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ARTAFRICA

Willie Birch: Stories to Tell

This exhibition's sweeping retrospective traces the layered afterlives of Black cultural memory across six decades of art making.

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At the California African American Museum, 'Willie Birch: Stories to Tell' unfolds as both retrospective and reckoning. Spanning works from the late 1960s to the present, the exhibition gathers more than five decades of

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Birch's uncompromising engagement with Black life in America, foregrounding the artist's enduring commitment to storytelling as social practice.

Born and raised in New Orleans, Birch has long examined what he calls "retentions" - the fragments of African cultural memory that persist across generations, geographies, and forms. Across painting, papier-mâché sculpture, charcoal drawing, and installation, his works move between intimacy and monumentality, documenting neighbourhood rituals, systemic inequities, and the fragile architectures of everyday life.

Rather than offering nostalgia, Birch's practice insists on complexity. Front porches become stages for collective memory, while street musicians, workers, and family scenes emerge as living archives of resilience and contradiction. Organised chronologically, the exhibition reveals an artist continuously reshaping his visual language while remaining rooted in community, cultural inheritance, and political urgency.

At a moment when questions of history and belonging remain fiercely contested, 'Stories to Tell' reminds us that survival itself is an act of narration.

This exhibition is on view at the California African American Museum until 21 October 2026.