

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BLANTON MUSEUM TO EXHIBIT *MAKING AFRICA: A CONTINENT OF CONTEMPORARY DESIGN*



Exhibition featuring the work of over 120 creatives sheds new light on contemporary African design

AUSTIN, Texas—September 11, 2018— The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin will present *Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design* from October 14, 2018 to January 6, 2019 in the Sarah and Ernest Butler Gallery. *Making Africa* showcases the work of over 120 artists and designers from and within Africa working in an exhilarating range of media including sculpture, fashion, furniture, architecture, film, photography, maps, digital comics, graphic and web design, and more. The exhibition presents Africa as a hub of experimentation—and as a driving force in the development of design in the twenty-first century.

Making Africa reconsiders and expands definitions of both design and Africa—a shift in perspective symbolized by Kenyan artist Cyrus Kabiru’s sculptural *C-Stunner* eyeglasses made of found materials (2012). The exhibition offers a vision of Africa in the twenty-first century as a place of unbounded optimism, rapid growth, and massive cultural transformation. This spirit echoes that of the mid-twentieth century, when a young generation of Africans, celebrating their liberation from colonization, self-assuredly asserted themselves on a global stage. The exhibition draws parallels to that era by juxtaposing select examples of mid-twentieth-century art and design with contemporary works.

“The Blanton is thrilled to present this deeply insightful and relevant exhibition to Austin’s creative community,” said Blanton director Simone Wicha. “*Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design* celebrates the innovative and inspiring work of over 120 African

artists, makers, entrepreneurs, and other creatives who are working at the forefront of art and international design. We are proud to share these globally forward-thinking perspectives, infused with the rich culture of Africa, with the Blanton's audiences."

The exhibition is organized into four sections: Prologue, I and We, Space and Object, and Origin and Future.



Prologue

Making Africa does not claim to present a complete picture of design in Africa, a continent of 54 nations that speaks 2,000 languages, and has over a billion inhabitants. Instead, through a variety of media, works in the Prologue provide counter-narratives that challenge preconceived notions of the continent. For example, *Alkebu-Lan 1260 AH* (2011), a map by artist Nikolaj Cyon, imagines what Africa would have looked like had it not been colonized by Europe. Likewise, a series of pocket squares from fashion label Ikiré Jones's 2014 collection *The Untold Renaissance* reinserts people of color as protagonists in the narratives and iconography of western art history. The artists, designers, and thinkers featured in this section of *Making Africa* assert the power of design as a vehicle for forging and communicating a wider, more representative view of Africa in the world.



I and We

At the intersection of style and politics, *I and We* focuses on design as a communicator of both individual and cultural identity. This section demonstrates how African creatives respond to, reinterpret, or diverge from global trends to produce distinctly African expressions of self or belonging, from

explorations of gender and sexual identities to subcultures such as Botswana's thriving heavy metal scene.

With an emphasis on fashion and photography, this section ranges from photographer J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere's black-and-white series documenting Nigerian women's hairstyles from the late 1960s to 2000s, to Mário Macilau and Omar Victor Diop's contemporary studio photography that captures the verve of their subjects, to cutting-edge fashion blogs from South Africa, and body jewelry made of wax cloth by MISWudé (*Waxology, No. 1*, 2014). "I and We" demonstrates the importance of style as a vehicle to communicate about oneself and one's culture to the world.



Space and Object

Space and Object explores how design shapes urban and personal environments as more and more people move to cities in Africa and throughout the world. In addition to a focus on city life and its impact on artistic creation, this section explores how everyday objects, living space, and urban space connect with habits, rituals, and needs. Pieces include the documentation of urban environments in Africa, such as famed architect David Adjaye's Urban Africa Project and Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse's photographs of Johannesburg's decaying Ponte City towers (2008–10); speculative urban planning projects; furniture such as the *Sun City* cupboard by Dokter and Misses (2013), which turns urban security bars into a decorative element; and digital tools that empower communities to take action in an urban sphere.

A video gallery features short films by Frances Bodomo (*Afronauts*, 2014), Wanuri Kahiu (*Pumzi*, 2009), and Michael MacGarry (*Excuse me, while I disappear*, 2014) that explore themes of urbanism and futurism.



Origin and Future

The last section of *Making Africa* is devoted to design's role as a mechanism for understanding the past and shaping the future. In the current era dominated by globalization and the Internet, Africa's pre-colonial history and culture exert a profound influence on the creative activities taking place on the continent. For example, art director Pierre-Christophe Gam combined imagery suggestive of an ancient African kingdom with bright colors and cartoon-like graphics to give the website of French-Congolese musician Taali M a strong visual identity. A cape, trousers, and top from London-based fashion designer Duro Olowu's 2013–2014 *Birds of Paradise* collection evokes the mixing of fabrics from Africa and Europe that he witnessed growing up in Nigeria, fused with Western haute couture design in a vision of cross-cultural exchange. Finally, Gonçalo Mabunda created his throne-like *Harmony Chair* (2009) from scrap metal and weapons used in the Mozambican Civil War as both a critique of African military regimes and symbol of the transformative power of creativity as resistance.

