PRESS RELEASE

Project a Black Planet

The Art and Culture of Panafrica



Exhibition
from 6.11.2025
to 6.04.2026

MAC BA TRENTA

Press release

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MACBA explores the Pan-African imaginary through the eyes of a hundred intellectuals and artists

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Project a Black Planet. The Art and Culture of Panafrica can be visited until 6 April. The exhibition includes a publication and an extensive public programme that expands throughout the city

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With 500 pieces, this is the first major international exhibition to analyse the cultural manifestations of Pan-Africanism, from the beginning of the last century to the present day

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The publication, published for the event, translates key texts of Pan-Africanism into Catalan and Spanish for the first time and follows their trail in Catalonia in episodes such as the spanish Civil War or the Second Republic

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Elvira Dyangani Ose: 'This exhibition invites us to imagine a world inspired by the collaborative spirit of Pan-Africanism'

Project a Black Planet. The Art and Culture of Panafrica



¡Asesinos, Asesinos! (Assassins, Assassins!), 2014. Photograph: © Andrew Curtis. Courtesy of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, ACCA.

Barcelona, 5 November 2025. MACBA kicks off Year Thirty with the opening of *Project a Black Planet. The Art and Culture of Panafrica*. Curated by the museum's director, Elvira Dyangani Ose, Antawan Byrd, Adom Getachew and Matthew S. Witkovsky, the show will run until 6 April 2026. The exhibition reveals the vast influence of Pan-Africanism on the creative, cultural and civic activities that have shaped the socio-political and aesthetic movements defining the last hundred years: two World Wars, the Republic and the Spanish Civil War, independence from colonial powers, the struggle for the downfall of dictatorships and the Civil Rights movements.

On display are over five hundred objects by a hundred artists and intellectuals from Africa, Europe, and North and South America over the past century, from the 1920s – when Pan-Africanism first gained widespread recognition – to the present day. Travelling across temporalities and geographies, this project features popular creations, books, posters, political speeches and music, in dialogue with painting, photography, sculpture and video.

It is worth emphasising the prominence of documentation in different formats. Newspapers, magazines, posters, books and leaflets coexist with the works of art and are just as relevant as the artwork from the point of view of the content of the exhibition.

This is the first major international exhibition to analyse the cultural manifestations of Pan-Africanism from the beginning of the previous century to the present day with the aim of breaking with the uniform and reductionist image of Pan-Africanism in order to present it as a global, polyphonic movement.

The project's magnitude is made possible by the combined efforts of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Barbican Centre in London, the KANAL Centre Pompidou in Brussels and the MACBA in Barcelona. *Project a Black Planet. The Art and Culture of Panafrica* open in Barcelona after its premiere at the Art Institute of Chicago and, in June 2026, will be on view at the Barbican in London.

A conversation between the curators will open the exhibition in the Meier Auditorium of the MACBA this Wednesday, November 5, at 6 p.m.

The *Black Archives* and the relevance of the documentary sources

Although each institution shares the bulk of the content, the exhibition takes a different form in each venue. In MACBA's case, three new documentary sources have been incorporated. On the one hand, there is documentation capturing the interpretations of Africa and its diaspora in the early 20th century, with sources addressing the colonization of its peoples up to the 1960s. Figures like W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the first intellectuals to coin the term 'Pan-Africanism,' illustrate the circumstances in which the African diaspora experienced the turn of the century.

On the other hand, there is material from Chimurenga: a Pan-African platform on literature, politics, and art founded by Ntone Edjab in 2002. This documentary archive is based on the voices of the diaspora and takes different forms. It is a channel for reflection and politics by Africans for Africans.

Finally, the Black Archives present 'Pan-African Orogeny,' a research and archival project by Tania Safura Adam. The result is a constellation of archives that weave together fragments of thought, popular culture, and 20th-century Pan-African politics, delving into the link between Pan-Africanism and the contemporary history of Spain and Catalonia. The documentation reveals the presence of Black activists in working-class Barcelona during the last century and the Civil War, when they joined the Republican side, which they saw as a symbolic battleground to defeat fascism.

