

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

AKINSANYA KAMBON

SELECTED PRESS



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Using Japanese Firing Technique, Former Black Panther Akinsanya Kambon Makes Ceramic Sculpture Rich with Personal History and African Influences

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on May 21, 2020 • 6:58 am

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THE POWERFUL CERAMIC SCULPTURES of **Akinsanya Kambon** (aka Mark Teemer) are embedded with history, identity, and ancient techniques with spiritual vibes. An extensive selection of his works is on view [“American Expressions/African Roots: Akinsanya Kambon’s Ceramic Sculpture.”](#) at the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento.

Kambon has traveled to Africa 14 times, conducting research and spending extensive periods in Mali and Sierra Leone. The Yoruba of Nigeria gave him his name. The artist’s experiences on the continent are reflected in figurative works distinguished by the metallic luster of their glazed surfaces. The sculptures take the form of African deities and historic and religious figures produced using raku, a firing technique with Japanese roots. Kambon practices a Western-style of the process.

In a conversation with Crocker assistant curator Christie Hajela, Kambon said he does an initial firing and then paints the sculpture with different color glazes and fires it again. “Usually when you do a raku firing, you have a lot of people all firing your piece. And the way we do it, sometimes we have women and they’re dancing and drummers are drumming and women are dancing and you can feel the spirit in the air of what’s taking place with this whole raku process,” he said.

“Then, everybody backs up and you open the kiln and you start taking the pieces out and putting them in the smoking can and the smoke mixes with the glazes and causes some type of chemical reaction and that’s what gives you all the metallic lusters. I like to use eucalyptus leaves, sawdust, newspaper, hay, all of these different combustibles. The more of them you put in, you never know what you’re going to get.”

“Sometimes we have women and they’re dancing and drummers are drumming and women are dancing and you can feel the spirit in the air of what’s taking place with this whole raku process.” – Akinsanya Kambon



Artist Akinsanya Kambon in conversation with Crocker Art Gallery assistant curator Christie Hajela about his work and exhibition "American Expressions/African Roots: Akinsanya Kambon's Ceramic Sculpture." | Video by Crocker Art Museum

KAMBON SPLITS HIS TIME between Sacramento, Calif., where he was born and grew up, and Long Beach, where he was a professor for 26 years at California State University, Long Beach. He grew up in Del Paso Heights and studied at Sacramento City College, where he was first introduced to the raku technique.

A former U.S. Marine, Kambon served in Vietnam. Back stateside, he served as lieutenant of culture for the Sacramento chapter of the Black Panther Party. He is represented in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where his ["The Black Panther Coloring Book"](#) (1968) was acquired in 2019.

He's never had a solo museum show, though. Kambon [told the Sacramento Observer](#), the city's longstanding black-owned newspaper, he almost had an exhibition at the California African American Museum (CAAM) in Los Angeles in 2002. The opportunity faded, he said, when artist [John T. Riddle Jr.](#) died. Riddle was CAAM's program manager for visual art at the time.

"I was thinking I wasn't going to ever get an exhibit in a museum after he died. I figured all my chances were gone," Kambon told the Observer.

Two decades later, the Crocker presentation is his first solo museum exhibition and the venue is fitting. Kambon says he is "comfortable" at the Crocker Art Museum. The oldest public museum west of the Mississippi River, the institution was founded in 1885. The artist "feels at home" at the museum because one of the founders, Judge E.B. Crocker (1818-1875), was involved with abolitionist activities before he moved to California, where he served on the state supreme court.

Kambon says he went to Lincoln Junior High School (which was on P Street in downtown Sacramento at the time) across from the Crocker and when he ventured into the museum as a young student it was his first encounter with art. He was mesmerized. "I'd never seen a museum," he said. "I'd never heard of a museum." **CT**

["American Expressions/African Roots: Akinsanya Kambon's Ceramic Sculpture"](#) is on view at the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, Calif., Feb. 2-Sept. 13, 2020. The museum is temporarily closed. Check directly with the institution for updated scheduling.

FIND MORE [about Akinsanya Kambon](#) on his website

FIND MORE about a recent exhibition inspired by John T. Riddle Jr. [here](#) and [here](#)



AKINSANYA KAMBON (American, born 1946), "Nehanda," 2013 (Raku-fired clay, approx. 18 1/2 x 9 inches). | Collection of S. Tama-sha Ross Kambon and Akinsanya D. Kambon aka Mark Teemer



AKINSANYA KAMBON (American, b. 1946), "Contradictions," 2016 (Raku – fired clay, approx. 50 1/2 x 28 1/2 inches). | Collection of S. Tama – sha Ross Kambon and Akinsanya D. Kambon aka Mark Teemer



From left, Installation view of AKINSANYA KAMBON, "John Randall, Buffalo Soldier," n.d., and "Equestrian Black Sampson," 2012. | Courtesy Crocker Gallery of Art



AKINSANYA KAMBON (American, born 1946), "John Randall, Buffalo Soldier," n.d. (Raku-fired clay, 15 1/2 x 4 x 9 1/2 inches). | Collection of S. Tama-sha Ross Kambon and Akinsanya D. Kambon aka Mark Teemer



AKINSANYA KAMBON (American, born 1946), "Shango III," 2012 (Raku-fired clay, approx. 23 1/2 x 10 inches). |
Collection of S. Tama-sha Ross Kambon and Akinsanya D. Kambon aka Mark Teemer



AKINSANYA KAMBON (American, born 1946). "The Greatest Shame." 2016 (Raku-fired clay, approx. 34 1/2 x 43)



AKINSANYA KAMBON (American, born 1946), "The Royal Embrace," 2013 (Raku-fired clay, approx. 17 3/4 x 11 inches). | Collection of S. Tama-sha Ross Kambon and Akinsanya D. Kambon aka Mark Teemer



AKINSANYA KAMBON (American, b. 1946), "Equestrian Black Sampson," 2012 (Raku-fired clay, 16 1/2 x 5 1/4 x 10 inches). | Crocker Art Museum, Gift of S. Tama-sha Ross Kambon and Akinsanya D. Kambon aka Mark Teemer, 2018.5

January 14, 2022
By Harmeet Kaur

An exhibition considers what's changed since the Black Power movement -- and what hasn't



Credit: Gordon Parks/Courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation and Jack Shainman Gallery

Many will know the [iconic photo](#) of Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton sitting on a rattan peacock chair, with a spear in one hand and a shotgun in the other.

Taken in 1968, the image would become one of the defining symbols of Black Power -- a cultural and political movement in the late '60s and early '70s that emphasized Black pride and self-determination.

It's also the inspiration for "Theorist's Throne," a work by Radcliffe Bailey, made in 2012, that recreates the peacock chair in miniature, covers it in glitter and encloses it in a bell jar. In remixing that historical symbol, the piece captures just what "[This Tender, Fragile Thing](#)," a new exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in upstate New York, is all about.



Akinsanya Kambon, Oshoshi, 2011. Credit: Courtesy of Akinsanya Kambon and Jack Shainman Gallery

Elsewhere in the exhibit, Akinsanya Kambon, an artist and former Black Panther, invokes the spirit of the organization through his ceramic sculptures. Drawing on African spirituality and religious traditions, his work is an expression of pride and a recognition of history -- a mission that was instilled in him during his time as the lieutenant of culture for the Black Panther Party's Sacramento chapter.

"One of the things the Black Panther Party did is it allowed me to understand that if you are an artist or if you come from a history of oppression and you do art, your art should talk about those things," Kambon told CNN. "Your art should challenge the system that puts you where you are."

"This Tender, Fragile Thing" is on view at Jack Shainman Gallery: The School in Kinderhook, New York, from January 15 through April 30.

Top image: Gordon Parks, Untitled, Harlem, New York, 1963. © Gordon Parks Foundation. Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

SIN&R

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A sacred art

See Sacramento artist and former Black Panther Akinsanya Kambon's terracotta sculptures at Crocker Art Museum

By [Patrick Hyun Wilson](#)

This article was published on [02.06.20](#)



Artist Akinsanya Kambon discovered Crocker Art Museum in junior high school. Now, he has a major exhibit there.

“The hero of vengeance.” That's the meaning of “Akinsanya,” a name that hails from the Yoruba culture of western Africa. It's a name that Sacramento artist Akinsanya Kambon was destined to live out.

But Kambon didn't see himself as a hero.

American Expressions/African Roots runs through July 5. Crocker Art Museum, 216 O St.
For more info, visit crockerart.org.

After discovering his Yoruba ancestry in the late '80s, Kambon wanted to strengthen his connection to his roots by adopting a Yoruba name. But in Yoruba culture, a person needs to be named by the people who know them best. So Kambon gathered his closest friends and family to choose his name, and the rest is history.

“I told them I couldn't accept the name because the people are the heroes, individuals are not,” Kambon said. “They said, ‘Yeah, we figured you were going to say something like that. We're still going to call you Akinsanya.’”

The name stuck over the years. Kambon began signing his work with his new name, and now it appears at the base of dozens of terracotta sculptures, many of which are currently on display at Crocker Art Museum's latest exhibition, *American Expressions/African Roots*.

For Kambon, the work is more than just sculpture. It's spiritual. But getting to that level of artistic expression was a long journey.



“Nehanda” embodies the spirit of Zimbabwean medium, Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana.
PHOTOS COURTESY OF CROCKER ART MUSEUM

A hero's origin

Before he was given his Yoruba name, Akinsanya Kambon was a young boy in Sacramento named Mark Teemer. Stricken with polio at age three, he became paralyzed on the left side of his body.

“I used to get teased by the other children. If I'd go out for recess, they'd throw me down and put dirt in my face, and grass on my face,” Kambon said. “Art was a type of therapy for me. I'd use it to combat the psychological abuse that I got from the other children.”

Kambon said he first discovered Crocker Art Museum while playing with friends around the corner from where he attended Lincoln Junior High School.

“We used to play over there in the yard,” Kambon said. “One day a kid said, ‘Let's go inside’ ... The first thing I saw was these huge paintings. I stopped in my tracks and my mouth dropped open and I was just looking at them. I had never seen anything like that, and the other kids were like, ‘Come on Mark, come on, you're going to get us caught.’ I couldn't move.”

From then on, Kambon said he would visit every day. The entry fee in 1950 was 25 cents, and on the days he couldn't afford it, he would try to sneak past the security guard.

In school, Kambon spent all his time drawing, so much that he stopped paying attention in his classes. By the time he graduated high school, he was reading at a second-grade level.

In 1966 he was drafted into the Marine Corps and sent to Vietnam as a combat illustrator. The experience had a lasting effect on him, artistically and psychologically.

“I didn't even know I had PTSD until I met my wife,” Kambon said.



Akinsanya Kambon uses the raku technique to create one-of-a-kind ceramics.

Themes of war influenced Kambon's work; many of his pieces are terracotta sculptures of warriors. Among them, there's "Equestrian John Randall, Buffalo Soldier," a rendition of Civil War Private John Randall, who was said to have survived an attack by 70 Cheyenne warriors while on a hunting trip.

It was also in Vietnam that Kambon was introduced to the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. But it wasn't until the 1969 Oak Park Riots—sparked after police raided the Black Panthers' Sacramento headquarters—that he became more interested in the organization. Kambon said that during the riots, he witnessed an officer swinging his nightstick at a young girl.

"I saw how the police were treating people, and then the Panther Party asked me to do some drawings," Kambon said. "Next thing you know, I was in the Black Panther Party."

While with the Black Panther Party, he drew the infamous "Black Panther Coloring Book," which contains child-friendly drawings of black men stabbing pigs wearing police uniforms.

In 1970, he was tried and ultimately acquitted in the shooting of a Sacramento police officer in the "Oak Park Four" trial.

Following the trial, Kambon attended classes at Sacramento City College, where he learned the raku technique, a low-firing ceramic sculpture process that causes clay to crack under pressure and produces unique glazes. He used the technique to create the many terracotta sculptures now on display in the museum of his childhood. Only now, he doesn't have to sneak in to see great art.



"Equestrian John Randall, Buffalo Soldier" is one of Kambon's many terracotta warriors.

Channeling the spirits

Kambon graduated from CSU Fresno with a master's of arts in 1976, and in 1984 he began to teach African American Studies at CSU Long Beach. He made several trips to Africa, but it was a 1995 trip to Elmina Castle in Ghana that clarified his work and life as an artist.

Inside what was once one of the biggest stops during the Atlantic slave trade, Kambon began to meditate at an altar where someone had placed candles.

“All of a sudden I heard this female voice say, ‘We've been waiting for you.’ And I looked up. It really scared me. And she said, ‘We need you teach our children who was stolen, about our history, about culture and about our religion,’ Kambon said.

“That's where I started really getting serious about my commitment to this artwork. And this artwork's purpose is to teach people about African history, African culture and African spirituality.”

When he works on the sculptures, Kambon said he feels as though he is serving as a vessel for a spirit that guides his hands.

One such piece, titled “Nehanda,” depicts Zimbabwean spiritual healer, Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, who led her people into battle against European colonizers in 1896. She's shown in a state of grief, palpable anger flashing across her face as a child hangs limply in her arms. A blood-red glaze glistens off the dying child as Nehanda attempts to heal them.

If you asked Kambon, he would tell you that this sculpture contains the spirit of Nehanda. It's not a figure of speech, but a sacred belief that her spirit is literally infused into the piece—making it more than just an object to be bought, sold or owned.

“When you work as close as I do with ancestor spirits, I think to put a price on these things and sell them would be like prostituting your culture,” Kambon said.

