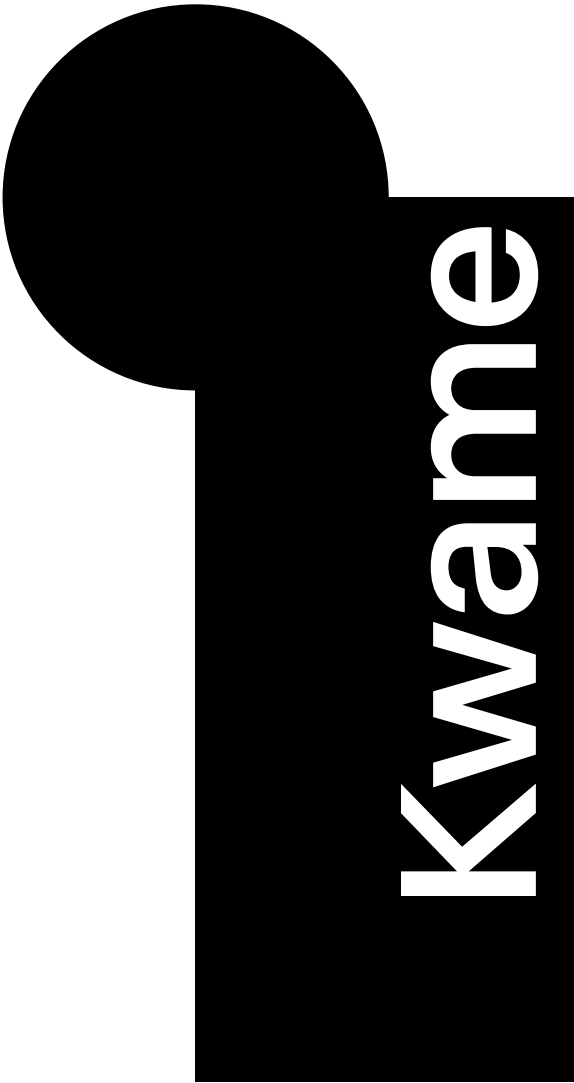


Centre
de la photographie
de Mougins



Press kit

Kwame Brathwaite
Black is Beautiful

5.07 –
5.10
2025

Curators
of the exhibition:

François Cheval
and Yasmine Chemali

Opening
Friday 4.07.2025
19:00

- 3 Note
on the programmation
- 4 Black is Beautiful
- 5 Biography
Kwame Brathwaite
- 6 Photographies
- 11 Publications
- 14 Contacts
/ Informations

Note on the Mougins Center of Photography

programmation

Since opening, the Mougins Center of Photography has set itself the mission of exploring the photographic medium in all its complexity – not through a logic of perpetual renewal or immediate consumption, but rather through cycles of reflection and long-term narratives. The trilogy devoted to African-American photography, which began in the summer of 2024, illustrates this desire: to think of the exhibition not as a final point, but as a chapter in a larger entity, an entry point into a constellation of narratives. Three selected photographers, three viewpoints and three complementary discourses to examine the question of the representation of a community.

Stephen Shames' work immersed us in the struggles of the Black Panthers. Alongside their demands, it was a question of paying tribute to all the women who carried out the sixty assistance programmes and the points of the Black Panther Party's programme. Stephen Shames, a white, progressive photographer with close ties to the movement, has created a unique activist archive, revealing a moment of intense mobilisation in the history of American civil rights. The second part, devoted to Bayeté Ross Smith, went beyond the racial issue of Black representation and 'the ghetto'. By thwarting visual codes, playing with stereotypes and subverting symbols of identification, the artist raised the question of the reappropriation of self-representation.

The exhibition 'Kwame Brathwaite: Black Is Beautiful' celebrates a photographer whose work, which began in the late 1950s, is a living memory of African-American culture. Inspired by the Pan-Africanism of Marcus Garvey, Brathwaite placed Black beauty at the heart of a political, aesthetic and cultural project. His photographs embody a movement of emancipation based on the reclamation of the self. Complementing the previous two parts, this chapter presents a completely autonomous discourse on the African-American community. Where Shames observed and supported, and Ross Smith deconstructed, Brathwaite asserts a way of inhabiting the world – American society, an awareness, an assumption of identity, and, in a way, a revendication of a life.

