



Press Release

The Guggenheim Museum Presents *Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers*

Traveling large-scale, mid-career survey spanning the museum's rotunda, featuring a robust live-performance program on a sculptural stage in collaboration with community partners.

Exhibition: *Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers*
Venue: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York
Location: Rotunda
Dates: April 18, 2025–January 18, 2026

(NEW YORK, NY—AUGUST 26, 2024) The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum will present a major solo exhibition of work by Rashid Johnson, opening in April 2025. Encompassing the entirety of the museum's rotunda, along with an outdoor sculpture, the exhibition will unfold through narrative themes, including social alienation, rebirth, and escapism, and offer a loose chronology of Johnson's artistic evolution from idealistic thinker to seasoned scholar. Titled *A Poem for Deep Thinkers*, the exhibition takes its name from a poem by Amiri Baraka, an American poet, writer, teacher, and political activist whose work is a frequent source of inspiration for Johnson. The show will be Johnson's first solo presentation at the Guggenheim, his largest exhibition to date, and the first expansive museum survey of his work in more than a decade.

Almost ninety artworks will span pivotal phases of Johnson's career, including notable series such as *The New Negro Escapist Social and Athletic Club*, the *Cosmic Slops*, black-soap shelf paintings, spray-painted text works, the more recent *Anxious Men* and *Broken Men* series, and large-scale indoor and outdoor sculptures. Johnson frequently returns to film and video throughout his career; the exhibition will also spotlight the significance of moving images in the trajectory of his artistic practice.

A Poem for Deep Thinkers will be animated by a robust performance and public-engagement program—developed with existing and new community partners—that will make use of a stage on the rotunda floor (the heart of the Guggenheim Museum) and a monumental site-specific work, *Sanguine*, which will occupy the building's top ramp. An embedded piano will activate the installation as a venue for programmed musical performances.

For nearly three decades, Johnson has cultivated a diverse body of work, drawing upon art history, philosophy, literature, and music as conceptual frameworks. Through this multidisciplinary approach, Johnson has developed a distinct visual language that engages with the central themes, questions, and aesthetics of the contemporary era, such as race and masculinity, and the conditions of artmaking when conventions around medium and meaning have been exploded. The exhibition situates Johnson within interconnected spheres: as a discerning scholar of art history; as a mediator of Black popular culture and its widespread commodification; and as a creative citizen engaged with the vast global circulation of contemporary art.

Beginning with his early explorations in photography, video, and installations, and extending to his recent ventures into materially hybrid paintings and assemblages, Johnson demonstrates a nuanced ability to explore the delicate human psyche amid the profound historical currents and influences of our time.

Johnson's oeuvre offers a panoramic view of major art movements over the past six decades, adeptly synthesizing diverse influences while eschewing the constraints of any single doctrine. Educated in Conceptual art, Johnson recognized limitations in its neglect of material culture and emotional introspection, prompting his departure from its confines. Instead, Johnson draws inspiration from various artistic traditions, including American



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modernist painting, Italian Arte Povera, Fluxus, and the linguistic playfulness of artists such as Marcel Broodthaers and Barkley L. Hendricks.

Furthermore, Johnson's work critically engages with Black aesthetics and the ongoing struggle for Black liberation, spanning from the New Negro movement and the Harlem Renaissance to Afrofuturism and post-Black aesthetics, all while reflecting on themes of masculinity, parenthood, and societal shortcomings, as exemplified in his acclaimed 2019 feature film *Native Son*, an adaptation of the novel by Richard Wright.

The Guggenheim will publish an exhibition catalogue in April 2025 designed by Kimberly Varella of Content Object Studios, including an interview with artist Odili Donald Odita, an exploration of moving-image artworks by Kevin Quashie, an analysis of the affective and emotional landscapes of contemporary artists by Nana Adusei-Poku, reflections on transgression by Tiona Nekkia McClodden, contemplations on recent paintings by Hendrik Folkerts, and elucidating essays by curators Naomi Beckwith and Andrea Karnes.

The exhibition is organized by Naomi Beckwith, the Guggenheim's Deputy Director and Jennifer and David Stockman Chief Curator, and Andrea Karnes, Chief Curator, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, Texas, with additional support from Faith Hunter, Guggenheim Curatorial Assistant.

Says Beckwith, "The Guggenheim could not be more thrilled to host this timely exhibition. Rashid Johnson is a master at synthesizing the key tendencies of twenty-first century art: the ability to move freely between different modes—painting, video, sculpture, performance—each a refined tool for forging a relationship between his own life history and art history. Above all, Johnson well understands that the vocation of the artist entails more than looking inwardly, it is also an opportunity to create, quite literally, platforms for the creative expression and self-care of others."

Travel

The Guggenheim anticipates a national tour for the exhibition, which is co-organized with the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, and will be on view there following its run at the Guggenheim, New York. Additional venues to be confirmed.

About the Artist

Born in Chicago in 1977, Rashid Johnson earned a BA in Photography from Columbia College in Chicago, followed by graduate studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he honed his multidisciplinary practice. Johnson has a long history with the Guggenheim as an exhibiting artist (shown, most recently, in *By Way Of: Material and Motion in the Guggenheim Collection* in 2024 and *Storylines: Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim* of 2015), and a supporter and funder of the museum's internship program; as well as a former member of the museum's Board of Trustees. He is also included in the Guggenheim collection with four artworks, ranging from sculptural painting to film and video. His work has been exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Detroit Institute of Arts; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Corcoran Museum of Art, Washington, DC; the Institute of Contemporary Photography, New York; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; and the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Support

Lead support for *Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers* is provided by Ford Foundation.

Major support is provided by Neuberger Berman.

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Visionary support is provided by Hilarie and Mitchell Morgan, Edlis-Neeson Foundation, and Daniel Xu and Flora Huang.

The Leadership Committee for this exhibition is gratefully acknowledged for its generosity, with special thanks to Hauser & Wirth, David Kordansky Gallery, Madeleine Arison, Justin Bayless, Marie-Josée Coutu, Nancy and Steve Crown, Natasha and François-Xavier de Mallmann, The George Economou Collection, Anton J. Levy, and Jennifer and Alec Litowitz.

Additional leadership funding is provided by Candace and Michael Barasch, Allison and Larry Berg, Mahshid and Jamshid Ehsani, Alex and Greg Mondre, Tiqui Atencio Demirdjian and Ago Demirdjian, Nicola Erni Collection, Katherine Farley and Jerry I. Speyer, The Forman Family Collection, Paul and Dedrea Gray, John and Amy Griffin Foundation, Stephanie and Tim Ingrassia, Kathy and Mitchell Jacobson, Paul Judelson, Amanda Precourt, Gary Steele and Steven Rice, George Wells and Manfred Rantner, Debi and Steven Wisch, Marilyn and Larry Fields, Bernard I. Lumpkin and Carmine D. Boccuzzi, Jessica and Brian Robinson, and Ann and Mel Schaffer.

Support is also generously provided by The Kate Cassidy Foundation, The Robert Lehman Foundation, and The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation.

Additional funding is provided by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's International Director's Council.

Yamaha Piano provided by Yamaha Artist Services New York.

About the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation was established in 1937 and is dedicated to promoting the understanding and appreciation of modern and contemporary art through exhibitions, education programs, research initiatives, and publications. The international constellation of museums includes the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; and the future Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. An architectural icon and "temple of spirit" where radical art and architecture meet, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is now among a group of eight Frank Lloyd Wright structures in the United States recently designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. To learn more about the museum and the Guggenheim's activities around the world, visit guggenheim.org.

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#RashidJohnsonGuggenheim

August 26, 2024

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