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## Groundbreaking Exhibition Fills In Gaps on Race, Slavery and Water Where Conventional Marine Art Cannot

*A Nation Takes Place* features a transnational collection of artwork by 38 artists from 21 leading partners to interrogate the complexity of the Americas formation, a project unthinkable without waterways, conquest, and slave ships.

WINONA, MN (August 8, 2024). The Minnesota Marine Art Museum (MMAM) is excited to announce its curatorial collaboration with artists and scholars Tia-Simone Gardner and Shana M. griffin to present the groundbreaking exhibition *A Nation Takes Place*, set to open on August 21, 2024.

Drawing critical attention to the “liquid fantasies” of the sea, *A Nation Takes Place* navigates race and the violent silences, voids, ruptures, breaks, and counterworld formations often overlooked by traditional maritime art. The exhibition features 38 artists and partnerships with 21 leading institutions, pairing contemporary artworks alongside their historical counterparts to examine how the imaginaries of seafaring are connected to the destructive forces of enslavement, colonialism, genocide, dispossession, and extraction.

Featuring over 100 works encompassing paintings, sculpture, film, photography, installations, and ephemera, *A Nation Takes Place* challenges the romanticized portrayal of the maritime world and instead presents it as a space of haunting, a capitalist playground, a violent terrain, a site of resistance, and a place to rethink the ecological imaginary. As a radical survey of such themes, the artists engage sea stories—the violent, disorienting, unpredictable, yet also romantic, sublime, and powerful—that situate Black and Indigenous peoples as unapologetic narrators of marine worlds.

The exhibition is accompanied by a 152-page illustrated catalog, *A Nation Takes Place: Navigating Race and Water in Contemporary Art*, distributed by the University of Minnesota Press, featuring seven newly published essays by **Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Jessica Marie Johnson, Tiffany Lethabo King, Katherine McKittrick, Brenda Marie Osbey, Erin Sharkey**, and exhibition co-curators, **Tia-Simone Gardner** and **Shana M. griffin**. “The more we delved into the art genre steeped in the visuality of ships, vessels, overseas trading, voyages of exploration, and colonial expansion, the more we encountered the recurring neglect and



**Kent Monkman** (Swampy Cree, Fisher River First Nation, b. 1965). *Saving the Newcomers*, 2023. Acrylic on canvas. 84 × 126 in. (213.36 × 320.04 cm). On loan from the Horseman Foundation, John and Susan Horseman Collection 2016.287

**Minnesota Marine Art Museum**

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disregard for the histories of slavery, conquest, and colonialism,” notes co-curator Shana M. griffin. “The exhibition is an incubator, an assembly,” recalls co-curator Tia-Simone Gardner. “It asks us to witness again, how have we encountered the wet world around us, the rivers, the oceans, the seas, gulfs, and marshes. How did we get close to them, or how were they eradicated from our consciousness? In this way, the exhibition is more choreographed than curated.”

*A Nation Takes Place* opens at MMAM on August 21, 2024 to mark the anniversary of the start of Haitian Revolution in 1791, the largest and most successful insurrection by self-emancipated Black people in the Western Hemisphere. A reception and catalog launch is planned for August 22, 2024 (5:30 p.m. - 8 p.m.) at MMAM, followed by the first of four national convenings on August 23, 2024 (12 p.m. - 2 p.m.) at MMAM that explores the content of the exhibition. The exhibition runs through March 2, 2025.

Major support for the project comes from the Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment For the Arts, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and the Terra Foundation for American Art. Their generosity allowed for co-curators, Tia-Simone Gardner and Shana M. griffin to consult with and build on the ongoing scholarship, activism, and curatorial approaches at a cross section of institutions, initiatives, and projects across the United States who are interrogating and exploring the creative possibilities of marine art beyond portraits of ships at sea. Based on their research, conversations, and site visits, the curatorial team and MMAM staff developed the checklist and thematic organization for the show. “The number of lending partners and collaborators is monumental for an organization like MMAM,” notes Scott Pollock, Executive Director. “Nothing to this scale would be possible without the support we received from our major funding partners.”