Kwame Brathwaite

Black is Beautiful

While almost everyone may be familiar with the expression 'Black is beautiful,' few people know who made it popular. We owe not only the slogan but an entire aesthetic specific to the Black community to an African-American photographer. Native to Brooklyn, Kwame Brathwaite (1938-2023) founded a movement in the 1960s whose ambition was to portray an original culture breaking free from the dominant culture. With the creation of AJASS – African Jazz-Art Society & Studios, a collective he founded with his brother Elombe Brath – Brathwaite created a space for artistic, musical, and photographic production that redefined the aesthetic standards of Black beauty. The Grandassa Models, activist icons of this counter-culture, took part in happenings that combined fashion, performance, and political protest. Adorned with African hairstyles, symbolic jewelry, and handmade clothing, they embodied a new pride: reclaiming one's body and image. Brathwaite used the medium of photography to pioneer a freer way of representing the Black body. Hair was no longer straightened and skin colour was celebrated. These actions were part of a broader community movement, exemplified by Marcus Garvey Day, celebrated every August 17th in Harlem since 1965, honoring Pan-African thought and Black autonomy. Brathwaite played an active role in these celebrations, photo-graphing beauty contests such as the Miss Natural Standard of Beauty – visual and political manifestos that affirmed Black beauty. His photography, deeply rooted in the richness of African American music – jazz, soul, funk, gospel, blues, and calypso – captured a vibrant and dynamic cultural scene. Early on, he worked with several record labels. His photographs graced vinyl covers, capturing the power and dignity of artists like Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach, and he became the photographer of choice for The Stylistics and Stevie Wonder. This exhibition is the first retrospective of the photographer to be held in Europe.

Kwame Brathwaite

Biography



Inspired in part by the writings of Marcus Garvey and the teachings of Carlos A. Cooks, Kwame Brathwaite's (1st January 1938-1st April 2023, New York, NY) photography created the visual overture for the 'Black is beautiful' movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Brathwaite spread this idea through his writings and photographs, as well as the activities of the two organisations he helped co-found: The African Jazz-Art Society & Studio – AJASS – and the Grandassa Models. His career spanning over six decades has allowed him to document the intersection of music, fashion, activism and art globally throughout the diaspora.

In the late 1950s Kwame Brathwaite and AJASS became active in the African Nationalist Pioneer Movement (ANPM) led by Carlos A. Cooks. They were also involved in the early struggle for liberation in Southern Africa. AJASS was regularly producing concerts at such venues as Club 845 in the South Bronx. Brathwaite took on the role of photographing these concerts, promoting them, and organising the cultural activities that would often be held during the concerts, such as art shows, poetry, theatre and African dance performances. By the 1970s, Kwame Brathwaite was one of the top music and cultural photographers, shaping the images of Stevie Wonder, Bob Marley, James Brown and Muhammad Ali. Brathwaite retired in 2018 and lived in New York with his wife, Sikolo Brathwaite. In 2019, a monograph produced by the Aperture Foundation was released, highlighting Kwame Brathwaite pivotal role and bringing renewed attention to his powerful visual legacy.

Kwame Brathwaite has been celebrated in a major touring exhibition, 'Kwame Brathwaite: Black Is Beautiful' which premiered, in April 2019, at the Skirball Cultural Center (Los Angeles, CA), and traveled to the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD, San Francisco, CA), Columbia Museum of Art (Columbia, SC), Blanton Museum of Art (Austin, TX), Detroit Institute of Arts (Detroit, MI), The New York Historical Society (New York, NY) and Abrams-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts (Birmingham, AL) from 2019-2023. His works feature in major museum collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA, Los Angeles, CA), Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (Houston, TX), Pérez Art Museum Miami (Miami, FL), National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC), Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, NY), and Sharjah Art Museum (Sharjah, United Arab Emirates).

© Kwame Brathwaite

Grandassa model,
Helene Brathwaite 'Nomsa Brath'
points to the Congo, on African
continental wall plaque,
where her natural coiffure is
very popular. Helene who heads
Grandassa Fashions, will be
one of the featured designers
and models in the September
AJASS productions,
'Naturally 65' at Rockland Palace
ca. 1964
14½ × 11 in. / 36.8 × 27.9 cm



Radiah Frye,
a model who embraced
natural hairstyles during
a photo shoot
at the AJASS Studios
ca. 1970
30 × 30 in. / 76.2 × 76.2 cm

