

HAMMER PRESS RELEASE

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Hammer Museum Announces *Noah Davis* The First U.S. Institutional Survey

June 8 – August 31, 2025
Press Preview: June 6, 2025



***Noah Davis* brings together over 50 works spanning painting, sculpture and works on paper.**

(Los Angeles, CA) — The Hammer Museum at UCLA is proud to present *Noah Davis*, the first U.S. institutional survey of the visionary artist Noah Davis (1983–2015). Following its debut at DAS MINSK in Potsdam and the Barbican in London, this landmark exhibition is a meaningful homecoming to Los Angeles, a city where Davis lived, worked, and left an enduring legacy. The exhibition will be on view from June 8 to August 31, 2025. The exhibition will travel to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2026.

Organized chronologically, *Noah Davis* brings together over 50 works spanning painting, sculpture, and works on paper, offering a comprehensive overview of his practice, including his curatorial and community-building efforts as co-founder of the Underground Museum, Los Angeles. The exhibition traces Davis's prolific career from 2007 until his untimely passing in 2015, featuring works that delve into his exploration of politics, current affairs, everyday life, ancient Egypt, family history, racism in American media, art history, and architecture. His paintings are presented alongside his experimental works in sculpture and works on paper, offering a deeper look into the conceptual foundations of his practice. The exhibition also includes a selection of Davis's eclectic source material on display for the first time.

Hammer Museum director Zoë Ryan said, "We are proud to present this retrospective of Noah Davis's work in Los Angeles, a city that continues to feel his impact as an artist and a builder of communities."

Images (L-R): Noah Davis, *Isis*, 2009. Oil and acrylic on linen. 48 x 48 in. (121.9 x 121.9 cm). Mellon Foundation Art Collection © The Estate of Noah Davis. Courtesy The Estate of Noah Davis and David Zwirner. Photo: Kerry McFate; Noah Davis, *Untitled*, 2015. Oil on canvas. 32 x 50 in. (81.3 x 127 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis in honor of Jerry Speyer's 80th birthday, 2020. © The Estate of Noah Davis. Courtesy The Estate of Noah Davis and David Zwirner. Photo: Kerry McFate; Noah Davis, *40 Acres and a Unicorn*, 2007. Acrylic and gouache on canvas. 30 x 26 in. (76.2 x 66 cm). Private collection. Courtesy of David Zwirner © The Estate of Noah Davis. Courtesy The Estate of Noah Davis and David Zwirner. Photo: Anna Arca

Noah's career was tragically cut short but nonetheless extraordinary, as this internationally touring exhibition demonstrates. He was also a great supporter of artists who felt overlooked by other institutions, and through the Underground Museum created a welcoming space for artists and audiences alike, greatly enriching the cultural fabric of this city. This exhibition is a celebration of Noah's life and legacy."

Davis's figurative paintings capture the emotional and fantastical textures of everyday life. Primarily based in Los Angeles, he felt a "responsibility to represent the people around me," drawing on an expansive pool of references—from anonymous vintage photography found in flea markets and personal archives, to film and television, music, literature, art history, and his own imagination. Through his vivid cast of characters—some real, some fictional—he depicted scenes of people diving into swimming pools, sleeping, dancing, and looking at public art. Davis fluidly moved between painting styles, often using unorthodox techniques and a diverse palette to create images that were both realistic and dreamlike, joyful, and melancholic.

Davis was deeply invested in the idea that art should be accessible to everyone. In 2012, he and his wife, fellow artist Karon Davis, co-founded the Underground Museum, in the historically Black and Latinx neighborhood of Arlington Heights, Los Angeles. They converted four storefronts into a cultural center that was free and open to all, transforming the parking lot into a garden planted with purple flowers in homage to Prince. In his lifetime, Davis used the Underground Museum as a studio, a site for residencies, and an exhibition space, negotiating with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA) to lend their collection in a three-year partnership starting in 2014. By the time he died in 2015, he had planned 18 exhibitions for the Underground Museum using MOCA's collection, motivated by the desire to "change the way people view art, the way they buy art, the way they make art."

Noah Davis's profound influence on contemporary art and the cultural fabric of Los Angeles is reflected throughout this exhibition, which unites key works from his groundbreaking career. Highlights include *40 Acres and a Unicorn* (2007), a striking blend of fantasy and history; *Isis* (2009), a portrait of his wife Karon depicted as the titular Egyptian goddess of magic; and the *Pueblo del Rio* series (2014), paintings that reimagine one of the oldest, largest, and most architecturally significant public housing developments in Los Angeles. Through these works and more, *Noah Davis* offers a comprehensive look at the visionary artist's practice and lasting influence.

ABOUT NOAH DAVIS

Born in Seattle, Washington in 1983, Davis had his first painting studio in high school. He briefly studied film and art at Cooper Union in New York before leaving to pursue his own artistic education. By 2004 he had moved to Los Angeles and was working at the famed bookstore Art Catalogues, where he could feed his appetite for a wide-reaching history of culture and, in particular, painting. Drawing on the legacy of artists ranging from Caspar David Friedrich to Mark Rothko, Romare Bearden to Kerry James Marshall, he developed a distinctive painterly style—one that engaged deeply with both the histories of representation and abstraction. Davis blended historical and contemporary source material to create images of Black life that are unbound by a specific time or place. To show Black life with beauty, majesty, joy, and humor was both a risk and a necessity; Davis painted at a time of acute racism and systemic violence in the United States, a country where identity has often been weaponized

through the circulation of images in the media and what were then newly formed social media platforms.

CREDITS

The exhibition is organized by the Barbican, London and initiated with DAS MINSK, Potsdam. The exhibition is curated by Eleanor Nairne, Keith L and Katherine Sachs Curator for Modern and Contemporary Art and Head of Department at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and former Barbican senior curator, and Wells Fray-Smith, curator, Barbican. The presentation at the Hammer is organized by Aram Moshayedi, independent curator and former Robert Soros Senior Curator, with Ikechúkwú Onyewuenyi, former curatorial associate, and Nyah Ginwright, curatorial assistant.

Lead support for this exhibition is provided by Andy Song. Generous support is provided by Susan Bay Nimoy and Leonard Nimoy. Additional support provided by the Eileen Harris Norton Foundation and Stephen Zimmerman and Lianne Barnes.

ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM

The Hammer Museum is part of the School of the Arts and Architecture at UCLA, and offers exhibitions and collections that span classic to contemporary art. It holds more than 50,000 works in its collection, including one of the finest collections of works on paper in the nation, the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts. Through a wide-ranging, international exhibition program and the Made in L.A. biennial, the Hammer highlights contemporary art since the 1960s, especially the work of emerging and under-recognized artists. The exhibitions, permanent collections, and nearly 300 public programs annually—including film screenings, lectures, symposia, readings, music performances, and workshops for families—are all free to the public.

HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION

Admission to all exhibitions and programs at the Hammer Museum is free. Hours: Tuesday–Thursday & Saturday–Sunday 11 a.m.–6 p.m.; Friday 11 a.m.–8 p.m. Closed Mondays and national holidays. Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Boulevard at Westwood, Los Angeles. Onsite parking is \$8 for the first 3 hours (maximum \$22), or \$8 flat rate after 5 p.m. Valet parking is available at the Lindbrook Drive entrance for \$15. Visit hammer.ucla.edu for details or call 310-443-7000.

Free Admission at the Hammer Museum is courtesy of Marcy Carsey, the Erika J Glazer Family Foundation, and the Anthony & Jeanne Pritzker Family Foundation.