His work on display at the Crocker is only a fraction of his extensive work, more than 4,000 sculptures.

“I'm doing this for people to see,” Kambon said. “I wouldn't mind my whole collection being in a museum, because I think it should be.”

Pano: 20 Hours in L.A., Plus Upcoming Picks in S.B.

On Dinosaur Jr. and Frieze Los Angeles



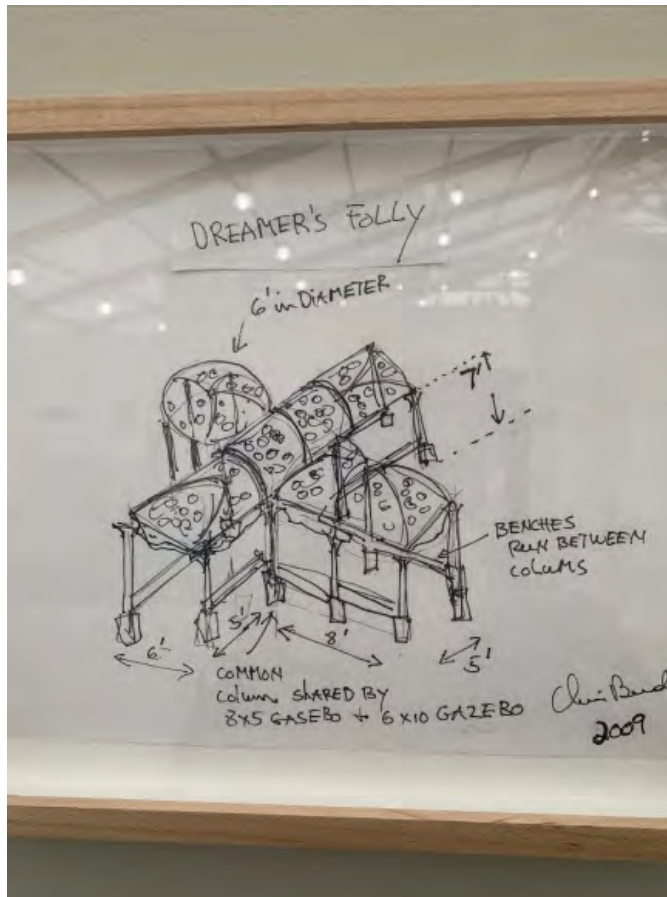
Credit: Charles Donelan

By **Charles Donelan**

Tue Mar 01, 2022 | 9:25am

FRIEZE IN BEVERLY HILLS

The 2022 edition of Frieze Los Angeles took place last week in a large, purpose-built structure on the grounds of the Beverly Hilton. After a hiatus in 2021, the fair rose from 70 gallery booths in 2020 to approximately 100 this year. The rise in participation coincided with a flurry of announcements by global galleries of new outposts in L.A.



Credit: Charles Donelan

These projects include the merger of New York–based Pace with mid-Wilshire’s Kayne Griffin, creating an international powerhouse with particular strength in the representation of Light and Space movement artists such as James Turrell. Sean Kelly, another New Yorker, will open a new 10,000-square-foot gallery in Hollywood on Highland this spring. The latest big shoe to drop is landing in East Hollywood at the beginning of 2023, when David Zwirner plans to occupy three buildings on North Western near Melrose.

When major galleries move, it’s not just artists and collectors who take notice. These announcements also mean high-profile work for architects. Sean Kelly retains his longtime architectural partner Toshiko Mori. Zwirner will build in East Hollywood with New York–based Selldorf Architects and Twinsteps Architecture. Other operations moving to L.A. include Lisson Gallery, Sargent’s Daughters, Shrine, and the Hole.

On to the fair! Neo-Pan-Africanism made its presence felt at the Jack Shainman booth. Several artists included at Frieze were in the most recent show at the gallery's Kinderhook, New York Schoolhouse space, *This Tender, Fragile Thing*. The raku ceramics of Long Beach and Sacramento-based artist Akinsanya Kambon impressed me the most. These dazzling objects depict the orishas of Yoruba land as filtered through Kambon's distinctive sensibility. Kambon was born in Sacramento in 1946 as Mark Teemer, and he's been a Marine, a Black Panther, and a professor of art. Here's a great video interview made for his show *American Expressions/African Roots* at the Crocker Art Museum in 2020.

I also loved Samuel Levi Jones at the Vielmetter Los Angeles booth. His geometric collages made from pulped law books desecrate historical source materials to achieve higher levels of consciousness. Jones transforms documentary practice into a mode of expression that resists social control. In the context of Frieze L.A.'s hyper-visual environment, these subtle compositions radiated a refreshing sangfroid.

Speaking of shelter from sensory overload and Los Angeles as a center for contemporary art, Gagolian Gallery showed an outstanding work by the late Chris Burden called "Dreamer's Folly." This riff on a 19th-century landscape feature known variously as a gazebo or folly stood at a prominent corner of the Frieze L.A. exhibition space. Constructed out of salvaged materials similar to those in Burden's "Urban Light," that most Instagrammable outdoor installation at LACMA, "Dreamer's Folly" offered visitors to Frieze a place to shelter for a moment, or, yes, take a selfie. The Gagolian Gallery has been in Beverly Hills since 1978, and Burden was the first artist that the gallery represented. This month, Gagolian will publish a book titled *Poetic Practical: The Unrealized Work of Chris Burden*, documenting the many projects that the artist planned but was unable to finish before his death in 2015 at the age of 69.

DINOSAUR JR. IN HOLLYWOOD



Credit: Charles Donelan

After a suitable psychic reset in the late afternoon, it was time to head to the Fonda Theatre in the heart of Hollywood for an evening of rock. This rock binge came courtesy of Dinosaur Jr. The band was in fine form, with guitarist J Mascis looking like Gandalf and shredding like Hendrix, bassist Lou Barlow appearing unfazed by a recent bout with breakthrough you-know-what, and rock drummer supreme Murph displaying tremendous energy from the kit. If you've never seen Dinosaur Jr. live, you have probably nevertheless heard that they are very loud.

While this is true, the mix at the Fonda was just right, and earplugs were, for a change, optional. The highlight of the long and late set was a medley from their most recent release, *Sweep It Into Space*, which sparked fiery bursts from the ever-combustible Mascis. For those who want to get a secondhand sense of how rad this was, consider listening to *Emptiness at the Sinclair*, a live recording made last May in Cambridge, Mass. As the title indicates, this livestream concert took place in an empty room, but it gives a good idea of where these guys are today.

Tue Mar 15, 2022 | 20:15pm

<https://www.independent.com/2022/03/01/pano-20-hours-in-l-a-plus-upcoming-picks-in-s-b/>

Charles Donelan

Executive Arts Editor

What Sold at Frieze Los Angeles 2022

Catherine Wagley Feb 21, 2022 12:01pm



Camille Henrot, installation view in Hauser & Wirth's booth at Frieze Los Angeles 2022. Photo by Casey Kelbaugh. Courtesy of Casey Kelbaugh/Frieze.

The first two iterations of Frieze Los Angeles felt novel, soaked so deeply in La La Land mystique that the stereotypes almost collapsed on themselves: set on the backlot of Paramount Studios in Hollywood, with Frieze Projects scattered across a set built to look like New York City. It was amusing to see work by L.A. artists taking over a fake version of the city long assumed to be the true U.S. art capital (even if L.A. galleries and artists have often been uninterested in that West-versus-East competition). And it was tempting to spend more time exploring this set, complete with bars and food trucks, than delving into the pristine, booth-lined tent.

This year, Frieze Los Angeles—back for the first time since 2020, relaunching as Omicron passes through the population—was less whimsical, more down-to-business. The tent, designed once again by Kulapat Yantrasast and his firm wHY architecture, was 40% bigger, accommodating 100 galleries instead of 70. It was constructed next door to the efficient, looming Beverly Hills Hilton hotel, a midcentury monument built by Conrad Hilton in 1955. With the cancellation of a public sculpture installation in the nearby Beverly Gardens Park, the big tent had little competition; there weren't even many onsite restaurants to draw patrons away from the litany of booths.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Estelle*, 1972. © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

- Xavier Hufkens sold out its booth of Thomas Houseago paintings, each with an asking price in the range of \$350,000. One work, *Purple Sunset on the Pool - Early Moonrise (for DH)*, was acquired by LACMA.
- Jack Shainman Gallery sold a painting by the exceptional late portraitist Barkley L. Hendricks, *Estelle* (1972), for \$1 million. The painting, a portrait of Estelle Johnson, a student at Connecticut College when Hendricks taught there. Since his death in 2017, Hendricks's market has grown exponentially, spurred on by shows like the major institutional survey "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power." The gallery also sold Nina Chanel Abney's *Outdoor Dining #2*, for \$225,000; Toyin Ojih Odutola's *Accountability* for \$175,000; and a work by Akinsanya Kambon, which went to a museum collection for under \$100,000.

MoMA



Black Power in Print: *The Black Panther* Newspapers at MoMA

Rescued from a storage closet, a dusty box contained a trove of Emory Douglas's iconic graphic work for the Black Panther Party.

[Akili Tommasino](#)

Oct 12, 2021

In November 2019, The Museum of Modern Art acquired 30 issues of the *Black Panther* newspaper, dating from 1969 to 1970, that I had the privilege and responsibility of stewarding for four years. The newspapers, which document the activities and opinions of the Black Panther Party during a crucial period in its history, are the first works by Revolutionary Artist and former Minister of Culture of the Black Panther Party [Emory Douglas](#) to enter MoMA's collection.

Before these materials came into my custody, they belonged to my dearly departed friend Patrick McQuaid; when I met him in 2011, he was an American expatriate living in Berlin. In the 1990s, Patrick was a high school student doing odd jobs at the Washington, DC, branch of the Century Foundation, a public policy research institute, where he had been tasked with emptying out and discarding the contents of a cluttered storage closet. Inside, he discovered a box of newspapers labeled "THE BLACK PANTHER," and had the foresight to ignore instructions and take it home with him. The box would remain in the basement of his parents' house for over 20 years.



The author pictured with the collection of Patrick and Nesta McQuaid and Akili Tommasino in MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design, October 11, 2019



The salvaged box of *Black Panther* newspaper issues

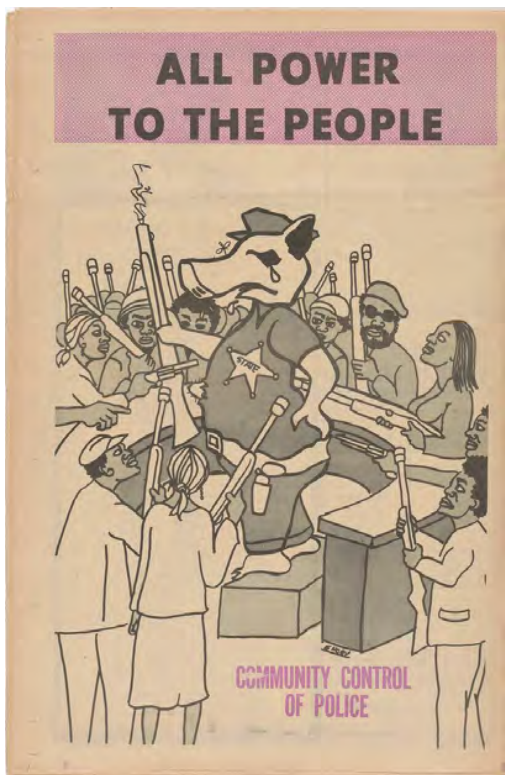
The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was founded in October 1966 in Oakland, California, by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. A year later, Newton established *The Black Panther: Black Community News Service* as its journalistic organ.[1] The first issue of *The Black Panther*, published April 25, 1967, is dedicated to the story of Denzil Dowell, a Black youth killed by police, and reflects the motivations for the Party's founding: to protect the community from wanton police violence and provide an alternative to the nonviolent civil rights movement.





July 1967--Minister of Defense, Huey P. Newton (right) and Chairman, Bobby Seale (left), reading an early edition of B.P.P. Newspaper at the home of Eldridge Cleaver, Minister of Information B.P.P.

Interior page detail from *The Black Panther Newspaper*, vol. 4, no.13 (Our main purpose). 1970



Back cover, *The Black Panther Newspaper*, vol. 3,
no. 25 (Oakland 1968, Fascism, Chicago 1969). 1969

Selling the newspaper became one of the requirements of Party membership. Some 537 issues of *The Black Panther* were published between 1967 and 1980; at its height, the international weekly circulation exceeded 100,000 copies.[2] Over the years, its editors included Eldridge Cleaver, Elaine Brown, David Dubois, and Michael Fultz. Except for the first issue, which was hurriedly compiled, *The Black Panther* was designed by Emory Douglas, whose alternately acerbic and uplifting woodcut-inspired graphic illustrations and photomontages convey the Black community's vexed relations with exploitative politicians and abusive law enforcement officers, the Panthers' stance against police brutality and imperialistic American foreign policy, and their hopeful visions of Black power and community prosperity. Producing and distributing the newspaper were often dangerous tasks. Several Black Panther Party members lost their lives for the paper, including circulation manager Sam Napier, who on April 17, 1971, was assassinated in the New York distribution office.

