

ARTS

## 2025 Spring Arts Guide: New Museum Exhibits to Explore

*Black artists in comics, Alphonse Mucha-inspired pop-up tattoo salons, and an ode to Essex Hemphill are some of the upcoming exhibitions opening in D.C. this spring.*



by **STEPHANIE RUDIG**, **LOUIS JACOBSON**, **CHRIS KLIMEK**, **ALLISON R. SHELY**, **SERENA ZETS** and **DARYL PERRY**  
MARCH 12TH, 2025



Simone Leigh, "Last Garment, 2022." Opening March 20 at the Glenstone, Leigh's bronze sculptures are installed in the Pavilions Water Court and visible throughout the galleries. Credit: Timothy Schenck

^Center's collection, which includes not just an extensive holding of works completed by its namesake, but a whole selection of works by Black American artists and African diaspora artists across eras. The exhibit's title is a nod to the importance of adding to and maintaining archives and the act of collecting and preserving art now to ensure it is a part of the record.



Inside *Future Histories*. Credit: Pete Duvall

There's a large volume of artists connected to the D.C. and Baltimore areas, such as a woodblock print of **David Driskell** himself by **Korey Richardson**, who's based in Maryland and also the preparator for the Driskell Center. A sewn piece by D.C.-born **Sonya Clark** has reimagined the novel *The Bluest Eye* in stitched blocks of different colors that suggest Morse code dashes. A collage by Baltimore artist **Zoë Charlton** features an ancient-looking statue holding a child's castle toy. The exhibit also features a series of photographs by **Deborah Willis**, taken when she was pregnant and after giving birth to her son, in defiance of her art professor who told her she was "taking a spot from a good man." The son in the photo is conceptual artist **Hank Willis Thomas**, also featured in this show, and embodying the spirit of passing art along for future generations. *Future Histories: New Acquisitions at the Driskell Center runs through May 9 at the Driskell Center. Monday through Friday; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. [driskellcenter.umd.edu](http://driskellcenter.umd.edu). Free.* —Stephanie Rudig





Sanders Pace Architecture, McDonough House at Loghaven (Knoxville, Tennessee, 2020). © Sanders Pace Architecture

The framing of *A South Forty: Contemporary Architecture and Design in the American South* is compelling: It's a survey of architecture in the South since 1990, tracking the influences of the region's racial past, its economic development, and its changing ecology on new buildings. But something gets lost in translation. The exhibit is organized by architecture firms—each firm offers a large photograph of one of their works, along with several smaller images of other projects. In most cases, the only textual explanation on each panel is an abstract statement of the firm's philosophy, and sometimes a quotation from the likes of **Eudora Welty**, **Sandra Day O'Connor**, or **Bon Iver**. Specific projects are rarely labeled, much less fully explained, leaving the viewer in the dark about the context of the structures being featured. Consider one building by de Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop—a fascinating structure made entirely of wooden beams set at right angles. What is it? An agricultural silo can be seen in the background. But beyond that, there's no explanation. For other projects, some answers can be gleaned from a collection of impressive scale models; a mysterious, elevated, cornucopia-shaped structure from a photograph turns out to be a treehouse in Hot Springs, Arkansas. But why no detailed explanation for a series of eccentrically angular homes in New Orleans? Or the large number of long, artfully sloping roofs? Another National Building Museum exhibit, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Southwestern Pennsylvania* (on view through March 17), manages to provide a lot of useful context on the architecture being spotlighted. Thankfully, one firm understood the assignment in *A South Forty*: El Dorado and KSU Design+Make Studio explains how its low-slung stone structure is designed to survive prairie tallgrass burns while also receding visually into the landscape. Alas, too much of the rest of the exhibit comes off as *Architectural Digest* porn. *A South Forty runs through winter 2026 at the National Building Museum. Thursday through Monday; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. [nbm.org](http://nbm.org). \$10. —Louis Jacobson*

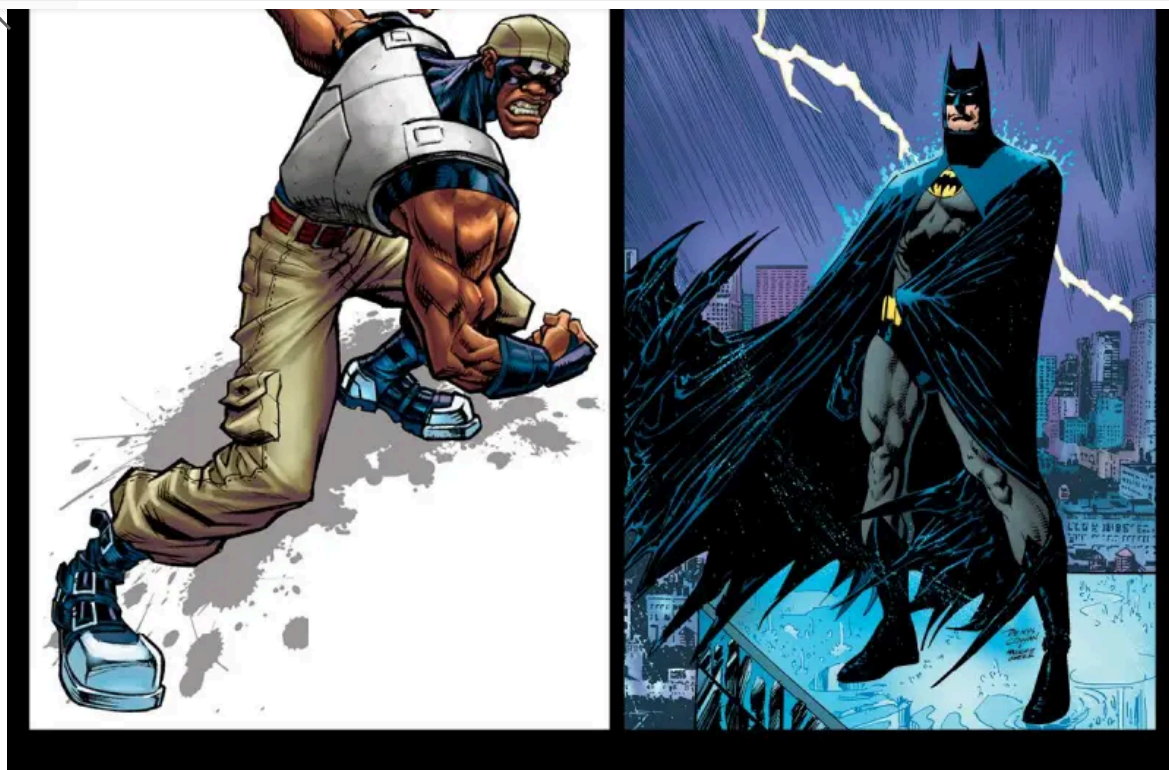




Elizabeth Catlett, "Red Leaves," 1978, lithograph, 2006. Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

**Elizabeth Catlett** was born more than a century ago in D.C., the grandchild of formerly enslaved people, and started her career at a time when it was unthinkable that a Black woman could become a working artist, even with an education from Howard University and a wealth of talent. She kept at it anyhow, studying and teaching drawing, painting, sculpture, and printmaking around the U.S., before heading to Mexico, where she found a home among the revolutionary print collective Taller de Gráfica Popular. *Elizabeth Catlett: A Black Revolutionary Artist*, curated in partnership with the Brooklyn Museum, captures the vast range of Catlett's career, from early sketches done in her days at Howard to public art commissions and dozens of prints and sculptural objects, spanning the 1930s until her death in 2012. Being active for so many years, her work concurrently evolved alongside sweeping upheavals in art movements and sometimes preceded major changes in history; she was celebrating Black Power and feminism before those movements had fully coalesced. In her depictions of Black people, mostly women, she had a particular talent for capturing an aliveness of her subjects. They seem to look either out at or past the viewer, and contort their bodies into poses that confer their pain and power. Over time, she sharpened her technical skills as well as her political messaging. She was more concerned that her art be socially charged and carry a message that could connect with ordinary people than that it be beautiful, but she regardless managed to create work that was visually and politically impactful, a potent reminder that art can do both. *Elizabeth Catlett: A Black Revolutionary Artist* runs through July 6 at the National Gallery of Art. [nga.gov](https://n ga.gov). Free. —S.R.





Dawud Anyabwile, Brian McGee, *Brotherman Dictator of Discipline*, 2009, Digital art (left);  
Denys Cowan, Malcolm Jones, *Detective Comics #600*, 1989, Pencil and ink with digital color (right)

A thousand years ago in the 1980s, the comic book market was split up among the big two—Marvel and DC—and then a panoply of much smaller independent publishers. Frequently, up-and-coming creators would work for one of the majors and then, having built a following, join an indie—or found one—so they could own their intellectual property. That was the rough career path of **Denys Cowan**, who drew an influential late-'80s run on DC's philosophical crime comic *The Question* before moving on to more recognizable heroes like **Batman**. In 1993, he and two other Black comic book creators—**Dwayne McDuffie** and **Michael Davis**—founded Milestone Media, an imprint with the objective of improving representation for Black creators and Black characters. Cowan is perhaps the most senior of the 20 Black creators whose work is featured in *The Artist's Experience: From Brotherman to Batman*, a showcase for the diversity of genres, tones, narrative approaches, and physical processes that characterize contemporary comic books. Cowan's pencil-on-ink work from his 1989 *Detective Comics* (the first of many monthly titles to chronicle Batman's war on crime) run is featured, as is more recent work from **Dawud Anyabwile**, co-creator with **Guy A. Sims** and **Jason Sims** of the landmark indie comic *Brotherman: Dictator of Discipline*. **Shawn Martinbrough**, author and illustrator of *How to Draw Noir Comics: The Art and Technique of Visual Storytelling*, curated the exhibit. He'll join comics journalist **David Betancourt** in conversation on May 30, and free "hands-on" workshops aligned with the exhibit include figure drawing with **Shawn "Painta" Lindsay** on April 16, noir drawing with Martinbrough on May 21, comics collaging with **Noreen Smith** on June 18, and comics and storytelling with **Ronald Wimberly** on July 16. The Artist's Experience: From Brotherman to Batman opens March 12 and runs through July 24 at Phillips@THEARC. Wednesdays and Thursdays; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. [phillipscollection.org](http://phillipscollection.org). Free, but advance registration is required for all talks and workshops. —Chris Klimek

## Hands on With Graffiti Painting at Phillips@THEARC, March 19

You can see murals and paintings by local artist **Luis Peralta de Valle** all over the city—in schools, embassies, hospitals, corporate offices, and other officially sanctioned environments. You might still be able to find traces of his graffiti and other not so officially sanctioned street art from his early artist days. The texture and momentum of his paintings, plus his penchant for portraiture on old traffic signs, incorporates the feel of street art even when they're shown inside. In his works, which often portray people, kids playing soccer and construction workers are on equal footing with luminaries like **James Baldwin**. Perhaps you too have recently been inspired (for no particular reason at all) to plaster some beauty or some defiant messages across our fair city, or paint the town red. At a graffiti painting event hosted by Phillips@THEARC, participants can learn how to combine fine art and street art techniques under the expert guidance of de Valle and with materials provided. During the workshop, the artist will touch on using tools like carbon transfers and stencils, graffiti as a tool of resistance, and how to hone a message for the public. The exhibit *The*



Credit: Luis Peralta de Valle

## March 20

Coming soon from the Phillips Collection : two opportunities to take the art on the museum walls and put it on

your skin. In honor of the Phillips Collection's current exhibit *Timeless Mucha: The Magic of Line*, the Czech painter **Alphonse Mucha** known for his art nouveau posters, the museum is hosting two Mucha-inspired pop-up tattoo salons. Three artists—**Memo Gonzalez**, **Lina**, and **Blady Tattoos**—from **Second Son Tattoo Co.** will join the Collection for its extended-hours Third Thursday events for “Mucha Flash” on March 20. (A second tattoo takes place on April 17.)

