

# Art, digital age and trends in Africa

Berjo Ange-Ernest Moudilou-Mouanga

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Bakalářská práce  
2011



Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně  
Fakulta multimediálních komunikací

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Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně  
Fakulta multimediálních komunikací  
Ústav reklamní fotografie a grafiky  
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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

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**Africký filmový plakát – historie a současnost africké kinematografie a filmového plakátu.**

**Praktická část:**

**Inspirace a vliv africkým uměním prostřednictvím grafického ztvárnění v podobě autorské tvorby.**

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## ABSTRAKT

Tento projekt je zaměřený na kinematografii Afriky a diaspory. Práce začíná stručným představením kontinentu, jelikož to u něj vše začlo. Africkým filmařům se podařilo dosáhnout úspěchu na mezinárodním poli, přes veškeré nesnáze kterými museli projít. Část mého projektu se zabývá filmovou reklamou v podobě plakátů. Jsme představení něčemu co je docela jiné od upoutávek ke kterým jsme denně vystaveni. Tento rozdíl vytváří především původnost a rozmanitost. Setkejte se s významnými filmovými režiséry jako jsou Oscar Micheaux, Spike Lee, Raoul Peck, Sebastien Kamba a Ralph Nwadike.

Klíčová slova: Afrika, Umění, Film, Plakát, Grafický design.

## ABSTRACT

This project is focused on the African and diaspora cinematography. The work starts with a brief introduction of the continent. Despite all the obstacles Black filmmakers had to go through, they have managed to reach a high level of success internationally. A part of the project touches film advertisement(movie posters), we are introduced to something that is quite different from what we are used to. The diversity and originality is what makes African and diaspora posters different. Meet Some of most significant filmmakers like Oscar Micheaux, Spike Lee, Raoul Peck, Sebastien Kamba and Ralph Nwadike.


Keywords: Africa, Art, Motion picture, Poster, Graphic design.

*I would like to dedicate this to all the people who have helped and supported me during my research, specifically my parents Jean-Claude and Natalia, doc. PaedDr. Jiri Eliska, The African American Cinema Museum in Harlem, Jepchumba, CEO of African Digital Art, NYSYMB LASCONY, John Van Means, Barbara Muriungi, Gaetano Gualdo and Nathan Collett*

*“With confidence you have won, before you have started”*

*Marcus Garvey*

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Ve Zlíně dne 16.5.2011 

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## **I. TEORETICAL PART**

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The history of African and diaspora cinematography

To fully understand the African cinematography we have to go through the history of its continent. In this case we are talking about *the sub saharan zone*. For more than four hundred years a large number (four million) of sub saharan African men and women were displaced to *North America* and *Carribbean Islands* in the *Atlantic slave trade*. Caught from home and forever split from their families they were enslaved in a new world without any familiar customs. Despite all difficulties and hardships they managed to keep their traditions and identities in the new world. Culture, religion and folklore has been preserved as an evidence of their past lives. [1]

Nowadays the term *African Diaspora* is also applied to the ones who have migrated from the continent to get education, working opportunity and a better life for themselves and their families.

There is not a huge difference between films made by Africans in and outside of the continent when it comes to socioeconomic and political issues. They point out the position of the black man in society in various aspects (history, culture, customs, social and political issues). African filmmakers all over the world are not possessed with themselves or their race, however they are still discovering different ways to preserve the history that was interrupted by colonialism and slave trade.

With a rich visual culture and history that has been influenced by the slave trade, colonialism and the postcolonial era, it is impossible to touch on every subject that has influenced the history of the Black film. Therefore I chose to outline the graphic identity and cinematic visual history from four different countries; Congo, Ghana, Nigeria and The United States of America. I chose these countries for various reasons, because each one of them stands out from a different point of view. Congo had a rich beginning of filmmaking, unfortunately the politic system was very bad for its development. Ghana has unique and very creative film posters. Nigeria, through Nollywood, represents the future of African filmmaking. The United States represents filmmaking for the African Diaspora, showcasing a long and deep tradition that have tied generations and cultures for hundreds of years.

As a graphic designer I pay a lot of attention to movie advertisement, so there is a trace of the movie poster history, from hand painted film posters to digitally created ones. African film posters are underrated. Not many people pay attention to them, because we don't know much about them. Their history has a strong connection with African art and the continent's development. However there is a huge difference between black film posters in and outside of the continent. The main reason is the lack of education and interest in art in Africa. Though the art form has changed with time and technological advances. The traditional art is now enriched with computers and digital tools. If we look into the African American film poster history we have to take into account the position of black people and racial stereotypes. Old hand-painted posters depicted black actors, men and women in different roles, and movies since *Oscar Micheaux films*, where Blacks occupy a major role and make up the majority of staff acting.

## 1.2 My first contact with the African film

I have been trying to put my ideas and thoughts together on this subject for a long time. It would be logical to start from the very beginning to understand my point of view and all the things that I will speak upon. I grew up in Brazzaville, the capital city of Congo where my grandmother raised me. I'm really glad that I was able to spend my first nine years of life in Africa for many reasons. A lot of my memories are connected with motion pictures because we used to watch television a lot at home, especially me. I watched everything, from cartoons to TV series and action movies, there is nothing that I can point out, because I loved it all. American action movies featuring actors such as *Silvester Stalone*, *Jean-Claude Van Damme* or *Arnold Schwarznegger* have always been very popular in Africa. That is why theatres were always packed to the capacity, anytime there was a new title. When I say theatres, I'm not actually talking about multiplex or big projection halls. Such things do not exist in Brazzaville. The theatre is a private small house, usually in very bad conditions with a TV set and video player, films are projected at an affordable price 25francs CFA (0,04EU). I have to admit that I was a big fan of it.

As far as African films I remember watching funny sketches and low budget films about everyday life struggles, and traditions in Congo, most notable *Ngadiadia Ngadios* and audio sketches by Nkaba Ndoudi.

The United States has always had a big influence on Africans, the main reason is because a lot of people still think that it is heaven. When someone spoke about America, they never

said anything wrong. So we loved everything that came from there (music, films, fashion, style...). The first Afro American film that I saw was *Malcolm X*, directed by *Spike Lee*. I was 7 back then. I remember I was very thrilled to watch that movie, because it was very popular and often talked about. I think I was the last person who didn't know about *Malcolm X*. After watching it for the first time I felt anger and pity at the same time, but I realized its importance while growing up.

At the age of 9 I moved to my father in Czech republic. So far it is still the biggest change in my life. My father is the person who sparked the interest in African culture, art and films in me. We used to borrow tapes at video shop and watch it together (*Boyz in the hood*, *Panther*, *Do the right thing*). He would notify me everytime there was an African diaspora film on TV. As time went by I started to pay more attention to African film directors, and issues of their films.

### **1.3 Festival de Cine African Tarifa**

Black film continued to influence my work and studies. In 2010 I had won the poster contest for the seventh African film festival in Spain, which challenged African designers from all over the world to create a poster that would celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of independence in Africa. My winning posters showcased leaders that played a big part during independence. While working on this project I began to discover more facts about African history, which I thought I had always known. I was sure that I will continue to study and do researches on this issue, so when it was the time to choose my thesis topic I did not have to think twice.

### **1.4 My researches**

I started by contacting different artists and individuals involved with african culture. I was lucky enough to interview various significant figures, I talked to *NYSYMB LASCONY*, who is a poet, writer, historian, documentarist, and conductor of a jazz orchestra originally from Congo. *Gaetano Gualdo*, an Italian working in the *NGO Al Tarab*, whose main activity is *Tarifa African film festival*, which is the main festival on african cinematography all over Europe. *Nathan Collett* a filmmaker who has shot award winnig films in Africa, *Barbara Muriungi* a motion graphic artist from Kenya and *Gregory Javan Mills* the CEO of the *African-American cinema museum in Harlem, U.S.A.*

The research I conducted also included a 2 week stay in New York City (me and two other students were chosen by my faculty to do research and get as much information as we could about our thesis subjects). I spent most of my time there in *Harlem*, which is the cultural capital of Black America where I visited the *Apollo theatre*, *the African American cinema museum in Harlem*, *Schomburg Center for research in Black Culture and Studio Museum Harlem*. I was warmly welcomed at the *African American cinema museum* by *Gregory Javan Mills* who introduced me to *John Van Means*, an African American artist. I had a wonderful time in his Manhattan studio, where he gave me some of his signed original posters.

I have learned a lot during all my research for this project. My work is based on facts and information, either from interviews I have made, art shows, literature and films.

By watching general mainstream movies I got to the very beginning of filmmaking in different countries. The film industry in Congo, its rise and fall, with the phenomenon of street children. Nigeria and so-called *Nollywood*, which is one of the biggest film productions in the world. Of course, there is a part of my work about filmmaking in United States of America, *Oscar Micheaux*, who is also called the godfather of black film. And the legendary *Spike Lee*.

## 2 CONGO BRAZZAVILLE

### 2.1 Historical overview

The beginnings of filmmaking in Congo was heavily influenced by french colonialists. Formerly known french region of *Middle Congo* became independent in 1960 and became known as the *Republic of the Congo*. After 25 years the marxist regime was replaced by democracy in the early nineties. Unfortunately, coup and civil war in 1997 again raised the Marxist regime of president *Denis Sassou-Nguesso* in this country that continues to reign to this day. [2]



Img. 1 Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza the explorer

### 2.2 Un voyage au Congo

The first prehistoric Congolese film history certainly can be seen in the movie "*Voyage au Congo*". Created by two men, *Marc Allegret* accompanied by *Andre Gide*, the film documented a journey to central Africa. "*Voyage au Congo*" was a silent and *Marc Allegret's* first film, which launched his successful directing career. At that time it was an enlightenment for curious European audience, because there was a first chance to watch a different culture, its tribes, customs, habits and traditions. The film was made without any political reference or controversy. [2]



Img. 2 Scene from the film *Un voyage au Congo*

It was during *André Gide*'s second trip to Africa that he wrote a book that openly criticized the french colonial officers and the way they treated natives. Gide's book offers a deeper look into the organisation of french colonies. This book (*Un voyage au Congo, published 1927*) was pivotal, because it was the first one to state problems of French presence in Africa, other books about Africa at that time were written to glorify or justify the agenda of colonial officers. Although critical of French presence in Africa, *Gide* did not want French to leave the continent, instead he desperately hoped for changes that would make their mission more successful. [2]

### 2.3 La rancon d'une alliance

As Congo declared its independence in 1960's, numerous of documentaries were shot by French filmmakers, without local collaboration. *Yves Alegret* and *Glauber Rocha* were those who produced and directed some of these projects that documented Congo's transition.

