

OCULA

"Isaac Julien's Ode to Frederick Douglass Shows at MoMA"

By Ocula

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Exhibition view: Isaac Julien, *Lessons of the Hour*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (19 May–28 September 28 2024). Photo: Emile Askey.



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Escaping from slavery in 1838, Frederick Douglass emerged as a key figure in the abolitionist movement. His powerful speeches and influential writings garnered widespread attention, making him one of his era's most photographed American men and an important advocate for social justice.

Isaac Julien pays tribute to Douglass in his exhibition *Lessons of the Hour*, which is showing at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from 19 May to 28 September 2024. The exhibition features Julien's film installation of the same name, which was recently collected by the museum.

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On view in a red-carpeted, dimly lit room, the 10-screen video installation explores Douglass's life and legacy. Through historical reenactments and excerpts from the abolitionist's speeches, writings, and letters, Julien invites viewers to reflect on the significance of Douglass's moral and political views.

Although previously shown at the National Galleries Scotland and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, among others, this is the first time the work is being shown with related artefacts.

These include portraits of Douglass, pamphlets of his speeches, first editions of his memoirs, and a facsimile of a rare manuscript on his ideas about photography displayed in a room with wallpaper made from period newspaper clippings, magazine illustrations, and scrapbook pages.

In conversation with Ocula in 2014, Julien discussed his desire to create work that incorporates intellectual ideas from historical, cultural, and artistic theory, while also transcending them.

'The challenge is to make a work that brings spectators to see it and speaks to an audience, and at the same time gets one to think about the issues the work raises,' he said.

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