Wangechi Mutu: The End of eating Everything

In conjunction with *Making Africa*, the Blanton will present *Wangechi Mutu: The End of eating Everything* in the Film & Video gallery located in the Klein Gallery from September 15 to November 25, 2018. Mutu's first animated video, *The End of eating Everything* (2013) features the musical artist Santigold as a bulbous, omnivorous being in a post-apocalyptic landscape, and suggests the destructive capacity of unbridled consumption. On view simultaneously will be two collages by Mutu, *In Whose Image?* and *In Whose Image? II* (2004), which explore representations of African and African American women.

Exhibition Organization and Catalogue

Making Africa is a collaborative project led by Vitra Design Museum Curator Amelie Klein and Advising Curator Okwui Enwezor, with support from a large board of curatorial advisors based primarily in Africa. The exhibition's presentation at the Blanton is managed by Claire Howard, Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art.

Making Africa is accompanied by a 345-page, fully illustrated catalogue edited by Klein and Vitra Design Museum Director Mateo Kries. The catalogue features essays and discussions with Klein, Enwezor, exhibition advisory board member Koyo Kouoh, and urban theorist Edgar Pieterse, among others,

complemented by statements from nearly seventy other African design thinkers and practitioners whose interviews are also featured in the exhibition.

This exhibition is organized by the Vitra Design Museum and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation and Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne.



German Federal Cultural Foundation

ART MENTOR FOUNDATION LUCERNE

Generous funding for this exhibition at the Blanton is provided by Suzanne Deal Booth and Jeanne and Michael Klein, with additional support from Ellen and David Berman.

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Public Programs:

Thursday, October 25 | 12:30 p.m.

Gallery talk: Art historian, artist, and curator Moyo Okediji examines *Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design*.

Friday, October 26 | 6-10 p.m.

B Scene: Afrobeats exhibition celebration

Thursday, November 8 | 12:30 p.m.

Gallery talk: Art historian Phillip Townsend on *Making Africa*.

Thursday, November 15 | Third Thursday programming

12:30 p.m. Perspectives gallery talk: Artist and designer Mukhtara Yusuf explores *Making Africa*.

5:30 p.m. Live music: Bamako Airlines

6:30 p.m. Artist panel: Art historian, artist, and curator Moyo Okediji moderates a panel of artists and designers discussing *Making Africa*.

Thursday, December 13 | 12:30 p.m.

Gallery talk: Artists Betelhem Makonnen and Tammie Rubin discuss *Making Africa*.

Please visit blantonmuseum.org for more program information.

About the Blanton Museum of Art

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with nearly 18,000 objects. Recognized for its modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings, the Blanton offers thought provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

The museum is located at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Congress Avenue and is open Tuesday through Friday from 10–5, Saturday from 11–5, and Sunday from 1–5. Thursdays are free admission days and every third Thursday of the month the museum is open until 9. Admission Prices: Adults \$12, Kids 12 and under FREE, Seniors (65+) \$10, Youth/College Students (13–21) \$5. Admission is free to members, all current UT ID-holders. For additional information call (512) 471–7324 or visit blantonmuseum.org

Image Captions:

Cyrus Kabiru
Caribbean Sun, 2012, from the series *C-Stunners*
Digital print
© Carl de Souza/AFP/Getty Images

Ikiré Jones
The Madonna, 2014, from the collection *The Untold Renaissance*
Silk-wool blend
42 x 42 cm
© Walé Oyéjidé [ikirejones.com]

J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere
Onile Gogoro Or Akaba, 1975, from the series *Hairstyles*
Silver gelatin print
Courtesy CAAC and Magnin-A, Paris © Ojeikere Estate

Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse
Windows, Ponte City (Lightbox) (detail), 2008–10
Duratran print
388 x 128.4 x 17 cm
Courtesy Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg © Mikhael Subotzky & Patrick Waterhouse

Gonçalo Mabunda
Harmony Chair, 2009
Welded weapons (handguns, rifles, land mines, bullets, machine gun belts, rocket-propelled grenades) and iron alloy
56 1/8 x 34 1/4 x 26 1/2 in. (142.6 x 87 x 67.3 cm)
Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Samuel E. Haslett, by exchange, gift of Mrs. Morris Friedsam, Georgine Iselin, and Mrs. Joseph M. Schulte, by exchange and Designated Purchase Fund, 2013.26.2 © Gonçalo Mabunda, photo: Brooklyn Museum