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Jeffrey Melo, Leaders of the New School, 2022. Courtesy the artist.



LAWRENCE, KS.- As of today, the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas is opening Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley: Let the World See, a significant exhibition exploring Emmett Till's life and his mother's powerful and tireless activism following his brutal and tragic murder. The exhibition offers keen insight into Till's life as a child in Chicago, the events that led to his kidnapping and murder, the entrenched racism and biases that allowed his killers to go free, and the ways that Mamie Till-Mobley's bravery in advocating for her son fueled the Civil Rights Movement. Let the World See shares these important stories through a deeply human lens and captures how a mother's love spurred social justice action that continues to reverberate into the present day. The exhibition includes photographs, first-person accounts and other historical materials, including a bullet-ridden historical marker noting the location where Till's body was removed from the Tallahatchie River, and interactive components that encourage learning and invite visitors to participate in community healing and activism. The exhibition will remain on view at the Spencer through May 19, 2024.

Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley: Let the World See is a collaboration of the Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley Institute, the Emmett Till Interpretive Center, the Till family, and The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, where the traveling exhibition first premiered in fall 2022. To expand on the themes and ideas presented in Let the World See, the Spencer is presenting a concurrent companion exhibition, titled One History, Two Versions, featuring

work by contemporary Black artists that explores and highlights Black life, love, representation, and activism. Drawing on the legacies of Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley, *One History, Two Versions* captures the role of art in illuminating and fostering dialogue about ongoing racial violence, justice movements, and Black lived experience.

One History, Two Versions takes its name from the title of a featured work by artist Deborah Roberts and references how racial injustices are both reported and perceived differently depending on the media platform or individuals involved. Drawing on works from the Spencer's collection as well as the expansive private collection of Bill and Christy Gautreaux, the exhibition includes important work by Derrick Adams, Nick Cave and Bob Faust, Todd Gray, and Meleko Mokgosi, among others. A selection of quilts and textile works, including a work by Simone Saunders from the Gautreaux collection as well as those by Marla A. Jackson and NedRa Bonds from the Spencer's holdings, capture the power of love between Black mothers and children and explore broader familial lineages and experiences, honoring the past and invoking the future. Additionally, the exhibition includes artist TJ Reynolds's portrait of Emmett Till, which was commissioned by The Children's Museum of Indianapolis and is on view for the first time outside of that institution. *One History, Two Versions* will be on view February 9 through June 16, 2024.

The Spencer's presentations of *Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley: Let the World See* and *One History, Two Versions* are also being developed in community partnership with representatives of the Lawrence Chapter of the NAACP, B.L.A.C.K. Lawrence (Black Literature and Arts Collective of Kansas), the Lawrence/Douglas County Community Remembrance Project Coalition, and Justice for Wyandotte. Some of the community partners will provide input on and develop didactic materials for *One History, Two Versions*. The exhibitions are also being activated by a series of public programs, including those developed and led by B.L.A.C.K. Lawrence. More information about events will be shared in the coming months.

"The forthcoming exhibitions on Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley and works by Black contemporary artists reflect the Spencer's commitment to expanding the range of voices and narratives shared within our galleries. As we continue to grapple with racial injustice and look for ways to heal our communities, the arts have a crucial role to play in bringing people together in dialogue and understanding. We hope that these exhibitions both further illuminate these important histories and create new space for finding connection and exploring solutions," said Saralyn Reece Hardy, the Marilyn Stokstad Director at the Spencer.

"I also want to thank our many partners and collaborators, who are helping us in shaping these presentations and supporting our ability to engage with our communities. This also includes KU students and faculty, and especially KU professor Dave Tell, who has been an active leader in establishing a public record of Emmett Till's life and who helped bring *Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley: Let the World See* to KU and the Spencer," Reece Hardy added.


Additionally, on January 16, 2024, the Spencer presented a recently acquired portfolio of prints by acclaimed Black modernist Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), titled *The Legend of John Brown*. Lawrence originally produced *The Legend of John Brown* as paintings in 1941. Due to conservation challenges with the works, in 1974 he collaborated with printers to translate this important body of work to screen prints. Lawrence drew inspiration for the 22 prints in the series from research he conducted at the Schomburg Center for Research

in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, notably Franklin B. Sanborn's *The Life and Letters of John Brown, Liberator of Kansas and Martyr of Virginia*, published in 1885. Lawrence's account of Brown's life and death includes consideration of his time in Kansas, where Brown first employed violence in his quest to rid the country of slavery.

It is with the generous support of Jeff and Mary Weinberg and the Jedel Family Foundation that the Spencer was able to acquire the portfolio. The forthcoming exhibition, titled *Jacob Lawrence and the Legend of John Brown*, shares the portfolio for the first time since its acquisition and invites greater understanding of Lawrence's vision and work. The presentation will remain on view through June 16, 2024.

About Emmett Till And Mamie Till-Mobley: Let the World See

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