Patrick told me about his collection of *Black Panther* newspapers and their intriguing provenance when I visited him from Paris, where I was then based, in October 2013. I mentioned that I had been moonlighting as an editorial assistant at [Editions de L'Herne](#), an independent French publishing house that in addition to volumes on art and literature published translations of radical political texts. I was thrilled at the prospect of unearthing the collection; we immediately resolved to carry out a project that would bring the uniquely preserved set of newspapers to light. Unfortunately, the following month, Patrick passed away in a tragic accident in Berlin; he was only 36 years old. I was devastated and I continue to mourn the loss of my friend. A loving father, avid basketball player, and aficionado of reggae music, Patrick was one of the most curious and compassionate people I have encountered.



Patrick McQuaid

Two years later, in 2015, I was working as a curatorial assistant at The Museum of Modern Art when I hesitantly reached out to Patrick's parents Carla and Bill. It turned out that Patrick had enthusiastically told them about our idea. When I visited the McQuaids, they graciously retrieved the box with the newspapers from their basement and entrusted it to me with the charge that I carry out the project that was so abruptly halted.

The box Patrick saved contained 37 copies of the *Black Panther* newspaper, representing 30 issues (three in duplicate, and one in triplicate), spanning May 4, 1969, to February 28, 1970. The *Black Panther* newspaper was typically distributed folded in half, but the Century Foundation stored its copies flat and in a dark box, so they remained in excellent condition and maintained the brilliance of Emory Douglas's beautifully colored covers and spreads with minimal creases. All the issues bear the systematic annotations of the Century Foundation, including an intake stamp denoting the date the paper was read and cataloged, and the initials of the reader. Throughout, names and reported locations of certain Black Panther Party members are underlined and circled with a blue colored pencil (see below). The Century Foundation's motive for holding multiple subscriptions to *The Black Panther* and assiduously annotating the issues remains murky. Founded in 1919 as the Co-operative League by business leader Edward Filene, and known as the Twentieth Century Fund during the period in question, the organization described itself as a "philanthropic foundation for research and public education on current economic, social and international policy issues." [3]



Detail of the Century Foundation's intake stamp,
from *The Black Panther Newspaper*, vol. 4, no.
8 (Free Breakfast for School Children). 1970



RENEE MOORE--19 years old (Peaches)--No Ransom Set

One of the two sisters at Central, Peaches suffered a miscarriage while the office was under siege. Coming out of the building, the people heard Peaches say, "This is the People's office, All Power to the People". She's now held at Sybil Brand, but is in good condition.

PAUL REDD--19 years old--No Ransom Set

Paul was in Central Headquarters when the attackers came. He was uninjured. Right now he's in New County Jail's "adjustment center"--the "hole"--for drawing revolutionary art on the jail walls. When they threw him into the hole, the pigs broke Paul's right hand. But he's strong and is in good spirits.

GEORGE YOUNG--22 years old (Duck)--Ransom: \$25,000.00

Pigs shot Duck in the back of Central Headquarters on Saturday night, December 6th. He has since received no medical treatment. A supposed "warrant" for his and two other brothers' arrests was the excuse for all the vicious attacks on our offices and homes on December 8th. Despite no medical treatment, Duck is doing well and loves the People.

Page detail showing Party members' names underlined and circled with a blue colored pencil, from *The Black Panther Newspaper*, vol. 4, no. 3 (By lifting their hands against these revolutionaries, they lifted their hands against the best that humanity possesses). 1969



A page from *The Black Panther Newspaper*, vol. 4, no. 4 (No justice in Amerikkka). 1969

The selection of papers documents a particularly compelling period in the history of the Black Panther Party and covers major events including the 1969 assassination of Illinois chapter chairman Fred Hampton, the trial of 21 New York City-based Panthers who were accused of planning attacks on police stations and subsequently acquitted, and the eventually successful appeal for the reversal of the 1967 voluntary manslaughter conviction of Huey P. Newton. In addition to the Ten Point Program, which was printed in every issue, the papers feature recurrent reports about the successes of the Black Panthers' Survival Programs, including free clinics and free breakfasts for children and the promotion of cultural activities (see left).

Patrick's box also contained a copy of the controversial *Black Panther Coloring Book*, published in 1968 by an artist then known as Mark Teemer, the Lieutenant of Culture for the Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panther Party; Teemer is now known as Akinsanya Kambon.



Cover of the *Black Panther Coloring Book*, 1968

During the four years before my former colleagues in MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design contacted me about acquiring the collection, I studied the newspapers, stored them as safely as I could, spoke about them at conferences, and contacted cultural institutions in hopes of keeping the collection intact and publicly accessible. It was both thrilling and instructive to share my nascent research, first with the students of interdisciplinary artist Kamau Amu Patton at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and, later, with Los Angeles-based artist Awol Erizku at MoMA PS1, at the invitation of former MoMA librarian Jennifer Tobias. I have been particularly struck by emerging artists' enthusiastic embrace of this historic material.

The contemporary relevance of the *Black Panther* newspaper is a double-edged sword: both a testament to the pervasiveness and persistence over time of the oppressive forces that called the Black Panther Party into action, and, especially in the era of "fake news," a reminder of the power of marginalized voices. The timeliness of the struggles and revolutionary art of the Black Panther Party is tragic but telling. More than 50 years after the founding of the Black Panther Party, and 40 years since its cessation, the *Black Panther* newspaper not only teaches us about the ambitions, successes, failings, merits, challenges, and aesthetics of the Party, but also provides a template for forging boldly equitable paths forward. Its message has again become urgent at a time when the murders of unarmed Black and Brown men, women, and children by police—as well as debates about prison reform, income and education inequality, and food justice—are receiving increasing public and media attention.

MoMA's acquisition of the *Black Panther* newspapers underscores the import and impact of the Black Panther Party on visual culture, and specifically highlights the revolutionary fine art practice of Emory Douglas. As an art institution, MoMA is especially well suited to present, interpret, and contextualize Douglas's work. Moreover, this acquisition enables MoMA to better promote the history and legacy of the Black Panther Party. While preserving these important cultural artifacts for posterity, the Museum has made their full contents accessible online, where they can inspire new generations of revolutionary artists and empowered citizens.



A page from The Black Panther Newspaper,
vol. 4, no.10 (Happy birthday Huey). 1970

I would like to thank my former colleagues for giving the newspapers formerly in my care a proper institutional home and for inviting me to mark the occasion of their MoMA debut with [a public conversation with Emory Douglas on October 14](#) and this article, which commemorates Patrick McQuaid's radical act of reclamation. I reiterate my gratitude to Patrick's son Nesta, mother Carla, and brother Dan for the opportunity to live with and learn from his collection. It has been a great gift, and I am honored to have helped MoMA share that gift with the world.

NOTES:

[1] The March 13, 1971, issue introduced the renamed *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service*

[2] Joshua Bloom "If You Can Get Your Hands on Copies of the Black Panther Newspaper," p.xxiii in Hilliard, David. 2007. *The Black panther: Intercommunal News Service*

[3] Century Foundation records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. b. 118 f. 7 Beaton, Leonard—The Politics of Arms Control 1969

Emory Douglas will join curators on Thursday, October 14, at 7:00 p.m. EST for [a live-streamed discussion of his work](#). He will also hold [a workshop with emerging artists](#) as part of MoMA's Art and Practice series, moderated by Professor Colette Gaiter, on Wednesday, November 3. You can further explore the printed legacy of the Black Panther Party and the Black Power movement through the Museum of Fine Art, Boston's [Black Power in Print](#) project, launching October 15.

[Akili Tommasino](#)

[Associate Curator, Modern and Contemporary Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

Crocker Exhibit Falls Victim To Coronavirus Shutdown



by GENOA BARROW
April 27, 2020

SACRAMENTO – Back in February, artist Akinsanya Kambon captivated audiences as he explained his creative process and what motivates his work as part of an exhibit at the Crocker Art Museum.



The work of local artist Akinsanya Kambon was on display at the Crocker Art Museum before the coronavirus pandemic forced its closure. Kambon visited the Crocker as a child, never expecting to one day be a featured artist there.

A month later, the coronavirus pandemic hit and Sacramento joined cities across the globe in shutting down large gatherings and encouraging people to shelter-in-place. The Crocker shut its downtown doors and in doing so, shut down the opportunity for many to see Kambon's "American Expressions/African Roots" and fully understand its significance. The Crocker is closed through at least April 30. The exhibit, Kambon's first ever, was to run through July 5, but should the COVID-19 closures extend beyond July, it will not be extended.

"If we were to extend an exhibition, it would create a significant domino effect that impacts other exhibitions months and even years ahead. For this reason, our current and upcoming exhibitions will remain on their original schedules," shared Crocker spokesperson Karen Christian.

"I'm sorry to say that we will not be able to extend the exhibition of art by Akinsanya Kambon. His art is spectacular and powerful and so very meaningful. It also has the ability to broaden perspectives of humanity and of our world. There is nothing quite like experiencing Professor Kambon's art in the museum setting, and it breaks my heart that the community isn't able to explore it and all of our art in person right now, with all of the cultural and emotional enrichment the museum has to offer," Ms. Christian continued.

Kambon has been creating art for decades and has been a vendor at various events, but this is the first time his work is on display in a museum. He was almost featured at the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, but the opportunity died when the museum's director, artist John Riddle, passed away in 2002 before the exhibit happened.

"I was thinking I wasn't going to ever get an exhibit in a museum after he died. I figured all my chances were gone," Kambon shared.

Nearly 20 years later, the Crocker's Associate Director and Chief Curator Scott Shields approached the former Black Panther. He'd come across his work and was interested in seeing more. After visiting his home in Sacramento, Kambon shares, Shields flew out to Long Beach, where his main studio is housed.

The Crocker, Kambon said, didn't shy away because of its colorful past. The exhibit opened in February and the artist was featured during the museum's Black History

Month celebration and in an art talk with its Director of Education, Stacy Shelnut-Hendrick.

“They know my history. They know that I was in the Panther Party. They know that I was arrested with the Oak Park Four. They know all that history,” Kambon said.

“That’s why I was really surprised when they gave me that exhibit, but I did some research and I found out how much the Crocker family was involved in the abolitionist movement. I’m talking about the old Crocker, the old man who started that. They fought against slavery.

That’s why I feel so at home at the Crocker. Anybody who’s family history goes back to the abolitionist movement, they were supporters of John Brown and all the other White folks that fought against slavery. I welcomed having an exhibit at the Crocker and I’m proud to be at the Crocker because of that,” he said.

Kambon hasn’t been idle during the COVID-19 shutdown. He’s created more than 100 new pieces.

“I get up every morning, go into that garage and I work until I get exhausted,” he said.

The new works were small, affordable pieces people might want to buy, having seen the larger, more expensive pieces featured in the exhibit.

“I’m looking at the pieces at the Crocker and the range is about \$100,000-\$600,000,” Kambon said.

He says he’d rather have people get something out of his work, rather than get rich from it himself.



“I don’t even do art for the sale,” he said. “A lot of people think that you ‘do art’ because you’re trying to make a living being an artist. That’s not my purpose. I was making my living when I was teaching at Cal State Long Beach. Art is something that I do for educating our people.

For every piece of artwork, there’s a story and every story with that artwork gives a fantastic history of our people if you look at it and you have to look at it and you have to understand. I’ve travelled to Africa 14 times. I’ve done research with different tribal groups I’ve lived with and I’ve asked people there in Africa questions about what the art means and when I do that, I do the piece and I try to incorporate the stories into the art.

Aside from creating new things, Kambon is revisiting work from his past. He and wife Tama-sha Ross Kambon are putting the finishing touches on a book sharing the “real story” behind a controversial coloring book he illustrated back in 1968. The publication, which featured violent interaction with cops, depicted as pigs and policing the Black community, saw a recent comeback. Kambon says there’s an opportunity to clear up some long-held myths, including ones that it was created by the FBI and its infamous Counter Intelligence Program (Cointelpro). He says Panther Party leadership “threw him under the bus,” but he went along with the narrative that the project wasn’t endorsed by the group in order to keep law enforcement from undermining the work members were doing in the Black community, including improving student success by providing nourishing meals for poor children.

“It was a book for adults. It was a history book and it wasn’t to be colored. What happened was Cointelpro. I took it to Oakland and Bobby Seale loved it. After it came

out, two weeks later it hit the headlines and when it hit the headlines, the FBI said that we were making kids study how to kill pigs before we fed them breakfast. They used that coloring book to attack the free breakfast program.”

People accused Kambon, known as Mark Teemer then, of being an FBI agent. Others thought the FBI had put out the coloring book and mailed it out to White families to scare them.

Kambon says the coloring book warrants conversation, as it deals with the racism and injustice the Black community still faces all these years later.

“That’s the reason it resurfaced after Trayvon Martin got killed. Then we had Eric Gardner, then we had Mike Brown, we had Freddie Grey, we had the little 12-year-old Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland and then Stephon Clark. All these things make the coloring book relevant today,” he said.

“The coloring book was reintroduced, but now I think people need to understand what the coloring book does. It’s like a history book.”

