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Acclaimed Exhibit “Dark Testament: A Century of Black Writers on Justice” to Travel to Vanderbilt University in 2025

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New Works by Nashville Artists Omari Booker, Lakesha Calvin, and Dayo Johnson to Join *Dark Testament* at Vanderbilt

December 17, 2024 (CHICAGO) – The [American Writers Museum](#) (AWM) is excited to announce that its co-curatorial partnership with Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, beginning February 14, 2025. The exhibit, which debuted in September 2022, celebrates the enduring impact of Black writers from the end of the Civil War through the Civil Rights era, using art, multimedia, augmented reality, and other interactive elements to bring their stories to life.




Inspired by a poem by [Pauli Murray](#)—a pivotal yet often overlooked figure in American history and culture—*Dark Testament* highlights Murray’s legacy alongside other groundbreaking writers whose works have shaped American literature and social justice movements. Though the physical exhibit concluded its run at the American Writers Museum in May 2024, its legacy endures through online extensions, specialized programming, and educational curricula that continue to engage audiences nationwide.

At Vanderbilt University, the exhibit, organized by the Office of the Vice Provost for Arts, Libraries, and Global Engagement, will be uniquely displayed between the **Vanderbilt University Museum of Art**, the **Central Library**, the **Divinity School**, and the **Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center**, with a guided tour connecting these spaces. The traveling exhibit is made possible by generous support from The Efroymson Family Fund, and from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative.

The Nashville installation will feature five newly commissioned artworks by Nashville artists [Omari Booker](#), [Lakesha Calvin](#), and [Dayo Johnson](#), adding to the exhibit’s existing collection of 16 large-scale, multicolored portraits. Two of the new portraits will depict unique versions of Pauli Murray, created specifically for the Divinity School to reflect their theological contributions and legacy. The other three will honor writers **Harriet Ann Jacobs**, **James Weldon Johnson**, and **Nikki Giovanni** whose groundbreaking

works have significantly influenced literature and social justice movements. These new additions deepen the exhibit's narrative, offering a richer representation of voices and stories that have shaped American history and culture.

The exhibit's original collection includes vibrant pieces by renowned Chicago artists **Damon Reed, Dorian Sylvain, Bernard Williams, and Dorothy Burge**. Together, these striking paintings and quilts honor literary giants such as **Ida B. Wells, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou**, and more. Enhanced with augmented reality features, the artworks allow viewers to explore these writers' lives and legacies in depth.

 *Testament* is a celebration of the power and impact of these writers. It is about their fortitude and resilience and the impact their work still has, which is why the large portraits make them bigger than life,” said AWM President **Carey Cranston**.

More than just a tribute to the contributions of Black writers, *Dark Testament* serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for justice and recognition in America. As the exhibit travels to Vanderbilt University, it brings with it the promise of inspiring and educating new audiences through its immersive and thought-provoking presentation.

[Press Kit Available HERE>>](#)

About the American Writers Museum

The American Writers Museum is the first museum of its kind in the United States. The mission of the American Writers Museum is to excite audiences about the impact of American writers – past, present and future – in shaping our collective histories, cultures, identities, and daily lives. The museum is located at 180 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, IL 60601, and offers something for every age group including permanent exhibits and special galleries highlighting America's favorite works and the authors behind them. Tickets to the museum are \$16 for adults, \$10 for seniors, students, and teachers. Free for members and children ages 12 and under. To inquire about discounted rates for groups of 10 or more, including adults, student travel groups, and University students, visit [AmericanWritersMuseum.org/visit/groups/](https://americanwritersmuseum.org/visit/groups/) or call [312-374-8765](tel:312-374-8765). Museum hours