

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART OPENS EXPANSIVE FRANK BOWLING EXHIBITION, CAPTURING THE SIGNIFICANT EVOLUTION OF HIS PRACTICE DURING HIS DECADE IN NEW YORK

Presentation Features More Than 45 Works by the Artist and a Companion Gallery Exploring His Role as a Critic, Curator and Teacher



***Frank Bowling: The New York Years 1966–1975*
May 20–September 10, 2023**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (March 30, 2023)—On May 20, 2023, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) opens *Frank Bowling: The New York Years 1966–1975*, the first major U.S. survey of the artist's work in more than four decades. Co-organized with the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, this exhibition captures the significance of the formative decade when Bowling, who was born in British Guiana (now Guyana), moved from London to New York. Featuring over 45 color-soaked paintings, this exhibition uncovers the explosive development of his vision and practice during a period that continues to inflect his deeply experimental works today. The SFMOMA exhibition adds to the Museum of Fine Arts Boston's presentation *Frank Bowling's Americas* with 11 additional artworks, including an expanded group of recent paintings produced between 2018 and 2022. The San Francisco presentation also features a wide selection of archival materials that emphasize Bowling's evolution as an artist, incorporating recorded interviews in New York and London, film footage and photographs from Bowling's 1968 visit to Guyana and a selection of his little-known "map" sketches. The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue and will be on view through September 10, 2023.

A companion gallery highlights artists from Bowling's international circle. It includes New York-based artists featured in *5+1*, the groundbreaking 1969 exhibition Bowling curated, such as Jack Whitten, Melvin Edwards and Daniel LaRue Johnson, as well as peers and interlocutors on both sides of the Atlantic such as Francis Bacon, Larry Rivers, Jasper Johns, Sam Gilliam and Alma Thomas. Visitors have a chance to see Bowling's work alongside his fellow visionary contemporaries, showing his voice as a curator, critic and important figure in debates around process-based abstraction and the role of Black cultural identity in artistic practices. By connecting his work to that of his peers, threads of influence can be traced to and from Bowling and the other artists.

"We are looking forward to engaging our communities with the exceptional work of Frank Bowling and to offering an in-depth exploration of the enduring influence of his time in New York, both on his own work and on the development of art more broadly," said Christopher Bedford, the Helen and Charles Schwab Director at SFMOMA. "In particular, the presentation of the *5+1* exhibition provides an opportunity to experience Bowling as a scholar and teacher committed to elevating the voices of Black artists and expanding the understanding of art history as it unfolded. This very much aligns with our institutional vision to share significant, if perhaps lesser-known, facets of artists' careers and to explore artistic achievement through a spectrum of lenses and perspectives."

Organized loosely chronologically, more than 45 paintings across nine thematic galleries trace the major bodies of work Bowling produced in New York when he lived at the famous Hotel Chelsea before moving to his studio at 535 Broadway. It opens with works made on canvases brought to New York from London with silkscreened images of his mother's storefront, Bowling's Variety Store, in New Amsterdam, Guyana. A suite of galleries contains Bowling's celebrated "map paintings" with hazy outlines of continents within oceanic fields of color that explore overlapping personal, political and modernist histories. Featuring expansive works measuring up to 20-feet wide such as *Penumbra* (1970), the exhibition also includes *False Start* (1967), *Barticorn I* (1967) and *Traveling with Robert Hughes* (1969–70) shown only at SFMOMA, highlighting Bowling's stunning range of techniques including stencils, thin washes of color, spray painted outlines and silkscreened images. Two additional works recently confirmed for the SFMOMA presentation—*Barbados in the Bath* and *Robert's Australia*—were made in 2022 and exquisitely illustrate the artist's most recent return to his map imagery.

Later galleries explore Bowling's engagement with abstraction from colorful compositions that reflect watery landscapes from Guyana, London and New York to his technically pioneering studio processes. His "poured paintings," made using a tilting platform to spill layers of acrylic paint from different heights, exemplify the depth of the artist's experimentation. *Rosebush* (1974), featuring a deep red background with brilliant drips of yellow, green and pink; and *Iceni* (1975), incorporating deep tones of green mixed over pale pinks and yellows, reflect this technique. Both paintings are exclusive to the SFMOMA exhibition. The unpredictability of the paint layers makes for dynamic and materially rich canvases.

The many influences of Bowling's time in New York shine through in the work he continues to produce today, exemplified in paintings like SFMOMA's *Elder Sun Benjamin* (2018), *Looking West Again* (2020) and *4 Bensusi* (2020), each of which integrate vivid layers of paint along with references to family histories and personal and studio materials. These works resonate with the artist's deep legacy of experimentation while incorporating the elements of inspiration he found in New York.

