

Meleko Mokgosi: Your Trip to Africa
Botswana-Born Artist Explores Complex Socioeconomic Dynamics of
Contemporary Southern Africa

Opening February 27, 2020 at Pérez Art Museum Miami



Meleko Mokgosi. *Democratic Intuition*, Lerato: *Philia I*, 2016. © Meleko Mokgosi. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

(MIAMI, FL — September 24, 2019) — **Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM)** is pleased to present ***Meleko Mokgosi: Your Trip to Africa***, an exhibition of newly commissioned works created by the artist specifically for PAMM's 30-foot double-height project gallery. On view from **February 27, 2020 through May 30, 2021**, the exhibition will investigate themes of colonialism, nationalism, and contemporary southern Africa. The show will feature a series of large-scale paintings that together function as a single, unified work.

Meleko Mokgosi, who was born in Botswana, employs traditions of Western European painting to deliver sharp political critiques relating to the postcolonial condition. By combining a high degree of painterly skill with a poetic, open-ended semiotic approach and an affinity for archival research, the artist shines light on some of the complex socioeconomic dynamics that animate contemporary southern Africa.

Mokgosi typically employs hyper-realistic figurative imagery on an epic scale, incorporating mysterious, unidentified personages loosely linked to one another in implied storylines, sometimes spanning multiple timeframes within the same composition. Mokgosi's work references murals and cinema as well as the conventional European artistic genre known as history painting. Whereas traditional history paintings feature lofty subjects—military battles or climactic scenes drawn from ancient legends—Mokgosi elevates everyday, anonymous persons and common objects, setting them against mundane domestic contexts while inserting references that establish an array of subtle yet powerful suggestive effects.

"This exhibition engages PAMM's long-abiding interest in the Afro-Atlantic world that interweaves Europe, Africa, the U.S., Latin America and the Caribbean," said **René Morales, PAMM's Interim Director of Curatorial Affairs**. "It draws from Miami's deep identification as the crossroads of the Americas while signaling the museum's dedication to addressing issues of racial, ethnic, and national identity with an eye toward diversity and transnational and cross-cultural interconnection."



Left: Meleko Mokgosi. *Acts of Resistance III*, 2018. Oil on canvas. 86 x 56 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches. © Meleko Mokgosi. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Right: Meleko Mokgosi. *Democratic Intuition, Lerato: Philia II*, 2016. Oil on canvas. 94 inches in diameter. © Meleko Mokgosi. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Mokgosi's exhibition at PAMM centers around the 1966 film *Unsere Afrikareise* (Our Trip to Africa) by the seminal filmmaker Peter Kubelka, who is widely recognized as one of the progenitors of the Structural film movement. The film follows a wealthy Austrian family on their safari trip through Africa, revealing the differences in social and economic status between the two cultures. As the Europeans engage in various

leisure activities (swimming, sunbathing, teasing their native attendants, and, of course, hunting), the action is intercut with fleeting glimpses of African passersby engaged in their daily labor (carrying water, pounding a mortar with a pestle). Kubelka punctuates these sequences with the repetitive, gruesome spectacle of the Austrians killing and skinning an elephant, a zebra, a lion, a giraffe, and other wild animals.

The disconcerting dimensions of *Unsere Africareise* have often been cited, together with Kubelka's stated disgust with his bourgeois patrons, to support the argument that he meant the work to serve as a critique of European colonialism and tourism in Africa. Mokgosi takes a more critical perspective, however, citing Kubelka's insistence that his true intention was to "try and tear the emotions loose from the people, so that they would gain distance to their emotions, their feelings." Taking Kubelka at his word, Mokgosi infuses the film with a new emotional force, reversing the desensitized tone that often accompanies modernist aesthetic treatments of non-Western subjects. As he has often done before, Mokgosi drives this critique through the heart of the Western art historical canon.

Meleko Mokgosi: Your Trip to Africa is organized by **PAMM Interim Director of Curatorial Affairs René Morales**. Ongoing support for PAMM's project galleries from Knight Foundation is gratefully acknowledged.

ABOUT MELEKO MOKGOSI

Meleko Mokgosi completed the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and received a BA from Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts, in 2007. He received an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in 2011. Solo exhibitions of his work have been presented at the Fowler Museum at UCLA; Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and Honor Fraser Gallery, Los Angeles. His work has been included in group exhibitions at the California African American Museum, Los Angeles; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; New Wight Gallery, UCLA; National Library of Cameroon, Yaounde; Whitney Museum of American Art; National Gallery, Gaborone, Botswana; and the Augusta Savage Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His work is included in the collections of The Studio Museum in Harlem; Hammer Museum; Alfond Collection of Contemporary Art, Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida; Colby Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine; and Pérez Art Museum Miami, among other institutions.

ABOUT PÉREZ ART MUSEUM MIAMI

Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) promotes artistic expression and the exchange of ideas, advancing public knowledge and appreciation of art, architecture, and design, and reflecting the diverse community of its pivotal geographic location at the crossroads of the Americas. The 35-year-old South Florida institution, formerly known as Miami Art Museum (MAM) and led by Director Franklin Sirmans, opened a new building, designed by world-renowned architects Herzog & de Meuron, on December 4, 2013 in Downtown Miami's Museum Park. The facility is a state-of-the-art model for sustainable museum design and progressive programming and features 200,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor program space with flexible galleries; shaded outdoor verandas; a waterfront restaurant and bar; a museum shop; and an education center with a library, media lab, and classroom spaces.

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