

MALLORY LOWE MPOKA

PORTFOLIO



MALLORY

LOWE

MPOKA

MALLORY LOWE MPOKA WAS BORN IN 1996 IN MONTREAL, CANADA. SHE WORKS BETWEEN MONTREAL AND DOUALA, CAMEROON.

A queer visual artist, her practice draws on archival photographs and personal experiences and examines how individuals navigate places, continually reconsidering the nature of identity and belonging. Her use of photography, textile, collage and screen printing refers to a reality between many cultures, while contextualizing her work in a local and familiar environment.

Her recent investigations question the notion of home as an (in)tangible place and the concept of migration through the prism of diasporic, transoceanic and post-colonial realities, while incorporating personal archives, heirlooms and self-portraits.

Mpoka was a Villa Lena Foundation artist-in-residence in 2021 and has been nominated as a finalist for the Access ART x Prize 2022/23 by Art x Lagos and Yinka Shonibare's Foundation.

She has shown her work nationally and internationally at Atiss Dakar Gallery, Art Toronto, Fofa Gallery, Phi Center, Rad Hourani and le Livart Gallery. Mpoka's most recent work, created during a research residency at Bandjoun Station Museum, is currently shown at the 13th Edition of Bamako Encounters, African Photography Biennale.

MALLORY LOWE MPOKA

b.1996

Montreal, Canada

Lives and works in Montréal, Canada



EDUCATION

2022

Studio Arts, BFA, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

Organizing Sustainability, Certificate, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

2020

Quadricolor Screenprinting, Workshop, Atelier Circulaire, Montreal, Canada

2016

DEC, Communication, Media and Studios Arts, Vanier College, Montreal, Canada

GRANT PRIZES

2023

RBC Future Launch Scholarship, Royal Bank of Canada

2022

Prix Malick Sidibé, Bamako Encounters, African Biennale of Photography

BPO Excellence Award, Concordia University

2021

The Coloured Women's Club of Montreal Grant

BPO Project Funding, Concordia University

BIPOC Artist In Community Grant, Concordia University

2020

Black Creator Fund, Banded Purple

June Mitchell Bursary, Zonta Club of Montreal

RESIDENCIES

2022

Research Residency, Fondation Jean Felicien Gacha, Cameroon

2021

Creation Residency, Villa Lena x Mqmbmq, Tuscany, Italy (Full Sponsorship)

Research/Creation Residency, Bandjoun Station Museum, West Cameroon

SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

2023

1-54 New York, AFIKARIS Gallery, New York, USA

The Next Contemporary Gallery, Toronto, Canada

The African Photography Biennale (13th Edition), Bamako, Mali

2022

Art Toronto, Art Fair, Toronto, Canada

Interweaving curated by Aissa Dione, Atiss Gallery (Biennale of Dakar - OFF), Dakar, Senegal

The Sum of Our Shared Selves, curated by Geneviève Wallen, Fofa Gallery, Montreal, Canada

2021

In Flux, curated by Phi Centre, Montreal, Canada

Spaced, curated by Banded Purple and The Nia Center for the Arts, Toronto, Canada

Feminine Notion, curated by Rad Hourani, Rad Hourani Foundation, Montreal, Canada

2020

This is what compels me to compel them, curated by Josephine Denis, Livart, Montreal, Canada

PUBLICATIONS/FEATURES

2024

Artist book, Piece Jointe Editions

2023

Esse, Artist Feature, Issue 107, Family, Montreal, Canada

2022

Fofa Gallery Exhibition Catalog, Being and Unbeing: A Photographic Testament to the Fluidity of Self-Identity, by Gloria Manege, Montreal, Canada

Journal Mutations, La Photographie d'art me nourrit, by Alain Ndanga, Cameroon

2021

Art Matters Festival Special Edition Publication, Never Let the Discourse Settle, Montreal, Canada

Vogue Italia, On The Importance Of Social Revolutions: How Three Black Creatives Are Straddling Culture And Craft, by Chidozie Obasi, online

2020

S Magazine, Artist Highlight, by Najma Eno, issue 19, Toronto, Canada

2019

IN Magazine, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, issue 7, New York, USA

COLLECTION

Collection Fondation Villa Lena



EXHIBITION VIEW

ARCHITECTURE OF THE SELF: WHAT LIVES WITH(IN) US, Art Toronto (Next Contemporary Gallery), Toronto
2022

In this duo series, which draws on archival photographs, Mallory Lowe Mpoka examines how she navigates places, continually reconsidering the nature of identity and (be)longing. Her use of photography, textile, collage and embroidery refers to a reality between many cultures, while contextualizing her work in a local and familiar environment. The repetitive burgundy tone invokes the color of her family village's soil in West Cameroon, the motherland and the violence of a colonial past.