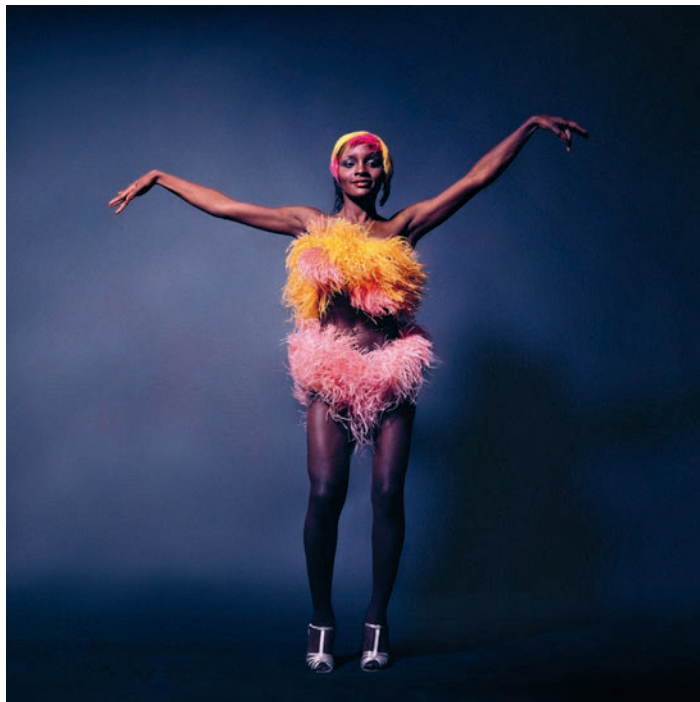


© Kwame Brathwaite

Naturally '68 photo shoot
in the Apollo Theater featuring
Grandassa models and founding
members of AJASS. Back
row includes Eleanor Ballard,
far left; Sikolo Brathwaite,
thirsd from left; Juanita McLean,
fourth from left; Zeta Gathers,
fifth from left; and Pat (last name
unknown), third from right.
Front row, left to right:
Klytus Smith, Frank Adu,
Bob Gumbs, Elombe Brath
and Ernest Baxter
ca. 1968
30 × 30 in. / 76.2 × 76.2 cm



Actress and Model
Marcia McBroom
for The Stylistics album shoot,
New York
ca. 1976
30 × 30 in. / 76.2 × 76.2 cm



© Kwame Brathwaite

Original members
of AJASS from left to right:
Robert Gumbs, Frank Adu,
Elombe Brath (seated),
Kwame Brathwaite, Fred K. Ward,
and Chris Hall.
AJASS Studios, Harlem
ca. 1964
30 × 30 in. / 76.2 × 76.2 cm



Grandassa Models
at the Merton Simpson Gallery,
New York
ca. 1967
15 × 15 in. / 38.1 × 38.1 cm



© Kwame Brathwaite

Untitled.
Deedee Little, a Grandassa model
in car during Marcus Garvey
Celebration Day
ca. 1965
30 × 40 in. / 76.2 × 101.6 cm

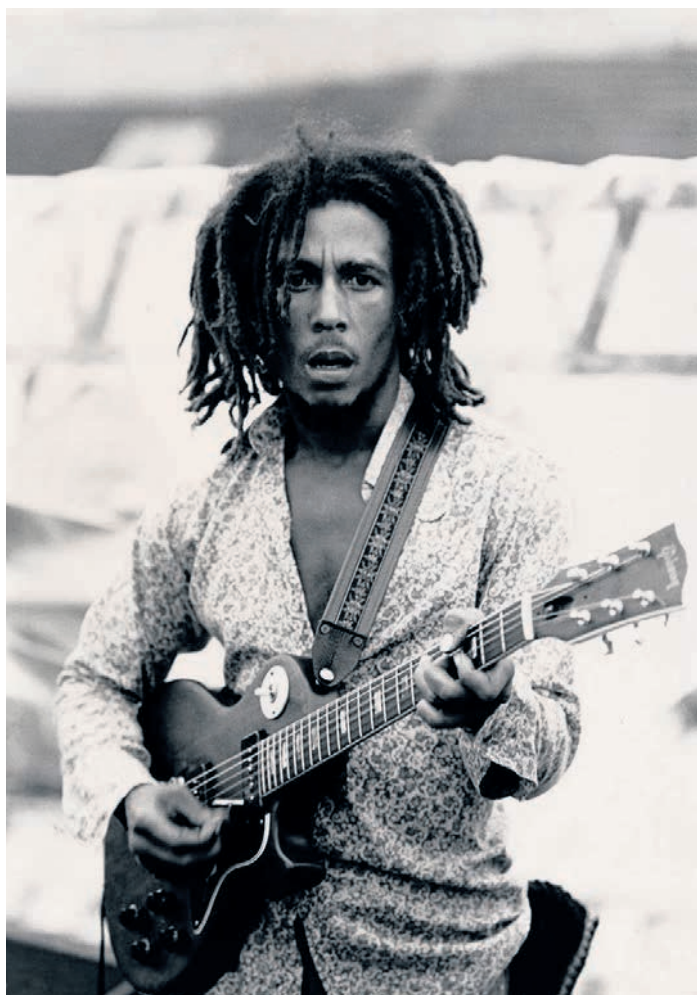


Jackson Five at Goree's
Musée de l'esclavage
1974
11 × 14 in. / 35.6 × 27.9 cm



© Kwame Brathwaite

Bob Marley
at Soundcheck
1975, October 4
20 × 16 in. / 51 × 40.8 cm



Muhammad Ali
in Ring
October 30, 1974
40 × 30 in. / 101.6 × 76.2 cm



Publication:**Black is Beautiful
Kwame Brathwaite****Authors:**

Yasmine Chemali
François Cheval
Kwame Brathwaite

Translations:

Jennetta Petch
Sandra Hübschen

Publishing:

June 2025
Bilingual French/English
192 pages
29 €
Isbn : 979-10-90698-58-1

On sale in the Mougins
Center of Photography
store.