By Genoa Barrow | OBSERVER Senior Staff Writer

OBSERVER photo by Ken Nelson

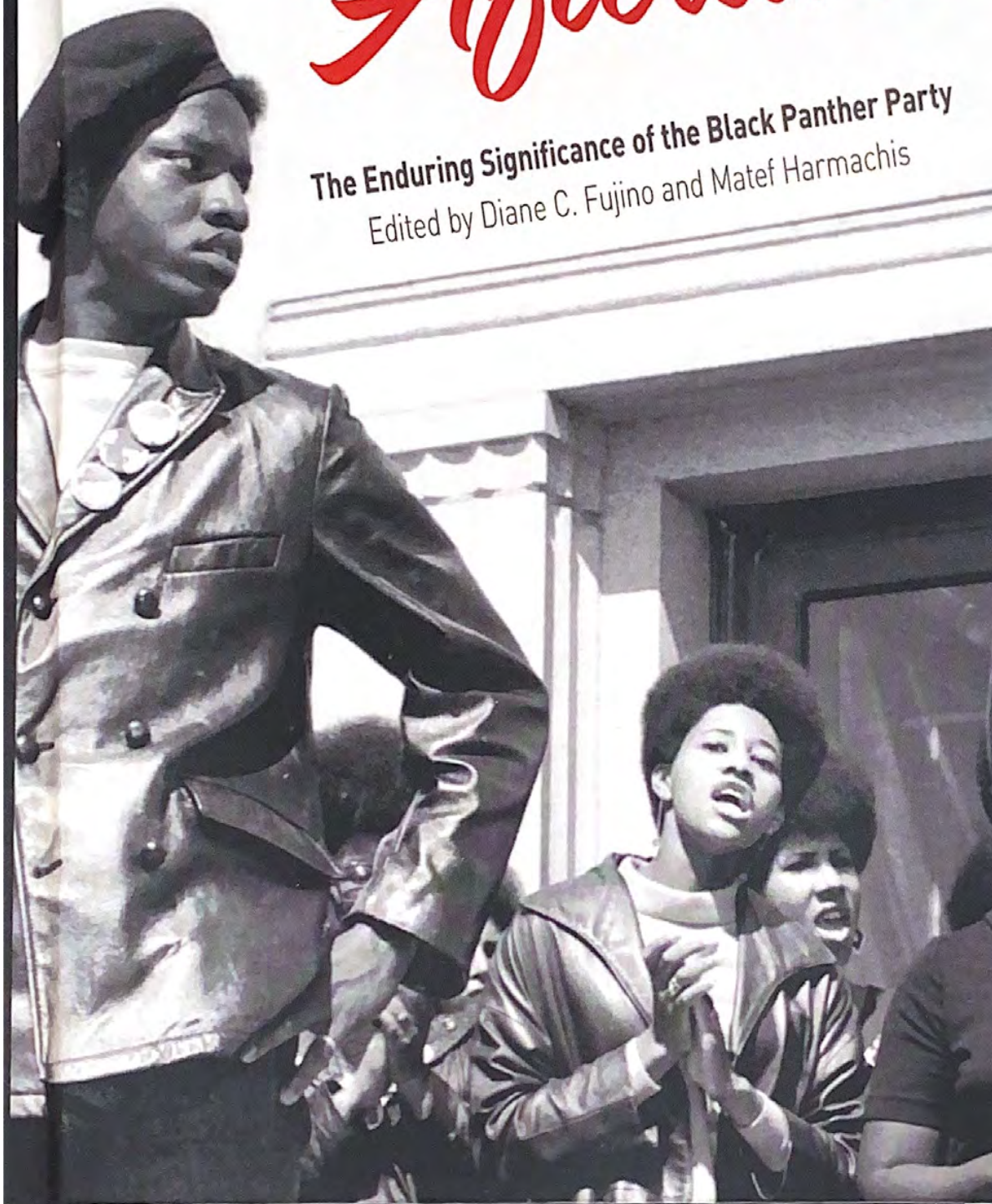


Genoa Barrow

BLACK POWER

Afterlives

The Enduring Significance of the Black Panther Party
Edited by Diane C. Fujino and Matef Harmachis





Akinsanya Kambon's bronze casting skills, developed in Africa, were enhanced working with the bronze casters in Burkina Faso in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso. Working with other artists in the city of Ouagadougou, Kambon added the patina to this art piece. *The Moor*, 2008, Bronze sculpture, 15 x 13.

CHAPTER EIGHT

States of Fugitivity: Akinsanya Kambon, Pan-Africanism, and Art-Based Knowledge Making

Diane C. Fujino

My part has been to tell the story of the slave. The story of the master never wanted for narrators.

—Frederick Douglass¹

Art can only deal with the truth. You have to tell the truth whether the people like it or not. The truth is the basis for setting you free.

—Akinsanya Kambon

Introduction

In May 1987, Akinsanya Kambon held a press conference in Chicago to announce that he was turning himself in. Behind him, his artwork, symbolic of his suffering and state of captivity, was on display. One reporter observed: “[There] were several busts he had sculptured of black men with expressions of agony. In a corner sat two huge oil paintings of young males with chains around their necks, hands and feet. The faces were those of Kambon’s sons.”² Kambon had been single-parenting two sons, who were with him throughout

his eighteen months underground, in Mexico, Long Beach, California, Washington DC, New York, and finally Chicago. From Chicago, he returned to Sacramento, California, where he surrendered. In November 1985, he had skipped his sentencing hearing and begun life as a fugitive. The first two trials had resulted in hung juries and mistrials; the third jury convicted him of drug and gun possession. Kambon explains that he was visiting a friend when the police raided his friend's apartment. His friend handed him one of the dishes of cocaine to flush down the toilet. Kambon refused, but in the attempted exchange left four fingerprints on the dishes. Kambon states, "Anyone who knows me knows that I don't drink or do drugs." He was facing up to five years in prison. Kambon told reporters that he felt his life was endangered given the constancy of the police harassment and brutality he faced in his hometown of Sacramento, especially since the Oak Park Four won a dismissal in a 1970 case involving Black youth accused of killing a white police officer. When arrested in the Oak Park Four case, Kambon recounts that the police had chained him to a radiator pipe, pulled down his pants and underwear, and threatened to castrate him with a razor. When he refused to sign a waiver to remain silent, they beat him and kicked out two teeth. From that time to the mid-1980s, he reports having been stopped by the police seventy-eight times and beaten numerous times. This kind of police violence and harassment prompted Kambon's flight.³

Kambon's time underground raises questions about the meanings of fugitivity. Does it involve any kind of escape, or specifically an escape from criminality (as in outlaws) or from conditions of oppression (as in runaway slaves)? Is it largely a physical condition, or are there political, cultural, psychological, and spiritual elements? How might we understand the multiple meanings of fugitivity? For Kambon and family, the physical escape, as expected, posed innumerable challenges. Angela Davis recounts her life as a fugitive rife with fear and anxiety. She decided to flee after being charged with aiding Jonathan Jackson in an armed courtroom takeover in an effort to free Jonathan's brother, prison movement leader and Black Panther George Jackson. Of her experiences in 1970, Davis writes: "[F]ugitives are caressed every hour by paranoia. Every strange person I saw might be an agent in disguise, with bloodhounds waiting in the shrubbery for their master's command. Living as a fugitive means resisting hysteria, distinguishing between the creations of a frightened imagination and the real signs that the enemy is near."⁴ Like Davis, Kambon experienced the exhaustion arising from the need for constant hypervigilance to avert capture. Physical conditions were also difficult. But for one who survived the Vietnam War and who understands

the hardships endured by fugitive slaves before him, Kambon could handle the meager conditions. What concerned him most was how to care for his two children while on the lam, including registering them for school while remaining undetected.⁵ He worried constantly about their futures and, if found, the possibility of their being killed as "collateral damage" in the police pursuit of Kambon. In fact, the media coverage and press conference were strategies to stay alive when relinquishing himself to the authorities, based on advice from the renowned human rights attorney William Kunstler.⁶

What may be most surprising about his fugitivity is the way Kambon continued a kind of normalcy while in hiding. Some would say this was foolish, but he had a friend ship some seven hundred pieces of his artwork to him in Chicago. When the reporter met him at his Chicago home in May 1987, he observed:

I walked into a scene as strange as any I have encountered in many years covering the vicissitudes of urban warfare. The ground floor of the house had been transformed into a secret African art gallery. Hundreds of paintings . . . hung on the walls over the decaying wallpaper. There were paintings of slave markets and paintings of starving black women staring hollow-eyed as their dying children suckled at their dry breasts. There were statues—hundreds of proud African heads with patinas of bright green and black and red. There were unfinished statues—clay molds in the making . . .⁷

Kambon recalls that when he turned himself in, he brought about fifteen hundred art pieces with him from his Chicago home. The creation of art while on the lam was more than a way to occupy his time; it allowed him to express his political and cultural beliefs, focus his fears, and connect to a liberation movement of utmost importance to him.

Fugitivity represented for Kambon not only escape from the law, but, more so, a kind of marronage or creation of a life outside of mainstream capitalist society. He already knew about the numerous slave rebellions that had taken place (including one in which his great-great-grandfather participated) as well as the maroon societies established by runaway slaves throughout the Americas. Whether called *palenques*, *quilombos*, *cumbes*, *mocambos*, *ladiera*, or *mambises*, whether ephemeral or complexly structured, maroon societies represented a freedom through the creation of autonomous Black communities.⁸ Like Assata Shakur, Eldridge Cleaver, Russell Maroon Shoatz, Safiya Bukhari, Sekou Odinga, Kuwasi Balagoon, Hank Jones, and other Black Panthers, Kambon's resistance exceeded escape from specific criminal charges.⁹ He viewed the entire US legal and criminal

“justice” apparatus as functioning to reproduce racial capitalism’s inherent inequalities of race, class, gender, and nation—one that was particularly ruthless against descendants of Africa. “I don’t think there’s any justice for Black people,” observed Kambon.¹⁰ No matter how harsh the conditions and the level of hypervigilance required, the creation of an alternative society, outside the strictures of white supremacist, colonial logics made sense to him. In fact, throughout his life, he had lived a kind of maroon existence from his early years in poverty, to prison, to homelessness, to the establishment of the Pan-African art studio in Long Beach, California. Akinsanya and his wife S. Tamasha Ross Kambon (Susan Ross) have created what Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz call “insubordinate spaces” that can transform spaces of oppression into spaces of transformation.¹¹ His life’s work is to make art that tells the story of African captivity, escape, marronage, and resistance. His sculptures, paintings, and drawings—and accompanying storytelling—tell the story of African creation of art, knowledge reclaimed from the ancestors, revolutionary theories and practices, transformed social relations, and emancipatory imaginations. Akinsanya states strongly, “I am a maroon!”

Early Years

Akinsanya Kambon was born Mark Anthony Teemer on Christmas Day 1946, in Sacramento, California, to Laura Ella Hackett (née Wells) and David Mike Teemer. His parents divorced when he was two years old. His mother married two more times. Kambon was the second oldest of nine children. There was poverty in his early years, but his tenacious mother, who was an avid reader and high school valedictorian, saved enough money to buy a boxcar, place it on concrete blocks, and creatively transform it into a home. In 1960, his mother was able to buy a two-story house on Sixth Avenue across from McClatchy Park, in the predominantly Black neighborhood of Oak Park.¹² Kambon’s life experiences taught him about the harsh realities of racism and impoverishment and about the need to defend oneself—lessons he would carry with him into the Black Panther Party.

Kambon recalls a childhood made difficult by his disability. At age three, he contracted polio and was paralyzed on the left side of his body, including his face. The children at North Avenue Elementary School teased him unmercifully. One student stood out. This is a story Kambon tells to explain how he became aware of US racism.

I was in kindergarten, and only four years old. There was a little white girl named Becky with Shirley Temple curls. I’d be sitting outside at school and everyone would tease me. I’d be crying and she’d come and put her arms around me, “Don’t cry, Mark.” We lived in a boxcar across the street from Becky’s house that had shrubs and fences. One day, Mama [ed.: Kambon’s maternal great-grandmother] and I were walking down the street and Becky came out to the gate and started waving at me, “Hi, Mark.” I went to wave. But my great-grandmother grabbed me by the ear, twisted it so hard, she twisted my head around, and said, “Boy, that’s fire and rope. Fire and rope.” I didn’t know what she was talking about. All I knew was just looking at that little white girl made my ear hurt.¹³

Kambon would soon learn that the threat of Black lynchings was not confined to the South. When he was about twelve years old, after seeing his white neighbors getting ready to go camping, he begged his mom to join their Boy Scouts troop. His mother objected, but he was so deeply disappointed that she relented. When they joined, he and the four other Black boys integrated that all-white troop. None of the Black scouts could afford the uniform and had to settle for a little cap as a stand-in to signify their inclusion. At one meeting, Kambon relayed how his excitement to learn to tie a variety of knots turned into tragedy.

