

Meleko Mokgosi: Bread, Butter, and Power
February 11–July 1, 2018



Meleko Mokgosi, *Democratic Intuition, Bread, Butter, and Power* (studio view), 2017
Courtesy of the artist and Honor Fraser Gallery, Los Angeles

Los Angeles—Opening February 11 at the Fowler Museum at UCLA, *Meleko Mokgosi: Bread, Butter, and Power* is a newly commissioned installation consisting of twenty-one large-scale paintings hung frieze-style around the perimeter of the Lucas Gallery. Masterfully rendered scenes of daily life in southern Africa address themes of feminism, the gendered division of labor, and the place of women in the nation-state. *Bread, Butter, and Power* comprises the most recent chapter in Mokgosi's series *Democratic Intuition* (2013–present), which explores the ways that democratic concepts influence our lives, loves, and relationships.

Bread, Butter, and Power is Mokgosi's first solo museum exhibition in Los Angeles and a homecoming for the Botswana-born, New York-based artist, who earned his MFA from the Interdisciplinary Studio program at UCLA in 2011. Solo exhibitions of Mokgosi's work have recently been shown at the Williams College Museum of Art (2017); the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester and Rochester Contemporary Art Center (2017); and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2015).

About the Exhibition

Several paintings in the installation picture intimate scenes of men and women in their homes—interior spaces that reflect their lived experience. In one, for example, a young woman sits casually on a comfortable chair in an airy, well-appointed room. Her leisurely pose raises questions about the labor expected of women according to their socioeconomic positions. Other canvases venture outdoors to portray groups of school children and market stands. These explore ideas about the varied standing of women across the social fabric of southern Africa, the sacrifices made by women, and the failure of national governments to value their hard work.

Mokgosi is, by his own account, a history painter. He employs a European style of narrative storytelling to reclaim histories of southern Africa and distinguish them from those imposed by colonial powers. This approach posits new stories while simultaneously upending accepted narratives. Before he begins each new chapter of a painting series, Mokgosi spends time gathering images and creating storyboards that reflect the intertwined roles of politics and history. Again subverting the conventions of traditional Western painting, he leaves his canvases unprimed. The raw canvas means that every brushstroke has permanency; fixing “mistakes” is not an option. The intentionality and precision of Mokgosi’s painting underscores the urgency of his messages.

Mokgosi lends his critical voice to the experiences of young African artists of his generation, born since the euphoria of the 1960s independence movements. In adopting a historian’s approach—drawing on extensive research and theoretical grounding—he provides new perspectives on the transition from the colonial era through to Botswana’s independence, and interrogates the current moment as it relates to the rippling ramifications of the past. Mokgosi has said: “I think historical specifics are crucial because I am grappling with the epistemological effects of colonialism in southern Africa. So it is urgent, I believe, to parse out how history has been legitimized, what dominant histories have been left out, and more importantly, how to trace untracked histories and bring them to the fore, because these are all histories that matter.”

About the Artist

Meleko Mokgosi (b. 1981; Francistown, Botswana) lives in New York, where he teaches at the Gallatin School at New York University. He completed the Affiliate Painting Program at the Slade School of Fine Art, University of London (2006); received his BFA from Williams College (2007); attended the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2007–2008); and received his MFA from UCLA (2011).

Solo exhibitions of Mokgosi’s work have been presented at the Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA (2017); the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester and Rochester Contemporary Art Center, Rochester, NY (2017); and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2015). His work is in the collections of, among other institutions, the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Eckard Collection, The Hague. He is represented by Honor Fraser Gallery, Los Angeles; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; and Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

Mokgosi is the recipient of numerous honors including a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant (2017); an Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation grant (2017); a Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Fine Arts (2017); a Painters & Sculptors Grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation (2016); and the Mohn Award in conjunction with the Hammer Museum's *Made in L.A. 2012*. He participated in the Rauschenberg Residency at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Captiva, FL (2015), and the Artist-in-Residence program at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2011–2012).

An illustrated publication will include an essay by exhibition organizer Erica P. Jones, Associate Curator of African Arts at the Fowler Museum at UCLA.

Credit

Bread, Butter, and Power is organized by the Fowler Museum at UCLA and curated by Erica P. Jones, Associate Curator of African Arts at the Fowler Museum.

The exhibition is made possible by major support from the Philip L. Ravenhill Endowed Fund and the Fay Bettye Green Fund to Commission New Work.

Generous funding is also provided by the Pasadena Art Alliance, Fowler Contemporary Council, and Fowler Exhibition Fund. Additional support is provided by Laura Donnelley, and Pamela and Jarl Mohn; Michelle Anne Bholat, Demetrio and Gianna Kerrison, Arthur Lewis and Hau Nguyen, and V. Joy Simmons, MD; and George and Azita Fatheree, Jay Geller, and Ric Whitney and Tina Perry-Whitney.

About the Fowler Museum at UCLA

The Fowler Museum at UCLA explores global arts and cultures with an emphasis on works from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas—past and present. The Fowler enhances understanding of world cultures through dynamic exhibitions, publications, and public programs, informed by interdisciplinary approaches and the perspectives of the cultures represented. Also featured is the work of international contemporary artists presented within the complex frameworks of politics, culture, and social action.

Visiting the Fowler Museum

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Admission to the Fowler is free.

Hours: Wednesday 12–8pm and Thursday–Sunday 12–5pm

Parking: UCLA Lot 4, 398 Westwood Plaza, directly off Sunset Blvd, \$12/day



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