THIS SPRING MARKS THE OPENING of a number of notable exhibitions featuring work by African and African American artists. In Los Angeles, William Pope.L’s largest-ever museum presentation is on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. In New York, a comprehensive overview of colorful works by Alma Thomas is at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, and June Kelly Gallery is displaying paintings by Philemona Williamson (shown above). The Museum of Modern Art in New York (“Migration Series”) and the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University (new acquisitions) are showing significant exhibitions by Jacob Lawrence. Several other artists have multiple shows scheduled this season, including Glenn Ligon, Yinka Shonibare, MBE, and Trenton Doyle Hancock. And, of course, the 2015 Venice Biennale featuring more than 35 black artists opens on May 9. A selection of some of

spring’s most intriguing offerings follows:

GLENN LIGON, Installation view of “Well, it’s bye-bye/If you call that gone” at Regen Projects, Los Angeles. | via Regen Projects

March 14 – Apr 18, 2015

1. GLENN LIGON, “Well, it’s bye-bye If you call that gone” @ Regen Projects (Hollywood) | Los Angeles

Through text and imagery, Glenn Ligon draws on cultural touchstones to raise issues of race, identity, history and culture. This presentation of recent works features a selection of “Come Out” paintings, referencing the defense of the Harlem Six, a group of African American teenagers wrongfully accused of murdering a Harlem merchant in 1964; a double neon sculpture with the word “America” face down on the floor; and “Hands” (1996), a silkscreen painting composed of images from the Million Man March.

ALMA THOMAS, “Fire Flies,” 1968 (acrylic and graphite on paper). | Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY

March 20 – May 16, 2015

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March 20 – May 16, 2015

National Gallery of Art Acquires 190+ Works by African American Artists From Corcoran

Culture Talk: Duke Professor Richard J. Powell on Archibald Motley

Weekend Reading: The Intersecting Worlds of Chris Ofili and David Adjaye

National Gallery Curators Explain How Corcoran Works Will Enhance Collection

NATIONAL GALLERY CURATORS EXPLAIN HOW CORCORAN WORKS WILL ENHANCE COLLECTION

THE YEAR IN BLACK ART 2014: NOTABLE NEWS, AWARDS AND EXHIBITIONS

11 BEST BLACK ART BOOKS OF 2014


Deftly employing color as a language, the ordered patterns and vibrant abstracts of Alma Thomas (1891-1978) speak volumes. The exhibition features more than 40 drawings and paintings (oil, acrylic and watercolor) and the gallery has published an accompanying catalog that includes a previously unpublished oral history interview with Thomas.


March 20 – May 10, 2014

3. “STAN DOUGLAS: Photographs 2008-2013” @ Nikolaj Kunsthall | Copenhagen Denmark

An innovator in film and video, Canadian-born Stan Douglas has been exploring staged photography in recent years recreating specific socio-political moments in history. Drawing on the stylistic expression of classic old Hollywood, film noir and the jazz age, the projects are full productions requiring the equivalent of major film sets complete with a casts, extras and lighting.
howard bingham, "michael jackson at manual arts high school," n.d. | promised gift of irene fertik, courtesy california african american museum

march 20 – june 7, 2015

4. “light catchers” @ california african american museum | los angeles

a celebration of seven los angeles-based african american photographers who have been covering the city since the late 1940s, the exhibition features howard bingham, don cropper, jack davis bob douglas, cliff hall, lambone mclemore and murphy ruffins. this reprise of a 1997 show organized by photographer irene fertik marks the donation of 35 prints by the photographers to the museum’s permanent collection.

william pope.l, “trinket,” 2008 (mixed media). installation in exhibition hall of municipal auditorium, kansas city, mo., produced by grand arts | courtesy the artist and mitchell-innes & nash, new york. photo by e.g. shempf

march 22 – june 28, 2015

5. “william pope.l: trinket” @ the geffen contemporary at moca la | los angeles

the largest-ever museum presentation of william pope.l’s work, this exhibition features new and recent work, including large-scale installations and new sculptures and performances, by the chicago-based artist. the show’s

definitive work is “Trinket,” an over-scale fraying American flag blown continuously by four industrial fans and lit by Hollywood-style lights.