The work draws on Mpoka's research into her family archive and ideas of place and identity. She questions the notion of home as an (in)tangible and psychological space and the concept of migration through the prism of diasporic, transoceanic and post-colonial realities. The artist sees herself as a bearer of the marks of a certain colonial past; her childhood in Quebec and her African European heritage have made tangible her inability to position herself in a permanent and fixed reality of belonging.



THESE PLACES THAT LIVE WITHIN US, 2022

Watercolour and earth pigments on moulin du gué paper, inkjet print on daguerre canvas, Italian cotton thread

50x70 cm / 20x28 in



EXHIBITION VIEW

ARCHITECTURE OF THE SELF: WHAT LIVES WITH(IN) US, Biennale africaine de la photographie (Maison africaine de la photographie à Bamako), 2022

Following this thread, Mpoka delves into the past through history and its tangible remnants using earth pigments and family archives which she transposes into a new body of work, decomposing photographs in a delicate balancing act between fabulation and memory. Fragmented and re-contextualized by the artist, they act as a site of transformation asking to be decoded, re-imagined. The superposition of these visual elements creates an intuitive closeness: in these recomposed images, the bodies submerged in the red earth pigments and the fingerprints also act as self-portraits. The earth to which one is bound; the colonized earth that becomes the colonized self. This first series is the introduction of a larger body of work exploring notions of territory and sense of belonging.



THESE PLACES THAT LIVE WITHIN US, 2022

Watercolour and earth pigments on moulin du gué paper, inkjet print on daguerre canvas, Italian cotton thread

