

California African American Museum

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California African American Museum Announces May Reopening and Two New Exhibitions



(Los Angeles, CA) — The California African American Museum (CAAM) announced it will reopen on May 22, 2024, with *Paula Wilson: Toward the Sky's Back Door*, a groundbreaking traveling exhibition of work by artist Paula Wilson. On May 26, 2024, the museum will join the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) to present the final stop in the national tour of the acclaimed exhibition *Simone Leigh*.

CAAM will reopen *Tatyana Fazlalizadeh: Speaking to Falling Seeds*, an installation of large-scale portraits of Black Angelenos that are wheat pasted across the Museum's atrium walls. Also continuing at CAAM are the historical exhibitions *We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California* and *Black California Dreamin': Claiming Space at America's Leisure Frontier*, which have both been extended.

Looking forward, CAAM Executive Director Cameron Shaw said, "I'm thrilled that we will reopen our doors in May with this slate of exhibitions. With three solo presentations of work by outstanding Black women artists, CAAM continues to foreground important conversations about contemporary art, representation, and its intersections with the lived experiences of our visitors. At the same time, the history exhibitions on view reveal untold narratives that are significant in their own right while offering deep context and connections to the contemporary art shown across the Museum."

The new exhibitions are:

Paula Wilson: Toward the Sky's Back Door

May 22 – August 18, 2024

Paula Wilson: Toward the Sky's Back Door presents nearly two decades of Paula Wilson's paintings, sculptures, prints, collages, and videos, with different media frequently intermixed in a single work. Breaking down perceived boundaries to connect global and local narratives, the work explores subjects as wide-ranging as the moth that pollinates Yucca plants, ancient Greek vases, West African D'mba, and modern technologies. Using the same techniques and styles to make art for viewing on the gallery wall as for the rugs she walks on and the clothes she wears, Wilson challenges the separations between art and everyday living. Often biographically oriented, her work investigates the polarities of human life, including her own identity as a Black biracial artist and her experiences living in both major metropolises and the small desert railroad town of Carrizozo, New Mexico.

The exhibition title comes from a poem by Robin Coste Lewis, "Let Me Live in a House by the Side of the Road and Be a Friend to Man."

Paula Wilson: Toward the Sky's Back Door is organized by The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College and curated by Tang Associate Curator Rebecca McNamara in collaboration with the artist. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue are supported by Friends of the Tang. The CAAM presentation is organized by Isabelle Lutterodt, Deputy Director, CAAM.

Simone Leigh

May 26, 2024 – January 20, 2025

Simone Leigh, a traveling exhibition organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston (ICA) and co-presented in Los Angeles by CAAM and LACMA, is the first comprehensive survey of this celebrated artist's richly layered practice and her most expansive exhibition on the West Coast to date. Presented across both institutions, the exhibition explores dozens of key works from throughout Leigh's career, including pieces from the artist's landmark 2022 Venice Biennale project. Marking the final stop in *Simone Leigh's* national tour, this joint presentation offers visitors the chance to experience a range of works not shown at previous venues.

Over the past two decades, Leigh has situated questions of Black femme, or female-identified, subjectivity at the center of contemporary art discourse. Her sculpture, video, installation, and social practice explores ideas of race, beauty, and community in visual and material culture. Informed by a rigorous attention to a wide swath of historical periods, geographies, and artistic traditions of Africa and the African diaspora, Leigh often combines the female body with domestic vessels or architectural elements to point to unacknowledged acts of labor and care, particularly among and for Black women. While Leigh—one of the most respected artists of her generation—has exhibited in prominent museums throughout the United States, this survey invites audiences to experience the breadth of her work for the first time in Los Angeles.

Simone Leigh is organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston and Eva Respini, Deputy Director and Director of Curatorial Programs, Vancouver Art Gallery (former Barbara Lee Chief Curator, ICA/Boston), with Anni A. Pullagura, Assistant Curator, ICA/Boston. LACMA and CAAM's co-presentation is curated by Rita Gonzalez, Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and Department Head, Contemporary Art, LACMA, Naima J. Keith, Vice President, Education and Public Programs, LACMA, and Taylor Renee Aldridge, Visual Arts Curator, CAAM.

The ongoing exhibitions are:

Black California Dreamin': Claiming Space at America's Leisure Frontier

Through August 18, 2024

Access to nature, recreation, and sites of relaxation—in other words, leisure—is critical to pursuing the full range of human experience, self-fulfillment, and dignity. *Black California Dreamin': Claiming Space at America's Leisure Frontier* illuminates Angelenos and other Californians who worked to make leisure here an open, inclusive reality in the first half of the twentieth century when Southern California was reimagining and positioning itself at the center of the Californian and American Dreams. In shaping recreational sites and public spaces during the Jim Crow era, African Americans challenged white supremacy and situated Black identity within oceanfront and inland social gathering places throughout California.

