

## **BAMPFA Opens Nationally Acclaimed Contemporary Art Exhibition That Explores the Great Migration**



***A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration*  
Captures Enduring Significance of the Great Migration Through  
Commissioned Works by 12 Acclaimed Artists**

**On View at BAMPFA from April 13 through September 22**

(Berkeley, CA) March 13, 2024—Next month, the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive will open *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration*, an exhibition that explores the profound impact of the Great Migration on the social and cultural life of the United States from historical and personal perspectives. Co-organized by the Mississippi Museum of

Art (MMA) and the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA), the award-winning exhibition features newly commissioned works across media by twelve acclaimed artists, including 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. Through the artists' distinctive and dynamic installations, *A Movement in Every Direction* reveals



the spectrum of contexts that shaped the Great Migration and explores the ways in which it continues to reverberate today in both intimate and communal experiences.

The Great Migration saw more than six million Black Americans leave the South for destinations across the United States at the start of the twentieth century and well into the 1970s, including more than three hundred thousand transplants to the Bay Area. This incredible movement of people transformed nearly every aspect of Black life, in both rural towns and urban metropolises, and spurred an already flourishing Black culture. *A Movement in Every Direction* provides a platform for the featured artists to explore their own relationships to this singular historical event through painting, sculpture, drawing, video, sound, and immersive installation. The exhibition was co-curated by Ryan N. Dennis, formerly the MMA Chief Curator and Artistic Director of the Museum's Center for Art and Public Exchange and currently the Senior Curator at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and Jessica Bell Brown, BMA Curator and Department Head of Contemporary Art.

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*A Movement in Every Direction* is accompanied by a two-volume publication that will be available for purchase in the BAMPFA Store, including essays by Kiese Laymon, Jessica Lynne, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, and Dr. Willie J. Wright. Public programs associated with the exhibition include a screening on June 13 of ***Daughters of the Dust***, Julie Dash's pathbreaking film about a multigenerational Black family's emigration from their home in rural South Carolina; a live performance on July 26 by the Oakland-based artist, writer, and musician **Brontez Purnell**, performing songs by his uncle J. J. Malone, a blues musician who migrated from Alabama to Oakland in the 1960s; and a panel discussion with the exhibition's organizing curators on September 21. In addition, BAMPFA will host a screening on June 15 of films by two of the artists featured in the exhibition, **Akea Broinne** and **Jamea Richmond-Edwards**, the latter of whom will appear in person at the event.

Many of the works in the exhibition engage with new and ongoing research by the artists, examining this history through the lens of contemporary life and establishing incisive parallels across time. **Torkwase Dyson's** *Way Over There Inside Me (A Festival of Inches)* (2022) centers on an installation of modular trapezoidal sculptures with hand-drawn notations informed by the relationships between plantation economies, Black liberation methodologies, architecture, and environmental crisis. The connections between migration, economies, and landscape are also explored in **Allison Janae Hamilton's** three-channel film installation, *A House Called Florida* (2022). It offers a haunting, mythic exploration of the longstanding, symbiotic connections between Black life and the Southern environment, and a speculation on the intertwined fates of life and land in the aftermath of climate degradation. The same themes occur in **Jamea Richmond-Edwards's** *This Water Runs Deep* (2022), a triptych painting and attendant soundscape reflecting on how natural disasters have catalyzed Black migration. In other instances, the artists' research emphasizes the making of culture, such as **Steffani Jemison's** video work, *A\*ray* (2022), which features Alabama-based actress Lakia Black expressing a range of real and imagined identities through performances and song.

The development, strength, and resilience of community also emerged in the research and creation of individual works, and as an important thread within the exhibition. **Mark Bradford's** *500* (2022), an installation of 60 individually painted and oxidized panels, is inspired by and takes its name from a Black settlement in New Mexico that the artist discovered during research for the exhibition, and which was billed as a safe and self-reliant community for Black people. In *A Song for Travelers* (2022), **Robert Pruitt** examines his hometown of Houston, particularly the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards, which served as a locus for protection and resources for new migrants through a large-scale drawing that reflects archival and contemporary representations of the evolution of his community. **Zoë Charlton's** large-scale installation, *Permanent Change of Station* (2022), features a monumental wall drawing and a sculptural vignette of collages that blur boundaries between real and imagined and between the domestic and foreign. Charlton explores how, for some families like hers, military service became both a complex engine for Black migration and pivotal opportunity for Black social advancement.

