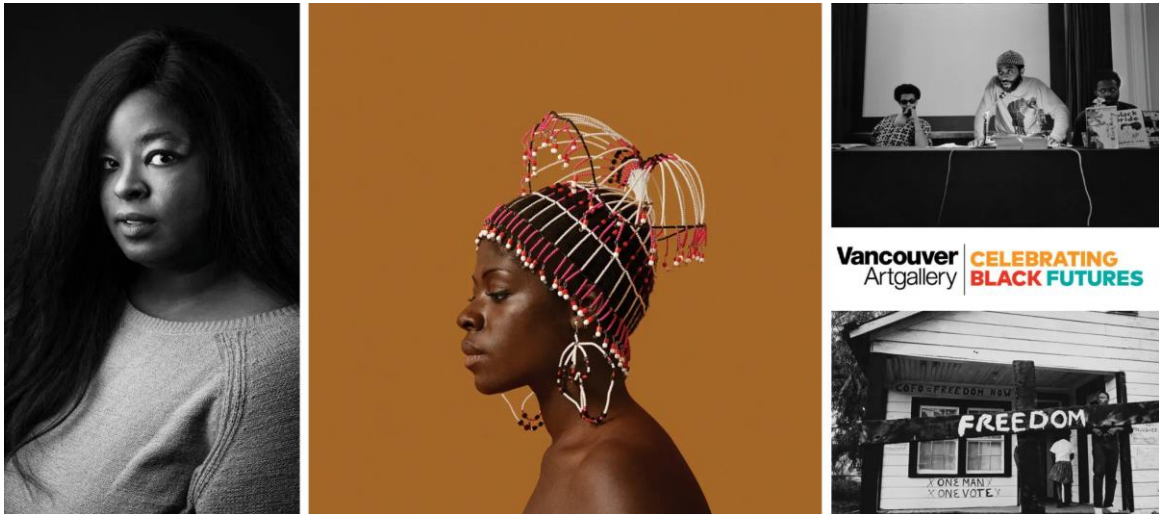


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**The Vancouver Art Gallery Presents *Celebrating Black Futures*,
Bringing Together Writing, Film and Performance**



January 29, 2026, VANCOUVER, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

This February, the Vancouver Art Gallery presents **Celebrating Black Futures**, a month-long public program series that fosters critical dialogue and creative exchange around the work of Black and African artists, locally and globally. Through talks, performances, film screenings and community-led conversations, the series brings Black artistic practices into focus, encouraging moments of reflection and collective exchange.

By foregrounding diverse voices and lived experiences, **Celebrating Black Futures** deepens public understanding, challenges dominant narratives and builds meaningful connections between artists, audiences and broader cultural contexts. The bespoke line-up, brought together in honour of Black History Month and in partnership with **the Vancouver International Film Festival** and **The Black Arts Centre**, celebrates Black Futures in Vancouver, Canada and beyond.

“We are thrilled to be presenting Celebrating Black Futures for its fourth year,” say **Eva Respini** and **Sirish Rao**, Interim Co-CEOs at the Vancouver Art Gallery. “We see these events and important partnerships as an opportunity to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Black communities and to engage with Black creativity not only as artistic expression but as a vital force shaping histories, futures and ways of being together.”

Celebrating Black Futures is organized by **Kika Memeh**, Public Programs Assistant at the Vancouver Art Gallery. She adds: “Through the work and practice of the incredible artists featured, this year’s programming offers a pathway for tracing and attending to the tangible connections between African, Black Canadian and Afrodiasporic ways of seeing and being.”

Highlights include a generative writing workshop led by Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize–shortlisted poet **Junie Désil**, inviting participants to reflect on water, place and belonging in dialogue with the exhibition *We who have known tides: Indigenous Art from the Collection*; the premiere screening of *Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story*, an uplifting documentary celebrating the photographer and activist whose images helped define the global “Black is Beautiful” movement; and the B.C. premiere of *True North*, a visually striking film that revisits pivotal moments in 1960s Montreal and positions Canada within the global Black liberation movement. In dialogue with *Enemy Alien: Tamio Wakayama*, *True North* reveals how Black American liberation movements—emerging just years after Freedom Summer—directly shaped Black Canadian political consciousness and appetite for systemic change. This dialogue is further explored through a panel discussion presented in conjunction with the exhibition, which revisits the direct impacts of Tamio Wakayama’s powerful photography and underscores the role of images in preserving memory and resistance. Together, these events create space for learning, connection and conversation, centering Black voices and stories across generations.

2026 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Writing Workshop: We who have known tides

Saturday February 7, 2026 | 11 AM–1 PM | Room 4East, Vancouver Art Gallery

Led by Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize–shortlisted poet **Junie Désil**, this generative writing workshop unfolds in conversation with the exhibition *We who have known tides: Indigenous Art from the Collection*. Participants are invited into the Gallery with a spirit of attention, considering the ocean as a site of relation, memory and deep time. Guided by the writings of Toni Morrison, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Dionne Brand, the workshop moves between observation, reflection and writing to explore themes of place, belonging, diaspora and the tides—literal and figurative—that shape our lives. No prior writing experience required. Tickets can be booked online at:

<https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/events/writing-workshop-we-who-have-known-tides/>

This event is co-presented with [The Black Arts Centre](#)



Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story

B.C. Premiere Screening | Wednesday, February 11, 2026 | 6:20 PM | VIFF Centre, VIFF Cinema

This feature documentary traces the life and legacy of Harlem-based photographer, activist and freedom fighter Kwame Brathwaite, whose images helped define the global “Black is Beautiful” movement. Drawing from a vast archive of more than 500,000 photographs, the film celebrates Black joy, style, and community—from everyday street life to intimate portraits of cultural icons including Nina Simone, Muhammad Ali and Stevie Wonder. Radical in its time and resonant today, *Black Is Beautiful* is an uplifting and cinematic tribute to beauty, resistance and self-definition.

Tickets can be booked online at: www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/events/film-screening-black-is-beautiful-feb-11/

This event is co-presented with [Vancouver International Film Festival](#)



Panel Discussion: Photography, Memory and Social Justice

Saturday February 14, 2026 | 3:30–5 PM

Room 4East, Vancouver Art Gallery

Presented in conjunction with *Enemy Alien: Tamio Wakayama*, this panel discussion brings together former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizers **Judy Richardson** and **Masaru Edmund Nakawatase**, community advocate **Kiyoko Judy Hanazawa**, and moderator **Dr. Desirée Valadares** for a powerful conversation. The discussion traces a lineage of socially engaged photography—from Depression-era America and the work of **Walker Evans** and **Dorothea Lange** to **Tamio Wakayama**'s photographic documentation of Japanese Canadian internment and racial injustice. Centering Wakayama's work, panelists examine intersections between the Japanese Canadian Redress Movement and the US Civil Rights Movement, highlighting photography's role in preserving memory, expressing resilience and documenting social struggle. Tickets can be booked online at:

www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/events/panel-discussion-feb-14/

This event is an initiative of the Gallery's [Centre for Global Asias](#) and Presented as Part of [Celebrating Black Futures](#).



Community Partner:



powell street festival society

パウエル祭協会

True North

B.C. Premiere Screening and Live Performance with Andy Milne

Saturday February 28, 2026 | 5 PM and 8:15 PM | VIFF Centre, VIFF Cinema

Set in 1960s Montreal, *True North* revisits two pivotal yet underrecognized moments in Canadian history: the Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams Affair. Through rare archival footage and first-person testimonies, the film positions Montreal as a powerful nexus within the global Black liberation movement. Centering

the voices of elders whose contributions have long been overlooked, *True North* offers a visually striking and emotionally resonant act of remembrance—and a call to action for future generations.

In this West Coast premiere, Andy Milne will perform a 45-minute set followed by a 15-minute Q&A (5 PM show); and then a longer set sans Q&A (8:15 PM show), presented alongside a screening of the film at both shows. Tickets can be booked online at: www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/events/true-north-andy-milne-in-concert-feb-28/

This event is co-presented with [Vancouver International Film Festival](#)



Celebrating Black Futures is organized by **Kika Memeh**, Public Programs Assistant at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Find out more: [Celebrating Black Futures 2026 | Vancouver Art Gallery](#)

Celebrating Black Futures is presented in partnership with:

VIFF Centre



More to explore at the Gallery:

Film Screenings: Freedom Summer

Friday, February 6, 13 and 20, 2026 | 6–8 PM

3rd Floor, The Vancouver Art Gallery

Screenings of Stanley Nelson Jr.'s acclaimed documentary *Freedom Summer* (2014) are presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Enemy Alien: Tamio Wakayama*. The film takes audiences into 1960s Mississippi, where the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—with Tamio Wakayama among its volunteers—organized the Freedom Summer of 1964, a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. Blending archival footage with first-hand accounts, the documentary captures the courage and collective action that helped reshape a nation, while offering vital historical context for Wakayama's photographs and activism. Screenings take place on the 3rd Floor in the Cinema Room within the exhibition. To attend, reserve an admission ticket for the night of the screening. For more information, visit: www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/events/film-screening-freedom-summer-feb-6/

Government Partner:



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Images:

Junie Désil, Photo: Joy Unagaebu; Visitors discover Sydney Pascal, *Distance*, 2022, in *We who have known tides: Indigenous Art from the Collection*, exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, November 6, 2025 to April 12, 2026, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

Kwame Brathwaite, *Untitled (Grandassa Models in Studio)*, 1972 c., Courtesy of The Kwame Brathwaite Archive

Women supporters gathered outside the courtroom during the Sir George Williams protest trials, Courtesy of Studio112

For media requests: media@vanartgallery.bc.ca

ABOUT THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

Founded in 1931 on the ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's celebrated exhibitions, extensive public programs and emphasis on advancing scholarship all focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is given to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to those of the Asia Pacific region—through the Centre for Global Asias (formerly the Institute of Asian Art) founded in 2014. The Gallery's exhibitions also explore the impact of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture.

The Gallery's new Art of Wellbeing lab furthers its commitment to community by promoting the role of art in fostering health and wellbeing. Developed in collaboration with healthcare professionals, researchers and Indigenous Elders, the lab creates opportunities for individuals to engage with art in ways that support mental, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Committed to inclusivity and accessibility, the Gallery welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to share perspectives, build community and shape our collective future through art.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a charitable not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the B.C. Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.