The Scout leader said, “Now I’m going to show you how to tie a knot that all scouts should know how to tie.” I tied my little knot and wrapped it around thirteen times and it slipped up and down. Then he said, “And now we’ll show you what it’s used for.” So he comes to the back of the room and grabbed me by the arm and took me up on the stage. I was a little guy for twelve or thirteen. I’m all proud and all these people are looking at me. He gets me to the edge of the stage, stage is about four foot up, and he puts that noose around my neck and then he kicks me off. The knot hit me in the neck and I couldn’t breathe and I started crying. I could see people laughing. And then I passed out. When I woke up somebody was massaging my neck. And there was two white men back there fighting. The guy that told us about the Boy Scouts and let us join was fighting with this other guy. I was scared! When I could breathe again, I started throwing up. I jumped off that stage and I took off and I ran out in the field. I laid down in the field and I cried. I said to myself, “My mother told me not to join the Boy Scouts.” I didn’t know nothing about the South and lynchings, nothing about racism.¹⁴

As Kambon heard family stories, he came to realize how the lives of his own ancestors intertwined with the history of Black oppression and Black resistance. Years after his great-grandmother’s “fire and rope” warning and the Boy

Scout incident, Kambon learned that his maternal great-grandmother, had a son who was lynched in Texas. During a short visit with his father, shortly after the Oak Park Four case ended in dismissal, Kambon heard stories about family rebels on his father's side. His father disclosed the story of his Uncle Buck, a Buffalo Soldier who fought in the Philippines and Cuba. But when forced to build the roads in Northern California, he took off, declaring, paraphrased by Kambon: "I ain't no damn slave. I'm a fighting man. You going to teach a man how to kill and then you're going to work him like a slave?" Uncle Buck then joined a gang of outlaws and used his skills gained in the US military to survive out West. They stole cows and horses and robbed banks, stagecoaches, and trains. During his years as a Buffalo Soldier and an outlaw, he allegedly killed forty-six people. After the revenge killing of his wife and unborn child he fled to Canada with his brother-in-law, a Cherokee.¹⁵

As Kambon shared with his father his own knowledge about the famous slave rebellions of Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner, and Denmark Vesey, his father dropped another knowledge bomb on him. He told him about the 1811 slave rebellion on the German Coast, near New Orleans, the largest slave revolt in US history. Inspired by the Haitian Revolution, some five hundred enslaved men wielding axes and guns, some dressed in military uniforms, carried out an armed revolt from January 8 to 11. They had a two-pronged military strategy—marching south down the River Road to New Orleans, while the enslaved Africans inside the city of New Orleans simultaneously revolted and captured an arsenal. The rebels, however, had mistakenly not anticipated a rear guard on their march south to New Orleans and were outmatched by the military might of the slaveholders. The militiamen found the escaping leader of the rebellion, Charles Deslondes, and killed him. They captured other rebels, including the Akan warriors Kook and Quamana. The planters held a tribunal, both to legitimize their violence as well as to reclaim their professed civility after engaging in such unconscionable acts of brutality. Whether killed in the initial battle, pursued and killed, or executed following the tribunal, the planters beheaded the rebels and stuck the severed heads on fence posts stretched across sixty miles along the River Road—as a display of their power and a warning to future insurrectionists. Kambon's father then revealed that his great-grandfather's was one of the heads on the posts.¹⁶

Kambon recounts stories of family members who were lynched in Texas, beheaded in retaliation for the 1811 slave rebellion, or a fugitive who countered white violence using the weapons of destruction taught to him as a Buffalo Soldier. What interests me most about these family stories is the social meanings

derived by Kambon. Scholar Alessandro Portelli contends that narratives, whether factual or not, are valuable because "they allow us to recognize the interests of the tellers, and the dreams and desires beneath them."¹⁷ Abiding by Frederick Douglass's charge to "tell the story of the slave," Kambon relays personal stories of African peoples to breathe life into the historical and structural apparatuses of anti-Black racism. He is a master storyteller and griot (or West African storyteller, historian, or cultural worker) in using the method of witnessing to testify to the experiences of Africans and the viciousness of power.¹⁸ He also derives inspiration and pride in recounting the actions of rebellious Black people, stories too often missing from public memory and from the written records. These stories have captured his imagination and find form, to this day, in his drawings, paintings, watercolors, and sculptures. One of Kambon's watercolors, created in 2018, shows Black men, women, and children walking on a dirt road lined with trees, interspersed with heads on poles, referencing the German Coast slave rebellion of 1811. In another set of watercolor paintings (2017), a Black soldier is outfitted as a Buffalo Soldier; in another, the protagonist sits on horseback shooting back while being pursued. Curiously unusual for a nineteenth-century Buffalo Soldier, Kambon painted the soldier with long dreadlocks, perhaps as a way of seeing himself in the insurgency and fugitivity of his Uncle Buck. In a charcoal drawing (2015), Kambon created a moving scene of a girl teaching a grandmother to read exposing the racist policies and practices that prohibited teaching enslaved Africans to read and write. As I watched Kambon draw, it struck me that his artwork elicited greater emotionality and sensitivity than the original photograph from which it was drawn. Perhaps it was knowing the social meaning of this piece, with Kambon himself having struggled with functional illiteracy as a young adult. But there is also an affective power, a spirit and a truth captured in Kambon's work.

Kambon's selection of stories have one more important function. In a society that equates nonviolence with ethical behaviors, Kambon's life experiences and political philosophy challenge the easy narrative of the civil rights movement's alleged nonviolence and the discomfort for some with Black Power's focus on self-defense. Kambon is captivated with the German Coast slave rebellion. It is personal for him. But more than that, it is political. To him, the omnipotence and viciousness of white structural power and white violence intertwine with capitalist and colonial domination to render as reasonable the method of Black self-defense, up to and including the use of armed struggle, to defend oneself, one's family, and one's community. Kambon views the long history of the Black radical tradition—from Denmark

Vesey and Nat Turner, to the 1811 enslaved rebels and his Uncle Buck, to Robert F. Williams and the Black Liberation Army—as his political genealogy. He too was trained to kill as a US Marine in Vietnam and carries to this day the physical and psychological scars concomitant with that brutality.¹⁹

Kambon was nineteen years old when he was drafted. He had assumed that his earlier polio and his then functional illiteracy would safeguard him from the military, but when he reported for his physical, they were told to count off 1-2-1-2 to determine whether a recruit went into the army or the marines. He ended up in the marines. It was May 1966 and the Vietnam War was raging. He recalls being pumped up for 'Nam and feeling like he was the “baddest on earth,” that is, until his older brother took him to a program at Sacramento High School, his high school, where he heard a dynamic presentation by Stokely Carmichael speaking against the war. This was December 1966, just before he was deployed to Vietnam. Kambon recalled, “I started tearing my uniform off right there.” Carmichael’s reasoning, along with his own experiences in Vietnam, turned Kambon from “military propaganda” to antiwar critique. As is his pedagogy, Kambon shows, rather than tells, through the use of story narratives or *testimonios*.

In Vietnam we used to have what we called Soul Sessions. We’d meet every week—all the brothers [Black men] in our battalion, about thirty of us—and go through the newspaper, the *Stars and Stripes*. We go over letters from home and every week a brother was reading about one of his friends that got killed by the police. Then we got this one letter, the first Black Panther Party newspaper, “Why Was Denzil Dowell Killed?” That’s where I first learned about the Black Panther Party. They were talking about doing to our people at home the same thing that they tell us to do to the “gooks.” They tell us if you kill a woman or child, plant a grenade on the body and say that they tried to blow you up or they tried to reach for your weapon—you know, just like the police do. So that was something that really got me.

We had this one brother who used to read to us. Detroit Blue was twenty-six, slightly older than the rest of us. He’d read this newspaper to us every week and explain stuff that we didn’t understand. One week they had the rebellion in Detroit and about forty or fifty Blacks were killed. It was on the front page of the *Stars and Stripes*. Blue got to reading the paper and all of a sudden he stopped and tears welled up in his eyes and then started running down his face. He dropped the newspaper and he walked off. We all sat there looking, “What the hell is wrong with him?” So we picked up the paper and we started trying to figure out what was said; it talked about a Black woman who got shot in the face with a .50-caliber machine gun. She

ran a daycare center in her apartment. The National Guard said they saw a flash and they shot her in the face. Detroit Blue knew her. So we thought that’s what had him break down. But a week later when we saw him again, he came over and apologized for breaking down. We said, “Aw, Man, we understand, you knew this sister.” He said, “That ain’t got nothing to do with it. What happened to me was, I felt betrayed by our own government using weapons that we can’t use in war, but they can use them on our brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers at home.”²⁰

As a combat illustrator for the marines, Kambon’s work was to document what he saw in the rice paddies, villages, and jungles. Years later, at his therapist’s directive to draw the ten most stressful experiences he had in Vietnam, he created oil paintings that depicted soldiers raping a young village girl and a soldier trying to hold in the brains of a dying child. He also created an image from guerilla warfare school, which trained soldiers in the method of cutting open the bellies of pregnant women and then stomping on the fetuses’ heads. These memories are forever embedded in his mind and body—and find expression in the stories he tells; in his paintings, watercolors, and drawings; and in his speeches against the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere at community programs, on college campuses, and at Veterans Day programs. In one particularly stirring painting, Kambon portrayed Detroit Blue reading the *Stars and Stripes* issue on the Detroit riots, with tears streaming down his face, and the words “Motown,” “Black Is Beautiful,” “Soul Power ’67” written across his helmet.²¹

Kambon has had ongoing difficulties, in Vietnam and ever since, emerging from what he now understands as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He got into fights in Vietnam, including an incident in which he didn’t remember a thing about how he tore up a movie theater and beat up fellow soldiers in defense of a Vietnamese boy who had been hospitalized with him. In Sacramento in 1973, a physical assault landed him in jail. After dropping off his seven-year-old stepdaughter to board a school bus, a motorist sped into the crosswalk and hit her, throwing her over the hood of the car. Kambon, then twenty-six, has no memory of what happened next, but was told he beat up the motorist, injuring the driver’s eye, nose, and chin. During that incident, Kambon had fractures in both hands and said that he was beaten by the police. The all-white jury found him guilty of assault and the judge gave him a seventy-five-day jail term and a three-year probation—a sentence Kambon attributes to the numerous letters written on his behalf and the judge’s recognition of his wartime traumas. For one suffering PTSD, Kambon reacted as if he

was in a combat situation. At the moment of his daughter's scream, he had a flashback of the incident with the US soldier who used his bayonet to slit the vagina of a five-year-old Vietnamese girl and rape her. But it took another two decades before his fiancée and now wife helped him understand what he's suffering as signs of PTSD. After trying for thirty-four years, he was finally able to gain disability status and receive Veterans Affairs services. In 2010, after twenty-six years, he retired from his job teaching art at California State University Long Beach. He now spends his days researching and creating art.²²

His focus on drawing and talking about what he witnessed in Vietnam is for self-healing, but it is also a political commitment to testify in opposition to what Kambon views as US imperialist wars at the expense of people in invaded lands and of the US working poor. To Kambon, the way the soldiers stomped the tiny bodies pulled from their mothers' wombs wasn't a strategic maneuver to ensure the baby's death, but more a reflection of the brutalizing and dehumanizing racist treatment of "Black" bodies that traces a lineage from slavery, to Emmett Till and Fannie Lou Hamer, to Ferguson, Baltimore, Minneapolis, Sacramento, Chicago, and Houston, and any number of US cities today.²³

Joining the Black Panther Party

After several injuries and being discharged from the military on May 8, 1968, and airlifted out of Vietnam, Kambon returned to his Oak Park neighborhood of Sacramento. Two months later, he found himself caught in a chaotic racial disturbance.²⁴ Kambon heard a commotion and stepped across the street from his home on Sixth Avenue to McClatchy Park. He saw a man throw a brick at the police and then try to hide in some bushes. Kambon decided to throw the man the camouflage shirt he was wearing and continued on. As Kambon walked down Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., as it's called today, he encountered a boy whose foot was stuck under a police car. As he tried to help, a police officer hit him on the back and shoulders with an axe handle. He then saw another police officer wield his axe handle to hit a girl on the head. As Kambon was yelling at the police to stop and about to get into an altercation, someone suddenly grabbed him from behind and carried him halfway down the block. He was surprised to see it was the brother who had thrown the brick, the recipient of Kambon's shirt. That brother was soon talking to Kambon about joining the Black Panther Party.²⁵

Kambon was not interested. He had had enough of guns, enough of war, and enough of trouble. But the Association for Black Unity (ABU)

asked Kambon to do a drawing for their newsletter of four Black men, representing the BPP, NAACP, Urban League, and the Nation of Islam. He obliged. Kambon found himself impressed by the discipline and fearlessness of the Panthers as they stood their ground before the police. He joined the Sacramento chapter of the BPP, recently formed in April 1968, headed by Charles Brunson and with women among the first members. The Panther office, at 2941 Thirty-Fifth Street, was on the other side of McClatchy Park, just a half mile from Kambon's home. As lieutenant of culture of the local BPP, Kambon worked to create revolutionary art and several of his drawings appeared in the *Black Panther* newspaper. As a veteran, he conducted weapons trainings. He spoke at Huey rallies, helped to implement the Sacramento Free Breakfast for Children programs, and like all Panthers, attended weekly political education study groups and sold the newspaper.²⁶ While the main focus of this chapter is on Kambon's post-Panther work, two topics warrant discussion—Kambon's creation of the *Black Panther Coloring Book* and his involvement in the Oak Park Four case.