The very first filmmaker of a Congolese nationality with a significant name was *Sebastien Kamba*. He shot and produced numerous short films. He was also known for collaborating with French, because most of his films were financed by them. He directed his first feature film in 1973, *La rancon d'une alliance*. This was a key movie not only for Congolese cinematography, but also for the whole continent. It is an adaptation of a historic novel, *La légende de Mfoumou Ma Mazono* by *Jean Malonga*; the author who openly gave a friendly look at the problem of national unity, which was typical for Congolese people back then. The film refers to a fratricidal war among two tribes before colonialism. The story takes place around the tribe of *Tsembo* and *Tsoundi*, their connection is confirmed by the wedding of the son and daughter of the tribe's leaders. But the wife *Hakoula* decides to give herself to a slave, which causes a bloodshed. *Hakoula*'s son later brought peace and



liberated all the slaves. This would undermine the traditions and give rise to a new progressive thinking company. For the first time in African cinema we meet the taboo subject of the slave trade amongst Africans in the pre-colonial period. [3]



*Img. 3 Sebastien Kamba setting the camera*

## **2.4 The 1970's and on**

The period for African cinema would be short lived, most of the cinemas in Brazzaville were sold to religious groups in the 1970's. The majority of the people who were used to French movies in the colonial period had no more opportunities to visit their favourite films in theatres. For the lack of funding, civil war threads and the post-colonial marxist government the film production in Congo was marginal in the eighties. The consistent change of political system every decade depleted most of the financial resources, which slowly made the film industry non existent in subsequent years.

Today there is an absence of national or international film festivals, that offer Congolese cinematography. Private companies quickly started to exploit the youth facing orphanage and poverty by turning the industry into mostly about making money. With a video player and a TV set they offer watching various films, at low price. Usually in a house in bad conditions. Scheduled movies are usually American action films, which are popular for their visual and computer effects, various musicals from the other Congo (Kinshasa) and now porn has become popular. Even youngsters (9-12 years) can get an access to pornographic films. [4]

The transformation of Congolese filmmaking is appalling, because the Congolese film had known masterpieces, which were significant also for African cinema. Films like *La racon d'une alliance* (Sébastien Kamba, 1974), which is one of the first French speaking film director in Africa who adapted novels, other films such as *Mami Wata* (Alain Nkodia, 1970), *Zomba Nkounkou* (Jerome Tsila, 1972), *Matanga* (David Pierre Fila, 1995), *Un pygmee dans la baignoire* and *Doigene a Brazzaville* (Alain Elandre Baker, 1993) give a rich visual history of the Congo's complicated history and culture.

In recent years, despite all the difficulties and complications Congolese filmmakers have started to make a name for themselves. *L'association des cinéastes congolais*, is a non governmental organization, established by the pioneer film director *Sebastien Kamba*. Its goal is to get an approval and the support of the government. Congo does not miss talented young people, and the future could be less evil-looking. In words of *Kamba*: “*There are young people trained in major schools such as Charles Nouma, Therese Batalamio, Roch Ondongo, William Bernard Mbounda or Julio Nzambi, ect..., waiting to be exploited to their full potencial.*” [5]



*Img. 4 The Congolese flag*

## 2.5 Les enfants de la rue / The street children

A SHORT DOCUMENTARY FILM BY ALAIN NKODIA AND NADEGE BANTOU, 2007

*Les enfants de la Rue* is a short documentary film by *Alain Nkodia*, shot with *UPND* (program of *United nations for development*) about the growing phenomenon of street children in the Capital city of Congo, *Brazzaville*.

## 2.6 Ndako Ya Bandeko

*Father Dominico* introduces us to “*Ndako Ya Bandeko*” (*The House of Brothers*“), which is an open house for all orphans and kids who lost their parents in war, and left on their own. This house has been opened for three years, the idea was initiated by *Franciscans* who have been in Congo since 1992. The basic concept was to provide the street children with a place, where they could eat healthy, get education, stay safe from the city danger and most of all open and fill their hearts with love and passion for doing something meaning in their lives. By taking them off the street, *Franciscans* also prepare them for their lives. [6]



*Img. 5 Children in the streets of Brazzaville*

*The House of Brothers* also rents different small houses in Brazzaville for children who are ready to take care of themselves. *Father Dominico*, explains that he had to gain children’s trust. So he would spend several nights, riding around the city with some of his Congolese

friends who would approach children and get to know them. It is important to understand that the House of Brothers is not made just to feed children, even-though kids come and knock on the doors every day, not everybody can get in. The goal is to prepare children for their real life. A lot of children have escaped the House, but some of them come back, because they are committed to learn and change their future. There are also cases when the House has to welcome sick or wounded children, from illnesses or beating up. Unfortunately some kids have to be deported because they are violent sometimes. [6]

## 2.7 Rod Kaba

The story also takes place around a teenager named *Rod*, who had a very tough childhood. Someone had contacted and asked the House to take care of him after his hospitalization. He had leaved in the streets for nearly 5 years, he was immediately accepted to the House for his bad physical condition. Rod had lost his mother and father during the civil war in 1997, so his grandparents took care of him. Because they couldn't afford to take care of him, he ended up in the streets, where he nearly spent two and half years. Despite being in the street he was studying. He was ill seriously, so his right knee was operated at *CHU (Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Brazzaville)*. After the operation Rod couldn't be left in the streets again, therefore he went to the House of Brothers. When he was recovered he felt amongst his brothers, he was not a trouble making kid. He reads a lot, because the center subscribes to various newspapers. Rod no longer lives in *The House of Brothers*, he is one of those children who live in a rented house and takes care of themselves. There is actually a trainer who helps them to organize their earnings for weekly food, so they work to eat. One of the young men confesses, that he could eat everything in the center, but now they are putted to a test, if they can feed themselves. He makes small wood statues, and sales them to have something to eat. Rod says that, despite sorrow and hardships he was never desperate. That is what made him write a letter to Brazzaville's mayor, where he asked him for financing his studies. Even though he was young, the mayor *Hughes Ngoulondede* and his Director of cabinet envited him to their office, after reading his letters. Rod told them his life story and they helped him and are still paying for his studies and health. Rod wrote a book in which he speaks upon poverty in Africa, the growing phenomenon of street children, orphans and his life. There will be two parts of the book, He says, the book will be published as soon as there is someone who is interested in his project. This teenager spends a lot of time by reading and studying Congolese novel-

ists and other authors to enrich his grammar, vocabulary and spelling. As he suffers from sickle cell anemia and diabetes, it was very hard for him to eat, while living in the streets. A strict diet that he could not easily afford was needed. This caused repeated fevers due to infection of his knee. He could not go to school, and practically was not able to walk. So he got himself to Brazzaville University Hospital, where they kept him in pediatric center, where he was treated. Despite his very bad health condition he spent six months in the hospital. *Rod* spent a month and half in coma, he could not speak. But sisters and other members of the hospital staff supported him. They even spent nights with him, because he was on his own. His health slows him down, so he has to be careful with physical activity. There are a lot of children that have been deported from the *House of Brothers* for different reasons, the reality is that they are back in the streets facing the tough reality. These kids are 6-18 years. *Father Dominico* says that it is impossible to approach them, because they don't consider themselves as human beings, they treat each other like animals. They have to face different types of drugs, violence and sexual abuse from older children. There are two groups of street kids, those from Democratic Republic and Congo (former Zaire) and Congo, Brazzaville. Sometimes a war can spark between those two camps. *Rod's* dream is to go to university and later become a doctor, because himself knows what it is like to be seriously ill. [6]



Img. 6 *Ndako Ya Bandeko* "The House of Brothers"

## 2.8 Interview with NYSYMB Lascony

*Thank you for your time Lascony, could you introduce yourself please?*

My name is *Ngombulu Ya sangui Ya Mina Bantu* (which is in Kongo, it means the lion of the jungle which consumed the poachers). *Lascony* (is my middle name).

I'm a poet, writer, documentarist, historian and conductor of a jazz orchestra originally from Congo Brazzaville.

*Are you familiar with the African and diaspora cinematography?*

Absolutely! There are a few films that strucked me, such as "*Yaaba*" by *Idrissa Ouedraogo* (Burkina Fasso); "*Sankofa*" by *Haile Geremi* (Ethiopia); "*Camp Thiaroye*" by the Senegalese director *Ousmane Sembene*, and many others. But I admit, that I was more influenced by African-American directors like *Spike Lee*, the *Hughes Brothers* and *Mario Van Peebles*. African filmmakers do not have enough material and financial resources, otherwise they would make films like their European or African American colleagues. For example I saw a Nigerian film (on DVD) that really touched me "*The Price*", which I don't know the director. It is a very good film that evokes a current reality in Africa. It is the story of a father who spends lavishly money, without thinking about his newlywed and his own children.

*Do you have a favorite African film director?*

Oh! It is hard to choose one, they are so many. The ones I just mentioned are among my favorite, but I could add other names like *Euzhan Palcy*, an Afro-Caribbean director from *Martinique*. She has made two films "*Rue case negre*" and "*Une saison blanche et seche*". Honestly, I find it difficult to choose one name. All have done very good films.

*Do European and Hollywood films have influence on African films? Are they completely different and independent?*

Necessarily, but only in certain points of view, because Northern countries have the technology. In contrast, African directors often deal with subjects that reflects their own reality. There is nearly no fiction in African cinema. If we take the example of Nigeria, which is the third largest film producer after India and the United States, we can realize that many films deal with the subject of witchcraft (juju), a subject that American and European filmmakers almost never deal with. Though those of India do.

*What are African films mostly about? What genres are filmed the most?*

It is hard to answer your question, because I haven't seen all African films, so I have just a subjective answer. Filmed subject are various, even though the stories are often about society. For example the film "*Sankofa*" tells a story about African deportation to the new world during the transatlantic slave trade. While the film "*Camp de Thiaroye*" tells a story of the massacre of African Infantrymen, who revolted in Senegal because of a broken promise by the French government on 1 December 1944, after The Second World War.

African filmmakers have achieved a lot. Despite their low budgets, they get to make films of good qualities. If African states have a financial help of Ministry of culture, they could make big films with costumes. The actors, costumes, plates and decorations take most of the budget. Fortunately most African films are not shot in the studio, otherwise it would be a disaster for producers. Nature is there to compensate the lack supply of money.

*Afro- American films deal often with civil rights movements and figures against racism and segregation. There were also a lot of African leaders against racism, figures who fought for independence. Is there any African film, which deals with this subject?*

There are probably such films, but I have never heard of them. Though there are films dedicated to popular African figures like *Nelson Mandela* and *Patrice Lumumba*, which were shot by diaspora directors, for example *Lumumba*, by *Raoul Peck – Haitian filmmaker*).

*Do you pay attention to film posters?*

Indeed. Posters are important for the advertisement of the film. When a poster is done correctly, it catches people's attention. It's like a perfume package, it has to be nice before we open it.

