

# EMORY DOUGLAS: BLACK PANTHER

An Exhibition Curated by Sam Durant for the New Museum

JULY 22–OCTOBER 18, 2009

SECOND FLOOR

Some of Emory Douglas's images are nearly forty years old, but they are still as powerful as when he first created them. They are dangerous pictures, and they were meant to change the world. Over a period of twenty years, Douglas was the Revolutionary Artist of the Black Panther Party and, subsequently, its Minister of Culture, part of the national leadership. Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California in 1966. Inspired by Malcolm X's call to resist aggressors "by any means necessary," Seale and Newton based the goals of the organization on a Ten-Point Platform and Program that called for civil and human rights for African Americans, including employment, decent housing, good schools, reform of the justice system, and community control of the police. They dedicated the Party to the defense of human rights and public safety of all citizens, and chose the symbol of the panther because it is an animal that defends itself to the death, but never attacks.

Between 1966 and 1980, the Black Panther Party built an international organization of over 5,000 members with chapters in cities across the country whose focus was on self-defense, community service, and social-welfare programs including free breakfasts for children, free health clinics, and charter schools, among others. The Party built coalitions with churches, labor unions, and a variety of multiethnic political groups, and by 1970 was fielding candidates for city, state, and national offices. Douglas's work gave visual form to many aspects of this extraordinary history as the Party modified its mission from a focus on armed self-defense to social welfare, survival programs, and participation in electoral politics.

Douglas created the overall design of the *Black Panther*, the Party's weekly newspaper, and oversaw its layout and production from 1967 until it ceased publication in 1979. During this time, Douglas made countless drawings, collages, and caricatures that were reproduced in the paper and distributed as prints, posters, cards, and even sculptures. All utilized a straightforward graphic style and a vocabulary of images that would become synonymous with the Party and the issues it fought for. At its height, the *Black Panther* had a circulation of 400,000. Early examples of Douglas's incendiary graphic compositions sought to inspire the African American community with representations of proud and defiant black men and women and trademark ironic caricatures of racist abusers of power. The pig, which became the predominant avatar for authority, is among the best known of Douglas's motifs, along with the stalking panther and the clenched black fist. Later works feature representations of community pride, economic development, and the positive results of the Party's many social programs. While Douglas's work was focused on the struggle for African American civil rights, it also took as its subject anti-colonial struggles around the world. By the early '70s, many of Douglas's works express the Black Panther Party's solidarity with analogous international groups dedicated to political and social reform, exhibiting formal affinities with protest graphics produced at the time in Cuba, the People's Republic of China, North Vietnam, and on the continent of Africa.

Despite the seriousness and sometimes even tragic nature of his subject matter, Douglas's compositional style is strong, striking, and radically contemporary. Often combining both photographic and drawn images with graphically lively backgrounds, his works feature vivid stylized patterns like sunbursts highlighted by bright colors. Thick black borders edge many of his figures, emphasizing the sinuousness and dexterity of Douglas's line and the beauty and clarity of his drawing. Like the master draughtsman that he is, Douglas catches likenesses with an economy of line that can match the finest caricaturists. From Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger to Amiri Baraka and Malcolm X, his portrait posters for the *Black Panther* offer a gallery of many of the most important public figures of the '60s.



Emory Douglas, *Black Panther*, November 8, 1969. Offset lithograph, 20 1/4 x 14 in (51.6 x 35.6 cm). Collection Alden and Mary Kimbrough. © 2009 Emory Douglas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



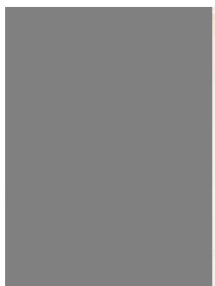
Emory Douglas, *Black Panther*, May 29, 1971. Offset lithograph, 17 1/2 x 11 1/3 in (44.5 x 28.7 cm). Collection Alden and Mary Kimbrough. © 2009 Emory Douglas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Emory Douglas, c. 1969. Offset lithograph, 22 7/8 x 15 in (57.9 x 39.6 cm). Collection Alden and Mary Kimbrough. © 2009 Emory Douglas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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Douglas's work establishes an iconic visual style that communicates the Black Panther Party's commitment to activism and social change, creating a powerful identifiable aesthetic that helped mobilize its constituency and sympathizers. It can also be seen as part of a tradition of activist art-making in the mid-twentieth century, including the expressionistic realism of Mexican muralists like Diego Rivera (1886–1957), the sculptures and prints of African American artist Elizabeth Catlett (b. 1915), and the prints of German artist Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945). In his use of photomontage, as well as his method of distribution—through newspapers and posters—Douglas's work can also be related to the anti-fascist photomontages of the German artist John Heartfield (1891–1968), whose powerful images served as covers for underground, anti-government publications throughout the Nazi regime. Like Douglas, these artists were dedicated activists whose visual art production cannot be disassociated from their political struggle, and like him, they chose delivery systems—from murals and monuments to prints, posters, and publications—that were easily distributable and unambiguously public.



