



28-29
FEBRUARY
2024



SYMPOSIUM + FILM SCREENING

TONI MORRISON

FELLOWSHIP INAUGURATION

AFRICA HALL
SHARJAH, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

THEAFRICAINSTITUTE.ORG

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Special Thanks

Al-Multaqa Chamber Orchestra
Sharjah Art Foundation
Sharjah Architecture Triennial
Sharjah Museums Authority

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Cover Image

Photograph by Deborah Feingold

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FOREWORD

“For me the history of the place of Black people in this country [America] is so varied, complex and beautiful, and impactful.”

From the documentary film
Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am

The Africa Institute, Global Studies University (GSU), Sharjah, UAE—a center for research, documentation, and study of Africa and its diaspora—hosts a two-day symposium celebrating the life and legacy of literary icon Toni Morrison on February 28 – 29, 2024, at The Africa Hall, in Sharjah.

This special event inaugurates the Toni Morrison Senior Fellowship in African Diaspora Literature and Cultural Studies, featuring captivating film screenings and insightful discussions.

Toni Morrison (1931–2019), a Nobel Prize-winning author, was a literary trailblazer whose profound works redefined American literature and explored themes of identity, race, and the human experience with unparalleled depth and insight. Her legacy resonates as a powerful voice for social justice and cultural understanding.

“Toni Morrison was not only a novelist but a theorist of the first order. From *The Bluest Eyes* to *Beloved*, she turned her unapologetic gaze inward while being critical of the white gaze, and in the process, she humanized and complicated the inner soul of African Americans and their agency. Her theoretical work complemented her storytelling with the most eloquent meditations on gender, race, and class in the context of the black experience in America. This body of work will remain a source of inspiration for generations to come,” said Salah M. Hassan, Director of The Africa Institute (GSU) and Distinguished Professor, Cornell University, USA.

The symposium shines a spotlight on Morrison’s artistic genius through screenings of two powerful films: *The Pieces I Am* (2019) and *The Foreigner’s Home* (2018). Following each screening, invited scholars and critics discuss Morrison’s artistic vision and its lasting impact.

The program also highlights The Africa Institute’s recent launch of the prestigious Senior Fellowship in honor of Toni Morrison. The fellowship is aimed at supporting established scholars and independent thinkers who have made significant contributions to

African and African Diaspora literature and cultural studies. The first recipient of this fellowship is Philathia Bolton, Associate Professor of English at The University of Akron, Ohio.

"My being selected as the first scholar to have her research supported by the Toni Morrison Senior Fellowship brings me great joy and feels highly significant," said Professor Bolton. "I will be a U.S. scholar from her home state of Ohio in a different cultural context writing, researching and speaking about her, this iconic person whose works resonated across the globe. I am humbled by this and feel most honored."

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

3:00 pm – 3:15 pm	Welcoming Remarks Hoor Al Qasimi – President, The Africa Institute, (GSU), and Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, U.A.E Salah M. Hassan – Director, The Africa Institute (GSU), Sharjah, U.A.E; Distinguished Professor, Cornell University, U.S.A
3:15 pm – 3:30 pm	Song Performance by Al-Multaqa Chamber Orchestra
3:30 pm – 3:40 pm	Introductory Remarks Ford Morrison – Architect, Plasma Physics Laboratory, Princeton University, New Jersey, U.S.A
3:40 pm – 4:40 pm	Film Screening The Foreigner’s Home Directed by Rian Brown and Geoff Pingree
4:40 pm – 5:40 pm	Panel Discussion Ford Morrison – Architect, Plasma Physics Laboratory, Princeton University, New Jersey, U.S.A Margo Crawford – Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A Moderator Meg Arenberg, Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, The Africa Institute (GSU), Sharjah, U.A.E

5:40 pm – 6:00 pm	Coffee Break
6:00 pm – 7:00 pm	Keynote Farah Jasmine Griffin – William B. Ransford Professor of English and Comparative Literature and African American Studies, Columbia University, U.S.A
7:00 pm – 8:00 pm	Panel Discussion Farah Jasmine Griffin – William B. Ransford Professor of English and Comparative Literature and African American Studies, Columbia University, U.S.A Manthia Diawara – University Professor of Comparative Literature and Cinema Studies, New York, U.S.A Moderator Salah M. Hassan, Director, The Africa Institute (GSU), Sharjah, U.A.E; Distinguished Professor, Cornell University, U.S.A

