

# Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity

## Press Kit



Seydou Keita, *Untitled*, 1959, Gelatin silver print  
© Seydou Keita, photo: Steven Bates, Courtesy CAAC - The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva

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### Title of the first exhibition

*Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity*

### Curator

Okwui Enwezor

### Open to the Public

from Thursday, June 17th, 2010

### Address

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### Opening Hours

Thurs. - Sun. 11 a.m. - 5 p.m., by appointment only. Please contact info@walthercollection.com

## The Collection

The Walther Collection is an international art collection dedicated to collecting and exhibiting contemporary photography and video art across recent historical periods and geographic regions. Its mission is to collect and present, through in-depth, annual exhibitions and a vigorous publishing program, works of historical and contemporary significance from artists working in Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world, whose enduring contributions to photography significantly expand the understanding, conception, and history of the medium. In addition, The Walther Collection also carefully collects a segment of modern and contemporary European and American photography, uniting the various focuses of the collection in lively, rigorous curatorial dialogue through thematic and conceptual relationships. A significant feature of the collection is its extensive holdings of the work of a selected group of photographers. By choosing to focus on certain key photographers and artists, it seeks to set up a critical relationship between the singular work and the oeuvre as a cohesive sustained artistic discourse.

The Walther Collection will be active in four areas: curatorial research, expanding the collection, the presentation of exhibitions, and the publication of books and catalogues. Each area will disseminate the work of artists from the collection and, at the same time, engage the works with a wider public and the field of contemporary art. The curatorial overview focuses on distinctive thematic, dialogic, and comparative frames, drawing both from recent scholarship and critical examinations of artists' contemporary engagements of photography. The exhibitions and their curators will change once a year. Each year, based on a different curatorial emphasis, the collection will be examined according to the research it has engaged and undertaken through existing and new works in its holdings.

With works by Samuel Fosso, Santu Mofokeng, Zwi Mkhize, J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere, Tracey Rose, Jo Ractliffe or the late Rotimi Fani-Kayode some of the most renowned artists of modern and contemporary African photography and video art are represented in The Walther Collection. Artur Walther collected selective African artists in greater depth, among them Seydou Keita, Malick Sidibé, David Goldblatt or Guy Tillim.

Works of noted Asian artists like Ai Weiwei, Cang Xin, Chen Shaoxiong, Huang Yan, Ma Liuming, Lin Tianmiao, Wang Qingsong, Yiwu Wang or Xiang Liqing form a second focal point of The Walther Collection.

Another expansive section is devoted to the German and U.S. American photographic traditions of the 20th century. It incorporates the complete set of 60 photographs of August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* (Face of Our Time), various works by Karl Blossfeldt, several large typologies by Bernd and Hilla Becher, as well as works by Lee Friedlander, Walker Evans or Bruce Davidson.

In total, The Walther Collection encompasses over 700 works from more than 100 artists.

## About Artur Walther

Artur Walther was born in Ulm, Southern Germany, studied in Regensburg and Harvard, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Ever since his retirement from Wall Street in 1994, Artur Walther has been involved with and supported a number of cultural and educational institutions that share his interests. He is among others on the Architecture and Design Committee of The Museum of Modern Art, the Photography Committee of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Photography Committees of Vassar College and Bard College. He serves as a Member of the Board of the Storefront for Art and Architecture and the International Center of Photography (ICP), where he chaired the exhibitions committee for many years. He spearheaded the launch of the ICP Triennial of Photography, which saw its third edition in 2009. Over the past ten years Artur Walther has devoted his time collecting and working with modern and contemporary photography and video. His collection has its historical foundation in the Neue Sachlichkeit and expanded from there. Today it includes the most significant body of contemporary Chinese and African works of photography in the world.

Artur Walther lives in New York.

## Location

The Walther Collection is a compound of four buildings set in Neu-Ulm / Burlafingen's quiet middle class residential streets. The three principal buildings are organized in an irregular triangle and house the collection's exhibitions. The fourth building is a three level residential building, which accommodates the office, a library, and an apartment. With the exception of the newly commissioned central exhibition structure, whose largest gallery was put underground in order to harmonize with the surroundings, each of the buildings is based on the reuse of existing vernacular architecture. The houses are strongly connected to the personal history of the collector.

The exteriors of the buildings have stayed the same, while the interiors have been transformed into spare gallery spaces. The new galleries have been proportioned to accommodate different scales of photography and video. They are distributed around three different buildings that have been named for their architectural character.

*The White Box*, which is the main building of the collection, is based on the idea of transparency. Designed by the Ulm-based architectural firm Braunger Wörtz, this is a light-filled three-story structure. It houses a glass-fronted foyer overlooking the compound and the surrounding streets; an expansive, open 5,000-square-foot gallery on the sub-ground level that can be seen from the first floor balcony; and a smaller, 1,500-square-foot gallery and reading room on the second floor. Each year, *The White Box* will host a program of thematic exhibitions in the large main gallery, and a new acquisitions exhibition or commissioned project of a single artist in the second floor gallery.

*The Green House* is a renovated, two-story former residential home in the region's vernacular style. Its façade is covered with green ivy. Except for the remodeled interiors, consisting of two modestly scaled galleries on each floor, nothing of the exterior architecture has been touched. The house remains exactly as it was built more than half a century ago. The intimate scale of *The Green House* galleries will be used for small-format works, either for comprehensive single-artist presentation or for two-artist comparative exhibitions.

*The Black House* is a one-level, bungalow-style structure with no windows on the sides of the building facing the street. Constructed like a minimalist monolith, the space is lit by a glass curtain wall in the back and is divided into three galleries. This building will be used for the presentation of serial, performative, and conceptually based photography.

## The First Year Program: *Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity*

The Walther Collection opens on June 17th, 2010 with *Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity*, introducing works from its African collection. Under the curatorial direction of Okwui Enwezor the exhibition presents 243 works by 32 artists and is divided into four projects filling all nine galleries in the three buildings of the new exhibition space. It integrates the work of three generations of African artists and photographers with that of modern and contemporary German photography and is designed around three discursive frameworks: portraiture and social transition, typologies and taxonomies, and theatricality and figuration. The combination of African and German works will serve as a model for the kind of curatorial process that animates the character of the collecting program.

### The White Box

The exhibition in The White Box is composed of two sequences: The first is a monographic exhibition dedicated to the large, color studio portraits by the Nigerian-British artist, Rotimi Fani-Kayode (1955–1989), whose staged portraits of the 1980s explored issues of sexuality, eroticism, and identity. The second is a large group exhibition that brings together twenty-five contemporary African artists, whose works are organized around the themes of portraiture, portrayal, gender, performance, theatricality, and identity: Sammy Baloji, Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé, Yto Barrada, Candice Breitz, Allan deSouza, Theo Eshetu, Samuel Fosso, David Goldblatt, Kay Hassan, Romuald Hazoumè, Pieter Hugo, Maha Maamoun, Boubacar Touré Mandémory, Salem Mekuria, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Zanele Muholi, James Muriuki, Ingrid Mwangi, Grace Ndiritu, Jo Ractliffe, Berni Searle, Mikhael Subotzky, Guy Tillim, Hentie van der Merwe and Nontsikelelo (Lolo) Veleko.

### The Green House

A dual exhibition in The Green House focuses on portraiture and the idea of societal transition and social transformation. It features the magisterial and influential portraits of two great modern masters: Seydou Keita (Mali) and August Sander (Germany). Drawn from selections of Keita's refined black-and-white portraits of the residents of Bamako during the late 1940s to mid 1950s in colonial Mali and Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* (Faces of Our Time; 1929) the corresponding exhibition devotes a floor each to the work of these two photographers, thereby drawing attention to similarities and differences in each of their conceptions of the image and portraiture. The point of this dialogue is to show two contrasting moments of the twentieth century, and the cultural implications of photography in assessing the changes occurring in each of the societies represented. The poses and gestures that the sitters adopt in front of the camera suggest the idea of these modern individuals as witnesses to, as well as participants in, the construction of historical narratives.

### The Black House

The Black House presents similar correspondences in the concepts of seriality and typologies in the works of Bernd and Hilla Becher (Germany), Malick Sidibé (Mali), and J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere (Nigeria). Small selections from the series of black-and-white pictures of obsolete modern machinery by the Bechers, along with the severe black-and-white headshots by Ojeikere, in which he analyzes the subjects' hairstyles, and Sidibé's studio portraits of women and men photographed from the back, all provide a complement of both intuitive and formal approaches in the work of this generation of artists. Included in this group is Santu Mofokeng's *The Black Photo Album / Look At Me: 1890–1950*, a video slide presentation of archival photographs of working- and middle-class black people dressed in complete Victorian attire dating as far back as the 1890s. The piece examines the anthropology of portraiture, self-representation, and colonialism in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century South Africa. It responds to the style of anthropological photographic documentations of Africans prevalent in the Victorian era, such as Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's photographic studies *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa*, a ten-volume work, which is presented for the first time here alongside Mofokeng's work.