- 1 Elizabeth Catlett, *Sharecropper*, 1952. Linoleum cut, composition: 17 5/8 x 16 7/8 in (44.8 x 43 cm); sheet: 18 1/2 x 18 7/8 in (47 x 48.1 cm). Publisher: the artist, Mexico City and Taller de Gráfica Popular, Mexico City. Printer: the artist, Mexico City and José Sanchez, Mexico City. Edition: A.P. before edition of 60. The Ralph E. Shikes Fund and Purchase. (162.2003). Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. Art © Elizabeth Catlett/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
- 2 Käthe Kollwitz, *The Widow I (Die Witwe I)*, 5th state, plate 4 from the portfolio "Seven Woodcuts About War," 1922–23, published 1924. Woodcut, composition (irreg): 14 5/8 x 9 1/3 in (37.2 x 23.6 cm); sheet (irreg): 26 x 18 3/4 in (66 x 47.7 cm). Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. © 2009 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn
- 3 John Heartfield, *Adolf the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk, "Prinz und Arbeiter,"* from the magazine *AIZ*, 1932. Rotogravure on newsprint, 15 x 11 in (38.1 x 27.9 cm). The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Gift of Max and Isabell Smith Herzstein. © 2009 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

The public mural *What We Want, What We Believe* is presented in association with Groundswell Community Mural Project, the New Museum, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, with support provided, in part, by StratREAL Foundation USA.

G:Class is made possible by The Bloomingdale's Fund of the Macy's Foundation and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Additional support is provided by the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation and the Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation.

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## Public Programs

### Artist Talk by Emory Douglas, Introduced by Rigo 23

Emory Douglas, artist and former Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, will talk about his work. Artist and activist Rigo 23, a long-time friend and collaborator of Douglas's, will introduce the talk.

New Museum Theater

Thursday, July 23, 2009, 7 p.m.

\$6 MEMBERS, \$8 GENERAL PUBLIC

### Maysles Cinema at the New Museum Presents: Living With Conviction: A Black Panther Party Film Series

In conjunction with the exhibition "Emory Douglas: Black Panther" at the New Museum, Philip Maysles of Maysles Cinema has selected a series of films exploring the history and legacy of the Black Panther Party. The series features three screenings at the New Museum (dates and times below), with three additional screenings at Maysles Cinema in Harlem.

New Museum Theater

Saturday July 25, Saturday September 12, and Saturday October 17, 3 p.m.

\$6 MEMBERS, \$8 GENERAL PUBLIC (each screening)

For information on all exhibition-related programs at the New Museum, please visit [newmuseum.org/events](http://newmuseum.org/events).

Free iPod audio tours with a discussion of "Emory Douglas: Black Panther" are available at the Visitor Services Desk in the lobby.

Visitors can participate in free, docent-led public tours of the Museum's current exhibitions Wednesday–Friday at 12:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 and 3 p.m. Spanish and Chinese tours are available on Saturdays and Sundays; to confirm availability, please call Visitor Services at 212.219.1222 x555. For information on group tours, please visit [newmuseum.org/learn](http://newmuseum.org/learn) or call 212.219.1222 x235.

New Museum First Saturdays For Families take place on the first Saturday of every month from 10–12 p.m. and are free to the public. Tickets are given on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, please visit [newmuseum.org/learn/school\\_and\\_youth](http://newmuseum.org/learn/school_and_youth) or call 212.219.1222 x235.

"Emory Douglas: Black Panther" includes a wide variety of Douglas's work done while he was a member of the Black Panther Party. Selected by the Los Angeles artist Sam Durant, whose work often deals with political and cultural subjects in American history, it includes more than 155 posters, newspapers, and prints dating from 1966 to 1977, as well as a small-scale mural that reprises one of Douglas's vintage images. In Durant's opinion, this exhibition is not only a retrospective of Douglas's artistic achievement, but a primer on how art can encourage political consciousness and function within an activist context. That this graphically alive, and decidedly activist visual art is also relevant to contemporary art practices, is demonstrated by its influence on the work of fellow San Franciscan, Rigo 23, on view in the New Museum's Shaft Gallery through October 11, 2009.

