

Priya Ramrakha exhibition launches in Johannesburg

The work of renowned African photojournalist Priya Ramrakha is the subject of an exhibition entitled 'A Pan-African Perspective 1950-1968: Navigating Colonial Disentanglement', in October 2017, at the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre (VIAD) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ).



(c) Priya Ramrakha.

Ramrakha is chronicling his exploration of anti-colonial and post-independence struggles. Showcasing a collection of photographs illuminating watershed moments and political movements in Africa and the United States, *A Pan-African Perspective 1950-1968*, offers audiences a chance to rethink key political and historical narratives, and revisit the struggles, celebrations and lived experiences of the independence era in Africa.

Exposing often untold stories and painful sacrifices of liberation struggles across the continent, and internationally, *A Pan-African Perspective 1950-1968* confronts persistent absences in established historical narratives, whereby experiences of decolonial struggle have been problematically marginalised.

This comprehensive survey of recently uncovered images tracks the global travels of the pioneering Kenyan photojournalist in the 1950s and 1960s. Ramrakha's sensitive chronicling of major political figures and events, as well as testimonies of racial oppression and political resistance, bears witness to a range of experiences, collaborations and movements that shaped the future of postcolonial Africa.

Revealing a number of previously unpublished images, the exhibition speaks to an international dialogue around civil rights activism and independence struggle – the outworking of which continues to be felt in contemporary dialogues and activism around race, gender and decolonisation.

Born into an activist journalistic family, Ramrakha contributed to publications around the world as one of the first African photojournalists for the prestigious American *Time* and *Life* magazines. In Kenya, he also photographed for his anti-colonial newspapers, as well as for the East African edition of the renowned South African *Drum* magazine.

Ramrakha's humanistic photographic oeuvre captures moments with influential figures such as Tom Mboya, Jomo Kenyatta, Odumegwu Ojukwu, Martin Luther King Jr, Malcom X, John F Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Richard Nixon and the British Royal Family. *A Pan-African Perspective 1950-1968* traces these historical occasions, as well as the everyday engagements, contributions and political aspirations of African communities, providing vivid social documentation that sheds light on the profound, ongoing impact of colonisation.

Documenting Africa

Shravan Vidyarthi, exhibition co-curator and filmmaker of award-winning documentary *African Lens - the Story of Priya Ramrakha*, commented: "For decades, Africa had been portrayed through the colonial lens by Western photojournalists. Priya became one of the first photographers to document Africa — its people and its politics — from an African perspective. Finding Priya's lost photographs meant several things, it meant that his work could live on and it also meant that I could tell Priya's story, because even though I didn't have any recordings of Priya's voice, finding the photographs was, in many ways, like finding his voice."

Co-curator Erin Haney, said: "*A Pan-African Perspective 1950-1968* affords an opportunity to both revisit narratives and experiences of colonial disentanglement, as well as to consider the ethical imperatives, dilemmas and implied politics of their documentation.

"Unearthing these visual archives offers opportunities for viewers to rethink the current political and social climate through the lens of history. The images allow for a journey into a shared history and reveal expressions of resistance and freedom, and the sustained anti-colonial narrative rooted in a subversive and largely unacknowledged history of Africa."

A Pan-African Perspective 1950-1968 premieres at the FADA Gallery, UJ, on October 5 to 1 November 2017, free of charge to all. This significant new exhibition presents a platform to raise awareness around the history, experiences and origins of Black Consciousness and African liberation, giving audiences a chance to navigate post-colonialism and reflect on present day challenges.

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