*Do you have any or multiple favorite film posters?*

I like the one for "*Mo' better blues*" by *Spike Lee*.

*Do you consider movie posters as a masterpiece?*

Absolutely, because certain film posters are a part of some museums and some are even collectibles. There is nothing better than an old film poster. A big art show took place in *Musée du Quai Branly in Paris* last summer, it was an exhibition of old jazz posters. There were also posters of old jazz films like "*New Orleans*" and "*Cabin in the sky*". This was a great opportunity for all the viewers unfamiliar with jazz posters to see those masterpieces together, with their actors and filmmakers.

*I've seen lately an exhibition of Ghanaian film posters. It really surprised me, could you tell me something about the African film poster?*

I know very little about the history of African film posters. We can suggest that poster's bright days were during installation of the first printing houses, most of them belonged to the parishes of missionaries. Moreover, older films have been made in Africa by missionaries. In this case we talk about documentary films, nothing else was shot.

*I think that African film posters are completely different, comparing to Europe or America. Because most of the African film posters which I have seen were hand made.*

*I have studied graphic design and illustration for almost six years now and most of the posters that I have seen here in Europe were created digitally. But this has changed with time, because the very first film posters were paintings...It is rare to see this kind of European or American film poster nowadays.*

Indeed, with computers posters are no longer crafted in art studios. Now it is the designers who have the last word.

*Do you know any or multiple African film poster?*

Honestly I don't know. Frankly I am not really a fan of cinema. I prefer to watch documentaries, because I prefer reality from fiction.

*I understand your point of view. Though where is the difference between African and occidental art? What stories does African art tell in any field (painting, sculpture, photography, cinema)?*

Every art is a reflection of a civilization. For example, some African masks are scarred, yet the scars are signs of specific ethnic groups in Africa, so it has no reason to appear in European art. We find many scenes of everyday life in painting, there are more landscape painting in Africa than in Europe. African artists often like to replicate what they see every day. The arts are different, but can influence each other.

*Colonialism has terribly changed Africa, does this change also relate to African art?*

Yes, to the extent that Africans have been formed in the colonial language, although Africa has retained its soul. The European influence in some of our arts is undeniable. There are many African illustrators who studied in European fine arts schools.

*What is the future of African art?*



African art has a bright future, since it is exported so well. Today many African artists are experiencing a worldwide success, whether in music, sculpture or painting. The *Youssou Ndour*, *Salif Keita*, *Lokua Kanza*, *Tiken Jah Fakoly* play on the biggest stages in the world; painters like *Chery Samba* have been invited to exhibit their works at the *Venice Biennale*; *Ousmane Sow* has even showcased his work in Japan. African art, once considered primitive was later accepted naturally. The evidence can be challenged.

*Thank you very much for your time Lascony, good luck with your researches and take care.*

Thank you, good luck with your work too. Brotherly.

## 3 NIGERIA

### 3.1 Thoughts on Nollywood

*Nollywood* is the Nigerian film industry, which is also the third biggest film industry in the world. After *Hollywood* and *India's Bollywood*. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, the capital city Lagos has 16 million of people, the heart of movie market is *Sule*; a street situated in the center of the city, where the film industry began in the early nineties. We find a lot of studios here, where films are produced on a shoe-string budget of money and time; the production of a movie takes approximately ten days and the budget is around 15.000USD. After rising insecurity and criminality in the late eighties people in Lagos would not stay on the streets after dark; this led to poor visit of theatres which would close most of the cinemas in the city. Foreign films were not so popular, so this would be the first opportunity for Nigerian filmmakers to create films of their own. The basic idea of this industry is to prove that nothing is impossible despite hardships and obstacles. The originality and director's approach on each film is very diverse and unique at the same time. We have to understand that Nigerians make films in their own way no matter of the money involved in each project. Whether if it is an action film, comedy, drama, romance viewers are always satisfied, because they can relate to what they are watching. There are more positive things about this phenomenon, because it has opened a lot of new working opportunities for editors, musicians, actors, producers and post production companies. Through the difficult beginnings with poor image or sound, filmmakers today keep path with latest technology. Most recent projects are being filmed in high definition. Finished motion pictures are distributed on VCD discs and DVD. *Nollywood* actors have become household names even outside of Nigeria, their features are now recognized amongst international filmmakers and African diaspora, in Europe and America. [7]

### 3.2 Production

There are 50-60 movies released each week. In Lagos alone there are 5000 registered actors, over 1000 movies are produced a year, and the movie industry has a money return of over 800.000.000 naira. A blockbuster can sell up to 200.000 copies. Films are mostly distributed on DVD, it is believed that *Nollywood* is controlled by marketers and distributors.

*Ralph Nwadike* is a legend in *Nollywood* with more than 40 films under his direction, he is the owner of the biggest studio with a large and expensive equipment (worth 1.500.000 naira). He is considered to be the best director in the country. His film “*ARMAGEDDEON KING*” is one of the most expensive films in the motion picture industry, it cost more than 300.000 naira and it took more than three weeks to shoot. Another most expensive film produced in *Nollywood* is “*KING OF THE JUNGLE*”; a true life story interpreted by different characters. With the budget of 140.000 USD, featuring one of the biggest film stars, if not the biggest *Hank Anuku*. A 47 year old son of a former cabinet minister. He has played in more than 60-70 movies, he doesn't exactly remember himself. He is also one of the highest paid actors in the Nigerian movie industry. Hank has lived and worked in Europe and the United States for many years, he represents the type of a “Hollywood star” with a huge collection of cars and bikes. The undisputed Queen of the film industry is *Stephanie Okoreke* who has starred in more than 90 films. Stephanie has graduated from the University of Calabar with a degree in English and Literary studies, though she crowned her studies in New York Film Academy in 2007. She has directed several motion pictures, the most significant is “*TROUGH THE GLASS*” which received an *African Movie Award for Best screenplay* in 2009. Stephanie has also won other awards such as; *Best actress in “What a year award”* 2003; *Outstanding actress in “Afro Dublin Actress”* 2004; *Award For Excellence in “Film Makers of Nigeria”*; *Best Actress in “Afro Hollywood Award”* 2006 and many more. Glamour and luxury is a part of her life as well with earns of 800.000 naira per movie. [8]

*Inogu* is the second most important place of the Nigerian film industry; a south state capital in south eastern Nigeria. Many movies are produced over there, including “*Deceit of the Gods*” which is an epic; directed by a former actress *Chinny Ahaneku* (this is actually the director's second feature, because her first film was forged and sold to investors without her permission). This film tells us a story about the forest in *Inogu* state and the mysterious sacrificial deaths of twins and children, which are caused by the King and his evil priest. We meet the white colonial priest who converts the King into Christianity. Which led to the abolishment of sacrificial practices and the defeat of the evil priest and the bad King. This story is situated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The budget was 120.000 naira (20.000 USD), which was collected and raised by director's family and closest friends. Although the goal of this project was not a big blockbuster, it is more about making history. The cast crew of

the movie had 120 people, including hairstylists and make-up artists. Some young talented actors and actresses made their debuts on the set of this movie. [8]

### 3.3 Interview with Gaetano Gualdo

*Thank you for your time Gaetano, could you introduce yourself please?*

I'm an Italian man living and working in Spain since 2003. In 2006 I started to work in the NGO *Al Tarab*, whose main activity is *the Tarifa African Film Festival*, probably the main Film Festival on African cinematography all over Europe

*Are you familiar with the African and diaspora cinematography?*

Yes because I work daily on this kind of cinema.

*Do you have a favorite African film director?*

I don't think I have a favourite African director, but I can say there're some African movies I would recommend to everybody. Among others: „*Imani*“, „*Daratt*“, „*Drum*“, „*Rêves de poussière*“, „*L'enfant endormi*“, „*Ezra*“, „*Teza*“, etc. Moreover, we don't have to forget the former movie directors works such as: „*Tilai*“, „*Touki Bouki*“, „*La noir de...*“

*Do European and Hollywood films have influence on African films? Are they completely different and independent?*

The influence of American and European cinema is pretty evident, even if in different levels. For example, in former times France had a deep influence on the movie productions of francophone African countries, on one hand because movies were coproduces by France and on the other hand because of cultural influences. Other kind of influences we can find in most recent East African productions, were American influence is playing an important role on the production and realization of several movies.

*What are African films mostly about? What genres are filmed the most?*

I don't think we should speak about one kind of African movies. We don't have to forget that we're speaking about a whole continent, where a huge quantity cultures and traditions, even inside the same country. For sure this richness is mirrored in African films, so we can find a wide range of genres, from comedy to drama, from rural environment to urban space, from story of children to old people, etc.

*Do you pay attention to film posters?*

Yes, normally I pay attention to it. I don't say that a poster can bring me to go to see a movie, but sometimes it can help to take a decision.

*Do you have any or multiple favorite film posters?*

No, I don't

*What is the purpose of a movie poster, how do you look at it?*

The photo is very important; the producer has to decide a good photograph or a serial of photos that can tell to me something. Actually I prefer simple poster, maybe with a phrase that can get in touch with my deepest sensations.

*Do you consider movie posters as a masterpiece?*

Sometimes it can be a masterpiece but I don't consider movie posters in general as a masterpiece

*What about African film posters, have you ever seen any?*

Yes, because of my work I saw several African film posters.

*What does an African film poster look like?*

It depends, sometimes it's a poster that can work and give a message to the audience, in other case is something made without any objectives. For example I could say that "Imani" poster isn't a masterpiece, but it works perfectly because in one image and with few words is able to tell you what the movie is about. Moreover, I think intelligent to add the awards this movie won in different world Festivals, this is something that most of the time miss in African film poster.