"Building on SFMOMA's major recent acquisition of Bowling's *Elder Sun Benjamin* (2018), this exhibition features luminous and groundbreaking works that uncover the complexity and

richness of Bowling's formative years in New York," said Marin Sarvé-Tarr, Assistant Curator of Painting and Sculpture. "It shows his lasting impact on debates around representation, abstraction and cross-cultural contributions to global histories of art from the 20th century to today."

ABOUT FRANK BOWLING

Born in colonial British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1934, Bowling moved to London in 1953 to complete his education, winning a scholarship to London's Royal College of Art in 1959. Steeped in the British Pop movement early on, Bowling began traveling to the U.S. in 1961 and visited Guyana in 1962 before settling in New York in 1966. Over the course of the next decade, his work pushed the boundaries between abstraction and figuration in grand scale paintings that incorporate layered and sewn canvases, silkscreened and stenciled imagery and vibrant fields of color. Bowling held several teaching appointments, wrote copiously for important art journals, exhibited widely and curated *5+1*, an historically significant exhibition of five leading African American abstract artists plus Bowling himself at the Art Gallery of Stony Brook University, New York. While his primary residence in the U.S. concluded in 1975, Bowling still maintains studios in London and New York.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by *Frank Bowling's Americas: New York, 1966–1975*, an illustrated catalogue produced by MFA Publications. The book reproduces more than 30 works, accompanied by curatorial essays and scholarly contributions by Reto Thüring, Kobena Mercer, Akili Tommasino, Sarah Roberts and Debra Lennard as well as statements by contemporary artists Firelei Báez, Melvin Edwards and Julie Mehretu—inviting new ways of understanding the journey of an artist whose work has always remained in motion.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Visitors are welcome to take part in a wide range of engaging public programs and events presented in conjunction with *Frank Bowling: The New York Years 1966–1975*.

On Thursday, May 18, 2023, at 6 p.m., SFMOMA will host an opening talk with the artist's son, Ben Bowling, in conversation with Sarah Roberts, Andrew W. Mellon Curator and Head of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA.

SFMOMA will celebrate *Free Family Day: Frank Bowling and Friends* throughout the museum on Sunday, June 11, 2023. Audiences of all ages are invited to join special guest Danielle Krysa (author and podcast host, the "Jealous Curator") reading her picture books, *How to Spot an Artist* and *Art and Joy*; San Francisco Public Library staff will be onsite for a Frank Bowling-themed story time; and a Frank Bowling treasure hunt (with prizes) will send visitors on a fun-filled exploration of the galleries. Visitors can additionally enjoy *How to Paint Like Frank Bowling* in the museum's Koret studios, art activity giveaways and a special surprise from author K-Fai Steele. Learn more at sfmoma.org/free-days.

Through SFMOMA's ongoing First Thursday program, residents of all nine Bay Area counties enjoy free admission the first Thursday of each month. On Thursday, July 6, 2023, the museum will host a participatory pouring paint program, giving visitors the opportunity to explore the technique and process behind Bowling's paintings.

SUPPORT

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This exhibition is co-organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

ADMISSION + HOURS

Annual membership begins at \$120, and members enjoy free admission and priority ticketing for special exhibitions with advanced reservations, as well as complimentary guest passes (varies by membership level). Adult general admission to SFMOMA is \$25; admission for seniors 65 years and older is \$22; and admission for visitors ages 19 through 24 is \$19. General Admission and special exhibitions for all visitors 18 years and younger is free.

For local Bay Area residents, SFMOMA's First Thursdays offer free admission from 1–8 p.m. On Free Family Days, general admission to the museum is free for up to four adults accompanying one child or teen (18 and younger). For information about other free and discounted admission programs, please visit sfmoma.org/deals-discounts.

Museum hours are 10 a.m.–5 p.m. on Fridays through Tuesdays and 1–8 p.m. on Thursdays (closed Wednesdays). Current visitor information can be found at sfmoma.org/visit.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

151 Third Street
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The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is one of the largest museums of modern and contemporary art in the United States and a thriving cultural center for the Bay Area. Our remarkable collection of painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, design and media arts is housed in a LEED Gold-certified building designed by the global architects Snøhetta and Mario Botta. In addition to our seven gallery floors, SFMOMA offers 45,000 square feet of free, art-filled public space open to all.

Visit sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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Image credit:

Frank Bowling, *Barticaborn I*, 1967; courtesy the artist; © Frank Bowling, DACS, London / ARS, New York 2023; photo: Stan Narten