



The Phillips Collection

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## The Phillips Collection Presents *African Modernism in America, 1947-67*

Featuring more than 70 artworks by 50 artists, the exhibition explores cross-cultural artistic networks and exchanges between Africa and the US during the postwar period.



WASHINGTON, DC—The Phillips Collection presents *African Modernism in America, 1947-67*, the first major traveling exhibition to examine the connections between modern African artists and American patrons, artists, and cultural organizations amid the interlocking histories of civil rights, decolonization, and the Cold War. The show reveals the transcontinental networks that challenged academic assumptions about African art in the United States and thereby encouraged American engagement with African artists as contemporaries. **The exhibition will be on view from October 7, 2023–January 7, 2024.**

“The Phillips Collection is pleased to host this important exhibition, which provides a contextualized look into meaningful exchanges among artists who were united by shared aesthetic and political concerns,” says **Vradenburg Director and CEO Jonathan P. Binstock**. “Its presentation in Washington, DC has added significance given the pivotal role of Howard University, and other HBCUs, in providing early institutional support to African artists in the US. Ultimately, it is an important opportunity to learn about the contributions of a variety of African and African American artists to the history and lexicon of modernism, from those who have long been celebrated by the Phillips to those deserving greater recognition.”

Ranging from paintings and sculptures to works on paper, the exhibited artworks exemplify the experimentation and diverse artistic practices that emerged in Africa from the 1940s through the 1960s. The exhibition draws primarily from Fisk University's remarkable collection of gifts from the Harmon Foundation, an American organization devoted to the cross-continental support and promotion of African and African American artists. In 1961, the Harmon Foundation organized its landmark exhibition *Art from Africa of Our Time*. That same year, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, exhibited its first acquisition of contemporary African art, *Men Taking Banana Beer to Bride by Night* (1956) by Sam Joseph Ntiro (Tanzania), which is also featured in *African Modernism in America, 1947-67*. Such early exchanges introduced American audiences to modern African artists and defied preconceived Western narratives that diminished African art.

"The simultaneity of the Harmon Foundation show and the MoMA purchase was crucially important, drawing attention to African artists' modernity in the US," says **Perrin M. Lathrop**, Assistant Curator of African art at the Princeton University Art Museum and co-curator of the exhibition, who was previously the Postdoctoral Fellow in Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of Maryland and The Phillips Collection (2021–22). "Owing to the leading role of the Harmon Foundation, HBCUs, and other cultural organizations in supporting these artists in the US, the postwar period is one of the first times there is a concentrated opportunity for them to share the same physical space and collaborate together and alongside Black American artists."

"The exhibition considers the historical and contemporary socio-political contexts during a transformative moment that shaped the collecting and exhibiting of postcolonial African art in the United States," says **Camille Brown**, Assistant Curator at The Phillips Collection and lead curator for the presentation in Washington.

*African Modernism in America, 1947-67* is organized into four sections beginning with "Art from Africa of Our Time," which foregrounds the places and people who supported the display and promotion of modern African artists in the US. Showcasing works by artists who were included in the seminal 1961 Harmon Foundation exhibition, this restaging considers the multitude of institutions where modern art from Africa was exhibited, such as the Harmon Foundation, the Museum of Modern Art, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The second section of the exhibition, "Modernism Within Africa," highlights the continent-wide networks of artists, galleries, literary journals, and art education programs instrumental in the development of new, forward-thinking spaces for the display and discussion of postcolonial modern art. These collaborative workshops were influential in fostering creativity among African diasporic networks, which leads into the third section, "Modernism Between Africa and America." The establishment of meaningful connections between African and African American artists resulted in transcontinental travel and art that embraced these cultural exchanges. Artist and art historian David C. Driskell (United States), Professor of Art and Chairman of the Department of Art at Fisk University from 1966 to 1977, made numerous trips to Africa and was inspired to establish a residency for international artists at Fisk University, which played an influential role.

Concluding with "The Politics of Selection," the exhibition features a new commission of the same name by Nigeria-based artist **Ndidi Dike**. Incorporating archival research from the Harmon Foundation Records in Washington, DC, and Fisk University, Dike constructed an immersive mixed media installation that examines the multiplicity of viewpoints, biases, prejudices, allegiances, and omissions found in the

archives. Dike's paneled photo collage includes archival photography and documents to revise a complex history, investigating the presence and absence of women in the story of African modernity and the inequities inherent to white patronage.

## ARTISTS

Jacob Afolabi	Elton C. Fax	D.L.K. Nnachy
Justus D. Akeredolu	Yusuf Grillo	Sam Joseph Ntiro
Jimo Akolo	William Henry Johnson	Demas Nwoko
John Biggers	Mohammad Omer Khalil	Buluma Mordecai Ochungo
Skunder Boghossian	Ladi Kwali	Rufus Ogundele
Rene Bokoko	Grace Salome Kwami	Suzanna Ogunjami
Miranda Burney-Nicol	Akinola Lasekan	Simon Okeke
Peter Clarke	Jacob Lawrence	Uche Okeke
Leon Damas	Jean Nakadulu Luvwezo	Bruce Onobrakpeya
Emmanuel Owusu Dartey	Manyolo Estella Betty	James A. Porter
Ndidi Dike	Mohammed Melehi	Gerard Sekoto
Aaron Douglas	Thomas Mukarobgwa	George Talabi
David C. Driskell	Pilipili Mulongoy	Papa Ibra Tall
Afi Ekong	Selby Mvusi	Mamo Tessema
Ibrahim El-Salahi	Iba N'Diaye	Etso Clara Ugbodaga-Ngu
Ben Enwonwu	Malangatana Ngwenya	Solomon Wangboje
Làmìdì Olónàdè Fákéyẹ	Rekyaelimoo Njau	Viola Mariethia Wood

## EXHIBITION SUPPORT

This exhibition is co-organized by the American Federation of Arts and Fisk University Galleries and curated by Perrin M. Lathrop, Assistant Curator of African Art at Princeton University Art Museum; Nikoo Paydar, former Associate Curator at Fisk University Galleries; and Jamaal B. Sheats, Curator and Director of the Fisk University Galleries and Associate Provost of Art and Culture.



Major support is provided by Monique Schoen Warshaw. Additional support is provided by grants from the Marlene and Spencer Hays Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts. This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.



The presentation at The Phillips Collection is generously supported by Eric Richter and Charles Shoener.

The coordinating curator for the presentation at The Phillips Collection is Camille Brown, Assistant Curator at the museum.

The exhibition is accompanied by a landmark publication published by the American Federation of Arts and distributed by Yale University, which received an award for Curatorial Excellence from The Association of Art Museum Curators. Contributions include leading scholars Kate Cowcher, Ozioma Onuzulike, Paul C. Taylor, Chika Okeke-Agulu, Perrin M. Lathrop, and Nikoo Paydar, as well as an interview by Jamaal B. Sheats with the late David C. Driskell. Ndidi Dike details a digital collage based on her exhibition installation, with a written introduction by artist María Magdalena Campos-Pons.

Following The Phillips Collection, the exhibition travels to the Taft Museum of Art in Cincinnati in February 2024.

## EXHIBITION PROGRAMMING

### [Phillips Music](#)

In the upcoming 2023/24 season of Phillips Music's Sunday Concert series, the museum's long-standing international chamber music program, three performances highlight African composers and musicians: **Andile Khumalo and Ensemble Dal Niente** (November 12) as part of the program's Leading International Composers series, solo pianist **Rebeca Omordia** (November 26), and jazz superstar **Richard Bona with the Asante Trio** (December 14).

### [EmpowerED: Art & Wellness](#)

October 18, 25, November 1, 15, 5-7:30 pm

This accredited virtual 4-week, 15-hour teacher professional development equips educators with an array of teaching techniques to foster a positive outlook to uplift them and their students. The program incorporates the exhibition creating a distinctive cultural context to enrich the educational journey.