*Thank you very much for this interview Gaetano.*

## 4 GHANA

### 4.1 Train Kino

The packaging is one of the most important aspect of our everyday life. When we buy a new perfume, electronic device, or even food we are usually more interested into the look of the package. Sometimes the content does not matter. It is actually the same principle with movie market. We get excited when we see a group of famous actors in the same movie (also on the same poster), which helps producers to push, promote and profit from the investment. The film's success is not based on the filmmaker, but rather on the faces and names showcased on the advertisement. During the 1930's a filmmaker named *Alexander Medvedkine* used to travel in train around the *Soviet Union* to produce films about everything he saw. This means that he shot, edited and screened live; it helped various countries and cultures to learn about each other (*Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Latvians, Russians, Turkmen and Armenians*). *Alexander Medvedkine* is the inventor of the *moving cinema*. [9]

### 4.2 Ups and downs, smiles and frowns

Since the very beginning of the 1980's most of the video clubs in Ghanian towns (*Accra and Kumasi*) followed a path of the *moving cinema*. Even if the content of the broadcasted movies were not exactly linked to African life, the screening brought people together anyway. Film posters in Ghana follow two rules, a great visual sells and you have to go directly to the public if you want more viewers. These pieces were produced for travelling cinemas, which moved through several cities and towns in Ghana. They usually consisted of a TV, VCR player, an electrical generator and a car. Featured films usually presented famous movie superstars, so the name of the director was not so important. Each poster had to create an excitement and desire to see the movie. So artists would create images by mixing action superheroes, monsters, sexy and attractive women, which were hand painted with distorted African landscapes. Most of the posters showed scenes or images that were not in the movie, just to attract people. This move was very smart and successful. Though the film poster market had been through ups and downs. The late 80's and early 90's were the most successful times, the business was situated in two major towns, Accra and Kumasi. There were more than 40 video clubs, where people could rent VHS cassettes. [9]

### 4.3 Hand painted vs Printed

This continued till the late 90's, when the business dropped for many reasons. With the improvement of financial situation people could afford VCD players and color televisions, this led to the bankrupt of the majority of cinema clubs. In the early 2000's the business became huge again in small cities and towns. People could now afford to go to the cinema. Before 99% of the business was in bigger cities (*Accra, Kumasi*), now 90% took place in those small villages. The economic situation there is not great, but people can afford to go and get a cinema ticket that costs approximately 2 euro cents. Despite the low price cinema operators are able to profit from projected films from morning to night. The mobile generator is always there, if there is no electricity. These mobile cinemas are supplied by promotional posters from major video clubs. Hand painted posters have managed to take over the film advertisement, because of many reason. First of all there are no poster prints for international movies in Ghana; the second reason is that the color of hand painted posters is much brighter and vibrant than paper posters. Cinema operators are taught how to handle film posters, because they used to simply pin them on the wall; which would cause their damage and short life. As long as the poster looks nice, it is kept as an advertisement for a particular film, but as soon as it starts to look old it is automatically sold and replaced by a new one. A poster can survive from 2 to 5 years, it depends on its conditions. [9]

### 4.4 Interview with Nathan Collett

*Thank you for your time Nathan, could you introduce yourself please?*

I'm a filmmaker and I've shot several award winning films in Africa. Also started a film school in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya.

*Are you familiar with the African and diaspora cinematography?*

Yes.

*Do you have a favorite African film or film director?*

Tsotsi is my favourite African film. I like south African films in general because of their focus on quality and good storytelling.

*Do European and Hollywood films have influence on African films? Are they completely different and independent?*

Yes, European films strongly influence west African films. Hollywood not as much, but

has influenced South African films more.

*What are African films mostly about? What genres are filmed the most?*

Quantity is Nigeria but most are poorly done. But best is South Africa and the genre is usually *HIV/Aids* or development and some crime films

*Do you pay attention to film posters?*

Yes

*Do you have any or multiple favorite film posters?*

*City of god*

*Elite squad*

*Tsotsi*

*What is the purpose of a movie poster, how do you look at it?*

To tell the story

To capture the imagination of audience

To sell the film

*Do you consider movie posters as a masterpiece?*

I consider them art yes.

*What about African film posters, have you ever seen any?*

Yes

*What does an African film poster look like?*

Bad! Poorly done. Poorly executed, low quality.... Sad but true

*Do you have other thoughts on the African cinema? Its future?*

I think its an interesting time for Africa cinema. I see alot of positive developments, using new technologies and reducing costs, to tell more authentic and creative stories. Moving away from donor dependant films... yet there is also proliferation of low quality films of confusion in the market place. and a fragmented marketplace, not one big 'african market'.. its more like you speak of west african films, south african, north african, and some east African. ... the power of U.S. and some European films is that they reach larger audiences. Africa is more fragmented. So that realiance on outside help also creates a problem. W/O a good market, its hard to be sustainable.

Yet now there is more interest in African film and we hope that can lead somewhere.

I'd hope that there be more investment, interest and development of the artistic elements of the film. And more put into web campaigns, quality posters, and so forth. In the end,

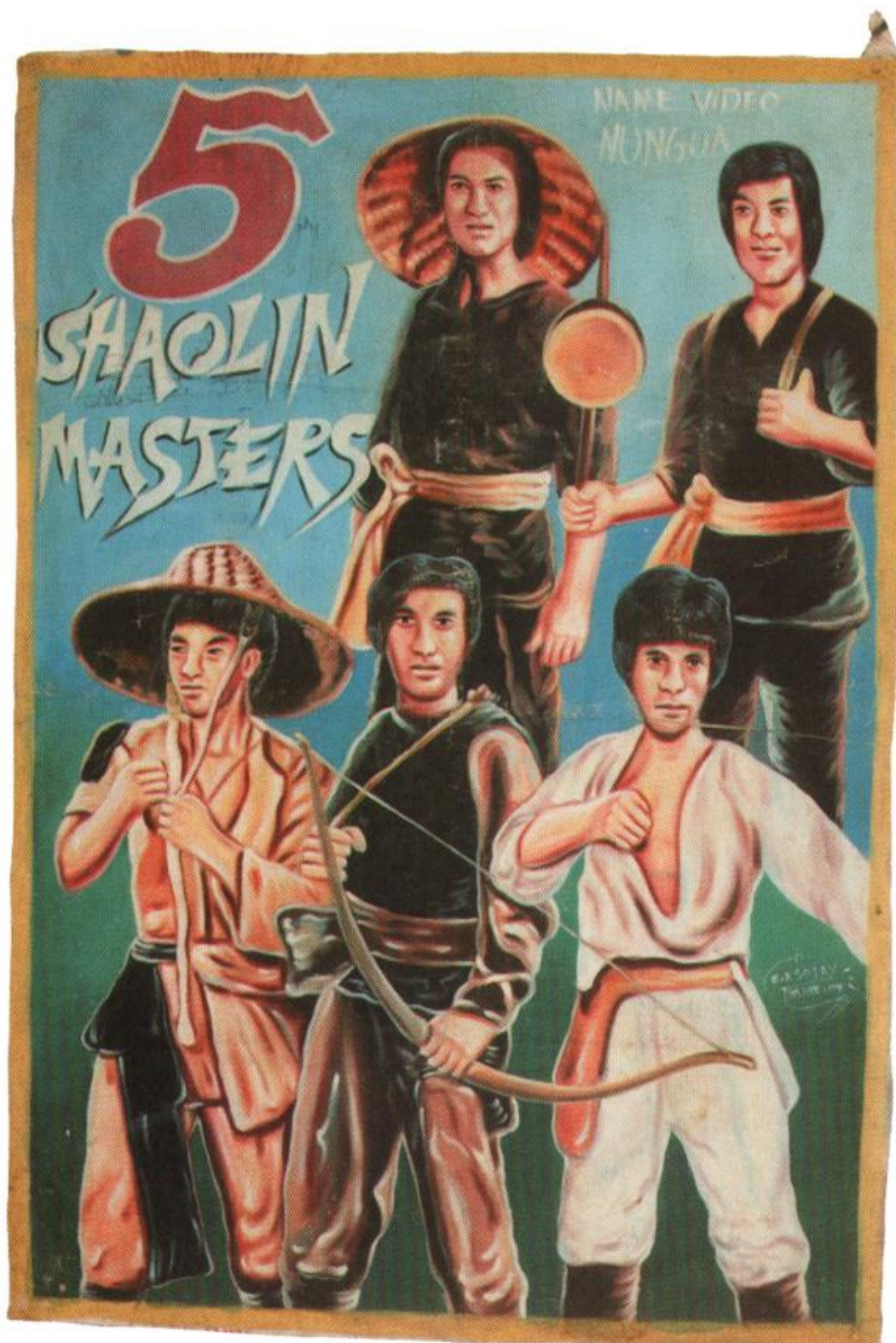


though, the audiences will be the most crucial point... if they watch the films, they can keep being made!

