

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA PRESENTS THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE RETROSPECTIVE OF WIFREDO LAM IN THE UNITED STATES

Featuring the artist's *Grande Composition* on view for the first time since 1963

Wifredo Lam: *When I Don't Sleep, I Dream*

November 10, 2025–April 11, 2026

Floor 3, The Robert B. Menschel Galleries

NEW YORK, September 30, 2025—The Museum of Modern Art presents **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 April 11, 2026. Spanning the six decades of Lam's prolific career, the exhibition includes more than 130 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 reveals how Lam—a Cuban-born artist who spent most of his life in Spain, France, and Italy—came to embody the figure of the transnational artist in the 20th century. *Wifredo Lam: When I Don't Sleep, I Dream* is organized by Christophe Cherix, The David Rockefeller Director, and Beverly Adams, The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art, with Damasias Lacroze, Curatorial Associate, 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. "He insisted on placing diasporic culture at the heart of modernism—not as a peripheral influence, but as central, a generative force."

Born in Sagua La Grande, Cuba, Wifredo Lam (1902–1982) emigrated at age 21 to pursue training as a painter in Madrid. Organized chronologically, the exhibition begins with a selection of his early paintings made during his time in Spain, including Lam's first overtly political and monumental work on paper, *La Guerra Civil (The Spanish Civil War)* (1937), on view in the US for the first time. In 1938 Lam fled the war in Spain for 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, Lam created imaginative line drawings for Breton's poetry volume *Fata Morgana* (1941) as well as a number of *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) and collective drawings, which are on view in the exhibition.

"His radically inventive works continue to speak to us across time," said Adams. "The realities he confronted—colonialism, racism, exile, and displacement—remain as urgent today as they were in his lifetime."

After almost two decades abroad, Lam returned to Cuba in 1941 via Martinique, where he met his future collaborator and lifelong friend, the poet Aimé Césaire. The retrospective sheds light on how Lam's return led to an absolute reinvention of his work and the creation of some of his most important paintings, including *La jungla (The Jungle)* (1942–43). Arguably his best-known work, which has been in MoMA's collection since 1945, *La jungla's*

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densely active composition foregrounds the Caribbean landscape, its inhabitants, and its histories of slavery and indenture. During this time, the artist also sought new ways to visualize the fluidity between physical and spiritual space by depicting landscapes and figures in moments of transformation and transcendence. Paintings from this prolific and experimental period include *Omi Obini* (1943), *Mofumbe* (1943), and *Ogue Orisa* (1943), all of which express his interest in Afro-Caribbean spiritualities. Lam would later transition to a much darker and earthier palette, making way for new compositions that balanced abstracted figures and forms in paintings like *Bélial, empereur des mouches* (*Belial, Emperor of the Flies*) (1948) and *Grande Composition* (*Large Composition*) (1949). This pivotal work, which has not been shown in more than 60 years, will make its US debut. Marking his return to painting on kraft paper, *Grande Composition* is the artist's most ambitiously scaled work.

In 1952 Lam returned to Europe, marking yet another key moment in his artistic practice. While living in Albissola Marina, Italy, he produced a series of ambitious, large-scale works that radically shifted toward abstraction, notably the Brousse (The Bush) series (1958), also on display in the US for the first time. By the early 1960s, Lam renewed his approach to figuration, developing a distinctive visual language marked by tangled, elongated figures that appear in *Les Invités* (*The Guests*) (1966) and the final major painting of his career, *Les Abalochas dansent pour Dhambala, dieu de l'unité* (*The Abalochas Dance for Dhambala, the God of Unity*) (1970), both of which will be on view in the exhibition. In his final years, Lam continued to push the boundaries of his practice, actively experimenting with ceramics and printmaking. The retrospective concludes with a selection of his late ceramic works, along with his collaborations with some of the most notable literary voices of the 20th century, including illustrated books with Édouard Glissant, René Char, and his print portfolio with Aimé Césaire, titled *Annonciation* (*Annunciation*) (1982).

PUBLICATION:

Wifredo Lam: When I Don't Sleep, I Dream is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue edited by Beverly Adams and Christophe Cherix. The landmark publication features contributions by Anny Aviram, Miriam M. Basilio Gaztambide, Terri Geis, Jean Khalfa, Damasias Lacroze, Laura Neufeld, María Elena Ortiz, Lowery Stokes Sims, Catherine H. Stephens, and Martin Tsang; fresh insights into Lam's relationship to Surrealism, Négritude, and other literary, cultural, and poetic movements; extensive new photography of Lam's art; and the first in-depth conservation analysis of his best-known painting, *La jungle* (*The Jungle*) (1942–43). 266 pages, 225 color illustrations. Hardcover, \$75. ISBN: 978-1-63345-178-0. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and available at MoMA stores and online at store.moma.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson in the rest of the world.

AUDIO GUIDE:

Explore Wifredo Lam's visionary work through an immersive audio guide that delves into the artist's remarkable life and gives context to the layered meanings within his work. Bringing together a range of voices, the audio reflects on the intersections of Lam's art, creative process, political engagement, and the many contexts in which he worked. Listeners will hear from contemporary artists (María Magdalena Campos-Pons, Rashid Johnson), historians (Ada Ferrer, Martin Tsang), an ecologist (Leo R. Douglas), the artist's son (Eskil Lam), and MoMA staff (Marlin Ramos, Damasias Lacroze, Kunbi Oni, Smooth Nzewi). Available free of charge at moma.org/audio and in MoMA's guide on the Bloomberg Connects app

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