



Noel W Anderson: Black Excellence

University Art Museum, University at Albany
August 25, 2025 – April 3, 2026

Noel W Anderson: Black Excellence

Spanning 15 years, *Noel W Anderson: Black Excellence* is the artist's most comprehensive exhibition to date and features stretched and suspended cotton Jacquard tapestries, video, prints, and works on paper. Anderson digitally and physically alters archival and media images from the 1960s–present centered on Black identity, labor, and performance. His processes of abstraction and erasure allow him to go deeper into the meaning of these images and to bring several historical threads into conversation: the privileged status of medieval tapestries, the history of cotton and Black labor, and the mechanical and digital production and distribution of images. Anderson's disruption of the image's surface across his many media is a reminder that the image itself is not reality and does not tell the whole story.

The exhibition specifically reflects on Black excellence—a term whose current usage grew out of the Civil Rights movement but whose underlying concepts have been debated in Black thought and education since the nineteenth century. Using film and media images of figures including singer James Brown; actor, singer, and activist Paul Robeson; and athlete LeBron James, Anderson looks at the extraordinary performance of Black individuals—the necessity to go above and beyond white peers' achievements to receive recognition in fields highly valued within the American system. Conversely, archival police images in the exhibition reveal how the system itself also contests the pursuit of excellence. Suspended between the demand for exceptional effort and institutional opposition, the pursuit of Black excellence becomes entangled with exhaustion and erasure for Anderson. He expresses these ideas by distressing his tapestries—dyeing, staining, picking them apart thread by thread—and literally erasing images.

The two-story, open-floor plan of the museum, designed by Edward Durell Stone (1902–78), creates an arena-like space for the exhibition to unfold and underscores Anderson's exploration of performance. It offers vantage points to experience his work from above and below, compelling the viewer to reflect on their role as participant, observer, or witness. Two of Anderson's tapestries suspended in the center of the museum pay homage to Sam Gilliam (1930–2022), the renowned American abstract painter from Anderson's hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, who first suspended and draped canvases in the 1960s and 1970s. Hanging in a state of limbo between the museum's upper and lower levels, the tapestries simultaneously evoke a sense of bodies suspended in space and a disembodied experience beyond the material world.

Working in concert with the exhibition's tapestries, the newly commissioned video *Echoes of the New World*, a collaboration with filmmaker and sound designer Solomon Bennett, centers archival footage of conductor Dean Dixon demonstrating musical terms. The film weaves these lessons into visual meditations on the public struggle and endurance of Black life in America by montaging them with appropriated elements that include Robeson in his film portrayal of Emperor Jones, the music of Duke Ellington, and news footage of O.J. Simpson's 1994 car chase, among other images.

Earlier works on paper represent explorations of the themes of race and erasure that still figure prominently in Anderson's work today. These include a series of prints on blue handmade paper using appropriated images, including archival police photographs, and his *EBONY* erasure works (2010–17), in which he chemically lifted the ink from vintage pages of the iconic Black politics and culture magazine to selectively erase and manipulate portions of the printed images. The erasure of these pages creates in the artist's words “a ‘tabula rasa’ effect [that] demands the viewer project their own ideas and images on the page”—an invitation extended to viewers throughout Anderson's work and as they move through the exhibition.

Cover image: *We Give 'Em Reverend Brown* (detail), 2023, discharge and dye on distressed stretched cotton tapestry, 110 x 75 inches



Above: *Slice*, 2014, mixed media on erased and collaged *EBONY* pages, 26 x 20 inches each

Noel W Anderson: *Black Excellence*
University Art Museum, University at Albany
August 25, 2025 – April 3, 2026

All works courtesy of the artist

Can you see the light?, 2023–present
Co-los-us, 2023–present
Discharge and dye on distressed cotton
tapestry, nylon cables
Dimensions variable