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29

11:00 am - 11:10 am	Introductory Remarks Philathia Bolton – Inaugural Toni Morrison Senior Fellow, The Africa Institute (GSU), Sharjah, U.A.E, Associate Professor of English, The University of Akron, U.S.A
11:10 am - 1:10 pm	Film Screening Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am Directed by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders
1:10 pm - 2:30 pm	Lunch
2:30 pm - 3:30 pm	Panel Discussion Riché Richardson – Professor of African American Literature, Cornell University Philathia Bolton – Inaugural Toni Morrison Senior Fellow, The Africa Institute (GSU), Sharjah, U.A.E, Associate Professor of English, The University of Akron, U.S.A Moderator Surafel Wondimu Abebe, Assistant Professor of Performance Studies and Theory, The Africa Institute (GSU), Sharjah, U.A.E
3:30 pm - 3:40 pm	Song Performance by Al-Multaqa Chamber Orchestra

BIOGRAPHIES

Hoor Al Qasimi

Hoor Al Qasimi has been spearheading the establishment of The Africa Institute into a major international institution, building upon the rich legacy of Afro-Arab cultural and scholarly interchange in Sharjah, including the landmark 1976 “Symposium on African and Arab Relations” that envisioned a future nexus for learning and collaboration between the two regions. Working in partnership with The Africa Institute’s Director Dr. Salah M. Hassan, she continues to shape its programming and future endeavors.

A practicing artist and curator, Al Qasimi is also President and founding Director of Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF) which was established in 2009 as a catalyst and advocate for the role of art in Sharjah, the UAE, regionally, and internationally. With a passion for supporting experimentation and innovation in the arts, Al Qasimi has continuously expanded the scope of the Foundation over its 10-year history to include major exhibitions that have toured internationally; artist and curator residencies in visual art, film, and music; commissions and production grants for emerging artists; and a wide range of educational programming for children and adults in Sharjah. As Biennial Director, Al Qasimi co-curated Sharjah Biennial 6 (2003) and Sharjah Biennial 15: *Thinking Historically in the Present* (2023). Under her leadership, the Sharjah Biennial has become an internationally recognized platform for contemporary artists, curators, and cultural producers. Her leadership in the field led to her election as President of the International Biennial Association (IBA) in 2017, an appointment that transferred IBA’s headquarters to Sharjah.

In addition to her role at The Africa Institute, Global Studies University (GSU) and Sharjah Art Foundation, Al Qasimi also serves as President and Director of the Sharjah Architecture Triennial.

Al Qasimi holds an MA in curating contemporary art from the Royal College of Art, London (2008). She earned a diploma in painting from the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2005), and received a BFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London (2002).

Salah M. Hassan

Salah M. Hassan is the Director of The Africa Institute, Global Studies University, Sharjah, UAE, and a Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences at Cornell University. He worked as the director of the Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM), and Professor of Art History and Visual Culture in the Africana Studies and Research Center, and the Department of History of Art and Visual Studies, Cornell University. Salah M. Hassan. Hassan is an art historian, art critic and curator, and editor and co-founder of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (Duke University Press). He currently serves as a member of the editorial advisory board of *Atlantica*, *Journal of Curatorial Studies* and *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. He authored, edited and co-edited several books including *Ahmed Morsi: A Dialogic Imagination* (2021); *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (2012); *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Reader* (2009), and *Diaspora, Memory, Place* (2008); *Unpacking Europe* (2001); *Authentic/Ex-Centric* (2001); and *Art and Islamic Literacy among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria* (1992). He also edited and introduced, *Ibrahim El-Salahi: Prison Notebook* (New York and Sharjah, MoMA and SAF Publications, 2018, and guest-edited a special issue of *SAQ: South Atlantic Quarterly*, titled African Modernism (2010). Hassan has contributed essays to journals, anthologies, and exhibition catalogues of contemporary art. He has curated several international exhibitions such as *Gavin Jantjes: To Be Free!*

