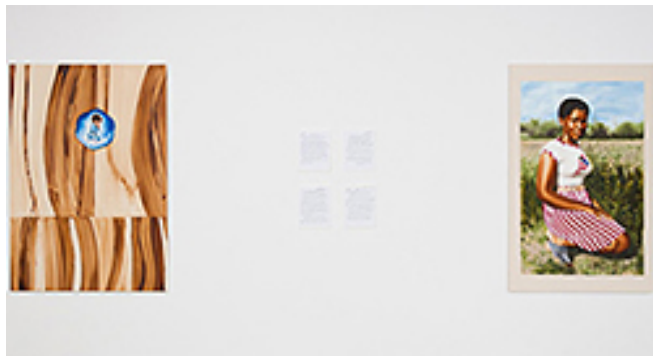


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Meleko Mokgosi, Honor Fraser Gallery, Culver City, California

Recommendation by Jody Zellen



In "Objects of Desire: Reflections on the African Still Life" Meleko Mokgosi demonstrates both classical technique and conceptual rigor. He renders his subjects in exacting and realistic detail. He also has the uncanny ability to combine styles, often purposely leaving large areas of raw canvas unfinished to suggest overlapping narratives and timelines. Mokgosi, a native of Botswana, came to prominence after receiving the inaugural Mohn Award in conjunction with his installation for the Hammer Museum's "Made in L.A. 2012."

Mokgosi exchanges those large multi-panel narratives in favor of smaller paintings depicting printed posters and advertisements, cropped scenes of interior spaces, and isolated figures. While his focus is on how African bodies and culture have been depicted and described over time, in this installation he investigates these subjects through the lens of still life — specifically looking at how African objects have been positioned in his own paintings. What sets Mokgosi's work apart is its intellectual intent combined with seductive imagery. For example, in "Object of Desire 6" he juxtaposes a painting of closely cropped wood grain onto which he has superimposed a small circular shape depicting a young white child praying. This is set against a second canvas painted with a snapshot of an African woman kneeling in the landscape, her body in a position that parallels the praying boy. Between these two canvases are four texts (paper mounted on board) covered with Mokgosi's handwritten annotations over art historical texts that reference Picasso, Gauguin and Max Ernst, and purport to explain the relationship between modern and tribal art.

While at first Mokgosi's many text panels feel overwhelming and a chore to read, it soon becomes evident that his commentary on the canon of art history, with respect to the terms 'primitive' and 'tribal,' and the MOMA exhibition, "Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern" is a combative argument about discourse, history and context. Within this expansive project Mokgosi includes paintings of African sculptures, cave drawings, mothers and sons, smiling brides, advertisements for Sofn'free No-Lye hair products, as well as a poster for the ANC featuring Nelson Mandela. Mokgosi has continued to mine his archives to present divergent representations that illustrate a fresh reading of African art and history.