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The MAX Announces New Exhibition, *John Jennings: Build Your World*
Explore the visionary storytelling of the Mississippi native and graphic novelist

MERIDIAN, Miss. (May 20, 2026) – The Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience (The MAX) is excited to announce *John Jennings: Build Your World*, a new immersive exhibition opening Saturday, June 20, 2026, that explores the extraordinary visual worldbuilding of Mississippi native John Jennings—*NY Times* bestselling graphic novelist, Harvard Fellow, and Hugo-and Eisner Award-winning artist. With work featured at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and appearances on *CBS Sunday Morning* and in multiple Marvel documentaries, Jennings is a rock star in the world of comics.

John Jennings: Build Your World uses sketches, storyboards, and finished art to demonstrate how creators of color use the medium of comics to reclaim history and design the future. The exhibition features four creative projects that explore how Jennings imagines richly layered settings that center Black characters and Mississippi culture:

- *Silver Surfer: Ghost Light* (Marvel Comics): Jennings reinvents a forgotten Black character as a cosmic guardian using African American culture. See a comprehensive overview of the complex process of working with a behemoth like Marvel and their teams of creatives.

- *Blue Hand Mojo: Hard Times Road* (Rosarium): A solo project conceived, written, drawn, and colored by Jennings, *Blue Hand Mojo* blends history with folklore and magic in a gritty graphic novel set in 1930s Chicago. Examine how Jennings richly layers this world using Mississippi culture through original watercolors.

- *Kenny Dreadful and the Hainted Hoodie*: A brand-new project being created by Jennings, *Kenny Dreadful* is an original Southern Gothic tale that blends horror, folklore, and coming-of-age themes. Early concept art, storyboards, and animated sketches show how Jennings incorporates influences from Mississippi folklore, African spirituality, and horror traditions into the tale of a magical hoodie haunted by ancestral spirits.

- *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* (Abrams ComicArts): Two-dozen original drawings show how Jennings built on Octavia Butler's seminal work of Black science fiction to create new worlds, with different sketch styles and color schemes to differentiate California in the 1970s and antebellum Maryland in the early 1800s.

Experiential elements will allow guests to dive deep into each of these worlds through soundscapes and interactive technology. "This exhibition is more than an art show—it's an experience—a living laboratory for building a better future," says The MAX's President + CEO, Penny Kemp.

For the first time, the public will have the opportunity to view more than two dozen original drawings from the 2017 graphic novel adaptation of *Kindred*, which Jennings brought to life for a new generation. The curator, Benjamen Douglas said, "I'm especially excited to showcase these never-before-seen drawings from *Kindred* alongside the completed book, to demonstrate the process Jennings used to imagine and create new, liberated worlds."

The perfect outing for group tours and field trips, with bookings now available through spring 2027, *John Jennings: Build Your World* provides a unique multidisciplinary curriculum for students, bridging literature, visual arts, and history. The exhibition offers a tangible way to study the creative process—from initial sketches to the finished page—and provides a gateway into the profound social and cultural questions addressed through science fiction.

A special preview will be held at 6 pm on Friday, June 19, in conjunction with the City of Meridian's Juneteenth Heritage Festival's Black Business Expo. The exhibition officially opens Saturday, June 20 and runs through March 27, 2027. In addition to an artist talk and guided tour with Jennings, opening day will feature an African drum circle, modern KRUMP street dancers, and art-making activities, all included with admission and free for members of The MAX.

A series of related programs will accompany the exhibition, including:

- Saturday, June 13, 2026: Join us every second Saturday of the month for Comic Commons. Bring your projects or ideas to our monthly, open-door gathering for comic lovers of all kinds—or come to read, connect, and create in a welcoming, shared studio space.

- Friday, June 19, 2026: Free preview of *John Jennings: Build Your World* exhibition – Get a sneak peek of the exhibition at the City of Meridian's Juneteenth Heritage Festival's Black Business Expo held annually at The MAX from 6 pm to 9 pm.

- Saturday, June 20, 2026: *John Jennings: Build Your World* Opening Day – Experience the new exhibition as a living space that sparks reflection, joy, and imagination through visual art, music, movement, conversation, and hands-on activities.

- Saturday, August 8, 2026: Cyanotype Zine Workshop – Create a handmade zine in this visual storytelling workshop with artist H.I. Green. Using cyanotype printing, collage, found objects, and watercolor, participants will craft imaginative narratives inspired by Mississippi folklore, symbols, and personal experiences.

- Saturday, September 26, 2026: Mississippi Book Festival – Meet John Jennings at Mississippi's annual literary lawn party, where readers and authors unite in an exciting celebration of books.

- Saturday, October 17, 2026: The Jackson Comics Experience – Experience Jackson Comics at The MAX, featuring an exhibition of student artwork, a panel discussion with Rodney Mooney, and hands-on workshops led by Jackson Comics artists.

- Saturday, March 20, 2027: Make-A-Monster Workshop with Jordan West – Inspired by the misunderstood spirits in *Kenny Dreadful and the Hainted Hoodie*, this workshop invites participants to explore the unique wounds and hidden strengths of their own monsters before bringing those supernatural attributes to life with custom puppet creation.

For more information or to schedule a tour, please visit msarts.org/johnjennings.

About the Artist:

A native of Flora, Mississippi, John Jennings is a graphic novelist, media studies professor, Harvard Fellow, and *New York Times* bestselling author who draws on Black Southern memory to create new worlds. Coauthor of the bestselling graphic novel *Kindred*, Jennings has also adapted Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, which recently received an NAACP Image Award. He is the creator of Marvel's *Silver Surfer: Ghost Light*, co-founder of the Schomburg Center's Black Comic Book Festival, and co-editor of the Eisner Award-winning collection *The Blacker the Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art*. Jennings currently has work on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room."

About The MAX:

The Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience (The MAX) is an arts and cultural center in the heart of downtown Meridian that celebrates Mississippi's creative legacy through interactive exhibits, workshops, and live performances. The multipurpose facility contains a two-story Hall of Fame celebrating the state's groundbreaking artists like Walter Anderson, William Faulkner, Morgan Freeman, Jim Henson, B.B. King, Elvis Presley, and Leontyne Price to name a few, along with over 20,000 square feet of interactive exhibits, art studios, a recording studio, and performance spaces. Every visit to The MAX is a unique experience that leaves visitors feeling inspired and in awe of Mississippi's global impact on music, literature, art, and entertainment. Visit www.msarts.org to learn more.

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