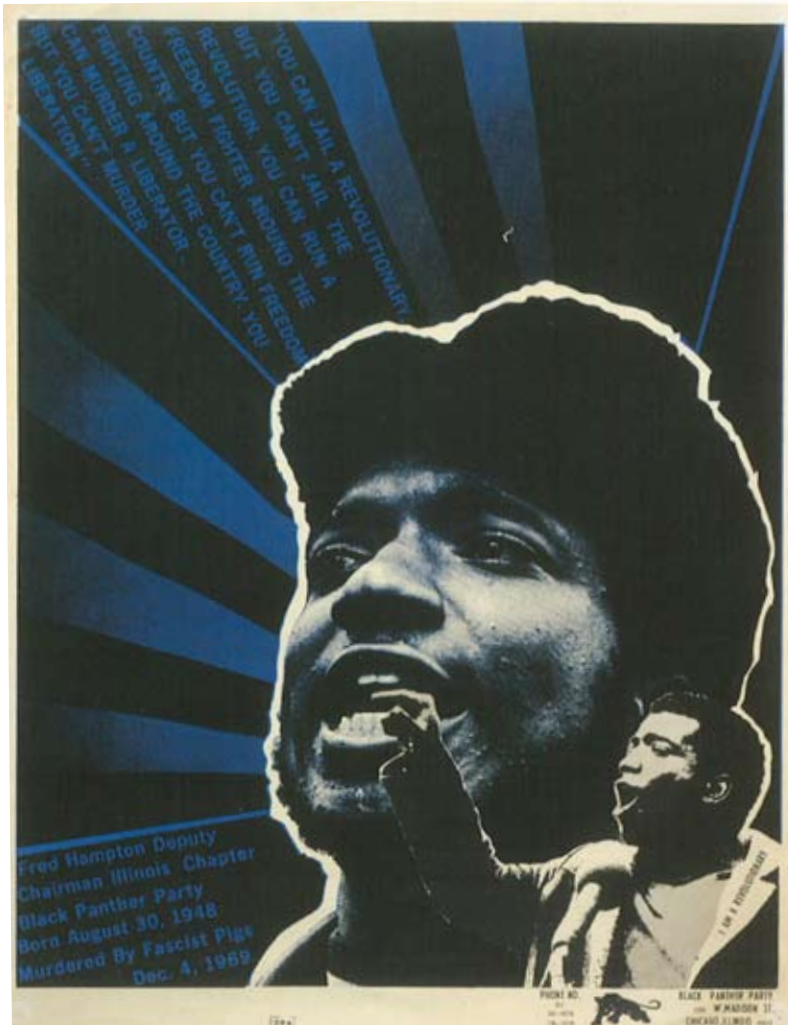
This exhibition will also introduce an entirely new generation of artists and art lovers to Douglas's work through an attendant program to commission a new mural, entitled *What We Want, What We Believe*, designed by Douglas and painted by New York high school students over the summer of 2009. A co-production of the New Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and Groundswell, a community organization, the mural, installed on 122<sup>nd</sup> Street and Third Avenue, will be a permanent public artwork—and Douglas's first in New York City.

"Emory Douglas: Black Panther" was curated by Sam Durant with the assistance of Candice Lin and organized at the New Museum by Laura Hoptman, Kraus Family Senior Curator, with Amy Mackie, Curatorial Assistant. The mural within the exhibition was executed for Emory Douglas by Rigo 23.

The New Museum would like to thank Emory Douglas and Sam Durant for so generously agreeing to collaborate on this project; Alden and Mary Kimbrough, Billy X Jennings, and the Center for Political Graphics in Los Angeles for their loans; Rigo 23 for painting the Douglas mural in the galleries; and Billy X Jennings for sharing his research and resources.



Emory Douglas, *Black Panther*, March 9, 1969. Offset lithograph 17 1/2 x 11 1/3 in (44.5 x 28.7 cm). Collection Alden and Mary Kimbrough. © 2009 Emory Douglas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Emory Douglas, c. 1969–70. Offset lithograph, 23 x 17 1/2 in (58.4 x 44.5 cm). Collection Alden and Mary Kimbrough. © 2009 Emory Douglas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York