



Museum of Contemporary
Art Detroit

For Immediate Release
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**Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) Announces
*Peter Williams: Black Universe***

On view April 3 through June 7, 2020

Opening Reception at MOCAD: Thursday, April 16, 2020,
7-11PM, Member Preview 6-7pm

Opening Reception at Trinosophes: Friday, April 17, 2020, 6-9PM

Detroit, MI – Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) announces ***Peter Williams: Black Universe***, a joint exhibition that presents Williams' figurative and abstract paintings. Williams' visually compelling works intertwine art historical references, allegories, current events, and personal life experiences. In this two-part exhibition, which presents more than two dozen paintings, the artist addresses difficult social issues, such as racial discrimination and climate change, through symbolic imagery, grotesque figures, and vibrant compositions.

“Where do Black people go during times fraught with pain and sorrow?” Peter

Williams asks. "What of our future consciousness?" Now a professor of painting at the University of Delaware, Williams taught for 17 years at Wayne State University in Detroit and was a well-established member of the arts community.

Organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit in collaboration with guest curators Larry Ossei-Mensah and Rebecca Mazzei, the exhibition highlights new figurative works from Williams' *Black Exodus* series (on view at MOCAD) and *Narration and Transition*, a survey of abstract paintings (on view at Trinosophes) that are an essential aspect of his dynamic oeuvre. Williams presents an uncensored picture of dominant contemporary culture, one in which our desires, our humor, our complicity and brutality are unsuppressed.

"Peter Williams is a master painter who I'm excited to collaborate with again after exhibiting his work at the CUE ART Foundation in 2018. His work is imaginative, moving, and candid. It is an honor and pleasure to reconnect him to Detroit via this exhibition, a city that has been truly instrumental in his personal and professional development," says co-curator Ossei-Mensah.

"Detroit has seen a lot of changes in recent years," adds co-curator Rebecca Mazzei. "It is important that new audiences get the opportunity to experience the contributions of those who have helped shape the creative character of the city. For those in the community who may already be familiar with Williams, we celebrate the trajectory of his career by showcasing his most recent work."

MOCAD presents a selection of 10 paintings from the *Black Exodus* series, featuring a highly evolved Afrofuturist storyline that uses allegory, dark humor, and satire to explore a new ecologically focused life for Black people. The series examines the idea of "space" literally and metaphorically, referring to the surface of the canvas, the physical realm, and perhaps most importantly, the realm of inner and outer consciousness.

With the earth on the verge of social and environmental disaster, a community bands together as they embark on an interdimensional voyage. Individuals travel in retrofitted 1950s flying cars, referencing the ingenuity of Cuban society during Socialism and Williams' time spent living in the Motor City.

The formal qualities of painting function purposefully in the artist's work as he slips between abstraction and figuration. Williams' stimulating color palette lures viewers in to explore themes regarding racial animosity that they may otherwise find challenging to confront. He also uses pattern and distortion as devices to "scramble things up," emphasizing the disruptive and disorienting conditions that affect Black lives in American society. His characters may grab the viewer's attention at first, but nothing can be taken at face value. A network of activity resides in the layers beneath the surface.

This charged body of work showcases the artist's incredible knack for storytelling, as well as an in-depth knowledge of art history and the history of civilization that seem to be at his fingertips. He invites viewers to use their imagination when exploring a narrative he has constructed.

Narration and Transition at Trinosophes features 14 pieces by Williams from 2012-2019. The survey of abstract painting highlights the unconscious, free-flowing meditative process during which Williams develops his coded visual language - the shapes, forms and experiments with color that become recurring tropes in his

representational work, as if they are silent characters.

These paintings often convey multiple perceptual experiences at once, evoking potent imagery of both a physiological and psychological nature—totemic forms suggestive of sexuality and desire, ancient cultural significance, or even his own experience living in his body. Williams experienced great trauma as a young man, when he was involved in a car accident that left him disabled. Flesh, muscle, blood vessels, and cellular activity come to mind in the visceral forms he repetitively makes. These elements also become solutions for figuration, laying the groundwork for props that emerge in his narrative paintings, where they take on new meaning while carrying the 'DNA' of their origin.

“This two-part show is an evolving dialogue between myself and the viewer about the future of ‘Negritude,’ the ‘quality or fact of being of African origin,’” Williams explains. “So much of my recent work tells the story of the transportation of the Black body and mind -- the strength of an undefeated people. It is about an escape from slavery, from Jim Crow, from Civil Rights, and even from a post-racial planet.”

“As I go further into the backstory of my work, I feel that it is all about the strength to cross a middle passage, to endure centuries of slavery, and find some place to exist that is not just on the physical plane. I'm trying to find that world inside my painting.”

Programming:

TALK

Saturday, April 18, 2020 at 1PM

An afternoon of conversation with the co-curators of ***Peter Williams: Black Universe*** Larry Ossei-Mensah and Rebecca Mazzei, discussing the exhibition and its themes with the artist Peter Williams and literary artist Lynn Crawford, whose writing has been inspired by Williams' paintings.

LECTURE

Saturday, April 25, 2020 at 1PM

Scholar and art critic Greg Tate speaks about the meaning and usage of the term “Afrofuturism” in the contemporary art world and society at-large, addressing ideas of interstitial, extradimensional Black space, while considering language and rhetoric used to introduce the audience to two MOCAD exhibitions, Conrad Egyir's show, ***Terra Nullius*** and Peter Williams' show, ***Black Universe***.

