

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** - January 12, 2024

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## ***Keioui Keijaun Thomas: Magma & Pearls***

October 20, 2023 - February 18, 2024



Credit: Keioui Keijaun Thomas, *Magma & Pearls: Oceans Rise and Fall Like Meteorites*, installation view, MOCA Tucson, 2023. Photographs by Maya Hawk, copyright © MOCA Tucson.

**TUCSON, AZ**—*Magma & Pearls: Oceans Rise and Fall Like Meteorites* is the first solo museum exhibition by artist and performer **Keioui Keijaun Thomas** presenting a large-scale sculptural installation commissioned by MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) Tucson with video, performance, and community-generated programming. The exhibition builds on over a decade of the artist's work exploring the affective and material conditions of Black and trans identity and expands on her ongoing practice of world-building to create spaces of safety, joy, and healing. The artist transforms MOCA's Great Hall into a post-apocalyptic geography to imagine new ways to relate to the American landscape centering interdependent systems of care for all living beings.

For her major new installation, Thomas builds an immersive landscape by accumulating utilitarian objects like latex-free gloves, packing tape, recycled cardboard, construction signage, and plant matter – materials associated with gendered caretaking labor and climate catastrophe. She repurposes these common materials to create lush bodies of water, snaking pathways, curtains, walls in states of ruin, and other built and natural formations. For the artist, this is the setting of a

speculative future where trans femmes have survived a mass extinction, highlighting how camouflage and metamorphosis serve as strategies for survival, and ultimately, transcendence.

A video trilogy is embedded within the installation that features Thomas in landscapes across the United States, sensuously interacting with the land to establish a new relationship with the environment. Each video includes audio of Thomas reciting her own poetry that journeys from the heart of the club, to the Middle Passage, to star-filled skies – speaking into existence a liberated future for and by trans femmes. The exhibition’s title, *Magma & Pearls: Oceans Rise and Fall Like Meteorites*, combines phrases in her poetry that tell the origin story of the expansive world of *Magma & Pearls* which spans from the depths of the earth’s core to the infinite reach of the cosmos.

For the artist, world-building is an antidote, a way to “reorder time and space to make room for all those who have been robbed of it.” A significant element of *Magma & Pearls* at MOCA is the Oasis, a soft physical space created as an invitation to gather for workshops, poetry readings, performances, and more. When it is not being activated with programs, the Oasis is a space dedicated to rest and comfort while visiting the exhibition.

Collaborative elements were incorporated into the Oasis through a three-day protest sign making workshop titled *Signs from Below: Protest (On the Edges of Time)* facilitated by the artist with participants from two LGBTQIA+ arts programs: Stay Gold (MOCA Tucson) and Mapping Q (University of Arizona Museum of Art), November 7 - 9, 2023.

### **Upcoming Oasis Programming**

Friday, January 12 | 5pm

Artist Talk & Poetry Reading - [Glory Be... Black Trans Vision & Queer Revolution](#), curated by Keioui Keijaun Thomas

Friday, January 19 | 6pm

Poetry Reading - [Glory Be... Unwavering and Bold Love](#), curated by TC Tolbert

Saturday, January 20 | 12-2pm

Workshop - [Passing: Practices with Grief and Attention](#), led by TC Tolbert

Sunday, February 4 | 5:30pm

Closing Performance - [Come Hell or High Femmes](#) by Keioui Keijaun Thomas

Friday, February 9 | 6pm

Poetry Reading - *Glory Be... Restorative, Healing and Care-Full*, curated by Aura Valdez

*Keioui Keijaun Thomas: Magma & Pearls* is organized by Alexis Wilkinson, Assistant Curator.

Exhibition partner is the University of Arizona Institute for LGBTQ+ Studies. Project collaborators are Mapping Q, a program of the University of Arizona Museum of Art; SAGA (Southern Arizona Gender Alliance); Splinter Collective; and Tucson's Poet Laureate TC Tolbert. Installation support from Production Fellow Suomo Snook.

Generous support for this exhibition is provided by the LGBTQ+ Alliance Fund held at the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Arizona Humanities; and MOCA Tucson's Board of Trustees, Ambassador Council, and Members.

In-kind support provided by The Downtown Clifton Hotel, the Folklore Hotel, and Rune Wines.

### **About the artist:**

**Keioui Keijaun Thomas** is a New York-based artist. She creates live performance and multimedia installations that address blackness outside of a codependent, binary structure of existence. Her performances combine rhapsodic layers of live and recorded voice, slipping between various modes of address, to explore the pleasures and pressures of dependency, care, and support. By centering self and communal care in real-time, Thomas' practice aims to build bridges of understanding and community. Thomas has presented work both nationally and internationally at The Rhubarb Festival, Toronto (2023); Skopje Pride Queer Arts Festival, Skopje, Macedonia (2020); Dweller Festival, Brooklyn (2020); ANTI – Contemporary Art Festival, Kuopio, Finland (2019); Fierce Festival, Birmingham, UK (2019); Time-Based Art Festival, Portland (2016); Rapid Pulse Performance Art Festival, Chicago (2016); SPILL Festival of Performance, Ipswich, UK (2014); Out of Site Festival, Chicago (2014). Solo performances at The Knockdown Center, New York (2018), Harvard University, Cambridge (2018); Performance Space UK, Folkestone, UK (2016); Housing NY, Brooklyn (2016); and Human Resources, Los Angeles (2015). Select group exhibitions at Performance Space, New York (2019); Wrightwood 659, Chicago (2019); Arnolfini, Bristol, UK (2019); Artists Space, New York (2018); Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston (2018); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2018); Human Resources, Los Angeles (2018); Broad Museum, Los Angeles (2017); New Normal, Istanbul and Beirut (2017); Encuentro 2016, Santiago (2016); Centro Cultural del México Contemporáneo, Mexico City (2016); EXPO Chicago, Chicago (2015); Théâtre de la Ville, Paris (2015). Solo exhibitions include No Longer Strange Fruit, JOAN, California (2023), Come Hell or High Femmes, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio (2022); and Hands Up, Ass Out, Participant Inc., New York (2021). Thomas is a 2022 recipient of the MAP Fund, the inaugural winner of the Queer|Art 2020 Illuminations Grant for Black Trans Women Visual Artists, and the Franklin Furnace Fund Recipient for 2018. She earned her Masters degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and her BFA with Honors from the School of Visual Arts in New York.

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**For more information, installation photos, or to schedule interviews with the curator, please contact Audrey Molloy at: [audrey@moca-tucson.org](mailto:audrey@moca-tucson.org).**

### **MOCA Tucson's Open Hours**

MOCA Tucson is open Thursday - Saturday 11:00 am - 6:00 pm & Sundays 11:00 am - 4:00 pm. Adults \$7, Students and Seniors \$4, Youth Free. Admission is free on Sundays.

### **About MOCA Tucson**

MOCA Tucson inspires new ways of thinking through the cultivation, exhibition, and interpretation of contemporary art. Established by artists in 1997, MOCA is Tucson's only museum devoted to local and global contemporary art. Housed in a repurposed firehouse, MOCA is a primary resource for arts education in our most vulnerable communities and maintains a full exhibition, public program and artist-in-residence schedule. Now in its 25th year, the Museum cultivates critical dialogue between artists and audiences about today's world; supports artists through the production and presentation of new, experimental work; and educates the artists and audiences of tomorrow.

### **Accessibility Information**

Designated accessible parking with access to a ramp is available on the south side of McCormick Street in front of MOCA. MOCA has an accessible restroom in the lobby and all exhibition and lecture spaces are ADA compliant. There is limited seating available in each of the gallery spaces. MOCA is committed to providing access to the arts for everyone. For questions or to arrange accommodations for your visit, please call MOCA's front desk at 520.624.5019 or email: [info@moca-tucson.org](mailto:info@moca-tucson.org).