“Whether you’re a longtime admirer of Mucha or new to his world, this is your chance to explore the exhibition and get inspired before getting [tattooed],” writes the Phillips Collection on the event listing. While Mucha’s theater-poster sylphs are not among the featured designs, participants can choose from nine art nouveau nature motifs, including flowers, bees, and leaves. As with most flash events, tattoos are only available in black ink and will only be applied to arms or legs. Recipients must be at least 18 years old and not under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Alcohol *will* be available, however, for those of age seeking post-tattoo celebration; Bread Furst is catering the events with its full menu, beer, wine, and a selection of aperitifs. *Mucha Flash, a Third Thursday event, starts at 5 p.m. on March 20 and April 17 at the Phillips Collection. [phillipscollection.org](http://phillipscollection.org). Free.* —**Allison R. Shely**

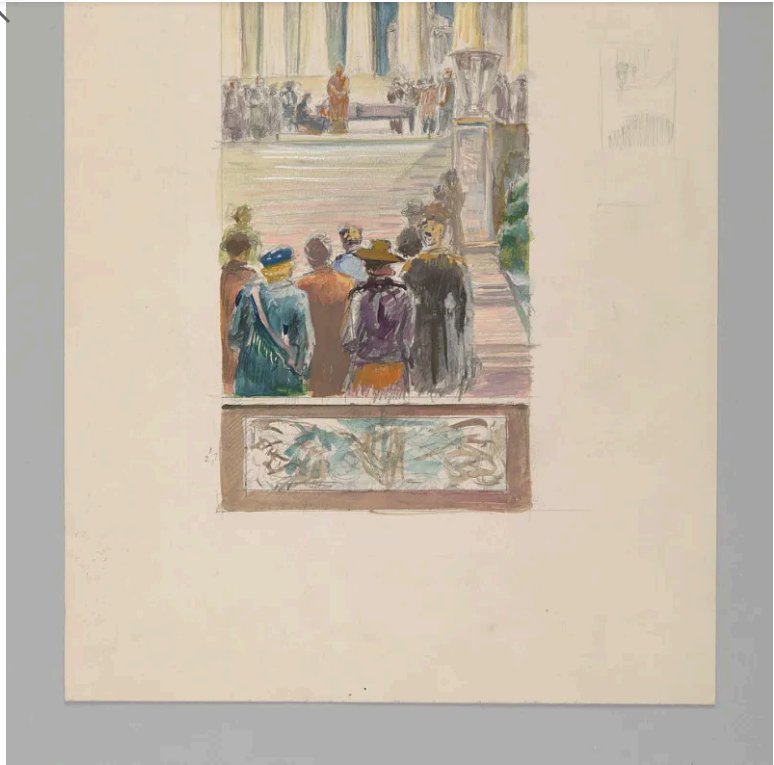
## Coffee & Collections: Rendering a Musical Legend in Art at Anacostia Community Museum, March 22

Founded in 1967, the Smithsonian’s Anacostia Community Museum is dedicated, as its website says, to the “untold ... often overlooked stories of people furthest from opportunity in the Greater Washington D.C. region.” As part of its Coffee & Collections events series, the museum presents an hourlong discussion with D.C. artist **Donnell Lewis** on how famed contralto singer **Marian Anderson** (1897-1993) is portrayed in the works of local artists. Anderson is best remembered for her 1939 Easter Sunday performance on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to a crowd of 75,000, following the Daughters of the American Revolution’s refusal to allow a Black performer to use their concert venue, Constitution Hall. (DAR, where she would eventually perform, did apologize to Anderson during her lifetime.) The museum also conserves Anderson’s monogrammed **fur coat**, worn to **John F. Kennedy**’s 1961 inauguration. Museum staff also encourages participants to make time to view the current exhibition ***A Bold and Beautiful Vision: A Century of Black Arts Education in Washington, D.C., 1900-2000***, which profiles the diverse manifestations of Black artistry across the 20th century, before or after the event. *Coffee & Collections: Rendering a Musical Legend in Art starts at 11 a.m. on March 22 at the Anacostia Community Museum. [anacostia.si.edu](http://anacostia.si.edu). Free, but pre-registration is suggested.* —**A.R.S.**

