

Guide

Five DC Exhibitions You Can See Despite the Government Shutdown

Even as major museums are shuttered, there's plenty of great art to see in the nation's capital right now, from Arab Pop Art to the work of McArthur Binion.



Emma Cieslik October 16, 2025



Water With Water, "Save me from What?" (2019), digital prints of silk bomber jacket with neon embroidery, part of the exhibition *Arab Pop Art: Between East and West* at the Middle East Institute (image courtesy the artists)

Amid a federal shutdown, an oppressive National Guard presence, and an even more threatening ICE presence, Washington, DC is wounded but not defeated. Along with major protests, the city is fighting back with [underground networks](#) documenting roadblocks and raids as well as the destruction of murals and other public art — part of the Trump administration's efforts to "clean up" DC.

In defiance, stickers, stencils, and signs have popped up across the city — a form of **local guerrilla art** that proliferates every time it's scrubbed, peeled, and sanded off of the walls. Despite, or because of, this violence and turmoil, DC's art scene is exploding with work highlighting the communities targeted by police brutality and border patrol, and the cultural impact of artists from these communities. In various ways, the exhibitions below demonstrate the revolutionary and liberatory potential of art.

Ange Martial Méné: From Ancestral Traces to Contemporary Visions

American University Museum, 4400 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC

Through December 7



Installation view of *Ange Martial Méné: From Ancestral Traces to Contemporary Visions* at American University Museum (photo Emma Cieslik/Hyperallergic)

For his first United States museum exhibition, Ivorian artist Ange Martial Méné presents acrylic works that visualize the spiritual. Inspired by sources ranging from ancient cave paintings to Surrealism, Méné invites viewers on a psychedelic journey marked by his intuitive process and symbolic imagery. My favorite work on display, “Genesis,” features green and blue abstract forms mirroring the marine world, like surreal cephalopods and manta rays, alongside an angular

human figure. As the [exhibition catalog explains](#), “the work evokes a sense of origins, conjuring the essential role of nature in the birth of the universe.”

Women Artists of the DMV: A Survey Exhibition

[American University Museum](#), 4400 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC

Through December 7



Sarah Bentley, "Building Walls" (2018) (photo Emma Cieslik/*Hyperallergic*)

American University Museum is also serving as the central location of an expansive survey of women artists working in the Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) area. The full exhibition features over 400 artists displayed in [16 locations throughout the region](#) — with 60 artworks on display at the American University Museum. While the didactics claim that the show represents the diverse and creative “superpowers” of the creators on view, I find it just scratches the surface of what artists such as [Leigh Mosley](#) — a lesbian photographer critical in documenting early LGBTQ+ activism in Washington, DC — have produced.

Yet the show, curated by Lorecio Lennox Campello, also offers a rich snippet of what women artists have brought to the nation's artistic stage through the brilliant work of Dora Patin, Sarah Bentley, Joey P. Mánlapaz, and many others. In addition, the exhibition catalog is [free](#) to download.

Notes on Form (Intimate Structures)

[Maria and Alberto de la Cruz Gallery](#), Georgetown University, 3535 Prospect St NW, Washington, DC

Through December 7



Installation view of *Notes on Form (Intimate Structures)* at the Maria and Alberto de la Cruz Gallery, Georgetown University (photo by Vivian Marie Doering)

McArthur Binion's *Notes on Form (Intimate Structures)* is an unexpected revelation for those who find abstract art impersonal. The artist refers to his works as self-portraits, but these grid-style paintings do not resemble human faces. Rather, Binion layers oil stick and ink over personal documents, including photographs, address book pages, and birth certificates, to imbue the pigment itself with intimate meaning. The gallery situates Binion's work among the impressive history of abstraction by Black artists in this city, from Alma Thomas to Sam Gilliam.

Also on view at Georgetown University through December 7 is *Lorraine O'Grady: Miscegenerated Family Album* at the Lucille M. & Richard F. X. Spagnuolo Art Gallery.

Enduring Traditions: Celebrating the World of Textiles

[The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum](#), 701 21st Street NW, Washington, DC
Through December 20



Installation view of *Enduring Traditions: Celebrating the World of Textiles* at the George Washington University Museum and the Textile Museum (photo Emma Cieslik/Hyperallergic)

Washington, DC has a rich subculture of textile revolutionaries — the No Kings protests were full of both paper and textile signage calling for representation and liberation. Fittingly, the Textile Museum's fall exhibition, celebrating its centennial, examines the myriad roles that textiles play in religious, political, and social spheres. From prayer carpets to beautifully embroidered royal robes, textiles are essential parts of our lives. This exhibition digs into the museum's collections to display some of its most colorful, complex, and culturally significant wearables.

Arab Pop Art: Between East and West

MEI Art Gallery, Middle East Institute, 1763 N Street NW, Washington, DC

Through January 23, 2026



Yasmine Nasser Diaz, "3eib (shame)" (2019), neon and archival inkjet print on wood mount (courtesy the artist and OCHI)

Curated by Laila Abdul-Hadi Jadallah and Lyne Sneige, this exhibition includes the work of 14 artists living in the wider Arab world and its diaspora. A visual deep dive into the ways in which this art has blended traditional motifs and themes with the aesthetics of American Pop Art, the show looks at how artists from the 1960s through today have used satire as a form of political and cultural protest. Featuring artists such as Rasha Eleyan, Hassan Hajjaj, and Helen Zughaib, it challenges simplistic Western stereotypes of Arab people and cultures while celebrating the complexity and multiplicity of Arab identity.