

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 30, 2026

MEDIA CONTACT:

Manuel Venegas

mvenegas@mcachicago.org

Saadia Pervaiz

sypervaiz@mcachicago.org



Rashid Johnson, *Self-Portrait with my hair parted like Frederick Douglass*, 2003. Lambda print mounted on Sintra; 57 1/4 × 45 1/4 × 1 3/8 in. (145.4 × 114.9 × 3.5 cm). Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of the Susan and Lewis Manilow Collection of Chicago Artists, 2006.26. © Rashid Johnson. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

Multimedia material: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/eeas159gsedx0khefnt4g/APkY741bD_mlodc-XOVBQng?rlkey=uk35m389y8246oggpntitfhql&st=n4y22k2d&dl=0

MCA Chicago Announces Fall 2026 Exhibitions and Programming Season

CHICAGO— Today the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago announces its fall 2026 exhibition and programming schedule. The season includes the opening of the major exhibition [Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers](#), the performance-centered exhibition [Slow Dance](#), the fifth annual [Chicago Performs](#) festival, and a new season of [Family Day](#).

Major 4th Floor Exhibitions

[Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers](#)

Griffin Galleries of Contemporary Art
November 7, 2026–April 25, 2027

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is pleased to announce *Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers*, a major survey covering nearly thirty years of Rashid Johnson's (b. 1977, Chicago, IL; lives in New York) practice. The exhibition examines Johnson's work from his perspective as a student of art history; a consumer and translator of Black popular, literary, and intellectual culture; and a cultural participant in the age of globalization and its aftereffects. With works including photographs, videos, large-scale installations, immersive paintings, and multimedia assemblages, *A Poem for Deep Thinkers* asks fundamental questions about the fragile human psyche in the face of ineffable historic forces. Johnson often says, "the subject of my work is freedom," and throughout the exhibition visitors will encounter pieces inspired by radical artistic and political movements from the 1960s to the 1990s that modeled how individuals and communities can resist established orders and carve out new paths through history.

A Poem for Deep Thinkers features over sixty artworks spanning the full breadth of Johnson's career, including works from his seminal *The New Negro Escapist Social and Athletic Club* series, the *Cosmic Slops* and other black-soap shelf paintings, spray-painted text works, and the *Anxious Men* and *Broken Men* series. Additionally, Johnson's film and video projects will be displayed intermittently throughout the galleries. Johnson's latest film *Home* (2025) explores familial dynamics through the lens of the artist's relationship with his siblings and his mother, Dr. Cheryl Johnson-Odim, who recites her own poetry over footage shot in and around her home just outside of Chicago. The subtitle of the exhibition also refers to Amiri Baraka and his poem of the same name from 1977.

A Poem for Deep Thinkers will be Johnson's third solo exhibition at the MCA, following his early-career show in 2002 as part of the museum's 12 x 12 series, which was his first institutional exhibition, and his mid-career survey, *A Message to Our Folks*, in 2012. A catalogue accompanies the exhibition with essays from exhibition curators Naomi Beckwith and Andrea Karnes, along with contributions by Nana Adusei-Poku, Hendrik Folkerts, Tiona Nekkia McClodden, Kevin Quashie, and Odili Donald Odita.

Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers was previously presented at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers was organized by Naomi Beckwith, Deputy Director and Jennifer and David Stockman Chief Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and Andrea Karnes, Chief Curator, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. The MCA presentation is curated by Jack Schneider, Assistant Curator.

Project and Collections Exhibitions

[Slow Dance](#)

Syliva Neil & Daniel Fischel Galleries
September 12, 2026–March 21, 2027

CHICAGO—The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is excited to announce *Slow Dance*, a performance-focused exhibition presented in the Sylvia Neil and Daniel Fischel Galleries on the MCA's second floor starting September 12, 2026.

Slow Dance approaches performance in two registers: as an artistic medium rooted in the live presence of bodies and as an economic imperative characterized by the pervasive demand for productivity, speed, and efficiency. Artists in the exhibition use performance to explore forms of slowness that resist this demand. Through gestures of suspension, hesitation, and inaction, they investigate the politics of the body's labor and maintenance.

Featuring works by Brendan Fernandes, Gordon Hall, Geumhyung Jeong, Carolyn Lazard, Melanie McLain, and Cally Spooner, *Slow Dance* presents painting, sculpture, and video in addition to live performance. These artists focus on how bodies wear away and how they endure, while also contending with the near-constant obligation to perform in labor markets, the protracted economies of waiting, and fatigue's latent potential as a form of resistance. While exploring conditions of failure, breakdown, or exhaustion, *Slow Dance*'s performers model new modes of reciprocity, intimacy, and connection that challenge the weathering effects of our contemporary imperative to perform. The exhibition will include in-gallery performance activations throughout the run of the show.

