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The Newark Museum of Art Presents  
***Adama Delphine Fawundu: In the Spirit of Àșẹ***

*On view April 21, 2023 – March 10, 2024*



Adama Delphine Fawundu, *Pali~Seat of the Ancestors and Water Spirits*, 2022-2023 (still from three-channel video Installation) © Adama Delphine Fawundu

**March 24, 2023** — The Newark Museum of Art is pleased to present ***Adama Delphine Fawundu: In the Spirit of Àșẹ***, a new exhibition opening on **April 21, 2023**. On view through March 2024, the exhibition is NMOA's fourth iteration of its *Global Contemporary* series of year-long installations showcasing new work by living artists in dialogue with the Museum's collections.

As her entry point, Fawundu chose Sierra Leonean artist Olayinka Miranda Burney-Nicol (1927-1996)—a pivotal African modernist whose artistic career began in New York yet is not well

represented in American public collections. Three of Burney-Nicol's works on paper, alongside Fawundu's new artworks, will be on view for the first time. Further drawn to collection examples that embody Yorùbá philosophy, Mende aesthetics, and connections between art, nature, and spirituality, Fawundu created "new beings." For her, everything is intertwined and alive with "performative power" known as *àṣẹ* – the vital force the Yorùbá recognize as the source of all existence, including art and artists.

*Àṣẹ*, referenced in the title, has long been known to and used by the artist as a Pan-Africanist term that conjures up ancestral energy, but in 2022 while conducting research and creating work for this exhibition, Fawundu had a revelation about its significance to her artistic impulses. She encountered *àṣẹ* in Cuba, where it manifests as *ache* in the context of *Santería* – the syncretic religion practiced in Cuba that blends Caribbean tradition with Yorùbá spirituality and elements of Catholicism. She describes this discovery as the moment "I knew *àṣẹ* was the word I was looking for to describe the intuitive nature of my artistic process."

In the exhibition, Fawundu continues exploring themes centered around ancestral memory to extend her vision of liberated and sustainable futures for humanity and our planet. Much of her artistic process involved filming and photographing herself at sites of Black resistance in Africa and the Americas, where she also sourced many of her materials. Comprising 17 new artworks, including a three-channel video projection, sculptures, photographs, screenprints, and woodcuts, the year-long installation is a multisensory experience.

"It has been gratifying to partner with Delphine, who engages in a practice driven by history and inheritance to address an urgent global crisis and our collective futures," said **Henone Girma**, Associate Curator, Arts of Global Africa. "In tapping into NMOA's important collection, she connects genres, ideas, and generations of African visual culture to assert the continent's indigenous knowledge systems and traditions, reclaiming their exclusion from dominant narratives."

To accompany the exhibition, the Museum is planning programming with Fawundu, including a bookmaking workshop and an artist talk scheduled for August 26 and November 2 respectively. In addition, as a recipient of the 2022 [Catchlight Fellowship](#) and grant, the artist plans to create student workshops and an open-source curriculum for educators using the exhibition as a focal point.

Moreover, Fawundu's engagement with the City of Newark's artistic community extends beyond NMOA. In 2021, she was an artist in residence at [Project for Empty Space](#) in Newark, NJ, which culminated in a solo exhibition in 2022 titled *Wata Bodis*, and an ongoing project with Rutgers University-Newark BOLD Women's Leadership Network to design and create a 70-foot mural titled [COURAGE](#). Alongside these projects, she also partnered with [Newark Artist Collaboration \(NAC\)](#) to develop a nearly 50-foot immersive digital artwork for the lobby of Audible's One Washington Park headquarters. Likewise, Fawundu is collaborating with [Shine Portrait Studio](#) to publish an artist book as part of its *Plume House of Prayer Series* due to be released this summer.

“We are so excited to showcase the inspiring work of Adama Delphine Fawundu, who has a unique knowledge and appreciation of Newark's cultural legacies" said **Linda C. Harrison**, Director and CEO. "This solo exhibition, and its intimate connection to the Museum's collection, is a thoughtful communion of past, present, and future that brings Fawundu full circle. It will be a terrific cap off to our two months of honoring those who came before us.”

The exhibition is made possible by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, The McMillan-Stewart Foundation, and the Elizabeth Richards Family Exhibition Endowment Fund.

For more information on *Adama Delphine Fawundu: In the Spirit of Àṣẹ* or the Museum's Arts of Global Africa collection, please visit the Museum's [website](#).

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### **About Adama Delphine Fawundu**

Adama Delphine Fawundu is a photographer and visual artist of Mende, Krim, Bamileke, and Bubi descent. Her distinct visual language centered around themes of indigenization, and ancestral memory, enriches and expands the visual art canon. Fawundu co-published the critically acclaimed book *MFON: Women Photographers of the African Diaspora*. For decades, she has exhibited both nationally and internationally. Her awards include the Catchlight Fellowship, Anonymous Was A Woman Award, New York Foundation for The Arts Photography Fellowship, and the Rema Hort Mann Artist Grant, among others. She is also a 2022 Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition finalist. Fawundu was commissioned by the Park Avenue Armory to participate in the 100 Years | 100 Women Project / The Women's Suffrage NYC Centennial Consortium (2019–2021). Her works are in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum of Art; Princeton University Museum; Bryn Mawr College; The Petrucci Family Foundation of African American Art, Asbury, NJ; The Brooklyn Historical Society; Norton Museum of Art, Palm Beach; The David C. Driskell Art Collection, College Park, MD; and several private collections. She is an Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at Columbia University.

### **About the Newark Museum of Art**

Founded in 1909, The Newark Museum of Art (NMOA) is the largest museum in New Jersey and ranks twelfth nationally in collection size, with more than 130,000 artworks and significant holdings of science and natural history. The NMOA is committed to the values of Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion by responding to the evolving needs and interests of diverse audiences through participation, visitor experiences, and community engagement.

From the ancient world to contemporary art, the Museum boasts a renowned collection of exceptional quality and depth, spanning concentrations in the Arts of Global Africa; Arts of Global Asia, featuring

a Tibetan Buddhist altar; Arts of the Americas; American Art, with a particular strength in Native American art; Decorative Arts; Arts of the Ancient Mediterranean; and Science.

With a focus on welcoming everyone with inclusive experiences that spark curiosity and foster community, the NMOA offers groundbreaking exhibitions, engaging programming, a research library with 60,000 volumes, paid internships, and impactful local and global partnerships. A four-acre campus includes The Ballantine House (1885), a National Historic Landmark; the Ward Carriage House (1860); the Old Stone School House (1784); the Alice Ransom Dreyfuss Memorial Garden; and Horizon Plaza. Under the leadership of Director and CEO Linda C. Harrison, the NMOA has launched an era of transformation to create an engaged citizenry by reimagining the role of the art museum in the 21st century.