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Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) presents the first West Coast showing of *The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion*

October 5, 2022 - March 5, 2023
Press Preview: October 4, 2022; 10am-11:30am

(July 11, 2022, San Francisco, CA)—This fall, the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) dedicates its galleries to the first West Coast presentation of *The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion*, an exhibition highlighting the work of 15 contemporary fashion photographers—from London to Lagos, New York to Johannesburg—whose images present radically new perspectives on the medium of photography and art, race and beauty, and gender and power.

Curated by renowned New York critic and curator Antwaun Sargent and organized by Aperture, New York, the exhibition includes over 100 select works from these groundbreaking artists, including Campbell Addy, Arielle Bobb-Willis, Micaiah Carter, Awol Erizku, Nadine Ijewere, Quil Lemons, Namsa Leuba, Renell Medrano, Tyler Mitchell, Jamal Nxedlana, Daniel Obasi, Ruth Ossai, Adrienne Raquel, Dana Scruggs, and Stephen Tayo, as well as images created by other young artists contributing to this movement.

The work of this international community of Black photographers has been widely viewed in traditional lifestyle magazines from *Vogue* to *Allure*, numerous ad campaigns for Dior, Jimmy Choo, and other top brands, and within museums, as well as on their individual social media channels, reinfusing the contemporary visual vocabulary around beauty and the body with new vitality and substance.

“The works in this exhibition signal a dramatic and long overdue transformation taking place in fashion and art today, one driven by the bold vision of a breakout group of Black creatives who are stewarding the representation of the Black figure in the marketplace,” says Monetta White, Executive Director, MoAD. “The stunning images and the compelling narratives they construct vividly claim space on the world stage for a Black aesthetic. This is a must-see exhibition.”

The photographs open up conversations around the representation of the Black body and Black lives as subject matter. Seeking to challenge the idea that Blackness is not one-dimensional, the works serve as a form of visual activism. Chicago-born Dana Scruggs, the first Black
photographer to shoot a cover for *Rolling Stone* magazine in 2019, expands notions of darkness in photographs, culture, and people with her high-contrast and intimate photographs, often depicting dark-skinned models and celebrities. New York-based photographer Adrienne Raquel’s glamorous, fantasy-driven images, including her portraits of rapper Lizzo for *Playboy* magazine, unabashedly celebrate Black women. “I live for capturing our beauty, our attitude, delicacy, and regality,” says Raquel. American artist Tyler Mitchell, who was the first Black photographer to shoot a cover for *American Vogue* in 2018, places Black men and women in lush, idyllic green spaces and color-filled studios suggestive, for him, of a Black utopia, free from the insult of racism and discrimination. “To convey Black beauty is an act of justice,” he says.

This visual activism often extends to queer representation. Brooklyn-based photographer Quil Lemons explores shifting notions of gender and beauty as they relate to masculinity in Black communities. His 2017 *Glitterboy* series, an autobiographical coming of age body of work, features young Black men with their faces symbolically awash in glitter against pink backdrops. “The images are advocating, illuminating, and cementing others’ existence,” Lemons says. Lagos-based Daniel Obasi uses local styles to achieve “beter visual representations” of disempowered communities within Nigerian society, and especially to signify the importance of queer and feminine subjectivity. “My subjects are seen as beautiful, seductive, and in some cases otherworldly as a way of transferring significance and authority to minorities who are victimized or often ignored within my society,” he says.

*The New Black Vanguard* artists fuse the genres of art and fashion photography in ways that break down long-established boundaries and celebrate the cross-pollination between art, fashion, and culture in constructing an image. New York-based Arielle Bob-Willis, whose work has appeared in *L’Uomo Vogue*, the *New Yorker*, and more, defies traditional ideas of representation in portraiture with her conceptual fashion images of figures wearing candy-colored clothing against brilliant landscapes, often appearing in contorted positions with their faces obscured from the camera’s gaze. “I love the idea of seeing Black people represented in an abstract way. It’s important to me to continue to reject the notion that Black expression is limited—or limiting,” she says. The highly staged images of Swiss Guinean photographer Namsa Leuba frequently possess an anthropological quality that draws equally on the language of the fashion editorial, documentary photography, and performance as a means of ‘reveal.’ Her imaginary scenes, full of color and hints of the supernatural, include artifacts that evoke cultural rituals and African cosmogony specific to her ancestral home of Guinea and other tribes across the continent. “I am inspired by my origins and by new creative exchanges, infusing reality with my own sensitivities and experiences.”
Often made in collaboration with Black stylists, clothing designers, and models, the works in the exhibition are also a celebration of Black creativity and reflect the artists’ interest in supporting diversity in the industry. London-born Campbell Addy, whose studio and street portraits of overlooked youth cultures have been featured in publications such as *i-D*, launched a magazine, *Niijournal*, and a casting company, Nii Agency, as an extension of the ethos of his photography. South African image maker Jamal Nxedlana is the founder of the fashion label Missshape and cofounder of Bubblegum Club, “a cultural intelligence agency and online magazine” whose goal is to “help build the self-belief of the talented minds out there in music, art, and fashion, and to consolidate South Africa as a voice in global conversations.” He says, “Creating a platform and creating context around our work gives it more value.”

In addition to the more than 100 photographs on view, displays of publications, past and present, contextualize these images and chart the history of inclusion and exclusion in the creation of the Black commercial image, while simultaneously proposing a brilliantly re-envisioned future. They include the landmark 2018 *Vogue* cover photo of Beyoncé taken by Tyler Mitchell.

Visitors can also view videos created by *The New Black Vanguard* artists as part of fashion campaigns for Levi’s, Kenzo, Stella McCartney, Marc Jacobs, and more, such as Daniel Obasi’s *An Alien in Town*, a vision of Afrofuturism commissioned by the fabric company Vlisco.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalog with the same title, published by Aperture in 2019, that includes an introductory essay by author and curator Antwaun Sargent. It will be available through the MoAD bookstore.

Sargent is a writer, editor, and curator living in New York City. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *New Yorker*, and various art and museum publications. In addition to authoring *The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion* (Aperture, 2019), he is the editor of *Young, Gifted and Black: A New Generation of Artists* (2020). He is also a director at Gagosian Gallery.

*The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion* is organized by Aperture, New York, and is made possible, in part, by *Airbnb Magazine*.

**ABOUT MoAD**

The Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) is a contemporary art museum whose mission is to celebrate Black cultures, ignite challenging conversations, and inspire learning through the
global lens of the African Diaspora. MoAD is one of only a few museums in the United States dedicated to the celebration and interpretation of art, artists, and cultures from the African Diaspora. The Museum presents exhibitions highlighting contemporary art and artists of African descent and engages its audience through education and public programs that interpret and enhance the understanding of Black art. Founded in 2005, the Museum continues to be a unique, cultural arts staple in the San Francisco Bay Area community.

For more information about MoAD, visit The Museum’s website at moadsf.org.

For media information or visuals visit our online press gallery or contact:

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Online https://www.moadsf.org/press-resources

General Information
The Museum is open Wednesday-Saturday 11am–6pm and Sunday, 12–5pm. Museum admission is $12 for adults, $6 for students and senior citizens with a valid ID. Youth 12 and under always get in free. For general information, the public may visit The Museum’s website at moadsf.org or call 415.358.7200. MoAD is located at 685 Mission Street (at Third), San Francisco, CA.

COVID-19 protocol: City and State guidelines will be observed. Please check moadsf.org for details.

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