

The Museum of Modern Art

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

NEW YORK, September 24, 2024—The Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition *Ideas of Africa: Portraiture and Political Imagination* showcases 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 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 features 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 *The Idea of Africa*, a landmark publication by the late philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe (1941–2025), the exhibition brings 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 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 artist collective Air Afrique, 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 features 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 can access a selection of historical and contemporary photobooks and publications.

On the occasion of the exhibition, MoMA is publishing a richly illustrated catalogue featuring a lead essay by Oluremi C. Onabanjo, contributions by poet Momtaza Mehri and film programmer Yasmina Price, and reproductions of key texts by Brent Hayes Edwards and V. Y. Mudimbe. 140 pages, 105 color illustrations. Hardcover, \$50. ISBN: 978-1-63345-171-1. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and available at MoMA stores and online at store.moma.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson in the rest of the world.

RELATED PROGRAM:

In conjunction with the exhibition, MoMA’s Department of Film will present a Modern Mondays evening with the artist collective Air Afrique on March 16, 2026, featuring screenings at 4:00 and 7:00 p.m.

MoMA

11 West 53 Street
New York, NY 10019

AUDIO GUIDE:

From backdrops and props to poses and clothing, countless choices go into the making of a photographic portrait. Inspired by the creativity and imagination of the works on display, this audio guide explores the ways photographers construct their images to tell stories about the political realities within which they are working. Hear from artists (James Barnor, Silvia Rosi), writers and historians (Giulia Paoletti, Antawan I. Byrd, Sandrine Colard), and the exhibition's curator, Oluremi C. Onabanjo, as they look closely at a selection of works, inviting us to consider details we might otherwise miss. All audio is available free of charge at moma.org/audio and on the Bloomberg Connects app.

SPONSORSHIP:

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