

MoMA EXHIBITION OF RECENT ACQUISITIONS BY ARTISTS WORKING ACROSS A RANGE OF MEDIUMS PROVIDES CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON CURRENT GLOBAL EVENTS AND ISSUES

Unfinished Conversations: New Work from the Collection Includes Works Made in the Last Decade by More than a Dozen Artists from Around the World

Unfinished Conversations: New Work from the Collection

March 19–July 30, 2017

Floor six, The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art Gallery

Press Viewing: Tuesday, March 14, 2017, 9:30–11:30 a.m.

NEW YORK, March 2, 2017—Juxtaposing significant works by emerging and mid-career artists—all made in the past decade and recently acquired by The Museum of Modern Art—***Unfinished Conversations: New Work from the Collection*** is on view from March 19 through July 30, 2017. The exhibition considers intertwining themes of social protest, the effect of history on identity, and how art juxtaposes fact and fiction, through works by more than a dozen artists. The exhibition's title is inspired by John Akomfrah's three-channel video installation *The Unfinished Conversation* (2012), which chronicles the life and work of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall and is on view in the final gallery of the exhibition. *Unfinished Conversations* is organized by Klaus Biesenbach, Chief Curator at Large, The Museum of Modern Art, and Director, MoMA PS1; Lucy Gallun, Assistant Curator, Department of Photography; Thomas J. Lax, Associate Curator, Department of Media and Performance Art; Christian Rattemeyer, The Harvey S. Shipley Miller Associate Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints; and Yasmil Raymond, Associate Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, with Elizabeth Henderson, Department Coordinator, Office of the Chief Curator at Large.

"We're in a moment when it is increasingly important for institutions—in this case a museum—to illuminate how art and artists live and participate in the world around them," said Klaus Biesenbach. "This exhibition offers a series of positions from the curators' points of view. It is our hope that this gives viewers an opportunity to enter into the dialogue, and to construct their own meaning based on their life experiences and what they see. The conversation can't be finished without our public."

The exhibition features an international range of artists, working across diverse media, exploring anxiety and unrest around the world and offering a critical reflection on the present moment. From Cairo to St. Petersburg, from The Hague to Recife, some of these artists observe and interpret acts of state violence and activism. Others enter historical moments, reimagining images of the past and claiming their place within it. Still others take on contemporary debates, showcasing evidence of government surveillance and censorship or displaying products of

exploited labor in their work. Together, these artists look back to traditions both within and beyond the visual arts to imagine possibilities for an uncertain future.

Almost all of the works included in *Unfinished Conversations* will be shown at MoMA for the first time, beginning with a work from the 2012 series *Return the World*, by **Adrián Villar Rojas** (Argentine, b. 1980). Combining a fossilized vocabulary with naturalistic imagery, Villar Rojas's unfired clay and cement sculpture appears to be on the verge of decomposing—and the title of the series seems to imply a connection to the negative effects of human activities on the Earth's geology. Villar Rojas's work focuses on processes of accumulation, displacement, and entropy, suggesting both a prehistoric landscape and a post-apocalyptic ruin from the future.

Several artists in the exhibition take social and political protest as a point of departure, some using firsthand observation, while others look to news sources to offer a vision of their surroundings. The exhibition includes 12 drawings by **Anna Boghiguan** (Egyptian, b. 1946), created in 2011, that chronicle the events in and around Tahrir Square in Cairo following the Egyptian revolution of 2011. In another work on paper, artist **Erik van Lieshout** (Dutch, b. 1968) references news images of demonstrations that took place in August 2014 in Schilderswijk, a working-class district in the Netherlands, as Pro-ISIS demonstrators faced Dutch skinheads as well as anti-nationalist and anti-jihadist protesters. Conversely, **Wolfgang Tillmans** (German, b. 1968) pictures protest through an abstract vocabulary in the large-scale photograph *Sendeschluss/End of Broadcast I* (2014). The artist captured the pixel pattern of static or “snow” from a television in a St. Petersburg hotel room, calling to mind the cutting off of a television signal or news feed and offering a critique of the state's control over the dissemination of news and information at a time when activists and other artists were protesting the rise of anti-gay legislation and the Russian military's interventions in Eastern Ukraine. The source for **Andrea Bowers's** (American, b. 1965) drawing *A Menace to Liberty* (2012)—rendered in permanent marker on sections of cardboard boxes typical of protest signs—is an illustration originally published in Emma Goldman's 1914 journal *Mother Earth*.

