

RISING SUN: ARTISTS IN AN UNCERTAIN AMERICA

MARCH 23, 2023 – OCTOBER 8, 2023

**CURATORIAL TEAM: JUDITH TANNENBAUM (PAFA),
DEJAY DUCKETT (AAMP) AND JODI THROCKMORTON**
**With Curatorial Fellows Juan Omar Rodriguez (PAFA);
and Michael K. Wilson (AAMP)**

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), in partnership with the African American Museum in Philadelphia (AAMP), will invite 20 contemporary artists to create newly commissioned artworks that consider the question: *Is the sun rising or setting on the experiment of American democracy?* The exhibition is rooted in the use of the rising sun as a metaphor from two defining moments in U.S. history: a question asked by Benjamin Franklin in 1787—is the sun rising or setting on the United States—and the line



Rendering of *We Emerge from the Sunset of Your Ideology*
from Saya Woolfalk's proposal for *Rising Sun*.

“Facing the rising sun of our new day begun” from *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (or “The Black National Anthem”) written by James Weldon Johnson in 1900. Today, when the U.S. finds itself again at a critical crossroads, these ideas put forth by Franklin and Johnson—spoken, written, and sung—persist in the work of the contemporary artists in *Rising Sun*.

This ambitious, multi-venue exhibition will center contemporary artists in a discussion of the disquieting canonical history of the US, and the work of re-appraisal, reformation, reckoning, and repair needed to find a collective way forward. In a bold departure from PAFA's traditional exhibition models that centers exhibitions as answers to questions, *Rising Sun* will engage with open-ended questions and take responsibility for the ways in which museums have contributed to exclusionary definitions of American art and history. This is a critical re-framing for audiences, which asks them to wrestle with which narratives have been elided in the existing canon and demonstrates to new audiences an institutional engagement with their lived social, political and economic realities.

The intended impact of *Rising Sun* is to leverage the power of contemporary art to create immersive experiences making visible the reality that one citizen's democratic utopia may be another's lived dystopia.



John Akomfrah, *Triptych*
Three Channel HD Video Installation

PAFA and AAMP are committed to developing robust public programming to engage with the challenging conversations sparked by *Rising Sun*. The two institutions will engage community organizations and key civic leaders to be active partners in these dialogues. Public programs will begin in advance of the exhibition opening, in the Fall of 2022, to build audience awareness and help them see connections between cultural institutions and issues around democracy and citizenship, such as those that will inevitably arise during the fall 2022 election.

Participating artists will include Shiva Ahmadi, John Akomfrah, LaVaughn Belle, Tiffany Chung, Lenka Clayton, Petah Coyne, Mark Gibson, Eamon Ore-Giron, Martha Jackson Jarvis, Demetrius Oliver, Alison Saar, Dred Scott, Arlene Shechet, Rose B. Simpson, Sheida Soleimani, Renee Stout, Dyani White Hawk, Deborah Willis, Hank Willis Thomas, Wilmer Wilson IV, and Saya Woolfalk.