Slow Dance is organized by Jadine Collingwood, Pamela Alper Associate Curator, with Korina Hernandez, Curatorial Assistant.

Chicago Performs

[Chicago Performs](#)

Sep 18–20, 2026

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

A three-day festival of dynamic, electrifying performances by Ginger Krebs & Artists, Maria Gaspar with musical guests, and The Poor Farm.

[Ginger Krebs & Artists | *Protected by Invisible Fence*](#)

Sep 18–19 | 7:30 pm

Sep 20 | 2 pm

Edlis Neeson Theater

Protected by Invisible Fence is a choreographic work for eight humans and eight technologically enhanced crowd control stanchions. Equipped with custom sensing devices, the stanchions detect when performers pass by or touch them and quantify their actions through sound and light, prompting a resulting series of actions. The work uses humor, athleticism, and gamified labor to explore who is controlling whom in a world of relentless prodding from algorithmic demands.

[Maria Gaspar with musical guests | *We Lit the Fire and Trusted the Heat \(After Angela Davis\)*](#)

Sep 19 | 11 am

Sep 20 | 4 pm

Kovler Atrium

We Lit the Fire and Trusted the Heat (After Angela Davis) is a sonic sculpture and performance created from jail debris salvaged from Cook County Department of Corrections following a 2021 demolition of Division I. The work invites viewers to experience how steel bars reclaimed from a carceral demolition undergo transformation through touch and vibration. Musicians and performers attempt to transcend what were once materials of confinement into forms of liberation and freedom. The performance serves as a sonic structure of support, care, and release, in contrast to those of submission, restraint, and control.

The Poor Farm | Leopold Bench: A P(o)or(t)ch Theater (MIDWEST REDUX)

Sep 18 | 10 am–12 pm

Sep 19 | 12 pm–2 pm

Sep 20 | 3 pm–5 pm

MCA Plaza

A P(o)or(t)ch Theater (MIDWEST REDUX) blends stereoscopic photography with live performance and explores the porch as an emblem of generosity and social porousness at a moment of increasing isolation and division. Inspired by the writings of twentieth-century conservationist Aldo Leopold, the work centers on a pair of benches designed to support attentive observation of the natural world. Using a set of twelve original stereoscopic photographs as a twenty-hour score, the performance investigates how slight differences in perception can produce either heightened depth or clashing understandings of reality.

Panel Talk: Performance Art in Chicago moderated by Leon J. Hilton

Sunday, September 20 | 11 am

MCA Commons

In partnership with the Performance Art Museum and on the eve of the MCA's 60th anniversary, *Chicago Performs* audiences are invited to gather for a conversation on the history of performance art in Chicago. Artists and scholars Lin Hixson and Vanessa Damilola Macaulay are joined by former MCA curator of performance Peter Taub and moderator Leon J. Hilton to reflect on key questions about the city's performance ecology across generations. As a point of departure, the panel will revisit Christine Tamblyn's "Chicago Performance: An Annotated Guide" ([from High Performance #17/18, 1982](#)).

Performances

Jlin + Third Coast Percussion | Vernacular

Oct 15, 2026 | 7:30 pm

Edlis Neeson Theater

Grammy Award-winning percussion ensemble Third Coast Percussion and Pulitzer Prize finalist and composer/performer/electronic musician Jlin join together in a program that explores the evolution of their decade-long partnership. In a collaboration that could have only originated in Chicago, this new evening delivers a fresh sound to the world's concert halls, as TCP's contemporary classical training meets Jlin's visceral and innovative electronic practice.

Antoine's Organ

Nov 7, 2026–Apr 26, 2027

Griffin Galleries of Contemporary Art

Listen as an artwork comes to life. On select Tuesdays and Saturdays throughout the run of the exhibition *Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers*, *Antoine's Organ*—a massive plant-filled art installation—is inhabited by Chicago musicians who practice on a piano tucked within it. See the MCA website for a full event schedule.

asses.masses

Nov 8, 2026 | 12 pm

Edlis Neeson Theater

asses.masses, conceived by artists Patrick Blenkern and Milton Lim, is a live, participatory video game where museum guests lead a herd of unemployed donkeys in a witty, satirical revolution

from behind a console controller. The game analyzes notions of labor, technophobia, gaming as performance, unemployment in the face of AI, and nostalgia as a barrier to progress. Guests should expect a gaming experience that hybridizes *Animal Farm*, *Pokémon*, and *Final Fantasy*.

asses.masses will run about seven hours with no previous gaming experience required. There are four intermissions throughout the event.