LAYLAH ALI, “Untitled (Acephalous series),” 2015 (gouache, acrylic, watercolor, and pencil on paper). | via Paul Kasmin Gallery

March 25 – April 25, 2015

6. "LAYLAH ALI: The Acephalous Series" @ Paul Kasmin Gallery | New York
For her first show at Paul Kasmin and her first New York solo exhibition in a decade, Laylah Ali is presenting 10 gouache and acrylic paintings on paper. According to the gallery, Ali’s practice “explores power dynamics and interpersonal conflict through compositions that position culturally and sexually ambiguous figures in precarious, loaded, and unexpectedly humorous situations. While the works included in The Acephalous Series are similarly engaging and metaphoric, Ali has introduced new narratives with a fraught community of figures, including those with minimal bodies, some who lack heads, or appear to be on an endless, determined trek.” Ali lives in Williamstown, Mass., where she is a professor of art at Williams College.
7. “TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK: Skin and Bones, 20 Years of Drawing” @ Studio Museum in Harlem | New York

Inspired by graphic novels, comics and cartoons, music and film, over the past two decades, Houston-based Trenton Doyle Hancock has been exploring elaborate animated narratives. At times mythical and dark, often fantastic and fun, his drawings, collages and works on paper are populated by a cast of colorful characters. Organized by curator Valerie Cassel Oliver of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, the exhibition is the first in-depth consideration of his expansive body of work.

8. “Promised Land: JACOB LAWRENCE at the Cantor, A Gift from the Kayden Family” @ Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University | Stanford, Calif.

According to a Stanford, Cantor holds the largest collection of Jacob Lawrence works on the West Coast, thanks to a generous donation in July 2014 of 56 paintings and prints by Lawrence and one painting by Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, his wife. This exhibition presents the works together for the first time, charting the evolution of Lawrence’s output from 1943 to 1998. Twelve students designed the exhibition and wrote the accompanying texts.
Performance artist Kalup Linzy works in video and mixed-media and for more than a dozen years has used a soap opera format in an ongoing series in which he portrays 22 characters. The videos are semi-autobiographical, probing both his personal drama and satirizing real art world challenges. Presenting new and recent work and an accompanying soundtrack, the solo exhibition is Linzy’s first at the gallery.

Curated by Glenn Ligon, this exhibition brings together the work of 45 artists whose work “often deals with the...”
shifting experience of American identity, examining loaded questions around language, power, race, gender and sexuality. The description, of course, applies to Ligon’s own work too, which is presented in conversation with contributions by Jackson Pollock, Phillip Guston, Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Richard Serra, William Eggleston, Bruce Nauman, David Hammons, Adrian Piper, Byron Kim, Chris Ofili, Cady Noland, William Pope.L and Lorna Simpson, among many others.


Apr 3 – Sep 7, 2015
11. “One-Way Ticket: JACOB LAWRENCE’s Migration Series and Other Works” @ Museum of Modern Art | New York
Jacob Lawrence was only 23 when he produced his epic 1941 series documenting the black migration from the rural American South to the urban industrial North that began around 1915. The works are in the collection of two institutions. The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. owns the odd-numbered panels and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York holds the even-numbered. This exhibition brings together the entire 60-panel series for the first time in 20 years at MoMA, presented in context with interpretations of migration by other creatives, spanning disciplines and generations.

Rife with doodles, fragmented phrasing and recurring motifs, Jean-Michel Basquiat’s famous works often look like he was working his ideas out on the canvas. It should come as no surprise that he filled notebooks with what the museum describes as “poetry fragments, wordplay, sketches, and personal observations ranging from street life and popular culture to themes of race, class, and world history.” The exhibition is the first major presentation of his notebooks and includes 160 pages exhibited alongside related works on paper and canvas.

Organized by international curator and critic Simon Njami, this dynamic exhibition considers the themes of “The Divine Comedy,” Dante Alighieri’s epic poem, and demonstrates its relevance beyond the European context. Featuring more than 40 African-born artists from 19 nations—including Kader Attia, Berenice Bickle, Nicholas Hlobo, Julie Mehretu, Aida Muluneh (whose work is shown above), Wangeci Mutu, Maurice Pefura, and Yinka Shonibare, MBE—the exhibition is the first to expand beyond the museum’s traditional gallery spaces.
inhabiting the pavilion and stairwells, as well.

PEFURA, “Nos Voyages Immobiles,” 2015 (mixed media, cardboard, paper). Courtesy Skoto Gallery

April 9 – May 16, 2015

14. “PEFURA: Nos Voyages Immobiles” @ Skoto Gallery | New York

Perfura considers notions of space, location and belonging in this exhibition whose title translates to “Our Motionless Journey.” Paris-born of Cameroonian descent, Perfura is an architect who has been working as an artist for two decades. His mixed media paintings and installations “expand on the relationship between the body and the nature of spaces, the contrast between large collective spaces and individual compartmentalized spaces as well as notions of space as a set of destinations.”
15. NICK CAVE, “Soundsuit Invasion Photo Shoots” @ Cranbrook Art Museum | Detroit

In anticipation of “Here Hear,” his forthcoming exhibition at Cranbrook opening June 20, Nick Cave is staging a series of street performances and photo shoots around Detroit at iconic city locations this spring. Pop-up locations will be “leaked” via social media to draw crowds. The images will be published as postcards in a book titled “Greetings from Detroit.”

16. “PHILEMONA WILLIAMSON: Black & Colored, Recent Paintings” @ June Kelly Gallery | New York

A powerful interplay between color, technique and subject permeates the latest paintings of Montclair, N.J.-based artist Philemona Williamson. In a release, the gallery says “Her work continues to teeter on the edge of satire, tradition and innovation. For Williamson, objects transcend their function and are seemingly playful, but upon closer examination they are dark and foreboding, delving deep into contemporary themes that mystify.” (Her work is also shown at the top of this page.)
April 10 – May 16, 2015


Hank Willis Thomas’s latest exhibition is a counterpoint to “Unbranded: Reflections in Black by Corporate America, 1968-2008,” his 2010 installation at the Brooklyn Museum. A broad assembling of illustrations and photography, “Unbranded: A Century of White Women, 1915 – 2015” examines the representation of the “ideal feminine type” in print advertising and the “notions of virtue, power, beauty, privilege, and desire” associated with the images.

April 11 – June 27, 2015

18. “GORDON PAKRS: Segregation Story” @ Adamson Gallery | Washington, D.C.
In 1956, Gordon Parks traveled to Shady Grove, Ala., where he spent time photographing the members of an ordinary African American family. The color portfolio documenting the indignities of the Jim Crow South was published in Life magazine. The gallery’s exhibition presents a selection of images from “Segregation Story,” his evocative series which it describes as “an intimate portrayal of one family’s perseverance through racial and economic subjugation.”

ADAM PENDELTON has created a new series of Black Lives Matter paintings made with a low-tech “painting machine.” | via Pace Gallery

April 16 – May 23, 2015

19. “ADAM PENDLETON: New Works” @ Pace Gallery | London
New York-based Adam Pendleton is presenting new works—paintings, sculpture and a site-specific installation—that “explore the relationship between politics, language, and race, and consider how history bears on the present.” The exhibition features a new series of Black Lives Matter paintings conceived by the Richmond, Va.-born artist in response to the Michael Brown and Eric Garner killings and the rallying of communities across the United States in protest of police use of lethal force on unarmed black men and youth.
TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK, “Bringback Cabbage.” | Courtesy The Ringling

April 17 – Sept. 13, 2015

20. TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK, “EMIT: What the Bringback Brought” @ Ringling Museum of Art | Sarasota, Fla.

Through his illustrative storytelling, Trenton Doyle Hancock has developed the Mounds and the Vegans, a distinct set of mythological characters that the museum describes as “two diametrically opposed universal forces that play out the archetypal battle between good and evil.” This exhibition of commissioned works, the result of Hancock being awarded the 2013 Greenfield Prize, launches a first phase in the development of a new series of action figures and dolls, as well as a film presented in the form of a television commercial.

