

For Immediate Release

## Go Down Moses (July 18 – September 29, 2019)



Melissa Ann Pinney, *Selan's Beauty School*, 1988

CHICAGO—The Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago (MoCP) presents ***Go Down Moses*** from **July 18 – September 29, 2019**. The exhibition is guest curated by **Teju Cole**, acclaimed novelist, photographer, and former photography critic for the *New York Times Magazine*. This is Cole's first major curatorial project.

*Go Down Moses* presents a reinterpretation of the MoCP's permanent collection that can be understood as a visual tone poem of contemporary America, exploring elemental themes of movement, chaos, freedom, and hope. In doing so, Cole uses the photographic archive to interweave the past and present, suggesting an aesthetic approach to understanding the current psyche.

Taking its title from an old African American spiritual of the same name, the lyrics of "Go Down Moses" originally sought to link the black American freedom quest with the story of ancient Israel's struggle to be free of Pharaoh's bondage. "Everyone is longing to be free, and everyone is curious about whether hope is still possible," Cole writes in his curatorial statement. "The photographic archive contains evidence that thus it ever was, that we have always lived in this urgency."

*Go Down Moses* uses Cole's sense of poetics to create an intuitive sequence of photographs that run throughout the MoCP's galleries. Minimalist imagery of open spaces slowly crescendos into an intensity of images with a dramatic installation in the second-floor gallery composed of representations of chaotic, extreme conditions. What begins as freedom leads to mayhem; images of the body take on new meaning depending on their placement in the galleries. The photographic archive comes to life through Cole's curatorial intent, which he uses to excavate the meaning of hope, among other intangibilities.

The exhibition will feature over 150 photographs by artists including Robert Adams, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Jack Delano, Lucas Foglia, Myra Greene, Graciela Iturbide, Dorothea Lange, An-My Lê, Danny Lyon, Sally Mann, Gordon Parks, Melissa Pinney, Alan Reininger, and Joel Sternfeld, among many others.

*Go Down Moses* will be accompanied by an illustrated catalogue, edited by Cole and the MoCP and published by Chicago-based publisher Candor Arts. The catalogue will include original writing by Cole and an interview with Cole and MoCP Chief Curator and Deputy Director Karen Irvine.

#### MoCP SPONSORS

The MoCP is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Museum is generously supported by Columbia College Chicago, the MoCP Advisory Board, Museum Council, individuals, private and corporate foundations, and government agencies including the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

#### ABOUT the MoCP

The Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago is the world's premier college art museum dedicated to photography. As an international hub, the MoCP generates ideas and provokes dialogue among students, artists and diverse communities through groundbreaking exhibitions and programming. Now in its 42<sup>nd</sup> exhibition season, the Museum of Contemporary Photography cultivates a deeper understanding of the artistic, cultural and political roles of photography in our world today.

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