Other artists further invoke or reenact historical moments and iconographies, marking the effects of history on identity. **Kara Walker's** (American, b. 1969) monumental three-part drawing *40 Acres of Mules* (2015) features imagery from Stone Mountain Park outside Atlanta, and its infamous granite relief depicting leaders of the Confederate army. The work shows the generals and their horses, Klansmen, the Confederate flag, nude figures, and mules in a swirling, quasi-apocalyptic scene of domination and degradation centered around a black male martyr figure. The historical references are treated with a sense of irony, and reflect a critique of and abhorrence for these Confederate homages. In **Iman Issa's** (Egyptian, b. 1979) recent Heritage Studies sculpture series, she, too, looks to existing iconography and explores the contemporary resonance of historical artifacts to interrogate identity, memory, and so-called material culture. Meanwhile, in his African Spirits (2008) series of photographs, **Samuel Fosso** (French, b. Cameroon 1962) casts himself as a pantheon of political, intellectual, and cultural figures from Africa and the

African diaspora, re-creating famous portraits and channeling the distinctive characteristics of Angela Davis, Patrice Lumumba, and Malcom X, among others.

Questions around the juxtaposition of fact and fiction are present in several works in the exhibition, though the artists' approaches vary widely. **Jonathas de Andrade's** (Brazilian, b. 1982) video installation *The Uprising (O Levente)* (2013) depicts a horse-drawn cart race through the city of Recife. Though the tradition had been outlawed in the city, the artist circumvented civic regulations by providing alternative information to the authorities and the race participants. De Andrade's hijinks are quite different in intention from that of **Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's** (British, b. 1977) figurative paintings—yet both are rooted in the power of invention. While the likenesses she composes may appear to be portraits of known people, they are fictional characters that elude specificity of place or time. In the painting *Untitled (Intimate Suffering #11)*, **Kim Beom** (Korean, b. 1963) creates a visual riddle, mapping a massive network of lines that zigzag across the canvas. The work interrogates the idea of art as a leisure activity, challenging the viewer to solve this colossal labyrinth.

Operating at the junction of politics, poetics, and pornography, **Paul Chan's** (American, b. Hong Kong 1973) drawings explore ideas of body, desire, and voice. The work in the exhibition takes language from erotic texts, reassigning short excerpts to letters of the alphabet, and translating the original passages to a new context by creating a digital "font." Appropriating a very different set of texts and images, **Simon Denny's** (New Zealander, b. 1982) *Modded Server-Rack Display with Some Interpretations of David Darchicourt Designs for NSA Defense Intelligence* (2015) incorporates material that was part of Edward Snowden's 2013 leak of classified NSA documents, including graphics, charts, and diagrams that were part of PowerPoint slides used for internal communications. By bringing these materials into the work, Denny suggests that we might better understand why and how such visual methods were employed by the US government. A group of works from 2016 by **Cameron Rowland** (American, b. 1988) address reverberating effects of transatlantic slavery. Rowland's sculptural works are real-world objects produced by prison inmates, accompanied by texts written by the artist that connect the objects and their producers to the ongoing history of exploited labor.

The exhibition concludes with *The Unfinished Conversation* (2012) by **John Akomfrah** (British, b. 1957), a founding member of the Black Audio Film Collective. The three-channel video installation traces the life and work of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who was born in Jamaica, arrived in England as a student, and went on to become an influential figure of the British New Left and a foremost public intellectual engaged with questions of diaspora, race, ethnicity, and black identity. Akomfrah's installation interweaves Hall's biography with key national and international events—such as the weakening of the working class in Britain and nuclear disarmament—linking the personal with the historical. This use of archival footage and original interviews evokes Hall's own concept of "becoming," which he explains in the video: "Identities are formed at the unstable point where personal lives meet the narrative of history. Identity is an

ever-unfinished conversation." Made shortly before Hall's death in 2014, the installation is a testament to the ongoing impact of the thinker's ideas on artists and cultural institutions alike.

SPONSORSHIP:

Allianz is a partner of contemporary art at MoMA.

Additional support for *Unfinished Conversations: New Work from the Collection* is provided by the Annual Exhibition Fund.