'My goal was to focus on the Spanish and Catalan context, but I realized it was impossible to do so properly without understanding what happened globally,' Adam notes. The researcher traces back to the 1900 Pan-African Conference (London) and highlights the most significant events, names, and cultural and intellectual output up to the present. She uses the metaphor of orogenesis—the geological process of mountain and range formation, resulting from tectonic plate movement and collision—to explain Pan-Africanism: 'This analysis reveals how Pan-African conferences impacted different parts of the world, ultimately sparking social movements, driving the creation of political parties, and promoting cultural expressions.' In short, Pan-Africanism influences not



Simone Leigh. *Dunham, 2017.* The Art Institute of Chicago, purchased with funds provided by Marilyn and Larry Fields; Claire and Gordon Prussian Fund for Contemporary Art, 2019. Photograph: Jonathan Mathias

only intellectual and political life but also popular culture and the destiny of nations, especially African ones.

Adam employs this strategy to explain why the Lincoln Brigades supported the Second Republic and concludes that it was African-American concerns about the rise of fascism – even more so after Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia – that pushed them to fight for the Republican side. They understood that the struggle against fascism was a universal struggle.

The exhibition documents this issue and also the passage of intellectuals such as Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, Richard Wright and Claude McKay through Barcelona and other cities in Spain. The exhibition also documents the presence of a Black community that gathered in Barcelona's Raval neighbourhood around jazz and boxing in the 1930s, which shows that Barcelona was a cultural hub for people of African descent long before the recent uptick in immigration.

A publication that delves into art and the political imaginary

The work shown in the exhibition is complemented by the essay *Pan-Africa. Art and Political Imaginaries for the Construction of a Black Planet.* The book includes historical and contemporary texts and new essays that vindicate Pan-Africanism as one of the keys to understanding certain issues in contemporary Catalan and Spanish history. 'One of the fundamental concerns of the exhibition is the understanding that Pan-Africanism – the work of Black Marxists, American activism and African-American activism in particular – was closely linked to the anti-racist and pan-humanist histories that defined the social-democratic model of the Republic', says Elvira Dyangani Ose. 'This is one of the reasons why it makes very special and symbolic sense to have this exhibition now at MACBA in Barcelona' -she adds- 'the exhibition invites us to imagine a world inspired by the collaborative spirit of Pan-Africanism.'

Barcelona, a key element in understanding the links between anti-fascism, anti-colonialism and pan-Africanism

The director of MACBA situates the project in the concrete history of Barcelona as a key setting for understanding the links between anti-fascism, anti-colonialism and pan-Africanism. The starting point is the idea that the city, built with the riches of colonialism and the slave trade, is also a territory of resistance, cultural mixing and criticism of its own past. For this reason, she argues that Pan-Africanism is not an external history or an imported discourse, but a fundamental aspect of Barcelona's and Spain's socio-political imaginary.

Dyangani Ose notes that Catalonia, in the 1930s, was the epicentre of workers' and republican movements that inspired the international solidarity of Black intellectuals and militants, such as C.L.R. James and Paul Robeson, who saw the Spanish Civil War as an extension of the global anti-fascist and anti-racist struggle. This connection between the international brigades and African liberation struggles illustrates how the Spanish state and Africa intersect on the same historical front.

The director of MACBA argues that Barcelona has been, from its anti-fascist and republican movements to its current migrant and Afro-descendant communities, an active node of Black internationalism. In this perspective, Pan-Africanism is studied not only as a 20th century political movement, but as a path towards a living knowledge that allows us to rethink Spanish history from the experience of the African diaspora and its cultural agency.

An immersion in Pan-Africanism across nine ambits

Project a Black Planet. The Art and Culture of Panafrica through its artistic manifestations, guided by intellectuals without forgetting the social and political context.

