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From Pretoria to Toronto, AGO's two new exhibitions take a global look at documentary photography

Recent acquisitions of works by Ming Smith, Dawoud Bey, and Malick Sidibé make their début October 31, 2020

TORONTO — The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) announces the opening of two new photography exhibitions this October. Curated with artworks from the AGO Collection, both feature artists grappling with the same question, albeit from different eras and different perspectives: What can a photograph document? These exhibitions also mark the début of many recent acquisitions, including works by African American artists Dawoud Bey, John Edmonds, Wardell Milan, Ming Smith, as well as Malian photographer Malick Sidibé, part of the AGO's sustained investment in adding to the depth and diversity of its photography collection holdings.

Originally planned as part of the 2020 Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival but postponed due to COVID-19, *Documents, 1960s – 1970s* and *Dawoud Bey, John Edmonds and Wardell Milan*, will now open October 31, 2020 and run through April 18, 2021.

Opening in the Edmond G. Odette Family Gallery, *Documents, 1960s–1970s* brings into focus a moment of great social change internationally. Featuring artworks made on city streets and in photography studios from Bamako to Mumbai, Pretoria to Toronto, artists included in the exhibition are Henri Cartier-Bresson, Ernest Cole, Lutz Dille, Charles Gagnon, David Goldblatt, Bhupendra Karia, Paul Kodjo, Martha Rosler, Stephen Shore, Malick Sidibé, Ming Smith, Ian Wallace, and Garry Winogrand.

At the core of the exhibition is a selection of artworks from Africa. In their intimate black and white portraits of youth on the street and at parties, Malick Sidibé and Paul Kodjo each capture the sense of optimism and emancipation in Mali and the Ivory Coast during a turbulent period of post-colonial transition. These images stand in stark contrast to the oppressive strictures of South Africa's apartheid regime as

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documented in Ernest Cole's photographs, published as *House of Bondage* in 1967, and David Goldblatt's portraits in the region of Johannesburg from the 1970s.

Opening on the same day in the AGO's Robert & Cheryl McEwen Gallery, *Dawoud Bey, John Edmonds and Wardell Milan* features works by three contemporary African American artists. Despite a generational divide—Dawoud Bey (b. 1953), John Edmonds (b. 1990), and Wardell Milan (b. 1977)—their poetic works explore and re-envision the history of Black representation and the Black American experience.

In two works from his series *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* (2016–17), Bey presents rural Ohio landscapes as he imagines they would have appeared to enslaved people as they moved under the cover of darkness along the Underground Railway. John Edmonds photographs his models close up and from behind. Each subject wears a du-rag and the vantage point places the focus on this thin head wrap. Unfairly associated with gangs and drug culture, Edmonds brings attention to the racial stereotypes implicit in clothing. Edmonds produced this work after the 2012 death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager who was shot while wearing a hoodie by a man who insisted Martin looked "suspicious." Printed on Japanese silk, these images are both vulnerable and imposing.

Wardell Milan, reflecting on Robert Mapplethorpe's homoerotic photographs of Black men from the 1980s, recasts those same subjects in collaged multi-media works to consider this photographic inheritance, as part of his series *Parisian Landscapes* (2013–19).

"Demonstrating a variety of artistic strategies, these works create a complex picture of the documentary uses of photography at a time of social upheaval not only in North America and Europe, but internationally," says Sophie Hackett, Curator of Photography and the curator for both exhibitions. "The AGO's collection has strong holdings of social documentary photography, and we have made a concerted effort in recent years to acquire artworks that allow us to tell a more inclusive story, that broadens the history of documentary photography beyond Europe and North America."



More information about exhibition-related programming will be released at a later date.

ABOUT THE AGO

Located in Toronto, the Art Gallery of Ontario is one of the largest art museums in North America, attracting approximately one million visitors annually. The AGO Collection of more than 105,000 works of art ranges from cutting-edge contemporary art to significant works by Indigenous and Canadian artists and European masterpieces. The AGO presents wide-ranging exhibitions and programs, including solo exhibitions and acquisitions by diverse and underrepresented artists from around the world. In 2019, the AGO launched a bold new initiative designed to make the museum even more welcoming and accessible with the introduction of free admission for anyone 25 years and under and a \$35 annual pass. Visit AGO.ca to learn more.

The AGO is funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. Additional operating support is received from the City of Toronto, the Canada Council for the Arts and generous contributions from AGO Members, donors and private-sector partners.

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