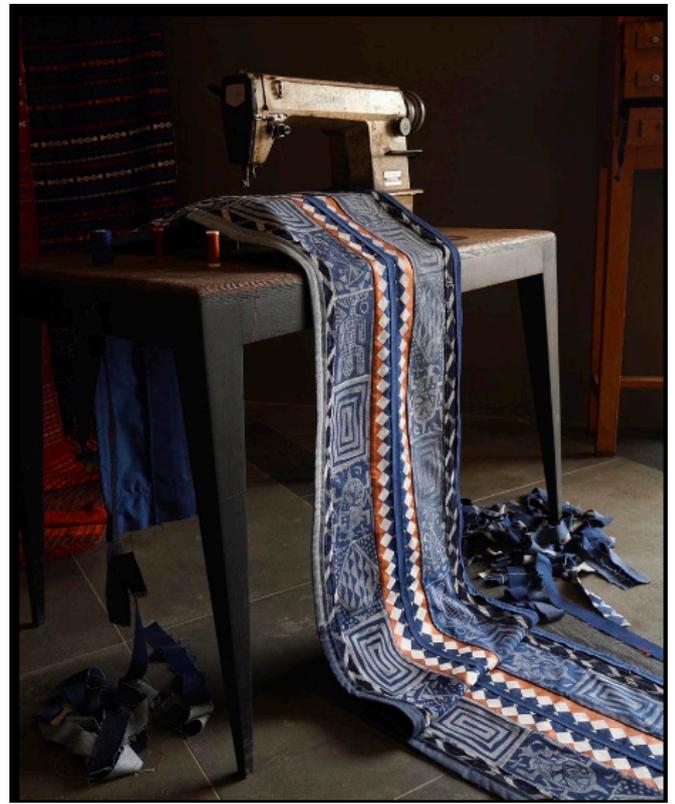
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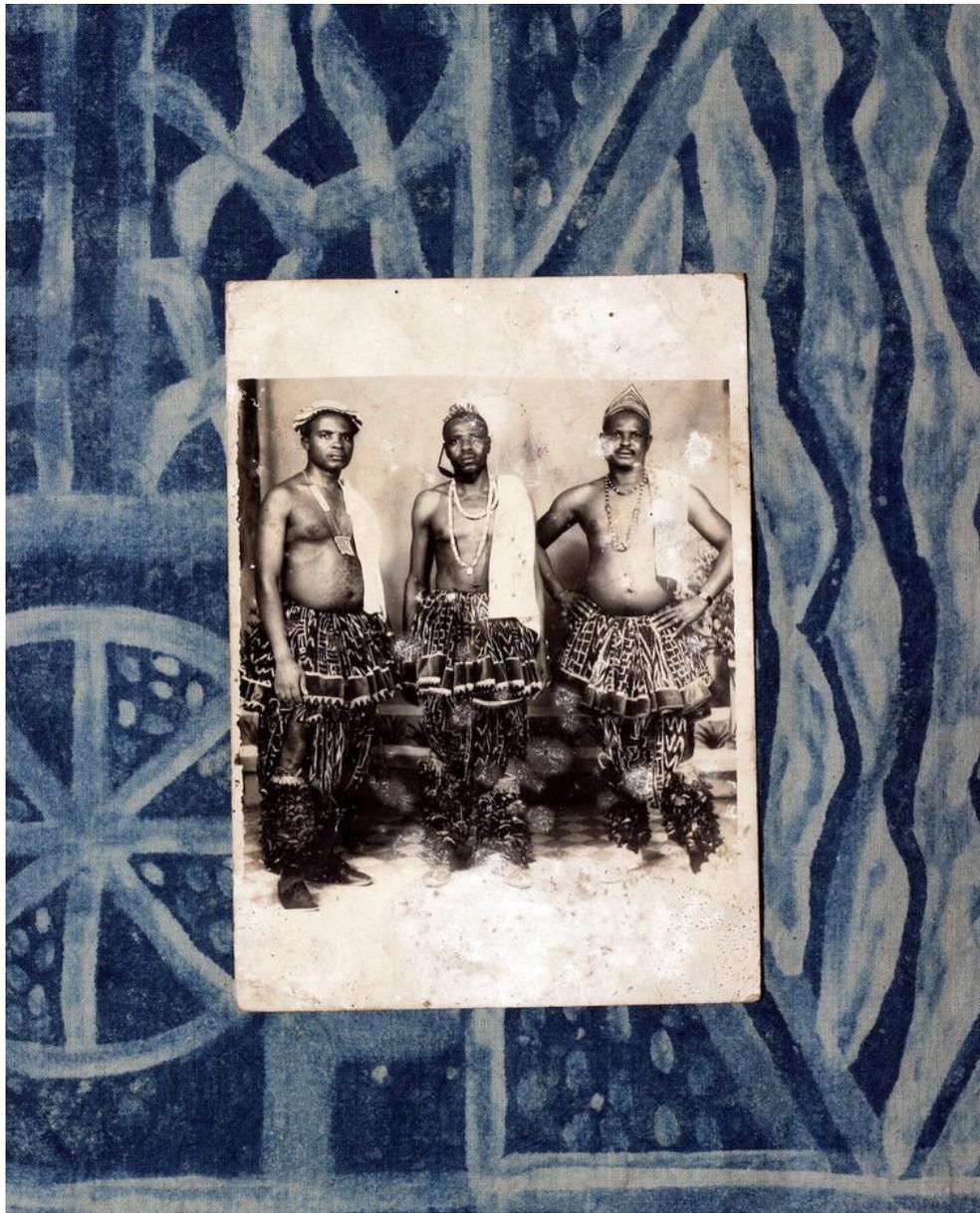
EXHIBITION VIEWS

ESPACE-TEMPS, Atiss Gallery (Dakar Biennale Off), DAKAR
2022

As visual and textile artists from multicultural backgrounds, Ajavon and Mpoka root their practice by anchoring themselves in the world through their heritage. In doing so, they bring their kin's teachings and know-how into practice and conjure artistic gestures in celebration of intergenerational learning. Mpoka is currently investigating indigo resist-dyed cotton textile (Ndop cloth) inspired by her paternal Bamileke lineage, while Ajavon is interested in Manjak textile drawn by his maternal Senegalese heritage.

One of Ajavon's fondest childhood recollections is of his mother offering them a piece of black fabric featuring white and red checks, a traditional textile motif common in Senegalese manjak textiles, before they left home for the first time. His mother explained that it was given to her by her own mother the first time she left home for France. The cloth was meant to shield her, like a protective charm. Receiving this ancestor's gesture had left an indelible influence on Ajavon, igniting their passion for textiles and weaving. This fabric is more than a simple piece of cloth; it is a remnant that had survived the passage of time and had been passed down for the protection of his predecessors, and then to him.

Raised in Canada, Mpoka was frequently involved in Bamileke community celebrations in Montreal, following her father to men's monthly reunions (also known as tontines), and attending important Bamileke family gatherings. The Ndop fabric and its derivative, faux-ndop, was very prominent in Mpoka's life from traditional attire worn by her uncles and aunties to tablecloths and home wall decorations.



