



HIGH MUSEUM OF ART ATLANTA

1280 PEACHTREE STREET, N.E. • ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30309

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**HIGH MUSEUM OF ART CO-ORGANIZES NATIONALLY TOURING EXHIBITION  
SURVEYING THE ART OF DAVID DRISKELL**

*Premiering at the High, the exhibition features powerful paintings and works on paper spanning seven decades of his illustrious career*

**ATLANTA, Jan. 11, 2021** — David Driskell (1931-2020) was one of the most revered American artists of his generation, recognized for his painting and printmaking practices, often characterized by his use of collage, which combined the Black American experience with his keen observations of the American landscape and the imagery and aesthetic innovations of the African diaspora. To celebrate the breadth of his work, the High Museum of Art and Portland Museum of Art, Maine, have organized “David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History,” bringing approximately 60 artworks together to present highlights of his career. The exhibition is also the first major survey of Driskell’s work since his death in April 2020 at age 88. It debuts at the High Feb. 6-May 9, 2021 and will travel to the Portland Museum of Art (June 19-Sept. 12, 2021), The Phillips Collection (Oct. 6, 2021-Jan. 9, 2022) and Cincinnati Art Museum (Feb. 25-May 15, 2022).

“Beyond David’s prolific career as an international artist and scholar, he was a dear friend of the Museum, in fact a life trustee. Without question, his work, as well as his generosity of spirit and intellect, have been transformational for the field,” said Rand Suffolk, the High’s Nancy and Holcombe T. Green, Jr., director. “We are honored to celebrate his incredible legacy through this exhibition.”

Mark Bessire, the Judy and Leonard Lauder director of the Portland Museum of Art, added, “This exhibition is a unique opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of David’s widespread influence. The contemporary significance of subjects that David explored throughout his career are more salient than ever, and we are looking forward to highlighting this remarkable American artist.”

The High has a long history of collaboration with Driskell, who in addition to his work as an artist was one of the world's leading authorities on the history of African American art. In 1977, the High hosted Driskell's landmark exhibition "Two Centuries of Black American Art." In 2005, the Museum established the David C. Driskell Prize, the first national award to honor and celebrate contributions to the field of African American art, including distinctions for both artists and scholars. The most recent recipient is artist Jamal Cyrus, with past honorees including Amy Sherald, Naima J. Keith, Mark Bradford, Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, Rashid Johnson and Valerie Cassel Oliver. Funds raised through the prize's annual dinner have supported the acquisition of 48 works by African American artists for the High's collection.

"What remains steadfast in Driskell's work is a commitment to his 'icons,' which elevate the mind and the spirit above that which exists in the physical world," said guest curator Julie McGee, associate professor of Africana studies and art history at the University of Delaware. "Among the many gifts Driskell bequeaths to us is the delight of seeing the world through his eyes, and it is a journey of immeasurable beauty and grace."

Added Michael Rooks, the High's Wieland Family curator of modern and contemporary art, "Driskell's command of vibrant color and line, and his attentiveness to what he called 'the symbolic presence of form,' endowed his subjects with a kind of frisson like that of an electrical charge, which made his work esthetically vigorous, bold and spirited."

"Icons of Nature and History" is the first posthumous survey of Driskell's work, spanning seven decades of his artistry, from the 1950s to the 2000s, with works drawn from museums, private collections and the artist's estate. The exhibition includes key works from the High's collection, including one of Driskell's self-portraits. In addition, the exhibition follows the course of his career, from Howard University and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture to Talladega College and his studio in Falmouth, Maine, and features recurring motifs such as still lifes, pine trees, aspects of the natural world, African masks, and iconographies drawn from his Christian and Southern roots and the Black experience. Works in the exhibition, including paintings, drawings and prints, reveal Driskell's mastery of materials and his indefatigable spirit of invention, which led to the development of a hybrid technique he called "collage-painting."

"David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History" is presented on the second level of the High's Anne Cox Chambers Wing.

### **About David Driskell (1931-2020)**

A Georgia native, Driskell graduated from Howard University in 1955 and received a Master of Fine Arts from The Catholic University of America in 1962. In 1953, he attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. A lifelong educator, Driskell honed his teaching repertoire at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) between 1955 and 1976, teaching at Talladega College, Howard University and Fisk University. From 1977 through 1998, he taught at the University of Maryland, College Park, which is now the home of the David C. Driskell Center, an exhibition space and research institute that houses Driskell's archive. In addition to a growing collection of African American art, it serves as a study center for the history of African American art and art of the African diaspora. While Driskell built a distinguished career as a scholar, he simultaneously maintained an active and distinguished artistic practice, regularly presenting his work in both solo and group exhibitions at museums and galleries including the High, the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, The Phillips Collection, Tate Modern (London), DC Moore Gallery and Kunsthal KAdE (Amsterdam).

### **Related Program:**

#### **Curatorial Conversation: Julie McGee and Michael Rooks**

Thursday, Feb. 18, 6 p.m.

Mark your calendar for a special curatorial conversation via Zoom examining the High's exhibition, *David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History*. Art historian and exhibition curator Julie McGee will join Michael Rooks, the High's Wieland Family curator of modern and contemporary art, to discuss Driskell's work and lasting contributions to the art world.

Julie McGee, an art historian with specialties in African American art and contemporary African art, has published widely on contemporary African American art and South African art, with particular focus on artist and museum praxis. She is an associate professor of Africana studies and art history at the University of Delaware and director at the Interdisciplinary Humanities Research Center College of Arts & Sciences.

#### **Exhibition Catalogue**

"David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History" will be accompanied by an expansive and fully illustrated catalogue of approximately 224 pages, published by Rizzoli Electa. The book will feature a lead essay by Julie L. McGee with contributions by Renée Maurer, Sarah Workneh and Katie Sonnenborn, Shaun Leonardo, Keith Morrison, Jessica May, Thelma Golden, Lowery Stokes Sims, Richard Powell, and Michael Rooks. It will also include a selection of Driskell's writings, edited by Richard Powell, an interview with artist William T. Williams by McGee, and a

timeline assembled by Monet Timmons.

### **Exhibition Organization and Support**

This exhibition is co-organized by the High Museum of Art and the Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Special thanks go to the funds provided by Patrons of “David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History.” This exhibition is made possible by Presenting Sponsor Bank of America; Major funding provided by Henry Luce Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts and Brenda and Larry Thompson; Premier Exhibition Series Sponsor Delta Air Lines, Inc.; Exhibition Series Sponsor Northside Hospital; Premier Exhibition Series Supporters Sarah and Jim Kennedy and wish foundation; Benefactor Exhibition Series Supporters Anne Cox Chambers Foundation and Robin and Hilton Howell; Ambassador Exhibition Series Supporters the Antinori Foundation, Corporate Environments, and Louise Sams and Jerome Grilhot; and Contributing Exhibition Series Supporters Farideh and Al Azadi, Sandra and Dan Baldwin, Lucinda W. Bunn, Marcia and John Donnell, Mrs. Fay S. Howell/The Howell Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter Jones, The Arthur R. and Ruth D. Lutz Charitable Foundation, Joel Knox and Joan Marmo, Margo and Danny McCaul, The Ron and Lisa Brill Family Charitable Trust, The Fred and Rita Richman Fund, and Ms. Harriet H. Warren. Generous support is also provided by the Alfred and Adele Davis Exhibition Endowment, Anne Cox Chambers Exhibition Fund, Barbara Stewart Exhibition Fund, Dorothy Smith Hopkins Exhibition Endowment Fund, Eleanor McDonald Storza Exhibition Endowment Fund, The Fay and Barrett Howell Exhibition Fund, Forward Arts Foundation Exhibition Endowment Fund, Helen S. Lanier Endowment Fund, Isobel Anne Fraser–Nancy Fraser Parker Exhibition Endowment Fund, John H. and Wilhelmina D. Harland Exhibition Endowment Fund, Katherine Murphy Riley Special Exhibition Endowment Fund, Margareta Taylor Exhibition Fund, and the RJR Nabisco Exhibition Endowment Fund.

### **About the High Museum of Art**

Located in the heart of Atlanta, the High Museum of Art connects with audiences from across the Southeast and around the world through its distinguished collection, dynamic schedule of special exhibitions and engaging community-focused programs. Housed within facilities designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects Richard Meier and Renzo Piano, the High features a collection of more than 18,000 works of art, including an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American fine and decorative arts; major holdings of photography and folk and self-taught work, especially that of artists from the American South; burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, including paintings, sculpture, new media and design; a growing collection of African art, with work dating from prehistory through the present; and significant holdings of European paintings and works on paper. The High is dedicated to reflecting the diversity of its communities and offering a variety of exhibitions and educational programs that engage visitors with the world of art, the lives of artists and the creative process. For more information about the High, visit [www.high.org](http://www.high.org).

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