

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jovan C. Speller Visualizes the Importance of Generational and Self Care in Black Communities in New Exhibition

The exhibition “Nurturing, and Other Rituals of Protection” will aestheticize the security of a community too often targeted, misunderstood, and misrepresented in public spaces

Minneapolis Institute of Art
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artsmia.org



Jovan C. Speller (American, 1983), *I See You, I Am You*, 2022, cut and layered pigment prints. Image courtesy of Jovan C. Speller.

MINNEAPOLIS, March 3, 2022—The [Minneapolis Institute of Art \(Mia\)](#) has announced “[Nurturing, and Other Rituals of Protection](#),” an installation by the multimedia artist [Jovan C. Speller](#). The exhibition will underscore the importance of intergenerational care in Black culture while aestheticizing the security of a community too often targeted, misunderstood, and misrepresented in public spaces. Through photographs and an installation that depicts a living room, the exhibition presents a story of possibility and the potential for hope for Black families in every American community. Presented as part of the [Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program \(MAEP\)](#), the exhibition will be on view from March 19 through June 26, 2022, in Mia’s U.S. Bank Gallery.

Upon entering the space, the viewer will encounter an installation inspired by Speller’s grandmother’s living room, with details such as floral wallpaper, a clear-vinyl-covered sofa, and a coffee table. Sounds traditionally associated with domesticity, including those of washing and cooking and of a woman humming, softly fill the gallery. A television enhances the soundscape

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with laughter and snippets of conversation. Referring to the installation as the aestheticization of ancestral shelter, Speller recreates the atmosphere of a shared family space and the sense of comfort, safety, and familiarity it provides.

The south gallery will feature a selection of Speller's newest photographic work, which focuses on intergenerational protection and familial relationships in Black communities. Using her signature cutting and layering technique, Speller has created a new series of large-scale photographs depicting scenarios of exaggerated protection, including a grandparent's enlarged hands holding an infant, a child's wrapped arms around an oversized adult's leg, and a child peeking out from behind a giant pleated skirt. Speller refers to these photographs as images of "ancestral shielding," visualizing the importance of elders in Black communities while suggesting the idea of mythical ancestral protection.

"I feel called to conjure possibility. To reimagine and make visible scenarios of freedom, conceptualize protection, and reposition power," Speller said. "This body of work is a reminder. Black people are derived from communities of intergenerational care and ancestral protection. But, when safety feels unattainable, it can be difficult to call forth and manifest these scenarios of protection. I feel compelled to compose and recreate these images, drawing on memories and gestures of generational care to invite them into our collective consciousness."

"The MAEP program is dedicated to supporting artists who live and work in Minnesota, and therefore by extension presents artwork which deals with issues that are of the utmost importance to our communities," said Nicole Soukup, Mia's assistant curator of contemporary art and coordinator of the MAEP. "While Jovan C. Speller's work recalls her own experiences, it also amplifies the small rituals, need for, and joy found in nurturing and care across generations. Considering our nation's history and our present moment, the work becomes part of a much larger conversation regarding how our society presents a constant and often lethal threat to the safety of Black lives."

"Nurturing, and Other Rituals of Protection" is part of the MAEP, a curatorial program of the Minneapolis Institute of Art, dedicated to exhibiting and supporting artists living and working in Minnesota. Founded in 1975 as a yearlong partnership between the museum and regional artists, it has grown into a unique, ongoing program. Generous support for MAEP provided by the McKnight Foundation, with additional support from RBC Wealth Management.

About Jovan C. Speller

Jovan C. Speller is a multidisciplinary artist based in Minnesota. Her work uses photography, installation, sound, text, and mixed-media visual works to interpret historic narratives through contemporary discourse. Her research-based practice is centered around elevating, complicating, and inventing stories that explore ancestry, identity, and spatial memory.

Speller holds a B.F.A. in Fine Art Photography from Columbia College Chicago. Her photographic works and installations have been published and exhibited in various group and solo exhibitions. Her work has been collected in private collections, and at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. She is a recipient of multiple grants and fellowships, including the McKnight Visual Artist Fellowship, Jerome Emerging Artist Fellowship, and Minnesota State Arts Board grants. Speller was awarded the 2021 Carolyn Glasoe Bailey Foundation Minnesota Art Prize. She is represented by ENGAGE Projects in Chicago.



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About the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum Hours

Thursday-Sunday 10am–5pm

Monday-Wednesday Closed

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