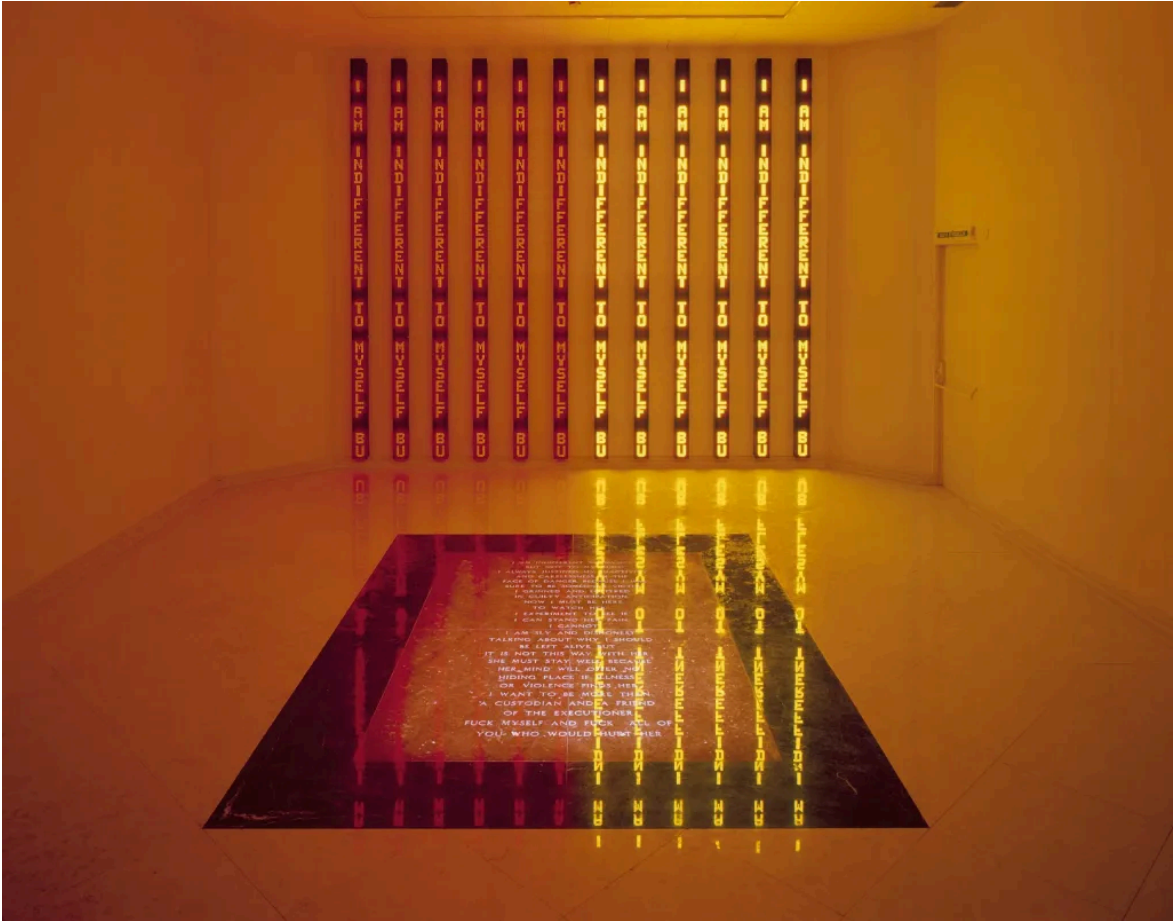


Bob Masse, Fisherwoman promo poster for the Collectors; 1967





"Crowd Watching Marian Anderson," James Amos Porter. Mid 20th Century. Anacostia Community Museum, Smithsonian Institution.



The Venice Installation: The Child Room, 1990; Jenny Holzer. Credit: Salvatore Licitra

^ contemporaries lack. Glenstone has commissioned the artist to create a light-up neon sculpture to serve as scaffolding for his video piece, “Kubber Pencil Devil,” which features colorful tableaux that often cast Da Corte as quirky characters. A group of works by **Jaune Quick-to-See Smith**, who just passed away in January, showcases the Native American artist’s exploration of maps, glyphs, and found materials. The works sometimes look like deceptively simple paintings, but are dense with loads of cultural references, collaged materials, and lines of paint so thick they become three dimensional. **Charles Ray**’s iconic stainless-steel sculptures are no longer on view outside the Pavilion building, but there are several other Ray statues inside, which have been installed in different rotating configurations five times before. The room through which one accesses **Michael Heizer**’s outdoor walk-around sculpture is no longer blocked, and **Robert Gober**’s immersive installation—aka that room with the topiary walls and all the running sinks—is also back in action, which, for me, feels like the turning on of the Bellagio fountains. *The pavilion reopening happens at 10 a.m. on March 20 at the Glenstone. Thursday through Sunday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. [glenstone.org](http://glenstone.org). Free, but advance registration required.* — S.R.