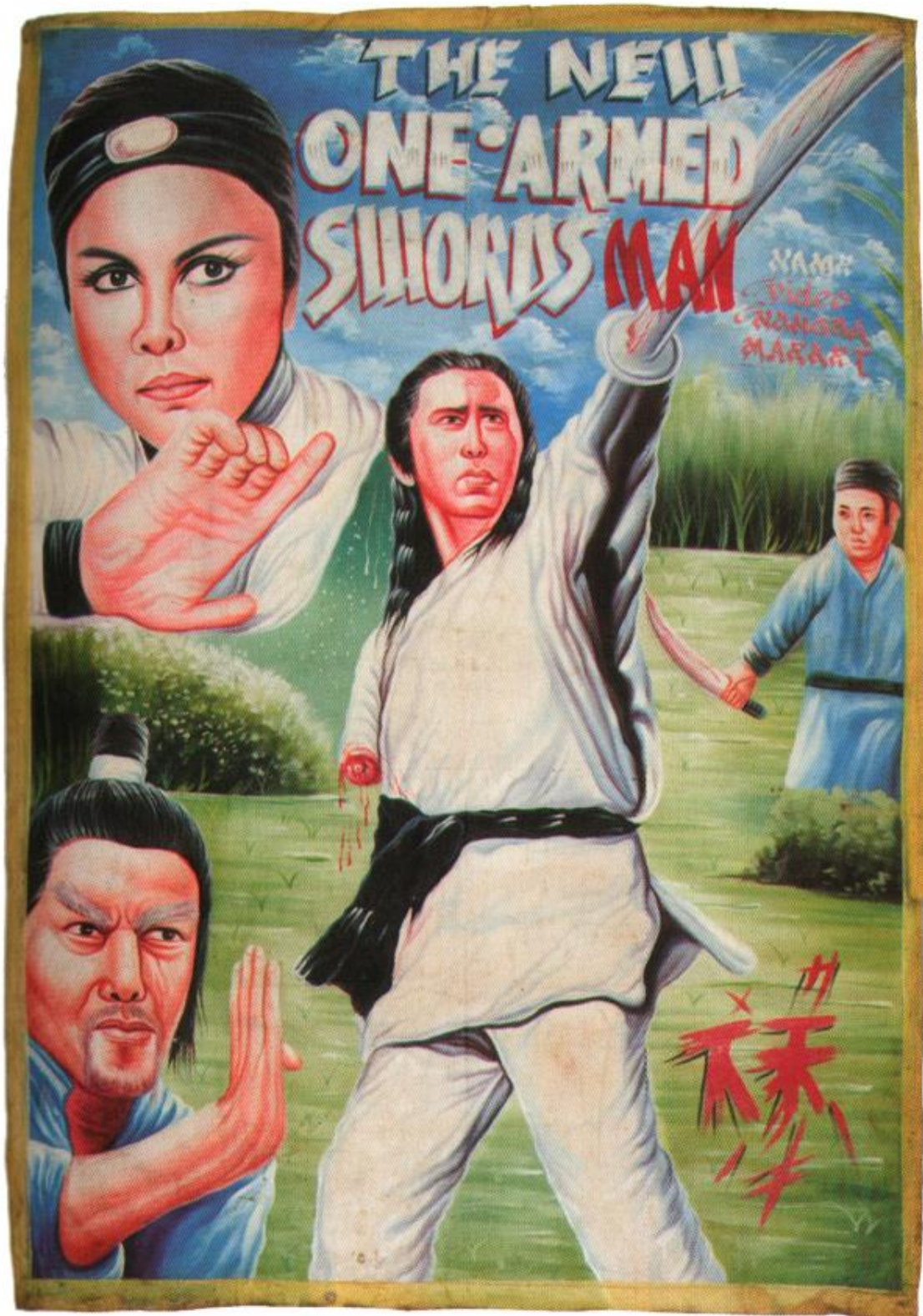
*Thank you very much for your time.*



*Img. 7 5 Shaolin Masters, painted by Stogers*



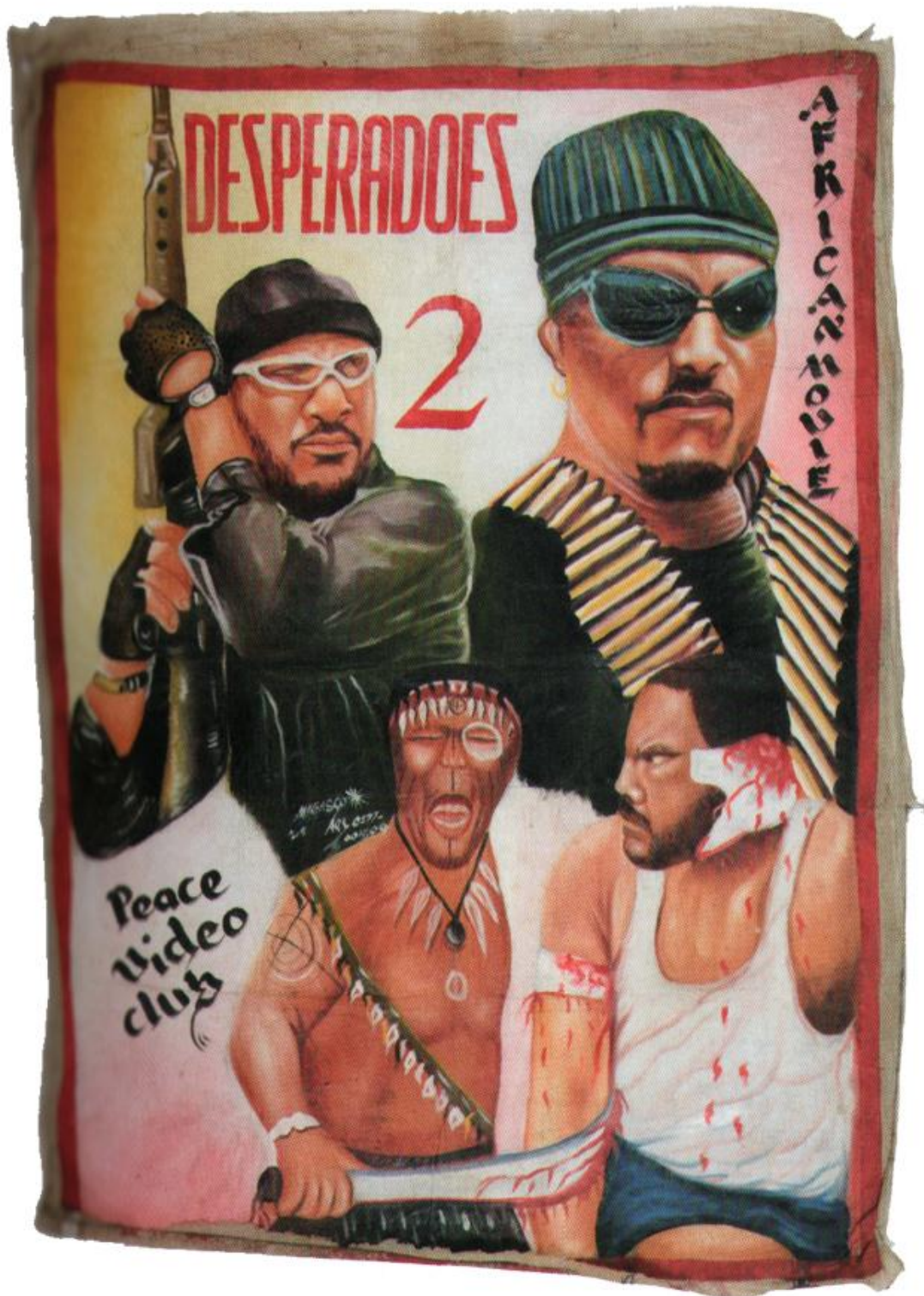
*Img. 8 5 Shaolin Masters, painted by Stogers*



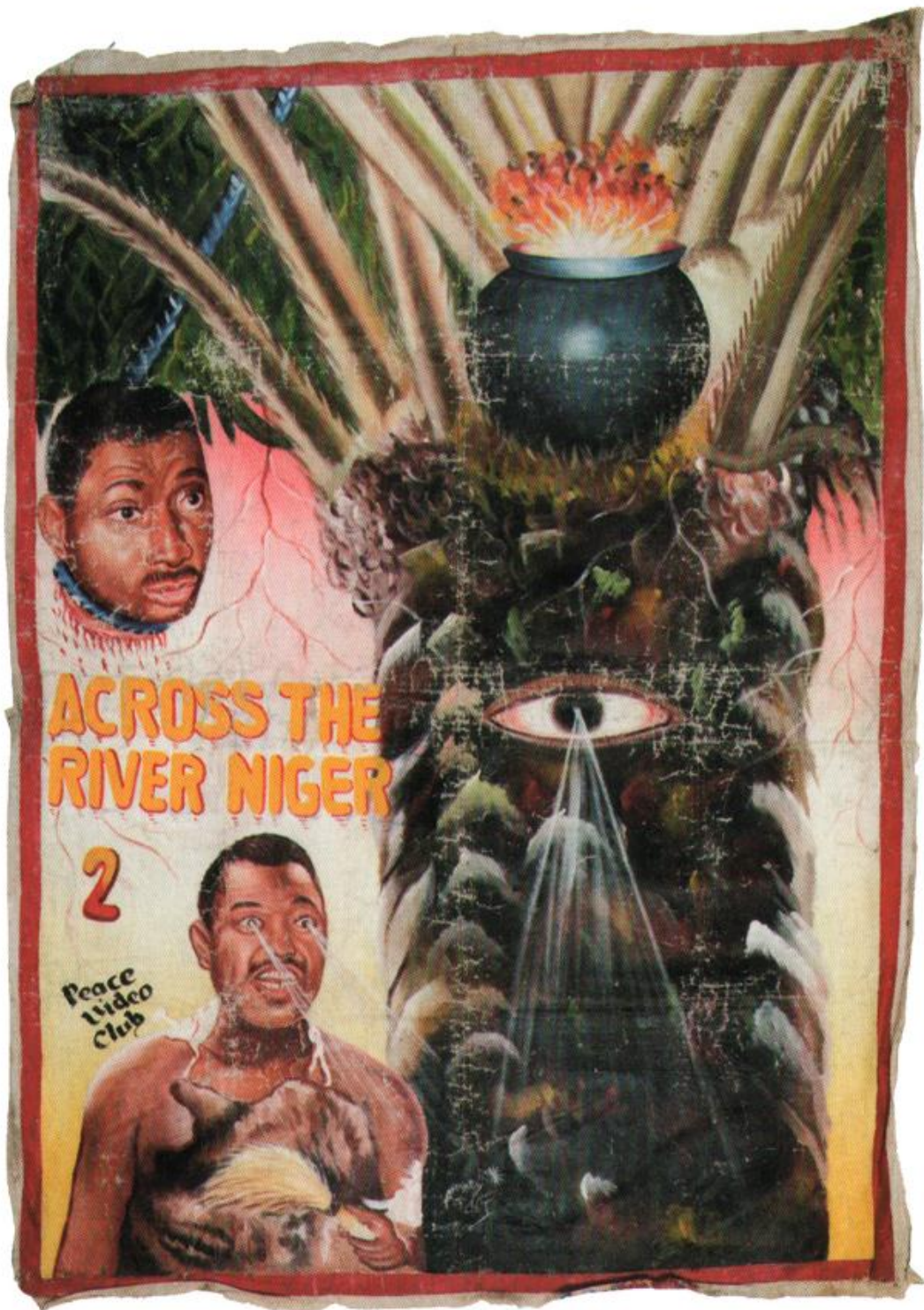
Img. 9 Shaolin The New One Armed Swords man, painted by Stogers



Img. 10 Master Der of Shaolin, painted by Stogers



*Img. 11 Desperadoes 2, painted by Stogers*



*Img. 12 Across The River Niger, painted by Stogers*

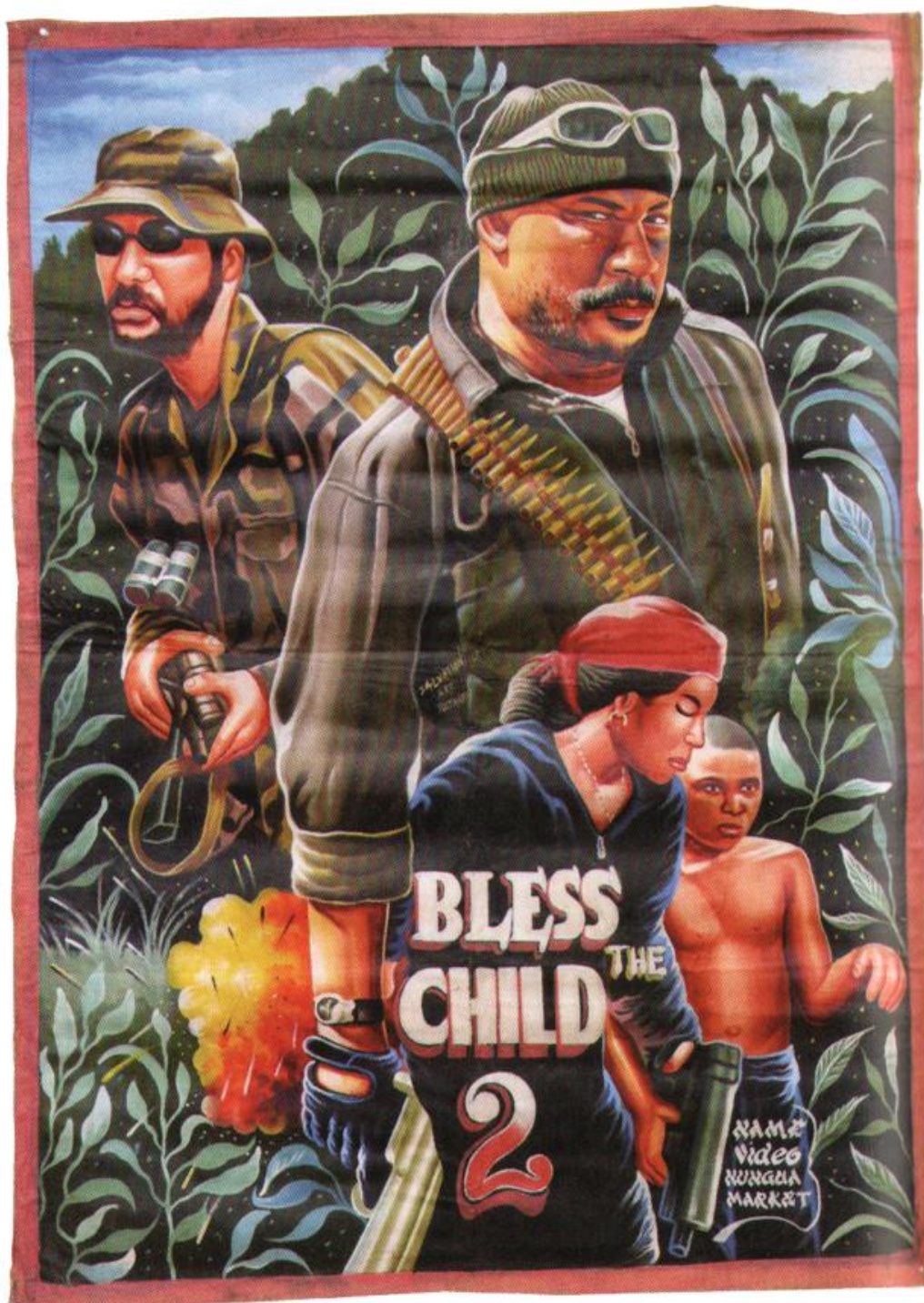


*Img. 13 Desperate Billionaires 2, painted by Stogers*

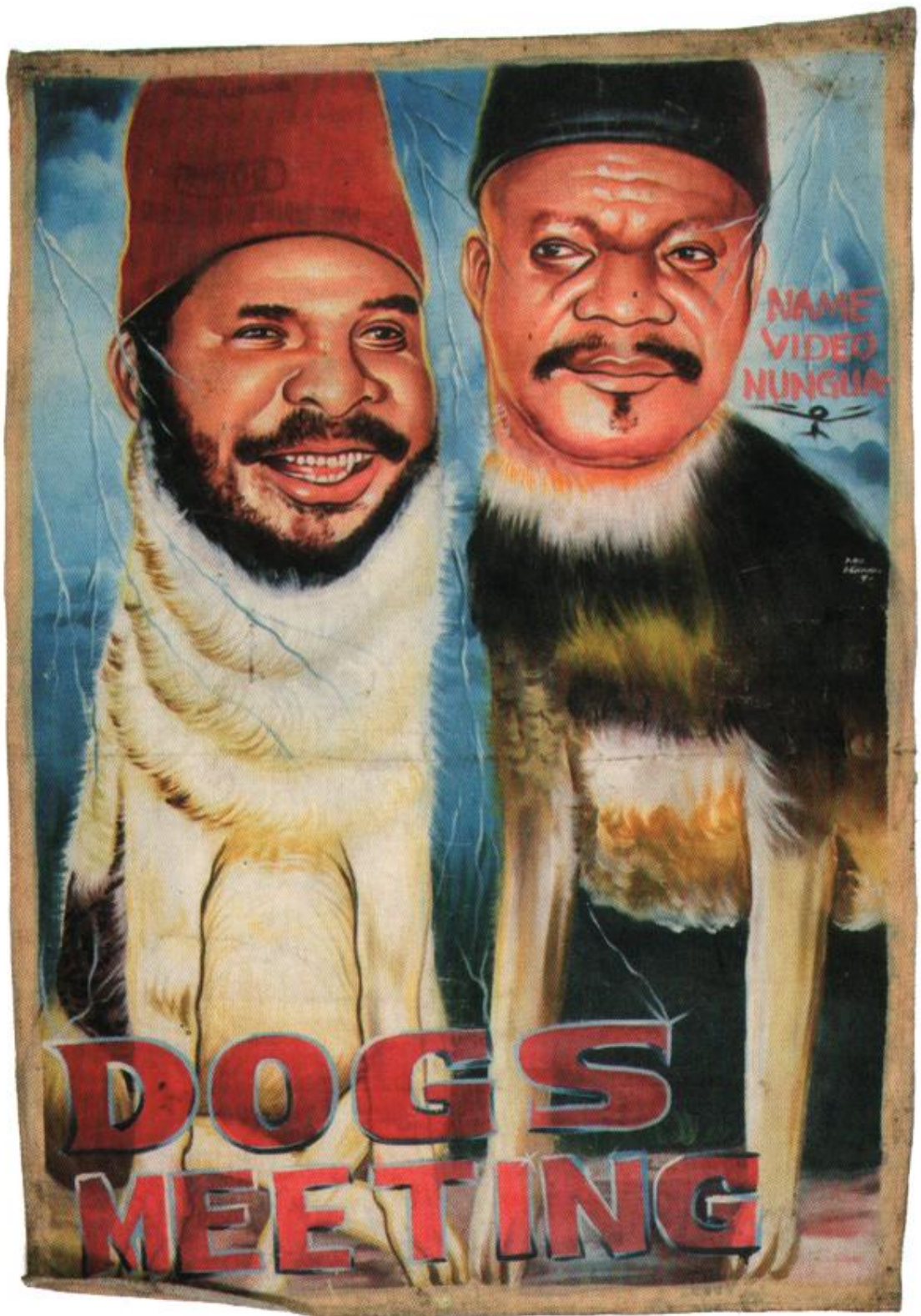


*Img. 14 Bless The Child, painted by Stogers*

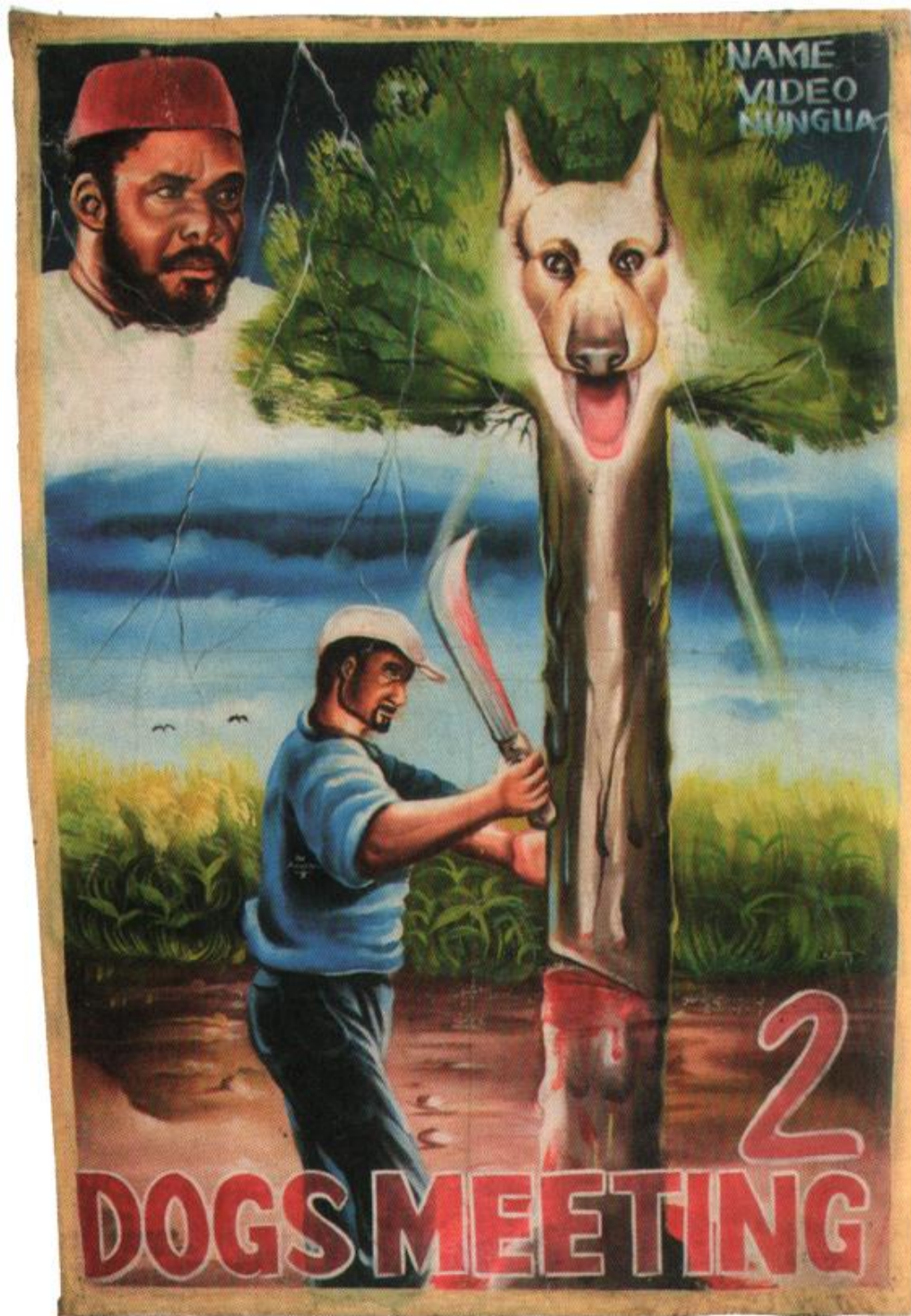




*Img. 15 Bless The Child 2, painted by Stogers*



*Img. 16 Dogs Meeting, painted by Stogers*



*Img. 17 Dogs Meetings 2, painted by Stogers*

## 5 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### 5.1 Oscar Micheaux

#### 5.1.1 Early life

He was born in 1884 in Metropolis, Illinois. He was the fifth of 13 children of parents *Calvin S. Michaux* (who had been a slave) and *Belle Michaux*. At the time when he was a kid African Americans in America had difficulties to succeed in a world ruled by Whites. His parents wanted him to have a good education, therefore they moved to find a city with better schooling system. *Micheaux* was lucky enough to attend a well-established school, but soon his family got into financial problems; which made them move back to the farm. This caused several problems with his consciousness, because he became rebellious. Which had caused another problems for his family. His father was not really happy with him, therefore he sent him away to do marketing in the big city. He had various occupations before becoming a filmmaker; *Micheaux* worked as a coal miner, stockyards man and pullman porter (which was a prestigious job for African Americans back in the day, as it was well paid) before becoming a homesteader in Gregory, South Dakota. This experience influenced his later novels. Most of his neighbors were all white. While farming he would write articles, which were later published in *The Chicago Defender*. [10]



