

Pan-African Pulp

September 22, 2019–September 2021

Pan-African Pulp is a large-scale installation by Meleko Mokgosi, the Botswana-born and now Brooklyn-based artist. For UMMA's inaugural commission—installed in the Vertical Gallery—Mokgosi explores the history of Pan-Africanism, the global movement to unite ethnic groups of sub-Saharan African descent, and its links to African liberation movements.

Mokgosi's installation features four elements: a massive wall of large-scale panels inspired by African photo novels of the 1960s and '70s; a mural examining the complexity of blackness, which he will paint on site (Sept. 20–23); a selection of posters from Pan-African movements founded in Detroit and Africa in the 1960s; and stories from Setswana literature told through wall texts. Videos of students interpreting these stories will be accessible with a QR code. The installation vividly connects to Detroit's deep history of activism, where organizations such as 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 were founded. In the last five years, Pan-Africanism has experienced a revival in Detroit, with such newly founded groups as New Era Detroit, Coalition for Black Struggle, and Change Agent Consortium, along with local chapters of Black Lives Matter and Black Youth Project 100. The renewed urgency for diversity and civil rights in Detroit, and the country as a whole, heightens the relevance of Mokgosi's project and reveals the deep connections between the historical movements and those developing today. With this project, Mokgosi explains that he "hopes to find meaningful ways of reconceptualizing the importance of a movement that sought to build alliances towards Black consciousness, and foregrounding the rights and

aspirations of Africans to self-determination, and self-governance. There is no doubt about the injustices, inhumanity, exploitation, violence, and racism caused by and associated with the Euro-American slave trade, European imperialism in Africa, and institutionalized racism in the Americas; the effects of these are ongoing and reflected not only in cultural and geopolitical contexts but also in the very reproduction and circulation of capital. Detroit and its links to African liberation movements are key in understanding the history and promise of Pan-Africanism.”

Mokgosi has been the subject of significant recent solo exhibitions at the Baltimore Museum of Art; Fowler Museum at UCLA; Williams College Museum of Art; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. His narrative installations feature paintings, sculptures, and texts that examine issues surrounding history, politics, popular culture, identity, and art.

QUOTE FROM MM:

The commission project at UMMA will aim to examine the history of Pan-Africanism in general, with the hopes of trying to find meaningful ways of reconceptualizing the importance of a movement that sought to build alliances towards Black consciousness, and foregrounding the rights and aspirations of Africans to self-determination, and self-governance. There is no doubt about the injustices, inhumanity, exploitation, violence, and racism caused by and associated with the Euro-American slave trade, European imperialism in Africa, and institutionalized racism in the Americas; the effects of these are ongoing and reflected not only in cultural and geopolitical contexts but also in the very reproduction and circulation of capital. Detroit and its links to African liberation movements is key in understanding the history and promise of Pan-Africanism. By studying Detroit organizations such as Black Nation of Islam, The Republic of New Afrika, the Shrine of Black Madonna (Black Christian Nationalism), the Pan-African Congress, and the United Negro Improvement Association, I hope to articulate important questions related to all of the above.