

SMART NEWS

Toni Morrison's Rarely Seen Papers Will Go on View at Princeton

The university is planning a months-long series of exhibitions, programs and performances

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Toni Morrison, the renowned author of powerful novels about the Black experience, taught at Princeton between 1989 and 2006. Bettmann / Contributor

One of Princeton University's most famous professors will be the subject of a campus-wide program of events and exhibitions next month: Toni

Morrison, Nobel Laureate and author of powerful novels about the Black experience. The writer, who died in 2019, taught at Princeton from 1989 to 2006.

Morrison's debut novel was *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and *Song of Solomon* (1977) cemented her fame soon after. Her most famous novel, *Beloved* (1987), is based on the true story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who killed her young daughter to spare her from slavery.

In addition to a rich collection of published works, Morrison also left behind 400 boxes of materials that have never before been publicly displayed: outlines and drafts of her work, speeches, correspondences, photographs and more.

Ninety objects from that archive will be on display in "Toni Morrison: Sites of Memory," which opens on February 22 at Princeton's Ellen and Leonard Milberg Gallery. The exhibition was curated by Autumn Womack, a scholar of African American studies and English, along with a team of graduate students.

"This project is bringing artists and scholars to Princeton who may not normally have come here and is pushing the thinking about what the archive can inspire," Womack tells the *New York Times*' Hilarie M. Sheets.

Per the *Times*, items on display include paper schedules and day planners from Morrison's time at Random House, where she was the company's first Black woman editor. In the margins of the documents, Morrison had also been outlining *Song of Solomon*.

Another exhibition juxtaposes Morrison's writing with the multimedia art of Alison Saar, who creates sculptures and prints that explore the African diaspora and the experience of being a Black woman in America. "Cycle of Creativity: Alison Saar and the Toni Morrison Papers" opens on February 25 at the Princeton University Art Museum.

Morrison and Saar share a "dedication to this idea that they are actively seeking out their ancestors in order to create a platform for their

descendants,” Mitra Abbaspour, the museum’s curator of modern and contemporary art, tells the *Times*.

Saar will elaborate on her art and its relationship to Morrison’s writing in a symposium that will take place on March 23–25, per the *Times*. The artist will appear alongside some 30 thinkers to discuss Morrison’s archive.

Attendees will also have the chance to see a variety of works inspired by the archive: Performance artists Daniel Alexander Jones and Mame Diarra (Samantha) Speis will appear on March 24–25. Jazz singer Cécile McLorin Salvant will present her original composition on April 12.

Throughout the program, Princeton will also host events for children, a spring lecture series and undergraduate classes on the acclaimed writer.

“In imagining this initiative—from exhibition to symposium to partner projects—I wanted to show the importance of the archive to understanding Morrison’s work and practice,” says Womack in a statement. “But I also wanted to show how this archive in particular is a site that opens up new lines of inquiry and inspires new kinds of collaboration.”

“Toni Morrison: Sites of Memory” will be on view at Princeton’s Ellen and Leonard Milberg Gallery from February 22 to June 4.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/princeton-university-celebrates-toni-morrison-life-and-work-180981390/>