*Img. 18 Oscar Micheaux*

### 5.1.2 Marriage

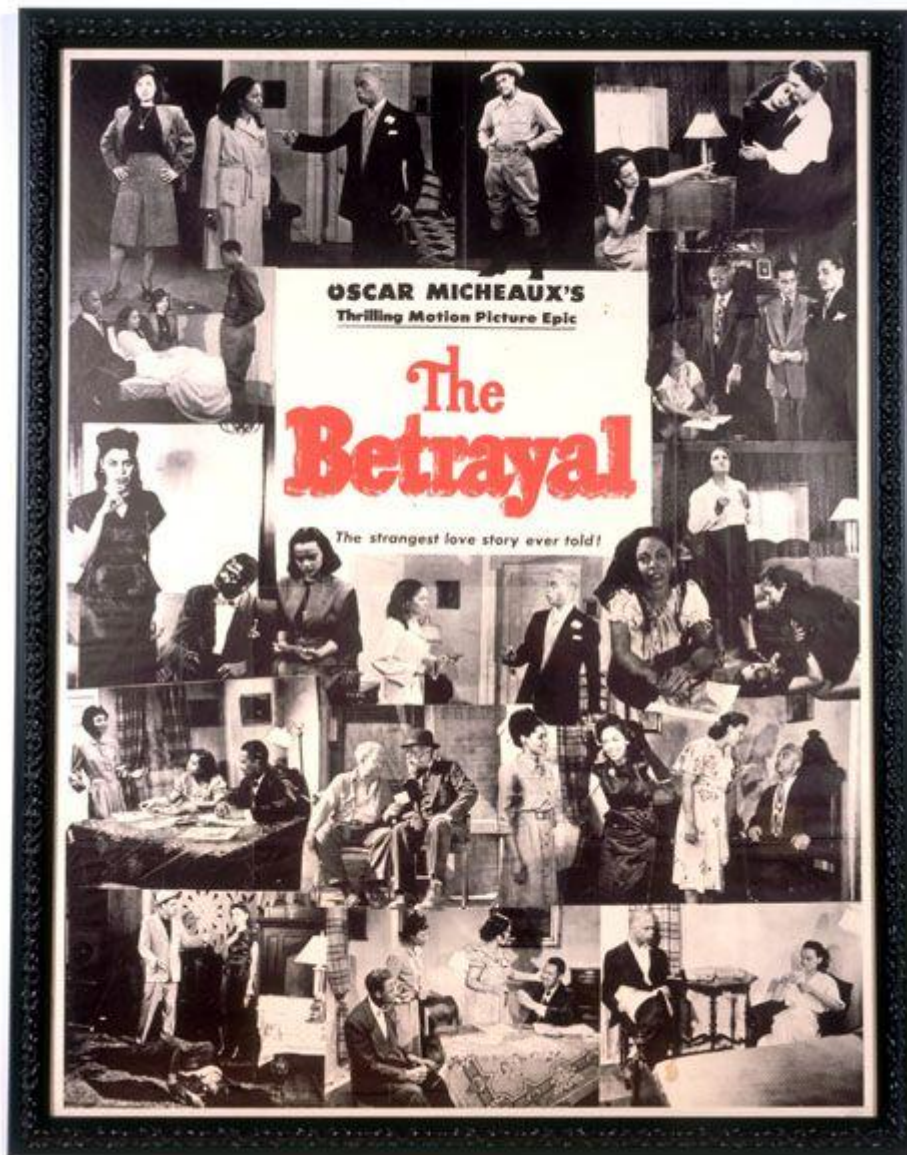
He nearly lost all of his money he had saved, while working as a pullman porter and a farmer during his unsuccessful marriage with *Orlean McCracken*. This was the first time he started to seriously think about becoming a writer, novelist and filmmaker later. [10]

### 5.1.3 Novelist, writer, filmmaker

*Micheaux's* first book was titled *The Conquest: The story of a Negro homesteader*, released in 1913. It was published anonymously and he changed characters names, the protagonist was called Oscar *Devereaux*; the book was based on his life as a homesteader, the failure of his first marriage, which was a autobiography of his early life.

He also touches on subjects of African American realizing their potential of being independent and successfully working in fields where access was previously denied.

*Micheaux's* first film called *Homesteader* was an adaptation of his book *The Conquest*. It received a critical and commercial success, which gained him a wider recognition. He provoked audiences and critics by touching racial issues of that time in many his movies. Oscar Micheaux found *The Micheaux Film Corporation*, located in Harlem, New York. It was the very first independent film company owned by blacks, which produced so-called "race movies". The company was founded in Chicago in 1918 as the *Micheaux Film And Book Company Corporation*. Between 1919 and 1940 *Micheaux* had produced over 30 films in which he touched on a variety of subjects, among them: racism and stereotypes in America and life in African American community. *Micheaux's* films offered a wide look at black life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, his themes reflect such issues as racial solidarity, assimilation and politics of skin color. Unfortunately most of *Micheaux's* films are still lost to us. His second film *Within Our Gates* was discovered in Spain after being lost for over 75 years. It is believed that this film is an answer to *D.W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation* (a core movie of the American cinematography, which is highly controversial for its portrayal of African Americans; Blacks were played by white actors in blackface as unintelligent people, sexually aggressive toward white women. The *Ku Klux Klan* is presented as an heroic force). [10]

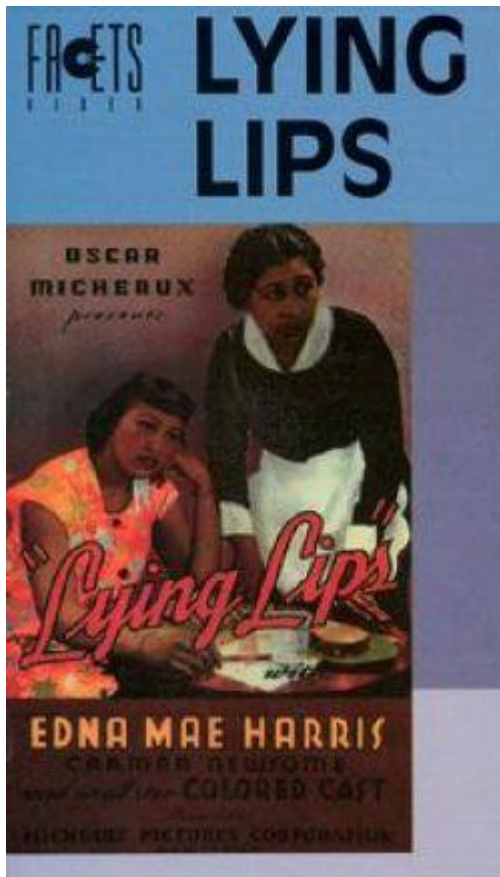


*Img. 18 The Betrayal*

#### **5.1.4 Legacy**

*Micheaux* is often criticized for presenting a class system based on color in his movies. The most affluent and successful Blacks in his films are the light skinned with straight hair, this also appears on film posters. Some critics suggest, these light skinned actors were playing leading roles in his films to appeal white audiences to his films. Micheaux fashioned the black cinema and black star system, that set the prototype for the independent African American cinema. He gave black actors roles, which were very different from Hollywood stereotypes of servants and other menial roles. Micheaux made silent and

sound films, which makes him a unique director, because not many other African American film directors made it through this transitional era in American cinema. [10]



Img. 19 Lying Lips



Img. 20 God's Step Children



Img. 21 The Girl From Chicago



Img. 22 The Exile



## 5.2 Spike Lee

### 5.2.1 Early life

He was born in Atlanta in 1957, his real name is *Shelton Jackson Lee*, the name “*Spike*” was given to him by his mother *Jacqueline Carol* (born *Shelton*), who was a teacher of arts and African American literature. His father was a jazz musician. The name Spike was a reference to his tough nature. *Lee* moved to New York with his family when he was a small child; he attended John Dewey High school in Brooklyn, where his production company 40 acres and Mule is also situated. Later he went to Morehouse College in Atlanta Georgia, where he made his very first student film, *Last Hustle in Brooklyn*. He graduated with a bachelor degree in mass communication. *Lee* finished his studies in New York’s Universities Tisch School of Arts, where he earned a Master degree in Fine Arts, film and television. His thesis film was titled *Joe’s Bed-stuy Barbershop: We cut heads*, it won a student academy award, and it was featured at Lincoln Center’s New Directors New Film Festival. [11]

### 5.2.2 She’s gotta have it

Winning a student academy award got *Lee* an agent, unfortunately their relationship did not last very long; because of misunderstandings between those two. *Lee* decided to write his own scripts and make his own independent movies. One of those films was *The Messenger*, which was a flop. This almost led to a decision to end his career of filmmaking. But he picked himself up and made another independent movie to prove his qualities. This film was called *She’s Gotta Have It*. The film’s budget was 125.000 USD, Though it went on to make 7.000.000 USD at U.S. box office. [11]

The film tells us a story of an African American woman *Noly Darling* from Brooklyn New York, who is in relationship with three men at the same time. It presents a sexually free black woman, which is a huge difference from *Blackploitation* movies, that were dominant in the 1970’s and 1980’s in African American communities; they featured black females as inferior beings. The main character was a strong black male with several women around.

### 5.2.3 Mars Blackmon

*Lee* himself played one of *Noly's* boyfriends (*Mars Blackmon*, who was a big fan of *Michael Jordan*). This film is often criticized for strong sexual content and themes such as relationships and politics amongst Blacks in America. This film led *Lee* to another venue. Marketing executives from *Nike* commissioned him to direct commercials for the company. They wanted to use his character of *Mars Blackmon* from the movie *She's Gotta have it*. This character became a figure of *Air Jordan* commercials with *Michael Jordan* himself.



The name "Mars" was suggested by Spike's grandmother. She had a great uncle, Mars, who was crazy.

