



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vanguard Revisited: Poetic Politics & Black Futures

An exhibition revisiting the 1968 photographic essay *Black Panthers* by Pirkle Jones and Ruth-Marion Baruch including never-before-seen work and a selection of contemporary works by four African-American artists and art collectives that connect the past and present of the Black political imagination

January 22 – April 7, 2019

Opening reception: Saturday, January 26, 5-8pm

(San Francisco, CA, January 9, 2019) San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), in conjunction with the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), presents *Vanguard Revisited: Poetic Politics & Black Futures*, an exhibition that revisits the controversial 1968 showing at the de Young Museum of the photographic essay *Black Panthers* by Pirkle Jones (1914-2009) and Ruth-Marion Baruch (1922-1997). The 30 photographs on view include many of the major works from the original exhibition 50 years ago, as well as never before printed works from the archive at UCSC. *Vanguard Revisited: Poetic Politics & Black Futures* places the archival photographs in dialogue with the work of four contemporary African-American artists and art collectives—Kija Lucas, Tosha Stimage, Chris Martin, and 5/5 Collective—whose work assembles a new understanding of the Black political imagination.

The exhibition is the culmination of SFAI's fall 2018 Collaborative Practices class, led by SFAI Librarian and Archivist Jeff Gunderson, who was good friends with Jones. The students selected the photographs on display and, in an important effort to connect the past to the present, invited current SFAI Guest Lecturer Leila Weefur to curate a collection of contemporary works that present a range of creative and radical resistance to augment the display of the historic photographs. Stimage and Martin use high contrast iconographies that serve as bold punctuations to the "What We Want, What We Believe," sentiment of the Black Panther's legendary *10 Point Program*. 5/5 Collective and Lucas use a taxonomic approach to examine "Home" by gathering and archiving objects, offering a quiet confrontation to the viewer's notions of "Home" and Blackness.

About the photographic essay *Black Panthers*

The Black Panthers, originally dubbed the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, was an organization founded in Oakland in 1966 to challenge police brutality against the African American community, starting with armed citizen patrols, but later instituting a number of popular community social programs. At their peak in 1968, the Black Panthers had roughly 2,000 members across the nation. They were implicated in several violent encounters with police, and their socialist message and Black nationalist focus made them a target of the FBI.

Jones and Baruch, husband and wife photographers who met in 1946 while studying under Ansel Adams at the California School of Fine Art (now SFAI), gained unprecedented access to the inner circle of the Black Panthers after Baruch was introduced in 1968 to Kathleen Cleaver, wife of Black Panther party leader Eldridge Cleaver. They took photographs from July through October of that year in an effort to create a better understanding of the organization that then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover once called “the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States.” Jones and Baruch were members of the Peace and Freedom Party and had grown up aware of racism and bigotry, Baruch having herself experienced anti-Semitism and Jones having witnessed terrible violence in his home state of Louisiana.

“We would bring stacks of prints to them every week for use in their newspaper and for whatever else they wanted them for,” recalled Jones. “At the time, everything in the press was negative and always out for shock value.”

Black Panther co-founder Elbert “Big Man” Howard noted that Jones and Baruch “had a great eye for humanity; nobody was posing; we were all part of somebody’s family,” and that they “captured the real love and inspiration of what the Black Panther Party was all about.”

An exhibition of the photographs at San Francisco’s de Young Museum in 1968 drew more than 100,000 people despite nearly being cancelled due to pressure from City Hall. It was both admired widely and detested. The photographs were faulted for being one-sided, as images of the Panthers engaging in violence were notably absent, while also praised for approaching their subject with great pathos. Baruch responded to the critics, “We can only tell you: This is what we saw. This is what we felt. These are the people.”

The exhibition went on to travel, first to the nascent Studio Museum in Harlem where it would be its first photography show, and then to the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College and to UCSC.

In 2016, UCSC received Jones' and Baruch's entire photography collection, the single largest gift in the campus' history, with an estimated value of \$32 million. Donated by The Marin Community Foundation, the gift comprised 12,000 photographic prints, 25,000 negatives, and thousands of transparencies created by both Jones and Baruch, as well as a selection of prints by such colleagues and collaborators as Dorothea Lange, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Minor White. In 2018, UCSC digitized over 6,000 of the photographs and made them available online for the public.

Vanguard Revisited: Poetic Politics & Black Futures is made possible in part by a generous grant from the Pirkle Jones Fund. SFAI student curators include Eliza Phelan-Harder, Kathryn Porter, Yang Bao, Mikayla Mays, Midori Kimata, Katrina Magowan, and Candice Rongwan Xia.

About the Artists

Ruth-Marion Baruch was a documentary photographer, poet, and educator who was born in Berlin, Germany in 1922. She immigrated to the United States with her parents in 1927 and spent her childhood in New York City. In 1946, she became the first recipient of a Master's in Fine Arts degree in photography from the University of Ohio. After completing her graduate studies, Baruch relocated to San Francisco and began post-graduate studies in photography at the newly inaugurated fine art photography program founded by Ansel Adams at the California School of Fine Arts, now SFAI.

