

OCULA

"Isaac Julien to Be Surveyed in San Francisco This Spring"

By Elaine YJ Zheng

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The artist, who was knighted in 2022, said American themes have been prominent in his work since the 1980s.



Isaac Julien, *North Star (Lessons of the Hour)* (2019). Framed photograph on gloss inkjet paper mounted on aluminium. 160 x 213.3 cm. © Isaac Julien. Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro.

British artist and filmmaker Isaac Julien will be the subject of a major survey at the de Young Museum in San Francisco this spring.

Opening from 12 April to 13 July 2025, *I Dream a World* is the first exhibition at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (FAMSF) dedicated to an artist working in multi-screen video installation. It is also Julien's first U.S. survey and largest to date.

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Ten major video installations will be on view, including Julien's famed 1989 documentary Looking for Langston, and films from the early 1980s, when he was a founding member of the London-based Sankofa Film and Video Collective, dedicated to Black independent film.



Isaac Julien, Pas de Deux No. 2 (Looking for Langston Vintage Series) (1989/2016). Ilford classic silver gelatin fine art paper, mounted on aluminium and framed. 58.1 x 74.5 cm. © Isaac Julien. Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro.

FAMSF curator Claudia Schmuckli told the San Francisco Chronicle that she wanted to emphasise the 'transnational reflexivity' of Julien's work—or the practice of examining one's assumptions, values, and perspectives in relation to other cultures and the world.

'I think it's so important in this particular historical moment,' Schmuckli said.

American abolitionist Frederick Douglass, for instance, is the subject of Julien's ten-channel film Lessons of the Hour (2019), which FAMSF acquired in 2023. Another work in the survey, Once Again . . . (Statues Never Die) (2022), addresses the importance of repatriation.

Last year, portraits from the latter series formed the backdrop of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's annual fundraiser, which raised a record 3.4 million USD.

In 2022, Julien was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in London, where Tate Britain held his first U.K. survey, What Freedom Is To Me, the following year.

Julien is represented by Jessica Silverman (San Francisco), Victoria Miro (London/Venice), and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery (Sydney). —[O]

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