AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY — The Ethics of Looking and Collecting in the Age of Restitution

Friday, November 11, 2022 | 9a-4p EST | Webinar Symposium

PROGRAM

9:00-9:30

Welcoming Remarks by
David Freedberg *(Columbia University)*
Douglas Fordham *(University of Virginia)*

Introductory Remarks by Z.S. Strother *(Columbia University)*

A brief review of some trajectories of African photography and how they intersect with debates on restitution of cultural heritage.

9:30-10:30

In Conversation / Artist's Talk

In this conversation, Lebohang Kganye and Steven Nelson explore the ethics and practices of working with photographs and their relation to intimacy, memory, and healing.

Lebohang Kganye is an artist and photographer living and working in Johannesburg.
Steven Nelson is Dean, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

10:15-10:30 Q&A

10:30-12:00

Roundtable: Ethics of Collecting and Curating

This roundtable brings together curators and scholars to discuss approaches to collecting and curating photographs and their archives in and from the African continent.

With Patricia Hayes *(moderator, University of the Western Cape)*, Osaisonor Godfrey Ekhator-Obogie *(Institute for Benin Studies)*, Candace Keller *(Michigan State University)*, and Ingrid Masondo *(Iziko South African National Gallery)*.

11:45-12:00 Q&A

12-1pm Lunch Break

1:00-2:30

Ethics of Looking

Presentations include

John Peffer *(Ramapo College of New Jersey)*

"Copyright, Privacy Rights, Human Rights and African Photography's Distributed Personae"

Portrait photographs are image-objects that may be owned as things and at the same time represent persons. Historically, the concept of photography in the eyes of modern law has oscillated between core cultural values about being (identity) and owning (property). Since photographs may represent people through their images, they also have a special role in the general progress of human rights. How have rights to privacy been related to rights to ownership of images? Specifically, what are the implications for African photographies of the intersection of legal concepts of ownership and authorship with objects that represent personae?

Debates about authorship and "the master hand" have a long history in African art studies. Does the modern context of portrait photography differ in significant respects from older ideas of creativity and ownership? This talk briefly reviews the history and the basic concepts, and then outlines current rules for privacy and copyright, specifically in South African law, as they pertain to the subjects in portrait photographs. This is related to legal rules in countries overseas where African peoples' photographs are now being dispersed, exhibited, and sold in the high-end art market. International laws supposedly governing such exchanges are considered; rules, it should be acknowledged, that are rarely respected. Similarities and differences with the situation in other African countries are brought in for comparison. The idea is to create a road map for honoring subjects' rights in vernacular photographs, especially in African contexts.

Sandrine Colard *(Rutgers University-Newark)*

"Another Substance of the Image: The (Auto-) Biographical Textures of African Photographs"

Giulia Paoletti *(University of Virginia)*

"On Naming and Looking, Together"

This paper focuses on one of Africa's most captivating photographic series portraying a couple in the interiors of their home and outdoors in the streets of Saint Louis, Senegal in the early 1940s. The black and white snapshots were first published in 1998 without attribution and have remained —to most—nameless until 2019, when Mme. Linguere Fatou Fall celebrated on social media the sitters and authors of the series as her grandparents, M. Macky Kane and Mme. Fatou Thioune. This paper asks, what happens when we have a name? Based on interviews conducted between 2011 and 2022, this paper redresses past interpretations of this corpus and explores its significance within a larger history of photography. Each photo—and the dozens featured within—bespeak a multitude of names, voices and gazes that refute the possibility of the single author, or solitary viewer. Akin to Zeynep Gürsel's proposition of "looking together" as a decolonizing method, these images-within-images establish connections and relations that destabilize visual hegemonies and single narratives.

2:10-2:30   Q&A

2:30-3:00   Coffee Break

3:00-3:50   **Keynote Lecture by Temi Odumosu** *(University of Washington)*

"Thick Description: On the possibilities for vibrant anti-colonial record-keeping"

After the photograph, what remains? This methodological keynote asks whether it is possible for collaborative descriptive practices to produce anti-colonial records that represent and catalogue African photography, in collections and online. Reworking the concept of thick description as a form of intentional performative writing about visual records and their multiple contexts, this provocation invites deeper reflection on issues of affect, articulation, translation, and power as they frame communication strategies, both past and present. From museum labels to metadata, crowdsourcing, activist intervention, and archival re-enactments by contemporary artists, we consider sensitive and conscientious record-keeping strategies that move beyond surface readings (the scan), to document the matters that moves us most today.

3:35-3:50   Q&A

3:50-4:00   **Concluding Remarks by Steven Nelson** *(National Gallery of Art)*

In his concluding remarks, Steven Nelson will offer thoughts on key themes of the symposium as well as future directions.

SPEAKERS' BIOS

Sandrine Colard *(Rutgers University-Newark)*

Sandrine Colard is an Assistant Professor of Art History at Rutgers University-Newark (USA), a researcher and a curator, based in New York City and Brussels (Belgium). Holding a Ph.D. from Columbia University (2016), Colard is a historian of modern and contemporary African arts and photography. She has lectured internationally (MoMA, Concordia University, EHESS, Wiels, Tate Modern, Bozar, Sorbonne, European Parliament), and she is the author of multiple publications (African Arts, Critical Interventions, Cahiers du CAP, Cultures et Musées). She was a 2021-2022 Getty/ACLS fellow for her book project about the history of photography in the colonial Congo.