The exhibition begins by questioning



Theaster Gates. *Alls my life I has to fight, 2019*. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Gray Gallery

the conventions of linear time, historical progress, the invention of Africa, the colonial library, as well as national sovereignty. The rooms present curatorial reinterpretations of key Pan-Africanist movements or events – the W. E. B. Dubois archive, Marcus Garvey's founding of the UNIA, *Négritude* and *quilombism* – alongside other explorations of individual identity and the formulation of collective affiliation. The works produced in the first decades of the 21st century encompass futurist social imaginaries, which offer a vision of interdependence, an anti-racist, transnational and cosmopolitan vision that emphasises the validity of the utopian promise – past, present and future – of Pan-Africanism.

In the Barcelona exhibition, the Black Madonna from Theaster Gates *Alls my life I had to fight* takes on special relevance. The figure borrows from the popular imagination of Alice Walker's film *The Color Purple* – recently revived in the notes of 'Alright' by the musician Kendrick Lamar – the notion of the Black Madonna, Gates' homage to mothers. Local audiences will not be able to avoid connecting the image with the Mare de Deu de Montserrat, la Moreneta.

Another key Pan-African perspective comes through the interpretation of the films of Djibril Diop Mambéty and Ousmane Sembène by the artistic collective The Otolith Group, which is materialised both in a video-graphic proposal and in a mural that welcomes the visitor in the main corridor on the first floor of the Meier building entitled *A massive concentration of Black Interscalar Energy* (2023).

Flags without territories. Symbols of solidarity that transcend national borders and differences

The first room of the exhibition houses works that examine the symbolic, political and colonial charges that come from the flags. On one of the walls, the visitor will find an extensive display.

While flags traditionally reinforce territorial claims and identify a country or homeland, the Pan-African flag symbolically unites Black populations and their liberation movements around the world. It therefore represents a collectivity that transcends the borders of nation-states. It is a reminder that most of these borders were set by force, violently expelling entire populations from their homelands, and subsequently maintained by deporting many others 'back home'.

Of particular note are the works of David Hammons *(Africom – American Flag*. 1990) and Chris Ofili *(Union Black. Indoor version.* 2003) who hybridise the Pan-African flag with the flags of their respective countries – the United States and the United Kingdom – in that way questioning who is 'united' under these national symbols, while claiming the possibilities of a transnational belonging.

The Belgian artist Edith Dekyndt in the video *Ombre Indigène (Native Shadow)*, shows us a flag fashioned from dark hair, hoisted by the wind at a point in Martinique. Dekyndt places this flag on the very spot where, in 1830, a smuggler's ship, engaged in the clandestine trade of enslaved people, sank with more than a hundred captives on board originating from an unidentified West African port.

The hall also houses pieces that show how many intellectuals and artists imagined their



Larry Achiampong, *Relic Traveler: Phase 1,* 2017 © Larry Achiampong. Courtesy of the artist and Copperfield, London

existence outside the earth, the utopia of an unattainable existence, in the face of the oppressive reality experienced in times of colonial or racist subjugation. *Two People in Space Suits (Shakshan fi Malabes al Fadaa)* by Abd al-Hadi el-Gazzar plays with these references to life in outer space.

Africa as invention. Pan-Africanism as a response

In a first formulation of this invention, Greek thought and European exploration described Africa as an empty, dark and uninhabited space in an effort to justify its colonisation. In a second, Western philosophers such as Hegel suggested that Africa lacked history, generating an imaginary of the primitive that the 'traditional versus modern' dichotomy has perpetuated to this day. The last, and most crucial, invention explores how Africans themselves, as well as their descendants, have appropriated this knowledge in order to disarticulate it, generating counter-narratives that have traversed, transgressed and transcended these dimensions of being and knowledge to articulate possibilities of liberation and pan-Africanist solidarity.

This sphere recovers some of these scenarios of 'the African' that the Pan-Africanist episodes present in this exhibition help to dismantle. It brings together intellectuals, politicians, writers, artists, activists and members of civil society who have generated new socio-political imaginaries that define an anti-colonial, pan-humanist world. While these proposals insist on not forgetting what the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon called a 'racial historical schema', they formulate the black world as a possibility of imagining ourselves sharing a common agency, united in disparity, beyond race.

