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**Whitfield Lovell to Give Artist Talk at Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts
Ahead of Exhibition Opening**

Whitfield Lovell: Passages on View Beginning October 27, 2023

September 19, 2023 (LITTLE ROCK, Ark.) - Whitfield Lovell, recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship “genius grant” and recognized as one of the world’s most significant contemporary artists, will give an Artist Talk on October 26, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts (AMFA). The Artist Talk coincides with the public opening of the *Whitfield Lovell: Passages* exhibition on October 27, 2023.

Passages is on view in the Harriet and Warren Stephens Galleries from October 27, 2023, through January 14, 2024. AMFA members, Circle Society donors and corporate partners can enjoy a private preview of the exhibition on October 26 in conjunction with the Artist Talk. Tickets to the Artist Talk and exhibition preview are available at arkmfa.org.

“Lovell’s work examines themes of identity, history, memory, and the African American experience. His projected and staged installations, drawings of anonymous individuals, and thoughtful use of found objects create a multi-sensory experience that will compel and transport visitors to connect with the art and their own experiences,” said Dr. Victoria Ramirez, Executive Director at AMFA. “Lovell’s art will transform the AMFA galleries and engage viewers’ mind and spirit. We are privileged to bring the show to Arkansas.”

Passages features drawings, assemblages, and installations that focus on African American history and raise questions about identity, memory, and our country’s heritage. Lovell makes

drawings inspired by photographs of unidentified African Americans taken between the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s.

“The importance of home, family, ancestry feeds my work entirely,” Lovell explains. “African Americans were generally not aware of who their ancestors were, since slaves were sold from plantation to plantation and families were split up. Any time I pick up one of these old vintage photographs, I have the feeling that this could be one of my ancestors.”

Passages marks the first time Lovell’s major installations *Deep River* (2013) and *Visitation: The Richmond Project* (2001) are shown together and on view in Arkansas. The immersive, multi-sensory installation *Deep River* details freedom seekers’ journeys across the Tennessee River to Chattanooga’s “Camp Contraband,” which housed African Americans fleeing the South during the Civil War and the Reconstruction.

Lovell piles soil into a mound in the middle of the gallery, arranging vintage objects—utensils, pans, lamps, ropes, boots, a Bible, and weapons—on top. Fifty-six foundry molds with hand-drawn depictions of unidentified African Americans surround the soil.

Visitation: The Richmond Project (2001) is a domestic interior displayed in a room built inside the Harriet and Warren Stephens Family Gallery. Lovell uses conté crayon to draw on the wooden walls, basing his compositions on old church picnic photographs. *Visitation* is inspired by the first major entrepreneurial African American community that settled in Jackson Ward, Richmond, Virginia in the 1860s, specifically Maggie L. Walker, the founder of the Saint Luke Penny Savings Bank and the first Black woman to charter and serve as president of an American bank.

Passages includes works on paper and freestanding tableaux from the artist’s *Kin* series (2008-2011). Also on display are drawings from his series *Card Pieces* (2019-). A grouping of 54 drawings, each matched with a vintage playing card, touches on the lively tradition of card games as a social activity in the African American community and hints at themes of chance and destiny.

Lovell’s newest series in the exhibition, *The Reds*, begun in 2021, consists of large-scale conté crayon figure drawings on red paper. With its associations of love, passion, courage, life, and

blood, the color red anchors these drawings with rich symbolism. A selection of early works from the late 1990s and early 2000s round out the exhibition, including *Hand II* (1994) which will be on view in the permanent collection galleries during the run of *Passages*.

Lovell invites his viewers to consider the human quest for equality and the pursuit of a better life. Through the combination of installations, sculpture, and works on paper, *Passage* gives AMFA guests the chance to witness the history and cultural memory of the African American experience and invites them to consider the physical passage of time, its effect on memory, and the reception of our collective history.

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Press images for *Passages* are available in AMFA's [press kit](#).

Whitfield Lovell's headshot is available [here](#).

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Whitfield Lovell: Passages is organized by the American Federation of Arts in collaboration with Whitfield Lovell. Major support for the national tour and exhibition catalogue is provided by National Endowment for the Arts and the Terra Foundation for American Art.

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About Whitfield Lovell:

Lovell studied at the Cooper Union School of Art in New York, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and the New York University Graduate Program in Venice. His works are featured in major museum collections including The Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; The Smithsonian American Art Museum, DC; The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, DC; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, PA; The Yale University Art Gallery; The Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, TN; The Brooklyn Museum, NY; The Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; Seattle Art Museum, WA, and many others.

About the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts:

Founded in 1937, the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts is the largest cultural institution of its kind in the state, offering a unique blend of visual, educational, and performing arts experiences. AMFA is committed to featuring diverse media and artistic perspectives within its permanent collection as well as through rotating temporary exhibitions. AMFA's international collection spans eight centuries, with strengths in works on paper, and includes notable holdings by artists from Arkansas, the South, and across the United States and Europe.

With a vibrant mix of ideas, cultures, people, and places, the museum extends its commitment to artistic diversity through the innovative Windgate Art School, a dynamic children's theatre and performing arts program, and community-focused educational programs for all ages. Located in Little Rock's oldest urban green space, MacArthur Park, AMFA's landmark building and grounds are designed by Studio Gang and SCAPE, in collaboration with Polk Stanley Wilcox Architects.