### **A Radical Alteration: Women’s Studio Workshop as a Sustainable Model for Art Making at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, opens April 25**

NMWA’S newest exhibit explores the impact of 50 years of the **Women’s Studio Workshop**. The heavily influential feminist visual arts studio and printing press in the Hudson Valley has changed the way U.S. artistic institutions support women and trans artists. Women’s Studio Workshop was born out of second wave feminism and is one of the few remaining arts organizations that has survived the volatility of the past half-century of change, both within the art world and outside of it. Institutions like NMWA owe a lot to the model of the Women’s Studio Workshop and this exhibit honors that relationship by bringing the work of the Workshop into the museum. Both institutions have done critical work to support generations of marginalized artists. A tangible output by the Workshop is the more than 240 artists’ books published by their press, collected and displayed all over the world; some of these books will be on display in the exhibition. Learning about Women’s Studio Workshop feels particularly important at this moment as artistic, feminist, and queer communities look for models of how to support and sustain themselves. Just like the Women’s Studio Workshop, we must turn toward each other, support and uplift one another’s work, and build institutions that will allow the longevity of these communities to flourish. *A Radical Alteration opens on April 25 and runs through Sept. 28 at the National Museum for Women in the Arts. [nmwa.org](http://nmwa.org). \$16.* —Serena Zets



Rhiannon Skye Tafoya, *Ul'nigid'*, 2020; Artist's book with woven paper, letterpress printing, and handmade paper case, 11 x 11 1/4 in. (closed); National Museum of Women in the Arts, Betty Boyd Dettre Library and Research Center; © Rhiannon Skye Tafoya; Courtesy of Women's Studio Workshop





Lyle Ashton Harris, "Essex, LA Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles," 1992/2015. Chromogenic print 15 x 20 15/16 in. © Lyle Ashton Harris

Born in Chicago and raised in Southeast D.C., **Essex Hemphill** stood out among the artists of his era for his unapologetic poetry and his activism for the LGBTQIA community, and gay Black men in particular. Hemphill didn't hold back in his work. His poetry tackled issues of homophobia, racism, and HIV/AIDS (Hemphill died of AIDS-related complications in 1995). His work also discussed the nuances of being both Black and gay, especially in his Lambda Literary award-winning anthology, *Brother to Brother: New Writing by Black Gay Men*. In a 1992 interview, Hemphill discussed his goal to create greater representation of and for Black gay men: "In a literary sense, it's happening in a tremendous way, the numbers of [Black] men who are for the first time struggling with creating poems or fiction of their experiences. And this is all in the context of confronting AIDS and the deaths around us. It's almost like a fierce resistance that says, 'Before I die, I'm going to say these things,'" he said. "That's why *Brother to Brother* picking up the [award] wasn't an award for me to take sole satisfaction in. It's an award that goes to 37 men who were willing to come forth, posthumously. We're trying to say everything we can." He often critiqued negative portrayals of Black men—including Robert Mapplethorpe's "Man in a Polyester Suit" photo, and his activism extended to co-founding the National Coalition of Black Lesbian and Gays. Hemphill's work often crossed into other mediums as well, his poems appeared in the documentaries and films of his collaborators throughout the '80s and '90s. *Essex Hemphill: Take Care of Your Blessings* will showcase the work of Hemphill's colleagues and collaborators, as well as artists who created work inspired by his writing. Featured artists include **Diedrick Brackens, Sharon Farmer, Lyle Ashton Harris, Sir Isaac Julien, Clifford Prince King, Glenn Ligon, Tiona Nekkia McClodden, Richard Bruce Nugent, Shikeith, and Joyce Wellman**. *Essex Hemphill: Take Care of Your Blessings* opens May 17 and runs through Aug. 31 at the Phillips Collection. [phillipscollection.org](http://phillipscollection.org). \$20. —Daryl Perry

Washington City Paper's 2025 Spring Arts Guide: *Art as an Act of Resistance* runs March 10 through 14. You can find [all our coverage here](#).