

BLACK PANTHER
The Revolutionary Art of
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Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas offers a compelling model of how art may be used to provoke a new political consciousness and function as a catalyst for social change. As the Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, which he joined in 1967 at the age of 22, Emory Douglas established an iconic visual style that communicated the organization's commitment to activism and social justice and created a powerful identifiable aesthetic that played a significant role in

Inspired by Malcolm X's call to resist violence and brutality by any means necessary, the Black Panther Party was among the most radical and significant American activist groups of the 20th century. Founded in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton in Oakland, California, the party's mission to attain justice and autonomy for all oppressed people was accompanied by an equal desire to improve their quality of life through economic, political, and social empowerment. The ideals and aspirations of the party were communicated to a global audience through *The Black Panther* newspaper, for which Douglas served as art director until its discontinuation in the early 1980s. Trained as a commercial artist at City College of San Francisco and ideologically aligned with

the growing black liberation struggle, he contributed hundreds of provocative drawings that brought the radical spirit of the party to life.

Employing a style that is boldly confrontational and conceptually efficient, Douglas transformed an impressive range of materials—including the newspaper’s tabloid-size back-page poster—into revolutionary tools through the inclusion of images that were highly political and often subversive. Together, these works provide a poignant visual record of the history of the Black Panther Party and the development of its evolving mission. Earlier drawings provide a sense of empowerment to the oppressed, with representations of social protest manifested through figures of gun-toting men and women and trademark ironic caricatures of racist oppressors. The pig, which functioned as the predominant avatar for authority, is among the most indelible of Douglas’s mordant motifs. As Bobby Seale wrote, “It was largely Emory’s images that communicated and helped the average protester and grassroots organizer define the phenomenon of who and what our oppressors were.” Later drawings feature humanistic representations of community pride, economic development, and the party’s many social programs.

While Douglas’s work focuses on the plight of African Americans in the social and political systems of the United States, it can also be considered within the context of the larger worldwide

struggle against oppression—particularly in terms of the message and style of the protest graphics of Cuba, Vietnam, and Africa. Like the Black Panther Party, which supported the efforts of analogous national and international groups, Douglas’s work provides a visual link to global efforts for political and social reform. It can also be associated with the anti-establishment attitude and satirical traditions that characterize earlier political artistic movements such as Dada and the Russian avant-garde.

Douglas has dedicated his life to the struggle for social justice and is perhaps the most prolific graphic agitator of the black liberation movement. Through the efficacy and immediacy of his extraordinary images, the illustration of the conditions that generated a revolutionary response, and the collective empowerment they have inspired, Douglas has not only exemplified how art can facilitate and support revolution, he has also shown how art can change the world.

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, edited by Sam Durant and published in February 2007 by Rizzoli.

A special web initiative at moca.org will present an up-close look at the art of Emory Douglas and provide a context for discussion about how the Black Panthers’ politically charged works continue to resonate today.

MY SUFFERING, MY BITTERNESS, MY LONELINESS; I'M NOT GOING TO LET IT
GET ME DOWN, I'M NOT GOING TO LET IT TURN ME AROUND



MINI: PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLAGE