FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) presents a new fall season of exhibitions including JOESAM and Spectrum: On Color & Contemporary Art

September 27, 2023 – March 3, 2024 (see below for individual end dates)
Press Preview: September 26, 2023; 10:00am-12:00pm

(July 26, 2023, San Francisco, CA)—This fall, the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) presents a diverse roster of new exhibitions that include JOESAM, the first Bay Area museum exhibition of the work of beloved, self taught, San Francisco artist JoeSam.; Spectrum: On Color & Contemporary Art, the curatorial debut of Key Jo Lee, MoAD’s inaugural Chief of Curatorial Affairs and Public Programs, that brings together an international group of Black artists working in various ways with color; and the latest in MoAD’s Emerging Artists Program series, Salimatu Amabebe’s solo exhibition GRASS, dedicated to Black nightlife, communication, and communion. Additionally, MoAD hosts The Only Door I Can Open: Women Exposing Prison Through Art and Poetry, an online exhibition curated from within prison by Empowerment Avenue and presented in partnership with Flyaway Productions of the work of visual artists and poets incarcerated at the Central California Women’s Facility at Chowchilla.

“As a San Francisco native, I’m proud to present MoAD’s fall lineup, which raises the profile of emerging and underrecognized artists from the African Diaspora,” says Monetta White, Executive Director, MoAD. “JOESAM is a testament to the power of art to connect us with our own local history and culture. I grew up knowing JoeSam., and I’ve always admired his work. He brightened up underserved communities when no one else cared, and I’ll always be grateful for his art, activism, and love for Black people. In addition, Key Jo Lee's first curated show at MoAD is a showcase of the vibrant and diverse work of contemporary Black artists. These exhibitions are full of color, life, and excitement. They remind us of the power of art to make a difference in the world.”

“This suite of fall exhibitions is a portal into MoAD’s ever-expanding creative vision of which I am proud to be a part,” adds Key Jo Lee. “My curatorial practice is deeply informed by my knowledge and experience as a museum educator. By focusing the frame on color in Spectrum, I am inviting visitors to narrow their attention and slow their apprehension in order to expand and deepen their personal interpretation of each work and the relationships between them. MoAD's Emerging Artist Program is one of the things that brought me to the Museum, and it is such a privilege to work with some of the Bay Area’s incredible young talent. Artist JoeSam., though familiar to many in the Bay Area, will be shown in an entirely new way that celebrates the political depth and formal vivacity of this mix of rarely and never before exhibited works.”

JOESAM
September 27, 2023 - March 3, 2024
Born in Harlem in 1938, JoeSam. is a self-taught, contemporary, mixed media painter and installation artist who has been making work for four decades in San Francisco. In this first Bay Area museum exhibition of the 84-year-old artist’s work, guest curator Erin Jenoa Gilbert, well-known for her careful scholarship and dedication to bringing forth unsung Black artists, has selected 20 mixed media paintings from key series produced between 1985 and 2020 to draw attention to JoeSam.’s experiments in text and abstraction, his activism, and his enduring love for the Bay Area in his work and life.

Gilbert states “JoeSam’s complex compositions contain found materials from the streets of California. Juxtaposing discarded elements such as bicycle wheels, guitar strings, piano keys, plastic pipes, and wooden blocks with archival images and news clippings, he conveys text messages in white capital letters strewn across discordant colors on the canvas. His large scale works critique American public policy. Incited to become a full time artist by the Jones Massacre of 1978 in which several African Americans were poisoned by cult leader Jim Jones, the works in this exhibition offer a political commentary on the continuous state of affairs in the Black community. JoeSam references historic and current events ranging from the Black body on the auction block, to the Rodney King beating by the LAPD, to the Charleston shooting in which 9 girls were murdered at Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in vibrant colors which combat recalling the trauma or bloodshed to our collective memory.”

JoeSam began his career as an educator. While a student at Columbia University, he facilitated educational seminars for public school teachers there and at the Floyd Patterson House in the East Village, a residential treatment facility for juvenile offenders. In 1976, committed to youth education and empowerment, JoeSam. was hired as director of the Head Start program for the City of San Francisco.

JoeSam states “I vividly remember looking at colors and textures. I spent a lot of time looking at hues of peeling paint. It was that old lead-based paint that peeled periodically, especially when the ceiling leaked. We always had these incredible designs on our walls. I am a mixed media artist. Whenever possible I use materials in the state in which they were found. Whatever the media, the surface of my work is textured or shaped. My work reflects the fact that I’m a Black artist; my colors, patterns, and designs are multi-faceted and combine many parallel elements in a single piece of work analogous to the way African derived music combines parallel rhythmic and melodic elements”.

He began his Black West series and the Black Jazz series while working full time. In 1985, he received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and retired from education to be a full time artist. JoeSam. was named an artist-in-residence at San Francisco’s Learning through Education in the Arts Project (LEAP) in 1987. In 1999, he became a Djerassi Artist-in-Residence in Woodside, California and was awarded the Compton Foundation Fellowship. He executed commissioned artworks for several institutions including the San Francisco Mission Police Station Juvenile Facility, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Rosa Parks Metro Rail Station, and the Sharks Ice Center in San Jose, California.

JoeSam has been commissioned to create artwork for commercial purposes as well including for the book The Invisible Hunters (1987), which was named a Coretta Scott King Honor Book; and album covers
for Bobby McFerrin’s *Medicine Man* (1990), Bennie Maupin and Dr. Patrick Gleeson’s *Driving While Black* (1998), and Upsurge’s *All Hands-on Deck* (2000) and *Chromatology* (2004).