Black California Dreamin' features historical photographs and memorabilia along with contemporary artworks that illuminate these leisure practices. The objects tell stories of self-determination, leadership, geographic and social mobility, beauty and gender standards, and cultural identity. African Americans helped define the practice and meaning of leisure in California as they faced emerging power politics around who gets access to naturescapes and other public spaces. In doing so, they set the stage for these places as symbols of invention and sites of public struggles still reverberating today.

Black California Dreamin': Claiming Space at America's Leisure Frontier is curated by Alison Rose Jefferson, independent historian, curator, and author of *Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era*.

We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California

Through February 2, 2025

The history of California's rural communities cannot be told without the role of African Americans. For generations, Black Californians have contributed to rural areas, working the land, building homesteads, fighting school segregation, training teachers, establishing independent settlements, and vigilantly protecting equal rights. Stories of these residents challenge myths about early California and create new narratives about freedom, citizenship, and self-governance. Through historical photographs and documents from court cases, poetry, vintage textbooks, interviews, music, and rare archeological objects, this exhibition reveals nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

residents living in varied rural landscapes from coastal mountains to the Central Valley and desert communities. Their civic accomplishments helped transform the state. *We Are Not Strangers Here* highlights the importance of Black Angelenos in particular to these efforts.

We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California is curated by Susan D. Anderson, History Curator, CAAM, with consultant Amy Cohen.

Tatyana Fazlalizadeh: Speaking to Falling Seeds

Through August 3, 2025

Tatyana Fazlalizadeh is a Brooklyn-based interdisciplinary artist whose practice considers Black image making as a site of protest, contestation, affirmation, and possibility. At CAAM, Fazlalizadeh presents a series of portraits of Black Angelenos wheat pasted across the atrium's monumental walls. Based on photographs and conversations that took place this spring while the artist was living in Los Angeles, the portraits ask how safety is presumed, built, and felt for the city's Black residents.

Speaking to Falling Seeds is presented in tandem with *Finding Soft Ground*, the artist's exhibition of wheat-pasted prints, oil paintings, graphite drawings, a single-channel film, and site-specific materials on view at Art + Practice (A+P), as part of CAAM at A+P, a five-year collaboration.

Tatyana Fazlalizadeh: Speaking to Falling Seeds is curated by Essence Harden, Visual Arts Curator, and Taylor Bythewood-Porter, former Assistant Curator.

On view outside:

Chloë Bass | #sky #nofilter: Hindsight for a Future America

Ongoing

Chloë Bass | #sky #nofilter: Hindsight for a Future America is a public sculpture and performance art project by conceptual artist Chloë Bass, on view at CAAM since June 21, 2023, the summer solstice. The sculpture, which takes the form of a participatory analemmatic sundial, consists of sixteen blue glass panels that collectively form a partial ellipse. While engaging with the sculpture, the human body functions as the gnomon—the necessary projecting element that casts its shadow onto each glass panel, determining the time of the day. Bass has engraved contemplative phrases onto each sundial panel that appear on the ground below in shadow form.

#sky #nofilter: Hindsight for a Future America culminates the artist's ongoing project, *#sky #nofilter*, which began during the lead up to, and aftermath of, the 2016 US Presidential Election. As a result of the election, continued killings by police, and the grief and anxieties caused by such events, the artist began capturing images of cloudless blue sky in an effort to keep time. Bass coupled the images with personal and political writing that was then shared through Instagram over the course of a year. The project expanded and became a scripted lecture-performance and a chapbook; more recently, Bass adapted the blue captures into a "magical painting" and glass and paper studies that were on view at Art + Practice in Leimert Park in 2022. The project's

continually shifting form considers what site-specificity means in both physical and digital space. *#sky #nofilter: Hindsight for a Future America*—Bass's first permanent commission—extends the artist's ongoing interest in public sculpture that materializes conceptual and abstract ideas.

Chloë Bass | #sky #nofilter: Hindsight for a Future America is curated by Taylor Renee Aldridge, Visual Arts Curator.

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 5,000 works of art, artifacts, and historical documents, and a publicly accessible research library. Admission to CAAM is free.

Hours beginning May 22, 2024: Tuesday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m.–5 p.m. Closed Mondays (except MLK Day), Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. CAAM is located in Exposition Park at the corner of Figueroa Street and Exposition Boulevard, west of the 110 (Harbor) Freeway. Exposition Park parking is available for \$15 (daytime) at 39th and Figueroa Streets. The Metro Expo line Expo Park/USC station is a five-minute walk through the Exposition Park Rose Garden to the Museum.

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Images:

Left: Paula Wilson, *Up My Sleeve*, 2021. Woodcut, relief, silkscreen, collagraph, monotype, and digital print; oil-based ink, oil, acrylic, muslin, and canvas, 35 x 58 1/2 in. Collection of Melissa D. Mathias

Right: Simone Leigh, *Cupboard*, 2020 (detail). Bronze, 88 1/2 x 85 x 44 7/8 in. Courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery; Photo: Timothy Schenck. © Simone Leigh