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Acclaimed Graphic Novelist John Jennings to Lead Weeklong Residency at The MAX with Free Public Events

MERIDIAN, Miss. (September 16, 2026) – Following the June opening of the immersive new experience *John Jennings: Build Your World*, the Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience (The MAX) will host a weeklong residency by Mississippi native and acclaimed graphic novelist John Jennings, giving the public multiple opportunities to meet the artist and explore his work.

Thousands of visitors have already experienced Jennings' exhibition, which features original artwork, sketches and never-before-seen works. Now based in California, he is returning home to Mississippi, whose history and culture have helped shape creative projects like *Blue Hand Mojo: Hard Times Road* (Rosarium Publishing) and the forthcoming *Kenny Dreadful and the Hainted Hoodie*.

On Saturday, September 26, the Mississippi Book Festival will feature Jennings on the grounds of the Mississippi State Capitol in Jackson. The day's events begin at 10 a.m. with a meet-and-greet at The MAX's tent. At noon, the festival will present a panel entitled *Mississippi in the Graphic Novel*, featuring Jennings alongside renowned author and scholar Christopher Benson, illustrator Eric Battle and moderator John Spann. The festival marks the global debut of *Framing Emmett Till: Exposing Dark Fear*, a new graphic novel written by Benson, illustrated by Battle and edited by Jennings for Megascope, his imprint with Abrams ComicArts. Jennings, Benson and Battle will sign copies of the book in the Signing Tent at 1:45 p.m. Throughout the day, festivalgoers can also experience a mobile exhibition showcasing Jennings's work, presented through a partnership between The MAX and Toot, Teach & Roll.

Next, Jennings will participate in a free screening of the documentary *Marvel's Behind the Mask* on Thursday, October 1, at 6:30 p.m. at The MAX. Jennings, the creator of Marvel's *Silver Surfer: Ghost Light* series and co-author of the upcoming Marvel compendium *My Super Hero is Black*, is featured in the hour-long documentary, which explores the evolution of heroes and representation through the lens of Marvel history. Following the screening, Jennings will take part in a Q&A moderated by Ryan Parker of Film Mississippi and the Mississippi Film Society, which are partnering with The MAX for this free event.

On Saturday, October 3, Jennings will lead a guided tour of the *Build Your World* exhibition at 10 a.m., providing insights into his work. The tour coincides with Earth's Bounty farmers market, hosted at The MAX in partnership with the City of Meridian from 8 a.m. to noon, and Free First Saturdays at The MAX, providing free admission all day on the first Saturday of every month.

To cap off his fall residency, Jennings will be a special guest at *BET Raised Us: From Mississippi to the World*, also at The MAX on Saturday, October 3. Tickets are on sale now at msarts.org for the celebration of Mississippi's enduring influence on entertainment, held in recognition of Robert L. Johnson, a Mississippi native and the founder of Black Entertainment Television. Hosted by award-winning comedians Rita Brent and Merc B. Williams, the event will begin at 5 p.m. with an add-on VIP dinner experience featuring a menu prepared by Chef Enrika Williams of Fauna Foodworks. At 6:30 p.m., a red carpet will open to all ticket holders, followed by a performance by Ariel J. at 8 p.m. and a set by DJ Sirato at 9 p.m. Attendees will have opportunities to meet Jennings and explore his exhibition throughout the evening.

In addition to public programs, Jennings' residency features an intensive schedule of outreach events across the state, beginning with an intimate conversation at the Mississippi Museum of Art. Jennings will engage students and educators through school and campus visits, including: Jim Hill High School and Peeples Middle School (September 25); Northeast Lauderdale Book Club, West Lauderdale Elementary and Northeast High School (September 28); East Central Community College (September 29); a dedicated John Jennings Day at Jackson State University (September 30); the Meridian High School Arts Academy and Ross Collins Career and Technical Center (October 1); and Meridian Community College with Lamar School, The 3-D School and other area schools in attendance (October 2).

Group tours and field trips for *John Jennings: Build Your World* are available through spring 2027. The exhibition provides a unique multidisciplinary curriculum for students, bridging literature, visual arts and history while providing a tangible way to explore the creative process. Schools across Mississippi Power's service area can visit The MAX with their students at no cost during the 2026–27 school year thanks to the Mississippi

Power Foundation, while schools traveling from outside Lauderdale County can inquire about travel reimbursement thanks to Yates Construction.

For more information or to schedule a tour, visit msarts.org/johnjennings. To see all upcoming events at The MAX, visit msarts.org/events.

About John Jennings:

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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