

Seven Rooms and a Garden

Rashid Johnson and The Moderna Museet Collection

30 September 2023–8 September 2024

In the exhibition *Seven Rooms and a Garden*, the work of American artist and filmmaker Rashid Johnson is in conversation, confrontation and at times collusion with the collection of Moderna Museet. Each room in the exhibition – and a garden – stages an encounter based on the personal, political and art historical relationships that unfold in his practice.

Rashid Johnson (b. 1977, Chicago, USA) is recognised as one of the most influential artists of his generation. In his paintings, sculptures, films, performances and photographs, he draws from his own biography, as well as numerous art and cultural histories, to reflect on the human condition at a time of great upheaval.

Abstraction as a source of life

For Rashid Johnson, abstraction is a source of life. In his *Bruise* paintings or the more recent *God* series, both of which are included in the exhibition, the abstract painterly mark is an expression of a spiritual or psychological journey. His monumental installation *Home* (2023), made especially for this exhibition, is an abstract self-portrait that uses shea butter sculptures, books and the growth of plant life to lend form to Black intellectual and cultural histories. Or the abstract gesture occurs through subtle interventions, from rearranging the architecture of Moderna Museet to introducing images, sounds and scenographies that reset how we experience the space of art and the museum.

In all the works and interventions in *Seven Rooms and a Garden*, Johnson explores the gesture of abstraction as an art historical lineage, a political necessity or a personal appeal.

The exhibition as a home

The space of the home is an important source of inspiration for Johnson, and serves as a model for *Seven Rooms and a Garden*.

Johnson says: “I’ve always been interested in the domestic. And kind of hijacking things that we’re familiar with and essentially occupying them.”

His recent film *Black and Blue* (2021), which features prominently in the exhibition, is a case in point. Mainly situated in the artist’s home, the work depicts the life of the protagonist, played by Johnson himself, as he goes through his daily routines of eating, driving, exercising, spending time with his family and sleeping. A tension is felt in *Black and Blue* between what is public and private, what is familiar and unknown, what is expected and what actually occurs. In this unconventional self-portrait, Johnson returns the gaze to the intimate endeavours of being human.

The artist’s home in *Black and Blue* is expanded in the exhibition to seven rooms and a garden – an interior of Rashid Johnson’s practice, with artists in Moderna Museet’s collection as likely and unlikely inhabitants.

We invite the audience to meet Rashid Johnson through nearly hundred works by over forty artists, including Louis Armstrong, Louise Bourgeois, Tony Cokes, John Coltrane, De La Soul, Jean Dubuffet, Samuel Fosso, Marcia Hafif, David Hammons, On Kawara, Sol LeWitt, Klara Lidén, Lee Lozano, Ernest Mancoba, Henri Matisse, Joan Miró, Maia Cruz Palileo, Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, Melissa Shook, Salman Toor, Cy Twombly, Stanley Whitney and Frank Zappa.

Seven Rooms and a Garden is curated by Hendrik Folkerts, Curator of International Contemporary Art and Head of Exhibitions, Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

The exhibition is generously supported by The Rashid Johnson Exhibition Circle and the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Conversations and public programme

Seven Rooms and a Garden includes a variety of activities and events throughout the exhibition period. On Friday 29 September there is an artist talk with Rashid Johnson. On the opening day, Saturday 30 September, renowned cellist/composer Svante Henryson is performing in the exhibition.

Subsequently, there will be a musician playing once a month in the exhibition space, as well as an extensive lecture programme, workshops and performances.

A booklet is available for free in the exhibition, comprising a dialogue between Rashid Johnson and writer Kevin Quashie, whose book *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (2012) has been a major inspiration to Johnson and the making of this exhibition. Quashie teaches black cultural and literary studies and is a Professor in the Department of English at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, USA.

More information will be published at modernamuseet.se

About the new presentation of the Moderna Museet collection

Seven Rooms and a Garden is the third chapter of the museum's new collection display where artworks from Moderna Museet's collection are presented in three larger shifting thematic exhibitions. Together the exhibitions plumb the depths of a variety of narratives from art history, replacing the earlier chronological format. Over time, the audience will thus encounter more works from Moderna Museet's collection, one of the foremost of modern and contemporary art in Europe.

Moderna Museet's director, Gitte Ørskou, says: "We have been implementing the new format for the collection, exhibition by exhibition, since the beginning of the year. Now that the third thematic hanging of the collection is in place, both our visitors and the Moderna team can see the entire transformation for the first time. The background to this new way of presenting the collection was the question how the museum could show even more art to the public. It's impossible to show everything, of course, since the collection comprises some 140,000 artworks, but through this format of shifting thematic exhibitions we can present a lot more over time and dig deeper into a variety of narratives and experiences."

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