A Retrospective 1970–2023, (Sharjah Art Foundation, 2023); *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist*, exhibited at The Tate Modern in London (July–October, 2013) after premiering at the Sharjah Art Museum (in March 2012) in Sharjah, UAE; *Authentic/Ex-Centric* (49th Venice Biennale, 2001), *Unpacking Europe* (Rotterdam, 2001–02), and *3x3: Three Artists/Three: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z* (Dak’Art, 2004). He also curated several exhibitions for the Sharjah Art Foundation including *The Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement in Sudan, 1945–2016* (2016–2017), and *When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists* (1938–1965) (2016) in collaboration with Hoor Al Qasimi. He served as the Madeleine Haas Russell Professor, Departments of African and Afro-American Studies and Fine Arts, Brandeis University (2016–2018). He is the recipient of several grants and fellowships, such as the J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship, Sharjah Art Foundation, Ford, Rockefeller, Andy Warhol and Prince Claus Fund foundations. Hassan has been honored as the 2021 Distinguished Professor by the College Art Association (CAA).

Surafel Wondimu Abebe

Surafel Wondimu Abebe studied Literature (BA) and Cultural Studies (MA) at Addis Ababa University (AAU) in 2010. He served as a lecturer, researcher, and Deputy Dean of Humanities at AAU. After completing his Ph.D. in Performance Historiography at the University of Minnesota in 2018, he continued working with AAU as an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Center for African Studies, and College of Performing and Visual Arts. Additionally, he is a board member of AGITATE, a multi-genre online journal at the University of Minnesota.

Abebe uses academia, performance, and media as sites of cultural politics from which to interrogate representational practices. Abebe engages with sedimented embodied historiographies in order to understand what it means to be human in the here and now. Currently, he is working on his book project, which studies the ways in which Ethiopian female performers manoeuvre and reinvent spaces of empires, revolutions, and neoliberal globalization. Currently, he holds the position of Assistant Professor of Performance Studies and Theory, The Africa Institute, Global Studies University (GSU), Sharjah.

Meg Arenberg

Meg Arenberg (Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, Indiana University Bloomington) is a scholar of 20th and 21st-century African literatures and a literary translator from Kiswahili to English. Her primary research interests focus on the intertextual relationships between Europhone and Afrophone African texts, Kiswahili poetics, and digital media. Her work has been published in *PMLA*, *Research in African Literatures*, *East African Literary and Cultural Studies*, *Postcolonial Text*, and *Words Without Borders* and has won recognition from the American Comparative Literature Association and the American Literary Translators Association. She has held postdoctoral research positions in the Department of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Languages and Literatures (AMESALL) at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, and the African Humanities Colloquium at Princeton University. Currently, Arenberg is an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature in the Department of Humanities and the African Languages and Translation Program at The Africa Institute, Global Studies University (GSU), Sharjah.

Philathia Bolton

Philathia Bolton an Associate Professor of English at The University of Akron in Ohio, is inaugurating the Toni Morrison Senior Fellowship at The Africa Institute, Global Studies University (GSU) as its first recipient. She also serves on advisory committees for the Pan-African Studies Program and the Women's Studies Program, and is the English Department's honors advisor. Her research interests include 20th-century African-American literature, the U.S. civil rights movement, and critical race studies.

Bolton has lectured on subjects in these fields, locally, and has presented her research at national and international conferences, namely at the American Studies Association and the College Language Association conferences. In 2019, she participated in a thematic residence program for writers at Faberlull in Spain. There she collaborated with scholars from various parts of the world on an edited collection of essays that examines the continued significance of gender disparities. Bolton's essay looks at the consequential, historical significance of colorism in the U.S. from a literary perspective, taking as primary texts of consideration Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man* (1912). Her forthcoming chapter on a volume devoted to Zora Neale Hurston makes an argument for how authors such as James Baldwin and Toni Morrison can be read in a Hurstonian tradition when considering both their vernacular, and cultural dispositions for writing.

While at The Africa Institute, Bolton will continue her research and writing on Morrison by revisiting her work on the novelist that connects the metaphoric significance of Macon Dead from *Song of Solomon* to certain novels by Black women writers of the 1970s and 1980s.

Bolton is a resident of Toni Morrison's home state. She has involved herself in the community as an educator beyond her traditional classroom and as a supporter of the Arts, namely, teaching for the Upward Bound Program, presenting at book clubs for retirees, and recently serving as a board member of city and state-wide Arts organizations. Bolton is an alumna of Spelman College, where she graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in English and with membership in Phi Beta Kappa. Her master's and Doctor of Philosophy degrees are in American Studies from Purdue University-West Lafayette.

