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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/niucp95vwtd9lfxl0xqce/AKawGM2FyWr5_634i9ZoLEI?rlkey=ril49yk787ua80tyj0pub1e6c&st=kcf3q65a&dl=0

MCA Chicago presentation of *Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers* to open November 7

CHICAGO— The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago's (MCA) presentation of *Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers*, a major survey covering nearly thirty years of work by Rashid Johnson (b. 1977, Chicago, IL; lives in New York), will open to the public on November 7, 2026, and run through April 25, 2027. The exhibition examines Johnson's work from his perspective as a student of art history; a consumer and translator of 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, which refers to Amiri Baraka’s poem of the same name from 1977, features over sixty artworks spanning the full breadth of Johnson’s career, including his seminal black soap shelf paintings, spray-painted text works, and his *Cosmic Slop*, *Anxious Men*, *Broken Men*, and *The New Negro Escapist Social and Athletic Club* 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 exhibition will also feature *Antoine’s Organ*—a massive plant-filled art installation—which will be activated from inside by Chicago musicians who engage with a piano tucked within the work.

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 × 12 series, which was his first institutional exhibition, and his 2012 mid-career survey *A Message to Our Folks*, which was his first major solo museum exhibition. A catalogue accompanies the exhibition with essays from originating 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 Assistant Curator Jack Schneider with Korina Hernandez, Curatorial Assistant.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rashid Johnson (b. 1977, Chicago, IL; lives in New York) is a leading figure among contemporary American artists, recognized for a multidisciplinary practice that explores themes of art history, cultural identity—both individual and collective—personal narrative, literature, philosophy, and critical history. Johnson earned a BA in Photography from Columbia College Chicago and pursued graduate studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Although he began his career in photography, Johnson’s practice quickly expanded to encompass a wide range of mediums including sculpture, painting, drawing, filmmaking, and installation. His work often incorporates materials loaded with personal and cultural symbolism—such as shea butter, black soap, books, plants, and tile—frequently referencing his upbringing and African American identity. In recent years, his work has increasingly engaged with existential themes, exploring interiority, anxiety, and transitional states.

SUPPORT

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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 Under 18 Fund. Find more information about MCA's exhibitions, programs, and special events at mcachicago.org or [312.280.2660](tel:312.280.2660).

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