

'Black Power' show coming to Bay Area

New Fine Arts director is bringing provocative exhibition to de Young

By Charles Desmarais

In a symbolic first exhibition choice, the new director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Thomas P. Campbell, announced Tuesday that the blockbuster contemporary exhibition "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power" will come to the Bay Area this fall.

Campbell told *The Chronicle*, "It's important that we as a museum speak to the audiences that represent the full diversity of our city. As a leading cultural institution, we have a powerful voice and a responsibility to amplify existing conversations around the city's struggles with race, class and identity. Art has always been a tool for social change, and we hope, always will be."

In an earlier statement issued by FAMSF, he said, "The artists featured in 'Soul of a Nation' were on the front lines of creating social and political change. Their work changed the course of the art historical canon, and with this exhibition we continue to tell a truer, more holistic story of what American art is."

During a time of heightened racial tension across the U.S.,

there is a sense of renewed urgency among art museum leaders around the need to diversify programs, collections and, crucially, audiences. "Soul of a Nation" is a deeply researched work of art history. It is, as well, a carefully assembled collection of significant works by 60 legendary artists through two explosive decades.

No museum exhibition will solve the problems or salve the wounds highlighted by "Soul of a Nation," which I previewed in Los Angeles last week. But it has been received worldwide as a muscular response to that pressing imperative.

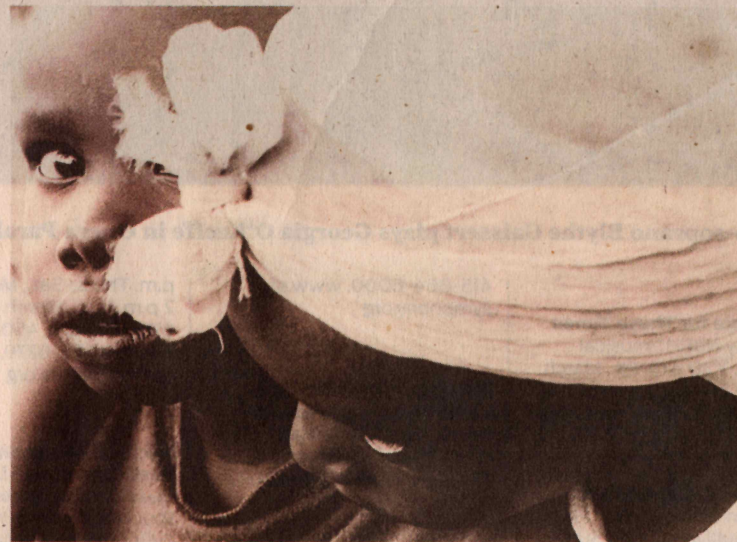
Organized by Tate Modern in London, where it was seen in 2017 by more than 136,000 visitors, the exhibition traveled to the Brooklyn Museum and to Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, Ark. A glamorous opening crowd filled with many of the artists (and celebrities ranging from Angela Bassett to Jay-Z) packed an opening party on Friday, March 22, at the Broad contemporary art museum in downtown Los Angeles, which was to be the final venue.

A quick shuffling of exhibition schedules at the de Young Museum, however, and a fran-



Aaron Galleries

Cliff Joseph's "Blackboard" (1969)



Herb Robinson

Herb Robinson's "Brother and Sister" (1973)

tic round of last-minute loan requests will now bring "Soul of a Nation" to the de Young from Nov. 9 through March 8.

One of the two Tate curators responsible for the exhibition, Mark Godfrey, was in San Francisco briefly last week to

discuss details with de Young curator Timothy Burgard. In an interview, Godfrey told *The Chronicle* that one Bay Area woman played a role in the show from the earliest investigations.

"In that research we were very much supported both morally and financially by Pamela Joyner, who's a great collector who lives here. Pamela has a lot of important artists in her collection, and we began to look at that," Godfrey said. The presentation in Los Angeles opens with a massive work by the artist Sam Gilliam, given to the Tate by Joyner and her husband, Alfred J. Giuffrida.

The exhibition develops several major themes, even as it highlights the individual contributions of key artists like Elizabeth Catlett, David Hammons, Barkley L. Hendricks, Betye Saar, Alma Thomas, Charles White and many others.

One pressing question for many of the artists was the problem of defining a black aesthetic, with abstractionists, photographers and pointedly political artists making cogent, if widely divergent, cases. Among the Bay Area work included is that of the Black Panther Party's minister of culture, Emory Douglas, who distributed his work in pamphlets and posters, declaring, "The ghetto itself is the gallery."

Charles Desmarais is The San Francisco Chronicle's art critic. Email: cdesmarais@sfchronicle.com Free weekly newsletter: <http://bit.ly/ArtguyReviews>