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**THE CALIFORNIA AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM TO OPEN FOUR NEW
EXHIBITIONS THIS SUMMER**

**Featuring solo exhibitions from artists Sanford Biggers
and April Bey plus an examination of debutante culture**

(Los Angeles, CA) — The California African American Museum (CAAM) announced today the presentation of four new exhibitions that will be on view this summer, all of which have deep connections to Los Angeles.

“We are delighted to offer these four exciting exhibitions, especially as Los Angeles emerges from what has been such a difficult year,” says Executive Director Cameron Shaw. “April Bey is a local artist, and this is her first solo museum exhibition in Los Angeles. For Sanford Biggers, our presentation of his acclaimed traveling exhibition *Codeswitch* represents a homecoming, as he grew up just a few miles from CAAM, even taking art classes at the museum as a young person. And *Rights and Rituals: The Making of African American Debutante Culture* draws from the history and archives of several LA-based social organizations to tell a fascinating story about women, class, and race work.”

CAAM’s upcoming summer exhibitions are:

April Bey: Atlantica, The Gilda Region

May 26, 2021–January 17, 2022



In *Atlantica, The Gilda Region*, April Bey’s first solo museum exhibition in Los Angeles, the Bahamian-American interdisciplinary artist presents an immersive installation that taps into Black Americans’ historical embrace of space travel and extraterrestrial visioning—a cultural movement dating back to the late 1960s and later termed Afrofuturism. Through this Afrofuturist lens, Bey reflects on subjects such as queerness, feminism, and internet culture in vibrant tableaux that combine living plants, video, music, photography, and

oversized mixed-media paintings and textiles. The artist positions herself as an alien from the planet Atlantica, while her mission on Earth is to observe and report as an undercover agent. This imagined world and her general interest in storytelling come from her father, who would tell her childhood tales using alien narratives to illustrate how Black people were othered in the United States and The Bahamas. In contrast to the racial oppression and exploitation rampant on Earth, Atlantica offers a beautiful diasporic world in which Black people thrive and flourish.

April Bey: Atlantica, The Gilda Region is curated by Mar Hollingsworth, Visual Arts Curator.

Rights and Rituals: The Making of African American Debutante Culture

May 26, 2021–February 27, 2022



In November 1961, President John F. Kennedy and California Governor Pat Brown greeted twenty-eight young ladies as they made their debut into society during The Links, Incorporated Los Angeles Chapter's tenth annual cotillion at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. The sitting president was foremost paying respect to singer Nat King Cole, whose daughter Carole was debuting that evening, yet his presence epitomized the emergent power of African American debutante culture. Social organizations such as The Links, Incorporated, the Questionettes, and the 20th Century Onyx Club have a long history of challenging institutionalized stereotypes that limited the role and

potential of Black girls. *Rights and Rituals: The Making of African American Debutante Culture* investigates the origins of these social organizations and the ways they supported young Black women's participation in vital, albeit sometimes understated, race work.

Through photographs, objects, and ephemera, the exhibition explores the foundational ideas of W.E.B. Du Bois's racial uplift movement and how African American social organizations melded upliftment ideologies with established European debutante traditions to create a unique cultural phenomenon that persists to this day. With a focus on the 1880s to the transformative decades of the 1950s and 1960s, *Rights and Rituals* looks specifically at how Black debutante culture developed in the West and offers a new perspective on its participants' contributions, both visible and invisible, to the fight for civil rights.

Rights and Rituals: The Making of African American Debutante Culture is curated by Taylor Bythewood-Porter, Assistant Curator.

Sanford Biggers: Codeswitch

July 28, 2021–January 23, 2022



For more than two decades, Los Angeles native Sanford Biggers has been developing a singular body of work that is deeply informed by African American history and traditions. *Sanford Biggers: Codeswitch*, the first survey of quilt-based works by the New York-based interdisciplinary artist, features over fifty pieces that seamlessly weave together references to contemporary art, urban culture, sacred geometry, and more.

Biggers's engagement with quilts dates to 2009, when he was commissioned by Hidden City Philadelphia to produce a work for the Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, a stop on the Underground Railroad. As the artist researched the history of the Underground Railroad, he was intrigued by the long-debated narrative that quilts doubled as signposts along escape routes throughout the nineteenth century. Inspired by those stories, Biggers created his first quilt-based works.

The exhibition's title, *Codeswitch*, refers to both the artist's quilt series, known as the Codex series, as well as to the idea of code-switching: shifting from one linguistic code to another depending on social context. The Codex series includes mixed-media paintings and sculptures done directly on or made from pre-1900 antique quilts. This

process, like linguistic code-switching, recognizes the plurality of language, as the quilts signal their original creator's intent as well as the new layers of meaning given to them through Biggers's artistic interventions.

Sanford Biggers: Codeswitch was co-organized by Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought, New Orleans, and the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, and overseen by Andrea Andersson (Founding Director and Chief Curator, Rivers Institute) and Sergio Bessa (Curator, Bronx Museum). The exhibition at CAAM is curated by Rivers Institute and is the first project in a multi-year collaboration between CAAM and Rivers Institute.