Muse for Onyx, 2008–present
Materials from the artist's studio and
archive including personal notes, color
swatches on napkins, color field studies on
coloring book pages, laser cut basketball
letters, artist's tools, archival photographs,
EBONY magazines, toy figurines, an African
sculpture, a cotton plant, and Daddy's watch
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Noel W Anderson and Solomon Bennett
Echoes of the New World, 2024–25
Single-channel video, 40:00 minutes;
color, sound

Gliding Throne, 2024–25
Distressed and stretched cotton tapestry
110 x 75 inches

Magic, Deep in Thought, 2023–25
Picked and stretched cotton tapestry
with photo objects and laser-cut
basketball leather
48 x 42 inches

Touched at the Apollo, 2023–25
Plastic hands on picked and distressed
stretched cotton tapestry
20 x 16 inches

Zip, 2016–25
Altered police barricade
140 x 1 ½ x 9 inches

(Hor)Rorschach (Downward Dog), 2019–23
Discharge and dye on picked and distressed
stretched cotton tapestries
Diptych: 101 x 92 inches each

Battle Royale, 2023
Distressed and stretched cotton tapestry
Diptych: 102 x 75 inches each

But Where?, 2022–23
Picked and distressed stretched
cotton tapestry
105 x 156 inches

Fan Addict, 2023
Stretched cotton tapestry
24 x 20 inches

Fan Addict, 2023
Fan Addict, 2023
Fan Addict, 2023
Distressed and stretched cotton tapestry
24 x 20 inches each

*James Brown enters the spirit's
canal*, 2022–23
Discharge and dye on distressed and
stretched cotton tapestry
76 x 50 inches

Land Cavalier, 2023
Distressed and stretched cotton tapestry
102 x 148 inches

Pleas-e Please Pl-ease, 2022–23
Discharge on distressed and stretched
cotton tapestry
70 x 89 inches

Referee's Reflection, 2017–23
Picked and distressed stretched
cotton tapestry
100 x 70 inches

Stella's Ground, 2022–23
Discharge and hand dye on distressed
stretched cotton tapestry
76 x 50 inches

Two Left Blues, 2023
Dyed and distressed stretched
cotton tapestry
Diptych: 24 x 20 inches each

We Give 'Em Reverend Brown, 2023
Discharge and dye on distressed stretched
cotton tapestry
110 x 75 inches

We Got 'Em Now, 2022–23
Hand dyed, picked, distressed, and
stretched cotton tapestry
95 x 64 inches

We Talk'in 'Bout Practice, 2022–23
Hand dyed, picked, distressed, and
stretched cotton tapestry
95 x 64 inches

Die Leitung
from *Blak Origin Moment*, 2018
Handmade paper object (linen pulp paint on
pigmented cotton paper)
18 x 24 inches

Dogon
from *Blak Origin Moment*, 2018
Handmade paper object (linen pulp paint on
pigmented cotton paper)
24 x 18 inches

Hampton's Feet
from *The Martyr Portfolio*, 2018
Handmade paper object (linen pulp paint on
pigmented cotton paper)
24 x 18 inches

The Sportsman
from *Blak Origin Moment*, 2018
Handmade paper object (linen pulp paint on
pigmented cotton paper)
18 x 24 inches

Escapism, 2017
Monoprints, relief, and Epson transfers on
erased *EBONY* pages
Series of 4: 13 x 10 each

Slice, 2014
Slice, 2014
Slice, 2014
Mixed media on erased and collaged
EBONY pages
26 x 20 inches each

Check the Skin, 2010
He's Mean, 2010
Sly Wink, 2010
Untitled, 2010
Woman There Is...?, 2010
Altered *EBONY* page
13 x 10 inches each



Gliding Throne, 2024–25, distressed and stretched cotton tapestry, 110 x 75 inches



Noel W Anderson installing suspended tapestries at the University Art Museum, University at Albany. Photo by Patrick Dodson.

Noel W Anderson
Born 1981, Louisville, Kentucky
Lives and works in New York, New York

Anderson's solo exhibitions include *Black Exhaustion in Extension*, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria (2024); *Black Exhaustion*, Shirley Fiterman Art Center, BMCC, CUNY, New York, New York (2023); *Erasure's Edge*, KMAC, Louisville, Kentucky (2022); *Heavy is the Crown*, Telfair Museum, Savannah, Georgia (2021); *It's Magic*, The Mudima Foundation, Milan, Italy (2021); *Blak Origin Moment*, Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee (2019); *Blak Origin Moment*, Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, Ohio (2017).
Notable group exhibitions include: *PANSORI: A Soundscape of the 21st Century*, 15th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju Biennale Hall, Gwangju, South Korea (2024); *Extra Taste*, International Objects, New York, New York (2024); *Des exploits, des chefs-d'œuvre*, FRAC SUD: Cité de l'art contemporain, Marseilles, France (2024); *Block Party: Community and Celebration in American Art*, Westmoreland, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2023); *Promise, Witness, Remembrance*, Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky (2021); *Slavery in the Hands of Harvard*, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2019); *Paper: Pull, Push, Press*, Dieu Donné, New York, New York (2019); *Present Bodies*, BRIC, Brooklyn, New York (2019); *Cut, Fold, Recreate*, Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, Ohio (2016); *The Art of Now*, Hearst Corporation, New York, New York (2016).
Anderson's awards, fellowships, and residencies include: Hermitage Artist Residency, Sarasota County, Florida (2020); Paper Variable Artist, Dieu Donné, New York, New York (2019); Tamarind Press Visiting Artist Edition, Tamarind Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico (2019); Jerome Camargo Residency, Cassis, France (2019); Dieu Donné Workspace Artist in Residence, Dieu Donné, New York, New York (2018); New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship (2018); Jerome Travel Grant (2017).
Anderson received an M.F.A. in Sculpture from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut in 2010; an M.F.A. in Printmaking from Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana in 2007; and a B.F.A. in Painting and Printmaking from Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio in 2003. He is Assistant Professor at The New School, New York, New York.



Noel W Anderson: Black Excellence

University Art Museum, University at Albany | August 25, 2025 – April 3, 2026

Noel W Anderson: Black Excellence

August 25, 2025 – April 3, 2026

1st and 2nd Floor Main Galleries, Nancy Hyatt Liddle Gallery

University Art Museum

University at Albany

State University of New York

1400 Washington Avenue

Albany, New York 12222

518-442-4035

www.albany.edu/museum

Copyright © 2025 University Art Museum

Noel W Anderson: Black Excellence is supported by the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation.

Additional support for exhibitions and programs provided by the Office of the President, Office of the Provost, The University at Albany Foundation, the University at Albany Alumni Association, the University Auxiliary Services at Albany, the Ann C. Mataraso Fund, the Robin Kanson Lewis '70 Exhibition Endowment Fund, the University Art Museum Director's Fund, and the Jack and Gertrude Horan Memorial Fund for Student Outreach.

MUSEUM STAFF:

Darcie Abbatiello, Registrar/Collections Manager

Jesse Asher Alsdorf, Technical Assistant

Berly Brown, Education Coordinator

Michael Ciervo, Preparator/Facilities Manager

Gil Gentile, Exhibition and Publication Designer

Corinna Ripps Schaming, Director/Chief Curator

Robert R. Shane, Associate Curator

Christine Snyder, Operations and Finance Manager

Christian Henry Wechgelaer, Museum Assistant

Special thanks to staff from Facilities Management at the University at Albany for assistance with tapestry suspension and the coordination and fabrication of exhibition benches and stretchers: Thomas Ashbee, Karl Baker, Michael Clancy, Charles Duncan III, James Grant, John Kelley, Mario Labrecque, Robert Napierski, Zach Newswanger, Erion Prifti, Steven Sano, and Kevin Zelno.



UNIVERSITY
ART MUSEUM
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Poster image: Noel W Anderson, *But Where?*, 2022–23, picked and distressed stretched cotton tapestry, 105 x 156 inches