Margo Crawford

Margo Crawford is the Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Professor of English at University of Pennsylvania. She is the Chair of the department. Crossing boundaries between African American literature, visual art, and cultural movements, her scholarship opens up new ways of understanding black radical imaginations. Crawford is the author of *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First-Century Aesthetics*. She is also the author of *Dilution Anxiety and the Black Phallus*. She is the co-editor of *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement* as well as *Global Black Consciousness*. Her latest book, *What is African American Literature?* was published in 2021. Her essays appear in a wide range of books and journals, including *American Literary History*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Modern Drama*, *American Literature*, *The Psychic Hold of Slavery*, *The Trouble with Post-Blackness*, *The Modernist Party*, *Publishing Blackness: Textual Constructions of Race Since 1850*, *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry Post-1945*, *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in Black Freedom Struggle*, *Callaloo*, *Black Renaissance Noire*, and *Black Camera*. She is on the editorial

board of the *Society for Textual Scholarship*, *The James Baldwin Review*, and the *Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature*.

Manthia Diawara

Manthia Diawara is a renowned filmmaker, cultural theorist, and art historian who has significantly contributed to Black and African diasporic cultural studies. His work explores postcolonialism, decolonisation, migration, and globalisation. He has produced essay films and documentaries that highlight the voices of influential Black theorists and artists and expose the impact of global modernity on African traditions and ecosystems. As the founder and editor of the journal *Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noire*, Diawara emphasizes the diversity of Black genius, resisting any singular definition of Blackness.

Diawara has created several films, published numerous articles and books, and served on the editorial boards of various publications. He has also been an advisor for the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin and a jury member for several film festival awards. He holds a Master of Arts degree from American University and a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Indiana University. Born in Bamako, Mali, Diawara now resides and works in New York.

Farah Jasmine Griffin

Farah Jasmine Griffin is the William B. Ransford Professor of English and Comparative Literature and African American Studies at Columbia University, where she also served as the inaugural Chair of the African American and African Diaspora Studies. Professor Griffin received her B.A. in History & Literature from Harvard and her Ph.D. in American Studies from Yale. She is the author or editor of eight books including *Who Set You Flowin?: The African American Migration Narrative* (Oxford, 1995), *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* (Free Press, 2001), and *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II* (Basic Books, 2013).

Griffin collaborated with composer, pianist, Geri Allen and director, actor S. Epatha Merkerson on two theatrical projects, for which she wrote the book. The first is "Geri Allen and Friends Celebrate the Great Jazz Women of the Apollo," with Lizz Wright, Dianne Reeves, Teri Lyne Carrington and others, premiered on the main stage of the Apollo Theater in May of 2013. The second, "A Conversation with Mary Lou" featuring vocalist Carmen Lundy, premiered at Harlem Stage in March 2014 and was performed at The John F. Kennedy Center in May of 2016. Her most recent book, *Read Until You Understand: The Profound Wisdom of Black Life and Literature* was published by W.W. Norton in September 2021. Griffin is a 2021-22 Guggenheim Fellow and Mellon Foundation Fellow in Residence.

Ford Morrison

Ford Morrison is a visionary architect who works at Princeton University's Plasma Physics Laboratory. His remarkable design for scientific facilities, experiments, and infrastructure has the potential to transform our understanding of matter and contribute to a sustainable future.

Apart from architecture, Morrison has a keen interest in filmmaking. He attended the Cannes Film Festival and filmed at the Louvre. He produced an insightful movie titled "*The Foreigner's Home*." Currently, he is working on several inspiring film and stage

projects that are based on the influential work of his mother, Toni Morrison. As Literary Executor of the Morrison Estate, he directed the publication of *Recitatif*, A Toni Morrison Treasury, and a forthcoming critical edition of Morrisons lectures on the African presence in American literature.