Cassandra Press: An Unfolding, Sanford Biggers and the Amistad Research Center

July 28, 2021–February 13, 2022

In response to *Sanford Biggers: Codeswitch*, Los Angeles-based artist and Cassandra Press founder Kandis Williams is creating an installation that mines the archives of the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans. Comprised of text, sound recordings, and found images, the project offers a paratextual reading of the materials and themes on view in Biggers's exhibition, including quilting and craft, song and rhythm, movement and migration.

This exhibition is curated by Cassandra Press and co-organized by Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought, New Orleans.

CAAM's ongoing summer exhibitions are:

Sanctuary: Recent Acquisitions to the Permanent Collection

Through July 11, 2021



Sanctuary features recently acquired works that explore the concepts of safety and refuge as they relate to the African American experience. Whether real, staged, or imagined, the worlds depicted in these photographs and mixed-media works support complex narratives and assert the importance of claiming a place of one's own. Each artist in the exhibition presents a unique perspective on the creation of space, inhabiting actual physical locations, evoking emotional ties and affiliations, or manifesting dream-like havens through digital manipulation.

In several instances, photographs are displayed alongside three-dimensional sculptural works by the same artist, forming expressive installations that speak to the artists' material versatility and to the creative potentials of the media in which they work. For example, Gary Simmons's photograph of an empty academic setting appears in tandem with one of his ghostly erased drawings of coniferous trees on a school chalkboard, while Janna Ireland's impeccably staged self-portrait complements a small still-life assemblage that suggests the fragility of her own domestic construct.

Sanctuary: Recent Acquisitions to the Permanent Collection is curated by Mar Hollingsworth, Visual Arts Curator and Program Manager.

Enunciated Life

Through August 15, 2021



In *Enunciated Life*, Black spiritual beliefs—as well as the movements, sounds, and other bodily expressions that have engendered communication within and beyond Black churches—operate as a point of departure for considering modes of surrender. The exhibition's title is derived from the scholarship of Ashon T. Crawley, who recognizes the beauty and power of breathing within Black

Pentecostalism “to enunciate life, life that is exorbitant, capacious, and fundamentally social, though it is also life that is structured through and engulfed by brutal violence.” Enunciated life, in other words, alerts us to the audaciousness of Black breath that endures in the wake of continued anti-Blackness.

The contemporary artists with work in this show, including commissioned works by Shikeith, Billy Mark, and Tiona Nekkia McClodden, draw upon the choreography and sonics of possession found in Black spirituality—the visible signs of embodied surrender, such as sweating, whooping, shouting, back-bending, and chest-opening. Through video, painting, photography, and installation, these artists help us explore the various bodily experiences that transpire through religion; they also make clear the far less legible elements that surround the event of incarnation, such as desire, longing, faith, and vulnerability.

Enunciated Life is curated by Taylor Renee Aldridge, Visual Arts Curator and Program Manager.

About the California African American Museum

CAAM explores the art, history, and culture of African Americans, with an emphasis on California and the West. Chartered by the State of California in 1977, the Museum began formal operations in 1981 and is a state-supported agency and a Smithsonian Affiliate. In addition to presenting exhibitions and public programs, CAAM houses a permanent collection of more than four thousand works of art, artifacts, and historical documents, and a publicly accessible research library containing more than twenty thousand volumes.

Visitor Information

Admission to the California African American Museum is free; reservations are required and can be made online at caamuseum.org. Call 213-744-2084 for additional assistance.

In response to COVID-19, numerous precautions are in place, including:

- Admission remains free, but reservations are now required.
- Capacity is reduced per public health and government guidelines.
- Masks and social distancing are required.
- No large bags. The bag check is closed.

Please visit CAAM's website for complete details about new visiting protocols.

Hours: Tuesday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m.–5 p.m. Closed Mondays (except MLK Day) and Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. The California African American Museum is located in Exposition Park at the corner of Figueroa Street and Exposition Boulevard, west of the 110 (Harbor) Freeway. Easy parking is available for \$12 at 39th and Figueroa Streets. The Metro Expo line stop Expo Park/USC is a five-minute walk through the Exposition Park Rose Garden to the Museum.

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Images:

Page 1: April Bey, *A Whole Me?! (detail)*, 2021. Acrylic paint, watercolor, and hand-sewn, digitally woven, and printed crown, 110 x 72 in. Courtesy the artist

Page 2: 20th Century Onyx Club, Oxnard, 1964 debutantes, 1964. Reproduction. Courtesy Black Gold Cooperative Library System

Page 2: Sanford Biggers, *Reconstruction*, 2019. Antique quilt, birch plywood, gold leaf, 38 x 72 x 19 in. © Sanford Biggers and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago. Photo: RCH Photography

Page 3: Ja'Tovia Gary, *An Ecstatic Experience*, 2015. Video, color, sound, 6 min. Courtesy the artist

Page 3: Carla Jay Harris, *Sphinx*, 2019. Archival pigment print, two panels, 40 x 30 in. each. Courtesy the artist