For Kambon, the controversy surrounding the *Black Panther Coloring Book* still stings. It signals to him a betrayal by Panther leadership, but also represents a larger battle between the ideas of Black Power and the state's apparatus of repression. According to Kambon, shortly after he joined the BPP, he created the *Black Panther Coloring Book*, consisting of twenty-three pages of images depicting Black self-defense toward the white power structure, symbolized by Emory Douglas-inspired upright pigs in police uniforms. For Kambon, the coloring book was never intended for children. Instead, he deployed images to illuminate ideas about Black pride and resistance against power for adults like himself who had struggled with reading. He asserts that top BPP leadership asked him to change the words "African" to "Black," but otherwise approved the booklet. Apparently, twenty-five copies were run, but once the BPP said to end it—and Kambon obliged—it appears that someone else printed a thousand copies. According to Huey Newton, the FBI reproduced the numerous copies and, by contrast to Kambon's view, also added the captions. Newton wrote: "After its rejection by party leaders, however, an informant for the FBI stole one of the few drafts of this proposed publication and delivered it to the FBI. Thereupon the FBI added captions advocating violence, printed thousands of copies bearing the party's name, and circulated them throughout the country, particularly to merchants and businesses who contributed to the breakfast program" and subsequently withdrew their support.²⁷ Yet after the Sacramento BPP ended in 1970,

Kambon and other Panthers helped to sustain the free breakfast program continued through Sacramento City College Black Student Union.²⁸

In June 1969, during the Senate Permanent Investigation subcommittee chaired by Senator John McClellan, the testimony of two former Los Angeles Panthers, Jean and Larry Powell, charged the BPP with violence and shakedowns of ghetto merchants and claimed that the coloring book was distributed at the BPP Breakfast Programs to turn children against the police (other Panthers deny that it was circulated at the breakfast programs). Vice President Spiro Agnew weighed in, saying that there should be “laws prohibiting the distribution of such inflammatory propaganda.” BPP chief-of-staff David Hilliard also reportedly denounced the coloring book, “It was not geared to our party line because it was racist and nationalist.”²⁹

Scholar Ward Churchill contextualizes this controversy within the workings of the FBI’s counterintelligence programs (COINTELPRO) directed most vehemently against the BPP. He contends that the FBI was concerned with the Free Breakfast for Children and other BPP “serve the people” programs because they made it impossible to characterize the BPP as only thuggish. When San Francisco FBI agent Charles Bates raised concerns that attacking the BPP programs would “convey the impression that . . . the FBI is working against the aspirations of the Negro people,” the FBI domestic intelligence chief William Sullivan sharply rebuked that the BPP is “not engaged in the ‘Breakfast for Children’ program for humanitarian reasons . . . [but rather] to fill adolescent children with their insidious poison.” Bates was then given two weeks to initiate COINTELPRO actions to eliminate the BPP’s serve the people programs. Bates’s agents found the coloring book, with its depictions of policemen as pigs and drawings of Black men, women, and children stabbing and shooting the police, as a tool for their means.³⁰

According to Kambon, the Panther leadership initially supported and sanctioned his creation of the coloring book but then withdrew their support and asked him to denounce the book when things got hot for the Panthers and the finances were affected. This remains an unresolved issue for Kambon. But in 2016, he self-published the *Black Panther Coloring Book*, this time claiming his original authorship and authority to illustrate such provocative but important ideas.

The second major incident of his Panther days resulted in his imprisonment as one of the Oak Park Four. On the night of May 9, 1970, while driving north on Thirty-Fifth Street from Fifth Avenue, police officer Bernard Bennett, twenty-four, was hit in the back of the head when sniper shots were fired

at his patrol car. He died four days later. The *Sacramento Bee* noted that “one of the city’s most intensive” police investigations led to the arrests of seven young Black men on May 26, all held without bail.³¹ Charges were dropped for three defendants. The “Oak Park Four” defendants (including Kambon, then Mark Teemer, twenty-three) were known to be “young black militants”; two were Black Panthers and all community activists.³² The Black community feared that the Black youth accused of killing a white police officer would be railroaded into a conviction, especially after the police-instigated “riots” in Oak Park and the police raid on the BPP office, both on Father’s Day, 1969. Community members charged the Sacramento police with creating “a military occupation in the heart of Oak Park” and “summer of police terror” so much so that “many Blacks abandoned 35th Street and James McClatchy Park as unsafe.”³³

The Black community responded with widespread support. Historian Clarence Caesar noted, “Not since the Archy Lee case in 1857 had a local criminal case involving blacks attracted the same kind of support the Oak Park Four case did within the community.”³⁴ Shortly after the May 26 arrests, more than fifty students created the Oak Park Legal Defense Fund and sponsored dances, car washes, benefit fundraisers, sold the artwork of defendant Kambon, and had lawyers, law students, parents, and other volunteers investigating the case. The Black newspaper, the *Sacramento Observer*, ran a supplemental newspaper on the Oak Park Four case, published on October 1, 1970, featuring multiple articles that humanized the defendants and provided information on the trial to the community.³⁵

The trial began on October 5, 1970, and was based primarily on the testimony of Lamont Rose, former “Oak Park 7” defendant-turned-state-witness, former Black Panther, and admitted drug user. Though the judge denied the motion to throw out Rose’s testimony, the judge ruled that the testimony of two other key witnesses was “inadmissible as evidence” because they were coerced statements gained through police intimidation, harassment, and violence. One witness claimed that the police roused him out of bed while pointing a shotgun at him.³⁶

In the end, the unexpected happened. Based on the removal of coerced testimony, the district attorney asked the court to dismiss the murder and conspiracy to commit murder charges against the Oak Park Four; the judge complied. The *Observer* noted the case’s racial meaning: “The ruling of Judge DeCristoforo marked the first time in the history of America that Blackmen [*sic*] accused and charged with the murder of a white policeman have

been released.³⁷ While the court's ruling was of historical significance, Kambon issued a cautionary warning: "This isn't a victory. They are using us to make Blacks believe the system works for Blacks. In fact the system does not work for Blacks but against them. Any system which legally kills and maims Blacks cannot be considered just."³⁸ To Kambon, their case represented a pattern of police control and domination of Black communities. He told the *Sacramento Observer*, "Figures on Black deaths from various kinds of execution, between the years of 1930 and 1970 showed that out of 3,568 deaths by execution, over 2,066 victims were Black," representing more than 57 percent of those executed by the state. Kambon was referring to the structural oppression of the Black community, what some call Black genocide and what scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore views as the defining characteristic of racism: "The state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."³⁹ Today police killings of Black people has reached a crisis situation. But for Kambon, the only new feature is the visibility of the killings and the mainstream opposition, whereas the systematic state-sanctioned killings of Black people date back to slavery, lynchings, chain gangs, and the violence of poverty. He himself knows this only too well.⁴⁰

After the trial, he moved to Fresno, California, to escape the police harassment in Sacramento, and earned a bachelor's and then later master's degree in fine art at California State University, Fresno.⁴¹ As he continued in his political education study, he began to embrace socialist Pan-Africanism. Even as Kambon has stated that he left the BPP because "they wanted reform, I wanted revolution," he also acknowledges that he learned about socialism in the BPP and believes that "all the Panther programs we were implementing were socialist programs."⁴² He explained: "We started the Free Breakfast for Children programs to heighten the contradiction. Children shouldn't go to school hungry. This so embarrassed the government that the government started free breakfast and lunch programs." In the *Black Panther*, the BPP stated that "The Free Breakfast for Children program is a socialist program, designed to serve the people. All institutions in society should be designed to serve the masses, not just a 'chosen few.' . . . In capitalist America, any program that is absolutely free is considered bad business. . . . The Black Panther Party is educating the people to the fact they have a right to the best that modern technology and human knowledge can produce."⁴³ The Panthers' survival programs were indeed revealing contradictions of racial capitalism.⁴⁴ By showing how the Panthers could do so much with so few resources and how the government did so little

with so much, the BPP argued that community needs could be met but only under a different organization of the political economy, one not designed for corporate profit-making and labor exploitation. The lessons Kambon learned in the BPP have become part of his political philosophy. He states: "You have to make people well when they're sick. You have to feed them when they're hungry. You have to educate them when they're not educated. This is something we have to do and something we have to figure out how to do. That's the bottom line."⁴⁵ What Kambon learned in the BPP enabled him to be ready for what was to come as he moved toward global Pan-Africanism.

Global Pan-African Politics and Art

Kwame Ture (née Stokely Carmichael) was the most ideologically influential figure in Kambon's life. Kambon had already been drawn to the power of Ture's ideas and compelling presentation when he first heard him speak against the Vietnam War in December 1966. When Kambon joined the marines in May 1966, he could not have predicted his conversion to Black Power and later to revolutionary Pan-Africanism. But the Black freedom struggle and the world itself was in a state of change. In January 1966, SNCC became the first "civil rights" organization to officially oppose the US war against Vietnam. In June 1966, Kwame Ture, as SNCC's newly elected chair, and SNCC member Mukasa Willie Ricks popularized the call for Black Power in Greenwood, Mississippi, during the March Against Fear. Ture himself was undergoing an ideological transformation. In 1967, as he traveled the world, he met with revolutionary leaders of Cuba, China, Vietnam, and Africa. Shirley Graham Du Bois introduced Ture to Kwame Nkrumah, the first democratically elected president of independent Ghana, who in February 1966 was overthrown in a CIA-instigated coup. At the time Nkrumah was developing his theoretical ideas for anticolonial struggle in the *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* and establishing an organizational formation to carry out the development of a democratic and socialist Africa, the All-African People's Revolutionary Party (AAPRP). In placing himself under the tutelage of Nkrumah and Guinea's Sékou Touré, Kwame Ture received Nkrumah's direction to organize the AAPRP in the diaspora.⁴⁶

According to the AAPRP, Kwame Ture introduced the AAPRP to US audiences at Howard University in October 1972. As Ture spoke to an estimated 500,000 students in North America from 1970 to 1988, he consistently spoke about Nkrumah and the AAPRP.⁴⁷ Kambon was one of those who heard

Ture and joined the AAPRP in 1974, while living in Fresno. The heavy reading and theoretical study required of party members was difficult for one who by self-admission had only learned to read fluently after joining the BPP. Kambon recounts one incident when Ture asked him a question about the biweekly AAPRP readings only to discover that Kambon had not done his assignment. Ture became so angry that he stopped talking to Kambon for two straight days—and Ture was staying at Kambon's home. Kambon's shame motivated his serious study and reading of the books and ideas of Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, Amílcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Eric Williams, and V. I. Lenin, among others. Now living in Long Beach, Kambon helped to organize the AAPRP's annual African Liberation Day programs, to use his artistic skills to create propaganda for the party, to educate about Pan-African socialism, and to build and participate in the biweekly study circles. The more he studied about global politics and history, especially about Third World struggles against colonialism, the more he embraced revolutionary Pan-Africanism.

Kambon first traveled to Africa in the mid-1970s. He visited several West African nations and insisted on traveling hundreds of miles by foot, interacting with the local villagers and townspeople. On his travels, he learned African techniques of sculpture and of bronze casting, a complicated, expensive, and time-consuming process requiring precision and constant vigilance to ensure the mold not crack and the melted metal turns into the envisioned sculpture. By the late 1970s, he was given the name Akinsanya Kambon, meaning "hero avenges" in the Yoruba language.⁴⁸

While in Ghana in 1994, Kambon had a life-changing experience. He and Tamasha were visiting the widely known Elmina slave castle. In contrast to its grandeur as the largest European building in sub-Saharan Africa, built by the Portuguese in the 1480s, it came to serve as a dungeon holding hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans in overcrowded, filthy conditions, their last stop in the journey across the Middle Passage into slavery in the Americas. When the tour guide was explaining how the overseer selected women in the courtyard and forced them to climb a ladder to be raped by the European master, Kambon experienced a fiery rage and stepped outside.⁴⁹ When the tour finished, the guide invited them back in to explore the building. During their self-guided tour, they briefly separated. Akinsanya went into the holding place for the enslaved Africans. He explained:

I got on my knees and started meditating and got into deep meditation. All of a sudden I heard a female voice say, "We've been waiting for you." It scared the hell out of me. My heart almost skipped a beat. I looked up and

saw one of these, they didn't look like people, they looked like ghosts. They said, "We need you to teach our children who were stolen about our history, our cultures and our religions." And I thought to myself, I don't know much about that and she could hear what I was thinking. She said, "Don't worry. We've been guiding your hands." So I figured everything I've done they had guided my hands to do it.⁵⁰

Kambon did not tell anyone about this experience for a long time, assuming people would think he had had a psychotic break. But he has since been able to embrace the experience as his calling from the ancestors—a point that seems contradictory with the materialist views of BPP, yet many former Panthers and Black radicals embrace a variety of spiritual practices.

For Kambon, knowledge already existed in Indigenous and African history, knowledge that has been appropriated, misused, distorted, and erased. Since visiting Africa in the 1970s, Kambon uses his distinctive style of sculpture to create hundreds of pieces of art. His magnificent sculptures are intricately crafted pot-shaped or cylindrical or tiered bases featuring three-dimensional images in bas relief, often busts from the shoulder or waist up, of African legends, warriors, gods, and ordinary people. He designs his sculptures based on the stories of Africa passed to Kambon in the oral tradition or through his research. Other faces appear in agony, symbolizing the anguish experienced by Africans witnessing yet another atrocity inflicted on their people. One story Kambon frequently tells is of the Yoruba *orishas* or spirits, Osanyin, the god of herbal healing and knowledge, and Shango, the god of justice, social responsibility, and thunder. These stories, carried on the slave ships, shape spiritual practices and philosophies throughout the Caribbean and the Americas. Kambon relays:

I've been studying history and what our ancestors did. Because if you look at Indigenous and African history, we already figured shit out. This American system got rid of all that, the things we already knew. I studied about this cat named Osanyin. God gave him the ability to learn herbs and plants to use for healing. God said, now that you know this, when people get sick you go and make them well. Osanyin did that, but after a while he started thinking, when people are sick and going to die, they'll give me money for the medicine. So he starts selling medicine to these people. If people didn't have the money, he didn't give them the medicine. God knew what he was doing. He sent his enforcer down to tell Osanyin, you got to stop doing that. If I find out you're selling medicine to sick people, I'm going to jack your ass up. But Osanyin couldn't resist the money and kept doing it. So the enforcer caused an earthquake and made the palace that he built fall down on top of

him, put out one of his eyes, he became deaf in one of his ears, and had him hopping around. This cat is slick. He rebuilds his palace and starts selling out his back door.