Riché Richardson

Riché Richardson was born and raised in Montgomery, Alabama and is a professor of African American literature in the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University. She graduated from Spelman College with a major in English and minors in philosophy and women's studies and received her doctorate in American Literature from the English Department at Duke University. She taught at the University of California, Davis from 1998-2008. Her Op-Eds have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Public Books* and *Huff Post* and interviews in news media such as NBC's *The Today Show* and *Nightly News*, *CNN*, and Al Jazeera's *Newshour*. In 2021, Richardson was selected as #8 on *Dismantle* magazine's list of "8 Thinkers Who Influenced (How We Understand) Black History." She has produced over 40 essays, and her books include *Black Masculinity* and the *U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta and Emancipation's Daughters: Reimagining Black Femininity* and the *National Body*, the 2022 recipient of the C. Hugh Holman Book Award from the Society for the Study of Southern Literature. She edits the New Southern Studies Series at the University of Georgia Press. She is also a visual artist whose art quilts have been highlighted in national and international exhibitions, films, journals and books.

Al-Multaqa Chamber Orchestra

The Al-Multaqa Chamber Orchestra is a music, arts, and cultural platform dedicated to preserving, reviving, and nurturing Afro-Arab and African cultural heritage. Its mission is to promote dialogue and empathy on a global scale. Based in the Africa Hall and in partnership with The Africa Institute (GSU), Al Multaqa fosters a dynamic environment that celebrates Afro-Arab cultural heritage.

Sharjah Art Foundation

Located in Sharjah's historic Art and Heritage Areas, Sharjah Art Foundation activities and events take place throughout the year and include exhibitions featuring the work of Arab and international artists, performances, music, film screenings and artist talks as well as extensive art education programmes for children, adults and families. The Foundation hosts the annual March Meeting and every two years presents the Sharjah Biennial.

Sharjah Architecture Triennial

Sharjah Architecture Triennial is a platform for architecture and urbanism in a region that extends from West Asia to South Asia and the African continent. Physically anchored in Sharjah and the United Arab Emirates, SAT aims to engage diverse audiences and stakeholders in a collective conversation on architecture at the neighborhood, city, and regional levels. Institutional research and programming support ongoing critical reflection through exhibitions, publications, and public programs in tandem with international editions. SAT is committed to pursuing a multi-disciplinary approach that fosters an understanding of the broader role of architecture, including its relation to social and environmental issues.

Sharjah Museums Authority

As directed by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, the Sharjah Museums Authority – SMA was established in 2006 as an autonomous government authority. SMA links and oversees 16 museums across Sharjah that cover widely varied fields, including Islamic art and culture, archaeology, heritage, science, marine life, as well as the history of Sharjah and the region. Our vision is to be a cultural beacon that enhances Sharjah's identity locally and internationally and contributes to nurturing a community aware of museums' importance as a cultural, educational, and enjoyable destination. Our mission is to deliver the highest museum standards to preserve collections & enhance an appreciation of culture and learning through our exhibitions, and educational and community programs. Studies.

FILM SCREENINGS



The Foreigner's Home

(2018 | 57 minutes)

Directed by Rian Brown and Geoff Pingree, and produced by Ford Morrison, Toni Morrison's son, "The Foreigner's Home" delves into her 2006 Louvre exhibition, using exclusive footage and archival materials to illuminate her profound insights on race, identity, and the transformative power of art.



Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am

(2019 | 120 minutes)

Directed by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, "Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am" offers an intimate exploration of Morrison's life and work, featuring interviews with renowned figures like Hilton Als, Angela Davis, and Oprah Winfrey.

THE AFRICA INSTITUTE

About the Africa Institute, Global Studies University (GSU), Sharjah, UAE

The Africa Institute is a globally oriented institution of research, documentation, study and teaching of Africa and its diaspora, in the humanities and social sciences. It is conceived as a research-based think-tank, and a postgraduate studies institution (offering both master's and Ph.D. programs, and diplomas in African Languages and Translation), which aims to train a new generation of critical thinkers in African and African diaspora studies. The Africa Institute is proposed to be a model center of excellence in research, teaching, and documentation that is hoped to match in quality and breadth of coverage, existing peer of African and African Diaspora Studies in Africa, Europe, and North America. The Africa Institute is now integrated into the newly established Global Studies University (GSU) to form one of the networks of semi-independent institutes and colleges, each concentrating on different regions of the world. These globally oriented institutions aim to focus on postgraduate studies, research, and documentation of histories, cultures, and peoples who constitute different regions of the world. The next entity to be officially established in 2024 is The Asia Institute, College of Asian Studies. Preparations are also underway to launch additional colleges and institutes that will focus on the regions of Oceania, Europe, and the Americas in the next few years. The Africa Institute is led by President Hoor Al Qasimi and Director Dr Salah M. Hassan.

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