

Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive
Part I: Santu Mofokeng and A.M. Duggan-Cronin
September 12 – November 17, 2012



Are these images evidence of mental colonisation or did they serve to challenge prevailing images of 'The African' in the western world?



Santu Mofokeng, "The Black Photo Album / Look at Me: 1890-1950" (1997); A.M. Duggan-Cronin, Korana Girl, Kimberley, South Africa, early twentieth century

The Walther Collection is pleased to announce the beginning of a yearlong series of exhibitions, **Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive**, with the opening of Part I: Santu Mofokeng and A.M. Duggan-Cronin on September 12, 2012. The series unfolds in three parts at The Walther Collection Project Space in New York, culminating in an extended version that will open at the collection's museum campus in Neu-Ulm, Germany in June 2013, and is curated by Tamar Garb.

Part I introduces the themes and sets the terms for the series as a whole. On view will be the work of two photographers: Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin and Santu Mofokeng. An Irish South African who lived in the mining town of Kimberly, Duggan-Cronin produced an extraordinary range of photographs of South Africa's indigenous populations. Renowned and contested for preserving an ethnographic vision of

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African heritage, his work was published in eleven volumes, alongside anthropological essays and captions, entitled **The Bantu Tribes of South Africa**. Duggan-Cronin's work is shown in many formats, including printed volumes, vintage prints, extracted plates with captions, and reproductions viewable on iPads, to allow for reading of two complete books.

In contrast, **The Black Photo Album / Look at Me: 1890-1950**, created in 1997 by contemporary South African artist Santu Mofokeng, is an archive of pictures—commissioned by black South Africans in the early twentieth century—and stories about the subjects, challenging fixed ideas of the “native type” most often associated with photographic representations of Africans. Mofokeng's project also takes many forms. Central is the slide presentation that he compiled of reproduced photographs from his collection, juxtaposed with provocative questions and commentary. Also on view are gelatin silver prints reproducing the portraits, as well as a selection of the vintage, timeworn pictures.

By placing these two bodies of work alongside one another, **Distance and Desire, Part I**, opens up the question of the “African Archive,” understood here not so much as an official repository of documents and objects but as a contested assemblage of representations that have helped to construct and project a dominant image of Africa that is now under pressure and revision.

The three-part exhibition series on photography from Southern Africa, **Distance and Desire** offers new perspectives on the archive, reimagining its poetic and political dimensions, its diverse histories, and its changing meanings. Part II: Contemporary Reconfigurations (November 30, 2012 – March 9, 2013) centers on photography and video art by contemporary African and African American artists who engage critically with the archive by parodying, replaying, exposing, and dialoguing with its pictorial tropes and traditions. Part III: Poetics and Politics (March 22 – May 18, 2013) will be a presentation of vintage portraits, books, albums, postcards, and cartes de visite, revealing the complexity of the African archive through works produced in the 1870s to the early twentieth century. The images make visible both the ideological frameworks that prevailed during the colonial period in South Africa as well as the extraordinary skill of photographers working in the studio and the landscape.

The Walther Collection is a private non-profit foundation dedicated to researching, collecting, exhibiting and publishing modern and contemporary photography and video art, based in Neu-Ulm, Germany and New York. The Walther Collection Project Space opened in New York in April 2011. The Project Space extends the Foundation's mission and program to New York-based audiences and helps foster an international dialogue about global contemporary photography.

The Walther Collection Project Space is located at 526 West 26th Street, Suite 718, and is open to the public Wednesday through Saturday from 12pm to 6pm. For further information, call + 212 352 0683 or email brendan@walthercollection.com.