

# Press Release

# Brooklyn Museum



Allison Janae Hamilton (born Lexington, Kentucky, 1984; based in New York, New York). Still from *A House Called Florida*, 2022. Three-channel film installation (color, sound): 34 min., 46 sec. Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen

## **The Brooklyn Museum Presents *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration***

The exhibition examines the complex impact of the Great Migration with newly commissioned works by twelve artists: Akea Brionne, Mark Bradford, Zoë Charlton, Larry W. Cook, Torkwase Dyson, Theaster Gates Jr., Allison Janae Hamilton, Leslie Hewitt, Steffani Jemison, Robert Pruitt, Jamea Richmond-Edwards, and Carrie Mae Weems.

In *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration*, twelve influential and emerging artists reflect on the Great Migration period (1915–70) and its continuing impact on their lives and on social and cultural life in the United States. On view at the Brooklyn Museum from March 3 to June 25, 2023, the exhibition presents newly commissioned works ranging from large-scale installation, painting, and immersive film to photography, tapestry, and mixed media.

*A Movement in Every Direction* is co-organized by the Mississippi Museum of Art and the Baltimore Museum of Art. The exhibition is co-curated by Ryan N. Dennis, Chief Curator and Artistic Director of the Center for Art and Public Exchange, Mississippi Museum of Art, and Jessica Bell Brown, Curator and Department Head for Contemporary Art, Baltimore Museum of Art. The Brooklyn Museum presentation is organized by Kimberli Gant, Curator, Modern and Contemporary Art, with Indira A. Abiskaroon, Curatorial Assistant, Modern and Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum.

“We are thrilled to be the third venue for this exhibition and bring the work of these great artists—several of whom are in the permanent collection—to our Brooklyn audiences. One of the many goals of this show is to enrich and expand the story of the Great Migration by presenting contemporary artistic responses to a period that remains influential to many Black American artists. We look forward to presenting the migration experience through a modern lens and to giving some of the nation’s most talented and incisive artists the space to ruminate on their ancestral migration narratives,” says Kimberli Gant, Curator, Modern and Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum.

Between 1915 and 1970, in the wake of racial terror during the post-Reconstruction period, millions of Black Americans fled from their homes to other areas within the South and to other parts of the country. This remarkable movement of people caused a radical shift in the demographic, economic, and sociopolitical makeup of the United States. For instance, New York City—and particularly Manhattan—became home to hundreds of thousands of Black Americans during this time, catalyzing the start of the artistic and cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. By the 1930s, the newly opened A train line provided easier access to Brooklyn, where affordable housing and less crowded neighborhoods offered a better quality of life. The new subway service prompted a mass local migration between boroughs and the establishment of strong communities in the neighborhoods of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, East New York, and Brownsville.

Using historical and contemporary census data about Brooklyn’s migration patterns, the Brooklyn Museum presentation offers supplemental context to the exhibition and centers the borough as an important site in the Great Migration, emphasizing its historical impact that can still be felt today. Visitors are encouraged to share their own personal and familial stories of migration through an [oral history](#) “pod” available in the exhibition galleries.

*A Movement in Every Direction* presents a departure from traditional accounts of the Great Migration, which are often understood through a lens of trauma, and reconceptualizes them through stories of self-possession, self-determination as well as critique. The South did lose generations of courageous, creative, and productive Black Americans because of racial prejudice, a lack of economic opportunities, and environmental destruction. While honoring this truth, the exhibition expands this narrative by introducing those individuals, families, and communities who stayed in the region during this time and created their own legacies.

The dynamic array of works in the exhibition draws from historical research, familial heritage, and lived experience. Highlights include **Torkwase Dyson’s** *Way Over There Inside Me (A Festival of Inches)* (2022), a sculptural installation that presents a physical manifestation of the dispersion of Black Americans during the Great Migration. The multidirectional, modular sculpture emphasizes the movement of people in all directions. This piece also highlights migration patterns in the context of the Great Migration as well as those prompted by the climate crisis today. Similarly, **Allison Janae Hamilton’s** *A House Called Florida* (2022), a three-channel film installation, focuses on her home of northern Florida. Hamilton explores the relationship between Black people and the physical landscape of the American South, and how climate change and natural disaster impact the region. **Mark Bradford’s** work *500* (2022) was inspired by his research on a small Black settlement that existed in New Mexico in the early twentieth century. Bradford’s work, an installation of sixty individually painted and oxidized panels, replicates a want ad seeking five hundred Black families to inhabit the town— a community that was purportedly free from Jim Crow laws and discrimination.

**Carrie Mae Weems** looks to her own familial past to contemplate the broader circumstances of the Great Migration. Her two pieces in the exhibition are an immersive video installation titled *Leave! Leave Now!* (2022) and a series of photographs titled *The North Star* (2022). Both are inspired by the story of Weems's grandfather, the prominent tenant farmer and union activist Frank Weems, and his journey to Chicago after being attacked by a white mob and left for dead. **Robert Pruitt** also considers his own identity and heritage in his large-scale work *A Song for Travelers* (2022). This four-panel drawing is influenced by his hometown of Houston, Texas, which served as one of the largest destinations in the South during the Great Migration. The work speaks to both Pruitt's personal history and the larger narrative of Black Americans who chose to remain in the region.

*A Movement in Every Direction* is accompanied by a two-volume catalog published by Yale University Press that includes a critical reader and a capsule presentation of exhibition content, with commissioned essays by Kiese Laymon, Jessica Lynne, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, and Dr. Willie J. Wright. Both volumes will be available in the Brooklyn Museum Shop.

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