In this space there is also a reading area with magazines, books and essays.

Garveyism. Building a Black Planet in parallel to the Western world

The Jamaican Pan-Africanist, Marcus Garvey, advocated global racial solidarity for people of African descent. The resulting movement, bearing his name, offers a means of addressing the effects of racism and the legacies of slavery and colonialism – central problems that Pan-Africanism addresses. Garveyist descriptions of Africa as a homeland have led many to characterise his programme as a 'back to Africa' movement. However, the return Garvey proposed was often more psychological than physical; he himself never travelled to Africa.

Garveyites saw Africa as the land of the future, a place to build a parallel Black world based on self-determination, civic and political equality, and mobility. From the Black Star Line, a commercial shipping company, to passports and paramilitary units, followers of the movement recast key signs and symbols of imperial states, reclaiming them for Black people. With Garvey's own oratory and Garveyite formations as their basis, the works in this room consider history, the seas, the land, and even outer space as part of Pan-Africa.

The French-Algerian artist Yto Barrada, in her work *Tectonic Plate* (2010), draws a map of the world with Africa at its centre. The continents, coloured as if they represented different skin tones, form the pieces of a sliding puzzle as if it were a children's game. The public is invited to reflect on the differences that govern the laws of political boundaries and those of the geological processes of continental drift, as well asto imagine possible movements that unite the peoples of the world.

In *Caribbean Basin* (1982), Trinidad and Tobago artist John Stollmeyer presents a rusty basin that can no longer hold water. A humble domestic object that



Yto Barrada. *Tectonic Plate*, 2010. Deutsche Bank Collection

has lost its functionality due to its three large holes. These holes outline the shape of Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua. The socialist revolutions in these three countries between the 1950s and 1970s were a source of inspiration for the entire region and the entire world. However, the US deliberately excluded Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua from the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act of 1984, an act that offered tariff and trade benefits to other Central American and Caribbean countries.

Négritude. Rethinking civilisation through black histories and achievements

In the 1930s, while studying in Paris, the Caribbean writers Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas, and the Senegalese poet, Léopold Sédar Senghor, invented a philosophical and poetic movement called *Négritude*. They debated questions of freedom, belonging and cultural heritage from an African and diasporic point of view. Aware of France's colonial legacy and the exploitation of Black soldiers, enlisted against their will during World War I, the advocates of *Négritude* concluded that humanist universalism must confront its relationship to racism, displacement and inhumanity. They also argued that modern Western culture should include, and even highlight, African heritage in the hitherto so-called 'universal culture', rather than perpetuating the invention that Africans lacked history and cultural heritage.

Négritude continued to advance not only culturally, but politically and socially, dialoguing with African modernism, the Harlem Renaissance and aspects of surrealism between France and the Caribbean. Its proponents advocated a planet where Black perspectives would be intertwined with Eurocentric views. This poetic imaginary – converted into cultural policy by Senghor during the first decades of his rule in Senegal – was controversial for those who saw in this desire a manifestation of another form of racism.

In this room, two photographs are on display taken by the Polish photographer Walery in 1920s Paris of the Senegalese dancer and model Feral Benga. François 'Féral' Benga became known in the French capital as the male *partenaire* of the legendary dancer Josephine Baker. In the 1930s he became a sensation in the city's cabarets and music halls with his provocative and sensual dances. Walery photographed Benga on several occasions. In the images shown here, dancer and photographer model the space by playing with the tensions between the dancing body, the background and the sabre, thereby subverting the racial and gender stereotypes of the time and proposing images of beauty outside the white canon.

In *Agony (Agony)*, the oil on panel presented here, Colette Oluwabamise Omogbai composes a dismembered, contorted body of intense, vibrant chromaticism floating

against a dense, dark background. A work that does not seek out the pleasant and the obvious, but rather invites us to enter into another kind of aesthetic and psychic commotion.

Blackness. What can it mean to be Black?

