

MENSBOOK

LIFE IN ATLANTA



State of the Arts

Painter, performance artist and scholar Fahamu Pecou is taking Atlanta's art world by storm with an eye-opening exhibition at the High Museum this spring shown in conjunction with the works of celebrated Afro-Cuban surrealist Wifredo Lam.

| By Phebe Wahl |
| Portrait by Alex Martinec |

Brooklyn-born artist Fahamu Pecou came to Atlanta in 1993 to attend the Atlanta College of Art and has called it home ever since. Currently a Ph.D. candidate at Emory University, the avid academic is having a banner year with blockbuster exhibitions all over town. After just closing a solo show at MOCA GA in February, Pecou will join Brooklyn-based artist José Parlá to collaborate for *Imagining New Worlds* at the High Museum of Art. On view Feb. 14 to May 24, the show is expected to draw 70,000 visitors to see the work of Latin American surrealist Wifredo Lam. Pecou and Parlá will offer their contemporary perspectives on Lam's life and career.

"I selected José Parlá and Fahamu Pecou purposefully for different reasons," notes Michael Rooks, Wiseland family curator of modern and contemporary art. "Parlá is very much a painter, like Lam, in touch with imagistic traditions from magical realism to abstract expressionism. Fahamu, on the other hand, engages with the history of negritude, a movement central to Lam's work, as well as the rich history of the Johnson Publishing Company, which produced

Ebony, *Jet*, *Negro Digest* and other magazines that showcased a black middle class during the postwar period," Rooks explains. "His paintings are also informed by his performance art—Fahamu painting Fahamu performing. This doubling effect combines contemporary hip-hop culture—its varied and fraught internal and external performative pressures—with historical symbols of black identity."

"It has been a lot of fun and also a challenge," remarks Pecou, who will show all new works for the exhibition in a space adjacent to Lam's work. "I jumped right from putting the work up on the wall at MOCA GA to starting on a new body of work," he reveals of his prolific push leading up to the exhibition. Pecou spent the majority of his childhood in South Carolina, far from the hallowed halls of cultural institutions like the High Museum. "The first museum that I ever walked into was the High Museum," he reflects. "I still remember being a student at the ACA and saying one day I want to have my work in there. And here I am. It is an emotional moment."