

Exhibition: *Afro-Atlantic Histories*

Dates: December 11, 2022—September 10, 2023

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 3)

(Los Angeles, CA—November 28, 2022) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Afro-Atlantic Histories*, an exhibition that charts the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies in the African diaspora. Through a series of dialogues across time, *Afro-Atlantic Histories* features artworks produced in Africa, Europe, and the Americas in the last four centuries to reexamine—from a global perspective—histories and stories of enslavement, resilience, and the struggle for liberation.

The exhibition comprises over 100 artworks and objects from the 17th to 21st centuries, expressing and analyzing the ebbs and flows between Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe and exploring the diverse visual cultures of the Afro-Atlantic—a place marked by the transatlantic slave trade and its brutal, forced movement of African peoples across the Atlantic Ocean. Also called the Black Atlantic, a term coined by historian Paul Gilroy, this is a geography lacking precise borders, where the vast culture of the African diaspora was disseminated, sometimes merging with and transforming other cultures. *Afro-Atlantic Histories* juxtaposes works to presenting evolving perspectives across time and geography through paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures, photographs, time-based media, and ephemera, from historical paintings by Frans Post and Édouard Antoine Renard to contemporary works by Kerry James Marshall, Alison Saar, Hank Willis Thomas, and Kara Walker, among others.

The exhibition was initially presented as *Histórias Afro-Atlânticas* at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP) and the Instituto Tomie Ohtake in Brazil, in 2018, with touring venues in the U.S., including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), the National Gallery of Art, and the Dallas Museum of Art. At the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand and at the Instituto Tomie Ohtake,

the exhibition was curated by Adriano Pedrosa, Artistic Director, MASP; Ayrson Heráclito, Guest Curator; Hélio Menezes, Guest Curator; Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, Adjunct Curator of Histories, MASP; and Tomás Toledo, Former Chief Curator, MASP. The North American tour is curated by Kanitra Fletcher, Associate Curator, African American and Afro-Diasporic Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. LACMA's exhibition is co-curated by Rita Gonzalez, the Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and Department Head, Contemporary Art, and José Luis Blondet, Curator of Special Initiatives, Contemporary Art.

"It is an honor to partner with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, and the National Gallery of Art to bring this momentous exhibition to the West Coast," said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. "The many stories and perspectives explored in *Afro-Atlantic Histories* are crucial to our understanding of the African diaspora's resilience, creativity, and power. Several additions to the Los Angeles presentation are drawn from LACMA's strong collection of art by Black artists."

Exhibition Organization

Afro-Atlantic Histories unfolds through six thematic sections that explore varied narratives, encouraging new connections between historical and contemporary works and raising questions that inspire us to reconsider Afro-Atlantic histories.

The first section, **Maps and Margins**, focuses on the passage between Africa and the Americas and how artists have represented and reinterpreted the histories shaped within. With many images of ships and continents, the works of art seen here powerfully evoke the early crossings and encounters of the Black Diaspora.

The terror of the slave system and struggles for freedom are the focus of **Enslavement and Emancipation**, from paintings by European artists who illustrate conditions of captivity and documents recording the sale of enslaved people to works by contemporary artists who confront this brutality by incorporating historic images of slavery in their own practice.

Everyday Lives features images of daily life in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas, from the 17th century to the present, that reflect moments of labor and leisure in Black communities. Thematically organized paintings juxtapose works from different periods and regions, proposing a dialogue among pictures of Black people, with works made by Europeans that often romanticized Black subservience and later imagery by Afrodescendant artists that detail realities of racial inequities and state violence.

Rites and Rhythms includes depictions of various types of music and dance as well as festivals, ceremonies, and other rituals. Ceremonies, foods, ornaments, offerings, deities, instruments, and different types of priests and priestesses were reinvented in

the Americas and the Caribbean, but they share the use of African languages and references in their songs, spirits, and views of the cosmos, world, and nature.

Portraits presents an array of portraits of Black people from the 17th century through the present in a range of media, including leaders, heroes, and ordinary individuals; nudes and fashion plates; invented subjects and the artists themselves. They affirm the poise, power, and presence of Black people and include some of the most celebrated Afro-Atlantic portraits in the history of art.

The last section, **Resistance and Activism**, takes its cue from histories of the powerful pursuit of self-determination. Works on view reflect visual protest strategies in demonstrations, banners, textiles, and performances that have circulated throughout the Black Atlantic and played a central role in activism. Expressing cultural, political, religious, and artistic identities, they assert and advance the ongoing struggle for full and dignified freedom.

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by DelMonico Books/Museu de Arte de São Paulo, edited with text by Adriano Pedrosa and Tomás Toledo, with additional texts by Ayrson Heráclito, Deborah Willis, Hélio Menezes, Kanitra Fletcher, Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, and Vivian Crockett, showcasing over 400 works by over 200 artists.

Credit

This exhibition is co-organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand - MASP in collaboration with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

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About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 149,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions: (Left) Aaron Douglas, *Into Bondage*, 1936, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Corcoran Collection (museum purchase and partial gift from Thurlow Evans Tibbs, Jr., the Evans-Tibbs Collection), © 2022 Heirs of Aaron Douglas/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; (Center) Dalton Paula, *Zeferina*, 2018, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, gift of the artist on the occasion of the Afro-Atlantic Histories exhibition, 2018, © Dalton Paula; (Right) Hank Willis Thomas, *A Place to Call Home (Africa America Reflection)*, 2020, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, © Hank Willis Thomas, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

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