Baruch's work is in the permanent collections of the Oakland Museum of Art, Center for Creative Photography, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, George Eastman House, Arizona State University, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Polaroid Corporation, among others. Her one-person exhibitions included the 1966 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art show, "Illusion For Sale," a photo essay about women shoppers in San Francisco's Union Square; "Haight Ashbury 1967," at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco's DeYoung Museum; and "The Shape of Birth," in 1976 at the Focus Gallery in San Francisco.

Pirkle Jones was born in 1914, in Shreveport, Louisiana. He came to California in 1946 to study photography under the GI Bill at the California School of Fine Arts. He studied under Ansel Adams and Minor White. For almost sixty years he chronicled the people, politics, and landscape of Northern California. Jones did collaborative work with Dorothea Lange on a project commissioned by *Life Magazine* documenting the dislocation of the farm community of California's Berryessa Valley to build Lake Berryessa in a photo essay later published in *Aperture Magazine* titled "Death of a Valley." Other collaborative

projects included “The Story of a Winery” with Ansel Adams, and “Walnut Grove” and “Black Panthers, 1968” both undertaken with his wife of 48 years, Ruth Marion Baruch. Jones’ individual work included landscape photography of California, most notably Marin County and Mt. Tamalpais, as well as a series titled “Gate Five” which were portraits of the life of the artist, houseboat, and hippy community of Sausalito in the early 1970s.

Jones taught at SFAI for twenty-eight years, retiring in 1997. In 2003, SFAI awarded him an honorary doctorate.

Jones’s achievements included the Photographic Excellence Award from the National Urban League and a National Endowment for the Arts Photography fellowship. He exhibited at the International Museum of Photography, New York, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Art Institute of Chicago, Oakland Museum of California, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution, M. H. de Young Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Kija Lucas is an artist and educator based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She uses photography to explore ideas of home, heritage, and inheritance. Lucas received her BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2006 and her MFA from Mills College in 2010. Her work has been exhibited throughout the Bay Area at The Headlands Center for the Arts, The California Institute of Integral Studies, Altar Space, Intersection for the Arts, Luggage Store, Mission Cultural Center, Root Division, The Bedford Gallery, Pro Arts, The Asian Resource Center Gallery, as well as Venice Arts in Los Angeles, CA, La Sala d’Ercole/Hercules Hall in Bologna Italy, and Casa Escorsa in Guadalajara, Mexico. Lucas Has been an Artist in Residence at The Lucas Artist Residency at Montalvo Center for the Arts, Grin City Collective, and The Wassaic Artist Residency. Lucas is currently the program manager for The Growlery in San Francisco. She has been a member of 3.9 Art Collective since 2018.

Christopher Martin is a southern-raised artist from North Carolina and is currently based in San Francisco. While attending school at North Carolina A&T for graphic design, Martin was prone to create hand cut and sewn banners with logo-like images to tell a story relevant to his own culture and history. With cotton representing the toil/labor of those captured in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Martin hand-cuts and sews tapestry pieces that are representative of the modern-day experience of the African diaspora. His work continues in this medium alongside many other freelance positions like graphic design, electric tattooing, photography, videography, & teaching art classes/workshops throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

Tosha Stimage is a multi-disciplinary artist who uses a variety of mediums to examine and reflect on the limitations of language. Her work focuses on disrupting the idea of isolated meaning. By consistently re-contextualizing material forms and histories she is able to challenge visual languages as an ongoing investigation of racial ideologies. Stimage is a recipient of numerous awards/residences such as: Toby Devin Lewis Award, Murphy Cadogan Award, Real Time and Space Artist in Residence, and Facebook Artist in residence. She is currently an AICAD teaching fellow at The Columbus College of Art & Design.

5/5 Collective is a multimedia collective dedicated to exploring Black(ness) as an idea, consciousness, reference, and embodied experience through space, language, and visual culture. Tania Balan-Gaubert uses photography, found and ready-made objects, assemblage, and video to contemplate exodus, long-distance nationalism, and belonging. Troy Chew's work explores the African Diaspora within the urban culture through painting and sculpture, while also questioning the definitions of "Fine Art" and "Folk Art." Employing hand sewing, collage, drawing, and assemblage, Nkiruka Oparah builds multimedia portraits from found objects, familial images, video, and repurposed materials to investigate black identity, and Nigerian cultural memory as an ongoing attempt to materialize her experience of displacement.

About Walter and McBean Galleries

SFAI's Exhibitions and Public Programs provide direct access to artists and ideas that advance our culture. The Walter and McBean Galleries, established in 1969, present exhibitions at the forefront of contemporary art practice. The galleries serve as a laboratory for innovative and adventurous projects and commission new work from emerging and established artists.

About San Francisco Art Institute

Founded in 1871, SFAI is one of the country's oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher education in the practice and study of contemporary art. As a diverse community of working artists and scholars, SFAI provides students with a rigorous education in the arts and preparation for a life in the arts through an immersive studio environment, an integrated liberal arts and art history curriculum, and critical engagement with the world. Committed to educating artists who will shape the future of art, culture, and society, SFAI fosters creativity and original thinking in an open, experimental, and interdisciplinary context.

General Information

SFAI's Walter and McBean Galleries are open to the public Tuesday 11 AM – 7 PM and Wednesday – Saturday, 11 AM – 6 PM and are free. For general information, the public may visit sfai.edu or call (415) 749-4563. SFAI's Walter and McBean Galleries are located at 800 Chestnut St., San Francisco, CA.

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