



## **NEWS RELEASE**

**August 3, 2020**

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### **‘PICTURE ID: Contemporary African American Works on Paper’ addresses issues of race, gender and identity**

**New exhibition highlights nine contemporary artists,  
including Glenn Ligon, Lorna Simpson, Kara Walker and Fred Wilson**

TOLEDO, Ohio – A new exhibition at the Toledo Museum of Art examines the work of contemporary African American artists who use a mixture of text and images to tackle cultural stereotypes and challenge oppressive racial characterizations. *PICTURE ID: Contemporary African American Works on Paper*, which was scheduled to open in March and postponed due to the coronavirus, will be on view for the public beginning Aug. 4 in Gallery 4. The exhibition will close on Jan. 17, 2021. All works in the exhibition are drawn from TMA’s permanent collection.

The nine artists featured – Glenn Ligon, Howardena Pindell, Adrian Piper, Martin Puryear, John Rozelle, Lorna Simpson, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems and Fred Wilson – created works in response to artistic developments and cultural debates prevalent through the late 1980s and 1990s in the United States. These included the rise of multicultural activism, concerns surrounding the AIDS crisis, conservative social and economic policies, rapid gentrification and increasing urban crime.

“The exhibition title is inspired by the key question each artist raises, which is how appearances shape our perceptions and assumptions of our identity and character,” said Robin Reisenfeld, TMA’s senior curator of works on paper. “The artists manipulate texts, words and phrases related to race, combining them with photographic or invented imagery to examine the meaning and interpretation of individual identity. Through various visual strategies, they ask the viewer to consider identity through the overlapping perspectives of gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality to challenge the notion of selfhood as one fixed set of characteristics.”

Central to the exhibition is *Wigs* by Lorna Simpson, who presents an array of wigs and hairpieces from thick braids and weaves to smooth blond locks.

“Lorna Simpson’s work makes us stop and think how our hair reflects and shapes our identity and how we perceive others,” Reisenfeld said. “The panels of fragmented text that accompany many of the images allude to the hairpieces’ capability for personal transformation and/or concealment. The repetition of different wigs – of real or artificial hair – that one wears for adornment or disguise suggests that identity itself can be a costume which one assumes to adopt another persona.”

Printed on felt, each photo-lithographic image possesses a tactility that recalls the texture of hair. Simpson’s sequence of images encourages one to question assumptions about who might wear the various wigs and raises the issue of hair’s centrality in African American cultural and personal identity, especially in relation to traditional white standards of beauty.

“Though Simpson’s work deals with issues of race, gender, class and identity, she leaves any precise interpretation of her images and text – and how they interact – up to the viewer,” Reisenfeld said.

In addition to *Wigs*, Glenn Ligon’s *Untitled (Crowd/The Fire Next Time)*, a screenprint with coal crystals, will be featured in the exhibition. Ligon is a multi-media artist noted for his text-based work in black and white that engages with visual art, literature and history.

*Untitled* features a stenciled text that spells out in glittering coal crystals: “Something in me wondered what will happen to all that beauty?” excerpted from James Baldwin’s 1963 famous essay “The Fire Next Time.” Beneath Baldwin’s quotation lies a screen printed, blurred photographic image of the Million Man March, a demonstration of Black activists on the Mall in Washington in 1995.

“Obscuring the legibility of each, the placement of Baldwin’s powerful words onto an underlying photographic image of a historic march that occurred more than three decades later calls attention to the ongoing discourse about race in America,” Reisenfeld said.

*PICTURE ID: Contemporary African American Works on Paper* is sponsored by 2020 Exhibition Program Sponsors Taylor Cadillac and ProMedica with additional support from the Ohio Arts Council. Admission to the exhibition is free.

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The Toledo Museum of Art is a nonprofit arts institution funded through individual donations, foundation grants, corporate sponsorships and investments. The Ohio Arts Council helps fund programs at the Toledo Museum of Art through a sustainability grant program that encourages economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. Glass Pavilion® and Toledo Museum of Art Glass Pavilion® are registered service marks.

Admission to the Museum is free as always, but visitors are required to reserve a museum pass in advance through [tickets.toledomuseum.org](https://tickets.toledomuseum.org) or by calling 419-255-8000 ext. 7448. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from noon to 4 p.m., with special hours from 10 a.m. to noon reserved for at-risk populations, and is closed Monday and major holidays.

The Museum is located at 2445 Monroe Street at Scottwood Avenue, just west of the downtown business district and one block off I-75 with exit designations posted. For general information, visitors can call 419-255-8000 or 800-644-6862, or visit [toledomuseum.org](http://toledomuseum.org).