JoeSam is a member of the Hunters Point Shipyard Artists community. During his decades in San Francisco, the artist forged life-long friendships with other Bay Area painters including Robert Colescott, Joe Overstreet, Raymond Saunders, Arthur Monroe, and Mary Lovelace O’Neal.

**JOESAM** is guest curated by Erin Jenoa Gilbert, a New York based curator and art advisor, specializing in Postwar and Contemporary Art. Her company EJG International, founded in 2013, explores the relationship between art, power and politics through exhibitions, publications and acquisitions. With focus on abstract, conceptual and sculptural practices Gilbert has held positions at the Art Institute of Chicago, Studio Museum In Harlem and the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. For the past four years she has worked with Barbara Chase-Riboud organizing a series of retrospective exhibitions, including *Monumentale: The Bronzes* at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation in St. Louis, *Barbara Chase-Riboud: Infinite Folds* at the Serpentine Galleries in London and *The Encounter: Barbara Chase-Riboud and Alberto Giacometti* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

**Spectrum: On Color & Contemporary Art**  
**September 27, 2023 - March 3, 2024**

How does color influence the way we perceive a work of art? MoAD’s inaugural Chief of Curatorial Affairs and Public Programs Key Jo Lee explores this fundamental question in art-making and interpretation as she makes her curatorial debut with *Spectrum: On Color & Contemporary Art*. This exhibition brings together the work of a multigenerational and international group of 17 contemporary Black artists and illuminates the importance of color to both the form and content of their work, as well as the importance of paying attention to color in our interpretations of a work of art. Through a series of thematic groupings, visitors can explore how each artist employs color to guide our perception and to convey mood, identity, architecture, and more.

Participating artists include Tariku Shiferaw, Stacey Gillian Abe, Sheena Rose, Mildred Thompson, Barkley Hendricks, MANYAKU MASHILO, Delita Martin, Tawny Chatmon, Rashid Johnson, Richard Mayhew, Gabriel Mills, and Felandus Thames.

**Emerging Artists Program**  
**Salimatu Amabebe: GRASS**  
**September 27 - December 10, 2023**

GRASS is a multimedia exhibition featuring multichannel video pieces and sculptural motifs that activate the gallery for performance. Dedicated to Black nightlife, communication, and communion, the installation features eight queer and trans dancers in looped movement that draws from different styles
of freestyle and praise throughout the African diaspora. Visitors are invited to remove their shoes and step onto a dirt and mica covered floor.

Salimatu Amabebe’s work in the last ten years has been about making work for Black folks. Much of that work has been tied to food-making and developing an art practice rooted in care work. In 2017, Amabebe started Black Feast, a culinary event celebrating Black artists and writers through food.

Since moving to the Bay Area and starting the MFA program at UC Berkeley, Amabebe has focused on Black spaces and space-making. This work has involved researching the many Black spaces that once were and employing various tactics to revive their spirit.

Amabebe maintains a studio in Richmond, CA.

Amabebe’s solo exhibition is the third of MoAD’s 2023-2024 Emerging Artists Program series and will be followed by Lishan AZ’s Eugene Cove, on view December 13, 2023 - March 3, 2024. More information about this exhibition and the full 2023-2024 Emerging Artists Program cohort at https://www.moadsf.org/programs-residencies-awards/emerging-artists-program.

**The Only Door I Can Open: Women Exposing Prison Through Art and Poetry**

**Online at moadsf.org September 27, 2023 - October 1, 2024**

*The Only Door I Can Open: Women Exposing Prison Through Art and Poetry* is a visual art exhibition curated from within the Central California Women’s Facility at Chowchilla (CCWF) by Tomiekia Johnson and Chantell-Jeannette Black of Empowerment Avenue in partnership with MoAD and Flyaway Productions. Through the work of five visual artists and two poets, the exhibition makes visible the invisible women in prison through their own words and images—building empathy and empowering viewers to take action.

Empowerment Avenue’s (EA) mission is to normalize the inclusion of incarcerated writers and artists in mainstream venues by bridging the gap between them, harnessing this creative proximity as a path to decarceration and public safety. Founded by Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, who was incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison, and freelance writer Emily Nonko, Empowerment Avenue advocates for talented writers and artists in prisons across the country by providing them the resources they need to get their creative work outside prison walls and be fairly compensated for it. Nonko oversees EA’s program for writers, and Christine Lashaw, a senior museum professional, oversees EA’s program for visual artists.

The online exhibition, which features artworks, poems, and a zine, also includes an opportunity for viewers to write letters to the artists and a call to action for those who would like to advocate for change.

The exhibition is part of a larger program headed by Flyaway Productions, a San Francisco-based dance company, that is creating a related dance performance project with the CCWF artists.
ABOUT MoAD

The Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) is a contemporary art museum whose mission is to celebrate Black cultures, ignite challenging conversations, and inspire learning through the global lens of the African Diaspora. MoAD is one of only a few museums in the United States dedicated to the celebration and interpretation of art, artists, and cultures from the African Diaspora. The Museum presents exhibitions highlighting contemporary art and artists of African descent and engages its audience through education and public programs that interpret and enhance the understanding of Black art. Founded in 2005, the Museum continues to be a unique, cultural arts staple in the San Francisco Bay Area community.

For more information about MoAD, visit The Museum’s website at moadsf.org.

For media information or visuals, contact:
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Online moadsf.org/press-center/

General Information
The Museum is open Wednesday-Saturday 11am–6pm and Sunday, 12–5pm. Museum admission is $12 for adults, $6 for students and senior citizens with a valid ID. Youth 12 and under always get in free. For general information, the public may visit The Museum’s website at moadsf.org or call 415.358.7200. MoAD is located at 685 Mission Street (at Third), San Francisco, CA.

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