**Sokari Ekine (Nigeria, b. 1949).** Takasa Wudo, Kenya, 2017 Archival inkjet print. 36 × 24 in. (91.44 × 60.96 cm). Courtesy of the artist

The 4,568 square foot exhibition in MMAM’s Manoogian Gallery is organized around three main themes. Section 1: The Ledger, draws our attention to the political economy of seafaring and its relationship to the international and domestic slave trade and colonization. Artists like **Claire Foster-Burnett**, **Gordon Coons**, **Wendy W. Walters**, and **Dyani White Hawk** remind us to examine historic and contemporary connections across the production of art, the production of settler nations, and the production of wealth. Artworks created by **Radcliffe Bailey** and **kai lumumba barrow** encourage us to re-examine our own attachments to the ocean’s representations, particularly of the coast, ship, and seascape.

Section 2: The Wake/The Break, peers into the absences of inherited marine narratives and emphasizes the transformative potential of art to resist, reimagine, and intervene. Artists like **Torkwase Dyson** explore the relationships among the built environment and Black ecologies. Artworks by **Jacob Lawrence**, **Dred Scott**, **Fred Wilson**, and **Imani Jacqueline Brown** examine historical and contemporary injustices.

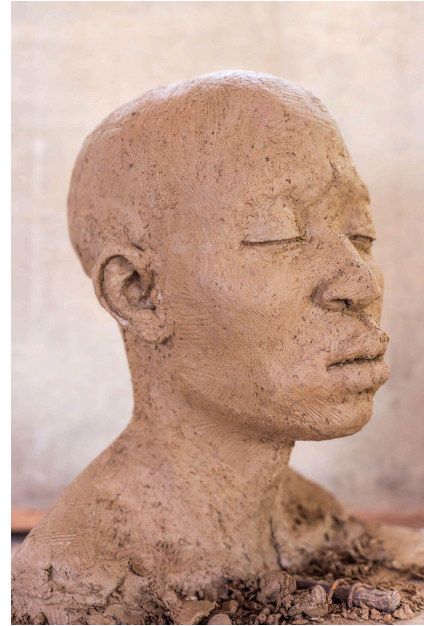
Section 3: The Deep, introduces us to artists that press against unjust national myths born from colonial Atlantic contact. Work from artist like **Dawoud Bey**, **Renee Royale**, **Willie Birch**, **Deborah Jack**, and **Wesley Clark** remember and invent counterworld formations, where we can breathe underwater, where we can be insulated from the terror of the ocean, of bodies of water, by beauty. In this same section, artworks by **Pamela Longoardi** and **Peter Happel Christian** remind us of the connections between

oceans, lakes, and human-environmental impact. They bring us back to ideas of the productive power of water, not only as the birthplace of new world nations, but also of new cultural forms and possibilities.

Support for this project also provides opportunities for four mid-career artists to participate in research and professional development opportunities. Exhibiting artists **Juan Carlos Quintana** and **Monica Moses Haller** will each participate in artist residencies at A Studio In the Woods (New Orleans, LA) and **Elana Mann** and **Dameun Strange** will participate in artist residencies at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum (Winona, MN).

New work created specifically for this project comes from Ghanaian multi-disciplinary artist, educator, and founder of the Ancestor Project and the Nkyinkyim Museum in Nuhalenya Ada, Ghana, **Kwame Akoto-Bamfo** and new ledger work by **Cole Redhorse Taylor** (Mdewakanton Dakota/Prairie Island Indian Community).