Our publications:

#1

Isabel Muñoz
1001

176 pages
Isbn: 979-10-90698-50-5
© 2021
Authors:
Yasmine Chemali,
François Cheval,
Stéphane du Mesnildot,
Yuta Yagishita,
Pascal Bagot,
Emil Pacha Valencia
Translation:
Sara Heft

#2

Natasha Caruana
+ Jenny Rova
L'amour toujours

192 pages
Isbn: 979-10-90698-51-2
© 2021
Authors:
François Cheval,
Laurence Pourchez,
Jenny Rova,
Natasha Caruana,
Dr Chris Hoff,
Christophe Perrin,
Yasmine Chemali
Translation:
Sara Heft

#3

Yuki Onodera
+ Li Lang
La clairvoyance du hasard

176 pages
Isbn: 979-10-90698-52-9
© 2022
Authors:
François Cheval,
András Páldi,
Jean Daunizeau,
Takayo Iida,
Yasmine Chemali
Translations:
Ruth Oldham,
Patrick Honnoré

#4

Tom Wood
Every day is Saturday:
portraits anglais

192 pages
Isbn: 979-10-90698-53-6
© 2022
Authors:
François Cheval,
Leïla Vignal,
Jean Daunizeau,
Alexis Tadié,
David Peace,
John Peel,
Yasmine Chemali
Translations:
Ruth Oldham,
Alexis Tadié,
Leïla Vignal

#5

**Catherine De Clippel
+ Marie Baronnet
Ce qui nous arrive ici,
en plein visage**

192 pages
Isbn: 979-10-90698-54-3
© 2022
Authors:
Jérôme Esnouf,
François Cheval,
Jean-Paul Colleyn
Translations:
Ruth Oldham,
Jennetta Petch

#6

**Harold Feinstein
La roue des merveilles**

192 pages
Isbn: 979-10-90698-55-0
© 2023
Authors:
François Cheval,
Alexis Tadié,
Ya'ara Gil-Glazer,
Yasmine Chemali
Translations:
Ruth Oldham,
Jennetta Petch,
Alexis Tadié

#7

**Anna Niskanen
Point sublime
+ Jessica Backhaus
Nous irons jusqu'au soleil**

144 pages
Isbn: 979-10-90698-56-7
© 2023
Authors:
François Cheval,
András Páldi
Anna Niskanen
Translation:
Jennetta Petch

#8

**Stephen Shames
Comrade Sisters: Women
of the Black Panther Party
+ Bayeté Ross Smith
Au-delà des apparences**

192 pages
Isbn: 979-10-90698-57-4
© 2024
Authors:
Yasmine Chemali,
François Cheval,
Paul David Henderson,
Ericka Huggins
Translation:
Jennetta Petch

Contacts

**Centre
de la photographie
de Mougins**

**43 rue de l'Église
06250 Mougins**

0033 4 22 21 52 12
centrephotographiemougins.com
centrephotographie
@villedemougins.com
@mougins_centrephoto

Press:

Ludivine Maggiore
lmaggiore
@villedemougins.com

Florence Buades
com.mouginstourisme
@gmail.com

Informations

Open

5.07 → 30.09.2025
11:00 → 19:00
Closed on Tuesdays

1st.10 → 5.10.2025
13:00 → 18:00
Closed
on Mondays and Tuesdays

Admission

Adult → 6 €
Student → 3 €
Group (10 or +) → 4 € / pers.
Guided tours → 10 € / pers.

Free
1st Sunday of each month
Under 18, students
from the region PACA,
job seekers,
disabled visitors and one
accompanying person,
ICOM / ICOMOS / CIPAC,
Friends of the Center,
teachers, press,
guide-lecturers.

Guided tours (express)
every Wednesday
and Saturday
→ 15:00

**Book your
guided tour + workshop
for schools, groups
and associations:**
Sinem Bostanci
sbostanci@villedemougins.com

The Mougins Center
of Photography is supported
by the Regional Directorate
of Cultural Affairs (DRAC PACA),
06 Department
and Region SUD ;
and is a member of Botox(s),
Plein Sud and Diagonal
networks.

MOUGINS
CÔTE d'AZUR
FRANCE



de l'air

MOUVEMENT

artension

GRAND ARLES
EXPRESS 2025
LES RENCONTRES
DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE