

Avant-Garde and Liberation Contemporary Art and Decolonial Modernism

June 7, to September 22, 2024

Press conference

Thursday, June 6, 2024, 10 am

Opening

Thursday, June 6, 2024, 7 pm



Fahamu Pecou

A.W.N. (Artist with Negritude), 2012

Acrylic on canvas

178 x 147 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Backslash,

Paris

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The exhibition *Avant-Garde and Liberation* highlights the significance of global modernism for contemporary art. It raises questions of the political circumstances that move contemporary artists to resort to those non-European avant-gardes that formed as a counterpart of the dominant Western modernism from the 1920s to the 1970s. What are the potentials artists see in the ties to decolonial avant-gardes in Africa, Asia, and the “Black Atlantic” region, to take a stand against current forms of racism, fundamentalism, or neocolonialism? Which artistic methods are employed when addressing subjects such as the encroachment on personal liberties and social cohesion by drawing on seminal anticolonial and antiracist positions of the early to mid-twentieth century?

The exhibition was conceived by Christian Kravagna, Professor of Postcolonial Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, who has already acted as an advisor and curator for mumok in recent years.

Dealing with current crisis phenomena by referencing artistic, literary, and activist avant-gardes of the twentieth century is an approach that can be found in various regions and cultural contexts. In reaction to the racism and killing of Black people by the police in the United States, African American artists like Fahamu Pecou and Cauleen Smith recall emancipatory forms of expression that emerged during the Civil Rights Movement. They hark back to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s as the first manifestation of Black modernism or the activist and aesthetic legacy of revolutionary movements like Black Power in the 1960s.

In light of neocolonial economies, African artists reference photographers and musician-activists whose works stand for the liberation of African post-war societies. Serge Attukwei Clottey and Moffat Takadiwa should be named as examples. North African artists like Yto Barrada and Mohamed Bourouissa quote pioneers of the Arabic modernism of the 1950s and '60s or update the writings of anticolonial authors like Frantz Fanon.

In European societies marked by migrant crises and neofascisms, artists like Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc and Patricia Kaersenhout reconstruct anticolonial film aesthetics and feminist contributions to the Négritude movement.

Indian artists, such as Atul Dodiya and Vivan Sundaram, react to the Hindu nationalist erosion of secular democracy with recourse to cosmopolitan projects of Rabindranath Tagore or works by sculptor Ramkinkar Baij from the time of the independence movement.

Showcasing several works by more than twenty-four artists from South Asia, Africa, Europe, and America, *Avant-Garde and Liberation* offers a glimpse of global modernism through the prism of their pertinence for contemporary art. In the

complex tangle of past and present, the exhibition reflects on questions of temporality as well as the possibility of engaging with old and new liberation movements. Ultimately, the global network of historical references allows for a necessary revision of the concept of Avant-Garde, which is still dominated by its European interpretation. Along with its political dimension, the exhibition also sees itself as an homage to the contemporary artists who commemorate marginalized Avant-Gardes beyond the Eurocentric notion of modern art. In addition to its political dimension, the exhibition also pays homage to those contemporary artists who recall marginalized avant-gardes beyond the Eurocentric notion of modern art.

Artists:

Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc, Omar Ba, Radcliffe Bailey, Yto Barrada, Mohamed Bourouissa, Diedrick Brackens, Serge Attukwei Clottey, William Cordova, Atul Dodiya, Robert Gabris, Jojo Gronostay, Leslie Hewitt, Iman Issa, Janine Jembere, Patricia Kaersenhout, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, Zoe Leonard, Vincent Meessen, The Otolith Group, Fahamu Pecou, Cauleen Smith, Maud Sulter, Vivan Sundaram, Moffat Takadiwa

Curated by Christian Kravagna, co-curated by Matthias Michalka

Exhibition publication

Avant-Garde and Liberation: Contemporary Art and Decolonial Modernism

ed. by Christian Kravagna and Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien

Preface by Karola Kraus and Matthias Michalka; essays by Zeigam Azizov, Christian Kravagna, Saloni Mathur, Lina Ramadan; interview with Nana Adusei-Poku

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