

Henderson, Teri. "Martha Jackson Jarvis," *Artforum*, 5 October 2023.

# ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS BALTIMORE

## Martha Jackson Jarvis

Baltimore Museum of Art  
10 Art Museum Drive  
May 7, 2023 - March 24, 2024

By Teri Henderson ☺



Martha Jackson Jarvis, *Night Crawlers Meets Day Break I*, 2020, oil, acrylic, watercolor, black walnut ink, and canvas on paper, 5' x 10' 6".  
From the series "Adaptation: Luke Valentine's Sonic Journey," 2020–22.

"What the Trees Have Seen" is Martha Jackson Jarvis's first solo museum exhibition since 1996. Her expressive mixed-media paintings flood the galleries with vibrant sweeps of color, which are accompanied by deep solid earth tones and generous swaths of black-walnut ink—the compositions practically dance across the galleries' walls.

The show pays homage to her great-great-great-great-grandfather Luke Valentine and his stunning odysseys. Valentine was a free Black militiaman during the American Revolution who traveled on foot multiple times to South Carolina from Virginia for battle. Following a transcript of Valentine's testimony to the US Congress that he gave to receive his veteran's pension, the artist physically traced and recorded her relative's tracks for nearly a year. Jackson Jarvis clearly embodied her ancestor's sense of spirit and faith, which resonates palpably throughout the entirety of this presentation.

The exhibition centers on the series "Adaptation: Luke Valentine's Sonic Journey," 2020–22, comprising thirteen abstract, large-scale mixed-media paintings, including *Night Crawlers Meets Day Break I*, 2020, which features a murky mud-brown background interrupted by explosive passages of red, yellow, and green. As its title suggests, the work evokes the

nocturnal elements of Valentine's journeys and is surreal in its arresting stillness. The artist's brushwork calls to mind the trajectories of shooting stars traversing the night sky. Here and elsewhere, Jackson Jarvis references the celestial bodies that illuminated Valentine's travels.

The artist has imbued the exhibition with aspects that expand the sensory experience of the show, such as Herman Burney's sound composition *A Sonic Journey, 2023*, which seems to rhythmically mirror Valentine's careful peregrinations during the war. A collection of poetry by poet Carol Bean also was created to accompany the exhibition. Moreover, the tangibility of Jackson Jarvis's studio process is literalized through a small piece of 300-pound paper on display—the material she used for all the work here. Viewers are invited to touch the paint-spattered scrap; by doing so, one is physically connected with the artist's past and the efforts she made to manifest it for our delectation in the present.