

## Spencer Museum of Art Acquires Major Works by Artists Dread Scott and Fahamu Pecou

### Paintings Currently on View in *Black Writing*, Open Through January 7, 2024

Lawrence, KS (November 8, 2023)—The Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas (KU) announced today that it has acquired major works by artists **Dread Scott** and **Fahamu Pecou**. The two paintings are currently on view at the museum as part of the exhibition [Black Writing](#), which explores the power, politics, and complexities of language in contemporary Black culture. The exhibition, which will remain open through January 7, 2024, was developed in partnership with the History of Black Writing (HBW), an ongoing research project on KU’s campus that supports the recovery and study of literature by Black writers, and celebrates HBW’s 40th anniversary by bringing the visual and literary arts together.



Fahamu Pecou. *Parable of the Sower: Oya's Dream* (2023). Courtesy the artist and Spencer Museum of Art.

Pecou’s painting, titled [Oya’s Dream](#), was commissioned by the Spencer as part of its [Common Work of Art](#) program, which serves as a companion to KU’s annual [Common Book](#) selection. This year, KU chose Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, and the Spencer invited Pecou to create a work that engages with the author and the novel, to be featured in *Black Writing* as well as in broader curricula across the University. Scott’s painting [I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free](#) (2023) is also a significant focal point of the exhibition and is part of a new body

of work inspired by songs sung by Nina Simone. The painting first premiered in a solo exhibition at Cristin Tierney gallery in April 2023. The acquisitions are part of the Spencer’s ongoing efforts to diversify its 48,000-object collection and expand its holdings of works by artists of color and women artists.

“The artworks in *Black Writing* have provided a rich depth of opportunity for dialogue and engagement with our campus and public communities. The paintings by Dread Scott and Fahamu Pecou express Black experience within the development of American history and narrative, and we are delighted to bring them into the Spencer’s collection,” said Saralyn Reece Hardy, the Marilyn Stokstad Director at the Spencer.



Dread Scott. *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free* (2023). Courtesy the artist and Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York

“The Spencer recently reinstalled its collection galleries to bring forward a diverse range of voices, perspectives, and experiences and to engage with themes and ideas relevant to the contemporary lives of our audiences. Our acquisitions strategy follows the same vision, and we are excited to continue to expand our holdings with works by exceptional artists, working today and from across history and culture,” she added.

**Dread Scott (b. 1965, Chicago)**

***I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free* (2023)**

Dread Scott is an interdisciplinary artist, whose multi-decade practice examines and challenges the history, values, and contexts of American society. *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free* is part of a series of works inspired by the work of Nina Simone, which premiered in a solo exhibition, titled *Goddam*, at Cristin Tierney gallery in New York in spring 2023. In particular, the four canvases featured in the series take Simone’s 20th-century protest songs as a point of departure to explore the enduring presence and effects of white supremacy

and patriarchy in America’s contemporary culture. *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free* is the first work by Scott to enter the Spencer’s collection and comes to the museum as a promised gift.

**Fahamu Pecou (b. 1975, New York)**

***Parable of the Sower: Oya’s Dream* (2023)**

Fahamu Pecou is an interdisciplinary artist, who engages with hip-hop, popular culture, and fine art to address and expand representations of Black men. Inspired by Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, *Oya’s Dream* is part of Pecou’s *Trapademia: Lit* series, which juxtaposes Black bodies with famous literary works by Black authors. The series title refers to trap music, a subgenre of hip-hop, and plays on the euphemism “lit.” *Oya’s Dream* depicts a pregnant Black woman, reclining with a copy of Butler’s novel and a portrayal of the orisha (god or goddess) Oya balancing on her hip. Oya is part of Ifá cosmology, a belief system practiced in many parts of the African diaspora. The painting is the first by Pecou to enter the Spencer’s collection and is a purchase made through the R. Charles and Mary Margaret Clevenger Fund.

**About the Spencer Museum of Art**

[The Spencer Museum of Art](#), located on the University of Kansas Lawrence campus, explores the intersection of art, ideas, and experiences. With a diverse collection of more than 48,000 works, the Spencer is the only museum in Kansas with contemporary and historic artwork in all mediums from cultures across six continents. The Spencer Museum facilitates arts engagement and research through exhibitions, artist commissions and residencies, conferences, performances, lectures, children’s art activities, and arts and culture festivals. Admission to the Spencer Museum of Art is free.

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