Osaisonor Godfrey Ekhator-Obogie *(Institute for Benin Studies)*

Osaisonor Godfrey Ekhator-Obogie is Research Fellow at the Institute of Benin Studies and Principle Researcher in Nigeria for the Digital Benin project. An expert on the cultural history of Benin and Edo-speaking people, he also acts as a tour guide for visitors to heritage sites associated with the Ancient Kingdom of Benin.

Patricia Hayes *(University of the Western Cape)*

Patricia Hayes is the National Research Foundation SARChI (South African Research Chairs Initiative) Chair in Visual History & Theory at the Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape. Her research background is in African history, and she engages extensively with photographic archives and their methodological challenges to bring together history and aesthetics. She is co-editor of the volume Ambivalent: Photography and Visibility in African History (2019); also the special issue on 'Other Lives of the Image' of the journal Kronos, Vol 46 (2020), and the recent edited volume Love and Revolution in the Twentieth-Century Colonial and Postcolonial World: Perspectives from South Asia and Southern Africa (2021).

Candace Keller *(Michigan State University)*

Candace Keller is Associate Professor of African Art and Associate Director of Matrix: The Center for Digital Humanities and Social Science at Michigan State University where she directs the Archive of Malian Photography (amp.matrix.msu.edu). Her research centers on the histories of photographic practice in Mali. She is author of Imaging Culture: Photography in Mali, West Africa (Indiana University Press 2021).

Lebohang Kganye *(Visual Artist & Photographer)*

Lebohang Kganye forms a new generation of contemporary South African photographers. Primarily known for her photography, Kganye often incorporates the archival and performative into a practice that centers storytelling and memory as it plays itself out in the familial experience. Her interest in the materiality of photography is ongoing and explored in a myriad of ways, through her use of the sculptural, performative and the moving image. While her work may resonate with a particularly South African experience; it critically engages with oral tradition as form and memory as a tangible source material.

She is currently doing her Masters in Fine Arts at the Witwatersrand University, South Africa. Notable awards include the Grand Prix Images Vevey 2021/22, Paulo Cunha e Silva Art Prize, 2020, Camera Austria Award, 2019 and the finalist of the Rolex Mentor & Protégé Arts Initiative, 2019. Kganye's work forms part of several private and public collections, most notably the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pennsylvania and the Walther Collection in Ulm.

Ingrid Masondo *(Iziko South African National Gallery)*

Ingrid Masondo's involvement in the arts and heritage sectors spans more than two decades. Her practice has encompassed artist and project management, production management, curatorial and archiving work, within music and photography. She worked at various institutions as – artist manager at Making Music Productions; archivist at the UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives; researcher and curator at Badilisha Poetry Radio; photo editor and member of the editorial team at Chimurenga Chronic (in Cape Town) and as projects and curriculum manager at the Market Photo Workshop (in Johannesburg). Since 2015, Ingrid has been the curator of photography & new media at the Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG) in Cape Town. Much of her focus at ISANG has been to support the presentation and acquisition of works by invisibilised artists and communities. As a photographer, she has worked extensively on independent projects that focus on the body (habits, practices, performances). In recent years, she has focussed on how the personal interconnects with systemic and institutional pressures that include the family, the state and the market, amongst many others. Although plagued by issues of representation & authorship, power and circulation in the field, she still considers the moment of creating a photograph as magical – whether working alone, collaborating with others to make images or (re)creating these alone in the darkroom.

Steven Nelson *(National Gallery of Art)*

Steven Nelson is Dean of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art and Professor Emeritus of Art History at UCLA. Nelson has published widely on the arts, architecture, and urbanism of Africa and its diasporas and on queer studies.

Temi Odumosu *(University of Washington)*

Temi Odumosu is an art historian, curator, and assistant professor at University of Washington Information School. Her research and curatorial interests are concerned with living archives and memorialization practices, with a current focus on colonial photography and its representation in Nordic collections, and ethical considerations surrounding the digitization of cultural heritage. She currently teaches on gender and race in information technology, and Afrofuturisms.

Giulia Paoletti *(University of Virginia)*

Giulia Paoletti is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Virginia. Her research focuses on the histories of modern art and photography in Africa. Based on over ten years of research, her book on photography in Senegal is forthcoming with Princeton University Press (2024).

John Peffer *(Ramapo College of New Jersey)*

John Peffer is a scholar of modern African art and photography and Professor of Art History at Ramapo College in New Jersey. His books include Art and the End of Apartheid (Minnesota, 2009) and (as co-editor) Photography and Portraiture in Africa (Indiana, 2013).
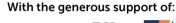
Z.S. Strother *(Columbia University)*

Z. S. Strother is Riggio Professor of African Art at Columbia University (NY). She is author of Humor and Violence: Seeing Europeans in Central African Art (2016); "Iconoclasms in Africa: Implications for the Debate on Restitution of Cultural Heritage," HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, Vol. 10 (3) 2020: 928-952, 985-988; "'A Photograph Steals the Soul': The History of an Idea," in Portraiture and Photography in Africa, ed. John Peffer and Elisabeth Cameron, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013, 177-212.