

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA ANNOUNCES A FOCUSED EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTING THE ROLE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT IN CIRCULATING IDEAS OF PAN-AFRICAN SUBJECTIVITY AND IMAGINATION

NEW YORK, September 24, 2024 [Updated July 17, 2025]—The Museum of Modern Art announces *Ideas of Africa: Portraiture and Political Imagination*, an exhibition that will showcase how photographic portraits fuel ideas of Pan-African subjectivity and solidarity. On view from December 14, 2025, through July 25, 2026, the exhibition considers the transatlantic call and response that constructed Africa as a political idea, due to the “winds of decolonial change” that swept the African continent in tandem with the Civil Rights movement in the United States. *Ideas of Africa* is the third exhibition to be organized at The Museum of Modern Art in celebration of the 2019 gift of modern and contemporary African art from prolific collector Jean Pigozzi. The exhibition will feature core works from this gift, alongside a selection of recent acquisitions and key loans. *Ideas of Africa: Portraiture and Political Imagination* is organized by Oluremi C. Onabanjo, The Peter Schub Curator, with the assistance of Chiara M. Mannarino, Curatorial Assistant, The Robert B. Menschel Department of Photography.

Conceptually influenced by V. Y. Mudimbe’s 1994 book *The Idea of Africa* and Robin D. G. Kelley’s *Africa Speaks, America Answers* (2012), the exhibition will bring together works by 20th-century photographers such as Seydou Keïta, Malick Sidibé, Jean Depara, Sanlé Sory, and Ambroise Ngaimoko, who worked across key urban centers in West and Central Africa during the “golden age of African portraiture.” Images by James Barnor and Kwame Brathwaite will illuminate Pan-African modes of image-making across the African diaspora. Works by contemporary artists of African descent, including Samuel Fosso, Silvia Rosi, and Njideka Akunyili Crosby, alongside ephemera selected from the archive of the contemporary artist collective Air Afrique, will embody the physical circulation of these ideas across space and time.

“As we continue to witness transformative shifts in the global geopolitical order, it is instructive to revisit a moment in history that saw the disintegration of colonial territories and the formation of transnational solidarity across the African continent and diaspora. This exhibition locates dazzling modes of Pan-African possibility in images made by inventive photographers who registered and beckoned in new worlds,” says Oluremi C. Onabanjo.

Ideas of Africa will feature a reading room as a tribute to the aspirations of knowledge production and the proliferation of the photographic image in print media during the decolonial era. In the reading room, visitors will have access to a selection of historical and contemporary photobooks and publications. On the occasion of the exhibition, MoMA will publish a richly illustrated catalogue featuring a lead essay by Oluremi C. Onabanjo, contributions by poet Momtaza Mehri and film critic Yasmina Price, and reproductions of key texts by Brent Hayes Edwards and V. Y. Mudimbe.

In anticipation of the exhibition, MoMA’s Department of Research Programs will present Reimagining Liberation: An Open Study Session, which will introduce key themes of *Ideas of Africa*, on **Tuesday, October 8, 2024, 6:00–8:00 p.m.**, in the Celeste Bartos Theater.

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