Now there's another cat named Shango. He's over lightning and thunder. He's a bad cat. One day, Shango's wife Oya had twins. When one got sick, she brought him to Osanyin for medicine. (Shango was away at war; he's always away at war). So Osanyin looks at the baby and says, "Yeah, I have the medicine, but you have to have the money." She says, "I didn't bring any money. We didn't know we had to pay for it." But Osanyin wouldn't give the medicine. The baby died on the way home. When Shango found out, he was mad and goes looking for Osanyin. Osanyin was in his palace. He hears the thunder in the background and knows Shango's coming for him and tries to figure out what to do. He sees the lightning and thunder and heads out to hide behind this big baobab tree in the back. Shango saw him go there and throws a lightning bolt at the tree. The tree explodes. Osanyin took off running. Shango took that razor-sharp ax and took off after him and threw it at him. Chopped off one of his legs in full stride. Then Shango chopped off one of his arms. He looks at him. I'm going chop this fool's head off. Then the enforcer comes, "Now Shango, you can't do that. Because if you do that all the knowledge of medicine will be lost." So he took that razor and slit Osanyin's throat and took his voice box out. Now this fool hops around the forest on one leg, one eye, one ear, and can't talk. But he's giving out the medicine to the people.⁵¹

These two stories—of the ancestors in Elmina and of Osanyin—reveal personal messages to Kambon. Some say Kambon is unwise for not selling his art, with some of his sculptures appraised in the five-figure range. But he feels he cannot sell them, or more accurately, he does not create his art as commodities to be sold in the marketplace. If the ancestors gave their knowledge freely to him and are guiding his hands, then unlike Osanyin, he feels compelled to make the art not for his own financial aggrandizement but to "teach our children who were stolen about our history, our culture, and our religion." This has created a conundrum for Akinsanya and his business manager/wife, who have more than a thousand sculptures, paintings, and drawings in their studio.⁵² After a 2018 extensive burglary of the studio and with Kambon aging, their desire to exhibit his art has become more urgent than ever. They recently established the Pan-African Art Museum to display the artwork, assure its care, and to teach the stories about African culture and history that Kambon has been learning over many years, passed to him from the elders and based on his own research.⁵³

Art, Transformation, and the Gang Truce

By 1984, Kambon was living in Los Angeles, raising his preteen sons as a single father.⁵⁴ Professor Mary Hoover, then chair of Africana Studies at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), rescued Kambon from homelessness (at the time, he was living in a van hustling Venice Beach by selling his artwork, while his sons performed Michael Jackson songs) and hired him to teach African and African American art at CSULB. Kambon initially opened the Pan African Art School in Long Beach in 1984, but had to close it in his period of fugitivity and while completing his jail sentence. He was able to reopen the school in 1991, where he has taught free drawing, ceramics, and other art classes to children and youth. Kambon observed the changes in his art. His art moved from "violent and ugly pig drawings" to "an art which portrays the lives and struggles of Africans from the days of slavery to the present. . . . [My] oils, charcoal sketches, and sculpture exude their own intensity and power. But they're now subtler—a slave's face that mixes sadness and fear, a black Moses whose face conveys defiance and wisdom; happy, shy African children whose innocent goodness personifies hope."⁵⁵ On the walls of the sizeable but modestly appointed building, Kambon displays paintings, watercolors, and drawings. The building housed table after table filled with sculptures and had works in progress and kilns in the back patio area.⁵⁶

One day while teaching, a student recognized his professor as the former BPP artist Mark Teemer. That student, Danifu Kareem Bey (née Raymond Cook), was an original member of the Crips street gang. Bey was helping to organize the famed gang truce between the Bloods and the Crips and invited Kambon's involvement. Both Bey and Kambon contest the mainstream view that links Black gangs to theories of cultural deficiencies or pathologies and instead contend that the Black gangs that emerged in the late 1960s had roots in Black Power and Black nationalist politics. As young teens, the original Crips attended the BPP breakfast program and some like Bey sold the Panther newspaper. The youth were awed by the Black Panthers' militant style, leather jackets, and audacious confrontations with the Power structure. In Los Angeles, Bunchy Carter, former leader of the largest street organization in Los Angeles, the Slausons, recruited hundreds of gang members into the Los Angeles BPP chapter. Bey and friends wanted to join, but were told they were too young, so instead formed their own street organizations. Fifteen-year-old Raymond Washington is credited with founding the first new street gang, the Baby Avenues, or Avenue Crips referring to their youthfulness, in 1969, which soon transformed into the Crips. Stanley "Tookie" Williams, executed

by the state of California in 2005, was probably its most famous member. In forming the Crips, Washington and others were influenced not only by the Panthers' guns and breakfast programs but also by the Watts rebellion that raised consciousness about the continuing conditions of poverty and racism. Danifu Bey describes "the spirit that the Crips were created [in] the climate of the Watts Riot. . . . Black people being awakened to freedom and tired of being treated like slaves . . . the spirit of self-determination."⁵⁷

By the early 1970s, core Crips decided to revive the original community-oriented principles of their founder and created CRIPS, the Community Revolutionary Inner Party Service. But in time, as the Crips increased their robbing, stealing, and illegal activities, a new verb was invented, *cripping*, to signify their aggressive criminal activities. One writer noted, "Because of immaturity and a lack of political leadership young Raymond Washington and his group never were able to develop an efficient political agenda for social change within the community."⁵⁸ By the time Kambon met Danifu Bey in the mid-1980s, intensified policing and the introduction of crack cocaine had resulted in a huge growth in gangs and in Black-on-Black violence. Kambon worked with Bey and others to implement a gang truce in the notoriously violent conflict between the Crips and Bloods. "They called this 'headquarters,'" Kambon told the *Los Angeles Times*, referring to the Pan African Art studio, where regular gang truce meetings took place. Gang members helped to build the canopy that covers the patio and to repair the house attached to the studio. One day, Kambon got to witness the work of Gangs for Positive Action, headed by Bey, when a woman and her daughter walked into the art studio looking for help to stop the domestic abuse taking place in her home. She didn't want to involve the police, the courts, or the prison system, so they held a people's tribunal to resolve the problem. It worked to end that case of domestic violence and others as well.⁵⁹

Kambon has worked with Bey to organize or participate in at least six gang summits from the mid-1980s to 2005, held across Los Angeles, including at the Lakers former home, the Forum in Inglewood, and at St. Mary's Medical Center in Long Beach, as well as at Antioch Church in Kambon's hometown of Sacramento. Kambon had speakers such as Kwame Ture and Indigenous leader Ernie Longwalker address the gangs arriving from all over Southern California. About three hundred gang members participated in the first summit that Kambon attended. Bey had invited Kambon, recently returned from Africa, to show slides and talk about his trip, which inspired numerous gang members to want to go to Africa. Kambon told them: "It's

good, but here's the thing. In Africa we don't need this gang banging and drugs and negative shit y'all doing."⁶⁰

For Kambon, learning about the history and culture of Africa is part of the process for Africans in the diaspora to end the cycle of destructive activities and to decolonize their minds. In 1995, Akinsanya and Tamasha established Pan African Art, Inc., offering free art, culture, and leadership programs for youth. The art school held free art classes for children ages eight to eighteen to sculpt, paint, and draw every Wednesday and Saturday. "Any kid can come," stated Kambon. "You can come if you're red, green, blue, or brown. We will teach you free. That's what society should be about." At the studio, the young people were surrounded by African images including Kambon's paintings of Malcolm X, a Zulu king, and a collage of Angela Davis. Kambon has witnessed the change in children as they learn their own histories. He showed videos on Africa, taught lessons on African history and culture, and took the children on field trips, for example, to the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana to see a Nubian art exhibit. "You take a lot of kids with no hope, and they can identify with this work. They have more of a will to live and a will to succeed than they did before," he said.⁶¹ For Kambon, education is a crucial pathway to escape the imprisonment of illiteracy, poverty, and prisons, as it was for him. He encourages going to college as well as learning through trips to the ancestral homeland. Among his fourteen trips to Africa, he has done continuous research, worked as a visiting professor, and taken groups of young people.⁶²

As part of their work to use art to transform self and society and to link creativity with street life, Pan African Art sponsored a one-day expo in 1993 at Leimert Park in the heart of Little Africa in Los Angeles. "Graffiti, Tagger and Mural Expo," presented eight-by-four-foot murals that addressed the many forms of violence affecting US society and the world. Theirs was a participatory art project, involving more than fifty contributors, ages eight to twenty-seven, who created the art using a variety of media, including spray paint, acrylics, oils, and collage. In 1998, Kambon involved local youth and some gang members in painting tiles in a program with the City of Long Beach called, "Public Art in Private Places."⁶³ Kambon understands the power of participation and of art creation in generating new ideas, new political imaginaries, and new social relations. This kind of transformation through self-activity is also reflected in the work of Project Row Houses in Houston's Third Ward. Project Row Houses converted places of segregation into places of congregation, where single Black mothers live rent-free in small shotgun houses while completing college and where art is part of the

process of re-creation to change lives shattered by poverty and gentrification into possibilities of hope and economic sustainability. Project Row Houses came into existence following the police killing of Carl Hampton, whose activist work in Houston was inspired by a visit to the Oakland BPP and whose killing by the police in 1970 was instigated by his defense of two Panthers harassed by the police for selling the *Black Panther* newspaper. Project Row Houses is taking the violence of poverty and the police and converting it into spaces of art-based community making.⁶⁴

Kambon's work with gangs also involves presenting knowledge about the origins of their street organizations rooted in Black radicalism. In community venues and on college campuses, notably at California State University Sacramento, City College of Sacramento, California State University Long Beach, and Compton College, he talks about the inspiration of Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party as well as the Mau Mau in Kenya who in the 1960s liberated their country from colonialism. To Kambon, the devastation of Black communities and the rise of gangs is a legacy inherited from the FBI's counterintelligence program that was designed to eradicate the BPP Party and other Black radical organizations and individuals. Part of his success in working with gangs is that he draws from his own experience to show a different way forward, not of assimilationism, but of revolutionary transformation. "I can tell them this stuff because I've lived it," said Kambon, referring not just to poverty, inadequate schooling, incarceration, and warfare abroad and at home, but also to the power of knowledge, artistic creation, and liberation struggles.⁶⁵

Always the Truth

In April 1997, as Kwame Ture was struggling with inoperable cancer and receiving medical treatment in Cuba, New York, and Guinea, Akinsanya and Tamasha hosted a fundraising dinner at the Pan African Art studio that also provided, at that time, a rare opportunity for guests to interact with Ture. The place was beautifully appointed, guests arrived in exquisite African clothing, revolutionary conversations abounded, and the local community contributed to Ture's health care needs.⁶⁶ Kambon lost his dear friend and greatest ideological mentor when Ture transitioned to the ancestors on November 15, 1998, in Conakry, Guinea. With the loss of his political anchor, Kambon began to drift away from the All-African People's Revolutionary Party, but not from its Pan African socialist politics. He had learned in the AAPRP

that students were the spark of the revolution and continued his commitments to teaching African art, history, and politics to children, youth, and gang members.

In response to the widespread spotlight on police killings of young Black people, the recent growth of the movement (especially since the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman in the killing of Trayvon Martin) feels like coming full circle for Kambon. While most activists and media reports focus on the innocence of "unarmed" Black victims, Kambon wants to focus attention on the Micah Johnsons and Gavin Longs who responded to the police killings of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling with targeted shootings of police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge, respectively. Unlike President Obama's remarks, "If you shoot people who pose no threat to you . . . you have a troubled mind," or the *Los Angeles Times*' headline, "A Study in Anger: How Gavin Long Went from Decorated Iraq Veteran to Cop Killer," Kambon's theorizing does not dwell on personal responsibility or individual psychology.⁶⁷ Instead, he places such actions within the social structure of race and oppression, examining the why of Long and Johnson's actions against the police in the wake of massive police violence against Black communities. Unlike the mainstream protest communities, Kambon wants the names of Micah Johnson and Gavin Long to be remembered within a tradition of Black militant resistance to white supremacy and racial capitalism that traces a line from not only the famous like Nat Turner and the Black Panther Party but also to the innumerable unknown resisters, including his great-great-grandfather who was beheaded in the aftermath of the 1811 slave revolt and his own trials and tribulations as a US Marine destroying Vietnamese people and land, as an Oak Park Four defendant, and as a fugitive. He embodies a legacy of marronage that flows from the runaway slaves, to his Uncle Buck who dared to kill fifteen white men, avenging the rape and murder of his Indigenous wife, to the underground work of his Panther comrades.

Kambon's life teaches us not only about the use of creativity and art to transform society, but also of a need to examine the hard truths of violence and structural oppression and to raise difficult questions about methods of resistance. For Akinsanya Kambon, we can say, always the art, always the youth, and always the truth.

The Current



Photo Credit: EMORY DOUGLAS

The Art of a Movement

Artists whose work helped define the Black Panther Party to discuss work at UC Santa Barbara

By Jim Logan

Wednesday, November 9, 2016 - 09:45

Santa Barbara, CA

As Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, Emory Douglas created bold, provocative art that spoke for revolution and the empowerment of African Americans. Fifty years later his art has lost none of its power or relevance.

On Monday, Nov. 14, the UC Santa Barbara Center for Black Studies Research (CBSR) will host Douglas and fellow Black Panther artist Akinsanya Kambon in "50 Years of the Black Panther Party: Revolutionary Art and the Black Radical Tradition."

