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Art

10 Trailblazing Artists with Must-See Museum Shows in 2023

Allyssia Alleyne

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Carrie Mae Weems, *Cyclorama - The Shape of Things, A Video in 7 Parts*, 2021. © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

There's nothing inherently wrong with another exhibition venerating an Old Master or a modern art rock star. But this year, many museums and major institutions are instead highlighting the work of women artists, queer artists, and artists of color who were overlooked in their lifetime, or introducing a generation of fresh voices to their largest audiences yet.

Here, we share 10 artists with major museum solo shows in 2023, spanning everything from sculpture and painting to film and installation art made with artificial intelligence.

Senga Nengudi

Dia Beacon, Beacon, New York

February 17, 2023–



Senga Nengudi

Performance Piece, 1978

The Studio Museum in Harlem

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Last year, Senga Nengudi took home the Nasher Prize, awarded for excellence in contemporary sculpture. In her practice, she's used everything from thrifted pantyhose and dry-cleaning bags to sand, paper, and tape to create abstract works that explore the body, race, and womanhood, among other themes. The use of inexpensive, overlooked materials has been a hallmark of her practice since the 1970s, when she was staging performance art pieces in freeway underpasses and other public spaces as part of the L.A. collective Studio Z.

Much of Nengudi's work straddles the line between sculpture and performance. To translate that cross-disciplinary aspect of her practice, Dia Beacon's long-term exhibition of sculptures and immersive installations will be accompanied by a series of performances devised with partnering venues.

Martin Wong

KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin

February 25–May 14, 2023

Also traveling to: Camden Art Centre, London;
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam





Martin Wong, *Did I Ever Have a Chance*, 1999. © Martin Wong Foundation. Courtesy of the Martin Wong Foundation and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York.



Martin Wong, *Tell My Troubles to the Eight Ball (Eureka)*, 1978–81. © Martin Wong Foundation. Courtesy of the Martin Wong Foundation and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York.

In a recent [conversation](#) with *Interview* magazine, artist [Oscar Ji Hou](#) described Martin Wong as “the OG Gaysian Cowboy,” which seems like a suitable introduction. From the 1970s to the ’90s, the Chinese American painter captured the margins of society, depicting queer life in racialized communities and dense urban landscapes while embedding his vignettes with Chinese iconography, graffiti, images of American Sign Language, and homoerotic undertones.



Martin Wong⁷
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The first major European exhibition of Wong’s oeuvre—“Malicious Mischief,” which debuted in November 2022 at Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (CA2M) in Móstoles, Spain—is set to make its way to Berlin’s [KW Institute for Contemporary Art](#) this February. The presentation will include more than 100 works created between the late 1960s and 1999, the year Wong died of AIDS-related illness at age 53. After finishing its run in Germany, the exhibition will spend the summer at Camden Art Centre in London, before traveling to the [Stedelijk Museum](#) in Amsterdam in November.

Cecily Brown

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

April 2–September 24, 2023



Cecily Brown, *Fair of Face, Full of Woe*, 2008. © Cecily Brown. Courtesy of the artist and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Cecily Brown may have risen to prominence in her native London as the starriest painter among the Young British Artists, but she decamped to New York shortly after graduating from the Slade School of Art in 1994 and has been living in the city ever since. This year, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is commemorating those nearly 30 years of American life with “Death and the Maid” — Brown’s first major exhibition in New York since her big move.

Cecily Brown ⁷
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Brown is known for her gestural brushstrokes that bring motion to static scenes, and colorful canvases that blur the line between figuration and abstraction, as well as her wealth of art historical references. Featuring 50 paintings, drawings, monotypes, and

sketchbooks, the Met exhibition will highlight Brown's references to still lifes, memento mori, and other Western motifs relating to the brevity of life and the vanity of humanity.

Pacita Abad

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

April 15–September 3, 2023



Pacita Abad, installation view of "A Million Things to Say" at the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD), Manila, 2018. Photo by Pioneer Studios. Courtesy of the Pacita Abad Art Estate.

For 30 years, the flamboyant Filipino artist Pacita Abad, who died in 2004, experimented with works on paper, ceramics, textiles, and costume design. But her lasting legacy has been her trapunto tapestries – canvases that she padded and stitched, in a technique akin to quilting, before applying paint and encrusting their surfaces with shells, sequins, and other objects. Even before she studied at the Corcoran School of Art and, later, the Art Students League of New York, textiles were familiar terrain: When she first moved to the United States in the early 1970s, fleeing Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorship, Abad supported herself as a seamstress.