## Artists in Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity

**Sammy Baloji**  
Born 1978, Democratic Republic of Congo  
Lives and works in Lubumbashi

After studying literature and the humanities at Lubumbashi University, Sammy Baloji grew interested in photography and video as a means to speak to the colonial and postcolonial conditions of Katanga, the southernmost region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Focusing on the cultural, industrial, and architectural heritage of his homeland, the artist has worked across a number of media, at times collaborating with choreographers and filmmakers. For a 2006 series entitled *Memory*, Baloji researched and located archival black-and-white photographs of Congolese laborers—photographs taken during the height of colonialism—and inserted them into panoramic images of the contemporary Katanga landscape. Group shots of workers have faded with the passage of time, and the patina of these inserted portraits blends curiously with the blue skies and the Congolese landscape, appearing here as a post-industrial wasteland, replete with crumbling factories and expansive mounds of slag and rubble. While these archival photographs speak to Katanga's colonial past, illustrating how bodies were controlled, restrained, and measured, the strength of Baloji's more recent recordings of contemporary Katanga underscore the effects of similar processes on the landscape itself. The images are among the first innovative photographic meditations to consider Congo's past and present in parallel fashion, and their impact is striking. Baloji's juxtapositions emphasize murky browns, beiges, and startlingly azure skies, a palette formally suggestive of Katanga's own material wealth as a region exploited for its copper and cobalt. Baloji was a recipient of the Prince Claus Award in 2008 and received two awards at the 2007 African Photography Biennial in Bamako. *The Beautiful Time in Lubumbashi: Photography by Sammy Baloji*, the artist's first solo exhibition in the United States, was organized for the Museum for African Art in New York in March of 2010.

**Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé**  
Born 1963, Odo-Eku, Nigeria  
Lives and works in London

*Celebrate* (1994), a series of eight C-prints, forms a key-stone within the work of Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé, a Nigerian-born artist and writer currently based in London. The large-scale photographs in lush color are a departure from earlier, profoundly unsettling images in black and white. Back turned to the viewer, his naked body splayed in tense, headless poses set in nondescript domestic settings or against fabric backdrops, these earlier works mobilize all the clichés of assaultive sexuality that irrevocably cling to the black male body. As relentless as quicksand, their deeply visceral address bonds the viewer's disquiet to the artist's perilous negotiations of identity as a Nigerian raised in Scotland. Bamgboyé started experimenting with color photography in 1992 and employs it to full advantage in *Celebrate*. The series traces the artist's movements as he dances naked through a luminous white environment streaked by streamers in crinkled red, silver, and glimmering gold, a lone chair placed in the foreground. The setting is indeterminate to the point of illegibility. The aftermath of a party perhaps? A stage set? Multiple exposures lend the images the shifting, flurried quality of a snow globe or a chemical reaction not yet settled. Contrary to earlier works, these scenes evoke a joyous ebullience that calls to mind Hélio Oiticica's Parangolés of the 1960s, in which performers took to the streets dancing, dressed in streaming bands of color. Yet *Celebrate* remains invested in the questions of Bamgboyé's earlier works, rooted in the profound challenges that cultural displacement poses to identity discourse. Referring to Emmanuel Levinas's model of Self, Other, and Supplement, the artist puts it this way: "What if one is the Supplement, the one that lives 'between worlds'?" The carefully choreographed unsettledness of *Celebrate* willfully withholds, and Bamgboyé's final question remains: "Can the supplement ever be equated with the boy?"

**Yto Barrada**  
Born 1971 in Paris  
Lives and works in Paris and Tangier

Yto Barrada's *Girl In Red* (1999) looks away or, rather, looks elsewhere. Positioned slightly left of center against an ornate and colorfully tiled yet crumbling mosaic wall in Tangier, Morocco, we see only her back. Fully absorbed, the young woman seems to lean forward, her upper legs pressing against the lower, extended part of the wall as she looks upward. Such postures course throughout Barrada's *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (1998–2004), the larger series from which *Girl In Red* derives. Focusing on the everyday imagery of Tangier, a city on the western edge of the Strait of Gibraltar—that sliver-thin



body of water separating Africa from Europe—Barrada's images are hauntingly still. She has described the project as an attempt "to expose the metonymic character of the strait through a series of images that reveal the tension—which restlessly animates the streets of my home town—between its allegorical nature and immediate, harsh reality." Since the European Union's adoption of the Schengen Agreement in the 1990s, passage between Morocco and Spain has been severely restricted and Tangier "has become," according to Barrada, "the destination and jumping off point of a thousand hopes." Barrada's subjects repeatedly look elsewhere, sometimes into the distance, to Spain, and sometimes straight into a wall. Vision is equally deferred in Barrada's images of *Sleepers*, most of whom are shown prone in public parks, heads shrouded in an article of clothing, itself little more than a symbolic gesture protecting their sleep from the rumble of the outside world. Far from a leisurely nap on the green, these figures appear exhausted, spent, burned out. Barrada writes of Tangier's 'burners' who have destroyed their papers and broken with the law, with the conventions of citizenship, to seek a different life on the other side of the Strait, and these figures they may well be. They rest, covered, yet in plain sight, their presence suggestive of a purposeful absence. In sleep, too, they manage to look elsewhere.

**Bernd and Hilla Becher**

**Bernd Becher: born 1931, Siegen; died 2007, Rostock**

**Hilla Becher: born 1934, Potsdam**

Since beginning their work in 1957, Bernd and Hilla Becher have systematically developed one of the most important photographic projects of the latter half of the twentieth century. Indebted to the work of Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) photographers Albert Renger-Patzsch, Werner Manz, and particularly to August Sander's attempt to create a complete photographic record of the Weimar Republic's varied citizens, ages, and professionals of the 1920s, the Bechers photographed examples of increasingly outmoded industrial architecture in Europe and America over a period of nearly fifty years. Like the gas tanks, coal bunkers, and gravel plants included in *Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity*, the Bechers photographed their architectural subjects frontally, with a minimum of context, in even light. These documentary images are a means to preserve, as objectively as possible, both the general and the particular forms of each specific building, as well as the larger architectural categories of each structural type. To emphasize both the singular and the general, the Bechers present their photographs in grids, what they refer to as typologies, in which individual architectural types—such as the spherical gas tank—are arranged in series. Explaining this choice, the Bechers have written that "the information we wish to give first arises thanks to serialization, by the juxtaposition of similar or different objects that possess one and the same function." Precisely this emphasis on serial and repetitive procedures led to the Bechers' reception as key figures, not only in the history of documentary photography but also within minimalism and photographic iterations of conceptual art from the middle 1960s onward. While Ed Ruscha's photo books *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (1964), for example, share a similar serial impulse, such conceptual photography emphasized a radical de-skilling of the photographic enterprise, where artists were often content with simple snapshots. In contrast, the Bechers painstakingly photographed their subjects, the anonymous sculptures of the industrial landscape, using large-format cameras and waiting days—even weeks on certain occasions—for the right conditions to achieve a precision and tonal variation in the image true to the density and specificity of the architectural forms they document.

**Candice Breitz**

**Born 1972, Johannesburg**

**Lives and works in Berlin**

Since the mid-1990s, Berlin-based artist Candice Breitz has produced a body of work treating various aspects of the structure of identity and psychological identification. Breitz's materials reveal an early interest in the everyday mediations of racial, and especially sexual, identity in South Africa; white-out connotes both the banality of forgone censorship and the invisibility of such racially coded power in several important early series. Breitz's subsequent photographic works, sometimes compared to the photomontages of the German Dadaist Hannah Höch, conflate fetishisms both pornographic and ethnographic to critical ends. With the turn of the twenty-first century, Breitz embraced multi-channel video installation and began a sustained examination of the form of the portrait and the subtleties of the mass-mediated subject's experience of enjoyment. Although predicted by the *Surrogate Portraits* of 1998, it was with the subject of popular music—fully expressed in the video installations *Legend*, *King*, *Queen*, *Working Class Hero*, as well as the excellent photographic *Monuments* series—that Breitz began her examination of the appropriation of mass cultural forms through the performativity of fan enthusiasms. Breitz's work attempts to reach the absolute of exteriority, with an ambiguous ambivalence reminiscent of Andy Warhol, for whom stardom and anonymity, success and disaster were continuous, and an archival operation recalling the nominalist photographic grids of Bernd and Hilla Becher, for whom the exception did not reveal the rule.



**Allan deSouza**  
**Born 1958, Nairobi**  
**Lives and works in San Francisco and Los Angeles**

Allan deSouza's photographs turn on the limits of the medium as an evidentiary representational mode. Refuting expectations of authenticity, they point, by extension, to the fallibility of documentary and historicizing narratives of all breeds. Fact and fiction merge in deSouza's recent bird's-eye landscapes, which double up single exposures to form uncannily mammalian bilateral symmetries. The artist shot these topographical photographs from airplane windows during his regular commute between two California cities. On several occasions, other passengers profiled him as a potential terrorist (deSouza is of Indian descent). The absurdity of such a claim notwithstanding, the works present compelling reconnaissance on the politics of Empire, race, and fear. Fact and fantasy converge to equal advantage in *Terrain*, a 1999 series which at first appears to depict sweeping landscapes of the American West, conjuring the colonial logic of Manifest Destiny celebrated by the Hudson River School painters in the mid-1800s. DeSouza's is quite a different referent: small tabletop sculptures he fashioned from bodily detritus—eyelashes, nail clippings, skin. If humor leavens these and other projects, wit is less at cause in *The Lost Pictures*. In that 2003 series, deSouza had prints made of childhood slides from 1962 taken by his father in Nairobi, where the artist lived until the age of seven. Shortly after his mother's death, deSouza placed the prints about his house—in the kitchen, the shower, and the bathroom. Dust and other residue registered the passage of time, abrading and obscuring the original images almost beyond recognition. Simulating the fog of memory, the photographs suspend our reading in perpetual indeterminacy, revealing a memory-image and effacing it at the same time. Forgetting and remembering, loss and retrieval—it is these cognitive processes that are ultimately at stake here, processes in which, as deSouza's pictures suggest, photographic mediation plays an inescapable role. And yet, faded to the point of inscrutability, the series casts doubt on photography's function as mnemonic reference. The past reveals itself only through the gnarled sieve of the present, which itself reads as an elusive palimpsest haunted by the ghosts of the past it overlays.

**Theo Eshetu**  
**Born 1958, London**  
**Lives and works in Rome**

Theo Eshetu is a London-born, Ethiopia-raised, and Rome-based media artist who creates video-based installations that display the expansiveness of both his cultural inspirations and his medium. Eshetu asks his viewers to reflect on the processes of his own mediation as we discern the multiplicitous strategies of image production occurring across his diverse cultural sources. His form and content generate a provocative "electronic elsewhere," as articulated by Chris Berry, Soyoung Kim, and Lynn Spigel: Eshetu produces social spaces that are of the material world (gallery installations comprised of mirrors, monitors, photochemical representations of lived experiences), yet are equally premised on consideration of the non-space produced by his media technologies. It is this contradiction that finds generative expression in works such as *Brave New World* (1999). Here, Eshetu commingles far-reaching moving-image selections pulled from Super 8 film and transferred to video, his own recordings on video, and appropriated television programming, into a poetic syncretism that is sensitive to his specific global experience. Further, he presents these images in a playful panopticon: a single video monitor emits his diverse content streams into a mirrored cube that bowls out into a concave mise-en-abyme of vaulted, fragmented projections. A viewer must insert his or her head into the roughly 4:3 frame of the work to see the refraction of the television images. One's own perceiving body is pulled into the spectacular nonplace of Eshetu's installation. In *Trip to Mount Ziqualla* (2005), the artist emphasizes the particularity of his position and his manipulative capabilities. In this three-channel projection, the left and right images mirror each other, in contrast to a distinct central image. But the screens soon cross-populate into a lush, complex mandala of figures and brightly colored clothing. Hand-held, close-crossed documentary video is inter-cut with religious performances. A swelling orchestral score by Bach and N.W.A. intermingle on the sound track before diegetic audio abruptly returns to assert its synchronous presence. The artist skillfully underscores the elasticity of electronic media technologies. Eshetu asserts the cross-cultural influences that such technologies create, but also the influences that are already quite firmly present.

**Rotimi Fani-Kayode**  
**Born 1955, Lagos; died 1989, London**

While the posthumous discussion of photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode is limited to the artist's brief career of six years, it remains a lively site of contestation, complication, and shifting resonance as time and distance accrue between its studio-based making and its contemporary global circulation. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1955, Rotimi Fani-Kayode passed away due to AIDS-related complications in 1989. As a Nigerian-born photographer who grew up in exile in Britain, and a man whose homosexuality conflicted with the beliefs of his Yoruban heritage, Fani-Kayode self-identified as an outsider in terms of sexuality, cultural geography, and filial expectations. After studying at Georgetown University and

earning his MFA degree at Pratt Institute in 1983, Fani-Kayode returned to Britain where he co-founded the black photographers group Autograph and challenged the conventions of a 1980s art world in England that denied access to certain representations and discourses of race and sexuality. During his life, Fani-Kayode used his photography as a weapon to defend attacks on his sexuality and artistic integrity, and here the frame of gay identity politics often ascribed to his practice offers a productive arena of discussion. However, the self-imaginings in the Walther Collection from the series *Nothing to Lose* (1989) and *Every Moment Counts* (1989) stage sites of indulgence, consumption, and formal practice whose subtleties belie an overdetermined reading of homoeroticism as the dominant constructive force of identity. Now, more than twenty years after the artist's death, we bear witness to the manifold legibility of the body (its form, its gesture, its color, its studio site) and its inclusion or fragmentation by the frame—as a means of navigating but never fully reconciling the binds of past and present, home and exile, diaspora and geographic fixity. Fani-Kayode's work offers no easy answer to the question of hybridity; its refusal to lay cleanly or quietly between these poles of inscription speaks to the empowering mutability of the body, in particular the transformative capabilities of the sexualized body to transgress, transform, and create sites of meaning.

**Samuel Fosso**  
**Born 1962, Cameroon**  
**Lives and works in Bangui**

In his self-photographic projects, Samuel Fosso mines the field of portraiture to conjure tropes of representation and enactment, from humorous masquerade to social taxonomy to historical memory. Born in Cameroon in 1962 and raised in Nigeria, Fosso escaped civil war in 1972, fleeing to Bangui, the capital city of the Central African Republic. An early photography apprenticeship inspired the young artist to open his own photographic studio at age thirteen, where he produced portrait and passport photographs of local residents. While Fosso still maintains this business, few local patrons are aware of the international artistic renown he has achieved for his after-hours work: highly costumed and choreographed self-portraits of the artist in various modes of dress, character types, and historical figures. The works in the inaugural exhibition of the Walther Collection present a then-and-now selection of Fosso's self-portraits, juxtaposing the 1976 studio-as-dressing-room Self-Portrait series with the 2008 series *African Spirit*, in which Fosso donned the characters of African and African diaspora who shaped postcolonial thought, including Angela Davis, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Aimé Césaire, and Ethiopian Emperor Hailé Selassie. In these striking, often elaborately staged self-portraits, the studio becomes a proscenium for a personal and political practice of chameleonic self-representation and interpretation that remains "as much a work of vanity as it is a taxonomy of masculine desire." As some scholars argue, the self-portrait is a sign that performs—it is an act rather than a symbol with representative power. The reflexive, performative tenor of Fosso's self-fashioning therefore tangles the traces of subject, object, and author that ontologically anchor photographic practice to meaning via theories of the index. Confiscating any notion of the portrait as reliable signifier, Fosso's practice instead opens up the possibilities of the self as an embodiment of and stage for myriad desires, and uses the power of self-imaging to question the notion of the archive as a coherent field of knowledge.

**David Goldblatt**  
**Born 1930, Randfontein, South Africa**  
**Lives and works in Johannesburg**

Born into a family of Lithuanian Jews who had fled to South Africa in 1890 to escape persecution, David Goldblatt has continually documented his country through a sustained photographic practice that spans more than half a century. Shot primarily (but not exclusively) in black and white, Goldblatt's pictures of South African mines, townships, buildings, monuments, and subjects may be read as a series of meditations on the conditions and spaces of interior and edifice: for every intimate portrait of an African in her apartment, there appears an implied counterpart: an earnest shot of a councilman or bureaucrat Afrikaner, seated at an imposing (yet strangely modest) desk. Likewise, pictures dating to apartheid-era township meetings resonate with more recent photographs of vast expanses of the South African landscape. Such structural binaries may easily be extended to accommodate readings of subterranean / streetscape, urban / suburban and, even formally, black / white. In short, Goldblatt's masterful images alternately portray the order and ruin that lie at the heart of South African modernity, suggesting that any investigation of apartness must also account for a deeply internal register. Yet just as the images foreground a sense of the inside-yet-outside—a condition that speaks to the photographer's own complicated personal history within that of South Africa's—they neither editorialize nor endorse, a quality that updates Eugène Atget's long-ago adage ("These are documents I make") with a deeply existential valence. Informed by U.S. Farm Security Administration photographers Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) and Walker Evans (1903–1975), and drawing more proximal inspiration from South African photographers working for *Drum* magazine in the 1950s (including Jürgen Schadeberg, Peter Magubane, and Bob Gosani) Goldblatt's images eschew the sensational, opting instead for the everyday. Many of these recent pictures have focused on the stark landscapes of the Northern Cape,

while related works examine the public and private memorials populating these vistas. Here, the diptych *Sheep Farm at Oubip, Between Aggenysand Loop 10, Bushmanland, Northern Cape, 5 June 2004*, explores the historical significance of the land itself, symbolic of the disempowered status of Black Africans. Dedicated to democratic representation in the fullest sense, Goldblatt has worked endlessly as a principled photographer, mentor, educator, and supporter of South African photography. In 1989 he founded the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg, a social, cultural, and technical center intended to educate young photographers who were otherwise excluded from formal training. Goldblatt's photographs have been exhibited throughout the world in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including a major retrospective exhibition, *David Goldblatt: Fifty-One Years*, organized in 2001 by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. In 2009 Goldblatt was awarded the Henri Cartier-Bresson Award for *TJ*, an ongoing examination of the city of Johannesburg.

**Kay Hassan**  
**Born 1956, Johannesburg**  
**Lives and works in Johannesburg**

Working with a number of media, including photography, video, and works on paper, Kay Hassan has continually explored the connections between representation and institutional control, in particular how photography and the visual arts functioned in South Africa during the apartheid era. To date, this has frequently involved the use of found materials, advertisements, printed materials, and billboard clippings, all marshaled into organic collages that seem most active at the sites where fragments are visibly stitched or pieced together. In the 1970s, Hassan studied printmaking and fine arts at both the Schule für Gestaltung in Basel and at the Evangelical Lutheran Art and Craft Centre in Rorke's Drift, South Africa; this intense formal training across a number of media has resulted in a unique artistic style that frequently capitalizes on the mechanical logic of reproduction, yet never surrenders the significance of the hand. Hassan's hybrid practice often assumes the format of large-scale paper-based "constructions," a neologism that certainly encompasses the sprawling visual array of photographic material in his 2006 *Negatives*. Here, Hassan uses the backings, over- and underexposed "errors," and misprints of instant snapshots intended for ID cards and passports. A vaguely indeterminate band of photographic negatives anchors a "landscape" orientation as if to counter the visual orientation of "portrait." While the negatives carry a photographic inversion of the actual prints, functioning as a kind of haunted source material, the under- or over-exposed images suggest a breakdown in the very process of representation itself. Annealed and overlapped, these remnants allow Hassan to conceptually trace the inverted space of the ordering gaze of the camera, and begin to draw conclusions about the broader ideological implications of state-based archival and institutional photography. In seizing on the dual nature of "identification" as both a powerful tool of governance and a highly personal domain, Hassan presents to the viewer a collective and complicated portrait of South Africa.

**Romuald Hazoumè**  
**Born 1962 in Benin**  
**Lives and works in Porto-Novo, Benin**

The protean oeuvre of Romuald Hazoumè forms an extended meditation on the complex web of interdependencies that laced—and continues to lace—his native Benin into global networks of exchange. Hazoumè first came to prominence with a series of sculptural works called *Masques Bidons*, or jerry-can masks, dating to 1987. They nod formally to the African ritual masks so influential on European avant-gardes, but are constructed of the ubiquitous plastic canisters used in Benin to transport everything from water to black-market Nigerian oil. Objects with "worn-out destinies," as the artist calls them, these battered and scarred vessels are now at the end of the line in a long chain of exchange. There is a sad joy in their prominence on Benin's roads and sidewalks; elsewhere these lowly servants, always mere carriers, never commodity proper, disappear into pure utility. During the 1990s, Hazoumè started juxtaposing masks with documentary photography in mixed-media installations. The slippage between human and inanimate here extends into the photographed scenes, mostly rear-view shots of people hauling cans on bicycles and motorcycles, their bodies obscured by and subservient to the looming, bulbous compositions strapped precariously to their backs. Once the fabled Kingdom of Dahomey, Benin still resonates with the history of the transatlantic slave trade, a recurring theme. Hazoumè's celebrated 1997 installation *La Bouche du Roi* (The Mouth of the King) arranged more than 300 masks after a 1789 print of the *R R Brooks*, a British slave ship, each one embodying an individual slave. *Market Forces (Better to Sell Meat than Men)*, a large-scale panoramic view of a sleepy goat-market, approaches the subject in a more oblique way. Part of a series portraying the present condition of old slave trade sites, its scene refuses to settle into the comforts of pastoral cliché, the index of slavery as inescapable as the links between economies present and past.

**Pieter Hugo**  
**Born 1976, Cape Town**  
**Lives and works in Higgovale, South Africa**

South African photographer Pieter Hugo first heard of the Nigerian Gadawan Kura, or hyena handlers, in 2003, and was immediately intrigued. Living and working in Abuja, a shantytown suburb of Lagos, the handlers were typically characterized as unsavory snake-oil men for the twenty-first century: thieves, thugs, drug dealers, and itinerants who trained and kept massive, wild-looking hyenas on imposing leashes and chains, capped with muzzles, as they collected outstanding debts, staged minstrel-like performances, and peddled wares such as traditional medicine. Beginning in 2005, Hugo traveled with the handlers for weeks at a time, photographing them in a number of settings, each pose suggesting a complicated mix of spectacular performance and the surreal everyday. A 2005 print, *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Nigeria*, is typical of the series, entitled *Hyenas and Other Men*. In the photograph, Mallam Galadima squats nonchalantly in the brush, while Jamis confronts the gaze of the camera in ambiguous, yet possibly menacing fashion. We are left grasping for additional context: What to make of the dress of the handler? Where in Nigeria are we? Readily recognizable items of clothing and the presence (in other prints from the same series) of highway overpasses and parking lots point to Hugo's interest in the transitional status of his subjects; their status as figures populating a contemporary, globalized landscape complicates any narrative attempting to relegate the handlers to a prior historical era. That the hyena, a little-understood, densely muscled and imposing-looking animal, serves as both subject and descriptor in the series speaks to Hugo's sustained photographic interest in the edges of African societies. While earlier projects have dealt explicitly with the AIDS crisis in South Africa and the realities of the Rwandan Genocide, Hugo's recent work emphasizes liminality and often-misunderstood figures, such as his documentation of South Africans with albinism, or the proliferating "Nollywood" Nigerian film industry.

**Seydou Keïta**  
**Born 1921, Mali; died 2001, Paris**

Seydou Keïta is today undoubtedly one of the best-known West African commercial photographers of the 1950s, a period often referred to as the golden age of black-and-white studio photography. Yet even though his reputation in Mali never dwindled, it was not until the early 1990s that his work became known internationally. Keïta, largely self-taught, opened a thriving commercial studio in the heart of Bamako, Mali's capital, in 1948. Shortly after the country gained independence from France in 1960, he was forced by the new government to close his studio, which never reopened. In the decade that Keïta was active, he catered mainly to the rising demands for portraiture of Bamako's urban middle class. His works are striking examples of Afro-politanism, Achille Mbembe's term for the mix of autochthonous status markers and style—elaborate fabrics, jewels, body modifications—and recontextualized snippets of Western consumer culture—a pose snatched from a gangster movie, a suit, a pair of glasses—employed to signal suave urbanity in 1950s Bamako. Many of Keïta's images seduce with a stylish foreignness: a wasp-waisted woman in a gorgeous white dress, another one looking at us over her shoulder. Yet often the synthesis of signs slightly stammers, lending the images a forceful punctum. There is the woman sitting on the floor, her back arched just a little too awkwardly, a lone shoe displayed on her fanning skirt; the unintentionally endearing young man holding a flower. Studio photography has been described as a ritual form of self-imagining, a dream factory. Keïta's images speak to the irresolvable pressures subtending those dreams in 1950s Bamako, and to their artifice. Yet they also testify to the dream. Keïta made a point of never discarding negatives and accrued more than 30,000 of them over the course of a decade, a vast portrait of life in his city. Dreams, after all, are part of life as well.

**Maha Maamoun**  
**Born 1972, Cairo**  
**Lives and works in Cairo**

Through her manipulation of found materials, printed matter, photographs, and film, Maha Maamoun has intervened in the history of depictions of Egypt as circulated through postcards, travelogues, and cinema. Speaking directly to a tradition of exoticism and Orientalist image-making, Maamoun interrogates distances traveled; by evoking the terms "navigation" and "consumption," the artist succinctly describes her interest in the sliding registers of estrangement, a simultaneously "intimate and distant relationship to one's environment" hovering between the proximal (personal experience) and the distal (a visual history of the representation of Cairo dating as far back as its period of Greek rule, circa 332–330 B.C.). Her 2005 series *Domestic Tourism* reshuffles imagery through strategies of subtle digital manipulation and appropriation, in ways meant to estrange and challenge viewers: *The Beachfinds*, a comically positioned and scaled paddle-boater tearing up the waterfront, leaving the viewer wondering how other swimmers in the photograph may be similarly cropped by the artist. *Fellucca* likewise benefits

from subtle sampling and remixing, but here Maamoun gestures toward an earlier pictorial tradition, namely the panoramic photographs of the nineteenth century, when Cairo's vistas were a destination on European Grand Tours. At once playful, bright, frequently absurd, and sometimes unsettling, Maamoun's photographic interventions benefit from these outside perspectives, and strive to redefine the historical implications for representing the cities (or bodies) of others. Maamoun holds an M.A. in Middle Eastern History from American University in Cairo. Her artwork has recently been shown in the 9th Sharjah Biennial 9 (2009); *Global Cities* at the Tate Modern (2007); the 10th Venice Biennale of Architecture (2006); *Snap Judgments* at the International Center of Photography, New York (2006); and *Photo Cairo* at the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo (2003). Maamoun is a board member of the Contemporary Image Collective (CiC), a Cairo-based art space.

**Boubacar Touré Mandémory**

**Born 1956, Senegal**

**Lives and works in Dakar**

Boubacar Touré Mandémory, a Senegalese photographer based in Dakar, is an indefatigable chaser of images, an urban forager incessantly on the hunt for fleeting glimpses of everyday life: young people on the beach, street vendors, children horsing around. He roams Dakar, a cheap compact camera in his pocket, capturing the teeming life of the city in low-slung, improvised shots taken from the hip or crouched at ground level—images with the impromptu charm of a quick-draw smile. Yet Mandémory's intent is not reportage or documentation. His works form a lexicon of stolen moments as intimate as they are strange; his approach is that of a poet rather than an ethnographer. Off-kilter angles evoke the warped opticality of dreamlife, often underscored by a darkened palette that lends the scenes a distinct sense of liminality. In the series *Villes Capitales d'Afrique* (Capitals of Africa), for instance, Mandémory presents images dominated by expansive, deep blue skies and the hyper-saturated opaline tones of bare skin, punctuated here by the flutter of glimmering cloth clinging to skin, there by a glance unexpectedly returned. What he was chasing in this series, the artist explains, was not the essence of daily life in Dakar as such, but the Dakar of his childhood, the collection of streets and neighborhoods locked in his mind's eye. Mandémory self-consciously positions his practice in opposition to documentary photography, in which he discerns the specters of colonial ethnography and its oppressive fictions. Nor does he identify with "dreed" (a Wolof word meaning "hastily made"), a type of instant street photography omnipresent in Dakar. Rather, his work is an archaeology of sorts, mobilizing the gentle murmur of strangeness that lies dormant beneath the skein of the everyday in order to recuperate an oneiric past for the present.

**Salem Mekuria**

**Born 1947, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia**

**Lives and works in Boston, Massachusetts**

An independent film producer, writer, and director working primarily in the Boston area, Salem Mekuria is internationally recognized as speaking eloquently to the conditions of the people and spaces of her native Ethiopia. A professor of art at Wellesley College (near Boston, Massachusetts), she has worked for several years with NOVA, American Public Television's premier science documentary series, and with numerous regional, national, and international film production companies, all part of a sustained effort to depict issues related to African women and development. Her 1996 film *Deluge*, a highly personal account of the events of the Ethiopian student revolts and their suppression under a brutal military dictatorship, was screened at numerous festivals and garnered considerable praise. Her more recent *IMAGinING TOBIA* (2006) is a three-channel triptych video installation featuring a multiple-perspective take on what the artist has described as "the vivid imagery" of the Ethiopian landscape. Indeed, Tobia (a vernacular term for the country) is far removed from the now canonical imagery of the barren Ethiopian countryside of the mid-1980s. To counter this narrative, one that belies the longstanding history of self-sufficiency, independence, and richness of Ethiopia, the filmmaker depicts a vibrant country, lush and frequently green, one populated by markets and thriving communities. In thoughtful sequences alluding to the nation's densely layered history, Mekuria's camera lingers on the country's striking and hybridized architecture. Here, buildings elude rapid classification, suggesting a blurring of previously understood distinctions between private and public, or between Christian and Muslim communities. At the heart of Mekuria's project lies a set of affirmations and open-ended questions about a complex modern nation whose sovereignty has been largely forgotten, a history transfigured by its ideological alignment with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and replaced more recently by overly determined narratives of famine and oppression. *IMAGinING TOBIA* reminds the viewer that Ethiopia should be considered on the one hand for its status as one of only two countries to maintain independence in the wake of the 1885 Berlin Conference and, on the other, by virtue of a promising future—as Africa's second most populated country. Mekuria's films have been screened with distinction at various exhibitions throughout the world, including the 50th Venice Biennale (2003), the 2nd Seville Biennial (2007), the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale and the Black Maria Film & Video Festival (both 1997), to name only several. Her work has been presented at the National Center for Afro-American Artists, Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian



Institution in Washington, D.C., and at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. In 2005 she was a Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University.

**Santu Mofokeng**  
**Born 1956 in Johannesburg**  
**Lives and Works in Johannesburg**

A member of the Afrapix collective of South African documentary photographers throughout most of the 1980s, and a former student of David Goldblatt, Santu Mofokeng has worked to challenge the ways that conventional photographic archives have been employed to ideological ends. While his work may be read as a sustained engagement with apartheid- and post-apartheid-era photojournalism, one ongoing project dating to the late 1980s helps to contextualize Mofokeng's inquiry into the relationships between images, archives, and citizenship as they emerged during a much earlier moment in the history of photography. Developed while Mofokeng was a documentary photographer and researcher at the Institute for Advanced Social Research at the University of the Witwatersrand [1988–1998], *Black Photo Album / Look at Me: 1890–1950* instead posits an “unofficial” archive—an extensive collection of locally commissioned family photographs that the artist has sourced, copied, scanned, retouched, and presented as an alternative to the state-based South African photographic apparatus. Here, Victorian parlor conventions of posture, dress, manner, and costume frame highly focused subjects as they sit for the camera amidst theatrical props such as pillars or tapestries. These portraits, unseen and overlooked for decades, convey a sense of pride, thoughtfulness, wisdom, and above all, agency. What makes these portraits so striking is the recognition that they were produced during an era that was understood primarily through images produced explicitly for archival purposes—pictures that ordered information according to typological grids and the tenets of social Darwinism. The historical specificity of Mofokeng's project is crucial for understanding the emergence of photography as deeply entwined with the colonial enterprise. In a text accompanying the images, the artist writes, “While the world went to war twice during this time, South Africa was busy articulating, entrenching, and legitimating a racist political system that the United Nations later proclaimed a crime against humanity.” Mofokeng's project thus stresses the fact that the official archives created and extended by the South African state during this period were instruments of power, and that the vast collections of passport photographs, officially commissioned portraits and governmental documentation of the townships culminated in the portrayal of black Africans as beings to be managed and administered. Never fully recognized as citizens, they were stripped of their sovereignty, measured, ordered, and categorized according to earlier models of pseudoscientific race theory. By contrast, Mofokeng's archive enacts a quite different history, bringing to new light a group of subjects who commissioned and posed for their own photographs, promoting a circulation of images that remained largely private and community-based, on display for consumption at a slight remove from the gaze of colonial governance.

**Zwelethu Mthethwa**  
**Born 1960, Durban, South Africa**  
**Lives and works in Cape Town**

Color teems in the photographic portraiture of Zwelethu Mthethwa. The artist first garnered critical acclaim for an extended series dedicated to residents of the informal settlements on the margins of Cape Town, which swelled as the apartheid system collapsed in the late 1980s and as black South Africans, formally relegated to Reserve areas, gravitated to the city in search of work. Frontal and centered, Mthethwa's compositions frame single subjects posed at home within the domestic interiors of settlement vernacular architecture, structures built of corrugated metal, plastic sheeting, and other readily available materials. The sitter's gaze locks on the camera's lens. Whirling around this perceptual confrontation, a kaleidoscope of printed pattern reigns: stenciled linoleum, fabric, and improvised wallpaper made of found advertisements that multiply in duplicates to form festive grids. Invading private space like a virus, global capitalism's image regime indexes the vulnerability of Mthethwa's subjects to the inequalities of labor and compulsory consumption in the international marketplace. At the same time, the Pop-repetition of these repurposed ads saps away their corporate impact, perhaps denaturing the myth of consumer pleasure that they tender. The mad vitality of these decorative schemes also indicates another kind of agency, a performative enactment of aesthetic self-fashioning, underscored here by the carefully staged collaboration between sitter and photographer. If this set of contradictions recalls the 1950s studio portraits by Malian photographer Seydou Keita, the saturated color palette of Mthethwa's practice sets them apart. Color also distinguishes Mthethwa's portraiture from the black-and-white conventions of documentary photojournalism, a genre that played an important role in the struggle to end apartheid, but which often reduces its subjects to their symbolic value as signs of the impoverishment that governs South Africa's urban peripheries. Without overlooking that economic reality, Mthethwa's vivid chromatic spectrum insists on human dignity, as much in this series as in a more recent suite of portraits of sugar-cane laborers and miners. While rich color, glossy lamination, and massive scale risk sending Mthethwa's photographs back to the continent of commodity fetishism, these

details also pose an important question about the relationship between representation and citizenship, contesting the social invisibility of settlement residents, only to highlight it again by the blank and anonymous banner *Untitled*.

**Zanele Muholi**  
**Born 1972, Umlazi, Durban**  
**Lives and works in Johannesburg**

Claiming the label of “activist-photographer,” Zanele Muholi has worked to advance social tolerance in South Africa and elsewhere by frankly addressing issues of sexuality, gender, and representation through a body of vibrant, rich, and consistently intimate set of photographic portraits. After studying advanced photography at David Goldblatt’s Market Photo Workshop and holding her first solo exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2004, Muholi co-founded and worked as a community relations officer at the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), a black lesbian organization based in Gauteng, and worked as a photographer and reporter for *Behind the Mask*, an online magazine on LGBT issues in Africa. Within the specific context of South Africa, where the open portrayal of black women frankly displaying same-sex practices has recently been met with controversy and dismissal from top government officials, Muholi offers a deeply personal take on the quiet spaces and rituals that fill our days and shape us in relation to those closest to us. Her photographs are often sensuous, lingering at volume and surface in dignified ways, suggesting a wholly tactile understanding of beauty and subjectivity. Refusing notions of sensational taboo, and instead foregrounding highly intimate moments such as bathing, preparing food, sleeping, and resting in domestic settings, Muholi’s primary concern would seem to begin with a sense of the sovereign body, one tending—and being tended to. These portraits are at times so intimate as to severely crop the body itself, suggesting perhaps an interest in the South African landscape, a connection literalized in her 2007 series *Miss D’Vine*, where a transgendered subject poses in front of what appears to be a cluttered or abandoned lot. Muholi’s photographs often capture the subtle tensions in bodies at rest; at other times her subjects are proud, directly confront the camera’s gaze, and are gathered into poses redolent of earlier portraiture. Due in no small part to her own personal affiliations with and connections to and throughout these communities, Muholi has succeeded in deepening David Goldblatt’s democratic vision of South Africa, offering viewers a frank statement on empowerment, and beauty. Muholi was the recipient of the 2005 Tollman Award for the Visual Arts and has been recognized as an eminent photographer at the Bamako Biennial of African Photography. In 2009, she was the Ida Ely Rubin Artist-in-Residence at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**James Muriuki**  
**Born 1977, Kenya**  
**Lives and works in Nairobi**

Throughout Nairobi, Kenya, fleets of privately owned small buses and minivans, called “matatus,” operate as shared transportation services. These vehicles fill a void in the Nairobi public transportation system and are regularly used by a wide range of citizens to commute to and from work. Though their significance as simple transport is undeniable, matatus also operate in a social milieu among Nairobi’s youth culture. Often painted with dazzlingly bright colors and themes and branded with images of music icons and suggestive phrases, matatus often boom loudly with the rhythm of the latest hip-hop and rap music from expensive sound systems, the low rumble of bass overpowering the sounds of their own diesel engines. Often selected by young riders based on the music, their painted decoration, or a combination of the two, matatus can be as much mobile party as morning commute. James Muriuki’s *Matatus photographs* (2005), from his *Town* series, represent these buses alternately speeding through the frame or stopped in gridlocked traffic after dark. While these images can be read as an everyday return home after business hours, the sharp contrasts, blurred imagery, and doubled lights more aptly suggest the careening and mobile social fabric of late-night Nairobi. An undecidable suggestion of speed—matatu drivers infamously flout traffic and safety regulations—and sound blend together in Muriuki’s images as the on-the-street cacophony is suggested by the visual information in the photographs. In imaging the matatus, Muriuki’s photographs resound with both music and movement—each of which, by its nature, exceeds the still frame. Much like the blurred streets seen from the colorful matatu windows, Muriuki presents a view of Nairobi’s dynamic and hybrid culture.

**Ingrid Mwangi**  
**Born 1970, Nairobi**  
**Lives and works in Ludwigshafen / Rhein, Germany, and Nairobi, Kenya**

Born in Nairobi, Kenya, but living primarily in Germany, where she moved at age fifteen, Ingrid Mwangi has developed an artistic style that seeks to interrogate the status of the individual, yet in so doing never assumes that notions such as identity, singularity, or personality are uncomplicated or simply given. Rather, Mwangi’s work, which frequently involves photography and documentation of her own body, may be read as perpetually challenging terms such as autonomy and agency at a register at once



sensual and theoretical, suggesting a critical engagement with the concept of duality: dual spaces, natures, and identities, all mapped simultaneously onto the same locus. In recent years Mwangi has worked to fulfill this project more radically by merging her artistic identity with that of her partner, Robert Hutter; they are now routinely referred to as one name, IngridMwangiRobertHutter, a practice Simon Njami has referred to as a complicated and productive “twinship,” a condition underscoring the distinctions and convergences bound up in “a self-centered, singular I, to the particularly problematic plural we.” Such duality finds precedence in her 2001 diptych *Static Drift*, where the artist first applied stencils to her own abdomen, one corresponding to the outline of the continent of Africa, the other corresponding to the outline of Germany. In a process that simultaneously alludes to the chemical processes of photography and the inextricable connections between skin pigmentation and identity, Mwangi then allowed the sun to burn her skin, leaving under- and overexposed terrains to remain mapped onto her own body. Short enigmatic phrases underscore the historical connections between the two spaces: Africa, light and framed by darkened skin, is a “Bright Dark Continent,” while Germany, “Burn Out Country,” is dark, suggestive of failure at several registers. The inversion of pigmentation that occurs between the two embodied mappings thus reinforces the chemical processes that link photography to the enterprise of late-nineteenth-century colonialism.

**Grace Ndiritu**  
**Born 1976, Birmingham, UK**  
**Lives and works in London**

London-based Grace Ndiritu frequently works with pieces of fabric to create what she has referred to as “hand-crafted” videos and installations, coaxing subtle gestures, striking patterns, and amorphous forms into dynamic statements that draw connections between sculpture, performance, and photography. In *Nightingale* (2003) the artist appears before the video camera, framed in an intimate close-up, interacting with a large piece of bright red fabric, wrapping it around her head, shoulders, arms, and body. The movements appear accelerated, hovering between playful and forceful (a quality communicated largely through the artist’s gaze, which meets that of the camera throughout), provoking rapid-fire free associations of burkas, belly dancers, headscarves, and keffiyehs. At a deeper register, such performances shift beyond immediately recognizable visual clues that suggest linkages between gender, fabric, and exposed skin. Here, by acknowledging its materiality, malleability, and fluid nature as it shifts across and around her body, Ndiritu is able to reference the role of fabric itself as a structure with considerable presence, one that echoes and challenges the time-based nature of the medium of video itself. Fluid and dynamic fabrics allow for the possibility to contemplate form and motion, suggesting in turn a rich and nuanced engagement with animation. Fabric thus assumes a life and agency of its own, autonomous, defining the space of the frame, alternately constricting, freeing, obscuring, and accentuating the artist’s body. As Ndiritu herself has acknowledged, her studies, performances, and their documentation open onto a deeper history, one that foregrounds Matisse and the modernist tradition of assimilating and flattening fabric and materials (volume) onto the pictorial plane (surface); these works similarly expand the concept of autonomy, to reference the social power of photography and its relationship to self representation. In this sense Ndiritu’s works may be read as carrying forward the rich photographic practice of Seydou Keïta, whose studio portraits of modern Malians of the 1940s and 1950s present fully sovereign subjects, posed among broad swaths of patterned fabric. The connections between autonomy and animation are again emphasized; in Keïta’s portraits—as in Ndiritu’s videos—an explicit awareness of the camera serves to activate both the photographer and the subject.

**J. D. ‘Okhai Ojeikere**  
**Born 1930, Ojomu Emai, Nigeria**  
**Lives and works in Ketou, Nigeria**

“Every hairstyle has a beginning and an end,” Nigerian photographer J. D. ‘Okhai Ojeikere ponders. “They begin on one side and end on the other... Art transforms life and creates new models. I understand art as movement.” Ojeikere is discussing *Hairstyles*, a collection of black-and-white images documenting the elaborate sculptural compositions of braids and ornaments worn by women across Nigeria, his life’s work of more than forty years. Ojeikere intended the series as a form of visual memory, paying homage to the rich cultural traditions and diversity in his country. Hairstyles, in Nigeria, are a form of art with roots going back as far as 2000 years, as evidenced in the ceremonial hairstyles seen on certain antique sculptures. Traditionally, hairdressers were esteemed artisans, the guardians of patterns and techniques handed down from mother to daughter for generations. The earliest images in Ojeikere’s archive date from 1968; today the collection comprises more than 1,000 negatives, organized in an ever-expanding archive like the multiplying cells of a living organism. The series has a distinct, highly stylized aesthetic, which lends the hairstyles a consciously stilled and abstracted sculptural presence both elegant and alien. While this may appear to belie the artist’s interest in movement, it allows the eye to weave and loop through the unending landscapes of forms and shapes undisturbed. Ojeikere consistently photographs each head from behind or in profile, centered and framed against a neutral

monotone backdrop. His focus is never the face, which he considers distracting, but the purely formal play of intricate, meandering clusters of braids and the shifting textural patterns of light and shadow across the hair. Showing only head and neck, his compositions recall strange elaborate flowers or the ornaments of an architecture yet to be invented, placing his work squarely on the interface between document and dream.

**Jo Ractliffe**  
**Born 1961, Cape Town**  
**Lives and works in Johannesburg**

Throughout a career spanning nearly three decades, Jo Ractliffe has approached the photographic medium from widely varying strategies. In a style implicitly linked to photographer David Goldblatt's symbolic depictions of the South African landscape, Ractliffe sometimes patiently composes large-scale black-and-white images of depopulated or overrun vistas, elusive and indeterminate places strangely discharged of their subjects—yet still haunted by unseen events and energies. At other moments she eschews such “major” productions for the immediacy of inexpensive snapshots of everyday or disposable objects. Shot between 1990 and 1994 (and presented in The Walther Collection as an edit of the larger series), *reShooting Diana* features dozens of such fragmentary moments: doll's heads, glowing birthday cakes, empty yards, street signs, and arrivals at oceans are all woven together in a manner that suggests a transformative road trip, a visual vocabulary indebted to both the logic of the snapshot and the documentary photograph. Indeed, Ractliffe's photographs often portray spaces where humans (but significantly, not their earthly traces) have vanished, a presence that evokes a surplus of meaning, alluding to and extending beyond the evidentiary. Whether photographing “quiet” spaces of Angola in the wake of a devastating and extended civil war (*Terreno Ocupado*, 2007) or animating images of barren terrain to accompany audio recordings from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*Vlakplaas*, 1999–2000), Ractliffe repeatedly emphasizes that the “truth” of the camera is as contingent as the histories the device purports to narrate. This strategy, what Enwezor has referred to as “a photographic antidote to documentary literalism,” is perhaps most compelling in her toy camera works, shot on Holgas, Dianas, and other 120mm plastic toy cameras. The relative instability of these inexpensive cameras—light seeps in, frames advance erratically—frequently results in vignetting, wherein the center of the image is most saturated, and the edges of the frame are darkened and softened. The phenomenon hearkens to an earlier era of photography, where the mechanical limitations of the photographic medium accommodated terms such as unreliability and porosity.

**August Sander**  
**Born 1876, Herdorf, North Rhine-Westphalia; died 1964, Cologne**

Born in 1876 to a carpenter and miner in Herdorf, the Siegerland (now North Rhine-Westphalia), August Sander constructed a monumental photographic archive of more than 40,000 negatives that stirred as much admiration and opposition in its own time as it does now, among contemporary critics. In 1901 Sander relocated to Linz, Upper Austria, where he worked at and subsequently headed the Photographische Kunstanstalt Greifand, in 1906, first exhibited his photographs. Around 1909–1910, Sander again relocated to Cologne, where he lived and worked throughout the 1930s. When first exhibited in 1927 at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, Sander's opus, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Citizens of the Twentieth Century), did not yet comprise the more the 500 images divided into 45 portfolios that he had envisioned. In 1929 a selection of 60 images, with an introduction by Alfred Döblin, was published under the title *Antlitz der Zeit: sechzig Aufnahmen deutscher Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Faces of Our Time: Sixty Photographs of German People of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century), again as a preview of the planned work. Like that of his contemporaries Karl Blossfeldt and Albert Renger-Patzsch, Sander's photographic style eschewed both expressive and formal concerns in favor of a sustained examination of the wealth of detail available within the depicted object itself, a tendency that lead each to become associated with the emerging *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). That this perspective's “cool conduct” (Helmut Lethen's phrase) should focus on a human object has sustained the persistent objection to the encyclopedic totality of Sander's project. Walter Benjamin described this tendency as a fundamental shift in the appearance of the human face, which now assumed “a new and infinite meaning on the film plate,” as physiognomy replaced the portrait not only in Sander's work, but also in the typologies of filmmakers Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893–1953) and Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948). Coupled with this shift from the individual to the general, Sander contributed to the invention of a new genre, the photo-essay, a form that belonged to the supranational thrust of 1930s mass politics. Sander encapsulated one of the era's key concerns in a phrase from his 1931 radio lecture: “No national language anywhere could function as universally as photography, or could have greater significance. Because it can be universally understood, photography—as image and film—is already first among picture languages for the masses.”

**Berni Searle**  
**Born 1964, Cape Town**  
**Lives and works in Cape Town**

Conceptual artist Berni Searle engages the body and the senses in the service of photographic, installation, and sculptural practices to comment on the racial, political, and phenomenological conditions of humanity in her country, South Africa. With a bachelor's degree in fine art and post-graduate and master's degrees in education and sculpture, Searle uses her own body as a highly studied site of symbolic gesture and as a point of departure to speak to larger questions about nation and ethnicity. Often invoking the indices of violation—staining and bruising—on the body proper through the use of natural materials such as spices, ground seeds, and earth pigments, Searle “colors” the body with dust of the natural world, opening new inquiries into the fixity of the racially inscribed body, the politics of racial mixing, the colonial interest in the spice trade, and the ensuing historical violence in South Africa, along with the personal intersection of site, location, and physical being. Her 1999 work *Lifeline* from the *Discoloured* series, consists of an enlarged close-up of an outstretched palm, stained with henna and fragmented into twenty-four identically sized prints. In its twenty-four components, whose cropped edges break up the lifelines of a vulnerable body part, the universal lifespan of a day is imbricated with the personal and biological lifespan of a unique body—a body marked with indices of trauma, whose physical trace will fade over time but whose psychological trace surely will not. The *Discoloured* series followed the 1997 series *Colour Me*, in which Searle covered her naked body with various spices to evoke the primary colors of racial stereotyping: red (paprika), yellow (turmeric), brown (ground cloves) and white (pea flour). Although *Lifeline* is Searle's only work in The Walther Collection, the work's open palm serves as a palimpsest for the artist's concerns with unfixing the body from the categorical inscriptions of race, ethnography, and gender that have historically undergirded conditions of oppression and discrimination in South Africa and elsewhere.

**Malick Sidibé**  
**Born 1935, Mali**  
**Lives and works in Bamako**

Having worked to capture the lives and events of the citizens of Bamako, Malick Sidibé has been recognized in recent years as Mali's most famous and celebrated photographer. After training as a goldsmith at the National School of Arts, Sidibé worked as an apprentice to French photographer Gérard Guillaud, and in 1962 opened his own business, Studio Malick, in Bamako. Since that time the artist has developed an expansive body of work, black-and-white photographs taken primarily in one of two styles. The first, dating roughly to the 1960s as Mali gained its independence, is a vibrant, roving street-style of reportage that finds musicians and students dancing and cavorting in clubs, and young couples lounging on beaches; the second style, represented in the inaugural exhibition of the Walther Collection, is a lively studio practice, where portraits of local citizens illustrate the richness of Malian culture. Here, copping bold poses and gestures, young women stand in front of various backdrops, vamp for Sidibé's camera next to friends and lovers, frequently wearing a densely layered mix of traditional and western garments. In other studio photographs, Bamako dandies strut and stand off, lounging on motorbikes or bicycles, carefully positioning themselves in ways that accentuate their autonomy and seemingly infectious personalities. Central to any understanding of Mali's modernization and citizenship, Sidibé's photographs suggest a loving and earnest appeal to the corporeal. With their nods to current fashion, youth culture, music (in particular highlife and rock), and a pervasive evocation of the new, Sidibé's works are deeply sensuous, flattering, and beautifully composed. Introduced to a larger international audience by André Magnin in the 1990s, Sidibé has held major solo exhibitions at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, among others. In 2007 Sidibé became the first photographer to win the Golden Lion lifetime achievement award at the Venice Biennale.

**Mikhael Subotzky**  
**Born 1981 in Cape Town**  
**Lives and works in South Africa**

Mikhael Subotzky has been depicting South African life through the prism of its prisons since 2004, steadily building a portfolio that has garnished the young photographer numerous awards, as well as membership in the prestigious Magnum Photos cooperative agency. The series *Die Vier Hoeke* (The Four Corners), presented as Subotzky's degree portfolio at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town, was conceptualized when then-student Subotzky accompanied members of the Independent Elections Commission to document the Pollsmoor prisoners at the polling booth. The project, comprising a series of relentlessly flattened panoramic images constructed from as many as eighteen separate negatives, was then exhibited at Pollsmoor Prison on Freedom Day, 27 April 2005, in the cell that once housed Nelson Mandela. Insofar as the exhibition was primarily directed toward the subjects depicted in the

photographs themselves, it effectively reversed the prevailing relations of viewing by allowing only a group of 300 members of the public into the cell-cum-exhibition-hall. This allegorizing procedure is further developed in Subotzky's series *Beaufort West*, which depicts the town of the same name in Central Karoo; the town, once marking the border between Cape Colony and the remainder of the continent, was literally constructed around a prison marking off the ordered spaces of law and civilization from the wilds beyond. With these strategies, including a series of Prison Photo Workshops begun in 2005, Subotzky defends himself from the dangers of fetishization that his emphasis on technique and documentation betray; rather, Subotzky claims that "an image needs to... agitate the eye," and operates with "a notion of bearing witness... a type of reflection" that coincides with this aim.

**Guy Tillim**  
**Born 1962, Johannesburg**  
**Lives and works in Cape Town**

Barbed as they are gentle, Guy Tillim's photographs force recognition of the ineffable precarity of everyday life on the underside of war. Anchored in photojournalism, Tillim's work cuts against the grain of that genre, refusing its spectacle of climactic events in favor of a slowed-down, cumulative meditation on their aftermath. Tillim's titles further defy photojournalism's statistical anonymity by specifying the names of each person and place he photographs. By this and other measures, his work pumps the medium with the weight of its ambivalent history in colonial and postcolonial Africa, where it served as a technology of domination as often as it fueled protest and the fight for self-determination. A 2002 series shot during the Angolan civil war portrays a group of displaced civilians who fled their homes in advance of the military's "clearing" campaign and walked for five days to seek refuge in the town of Kunhinga. Frontally framed, Tillim's portraits reflect the intimacies of kinship and shared duress that bind his subjects, who stand together in pairs or small groups. Some look down or away, while others address the camera directly, holding our gaze with eyes deep as wells. The compositions' tightly bound parameters exert a kind of centripetal pressure, compressing the space in a manner reminiscent of the larger political forces to which the Kunhinga refugees, like many others, have been subjected. Each portrait is framed against an interior wall marked with verbal inscriptions. If, like so many scars, this graffiti points to the violence of the situation, it also reads as the unsigned articulations of those whom history has deprived of a voice, but who nonetheless insist on the will to speak. As in this case, without sentimentalizing or sensationalizing, Tillim's photographs index the brutal tides of postcolonial conflict and dispossession in subtle, interstitial details of surface and texture. The sensitivity of this approach characterizes Tillim's other series, including a recent project dedicated to temporal collisions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. There, the rapacious ambitions that soak the still-standing remnants of Belgian colonial architecture confront their contemporary successor in an urban landscape ravaged by war, greed, and the pauperization of the many for the wealth of a few.

**Hentie van der Merwe**  
**Born 1972, Namibia**  
**Lives and works in Antwerp**

Broadly engaged with the issues of masculinity, identity, and representation, Hentie van der Merwe's photography condenses these themes in a number of works focusing on militarism and the fetishization of the male body. In an earlier installation, *Untitled* (1997), van der Merwe reframed a series of World War II images of South African confederate soldiers stationed in Namibia. These clinical photographs of nude white soldiers taken against a plain ground, with all the trappings of medical review, are presented by van der Merwe in a grid, yet visible to the viewer only through their reflection in a mirror. Rather than a catalog of military might, the subjects waver between powerful and vulnerable, and our access to them as pure image, as reflection, pits pressure on our collective desire to project an essence on them. The works on view here, from the series *Trappings* (2002–2003), raise related questions but reverse the terms, focusing on clothing rather than the nude body. Again returning to an archival source, van der Merwe photographed nineteenth- and twentieth-century military uniforms in the collection of the South African National Museum of Military History. Drastically blurred through the use of a hand-held camera and extended exposure times, the garments, fitted to headless mannequins and tightly centered within the frame, refuse the legibility explicit in uniform and military decoration. Offering only a gestalt of the overall form — in a mode analogous to Hiroshi Sugimoto's architectural photographs or Uta Barth's series *Ground and Field* — the particular symbols, codes, and honors that hierarchically define each uniform are consumed by the blur. In *Transvaal Horse Artillery (Colonial), Officer (1903–1913)* (2002–2003), for example, the broad shoulders and ornate patterning of the garment clash with the limp, empty arms as the jacket hovers alone in space. Unanimated by a soldier's form, van der Merwe's *Trappings* refocus our attention on the problematics of the militarized body, both tethered to and wrenched from the violent history of military conscription under apartheid.

**Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veleko**  
**Born 1977, Cape Town**  
**Lives and works in Johannesburg**

Known for her sustained affiliation with the Market Photo Workshop, a Johannesburg-based institution founded by David Goldblatt in 1989, Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veleko has risen to prominence over the past decade by virtue of her formal command of color and gesture, as well as her ecstatic engagement with the rapidly evolving vernacular of post-apartheid street- and subcultures of Johannesburg. In its earliest years, Goldblatt’s Market Photo Workshop was committed to a program of democratic vision: practical and technical aspects of the photographic practice were taught and learned through the vocabulary of social documentary photography. Veleko’s practice has clearly carried along this legacy of principled representation, yet signals a vibrant new generation of contemporary photographers, artists, musicians, and designers, all collectively engaged with accounting for the proliferation of hybrid identities, postures, positions, and constructions that elude otherwise straight forward classification. At a practical level, this means that Veleko’s photographic eye has tracked graffiti artists, street style, and self-fashioned individuals across Johannesburg’s contemporary landscape. Her images are immediately recognizable by virtue of their explosive color; through informal (yet never completely uncalculated) gesture, her subjects carry themselves in poses that confront the viewer, their confident gazes returning to our own. A sense of nearly defiant subjectivity is abound in Veleko’s work—her 2004 series, *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder* suggests comparisons to the wholly sovereign gazes returned by the figures populating Seydou Keita’s mid-century Bamako studio portraits.

## Publication

Steidl publishes a comprehensive book accompanying the exhibition with full-page reproductions of the works in the exhibition, marking the starting point of the publication program at The Walther Collection. The book is edited by Okwui Enwezor and includes contributions by himself as well as Virginia Heckert, Kobena Mercer, Santu Mofokeng, Chika Okeke-Agulu, Gabriele Conrath-Scholl, Deborah Willis and a conversation between Willis E. Hartshorn, director of the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York, and Artur Walther.

The book is divided into several component parts addressing the particular attributes of each given oeuvre. Each contributor has written a carefully considered analysis of the key works of modern and contemporary African photography, as well as two important examples of German photography in the collection. With the exception of a few images, almost all works in the exhibition are reproduced.

Okwui Enwezor (ed.)

Contemporary African Photography from The Walther Collection

Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity

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Following a sample from the Interview by Willis E. Hartshorn with Artur Walther from the before mentioned publication:

## Willis E. Hartshorn and Artur Walther in Conversation

**Willis E. Hartshorn: What is your vision for The Walther Collection?**

**Artur Walther:** I want The Walther Collection to be active in four areas: curatorial research, collecting, the presentation of exhibitions, and the publication of books and catalogues. Each area will disseminate the work of artists from the collection and, at the same time, engage the works with a wider public and the field of contemporary art.

The inaugural exhibitions are curated by Okwui Enwezor. He has been extraordinary in his research, particularly in regard to contemporary African photography, both in helping to build the collection and in presenting the thematic and interpretive issues specific to this set of exhibitions. This publication represents Okwui's vision as he has worked with me to shape and expand the collection.

The concept for the exhibitions will change once a year based on different curators working with the collection. Their research will help to present the existing collection and add new works to its holdings.

**WEH: You started your engagement with photography as an image-maker. How has that informed your collection and why did you stop making your own pictures?**

**AW:** Although I made photographs for a relatively short period, it had a strong impact on me. It gave me an understanding of craft on the one hand and on the other I developed a certain way of seeing. By photographing I learned to look in a very deliberate way and developed a certain clarity and perspective. By 1998, I felt I had achieved a certain mastery of the process and knew that I could continue to make photographs. But to continue this growth and exploration would have demanded a level of commitment from me that seemed too singular. Through my work with organizations like the International Center of Photography (ICP) and the Whitney Museum of American Art, I realized that I wanted to engage with photography in a number of different ways. That became a new starting point for me and I became interested in all aspects of researching, collecting, curating and exhibiting. Over time, this new kind of engagement led to an increasing interest in building a collection.

**WEH: You were friends with Bernd and Hilla Becher. Did their practice help shape your patterns of collecting?**

**AW:** We met in 1997 and there was an immediate connection, very natural. They were very generous to me. We photographed and printed together. They influenced me greatly. It was the beginning of a wonderful friendship.

**WEH: What attracted you to their work?**

**AW:** Their investigation of industrial typologies was very close to my own way of seeing and looking at the world. I had been living in the United States for more than 20 years, but their work gave me a feeling of instant cultural connection. It told me something profound about myself. Their images of "anonymous sculptures" were black and white photographs, carefully constructed, focused on the object, no personal interpretation. The work achieved the character of a visual document and was very much connected to minimal and conceptual art. It was their encyclopedic approach, interest in form, object and function that attracted me and started my collecting. My first purchase was a typology of grain elevators from the American mid-west, then coal bunkers, gas tanks, and blast furnaces. One of my last purchases was a typology of gravel plants, and strangely enough I discovered that several of the images were made in the region where I grew up.

**WEH: Where did your collecting develop from there?**

**AW:** It was a short step from the industrial photographs of the Bechers to August Sander and Karl Blossfeldt. Sanders typological documentation of the structure of society of his day and Blossfeldt's photographs of plants are related to the Bechers in terms of methodology and concept.



**WEH: So what did this mean for you?**

**AW:** In all of these works, the intention is typological classification and the viewpoint is objectifying. It does not allow any experimental artistic aesthetic. The Bechers had already photographed for 40 years and Blossfeldt's *Urformen der Kunst* and Sanders' *Antlitz der Zeit* came out in 1928 and 1929, respectively. The work of all these photographers is systematic, serial, objective, classified, structured. And I loved it.

**WEH: What changed? How did you begin to collect Asian art?**

**AW:** I began to travel to China in the late 1990's and have returned many times since then. Chinese artists lived and worked for a large part in isolation until the 1990's when that situation completely reversed itself and art became experimental in nature. This shift was a highly individualistic response to the change in Chinese economic, social and cultural life. A new generation of artists emerged and broke away from the prevailing realism and symbolism. Using a conceptual and experimental approach they reflected the conditions and limitations of Chinese society. These artists' use of photography evolved from imitating western styles to developing an original language and character and creating startling visual effects using state of the art technology.

Before the 1990's photography served only the purposes of propaganda and unofficial photography was strictly private. The new works deliver unambiguous social and political messages and express strong assertions of individuality and self-identity.

**WEH: As your collecting has progressed, you seem drawn to the richly detailed, multi-layered images by international emerging artists. Can you discuss this development?**

**AW:** In my life, I live very minimally and the photographs I collected early on often mirrored that. I hung in my apartment in New York typologies of the Bechers, Sander and Blossfeldt. I followed this with the works of Ai Weiwei, Zhang Huan, Song Dong, Lin Tianmiao, Miao Xichun, Hong Lei, Zhang Dali and Wang Qingsong. These works are large in scale, colorful, and often digitally manipulated. Wang Qingsong's work, *The Night Revels of Lao Li* best reflects this direction. He reinterpreted one of China's most celebrated artworks *Night Revels of Han Xizai*, a scroll painting by Gu Hongzhong from the tenth century.

This has been a process, an evolution. It took quite some time and a lot of agonizing and self-questioning. A journey of exploration with lots of ups and downs. As I have spent time trying to understand other cultures and the art that is reflective of them, I have learned to see and appreciate aesthetics that are far removed from the typological nature that attracted me at first.

**WEH: Your collections of contemporary Chinese and African photography are the best examples of that departure. Do you feel this is risk taking? What draws you to this art?**

**AW:** I made many trips to China and Africa. I visited artists wherever they were, galleries, independent curators, museums, scholars, dealers, writers and exhibition spaces. I traveled alone and with experts. My method of collecting is very personal, I want to learn to know the artists, understand the context of their work, and return time and again to follow the development of their work and collect them in depth. It was a difficult step, moving beyond the familiar. I struggled with each individual picture, because it was something completely new to me, very foreign. I had to get out of myself and my preconceptions, borders and limits. My existing senses and emotions didn't work in those cultures.

**WEH: Why did you choose those two very different parts of the world to collect?**

**AW:** I knew this was the time when these artists, given their social and political environments, were creating work that was very special. This was very much about finding the unknown, about finding things that have not been seen before, that have not been written about before.

I am also interested to see where there are similarities in the work produced by different cultures. Over time, as the collection evolves, I can tell that more relationships, like the shared directness of portraits made by August Sander and Seydou Keita, will show the same impulses coming from different cultures.

**WEH: At what point did you decide to pursue African Art and how did you go about it?**

**AW:** After my obsession with modern and contemporary German and Chinese photography, I discovered the monograph on Seydou Keita, which instantly triggered a search for the Bamako portrait school. This investigation then widened to include other African artists such as David Goldblatt and Santu Mofokeng. Visits to the *Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine* in Bamako and to the *Dakar Biennial*

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# THE WALTHER COLLECTION

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followed. I got in contact with Okwui Enwezor who was one of the curators for *In/sight African Photographers, 1940 to the Present* at the Guggenheim in 1996. His book and the ensuing dialogue convinced me to pursue this new journey.

The result is a collection of African art of over 300 works by 33 artists, of which 180 and 30, respectively, are presented in the inaugural exhibition in the nine galleries occupying the entire 10000 square feet exhibition space of The Walther Collection.

**WEH: What ties your collection together?**

**AW:** One of the things I was especially interested in was the personal, commemorative aspect of the image and the story it tells about people's lives and aspirations. Whether it is images drawn from my own family album, the great photographs of August Sander, Seydou Keïta's portraits or Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album / Look at Me: 1890—1950*, all of these were made in their time with a purpose that is rooted in the desire of the sitter to be photographed. I am interested in the way these historical images look to us today. It has been so important for me personally to move from the roots of my culture and collecting and discover the comparability and affinity of all these works and cultures.

**WEH: A personal museum could be considered by some as an act of personal boasting. How will you tread this fine line?**

**AW:** These are modest structures in a well-functioning neighborhood. There is no signature building by a famous architect. But while the Collection is first shown in Germany, I want it to travel to other parts of the world. In addition, the publications will be well researched and will reach far beyond this location. I want to give curators the opportunity to pursue original works and artists the opportunity to have wider exposure through the Collection, but also by the fact that works are available for loan to other organizations. It is my intention that this Collection provides a structure to bring conceptual cross connections together. I consider the opening of The Walther Collection to be the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the collection. We are already embarking on work for the exhibitions in the upcoming years. In 2011 we will continue with works from the African Collection. The thematic focus, however, will be the landscape as represented by four important African artists. As a thematic counter position we will show Mitch Epstein's seminal works from his *American Power* Series dealing with the intrusion onto the American landscape by ever increasing energy demands.