



Director's Note

During a recent tour at CAMH, a young student shouted “James Brown!” Their joyous response prompted a clarion call as their peers recognized other earth-shaking culture makers—Sun Ra, André 3000, Kanye—who together signaled this is our place!

For that group of students, and so many others, our current exhibition, *The Dirty South*, is both a call home and a response to the global challenges we face. CAMH is thrilled to present *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse*, curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver, the Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and organized for CAMH by our Assistant Curator Patricia Restrepo.

As you'll see, this is an expansive exhibition, in fact it's the largest CAMH has presented since we opened this building 49 years ago. For this triumph, credit goes to our extraordinary team who each bring passion, care, and joy to the Museum, and to your experience of contemporary art at CAMH.

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The exhibition is meaningful for CAMH as it represents a return home for Valerie Cassel Oliver, who served as CAMH's Senior Curator for nearly 17 years, and who began research towards this exhibition during her tenure here. For those who follow Valerie's work, you'll see immediate hallmarks of her virtuosity, yet I believe this exhibition is singularly powerful. Stretching over 100 years and encompassing major themes of Black life in the South, it presents what we've lost and gained, and how we might find hope across the deepest fault lines of our society. This exhibition brings us urgently to the present, and I believe shows us how to live in an increasingly fraught world.

12 of the artists in this show are from Texas—John Biggers, Mel Chin, Jamal Cyrus, Nathaniel Donnett, Melvin Edwards, Robert Hodge, Earlie Hudnall, Jr., El Franco Lee II, Jason Moran, Robert Pruitt, Deborah Roberts, and Kaneem Smith—each of whom enliven and animate this state. Donnett, whose work greets you as you walk in the Museum recently posted, “*The Dirty South* goes far and deep back into the future.”

That kind of presence—both bearing history, and optimistically leaning ahead, seems to perfectly encapsulate our place in the world. CAMH is known as a place of firsts—a place where artists invent the future—and it is also a place where we can each learn to look, to see, and to listen closely to artists for their essential insights into the world.

As CAMH approaches our 75th year, even as we can look back at the ground CAMH has forged, our actual charge as a non-collecting Museum is to be present, and to chart an adventurous and fearless path forward.

Today, CAMH continues to craft a vision rooted in both care for our community and moving ambitiously beyond our walls. In this moment of reinvention, it is because of our remarkable team and your support that we can stake new ground.

We hope that all who experience *The Dirty South*, and other CAMH programs, leave their experience with a greater belief in artists, in the future of our city, and in the ecstatic potential of contemporary art. At the core of these beliefs is trust in artists. Thank you for all you bring to the CAMH community—we create this place together, with artists and with our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hesse McGraw', written in a cursive style.

Hesse McGraw
Executive Director