The objects exhibited in this area explore the construction of Blackness as part of the cultural imaginary and as a notion of being. It is an unstable term, a sonorous and visual signifier that poses problems in terms of reinterpreting it in language, with connotations determined by specific communities and contexts. Drawing on ideas raised by the philosophical movement *Négritude*, and through strategies such as dialogues, personal stories, popular imaginary, ethnographic surveys and visual abstraction, intellectuals and artists have examined Blackness in a self-reflexive and phenomenological way, alerting us to the effects of racialisation imposed by others on the individual psyche. These works reveal that Blackness is fluid and dynamic, shaped as much by historical circumstances as by subjective experiences. Taken together, they show how the construction of race can be transformed from a tool of separation and domination to a vehicle for liberation.

Quilombismo. Fighting for Islands of self-sufficiency in a sea of oppression

In Kuimbundu, a Bantu language found across West Central Africa, the word *kilombo* means 'war camp'. In Brazil, its translation, *quilombo*, designates an autonomous rebel territory founded by enslaved people who managed to escape their condition. The Portuguese-led human trafficking forced some 5.8 million Africans to travel to Brazil against their will – the largest trade of enslaved people in the world. These communities were mainly from West Central Africa. Secessionist revolts in other geographies gave rise to terms analogous to *quilombo*: *palenque*, *cimarronaje*. Today, there are hundreds of *quilombos* in Brazil and the multifaceted culture of these places is due to the cultural references that these communities brought from their territories of origin.

This room contains *Simbiose Africana no. 3 (African Symbiosis no. 3)*, an acrylic painting on canvas by Abdias do Nascimento from 1973. Flat and brightly coloured, the work can be read as a diagram presented against a background of the colours of the Pan-African flag. In the centre, the image of a snake biting its tail symbolises the persistence of Black traditions against the trafficking of enslaved people.

Also in this room is *Linguagem (Language)* by Brazilian artist Bruno Baptistelli. This work from 2015 consists of two silkscreen prints on paper, printed in different shades of black against a black background. In one, we read the word 'negro' and in the other the word 'preto'. These words connect to the historical claims of the Black movement which, throughout the 20th century, reclaimed them as symbols of identity and struggle. The work also criticises colourism as a discriminatory and oppressive system that segregates people according to their skin tones, from the lightest to the darkest.

Interiors. Living in your head: bodily confinement and mental emancipation

Though many artists see the private domain as a sanctuary from the public sphere, Pan-Africanist desires for self-determination and freedom can come to fruition through liberating the mind – decolonising it, as the Gikuyu author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o would say – and developing forms of resistance to structural and systemic racism. Pan-Africanists believe that such strengthening of the inner spirit can, in turn, inspire civic organisation and collective action.

One example is the 1965 oil-on-carpet painting by the Egyptian artist Samir Rafi, The Visit, where he depicts a half-naked man and woman behind the bars of what could be a prison or a domestic lattice. Combining aesthetics from the Egyptian tradition with resources from the European

avant-garde, Rafi creates a scene that is often read in a symbolic key, identifying the bound and melancholic man as Egypt and the sensual and confident woman carrying a candle as a symbol of hope, freedom and light for the country.

Dreams of the Detainee is an oil painting from 1961 where the artist wrenchingly depicts the suffering and mental resistance that are activated in situations of deprivation of liberty, specifically in the case of women. Beyond the bars, the prisoner maintains her inner world, her dreams and her identity. In the same exhibition room, similar themes are explored by the Sudanese artist Ibrahim El-Salahi in his heartbreaking *Self-Portrait of Suffering*.



Abdias do Nascimento. *Simbiose Africana nº 3*, 1973. Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Afro-Brasileiros (IPEAFRO)

Apparitions. Faith in community and reverence for our ancestors

Invisible Presence: Bling Memories plays a predominant role in this space. The installation consists of fifty coffin-shaped sculptures, created for a performance during Jamaica's Carnival celebration to address violence and socio-economic divisions in the country.

This sculptural ensemble references the aesthetics of carnivals and costumes at this annual celebration but is also directly inspired by the contemporary funerary practices of the Jamaican working class. There, memorial processions may include lavishly decorated coffins, accompanied by loud dancehall or reggae music to celebrate the life of the deceased.

In the various works exhibited here, the figures and practices of apparitions resurface through forms of group intimacy, including prayer meetings, liminal encounters and spectral public performances.

Those who departed this plane of existence in unjust circumstances, whether young people or assassinated heads of state, reappear in rituals that remember and commemorate them. The living help to fulfil their demands and repair the traumas of the past and present. Spiritual beliefs generate a symbolic link to their ancestors, they foster mental resilience, social wellbeing and provide a communal space for mourning, all of which can fuel Pan-Africanist efforts to combat systemic injustices and promote historical consciousness.

Agitation. Resistance emerging from individual disquiet and collective action

Agitation can be individual or collective; in every case, it involves disrupting the status quo. The presentation in this room highlights the centrality of social and political activism to Pan-Africanism, even when the artists reflect their individual states of mind. Several works in this section, such as Kader Attia's installation *Murderers! Murderers!* or Moataz Nasr's ceramic figurines, draw attention to the appropriation of public space and urge us to explore the ways in which people recognise themselves in the articulation of a collective unconscious that endows them with agency for a common struggle.

A public programme expanding the Pan-African universe into the city

The public programme parallel to the exhibition is one of the central themes of MACBA's Year Thirty programming. Coinciding with the museum's anniversary, it plans to extend the content of the exhibition to the city through an extensive public programme.

In the first week of November, coinciding with the opening of the exhibition, a series of films, talks and performances



Abdias do Nascimento. *Simbiose Africana nº 3*, 1973. Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Afro-Brasileiros (IPEAFRO)y

Public programme

From 3 November. Film series in collaboration with Filmlab Palestine, the Filmoteca de Catalunya, Dart Festival, Acció>Cinema and the cinema cooperative Zumzeig.

Wednesday 5 November at 18:00. Conversation with the curators of the exhibition Antawan I. Byrd, Adom Getachew, Matthew S. Witkovsky and Elvira Dyangani Ose.

Thursday 6 November at 19:00. The Palestinian choreographer Farah Saleh presents the performance *Balfour Reparations* within the dance series *Making History(s)* by La Poderosa.

Saturday 15 November at 19:00. Lecture by Fred Moten as part of the School of Common Knowledge of L'Internationale and in collaboration with Festival Sâlmon.

From 18 to 20 February 2026. Seminar on Black urbanisms curated by AbdouMaliq Simone and Asha Best in collaboration with the CCCB and Barcelona 2026 World Architecture Capital.

will be organised in collaboration with La Poderosa, Filmlab Palestine, the Filmoteca de Catalunya, Dart Festival, Acció>Cinema and the cooperative cinema Zumzeig.

This programme, which runs until February 2026, includes an international congress on Black Urbanisms in collaboration with the CCCB and Barcelona 2026 World Architecture Capital, among other initiatives.

Pan-Africa. Art and Political Imaginaries for the Construction of a Black Planet

MACBA publishes *Pan-Africa. Art and Political Imaginaries for the Construction of a Black Planet*, a selection of texts by various authors addressing Pan-Africanism from different perspectives with the intention of creating a socio-political and cultural imaginary linked not only to race but to solidarity as well. The book includes historical texts, contemporary texts and new essays that vindicate Pan-Africanism in order to understand part of our history. It will be published in Catalan and Spanish.

The exhibition *Project a Black Planet. Pan-African Art and Culture* also features a monographic publication in English published by the Art Institute of Chicago that explores the theme of Pan-Africanism and its diverse representations through the selected visual and auditory objects on display.

Opening hours
Mondays to Fridays
(closed Tuesdays except public holidays)
11am – 7:30pm (25 September to 24 June)
10am – 8pm (25 June to 24 September)
Saturdays: 10am – 8pm
Sundays: 10am – 3pm
Public holidays: please check
the website for opening times

#PlanetaNegreMACBA

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