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New Museum Presents Survey of Works by *Black Panther* Artist Emory Douglas

New York, NY...The **New Museum** will present a major survey of works by Emory Douglas made while Douglas was the Revolutionary Artist of the Black Panther Party and subsequently, its Minister of Culture. “**Emory Douglas: Black Panther**” will be on view in the second floor gallery from July 22 through October 18, 2009. Douglas created the overall design of the *Black Panther*, the Party’s weekly newspaper, and oversaw its layout and production from 1967 until it ceased publication in 1979. Douglas created a straightforward graphic style and a vocabulary of images that would become synonymous with the Party and the issues it fought for. Selected by the Los Angeles artist **Sam Durant**, whose work often deals with political and cultural subjects in American history, the exhibition includes more than **155 posters, newspapers, and prints dating from 1966 to 1977**, as well as a small-scale mural that reprises one of Douglas’s vintage images.

In Durant’s opinion, this exhibition is not only a retrospective of Douglas’s artistic achievement; it is a primer on how art can encourage political consciousness and function within an activist context. That this graphically alive, politically focused visual art is also completely relevant to contemporary art practices is demonstrated by its influence on the work of artist Rigo 23, who will execute the mural in Douglas’s show in addition to his own site-specific installation which will be simultaneously on view in the New Museum’s Shaft Gallery. Douglas will give an artist talk, introduced by Rigo 23, on July 23 at 7 p.m. in the New Museum theater.

Sam Durant met Emory Douglas in 2002, and began creating a book of Douglas’s work, which resulted in a monograph published in 2007. The same year Durant curated “Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas” at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The exhibition at the New Museum is organized by Laura Hoptman, Kraus Family Senior Curator, with Amy Mackie, Curatorial Assistant.

Between 1966 and 1980, the Black Panther Party built an international organization of over 5,000 members. With chapters in cities across the country, after 1968, the Party’s focus expanded from self-defense to community service and social-welfare programs including, free breakfasts for children, free health clinics, and charter schools, among others. The Party also built coalitions with churches, labor unions, and a variety of multiethnic political groups, and by

1970 was fielding candidates for city, state, and national offices. Douglas's work gave visual form to many aspects of this extraordinary history.

At its height, the *Black Panther* had a circulation of 400,000. Early examples of Douglas's lively and incendiary graphic compositions sought to inspire the African-American community with representations of proud and defiant black men and women and trademark ironic caricatures of racist abusers of power. The pig, which became the predominant avatar for authority, is among the best known of Douglas's motifs, along with the stalking panther and the clenched black fist. Later works feature representations of community pride, economic development, and the positive results of the Party's many social programs. Douglas also produced portrait posters that portrayed many of the most important public figures of the 1960s, including Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Amiri Baraka, and Malcolm X. While Douglas's work was focused on the struggle for African-American civil rights, it also took as its subject anti-colonial struggles around the world. By the early '70s, many of Douglas's works expressed the Black Panther Party's solidarity with analogous international groups dedicated to political and social reform, and exhibited formal affinities to protest graphics produced at the time in Cuba, the People's Republic of China, North Vietnam, and Africa.

Douglas's work established an iconic visual style that communicated the Black Panther Party's commitment to activism and social change and created a powerful identifiable aesthetic that helped mobilize its constituency and sympathizers. It can also be seen as part of a tradition of activist art-making in the mid-twentieth century, including the expressionistic realism of Mexican muralists like Diego Rivera, the sculptures and prints of African-American artist Elizabeth Catlett, and the prints of German artist Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945). In his use of photomontage, as well as his method of distribution—through newspapers and posters—Douglas's work can also be related to the anti-fascist photomontages of the German artist John Heartfield, whose powerful images served as covers for underground, anti-government publications throughout the Nazi regime. Like Douglas, these artists were dedicated activists whose visual art production cannot be disassociated from their political struggle, and like him, they chose delivery systems—from murals and monuments to prints, posters, and publications—that were easily distributable and unambiguously public.

Emory Douglas to Collaborate with Teens on Commissioned Community Mural in Harlem
In conjunction with the exhibition "Emory Douglas: Black Panther," the New Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and Groundswell, a community organization, will co-produce a new mural to be installed on 122nd Street and Third Avenue in Harlem, New York City. The mural, titled *What We Want, What We Believe*, will be a permanent public artwork— and Douglas's first in New York City. The mural team will consist of up to fifteen teens involved with the New Museum's

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G: Class student program and the Studio Museum, the majority of whom will be employed by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, through the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Douglas will work with the youth for two weeks, teaching the history of the larger Black Power Movement, conducting master print-making workshops, and leading discussions with youth participants. Over a period of two months, artist educators from the New Museum, the Studio Museum, and Groundswell will provide youth with tutorials on the social and political history that gave rise to the Black Panther Party and the Movement, as well as the history of printmaking and mural painting. *What We Want, What We Believe* will begin on July 1, with a dedication of the finished mural anticipated in early September 2009.

About Emory Douglas

Emory Douglas was born in 1943 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and has been a resident of the Bay Area in California, since 1951. He held the title of Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, a part of the national leadership, from 1967 until the party disbanded in the early 1980s. During the Party's active years he served as the art director overseeing the design and layout of the *Black Panther*, the Party's weekly newspaper. Douglas was trained as a commercial artist at City College of San Francisco and has been the subject of several solo exhibitions. His work has also been in numerous exhibitions about the history of the Black Panther Party, including shows at the Arts & Culture Conference of the Black Panther Party in Atlanta, GA in 2008 and "The Black Panther Rank and File" at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco in 2006. Most recently his work was the subject of a solo exhibition at Urbis, Manchester, UK in 2008–09. In 2007, artist Sam Durant curated a solo exhibition of Douglas's work at the MOCA Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles. Douglas's work has also been presented at the 2008 Biennale of Sydney, Australia; the African American Art & Cultural Complex, San Francisco; Richmond Art Center, VA; and the Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston.

Exhibition Related Programming

Thursday, July 23, 2009, 7 p.m. Artist Talk by Emory Douglas, Introduced by Rigo 23
\$6 Members, \$8 General Public

Saturday, July 25, 3 p.m. Living With Conviction: A Black Panther Party Film Series
Presented by the New Museum and Maysles Cinema
Free with New Museum Admission

About the New Museum

Founded in 1977, the New Museum is Manhattan's only dedicated contemporary art museum and among the most respected internationally, with a curatorial program known for its global scope and adventurousness. With the inauguration of our new building on the Bowery, the New Museum is a leading destination for new art and new ideas.

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