

# Project a Black Planet

The Art  
and Culture  
of Panafrica

6.11.25 / 6.04.26



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This exhibition presents Panafrica as an imagined territory where different definitions of art and culture transcend national borders, acknowledge long histories of colonialism and resistance, and envision a shared and equitable future. Panafrica derives from Pan-Africanism, a term that encompasses diverse movements seeking to unite communities of African descent in their pursuit of freedom and in the creation of an autonomous sense of belonging in the modern world. The exhibition unfolds through a series of interrelated, speculative and fragmented episodes that reveal the plural nature of the Pan-African project, one in which race pointed towards the formulation, perhaps metaphorical, of a planetary epistemology distinct from the Western models.



Yto Barrada. *Tectonic Plate*, 2010. Deutsche Bank Collection

***Project a Black Planet: The Art and Culture of Panafrica*** traces the vast influence of Pan-Africanism on creative, cultural, and civic spheres that have shaped the social, political, and aesthetic movements of the past century, including the two world wars, the Spanish Republic experiment and civil war, the independence movements across the colonial metropolises, the struggles against dictatorships, and the civil rights movements. Bringing together over 500 objects produced across Africa, Europe, North America, and South America and spanning more than a century, from the 1920s to the present, the project showcases popular creations alongside fine art, such as posters, books, political speeches, and music in dialogue with painting, photography, sculpture, and video.

The exhibition begins by questioning the conventions of linear time, the invention of Africa, the colonial library, national sovereignty, and continues with curatorial reinterpretations of pivotal Pan-Africanist movements and moments – such as W. E. B. Du Bois’s archives, Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, Négritude, and Quilombismo – alongside explorations of individual identity and collective belonging. Works created in the early twenty-first century expand these imaginaries through futuristic visions of interdependence: antiracist, transnational, and cosmopolitan, affirming the enduring, utopian promise – past, present, and future – of Pan-Africanism.

## **FLAGS WITHOUT TERRITORIES** **Symbols of Solidarity That Transcend** **National Borders and Differences**

Flags typically stake territorial claims. They announce a community or a country and evoke a homeland. Pan-African flags, emulate the U.S. flag or the U.K.'s Union Jack, feature red, black, and green stripes, proclaiming something radically different. Introduced around 1920 by Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and still widely used today, the Pan-African flag symbolically unites Black populations and freedom movements worldwide. Its colors are generally understood to represent: red for the blood shared by all people of African ancestry, wherever they may live; black for people of African descent who assert their right to sovereignty and self-determination; and green for Africa's fertile land.

The flag and its colors represent a collectivity that forcefully transgresses the national borders of nation-states – most of which were established by displacing entire populations from their ancestral lands and later maintained by sending others “back home.”

At times, the utopian vision of life beyond oppressive realities – whether shaped by colonial or racist domination – has led intellectuals and artists to imagine forms of existence beyond the Earth, or to cultivate a planetary sense of belonging. In some of the works presented, the desire for a shared humanity, alongside the recognition of difference, takes shape as a tribute to LGBTQIA+ activists. Together, these works offer a vision of interdependence and collective belonging that extends Pan-Africanism beyond the human.



Larry Achiampong. *Relic Traveller: Phase 1*, 2017. Copperfield Gallery



Arthur Bispo do Rosário. *Grande Veleiro* (attributed), 1970. Museu Bispo do Rosário Arte Contemporânea

## AFRICA AS AN INVENTION

### **Pan-Africanism as a Response**

What is Africa? What constitutes that “Africa” in the imagination of those who created it? The philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe observes that Africa was a designation of the modern Western world before it was ever a physical place. In *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (1988), he argues that Africa is a constructed nomenclature, not an objective reality. The “Africa” of this imaginary functions as a “colonial library”, a repository of knowledge produced for centuries by foreign explorers, missionaries, and anthropologists to serve European purposes. Despite the brutality and the violence embedded in that history, this constructed “Africa” created a framework that African intellectuals – members of Black radical thought – would later repurpose to define their own identity.

In the first stage of this invention, Greek thought and European exploration described Africa as an empty, dark, and uninhabited space,

thereby justifying its colonization. In the second stage, Western philosophers such as Hegel argued that Africa lacked history – giving rise to an imaginary of the primitive that has perpetuated to this day. The most recent and pivotal stage of this invention explores how Africans and their descendants have appropriated that very knowledge to dismantle it, generating counter-narratives that cross, transgress, and transcend established frameworks of being and knowing, while articulating possibilities for Pan-African liberation and solidarity.

This section revisits some of those scenarios of “the African” that the Pan-African movements presented in this exhibition help to deconstruct. Intellectuals, politicians, writers, artists, activists, and members of civil society, have generated new sociopolitical imaginaries that envision an anti-colonial, pan-humanist world. Without forgetting what psychiatrist Frantz Fanon called the historico-racial schema, this conception of Blackness is framed as a space for imagining shared agency – unity in difference – beyond race.

