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***Museum of Art + Light and Art Bridges Foundation Present
A New Exhibition
Crafting Sanctuaries: Black Spaces of the Great Depression South***

The exhibition explores the lives of rural Black Americans in the 1930s and '40s with rarely seen photos by Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, and more



Russell Lee, *Southeast Missouri Farms. Sharecropper's child combing hair in bedroom of shack home near La Forge project, Missouri, 1938*, printed 2024, silver gelatin print, 8 x 10 in. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI. Collection, LC-DIG-fsa-8b20258.



Russell Lee, *Negroes talking on porch of small store near Jeanerette, Louisiana, 1938*, printed 2024, silver gelatin print, 8 x 10 in. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-DIG-fsa-8a24610.

MANHATTAN, Kan., July 29, 2025—In a landmark institutional collaboration, the Museum of Art + Light (MoA+L) and Art Bridges Foundation present *Crafting Sanctuaries: Black Spaces of the Great Depression South*, a compelling new exhibition that reexamines the Farm Security Administration’s iconic photography through a rarely told story: the intimate lives and communal environments of Black Americans in rural Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, and South Carolina just after the Great Depression, during the 1930s and '40s. The images, commissioned by the FSA, were taken by photographers such as Jack Delano, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Marion Post Wolcott, and others. The exhibition will be on view August 20, 2025, to March 9, 2026.

“We are grateful to Art Bridges for the partnership in presenting this important exhibition,” said MoA+L executive director Erin Dragotto. “Through these compelling government-commissioned photographs, we can get a more nuanced view of how the Great Depression impacted Americans, specifically Black Americans, and their resilience in the face of adversity at the time.”

Curated by Tamir Williams, PhD, Curatorial Associate at Art Bridges, *Crafting Sanctuaries* brings to light lesser-known FSA photographs that document how Black Southerners created spaces of resilience, refuge, and identity amid widespread economic hardship and systemic oppression.

In 1935, Roy E. Stryker, head of the FSA's Information Division, recruited a group of photographers to undertake an ambitious project: to create a massive photo documentation of the living conditions of agricultural workers in the rural American South. With their photo equipment, rolls of film, and travel itineraries in hand, each photographer set out to capture honest scenes of everyday life for these Southern Americans who felt the devastating economic effects of The Great Depression.

These rarely circulated photos captured over the project's roughly nine-year span paint a nuanced picture of the Great Depression-era American South; the photos that Stryker later selected for mass public circulation offered a very narrow view of these Southern regions and their inhabitants. The exhibition presents a wider alternative than the distributed images, and through photos of homes, churches, schools, and barbershops, the exhibition shows how interior and public gathering spaces became canvases for self-determination and cultural preservation.

"Crafting Sanctuaries seeks to paint a much more truthful and diverse visual narrative of rural Southern America during the challenging years of the Great Depression by reexamining the photo archives of the Farmer Security Administration," says Williams.

The exhibition is presented in tandem with the interpretive area Sanctuary in Motion, which invites museum visitors to reflect and respond to questions of home, community, settlement, and places as sanctuaries relevant to Manhattan, Kansas' Yuma Street District—a neighborhood that relates the ethnic history of Manhattan's original African American neighborhood past and present. This space and history timeline is presented in collaboration with the Yuma Street Cultural Center, a non-profit organization founded by the Black Entrepreneurs of the Flint Hills, Manhattan, Kansas.

Crafting Sanctuaries: Black Spaces of the Black Great Depression South is exhibited in dialogue with *Heritage & the Human Condition*, a solo exhibition of paintings by acclaimed African American contemporary artist Dean Mitchell, on view in an adjacent gallery space. Together, the two exhibitions offer an expansive view of Black life in America, from historical documentation to modern interpretation, encouraging deeper dialogue around race, representation, and belonging.

Organized by Art Bridges Foundation, *Crafting Sanctuaries: Black Spaces of the Black Great Depression South* was curated by Tamir Williams (Curatorial Associate), with support from Ashley Holland (Curator and Director of Curatorial Initiatives), Isabel Ouweleen (Curatorial Research Assistant), and Javier Rivero Ramos (Assistant Curator).

Heritage & the Human Condition is organized by the Museum of Art + Light and curated by Erin Dragotto, executive director and Jori Louise Cheville, director of curatorial affairs. This exhibition has been generously supported by Kemper Family Foundations, UMB Bank, n.a., Trustee and the Dennis & Carol Hudson Family Foundation. The exhibition is complemented with loaned artwork from the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and the private collections of Robert and Tracey DeBruyn and George and Julie Strecker.

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About Art Bridges Foundation

Art Bridges Foundation is the vision of philanthropist and arts patron Alice Walton. Founded in 2017, Art Bridges creates and supports projects that share works of American art with communities across the United States and its territories. Art Bridges partners with a growing network of over 250 museums of many sizes—impacting more than 20 million people nationwide—to provide financial and strategic support for exhibitions, collection loans, and programs designed to educate, inspire, and deepen engagement with local communities. The Art Bridges Collection represents an expanding vision of American art from the 19th century to present day and encompasses multiple media and voices. For more information, visit artbridgesfoundation.org.

About Black Entrepreneurs of the Flint Hills

Founded and envisioned by the Black Entrepreneurs of the Flint Hills, The Yuma Street Cultural Center is a revival of history, a celebration of culture, and a catalyst for community empowerment. Nestled in the heart of Manhattan's historic Yuma Street neighborhood, the center stands as a testament to the resilience, courage, and contributions of the African American community.

About the Museum of Art + Light

The Museum of Art + Light is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit contemporary art museum dedicated to merging 21st-century technology with the visual and performing arts to incite positive emotion, cultivate meaningful connections, encourage artistic exploration, and spark innovation. Through strategic collaborations, the Museum fosters creativity, connection, and innovation by exploring the boundless intersections of art, concepts of light, and digital media. Visit www.artlightmuseum.org or follow MoA+L on [Facebook](#), [X](#), and [Instagram](#) for updates.