MoMA Audio+ is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

EXHIBITION HASHTAG:

#UnfinishedConversations

HEARING LOOPS:

In order to serve visitors with hearing loss, *Unfinished Conversations* includes induction hearing loops for sound amplification. Visitors to the installation can turn their hearing aid or cochlear implant to T-Coil mode to hear enhanced sound effortlessly.

AUDIO GUIDE:

Audio commentary by artists featured in the exhibition, including Andrea Bowers, Simon Denny, Wolfgang Tillmans, and Kara Walker, accompanies select works on view. MoMA Audio+ is available for streaming and download on MoMA's free app on iTunes and moma.org and is also available free of charge at the Museum.

MoMA Audio+ is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS:

An Evening Celebrating Stuart Hall, featuring John Akomfrah, with Cameron Bailey, Tina Campt, Kobena Mercer, and David Scott

Friday, March 17, 6:00 p.m.

The Museum of Modern Art

Mezzanine, Education and Research Center, Theater 3

John Akomfrah's recently acquired installation *The Unfinished Conversation* (2012) centers on the ongoing importance of Stuart Hall, the Jamaican-born public intellectual and leader of the British New Left. Following an introduction by Thomas J. Lax, Associate Curator in MoMA's Department of Media and Performance Art, the evening will include short presentations by Kobena Mercer, Professor of History of Art and African American Studies, Yale University, and David Scott, Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University; a dialogue between Cameron Bailey, Artistic Director, Toronto Film Festival, and John Akomfrah; and a conversation moderated by Tina Campt, Director, Barnard Center for Research on Women, and Professor of Africana and Women's Studies, Barnard College. Following the program, guests are invited to continue the conversation and meet the participants at an intimate reception catered by Settepani in MoMA's Education and Research Building Mezzanine.

Presented by The Friends of Education of The Museum of Modern Art, **Conversations: Among Friends** explores works of art as reflections of their political and social contexts.

Tickets (\$35 general public, \$20 Members, \$12 students) may be purchased at moma.org or onsite. The program will be livestreamed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udlvfm93y8Y>.

Modern Monday: An Evening with Jonathas De Andrade

Monday, April 10, 7:00 p.m.

The Museum of Modern Art

Jonathas De Andrade is a contemporary artist based in Recife, the state capital of Brazil's northeastern region, a city marked by the contrast between its peasant class and rural traditions, on the one hand, and its status as a quickly developing industrial center and film capital on the other. Working with installation, photography, and video, De Andrade explores the multiple experiences of the city, continuously involving the audience in the process of narrative construction. De Andrade, whose *The Uprising (O Levante)* is included in the current MoMA exhibition *Unfinished Conversations: New Works from the Collection*, will join Thomas J. Lax, Associate Curator in the Museum's Department of Media and Performance Art, for a discussion about recent and upcoming work.

Tickets (\$12 general public, \$10 seniors, \$8 students, Members free) may be reserved at moma.org or onsite beginning March 27.

PopRally x Unfinished Conversations: An Evening of Poetry

Thursday, May 4, 7:00

The Museum of Modern Art, The Agnes Gund Garden Lobby

More information will be announced at <https://www.moma.org/calendar/programs/38>

MoMA CLASSES:

Speaking the Language of Truth: Art from the Past Decade

Instructor: Yasmyl Raymond

Tuesdays, May 2, 16, 23, and 30, 6:00–7:50 p.m.

Usually in art the viewer perceives echoes of the psychological and social dynamics of a specific culture or context, as artists respond to life-altering experiences and historical events by drawing from source materials and shared knowledge. This course will focus on the exhibition *Unfinished Conversations: New Work from the Collection*, which features work by more than a dozen artists, made in the past decade and recently acquired by MoMA. Four lively conversations will consider various ways in which artists interweave lengthy research into their process, integrate subject matter and form, and structure layers of meaning and open-ended questions for the viewers to discover and examine.

Nonmember \$355, Member \$325, Student/Educator/Corporate \$250. Register at moma.org beginning March 21.

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Press Contact: Sara Beth Walsh, (212) 708-9747 or sarabeth_walsh@moma.org

For downloadable high-resolution images, register at moma.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, MOMA.org.

Hours: Saturday through Thursday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m.

Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Free admission during Uniqlo Free Friday Nights: Fridays, 4:00–8:00 p.m.

moma.org: No service charge for tickets ordered on moma.org. Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs).