

Introductory Panel Pan-African Pulp

Meleko Mokgosi creates narrative installations incorporating paintings, sculpture, and text that examine history, politics, popular culture, identity, and art. The artist is known for adopting a variety of strategies to question issues of power, national identification, colonialism, globalization, whiteness, transnationality, xenophobia, democracy, art history, gender, labor, and the authoritarian or institutional voice. Mokgosi was born in Francistown, Botswana and currently lives and works in New York City.

For this inaugural exhibition in a new program of site-specific commissions by contemporary artists, UMMA has invited Mokgosi to create a work for the Museum's Vertical Gallery. *Pan-African Pulp* explores the history of Pan-Africanism, a global movement with the aim of uniting ethnic groups of sub-Saharan African descent. The massive movement, which has a significant history in Detroit, includes organizations such as the Black Nation of Islam, The Republic of New Afrika, Shrine of the Black Madonna (Black Christian Nationalism), Pan-African Congress, and United Negro Improvement Association, among other groups.

The commission comprises four parts: a vinyl wall work, a text piece, a painted mural, and reproductions of a manifesto as well as vintage posters. The ambitious wall work references popular African photo novels from the 1960s and 70s, created from staged photographs of action scenes with dialogue conveyed via speech bubbles (in English). These novels were read widely across sub-Saharan Africa. Mokgosi enlarged panels from an issue of *African Film*, the most popular of the genre, which follows a James Bond-like private eye, Lance Spearman, on his crime-fighting adventures. Here, Mokgosi has replaced the original dialogue with his own. Texts wrapping around the Museum's upper-level balconies relay stories from Setswana literature in their original language. Mokgosi shared these tales with U-M students, who retell them in their own words in videos accessible through the QR code and URL posted in the gallery. The social realist-inspired wall mural addresses the complexity of blackness anchored by an image of the Zambian Freedom Statue in Lusaka (1974). Finally, Mokgosi has annotated the manifesto from the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers with his own critical commentary on the concept of "Africity" and other notions of Pan-Africanism. Alongside the manifesto, a selection of posters from various Pan-African movements in both Africa and Detroit in the 1960s demonstrate a shared visual language as well as the promotional strategies of their causes. With each element of this project, Mokgosi aims to find meaningful ways of reconceptualizing the ideas and histories of Pan-Africanism, which is as relevant today as it was when it began more than a century ago.

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Ali Subotnick
Guest Curator

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#MelekoMokgosi