First, Douglas and Kambon — a painter, sculpture and author of the "Black Panther Party Coloring Book" — will be in conversation with UCSB scholars Diane Fujino, the center's director, and Felice Blake, an assistant professor of English, in the campus's MultiCultural Center (MCC) Theater from 6 to 8 p.m. That discussion, the Clyde Woods Memorial Lecture, will be followed by a reception in the MCC Lounge for the corresponding exhibit of Douglas and Kambon's work, which will be on display through the end of the fall quarter. Both events are free and open to the public.

Fujino, who organized the event with Blake, said the work of both artists is still relevant today. "We want to wrestle seriously with the meaning and significant history of the Black Panthers and of Black Power at this moment, 50 years later, and to think very seriously about what it means and how it shapes our thinking and our social justice practices today," she said. "This program builds on the center's work to examine the work of art and the public humanities in shaping social consciousness, inspiring creativity and demanding critical thinking."

Founded in October 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party became the most influential Black Power organization to emerge from the Civil Rights era. Known initially for its armed patrols to protect African Americans from the police, the Panthers morphed into an important social justice movement that provided food and health care services to underserved communities.

"There's a lot to study there, and I think people are really trying to understand their significance and who they really were," said Fujino, who is also a professor of Asian American studies at UCSB and author of a book on a Japanese American leader of the Black Panther Party, "Samurai Among Panthers: Richard Aoki on Race, Resistance and a Paradoxical Life" (University of Minnesota Press). "At the same time, some Panthers are recreating their image in ways that they want to be seen today. We need to understand and analyze history, in all its good and bad, so we may learn from the past to build the kinds of social justice movements we need today."

Douglas, Fujino noted, is still active in social justice work around the world. Kambon, who trained as a fine artist, focuses on African themes in his work. "We're really fortunate to be hosting these two distinguished Panther artists within a month of the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Black Panther Party," Fujino said.

The Black Panthers's 50th anniversary comes as the nation continues to struggle with its troubled racial history and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the goals of which Fujino likened to those of the Panthers. "I think Black Lives Matter is very much influenced by the Panthers, and the whole Black Power movement," she noted. "They're raising ideas of what we want and a vision for society that's beyond what many people can even dream about. They're expanding our imaginations and they're expanding our dreams of freedom."

It's what the Panthers were doing in the 1960s and '70s. The survivors are gray today, but their contributions are still fresh and important, Fujino said. "It wasn't just a group that was trying to feed people," she noted. "They were saying we need to feed our youth if they're going to be able to study in school and focus, so that was part of it. But they were also raising ideological questions and critiquing the government: How come the government does so little with so much when we do so much with so little? As Huey Newton said, these are survival programs in service of liberation."

The CBSR will host an intergenerational activist dialogue Sunday, Nov. 13, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at La Casa de la Raza, 601 E. Montecito St. in Santa Barbara. For more information, see <http://www.research.ucsb.edu/cbs/>.

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ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

'All Power to the People' explores the often misunderstood history of the Black Panther movement

BY LIESL BRADNER
OCT. 14, 2016 4:30 AM PT

When the Oakland Museum of California decided three years ago to create an exhibition commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Black Panther Party and its significance to black people, the museum didn't know exactly how the discussion of race and gender inequality would reverberate in 2016.

"It's fascinating to observe the parallels in terms of themes and issues that were true 50 years ago and are relevant today," said René de Guzman, curator of "All Power to the People: Black Panthers at 50." The exhibit, which runs through Feb. 12, explores the often misunderstood history of the controversial and revolutionary party.

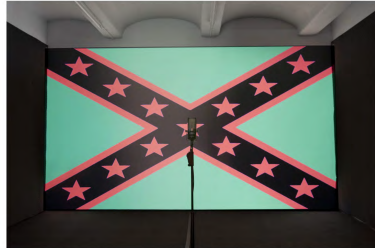


"The Assassination of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr." (2008), an archival pigment print by Carrie Mae Weems, provides a contemporary view of the Black Panther Party. (Carrie Mae Weems / Jack Sharrman Gallery, New York)

More than 200 objects on view look at aspects of the Black Panthers that are less known, such as the Free Breakfast for School Children Program as well as the Ten Point Program of principals and political demands written by co-founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Their original purpose of protecting residents from police brutality closely aligns with the Black Lives Matters movement of today.

But also on view are rare artifacts and art such as a clenched fist made of wood. The show provides a contemporary view of the party with works by modern-day artists Hank Willis Thomas, Carrie Mae Weems, Mark Teemer and Trevor Paglen, whose emphasis is on mass surveillance.

Thomas' maze-like quilt, made of decommissioned orange and white prison uniforms, hides the message "We the People."



It's a quilt from Black Righteous Source, a 2012 multimedia work by Hank Willis Thomas. The Confederate flag is reimagined using colors associated with the Pan-African flag. (Hank Willis Thomas / Jack Sharrman Gallery, New York)

A confiscated Panther rifle was repurposed into folk art with imagery of the group by Teemer, a former member and a Vietnam combat illustrator.

Paglen's landscape photo of a white streak against a night sky draws similarities to high-tech government intelligence "black sites," Internet eavesdropping facilities and the secret FBI counterintelligence program COINTELPRO initiated by Director J. Edgar Hoover.

"We included the photograph because it evokes ideas around state repression and how government handles dissent," De Guzman said. "The intention of the FBI program was to discredit the movement, a key part of the Panthers' story that led to the end of the party."



"Tree Huggers," circa 2007, by David Huffman is among the works in the exhibit "All Power to the People: Black Panthers at 50." (Collection of the Oakland Museum of California)

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Akinsanya Kambon, Black Panther Coloring Book author

By [Kris Hooks](#)

This article was published on [08.18.16](#)



PHOTO BY KRIS HOOKS

Akinsanya Kambon says he isn't surprised by any of the recent killings of black people by police. The turmoil between the black community and law enforcement is all too familiar for the former Marine-turned-Black Panther-turned-art professor, who, in 1968, drew the controversial **Black Panther Coloring Book** that received national attention for its depiction of children shooting police. SN&R recently talked with Kambon to discuss the provocative book, its oft-confusing history and why its message is still important nearly 50 years later.

What's the significance behind the coloring book?

Learn more about Akinsanya Kambon's work at

<http://tinyurl.com/gsnrsb6>.

What I was doing was trying to—in what's really a history book—show that all of the bad guys in history are depicted as pigs. Now, it's called a coloring book, so you can see a pig whichever color you want. It's not talking about white people, even though there were some Europeans who were involved in slave trade. There were also some Muslims, and there were also some Africans that participated. So however you see the pig, that's how you color that pig. That's the reason I called it a coloring book.

There's a common belief that the coloring book was created by the FBI for Cointelpro, a program aimed to infiltrate and disrupt political organizations. Is that not true?

It's been like that for years because the [Black] Panther Party said that that's what the FBI did. But that's not true. I'm telling you that I did it ... I'm the only one who knows that is me because I'm the one who drew it.

This essentially changes the book's known history.

I've always said it was me who did it. I ain't never said it wasn't me. I know that I did the book, and when I did it, it was no problem with the Panther party.

What was going on at the time that made you create it?

When I graduated from Sacramento High School, I was semi-illiterate. I could barely read, I read at like a second grade level. I ended up getting drafted into the Marine Corps, and when I got to Vietnam, we used to have these soul sessions, or rap sessions, and we had cats that used to talk about things in history that I never knew. ... The things that I experienced in my life is what created that coloring book. I've seen how corrupt the police are. I know how they are because I was on their team when I was in the Marine Corps. I was just like a police officer.

Do you think painting and drawing these memories helps your post-traumatic stress disorder?

When we first got back [from Vietnam], they told us don't talk about it—that's the therapy. Don't talk about it, try to forget about it, it'll go away eventually. Then they changed. They said whenever you have something stressful you need to talk about it write about it, draw about it—you need to get it out. I think that it does help, because I get everything out of me through this artwork. ... I'm so much in my work, and it's kind of like a spiritual walk that I'm doing.

Why reprint it after all these years?

When you have situations going on in this country where the police are killing black people all over the country just like they used to, I think the book needs to come out again and people need to see it.

The lawyers tried to use the coloring book against you in the Oak Park Four case—the 1970 Black Panthers-involved killing of a police officer. How so?

They tried to introduce it into evidence and the only way they could've done that, their key witness, Lamont "Buster" Rose, would have had to have seen me draw it. Well, he didn't see me draw it, because I drew it when I was at city college. When I was in my art classes, I'd take a break, go to the cafeteria and sit down and I'd have my drawings with me. The judge rejected it when the lawyers tried to present it.

You left Sacramento after that. Why come back?

Well, because there's a lot of stuff going on up here in Sacramento and Oakland, and there's a lot of places where people want to talk about this book. They want to talk to me about certain things, and I came up here because this is where I grew up. I know people, and my whole life is here.

You're making a follow-up book at some point, too, yes?

I'm coming out with another one after this, but it's going to be more in-depth. There won't be any children, and it's gonna start with [Pope Nicholas V's authorization of slavery in Portugal in 1452]. I got a lot the drawings already done. ... It's going to be a lot more comprehensive, because what I'm trying to do is get an understanding of how people can subjugate another people and enslave them.

Will you be adding stuff about the more recent police killings of black people?

I thought about doing a lot of the more recent stuff, but, man, they're just killing too much.

PRESS-TELEGRAM

BUSINESS

Ex-Vietnam combat illustrator's art and work with children help him battle PTSD

By [KELLY PUENTE](#) | kpunte@scng.com | Orange County Register

PUBLISHED: November 9, 2008 at 12:00 a.m. | UPDATED: September 1, 2017 at 7:50 a.m.

LONG BEACH – In his studio on Atlantic Avenue, artist Akinsanya Kambon flips through a stack of paintings depicting his experiences in Vietnam. Each scene is more horrific than the next.

The paintings show images of weeping soldiers and mangled civilians in bold colors of blood red, jungle green and bright yellow. One piece, titled “From Limb to Limb,” shows a Marine blown in half after stepping on a land mine. His shuddering upper torso hangs from a tree limb.

“In the Marines, they train you to think you’re invincible,” Kambon says. “But you realize you’re not so tough when you see some of your tough buddies get killed.”

Kambon completed his series of 10 oil-on-canvas combat scenes in 2000 as a part of a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder treatment program at the Long Beach VA hospital. Veterans were asked to write about their 10 most stressful experiences. Kambon, being an artist, was asked to paint.

From terra cotta soldiers to drawings of shackled slaves, Kambon keeps more than 10,000 original works of art in his studio at 2228 Atlantic Ave.

The 61-year-old veteran also teaches African Art at Cal State Long Beach and holds free Saturday art classes for children at his studio.

For Kambon, art isn't an occupation, it's a means of survival.

"I don't do it to sell it," he says. "I do it for my sanity."

Born in Sacramento as Mark Teemer, Kambon as a baby was stricken with polio that left one side of his face paralyzed. To avoid being teased by the other schoolchildren, Kambon kept his head down and drew quietly.

Kambon says he was illiterate when drafted into the Marine Corps in 1966 at age 19. His superiors, however, noticed his artistic talents and stationed him as a combat illustrator at bases in Da Nang and Chu Lai.

Kambon drew hundreds of combat images for the Marines. Some that showed the war in a not-so-favorable light, such as soldiers murdering children, were shredded by his superiors, he says. Kambon remembered many of those images and drew them again.

As an artist, he has the unique ability to imprint images in his head. The images are impossible to erase.

"It's something I live with every day," he says. "The smell, the sight, the feeling of blood. That's something you never forget."

Despite experiencing trauma and racism during his nine months in Vietnam, Kambon says fighting for his country gave him a sense of patriotism.

"It made me believe that I was part of America," he says. "I didn't find out I wasn't until I got back."

Returning to Sacramento, Kambon says he was recruited into the Black Panther Party much like he was recruited into the Marines.

As a Black Panther, Kambon taught himself how to read and even illustrated a Panther coloring book for children.

Kambon soon found himself in trouble with the law, named as one of the Oak Park Four who were accused and then acquitted for the killing of a Sacramento police officer in May 1970. He later was convicted and served time in jail on drug charges he says were "trumped up" by law enforcement.

Looking for a clean start, Kambon moved to Long Beach in 1984, where he founded the nonprofit organization Pan African Art. The program, which will celebrate its 25th anniversary next spring, is designed to teach children ages 5 to 18 about African and Latin culture through art.

Kambon's wife of 13 years, Tama-sha, says living with a husband who suffers from PTSD is extremely hard.

"I don't think that there's anything in his life that he experiences today that is not influenced in some way by the Vietnam experience," she says.

But the war, she says, also opened his mind to humanity and made him especially sensitive toward children.

The artist, a grandfather of 16, pours most of his time and money into his free art classes, leaving little for himself, she says.

"All this stuff is something I had to experience for me to become the person I am," says Kambon. "That's why I work with children. The children are the ones who really suffer in war."

Pan African Art is now accepting donations to keep its free Saturday art classes going. Beginning in February, the nonprofit will also hold fundraisers the third Friday of each month, featuring art auctions, poetry and more.

For information, call 562-424-8717.

Coming Tuesday: Sgt. Maj. Jesse Acosta, who was blinded while fighting in Iraq in 2006, is learning how to navigate through darkness.

WHAT WE WANT



1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.



2. We want full employment for our people.



3. We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black Community.



4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.



5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.



6. We want all black men exempt from military service.



7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people.



8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.



9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.

10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny.