

Press Release

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HIGH ORGANIZES FIRST US MUSEUM EXHIBITION FOR SOUTH AFRICAN ARTIST EZROM LEGAE

**“Ezrom Legae: Beasts”
June 13-Nov. 16, 2025**

ATLANTA, June 12, 2025 — This summer, the High Museum of Art will present **“Ezrom Legae: Beasts” (June 13-Nov. 16, 2025)**, the first major museum exhibition in the United States for celebrated South African artist Ezrom Legae (1938-1999). The more than 30 works on view address apartheid in South Africa through form and metaphor, exemplifying the ways in which Legae, like other artists at the time, used coded visual languages to subvert and endure tyranny.

“The poignant symbolism in Legae’s work reminds us of the expressive power of art, especially for those living through oppression,” said the High’s Director Rand Suffolk. “Through this exhibition, we are bringing new attention to Legae’s art in the United States, and by extension, telling a story of 20th century South Africa, which is particularly timely as we enter the third decade after the end of apartheid.”

Legae’s life was set against the backdrop of many groundbreaking moments and key players in South African politics and art history, not least the establishment of apartheid in 1948. He was just 10 years old when he witnessed the National Party win federal elections and instill the system of racial and ethnic segregation that later became a centerpiece of his career’s subject matter. His personal narrative began to weave through other historic local events, including the opening of the Polly Street Art Centre in 1949, one of the only places for Black artists to receive training, where he studied beginning in 1959.

After apartheid was established, many artists in South Africa contended with its corresponding oppression and bodily violence by presenting the human figure in animal form or abstracting it. This exhibition focuses on Legae’s own bestial compositions, with each work an imaginative study articulating the artist’s political consciousness of his surroundings while living in South Africa’s apartheid era.

Legae’s harrowing drawings of beasts not only depict his encrypted visual messages but also exemplify common through lines in works of that era: animals traditionally sacrificed, such as

goats and chickens, serve as allegorical figures for activists who endured sacrificial violence and suffering under apartheid, while larger beasts, such as bulls and contorted horse-like creatures, represent the autocratic government and agents of said violence. Occasionally dropping the metaphor or otherwise bravely bridging the connection between his animal forms and the human condition, Legae sometimes depicted surreal humanoid forms or created works that blatantly critiqued apartheid, as is the case in his depiction of South African activist Steve Biko.

The exhibition features drawings from 1967 to 1996, foregrounding the 1970s and 1990s, each groundbreaking periods in South African political history. Amid mounting unrest and anti-apartheid protests in the 1970s, such as the Soweto uprisings, activists and civilians endured increased violence, exile and imprisonment, often without trial and including solitary confinement. This period is considered Legae's most prolific, in which he produced pencil, ink and charcoal depictions of animals as covert representations of apartheid's players and impact. The artist produced substantially less until the 1990s, when he reemerged during South Africa's political transition.

"Legae's personal narrative weaves through sites for non-white creative development under apartheid, such as the Polly Street Art Centre and Jubilee Art Centre, in addition to the Amadlozi Group and Goodman Gallery," said Lauren Tate Baeza, the High's Fred and Rita Richman curator of African art. "Thus, this exhibition not only introduces American audiences to Legae but to the arts ecosystem of 20th century Johannesburg while further positioning South Africa appropriately within the 20th century art historical canon."

"Ezrom Legae: Beasts" will be presented in the Works on Paper Galleries in the Lower Level of the High's Wieland Pavilion.

Exhibition Organization and Support

"Ezrom Legae: Beasts" is organized by the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. This exhibition is made possible by Premier Exhibition Series Sponsor Delta Air Lines, Inc.; Premier Exhibition Series Supporters The Fay S. and W. Barrett Howell Family Foundation and Harry Norman Realtors; Benefactor Exhibition Series Supporters Robin and Hilton Howell; Ambassador Exhibition Series Supporter Mrs. Harriet H. Warren; and Contributing Exhibition Series Supporters Farideh and Al Azadi, Mary and Neil Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter Jones, Megan and Garrett Langley, Margot and Danny McCaul, and Wade A. Rakes II and Nicholas Miller. Generous support is also provided by Alfred and Adele Davis Exhibition Endowment Fund, Anne Cox Chambers Exhibition Fund, Barbara Stewart Exhibition Fund, Dorothy Smith Hopkins Exhibition Endowment Fund, Eleanor McDonald Storza Exhibition Endowment Fund, The Fay and Barrett Howell Exhibition Fund, Forward Arts Foundation Exhibition Endowment Fund, Helen S. Lanier Endowment Fund, John H. and Wilhelmina D. Harland Exhibition Endowment Fund, Katherine Murphy Riley Special Exhibition Endowment Fund, Margaretta Taylor Exhibition Fund, RJR Nabisco Exhibition Endowment Fund and USI Insurance Services.

About the High Museum of Art

Located in the heart of Atlanta, the High Museum of Art connects with audiences from across the Southeast and around the world through its distinguished collection, dynamic schedule of

special exhibitions and engaging community-focused programs. Housed within facilities designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects Richard Meier and Renzo Piano, the High features a collection of more than 20,000 works of art, including an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American fine and decorative arts; major holdings of photography and folk and self-taught work, especially that of artists from the American South; burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, including paintings, sculpture, new media and design; a growing collection of African art, with work dating from prehistory through the present; and significant holdings of European paintings and works on paper. The High is dedicated to reflecting the diversity of its communities and offering a variety of exhibitions and educational programs that engage visitors with the world of art, the lives of artists and the creative process. For more information about the High, visit www.high.org.

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