Pacita Abad ⁷
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Color, movement, and texture were constant concerns for the artist, but Abad veered from the abstract to the representational (tribal masks were a common motif) and featured both fantastical and political themes — most famously in her “Immigrant Experience” series. “I have always believed that an artist has a special obligation to remind society of its social responsibility,” she once said. The Walker Art Center’s exhibition will be the first retrospective looking at the entirety of Abad’s career.

Isaac Julien

Tate Britain, London

April 27–August 20, 2023



Isaac Julien, *Pas de Deux with Roses* from the “Looking for Langston Vintage Series,” 1989/2016. © Isaac Julien.
Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

London-born artist Isaac Julien first established himself as a voice of the Black British vanguard in 1989 with the release of his film *Looking for Langston*, a poignant meditation on Blackness and queer identity. In the decades since, he’s developed an expansive moving-image practice, folding elements of dance, sculpture, music, and film into immersive multiscreen installations. And now, 22 years after his Turner Prize nomination, and nearly a year after being knighted by Queen Elizabeth II, Julien is receiving his first survey exhibition in his home country—and at one of its most prestigious institutions, no less.



Isaac Julien ⁴
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“What Freedom Is To Me” at [Tate Britain](#) will start with works Julien produced as part of the politically minded Sankofa Film and Video Collective in the 1980s. The exhibition will also feature career highlights like *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007), which interrogated the various traumas of migration, and *Lessons of the Hour* (2019), his portrait of Frederick Douglass.

Liu Kuo-sung

National Gallery Singapore

January 13–November 26, 2023





Liu Kuo-sung 刘国松
Morning of the Hills 山崗之晨, 1966
RIVER ART GALLERY
Price on request



Liu Kuo-sung 刘国松
山高. 水遠. 茫茫尋, 2014
Mingshan Art
Price on request

Discussions about the meeting of East and West in art tend to focus on American and European artists incorporating Asiatic elements into their work. But that fascination can go both ways, and Taipei-based artist Liu Kuo-sung — one of the foremost figures in contemporary ink painting — is living proof. Since co-founding the Taiwanese Fifth Moon Group in the 1950s, he’s been marrying the techniques and traditions of his craft with elements of Western **Abstract Expressionism**, geometric art, and modernist aesthetics, all the while experimenting with new methods and materials.



Liu Kuo-sung ⁴
[View Slideshow](#)



“Experimentation as Method” at the [National Gallery Singapore](#) will showcase the breadth of Liu’s career with more than 60 paintings and 150 other materials gifted from the artist’s personal archive. Among the works on view will be pieces from his long-running “Space” series, inspired by and often incorporating images from the Apollo 8 mission; and Himalayan landscapes from his “Tibet” series.

Carrie Mae Weems

Barbican Centre, London

June 21–September 3, 2023



Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled (Woman and Daughter with Make Up)*, from “Kitchen Table Series,” 1990. © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.



Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled (Woman Standing Alone)*, from “Kitchen Table Series,” 1990. © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

Carrie Mae Weems’s famous “[Kitchen Table Series](#)” (1990) is, on its surface, an intimate exploration of the life of the individual: daily rituals, romantic relationships, moments of boredom, frustration, and contentment. But at the same time, the black-and-white photographs, with Weems at their center, speak to broader themes of collective experience — such as motherhood, friendship, and the passing of time — through the lens of race, gender, and class. This mode of investigating the political through the poetic has been a consistent thread through the MacArthur fellow’s practice, and will be on full view at her summer survey at the Barbican — her first major solo museum show in the U.K.



Carrie Mae Weems³
[View Slideshow](#)



In her artist statement, Weems, who considers herself both an artist and an activist, said: “My responsibility as an artist is to work, to sing for my supper, to make art, beautiful and powerful, that adds and reveals; to beautify the mess of a messy world, to heal the sick and feed the helpless; to shout bravely from the roof-tops and storm barricaded doors and voice the specifics of our historic moment.”

This spirit is embodied in works that will be on view, like *The Shape of Things* (2021), a seven-chapter panoramic film exploring facets of American racial politics; and *Lincoln, Lonnie and Me* (2012), a meditation on president Abraham Lincoln and the artist/activist (and regular Weems collaborator) Lonnie Graham.

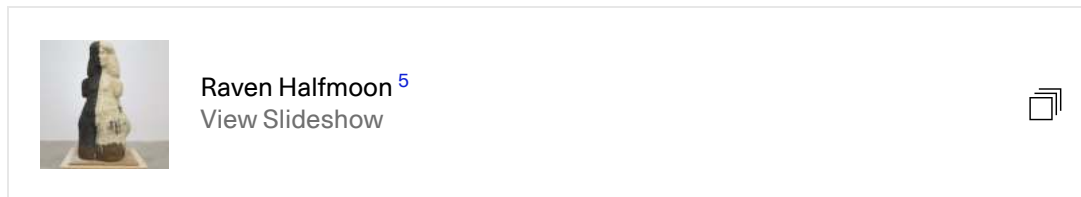
Raven Halfmoon

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut

June 25, 2023–January 2, 2024



Raven Halfmoon studied ceramics, painting, and cultural anthropology at the University of Arkansas before completing a long-term residency at the Archie Bray Foundation in 2020. However, her interest in sculpture stretches back to her upbringing in Oklahoma. Her tribe, the Caddo Nation, has been producing pottery for centuries, and she would make clay pieces with a community elder as a teenager.



Halfmoon still works with clay, creating monumental sculptures of Indigenous figures, often stacked or set side by side. Each piece is visibly crafted by hand, as revealed by the deep dents left by the artist's fingers that repeat in a rough pattern. Meanwhile, glazes in symbolic colors—red for the blood of murdered Indigenous women, and black for the clay of the Red River—are poured and dripped on haphazardly. In a way, the sculptures serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity to comment on both historic and ongoing injustices.

“My artwork exists to break the mold of the romanticized Native American stereotype and to simply say: We are still here and we are powerful,” Halfmoon has said. Her upcoming exhibition at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum will include works created over the last five years, along with a new commission.

WangShui

Haus der Kunst, Munich

September 8, 2023–March 10, 2024



WangShui, installation view of *Quiet as It's Kept*, 2022, in the Whitney Biennial 2022. Photo by Alon Koppel Photography. Courtesy of the artist and Haus der Kunst, Munich.



WangShui, installation view of *Quiet as It's Kept*, 2022, in the Whitney Biennial 2022. Photo by Alon Koppel Photography. Courtesy of the artist and Haus der Kunst, Munich.

Where other artists view artificial intelligence as an encroaching foe (in many cases rightfully so), WangShui sees the technology as a part-time collaborator. Their contribution to the [2022 Whitney Biennial](#), for instance, was a series of otherworldly LED video sculptures, programmed with the aid of an algorithm (and two helpful human programmers).

The interplay between technology and human beings, and larger questions of perception and corporeality, are at the heart of WangShui's practice. "Certainty of the Flesh" at Haus der Kunst will lean into this further. Along with paintings co-authored by AI, the exhibition centers on a namesake installation of interconnected LED screens playing an "artificial drama" generated by AI.

Simone Leigh

Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

April 6–September 4, 2023

Also traveling to: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; California African American Museum, Los Angeles



Simone Leigh, installation view of “Sovereignty” in the U.S. Pavilion of the 59th International Art Exhibition in La Biennale di Venezia, 2022. Photo by Timothy Schenck. Courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery.

Brooklyn-based sculptor Simone Leigh made history last year when she became the first Black woman to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale, and again when she was awarded the Golden Lion for Best Participation in the international exhibition “The Milk of Dreams.” Her winning work, *Brick House* (2019) — a 16-foot-tall bust of a Black woman that was originally commissioned as the inaugural High Line Plinth Commission — is a testament to the artist’s ongoing focus on Black female subjectivity and the possibilities of bronze.

Meanwhile, Leigh’s African-inspired makeover of the neo-Palladian U.S. pavilion was an exploration of diaspora, domestic architectures, and colonial histories – some of the themes that have defined her two-decade-long practice. Works from her pavilion presentation, “Sovereignty,” will form the core of the [Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston’s](#) survey of Leigh’s work. Expect a plethora of sculptures in bronze, porcelain, glass, and terracotta, along with video works and installations. The exhibition will travel to the [Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden](#) in Washington, D.C., this fall before it is jointly presented at the [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#) and the California African American Museum in Los Angeles in the summer of 2024. ■

Allyssia Alleyne

Correction: A previous version of this article misstated that the first major European exhibition of Martin Wong’s work, “Malicious Mischief,” will debut at KW Institute for Contemporary Art. The exhibition first opened at Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (CA2M) in Móstoles, Spain in November 2022 and will travel to KW Institute for Contemporary Art in February 2023.

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