MORE ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

For more than 40 years Williams has chronicled current and historical events, interspersing pictorial narratives with personal anecdotes and fictional characters in order to create paintings about the diverse experiences of Black Americans. With boldness and humor, he tackles the darkest of subjects including, but not limited to, police brutality, lynching, slavery, mass incarceration, and other realms of racial oppression. Williams uses cultural criticism to form new creation myths, retelling the history of America from fresh and cosmic perspectives.

Peter Williams lives in Wilmington, Delaware and is Senior Professor in the Fine Arts Department at the University of Delaware. He earned his MFA from the Maryland

Institute College of Art and his BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. His paintings are held in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian's American Art Museum; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Detroit Institute of Arts, MI; Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; Howard University, Washington DC; Davis Museum at Wellesley College, MA; Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, OH; the Mott-Warsh Collection in Flint, MI; and The Bunker/Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection, Palm Beach; Jorge Perez Collection, Miami; and the McEvoy Foundation, San Francisco, among others. Peter Williams is represented by Luis De Jesus Los Angeles. (Artist biography courtesy Luis De Jesus Los Angeles)

Peter Williams: Black Universe is co-curated by guest curators Larry Ossei-Mensah and Rebecca Mazzei and organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit. On view April 3, 2020 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit and Trinosophes (1464 Gratiot Avenue, Detroit) and runs through June 7, 2020.

Lead funding for this exhibition **Peter Williams: Black Universe** is generously provided by The Modern Ancient Brown Foundation, with additional support from Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

ABOUT MOCAD

The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) is an innovative addition to Detroit's vibrant Midtown neighborhood, and functions as a hub for the exploration of emerging ideas in the contemporary arts. As a non-collecting institution, MOCAD is responsive to the cultural content of our time, fueling crucial dialogue, collaboration, and public engagement. The Museum is located between the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the Detroit Institute of the Arts, Wayne State University, and the College for Creative Studies. The cavernous 22,000 square foot building, a former auto dealership, has been simply renovated to maintain its raw historic character. MOCAD's ambitious series of public programs include lectures, musical performances, films, literary readings, and educational activities for area youth. MOCAD is generously supported by individual members, private and corporate foundations, and government agencies. More information can be found at mocadetroit.org.

ABOUT TRINOSOPHES

Trinosophes is an artist-run space that opened to the public in December 2011. Co-founded by musician Joel Peterson and curator Rebecca Mazzei, the independent venue presents musical performances, lectures, screenings and exhibitions by more than 200 international and local artists per year.

TRINOSOPHES HOURS

Tuesday-Friday: 9am-7pm

Saturday: 9am-4pm

Sunday: 10am-3pm

Closed Monday

MOCAD HOURS

Wednesday, Saturday, + Sunday: 11am-5pm

Thursday + Friday: 11am-8pm

Closed Monday + Tuesday

Images:

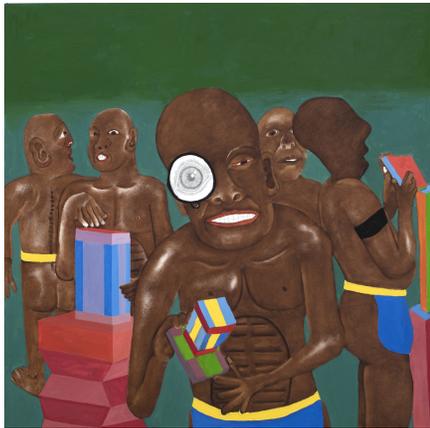
Above: Peter Williams, *The Sudanese Market* (2019), Oil on canvas, 72 x 96 inches, Courtesy of Pizzuti

Collection.

Below: Peter Williams, *Space Balls* (2019), Oil on canvas, 48 x 72 inches, Courtesy of Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Bottom Left: Peter Williams, *Spectacle* (2019), Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches, Courtesy of Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Bottom Right: Peter Williams, *Not titled* (2019), Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches, Courtesy of Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.



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MOCAD exhibitions and public programs are supported by the A. Alfred Taubman Foundation.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation supports MOCAD in experimenting with technology and new media to engage regional and international audiences both inside and outside the museum's walls. Supported programs include *Daily Rush*, an online exhibition program for experimental media and moving image; *Radix: Experience in the Age of Digital Everywhere*, MOCAD's long-term new media and technology initiative; and a series of future-focused, technology-based enhancements to the MOCAD campus.

MOCAD's Curator of New Media + Technology is supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

MOCAD's 2016-2021 Strategic Planning Initiative is funded in part by a generous grant from The Kresge Foundation.

Martin Creed's façade project, *Work No. 790: EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT (2007)*, is sponsored by generous support from the A. Alfred Taubman Foundation, Gavin Brown's Enterprise, Spectrum Neon, and the Applebaum Family Compass Fund.

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MOCAD would like to thank our Leadership Circle (Linda Dresner and Ed Levy, Roz and Scott Jacobson, Sonia and Keith Pomeroy, Jane and Ed Schulak, Sandy Seligman, and Robert Taubman) for making these programs possible: Mike Kelley's *Mobile Homestead*, Lectures, Poetry, Performance Art, Exhibitions, Film, DEPE Space, Music, Family Day, Public Programming, Education, Literature, and Museum Operations.



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