### **GARVEYISM**

#### **Building a Black Planet in Parallel to the Western World**

The Jamaican Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey championed a vision of global racial solidarity among people of African descent. The movement that bears his name offers one framework for reckoning with the effects of racism and the legacies of enslavement and colonialism, issues central to Pan-Africanist thought. Depictions of Africa as a homeland have often led

many to characterize the movement as a “Back to Africa” campaign. Yet the return Garvey envisioned was as much psychological as it was physical; Garvey himself never traveled to Africa. Garveyites viewed Africa as the land of the future, a place to build a parallel Black world based on self-determination, civic and political equality, and mobility. From the Black Star Line, a commercial shipping venture, to passports and paramilitary units, the movement’s adherents reappropriated the key signs and symbols of imperial states, claiming them in the name of Black sovereignty. Grounded in Garvey’s own oratory and the organizational forms of Garveyism, the works consider history, the seas, the earth, and even outer space as potential sites for Panafrica.

## NÉGRITUDE

### Rethinking Civilization through Black Histories and Achievements

In the 1930s, while studying in Paris, the Caribbean writers Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas, together with the Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor, developed a poetic and philosophical movement called Négritude – French for Blackness.

They engaged in debates about freedom, belonging, and cultural heritage from both African and diasporic perspectives. Aware of colonial legacies and of France’s exploitative treatment of Black Allied soldiers enlisted against their will during World War I, advocates of Négritude argued that humanist universalism needed to confront its entanglement with racism, displacement, and inhumanity.



Simone Leigh. *Dunham*, 2017. The Art Institute of Chicago, purchased with funds provided by Marilyn and Larry Fields; Claire and Gordon Prussian Fund for Contemporary Art, 2019. Photograph: Jonathan Mathias

They further insisted that modern Western culture must include and even highlight African heritage, rather than perpetuate the colonial fiction that Africans lacked history and civilization.

Négritude developed not only within cultural spheres, but also across social and political domains, in dialogue with African Modernism, the Harlem Renaissance, and forms of surrealism, circulating between France and the Caribbean. Its advocates envisioned entanglement: a planetary condition in which Black perspectives intertwine with Eurocentric worldviews. This poetic imaginary – later converted into cultural politics by Senghor during the early decades of his presidency in Senegal – proved controversial for critics, such as Frantz Fanon, who saw in it the persistence of another form of racism.

## BLACKNESS

### What Can It Mean to Be Black?

The objects on view explore Blackness as a cultural imaginary and as a way of being. It is an unstable term, a sonic and visual signifier that poses interpretive challenges, carrying connotations shaped by specific communities and contexts. Drawing on ideas from the philosophical and cultural movement Négritude, and employing strategies such as dialogue, personal histories, popular imagination, interviews, ethnographic surveys, and visual abstraction, artists and intellectuals have examined Blackness in personal, self-reflexive, and phenomenological ways. These approaches make visible the effects of imposed racialization on the individual psyche. These works show that Blackness is fluid and dynamic,

shaped both by historical circumstances as well as subjective experiences. Together they reveal how the construct of race can be transformed from a tool for separation and domination into a vehicle of liberation.



Theaster Gates. *Alls my life I has to fight*, 2019.  
Courtesy of the artist and Richard Gray Gallery

## QUILOMBISMO

### Fighting for Islands of Self-Sufficiency in a Sea of Oppression

In Kimbundu, a Bantu language spoken in west-central Africa, the word *kilombo* means “war camp.” In Brazil, the related word, *quilombo*, refers to a self-governing rebel territory established by enslaved people who escaped bondage. The Portuguese slave trade transported roughly 5.8 million Africans to Brazil – the largest forced migration in world history – most from west-central Africa. Secessionist revolts in other regions gave rise to related terms such as *palenque* and *marronage*. Today there are hundreds of quilombos in Brazil,

and the rich, multifaceted cultures of these communities are deeply rooted in the ancestral knowledge carried from their territories of origin.

The Brazilian playwright and scholar Abdias do Nascimento defined Quilombismo as a worldview, “integrating a practice of liberation and assuming the command of one’s own history.” Pan-Africanism conceived as such is therefore neither universal, as in Négritude, nor parallel to the dominant Western mainstream, as in Garveyism. Perhaps it would be best conceived as a plural archipelago of localized resistance. Its followers, or *quilombolas*, draw on Indigenous and separatist teachings, wisdom that continues to shape the culture of Brazilian communities and their diaspora worldwide.



