



SMART MUSEUM OF ART
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

not all realisms: photography, Africa, and the long 1960s

February 23–June 4, 2023 | Opening reception: Thursday, February 23, 5–7 pm

As the first exhibition organized by the Smart Museum of Art to focus on art from Africa, this project brings together photographic prints, publications, and printed ephemera from Ghana, Mali, and South Africa



A new exhibition at the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art addresses the role of photography in Africa's long 1960s—a period of resistance, revolution, new national and transnational movements, and the stuff of daily life therein. ***not all realisms: photography, Africa, and the long 1960s*** (February 23–June 4, 2023) focuses on Ghana, Mali, and South Africa and features photographic prints, reprints, books, magazines, posters, and other material means through which photography's relationships to real people and events were articulated, produced, and circulated.

The exhibition brings together nearly 60 photographic prints—including works by photographers such as **Ernest Cole**, **Malick Sidibé**, **James Barnor**, **Peter Magubane**, **Seydou Keïta**, **Paul Strand**, and **Henri Cartier-Bresson**—and displays them alongside over 130 publications and pieces of print ephemera, many of which come from Chicago-area collections, including UChicago's Regenstein Library, Northwestern's Herskovits Library of African Studies, and the Art Institute of Chicago. In the exhibition's examination of the enduring significance of the 1960s, it reaches back into the 1950s and forward into the present, by incorporating contemporary works in other media by **Njideka Akunyili Crosby** and **Sam Nhlengethwa** that engage and reimagine photographic materials from that era.

“In this exhibition, the 1960s is an idea that’s loose, expansive, hiccupping, looping. *not all realisms* poses questions about photography’s relationship to time, place, individual experience, and collective continuities, breaks, and transformations. Through a diverse body of material—ranging from studio portraits and magazine photo essays to book-length photographic studies and government pamphlets—the exhibition examines photography’s capacity to construct and convey what happened across Africa during the 1960s. In turn, it challenges us to consider our own relationships with photography and our hopes for what photographs can be and do,” said guest curator **Leslie M. Wilson**, who began this project as a two-year Curatorial Fellow at the Smart Museum from 2019–2021. She is now Associate Director of Academic Engagement and Research at the Art Institute of Chicago.

“I am grateful to Leslie and the team for realizing an impactful and thoughtful project that will stand as the Smart’s first self-organized exhibition focusing on material from Africa,” said **Vanja V. Malloy**, Dana Feitler Director of the Smart Museum. “In addition to serving as a catalyst for expanding the collection and providing opportunities for student research, *not all realisms* pushes the boundaries of disciplines to engage scholars and build relationships through courses in Art History, Political Science, Anthropology, English, and History across the University, Chicago, and beyond.”

The Smart Museum celebrates the opening of *not all realisms* and the concurrent exhibition *The Metropol Drama* (February 23–July 9, 2023) with a free public reception on **Thursday, February 23, from 5 to 7 pm.**



About the exhibition

For many parts of Africa, to refer to the 1960s is to gesture broadly toward a time of great transformation: the postcolonial turn. But that era of sweeping change is bound up in a chain of events long preceding that watershed decade with ramifications that reach potently into our present. Treating the 1960s expansively as an era and idea, *not all realisms: photography, Africa, and the long 1960s* examines photography’s role in relation to a time of intense self-consciousness about change, celebration, stagnancy, struggle, and representation.

As an exhibition, *not all realisms* is divided into four thematic sections. The first section, “**making matter**,” introduces the wide range of printed matter in the exhibition. It emphasizes the conversation between images, as well as text, and how the outlets for photography’s circulation reveal varying desires for representation, changing technologies and platforms for communication, and shifting political conditions. Next, “**before & after**”

considers how change is represented. It explores how governments and non-governmental organizations represented the impact of their policies, aiming to make persuasive cases for the success of their visions. And it also reflects on altogether more personal transformations. The section **“us & not-us”** asks: how is it that people often look at photographs of others and claim to see themselves? How do portraits of individuals, places, and systems do the work of representation, and how do people identify (or not) with those representations? Finally, **“again & again”** looks at how the visual vocabularies of sixties-era African photography have reemerged over time, and features examples of artists working today who reach back to the sixties to reflect on the past and contemplate the future.

The wide-ranging photographic practices represented in this exhibition traced rises and falls, new directions and ongoing struggles. As the official and unofficial collide, as the personal portrait and the object of state surveillance oscillate, and as the flow of people and their image worlds transcend borders and genres, *not all realisms* considers the ways that the 1960s is still coming into view.

This is the second exhibition in recent years at the Smart to think expansively about recent political and social histories of Africa, joining the fall 2019 presentation of *Meleko Mokegosi: Bread, Butter, and Power*, organized by the Fowler Museum at UCLA.

Related publication

The exhibition will be accompanied by a booklet that offers an expanded series of cross-disciplinary perspectives on African studio and event photography in the long 1960s. It features an in-depth essay by curator **Leslie M. Wilson**; contributions from University of Chicago faculty members **Adom Getachew** (Neubauer Family Assistant Professor of Political Science), **Kathryn Takabvirwa** (Assistant Professor of Anthropology), **Natacha Nsabimana** (Assistant Professor of Anthropology), and **Emily Lynn Osborn** (Associate Professor of African History); and select object treatments by UChicago Research Assistants **Serin Lee** (AB '21), **Daisy Coates** (AB '22), and **Mariah Bender** (AM '22). Once published, the complimentary booklet will be available in a limited edition for taking in the exhibition and for download on the Museum's website.

Related public programs

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Smart Museum presents an array of free programs, including exhibition tours, conversations with scholars and curators, and workshops for families and adults. A complete schedule of programs will be posted online at smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar.

About

not all realisms: photography, Africa, and the long 1960s is curated by Leslie M. Wilson, Associate Director of Academic Engagement and Research at the Art Institute of Chicago, with Berit Ness, Associate Director and Curator of Academic Engagement, for the Feitler Center for Academic Inquiry at the Smart Museum of Art.

Support for this exhibition has been provided by the Smart Museum's Feitler Center for Academic Inquiry Fund, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Endowment, and the Museum's SmartPartners.

The exhibition is presented in the Robert and Joan Feitler Gallery, the Joel and Carole Bernstein Gallery, and the Richard and Mary L. Gray Gallery.

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Images

Ernest Cole, From "*House of Bondage*," 1960s, Gelatin silver print. Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Gift of the Estate of Lester and Betty Guttman, 2014.224. © Ernest Cole / Magnum Photo.

Malick Sidibé, *Nuit de Noël (Happy Club)*, 1963, Gelatin silver print. Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Gift of the Estate of Lester and Betty Guttman, 2014.720. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

About the Smart Museum of Art

The Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago is a site for rigorous inquiry and exchange that encourages the examination of complex issues through the lens of art objects and artistic practice. Through strong community and scholarly partnerships, the Museum incorporates diverse ideas, identities, and experiences into its exhibitions and collections, academic initiatives, and public programming. The Smart Museum will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2024. Admission is always free.

Smart Museum of Art

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