Our Weekly](#), December 18, 2024

“Artists gathered at LACMA for a portrait commemorating their inclusion in ‘Imagining Black Diasporas: 21st-Century Art and Poetics,’ on view through July 27. During the photo shoot, there was a special request to listen to Roberta Flack (the singer had died two days earlier). The entire group sang along as ‘Killing Me Softly With His Song’ echoed through the galleries.”

—[LA Times](#), April 11, 2025

“LACMA’s current Pan-African exhibition of contemporary art helps redefine what it means to invest not only in showcasing Black art from an ethical standpoint, but also in supporting Black artists from an economic one (over half of the works in the show were acquired by LACMA). . . . Walking through *Imagining Black Diasporas* is a practice in presence; the show, organized into conceptual categories . . . requests an embodied, reflective approach to witnessing the myriad artworks, which are as varied and beautiful as the African diaspora itself.”

—[Carla](#), May 29, 2025

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