Ernest Mancoba. *Composition*, 1940. Private collection. Courtesy of Ferlov Mancoba Foundation



Abdias do Nascimento. *Simbiose Africana nº 3*, 1973. Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Afro-Brasileiros (IPEAFRO)

## INTERIORS

### **Living in Your Head: Bodily Confinement and Mental Emancipation**

Individuals may withdraw from society by inhabiting underground havens and island territories, seeking the comforts of home, grappling with the horrors of detention camps and prison cells, or by taking refuge in dreams while awake or asleep. The works explore a range of connections between physical interiors and psychological interiority.

While many artists view the private realm as a sanctuary from the public sphere, Pan-Africanist aspirations for self-determination and freedom can take shape through liberating the mind – decolonizing it, as the Kikuyu author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o would say – and cultivating forms of resistance to structural and systemic racism.

Pan-Africanists argued that strengthening the inner spirit can, in turn, inspire civic organization and collective action.

## **APPARITIONS**

### **Faith in the Community and Reverence for the Ancestors**

Animist beliefs conceive life across multiple planes of existence. To appear, then, is to become visible within one of those planes. Animals, humans, and other living beings – and even objects from the Earth – move within these planes and are made manifest through ritual practices in African communities and their diaspora. These spiritual beliefs generate a symbolic link with ancestors, foster mental resilience, social well-being, and provide communal spaces for mourning – all of which ignited Pan-Africanism's efforts to challenge systemic injustices and cultivate historical consciousness.

Revenant figures and practices emerge through forms of collective intimacy, including prayer meetings, liminal gatherings, and spectral public performances. Those who left this plane of existence under unjust circumstances – whether slain youth or assassinated heads of state – reappear in rituals that remember and memorialize them. The living help to address the demands of the dead and to repair the traumas of both past and present.

## **AGITATION**

### **Resistance Emerging from Individual Disquiet and Collective Action**

Agitation can be individual or collective; in all cases it implies a disruption of the status quo. Social and political activism is central to Pan-Africanism, even as the artists engage with individual states of mind. The gathering of doors and megaphones assembled in the installation by Kader Attia and the ceramic figurines by Moataz Nasr, draw attention to the appropriation of public space and urge us to explore how people recognize – or sometimes fail to recognize – themselves as part of a collective body.

**This exhibition is curated by:** Antawan I. Byrd, Elvira Dyangani Ose, Adom Getachew and Matthew S. Witkovsky

## **If you'd rather listen**

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Curators and artists' voices and explanations will guide you through the exhibition, thanks to MACBA's free digital guide.

## **The exhibition also offers**

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### **Public Program**

#### **Starting 3 November**

Pan-African film series, in collaboration with Filmlab Palestine, Filmoteca de Catalunya, Dart Festival, Acció>Cinema, and the cinema cooperative Zumzeig.

#### **Saturday, 15 November at 7pm**

Conference by Fred Moten in the framework of the School of Common Knowledge of L'Internationale, and in collaboration with the Salmon Festival.

With support from [L'Internationale](#)

### **Education Program**

#### **Red, Black and Green.**

#### **The Art and Culture of Panafrica**

Primary Education (from 3rd to 6th grade)

### **Publications**

***Project a Black Planet: The Art and Culture of Panafrica.*** A monograph in English published by the Art Institute of Chicago that explores Pan-Africanism and its diverse representations in the visual and sonic objects on display in the exhibition.

#### **Thursday, 6 November at 7pm**

Palestinian choreographer Farah Saleh presents the performance *Balfour Reparations*, as part of the series 'Making History(s)' organised by La Poderosa.

#### **From 18 to 20 February 2026**

Seminar on Black Urbanisms, curated by Abdou Maliq Simone and Asha Best, in collaboration with CCCB and Barcelona 2026 World Capital of Architecture.

More information at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat).

#### **Guided tours for groups and schools to *Project a Black Planet.***

#### ***The Art and Culture of Panafrica***

Secondary education and adult groups

In addition, MACBA has published ***Panafrica. Art i imaginariis polítics per a la construcció d'un planeta negre*** a collection of texts by several authors that connect the exhibition's theme with the local context. The book is published in Catalan and Spanish.

## A different kind of visit

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### Guided tours

Sundays at 11 am

Led by Albert Gironès, Eva Païà  
and Agnes Essonti.

Free activity. For booking and more  
information, go to [macba.cat](http://macba.cat).

### Opening hours

Mondays to Fridays

(closed Tuesdays except public holidays)

11am – 7:30pm (25 September to 24 June)

10am – 8pm (25 June to 24 September)

Saturdays: 10am – 8pm

Sundays: 10am – 3pm

Public holidays: please check  
the website for opening times

Your entrance ticket is valid for one  
month. Activate it at reception and come  
back as often as you like.

### MACBA Friends

10 November, at 6 pm. A guided tour  
led by Elvira Dyangani Ose, director of  
MACBA and the exhibition co-curator.

Check out our exclusive guided tours  
for MACBA Friends at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat).

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Co-production



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