Souls Grown Diaspora is an exhibition that explores a generation of leading contemporary visionary African-American artists from the wider United States, and situates their work into an art-historical lineage shaped by the Great Migration. The exhibition traces the migration: the movement spanning 1916 to 1970 in which six million African-Americans left the rural South for urban centers such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Oakland. Souls Grown Diaspora follows a new wave of artists, mostly self-taught, whose works address a range of revelatory social and political subjects.

The show’s title takes its inspiration from Atlanta’s Souls Grown Deep Foundation, which has worked for decades to change the canon of art history to include a group of pioneering African-American artists from the South—among them Thornton Dial, Lonnie Holley, Mary T. Smith, Hawkins Bolden, and the women’s collective known as the Gee’s Bend Quilters (Arlonzia Pettway, Annie Mae Young and Mary Lee Bendolph)—as essential to the understanding of developments in the history of American art. The name “Souls Grown Deep” originates from the last line of Langston Hughes’ 1921 poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”: “My soul has grown deep like the rivers.” A collection of research material will be included in vitrines and a series of performances and talks will accompany the exhibition during its run.

Souls Grown Diaspora was selected through apexart’s Open Call. For more information and images visit apexart.org/gordon.php or contact elizabeth.larison@apexart.org.

Sam Gordon is a New York-based artist and curator. In 2017 he and Jacob Robichaux founded Gordon Robichaux, a gallery and curatorial agency in New York City’s Union Square. Recent curatorial projects include The Frieze Library: Volume One, Frieze, New York, 2019, and Contemporary Drag, NADA, New York 2017. Gordon’s own painting, drawing, photography, and video work was regularly presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions at Feature Inc. from 1997 - 2013. His work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY), the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, MN), and the Tang Museum (Saratoga Springs, NY). In addition to his curatorial and artistic practice, Gordon has taught at the California Institute for the Arts, Rhode Island School of Design, and The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

apexart’s program supporters past and present include The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Buhl Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Greenwich Collection Ltd., William Talbott Hillman Foundation/Affirmation Arts Fund, Spencer Brownstone, the Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, the Fifth Floor Foundation, the Consulate General of Israel in New York, the Kenneth A. Cowin Foundation, the Trust for Mutual Understanding, the Puffin Foundation, and public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.