Mpoka's family photo archive juxtaposed on an indigo dyed cotton cloth prototype, showcasing her late grandfather (right) posing in ndop attire with his two friends in Douala, Rue Nassif (Douala), 1967, Joie de la lumière

Photo Credit: Jeannot Studio

The symbols found in Bamileke textile culture are rich in meaning and encompass a long story of oral tradition passed down from elders to younger generations. She has been fascinated by the ways in which stories, tales, and knowledge have been translated through textile. Her research and creative process are fundamentally a healing meditation on self-reconciliation and the ways in the which work from diaspora artists can often be about the bonds we form in the absence of our kin.



Mallory Lowe Mpoka working in her studio, Villa Lena, Tuscany
2021

Photo Credit: Damien Ajavon

This past summer, at Villa Lena artists' residency in Tuscany, Mpoka developed a prototype for a fresco constructed from an assemblage of 50 linen and cotton panels hand-dyed with red earth pigments varying from burnt ochres to dull yellow. The panels are screen-printed with portraits from her father's archive, as well as those collected from village artisans. One panel shows her grandfather in a white suit. In another, her grandmother appears in a short frock.

Mpoka asserts herself into the lineage in a series of self-portraits against striped backdrop, directing her archival interventions towards the production of memory that is also a reclamation of the present. Reminiscent of the compressed red earth brick dwellings of West Cameroon — but also, Faith Ringgold's decorative Street Story Quilt (1985), and Francesca Woodman's monumental collage Blueprint for a Temple (1980) — the grid-like structure of her fresco evokes the role of architecture in the construction of social identity of Bamileke people. "It is not enough" writes J. M.

Kamegne, the "to be somebody, you must prove that you have what it takes to be who you are. You must build." But instead of displaying status and wealth, Mpoka's assemblage of panels makes visible the lived experience of cultural plurality that marks the lives of individuals and communities of mixed heritage.

Foregrounding migration and exchange, cultures collide and coalesce in her practice: the childhood image of her father reappears affixed to stuffed cotton Milanese patches.

Hers is a practice of building belonging between places. It gestures towards the construction of Black aesthetics as a habitat formed across the African diaspora.



LEFT
Dyed Prototype on recycled linen and cotton, 2021
Bandjoun Station Museum, Cameroon



RIGHT
Mallory Lawe Mpoka in her studio, 2021
Vila Lena, Tuscany, Italy



EXHIBITION VIEW

THE SELF-PORTRAIT PROJECT, Spaced Exhibition, in collaboration Banded Purple and OCAD University, Toronto, Canada
2021

The *Self-Portrait* explores Mpoka's family photographic archive drawing on her Cameroonian-Belgian heritage while exploring notions of memory and transoceanic imaginaries. Inspired by photographs from her own family album, her self-portraits draw inspiration from the Central African's visualscape and photographic culture from the post-independence as well as her diasporic realities.

Holding a 1970's photograph of her father in one portrait, she aims to reimagine her sense of (be) longing and Bamileke heritage while aspiring to breathe new life into her archive. From a different place and stance, Mpoka sees in the archive as an opening to reimagine oneself and foster a place where dreams might be forged out of remnants.



THE SELF-PORTRAIT PROJECT, 2022
En Flux Exhibition, Centre Phi, Montreal, Canada



LEFT
THREE SIDES OF A COIN, 2022
Charcoal, acrylic, ink, black tea and old photos mounted on canvas
75x75cm / 30x30 in



RIGHT
INNER MONOLOGUES (EDITION OF 3), 2020
Inkjet print on Hahnemuhle photo rag
16x20 cm / 6x8 in

In *What is this home* that is home that is not home the subjects find themselves in a pool of rusty clay, referential to Mallory Lowe Mpoka's ancestral village in West Cameroon. The presence of this essential Cameroonian topographical feature, in a hidden lagoon in Montreal's Verdun Beach, is perhaps an indication that an individual's home may exist in more places than one. The clay references the many ways the Black diaspora may carry their homelands within. The notion of longing and belonging is further echoed in the traditional threading and weaving of the subjects' hair, using common West and Central African hair practices.



WHAT IS THIS HOME THAT IS HOME THAT IS NOT HOME, 2020
Inkjet print on Hahnemuhle photo rag,
16x20 cm / 6x8 in

This body of work calls into question our collective understanding of home - where we "are" versus where we "are from" - and how our corporeal bodies reflect these metaphysical spaces. How do diasporic bodies act as mnemonic agents in the ways they relate to ancestral sites? How are our sense of (be)longing and personhood shaped by our relationship to the land? In this series, Lowe investigates what these relationships look like and how they can be visually translated.

Her practice continues to be informed by transcultural narratives while exploring the historical, cultural, and socio-political influences in the creation of hybrid identities and diasporic imaginaries.