Four national convenings, the first held at MMAM on August 23, will be open to onsite and online participation, and are being organized to gather new ideas and fresh perspectives on where the historical representation of the sea intersects with the canon of American Art. These conversations are meant to look into why neither maritime art or American Art have strong references to the trade of goods, of unheroic men, to the blood and unfreedoms that were accumulated and carried over oceans to make “a new world”; and how water, and the artists who are engaging with it in this exhibition, become the material and the place of resistance, to hear, feel, and sing new narratives and new forms of cultural power. The three ensuing convenings will take place in the late fall of 2024 and the early winter of 2025, one in New Orleans, Louisiana (Amistad Research Center), followed by one in Mystic, Connecticut (Mystic Seaport Museum), with a final concluding convening in Hannibal, Missouri (Jim’s Journey: Huck Finn Freedom Center).



**Kwame Akoto-Bamfo (Nigeria, b. 1949).**  
*Nkyinkyim: Forced*, 2024. Concrete and Iron.  
30 × 18 in. (76.2 × 45.72 cm). Minnesota  
Marine Art Museum Commission. On loan  
from the Nkyinkyim Museum, Ghana.

Located near the headwaters of the largest watershed in America, MMAM is an ideal space to explore these ideas. . The Museum is committed to creating meaningful art experiences that explore our relationship with water, and organizational responsibility to reframe the portrayal of marine art in ways that give narrative equity to Black and Indigenous Peoples. Formative community-oriented research was conducted by Engage Winona, a local nonprofit organization that drives equitable civic action and social change by working to ensure everyone has access, voice, and power in community planning, decision-making, and changemaking. “There was a lot of reflection and conversation about the cultural divisions that exist in Winona, the practice of self-segregation, and the refusal of many people to reckon with the totality of US history,” noted Mai’a Williams, former lead Engage Winona researcher.. The report concludes that there is a desire by historically marginalized Black and Indigenous communities within the region to see more community discussions about race, the history of slavery in the Americas, and effects of this history

## ABOUT CO-CURATORS

**Tia-Simone Gardner** is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, and undisciplined Black feminist geographer, committed to understanding relationships between Blackness and landscape. She is a 2023–24 McKnight Visual Artist Fellow. Her work has shown both nationally and internationally, and her writing has appeared in *Georgia*, an independently published arts writing journal, and *New Suns*, a journal published by USA Artists. Gardner is an assistant professor of media and cultural studies at Macalester College in St. Paul, MN.

**Shana M. griffin** is a Black feminist activist, researcher, geographer, sociologist, abolitionist, and artist. Her practice is interdisciplinary, research-based, and decolonial, existing across the fields of sociology, geography, Black feminist thought, and land-use planning and within movements challenging displacement, carcerality, reproductive control, climate impacts, and gender-based violence. She is the recipient of several awards, including a 2025 Loeb/ArtLab Fellow at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2022 Andy Warhol Curatorial Research Fellow, and 2021 Creative Capital Awardee.

## ABOUT MMAM

Founded in 2006 on the shores of the Upper Mississippi River, near the headwaters of the largest watershed on the continental United States, the Minnesota Marine Art Museum (MMAM) has been boldly pushing the boundaries of what marine art is, and what it can be. Operating on a seven-acre site, with a 30,000-square-foot facility, MMAM has been presenting a suite of dynamic programming and exhibitions that amplifies the work contemporary artists are doing to both challenge our assumptions about traditionally defined marine art, and deepen our collective awareness about our relationship to water, over time, and across cultures.

The mission of the Minnesota Marine Art Museum is to **create meaningful art experiences that explore our relationship with water**. With new leadership in place, MMAM is shaping an ambitious vision to be nationally recognized for leveraging the generative capacities of **great art inspired by water** to **spark wonder** and create a more **compassionate and connected world for all**. *A Nation Takes Place* was produced to align and support the organization's 2023-2025 Strategic Plan, an opportunity for MMAM to take a fresh and expansive look at (1) What great art inspired by water is and who the museum serves; (2) The networks and collaborators it works alongside; (3) Ways to integrate its mission across the entire visitor experience; and (4) Its impact on the communities it operates from, both social and natural.

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