

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA ANNOUNCES *ISAAC JULIEN: LESSONS OF THE HOUR*, A 10-CHANNEL VIDEO WORK ABOUT FREDERICK DOUGLASS, OPENING IN MAY 2024

The New Acquisition Will Be Presented Alongside Pamphlets, First Edition Memoirs, Manuscripts, and Portraits of Douglass and His Wife Anna Murray Douglass from the 19th Century

NEW YORK, February 1, 2024 [Updated April 3, 2024]—The Museum of Modern Art will present *Isaac Julien: Lessons of the Hour*, an exhibition that will focus on the recently acquired 10-channel video installation of the same name, about the life and work of abolitionist Frederick Douglass. On view from May 19 through September 28, 2024, in the Museum’s Second-Floor South Galleries, Isaac Julien’s nearly 30-minute video will be featured for the first time at MoMA alongside a select group of historical objects, including pamphlets of Douglass’s speeches featured in *Lessons of the Hour*, first editions of his memoirs, a facsimile of a rare manuscript laying out his ideas about photography, and photographic portraits of Douglass and his wife Anna Murray Douglass. *Isaac Julien: Lessons of the Hour* is organized by Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, The Steven and Lisa Tananbaum Curator, with Erica DiBenedetto, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture.

Frederick Douglass was an abolitionist who broke free from chattel slavery in 1838. He became one of the most important orators, writers, and international statespersons of the 19th century. The exhibition will open with historical materials that provide further insight into Douglass’s life and career, including a whole-plate daguerreotype of Douglass by the studio Southworth & Hawes and several cartes de visite, alongside a specially designed wallpaper that features additional archival sources, such as newspaper clippings and magazine illustrations. Together these materials reveal how Douglass’s image and his ideas circulated in 19th-century America.

Lessons of the Hour is named after an address that Douglass gave at the Metropolitan AME Church in Washington, DC, in 1894, a year before his death. In it, Douglass warned of lynchings and other disenfranchisements that enforced anti-Black racism. Julien alludes to this speech throughout the work. *Lessons of the Hour* also examines Douglass’s profound understanding of the potential of photographic portraiture to challenge racist tropes and advance the freedom and civil rights of Black Americans and subjugated peoples around the world. The work features re-imagined private scenes that depict Douglass and Anna Murray sitting for separate portraits in the studio of the prominent African American photographer J. P. Ball, and of Douglass delivering passages from a speech now known as “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (Rochester, 1852), as well as his “Lecture on Pictures” (Boston, 1861).

ABOUT ISAAC JULIEN:

Sir Isaac Julien is an artist and filmmaker who lives and works between London and Santa Cruz, USA. His practice often questions the politics of masculinity, class and race, and uses critical visual strategies to reimagine Black histories. His pioneering multi-screen film installations and photographs incorporate striking and politically charged imagery that breaks down barriers between film, dance, photography, music, painting and sculpture, combining these disciplines into kaleidoscopic narratives, creating a uniquely poetic visual language. He is a co-founder of the Isaac Julien Lab with his partner, Mark Nash, at the University of California Santa Cruz, where he is also a distinguished professor of the arts. Julien is the recipient of the Goslar Kaiserring Award (2022) and the Royal Academy of Arts Charles Wollaston Award (2017). He was made a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2017 and granted a knighthood as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Honours List in 2022. His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including, most recently, a major retrospective at Tate Britain, London (2023).

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