Personal and familial experiences are central to the entire exhibition, and for several artists this engagement led to the creation of particularly intimate 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. A series of digital prints reflecting on Frank Weems' northward journey entitled *The North Star* (2022) accompanies the installation. **Akea Brionne's** *An Ode to (You)'all* (2022) explores ancestral resilience and strength within Black maternal family structures. The installation focuses on the lives of the artist's great-grandmother and three great-aunts through tapestries that contain familial significance and signals the labor of prior generations who worked to improve the lives and opportunities of their descendants. In a series of large-scale photographs and archival family photographs, **Larry W. Cook's** *Let My Testimony Sit Next to Yours* (2022) explores intergenerational narratives about fatherhood and forgiveness as he traces his paternal lineage across Georgia, South Carolina, and Washington, DC.

The interplay between the personal and communal continues with *The Double Wide* (2022) by **Theaster Gates Jr.**, a large-scale sculptural installation that resembles a double-wide trailer owned by the artist's uncle that had functioned as a candy store by day and a juke joint by night. The installation features two video works as well as material culture that speaks to Gates's childhood, family, and friends. **Leslie Hewitt's** *Untitled (Slow Drag, Barely Moving, Imperceptible)*, *Untitled (Barely Moving, Imperceptible, Slow Drag)*, and *Untitled (Imperceptible, Slow Drag, Barely Moving)* (2022) positions a group of three interrelated abstract sculptures informed by destabilization and migration in relation to time and space.

*A Movement in Every Direction* will open at BAMPFA as part of a five-city national tour, which began at the Mississippi Museum of Art in 2022. The exhibition's Berkeley presentation is organized by BAMPFA's senior curator Anthony Graham, with Matthew Villar Miranda, Curatorial Associate.

"We are thrilled to bring this incredible exhibition to the Bay Area," said Graham. "This group of artists illuminate the history of the Great Migration through works that reflect both personal histories and deep research. *A Movement in Every Direction* helps us to understand migration not only as a path from one place to another but also as a continuous way of rethinking our present moment."

"This exhibition brings to light a lesser known but very important part of the Great Migration of Black communities toward the West Coast and builds on a strong legacy of Black art in the Bay Area," said BAMPFA's Executive Director Julie Rodrigues Widholm.

### **About BAMPFA**

Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) ignites cultural change for a more inclusive and artistic world. BAMPFA has been uniquely dedicated to art and film since 1970, with international programming that is locally connected and globally relevant. It holds more than 25,000 artworks and 18,000 films and videos in its collection, with particular strengths in

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modern and contemporary art and historical Chinese painting, as well as the world's largest collection of African American quilts. As part of the University of California, Berkeley, BAMPFA is committed to artistic diversity through its robust slate of art exhibitions, film screenings, artist talks, live performances, and educational programs that shed new light on the art of the past and connect our audiences with leading filmmakers and artists of our time. BAMPFA sits on the edge of campus and downtown Berkeley, where it welcomes visitors from across and beyond the Bay Area in a repurposed building designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

### **Sponsorship**

*A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration* is co-organized by the Mississippi Museum of Art and the Baltimore Museum of Art. The exhibition is co-curated by Ryan N. Dennis, former Chief Curator and Artistic Director of the Center for Art and Public Exchange at the Mississippi Museum of Art, and Jessica Bell Brown, Curator and Department Head of Contemporary Art at the Baltimore Museum of Art. The presentation at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive is organized by Anthony Graham, Senior Curator, with Matthew Villar Miranda, Curatorial Associate.

Support is provided by the Ford Foundation, Teiger Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Bloomberg Philanthropies, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

### **Image credits**

1. Robert Pruitt (b. 1975), *A Song for Travelers* (detail), 2022. charcoal, conté, and pastel on paper, mounted onto four aluminum panels. Courtesy of the artist and Koplin Del Rio Gallery. Image courtesy of Adam Reich.
2. Theaster Gates Jr. (b. 1973), *The Double Wide*, 2022. spruce framing, armory flooring, metal roofing exterior, Mississippi reliquary, tar, pickled goods, bronze sculpture, two-channel video (color, sound), 2:02 min. (channel one) and 6:18 min. (channel two). Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist. TGM8. Photography by Mitro Hood. Courtesy of the Mississippi Museum of Art and Baltimore Museum of Art.

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## **Visitor Information**

### Hours

Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

### Tickets

\$14 general admission

\$12 non-UC Berkeley students, disabled, 65+

FREE BAMPFA members; UC Berkeley students, faculty, staff; 18 and under; one adult per child 13 and under; and artists in the BAMPFA collection/MATRIX

### Address

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