Lit & Luz

Nov 13, 2026 | 7– 9 pm
Edlis Neeson Theater

Experience the Lit & Luz Festival of Language, Literature, and Art's signature celebration the *Live Magazine Show*, returning this year with the theme of "Edge/Border." Each year, Lit & Luz supports the creation of collaborative performances between writers and artists from Chicago and Mexico that include music, poetry, video art, live performances, and more exploring the relationship between languages and artistic practices across cultures.

Events

Public Practice: A Convening on Collaboration, Engagement, and Programming

Nov 20–22, 2026
The Commons and Edlis Neeson Theater

Join museum colleagues from across the country for a convening exploring the past, present, and future of public engagement. Over three days, hear from artists and cultural workers, experience experimental programs, and have conversations about what it means to create programs that leave a lasting impact.

Talks

Bad at Sports | 21st Anniversary and Season One Wrap Party

Oct 3, 2026 | 11 am–6 pm
Anne & Kern Terrace Garden and Edlis Neeson Theater

Bad at Sports, the world's oldest contemporary art podcast, wraps its 21-year first season with a series of interview events around the museum. Tailgate in the afternoon with episodes live on the MCA Terrace, followed by a celebratory recording of the climactic and unforgettable episode 999 in the Edlis Neeson Theater.

Deem Symposium: *Designing for Dignity 04*

Oct 24, 2026 | 11 am–6 pm
Edlis Neeson Theater

Designing for Dignity 04: A Convening of Possibilities will present a day of hybrid in-person/online programming that positions and considers dignity as a foundational principle of design.

Family Day Series

Family Day | Warmups

Oct 10, 2026 | 11 am–3 pm
The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

Join us for a slow start to the Family Day season—dust off your creative muscles and get ready to play, see, and create.

Family Day | Knock on Wood

Nov 14, 2026 | 11 am–3 pm

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

Lean on your materials and create new ways of thinking inspired by the works of Kenzi Shiokava and Mike Cloud.

Family Day | Hibernate, Meditate

Dec 12, 2026 | 11 am–3 pm

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

Embrace the cold and let it influence your thinking. This month we think deeply like Rashid Johnson.

Development**Visionary Luncheon**

Oct 5, 2026 | 11 am–1:30 pm

Four Seasons Hotel Chicago

The MCA's annual luncheon celebrating arts philanthropy returns for an inspiring afternoon of conversation and celebration, featuring a program with multidisciplinary artist Amanda Williams and the presentation of the 2026 Arts Philanthropy Award to Rita Sola Cook, President, Bank of America Chicago. This event takes place at the Four Seasons Hotel Chicago at 120 East Delaware Place.

Education**Learning Series 1 and 2: Artistic Modes**

Day 1: Sept 26, 2026 | 11 am–1 pm

Day 2: Nov 21, 2026 | 11 am–1 pm

Crown Family Room

This year's Teacher Institute explores artistic practices that engage with themes of joy, sustenance, the sublime, anti-capitalism, and radical love. Participants will examine how artists and cultural workers create work that resists dominant systems of value while imagining more liberatory ways of expression.

Educator Workshop | Accessibility in the Classroom

Oct 17, 2026 | 11 am–1 pm

Crown Family Room

In this workshop, we will explore new tools, strategies, and accommodations for students with disabilities. Educators will learn about inclusive language, sensory integration, differentiating instruction based on support needs, and enhancing their students' emotional literacy and techniques for emotional regulation.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CHICAGO

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The MCA interweaves exhibitions, performances, collections, and educational programs while providing a place for audiences to contemplate and discuss contemporary art in pursuit of a creative and diverse future. The MCA believes in the values of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) as a platform to enact structural change. The museum is generously supported by its Board of Trustees; individual and corporate members; private and corporate foundations, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; and government agencies. The MCA is a proud member of Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District.

[The MCA is located at 220 E. Chicago Avenue](#) is open 10 am to 5 pm Wednesday to Sunday and Tuesdays from 10 am to 9 pm. Tuesday evenings (5-9 pm) are free for Illinois residents. The museum is closed on Mondays. Admission is free for all youth 18 and under, members of the military and veterans, and MCA members. Free admission for anyone 18 and under is generously provided by the Lefkowsky Free 18 & Under Fund. Find more information about MCA's exhibitions, programs, and special events at mcachicago.org or [312.280.2660](tel:312.280.2660).



facebook.com/mcachicago

X: [@mcachicago](#)

IG: [@mcachicago](#)