

# The Museum of Modern Art

## MoMA ANNOUNCES THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE RETROSPECTIVE OF WIFREDO LAM IN THE UNITED STATES

**NEW YORK, December 19, 2024**—The Museum of Modern Art announces ***Wifredo Lam: When I Don't Sleep, I Dream***, the most extensive retrospective devoted to the artist in the United States, on view at MoMA from November 10, 2025, through March 28, 2026. Spanning the six decades of Lam's prolific career, the exhibition will present more than 150 rarely seen artworks from the 1920s to the 1970s—including paintings, large-scale works on paper, collaborative drawings, illustrated books, prints, ceramics, and archival material—with key loans from the Estate of Wifredo Lam, Paris. The retrospective will reveal how Lam—an artist born in Cuba who spent most of his life in Spain, France, and Italy—came to embody the figure of the transnational artist in the 20th century and forged a unique visual style at the confluence of European modernity, African diasporic culture, and Caribbean traditions. *Wifredo Lam: When I Don't Sleep, I Dream* is organized by Christophe Cherix, The Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints, and Beverly Adams, The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art, with Damasia Lacroze, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, and Eva Caston, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints.

"Lam's visionary commitment to making his painting an 'act of decolonization,' as he put it, forever changed modern art," said Cherix.

"His accomplishments reverberate across multiple geographies and generations, and continue to resonate to this day," said Adams. "We look forward to sharing with our audiences for the first time the breadth and depth of Lam's work."

Born in the small town of Sagua La Grande, Cuba, Wifredo Lam (1902–1982) emigrated at age 21 to pursue training as a painter in Madrid, where he would combine modern approaches with explorations of his identity and political beliefs. Organized loosely chronologically, the exhibition will begin with some of these early paintings made during his time in Spain, including Lam's first monumental work on paper mounted on canvas, *La Guerra civil (The Spanish Civil War)* (1937), which will be on view in the United States for the first time in over 30 years. In 1938, Lam moved to Paris, where he met artists and writers such as Pablo Picasso and André Breton. After escaping to Marseille during the Nazi occupation of Paris, Lam collaborated with Surrealists who were also awaiting safe passage out of Europe—among these collaborations is a collection of drawings for Breton's poetry volume *Fata Morgana* (1941), which will be on view.

After fleeing France in 1941, Lam returned to Cuba after almost two decades abroad, and he began experimenting with a variety of techniques, including painting with extremely thinned-out oils to heavy impasto, leaving large swaths of canvas unpainted, and using a range of palettes, from vibrant colors to grisaille and warm hues of brown. The retrospective will focus on how Lam's return to Cuba led to an absolute reinvention of his work and the creation, in rapid succession, of some of his most important works, including *The Jungle* (1942–43), which has been in MoMA's collection since 1945. Arguably his best-known work, *The Jungle* references the tropical Caribbean landscape, with its brutal history of sugarcane plantations and slavery, along with references to Afro-Caribbean religious practices. During this time, the artist sought new ways to visualize the fluidity between

physical and spiritual space, fusing animal, human, and plant forms with profound significance, which can also be seen in other works.

Lam returned to Europe in 1952 and produced numerous large-scale works that moved closer to abstraction, before returning to figuration in the early 1960s with tangled, attenuated figures, as in *Les Invités (The Guests)* (1966). The retrospective will conclude with a selection of print portfolios and ceramics, including *Vase I* (1975), from the last decade of Lam's life, which he spent in Albissola Marina, Italy.

*Wifredo Lam: When I Don't Sleep, I Dream* will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue covering the full arc of the artist's career and including commissioned essays by scholars. The publication will present new scholarship on the artist, a technical conservation analysis of his large-scale paintings on paper, and a selection of poetry inspired by Lam.

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