MELEKO MOKGOSI, Detail of “Democratic Intuition, Exordium,” 2013–present (oil and charcoal on canvas).
April 21 – Aug. 9, 2015

21. “MELEKO MOKGOSI: Democratic Intuition @ Institute of Contemporary Art” | Boston

Inspired by photographic images, Meleko Mokgosi’s realistic paintings “investigate Southern Africa’s past and present.” Working on a grand scale across successive canvases, he portrays detailed powerful narratives that at their root are about recognition, giving a voice to suppressed people. Mokgosi is presenting a new body of work created specifically for this exhibition that examines democracy from five different perspectives. Born in Botswana, he lives and works in New York.

Works by Mokgosi are also on view at Jack Shainman’s The School in Kinderhook, N.Y. through April 12.

April 28 – Sept. 20, 2015

22. YINKA SHONIBARE, MBE, “Pièces de résistance” @ DCH/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art | Montreal, Canada

For Yinka Shonibare, MBE, the complicated origins of Dutch wax fabric provide a conceptual framework for his elaborate installations and ironic sculptures that probe “identity, authenticity, ethnicity, representation, hybridity, race, class, migration, globalization, and power.” For this exhibition, the foundation describes the London-born Nigerian artist’s approach as “a multiplicity of strategies, including auto-ethnography and humour in combination with art historical and literary references, to deliver a body of work that is simultaneously seductive and subversive.”
THEASTER GATES©, The inside of a local hardware store. It's contents preserved. | © the artist and White Cube,
Photo by Sarah Pooley

April 29 – July 5, 2015

23. “THEASTER GATES: Freedom of Assembly” @ White Cube Gallery | London

Drawing on matters of memory, history, politics and the cultural symbolism of material objects, Theaster Gates is presenting a new body of work—tar paintings, sculptures and installations. According to the gallery, the Chicago-based artist "explores the theme of assembly in its widest sense, enmeshing ideas of an autonomous art object with notions of individual freedom and the empowerment of place. In particular, Gates refers to the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which protects freedom of speech, the right to peaceably assemble, and the free exercise of religion.”
Represented by James Cohan, Yinka Shonibare, MBE, will present a solo exhibition of works at the New York gallery. The London-born Nigerian artist who considers the intersection of race, class, culture, identity and globalization in his work has described his practice as both a flirtation with the aristocracy and a critique of the establishment.

To mark its 250th anniversary, the Morris-Jumel Manson is hosting an exhibition of works by British-born Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare, MBE. His “work explores identity, race, gender and the cross-pollination of cultures through the use of Dutch wax textiles, period costumes and mixed media.” Along with a new theatrical installation commissioned for this exhibition, his sculptures will be displayed throughout the mansion. Built in 1765, the Washington Heights home is the oldest in the borough of Manhattan.


May 2015 – March 2016

26. RASHID JOHNSON, “Blocks” @ The High Line | New York

Combining basic materials with everyday objects, Rashid Johnson’s mixed-media sculptures investigate the intersection of race, identity, community and belonging. For the High Line, he is building a three-dimensional grid structure on which objects including busts will perch. A living greenhouse sited just south of The Standard Hotel, High Line plants will begin to integrate and grow within the public art work over the course of its nearly yearlong installation.


May 8 – Oct. 11, 2015

27. “Portraits and Other Likenesses from SFMOMA” @ Museum of African Diaspora | San Francisco
This special exhibition explores how portraiture has evolved from a form of personal identification to a genre as invested in fiction, subversion, stereotype, and fantasy as it is in the description of physical traits. Produced in collaboration with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the group show includes more than 50 works dating from the 1930s to present from SFMOMA’s collection. Featured artists include Njideka Akunyili Crosby, David Hammons, Wifredo Lam, Glenn Ligon, Chris Ofili, Lorna Simpson, Mickalene Thomas, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, and Fred Wilson, among others.

Okwui Enwezor | Photo via Phaidon

May 9 – Nov. 22, 2015

28. 2015 Venice Biennale @ the Giardini and the Arsenale | Venice, Italy
With Okwui Enwezor at the helm of the Visual Arts sector, the first African director of the Venice Biennale, the historic exhibition gathering features innovative programming and more than 35 black artists from around the world.

PLEASE OFFER COMMENTS sharing additional exhibitions opening this spring, particularly those featuring the work of black women artists. CT


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Amazing to see so many artists and their diverse visions in both national and international arenas. Times have so changed.

What do you think?