### [Curator Tour](#)

October 19 at 6:30 pm

Co-curator Perrin M. Lathrop leads an in-gallery tour of the exhibition. A book signing for the exhibition catalogue follows.

### [Phillips after 5: Afrobeat](#)

November 2 at 5 pm

Celebrate *African Modernism in America, 1947-67* with an Afrobeat-inspired evening, including music from Cheik Hamala Diabete and the Girot Street Band, a beer tasting from Soul Mega, and Ghanaian hand pies from Welle Made.

### [Film Screening](#)

November 16 at 6:30 pm

Join us for a rare screening of acclaimed director William Greaves's documentary film *The First World Festival of Negro Arts* (1966, 40 min.), the official documentary film of the festival held in Dakar, Senegal in 1966, and prolific painter Aaron Douglas's film *A Thing of Beauty* (1966, 28 min.) about Fisk University's first 100 years. A reception featuring cuisine inspired by the African Diaspora follows.

### [Guided Meditation & Curator Talk](#)

December 13 at 12:45 pm

Join us for a free, 30-minute virtual meditation led by local yoga teacher Aparna Sadananda via Zoom. Following the meditation, guest curator Dr. Perrin M. Lathrop gives a virtual tour of the exhibition.

### Guided Meditation

December 20 at 12:45 pm

Join us for a free, 30-minute virtual meditation led by local yoga teacher Aparna Sadananda and a spotlight talk led by a Phillips Educator highlighting a work from the exhibition.

### Panel Discussion

January 7 at 6:30 pm

To mark the end of the exhibition, join us for a conversation between esteemed art historians Dr. Salah M. Hassan, Cornell University, and Dr. Chika Okeke-Agulu, Princeton University.

### **IMAGE GALLERY**

High-resolution press images are available upon request. Please contact [lcantrell@phillipscollection.org](mailto:lcantrell@phillipscollection.org).

**IMAGES:** (Left to right) Peter Clarke (1929–2014, South Africa), *That Evening Sun Goes Down*, 1960, Gouache on paper, 22 x 17 7/8 in., Fisk University Galleries, Fisk University, Nashville, TN, Gift of the Harmon Foundation, © 2022 Peter Edward Clarke / DALRO, Johannesburg / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, NY, Courtesy American Federation of Arts. Funding for the conservation of this artwork was generously provided through a grant from the Bank of America Conservation Project; Ibrahim El-Salahi (b. 1930, Sudan; active United Kingdom), *Vision of the Tomb*, 1965, Oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in., Collection of The Africa Center, New York, NY, Photography by Jerry L. Thompson, © Ibrahim El-Salahi, All rights reserved, ARS, New York, NY 2022, Courtesy of Vigo Gallery and American Federation of Arts; Uche Okeke (1933–2016, Nigeria), *Ana Mmuo (Land of the Dead)*, 1961, Oil on board, 36 1/6 x 48 in., Gift of Joanne B. Eicher and Cynthia, Carolyn Ngozi, and Diana Eicher, © 1961 Uche Okeke, Photography by Franko Khuory.

### **ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION**

The Phillips Collection, America's first museum of modern art, was founded in 1921. The museum houses one of the world's most celebrated Impressionist and American modern art collections and continues to grow its collection with important contemporary voices. Its distinctive building combines extensive new galleries with the former home of its founder, Duncan Phillips. The Phillips's impact spreads nationally and internationally through its diverse and experimental special exhibitions and events, including its award-winning education programs for educators, students, and adults; renowned Phillips Music series; and dynamic art and wellness and Phillips after 5 events. The museum contributes to global dialogues with events like Conversations with Artists and Artists of Conscience. The Phillips Collection values its community partnership with THEARC—the museum's satellite campus in Southeast DC. The Phillips Collection is a private, non-government museum, supported primarily by donations.

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