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## **Milwaukee Art Museum Shows Monumental Works by Chicago Native Rashid Johnson this Summer**

Rashid Johnson: *Hail We Now Sing Joy* explores themes of escape and identity through new works and unique materials.

**Milwaukee, Wis. – April 12, 2017** – *Hail We Now Sing Joy*, on view at the Milwaukee Art Museum June 23–September 17, shows new paintings and sculptures from Chicago-born artist Rashid Johnson. The exhibition features 14 large-scale works that will fill the Museum’s entire feature exhibition space. Using his signature materials of white ceramic tile, red oak flooring, shea butter, black soap, and wax, Johnson examines themes of race, history, yearning, anxiety, and escape and investigates the relationship between art, society, and personal identity.

“Rashid Johnson’s work is on everyone’s radar right now as he tackles contemporary issues, including the complexities of living as a black American, that are especially important in today’s political and cultural climate,” said Margaret Andera, the Museum’s curator of contemporary art. “*Hail We Now Sing Joy* gives visitors the unique opportunity to see a significant body of work from one of the current generation’s most celebrated artists.”

*Antoine’s Organ*, the largest of the artist’s architectural grid installations ever shown in the United States at over 10 feet tall, is the first work Museum visitors will encounter. The monumental lattice of black scaffolding is filled with signifying objects, including books, televisions showing Johnson’s older video work, live plants and mounds of shea butter, which fill the space with a pleasant and recognizable aroma. Within this environment inspired by the African diaspora is an upright piano that musicians will play at scheduled times throughout the exhibition’s run.

Three series comprise the rest of the exhibition, including *Anxious Audience*, large-scale panels of white ceramic tile covered—except for a few curiously empty spaces—with dozens of agitated faces scrawled in black soap and wax. In the new *Falling Men* series, inverted figures fall through the air; they recall the pixelated animations from video games that Johnson played as a youth and can be interpreted as flying heroes or as chalk outlines from crime scenes. Lastly, the *Escape Collage* paintings consist of large-scale vinyl images of lush tropical environments atop a modernist tile surface. For Johnson, when he was a child in Chicago, the image of a palm tree invited daydreams about success and manhood: “As a kid I remember thinking that if you could actually live in a place with palm trees, if you could get away from the city and the cold, that meant you’d definitely made it.” The collages are some of Johnson’s most complexly layered works and introduce an expanded palette to his practice.

Informing all of Johnson's work, including the materials he uses, from shea butter and black soap to the books in *Antoine's Organ* (Paul Beatty's *The Sellout*, Deborah Dickerson's *The End of Blackness*, and Richard Wright's *Native Son*), is Afrocentrism and the artist's own experience as a black man in America.

Johnson was represented in the *30 Americans* exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Museum in 2013.

A full list of exhibition related programs is below. More information is available at [mam.org](http://mam.org)

**President's Circle Preview Party**

**Wed, June 21, 5:30–8:30 p.m.**

**Member Preview Celebration**

**Thurs, June 22, 10 a.m.–9 p.m.**

Member-only access to the exhibition

1:30 and 5:30 p.m. | Performance Antoine Baldwin on *Antoine's Organ*

6:15 p.m. | Lecture\*With Rashid Johnson and Marcelle Polednik, PhD, Donna and Donald Baumgartner Director

Appetizers, cash bar, and live music beginning at 5 p.m.

Non-members may join the celebration at 5 p.m. for \$25.

\*Lecture is ticketed. Tickets are first come, first served, beginning at 10 a.m.

**Gallery Talks**

**Tues, 1:30 p.m.**

**June 27, July 18, Aug 15, and Sept 12**

With Margaret Andera, curator of contemporary art

**30-Min. Express Talks**

**Meijer Free First Thursdays**

**Thurs, noon and 5:30 p.m.**

**July 6, Aug 3, and Sept 7**

**Performances: *Antoine's Organ***

**Thurs: 5–6 p.m. Fri, Sat: 12:15–1:15 p.m.**

Featuring local musicians throughout the run of the exhibition

**Book Salons**

**Saturdays, 10:30 a.m.**

Join us for facilitated discussions on three books related to topics addressed in the exhibition. RSVP to [katie.nelson@mam.org](mailto:katie.nelson@mam.org) or 414-224-3875. All books are available from the Museum Store.

**July 22 | East End: *Native Son* by Richard Wright**

**Aug 19 | Quadracci Suite: *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty**

**Sept 16 | Quadracci Suite: *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates**

### **Panel Discussion: Art, Politics, and Activism**

**Thurs, Aug 3, 6:15 p.m.**

Welcome Jamelle Bouie, political analyst for *Slate Magazine*; Marcus Doucette, host of the world music program *Sound Travels* on 88Nine Radio Milwaukee; Venice Williams, Milwaukee activist and founder and director of Alice's Garden Urban Farm and Body and Soul Healing Arts Center; and Margaret Andera, curator of contemporary art, for a spirited discussion about the importance of literature, music, politics, and art.

### **Soulful Sunday: A Community Gathering**

Sun, Aug 6, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Optional Brunch (\$): 11 a.m.–3 p.m. Coffee + Dessert, East End: 3–5 p.m.

Everyone is invited to this joyful, soul-fueling event. Explore the exhibition, hear local church choirs and jazz and blues music groups fill the Museum, and relax with friends over brunch or afternoon coffee. Optional brunch is on the terrace: \$65/\$50 Member (includes tax + gratuity). \$15 kids 7–12/Free kids 6 and under. Reserve your seat at [cafe@mam.org](mailto:cafe@mam.org) or 414-224-3822.

### **Ex Fabula: Power, Dissent, and Youth Empowerment**

**Thurs, Sept 7, 6:15 p.m. 15-min. artwork talks: 5–6 p.m.**

Experience the personal and the political in storytelling, through stories inspired by the nineteenth-century ceramics of David Drake and the work of Rashid Johnson and other artists of the African diaspora. Brief talks to familiarize guests with these works will be provided in the galleries in advance. This program is being held in conjunction with *200 Nights of Freedom*, a citywide marking of the fiftieth anniversary of the “March on Milwaukee,” a walk in protest of housing segregation that began on August 28, 1967.

Cosponsored by: The Chipstone Foundation

*Rashid Johnson: Hail We Now Sing Joy* travels to the Milwaukee Art Museum from the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City.

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**About the Milwaukee Art Museum**

Home to a rich collection of more than 30,000 works of art, the Milwaukee Art Museum is located on the shores of Lake Michigan. Its campus includes the Santiago Calatrava–designed Quadracci Pavilion, annually showcasing three feature exhibitions, and the Eero Saarinen–designed Milwaukee County War Memorial Center and David Kahler–designed addition. The Museum recently reopened its Collection Galleries, debuting nearly 2,500 world-class works of art within dramatically transformed galleries and a new lakefront addition. This reimagined space also allows for the presentation of additional changing exhibitions.

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