*Img. 23 Spike Lee as Mars Blackmon*

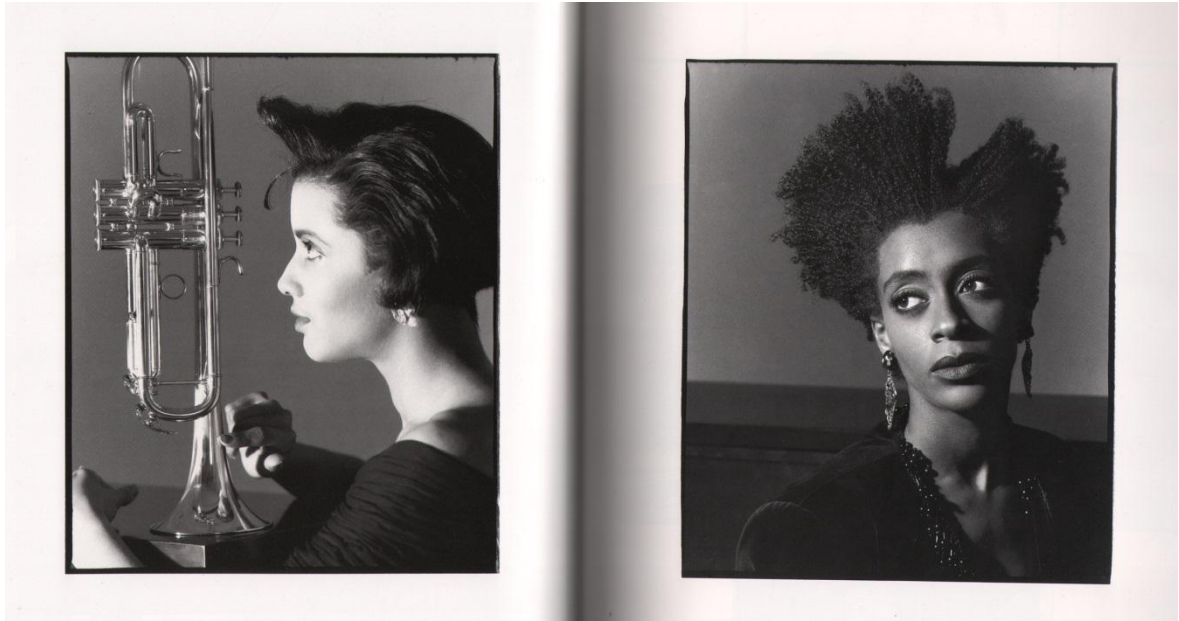
#### 5.2.4 Mo' better Blues

This is *Spike Lee's* fourth film, and I can confess that it is my favourite film from this director. As most of Spike's films *Mo' Better Blues* takes place in New York city. It combines the director's love for music (jazz, blues) and sport (baseball). The main character *Bleek Gilliam* is played by the young *Denzel Washington*. Although most of Spike's motion pictures deal with racial issues, this film is more focused on African American musicians and struggles they went through. The story is centered around *Bleek Gilliam*, who is a talented young, handsome, trumpeter. His main focus is music, everything else is secondary to him. *Bleek* dates with two women (Indigo and Clarke) at the same time; the film illustrates his hesitation between these two ladies. Another important character is *Giant* (played by *Spike Lee* himself), who is *Bleek's* manager; even though he is a heavy gambler, not very successful with getting a better contract. He does not get fired because him and *Bleek* have been friends since their childhood. The Saxophonist *Shadow Henderson* (played by *Wesley Snipes*) is another member of the quartet; him and the main character don't really get along, because of his long solos. The band plays in a smoky, underground nightclub *Beneath the Underdog*, built in the late 1930's. *Butterbean* is a stand comedian who occupies the stage during breaks. He tells funny anecdotes with strong explicit content, which lightens the story and gives a dose of humor. The white club owners Moe and Josh Flatbush (played by brothers *John and Nicholas Turturro*) exploit black talent, they represent a sort of struggle which most of African American artists had to deal with. The director also creates a competition among musicians, who feel they have not received the recognition that they deserve. *Shadow* is overshadowed by the main character *Bleek*, This later leads to their separation. I also admire the gradation of the storyline, in the beginning we see a very confident strong black man, who believes that music is his everything in his life and there is nothing else to care about. He gets into fight, when he tries to help his childhood friend *Giant*; a heavy gambler who gets into fight because of his habits. *Bleek* gets his lips busted, which changes him a lot. He starts to realize the importance of relationship and becomes more grounded. Almost every scene is accompanied by amazing background music. There is a very good scene when the main character *Bleek* accidentally calls *Clarke* (one of his lovers) by the name of his other woman, when they make love. This leads to an argument between those two, but we actually see *Bleek* arguing with both of his women, as he confuses both of their name.



*Img. 24 Denzel Washington as Bleek Gilliam*

Though there are several issues which this film deals with; interracial relationships (the band's pianist *Left Hand Lacey* is always late at meetings, accompanied by his white French girlfriend who cares about him exaggeratedly; he is ridiculed by his fellow band members for being with a white lady instead of dating black women). [12]



*Img. 25 Clarke and Indigo (Cynda Williams and Joie Lee)*

*Bleek* talks about his feelings regarding the audience who visits their performance.

He opens his worries about black folks who make the minority at the nightclub where his band performs. His frustration reflects the feeling that many musicians feel towards jazz music; as it seems that it is more popular and embraced by the whites and Asians worldwide. [12]

### **5.2.5 Legacy**

Mr. *Lee* is one of the most important filmmaker of all time. Since his first films he has felt the need to make films for Black people by his own way. He reflects the way Harlem Renaissance artists were thinking. Some people may look at Mr. *Lee* as a Black nationalist, but the truth is that he has always tried to set an example on how black folks should get together and make positive things. He opens subjects which are ignored by other filmmakers; by showing and telling the truth about racial stereotypes, politics and life among Blacks (his film *Do The Right Thing*, about a pizzeria owned by an Italian American in a Brooklyn neighborhood. This is the best example where the director opens a lot of subjects. For instance a five minute scene where individuals of various races (including the character of *Mookie* – played by Spike Lee himself) talk trash about each other; it references to racial tensions of the late 1980's in United States; killing of the character *Radio Rahim* (played by *Bill Nunn*), this is a reference to the police brutality in Black community,

which has been an issue for a long time. *Spike Lee's* films are also typical for featuring same actors in different projects (*Wesley Snipes, Denzel Washington, Samuel L. Jackson, Camila Johns, Rosie Perez, Cynda Williams, Bill Nunn, Veronica Webb*). The director himself has played various roles in his movies (*She's Gotta Have It – Mars Blackmon, School Daze – Darell, Do The Right Thing – Mookie, Mo' Better Blues – Giant, Jungle Fever - Cyrus...*). This director has involved some of his family members in his films (his sister *Joie Lee – actress, his brother David Lee – a photographer*). *Spike* has directed over 30 films, several music videos (*They Don't Care About Us – Michael Jackson*) and commercials (*Nike, Converse, New Era...*).



Img. 26 Spike Lee as Mookie in "Do The Right Thing"



**"Sal" and "Buggin' Out," Giancarlo Esposito.**

*Img. 27 Danny Aiello and Giancarlo Esposito as Sal and Buggin' out  
in "Do The Right Thing"*



*Img. 28 The staff of the movie "Do The Right Thing"*

### **5.3 1124 DESIGN**

Is an advertisement and marketing company based in Los Angeles, California dedicated to promote African American art, culture and entertainment.

#### **5.3.1 Beginnings**

The founder, and CEO *Art Sims* started with determination and a goal. Commitment and perseverance helped him to reach his own success. Originally from Detroit Michigan *Sims* was supported by his mother (a grade school teacher), to love and learn art. Which helped him to win to several awards for his artwork in elementary school. He was a bright student who excelled and earned a scholarship to Michigan State University. During the summer, while preparing for the senior year in college, he headed to New York City; where he ap-



plied for art director position. He had several meetings, which seemed to go well, and was asked to call back before he heads home. So he did, he called without any expectation and was asked to pack his stuff and find a place to stay in New York. During this summer he produced several album covers, he had to turn back to college as he needed to finish his final year. After graduation Sims decided to leave the east coast to go to Los Angeles. During his stay in L.A. Sims was given a job immediately. He started as an art director at *EMI*, working in music and film industry. After four years he was let go, because he was doing some freelance work, which the company did not appreciate. It did not take him too long, to find a new job at *CBS TELEVISION*, at the beginning he told the company, he was starting his own business. So *CBS* kept him busy as much as they could, so he could not do anything else. But Sims had saved enough money to start his own company, so when he left his office he immediately started *1124 DESIGN ADVERTISING*. When Sims came to L.A. he had a strong Christian ethics, so the name 11:24 refers to a particular chapter in the New Testament, Mark chapter 11 verse 24. With this name he wanted to describe his artwork, which was creative, unique and somehow different from other ad agencies. [13]

### 5.3.2 First film posters

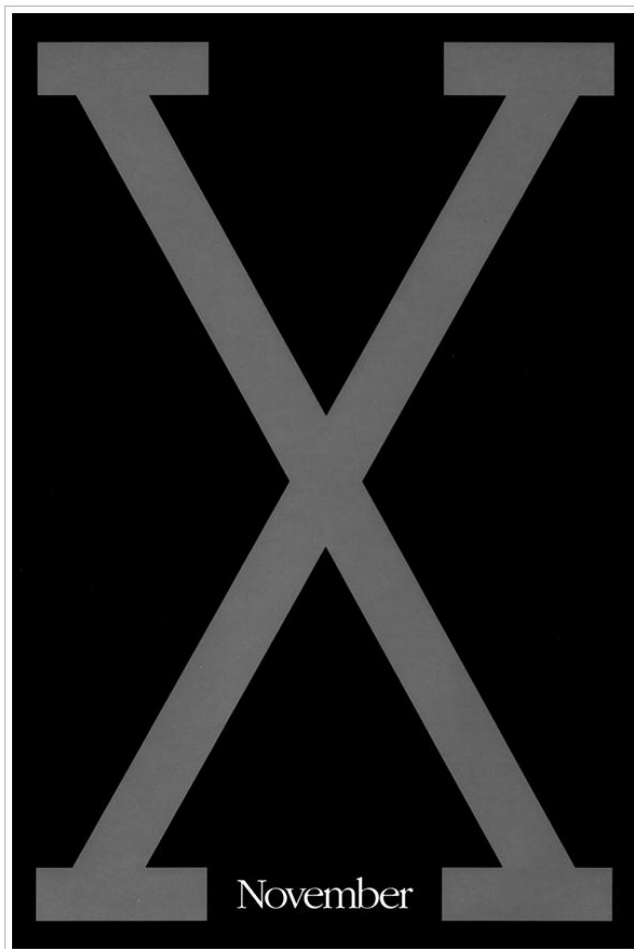
At the very beginning of his company Sims saw *Spike Lee's film She's Gotta Have It*, so he decided he wanted to work with *Mr. Lee*. He was contacted by a person from *Lee's* office who also connected him to *Steven Spielberg's* project *Color Purple*. When the opportunity showed up, Sims was ready to take it, without turning back. So he created the most beautiful images he could to prove how great he was, even though he had never created a film poster before. Soon after that he created a poster to a legendary film *NEW JACK CITY*. He used a picture *Wesley Snipes*, who played the bad guy and the drug dealer. *Snipes* was on the poster with sun glasses with a cigarette. The poster was so popular, that people were breaking down bus shelters to get it. [13]

### 5.3.3 Working with Spike Lee

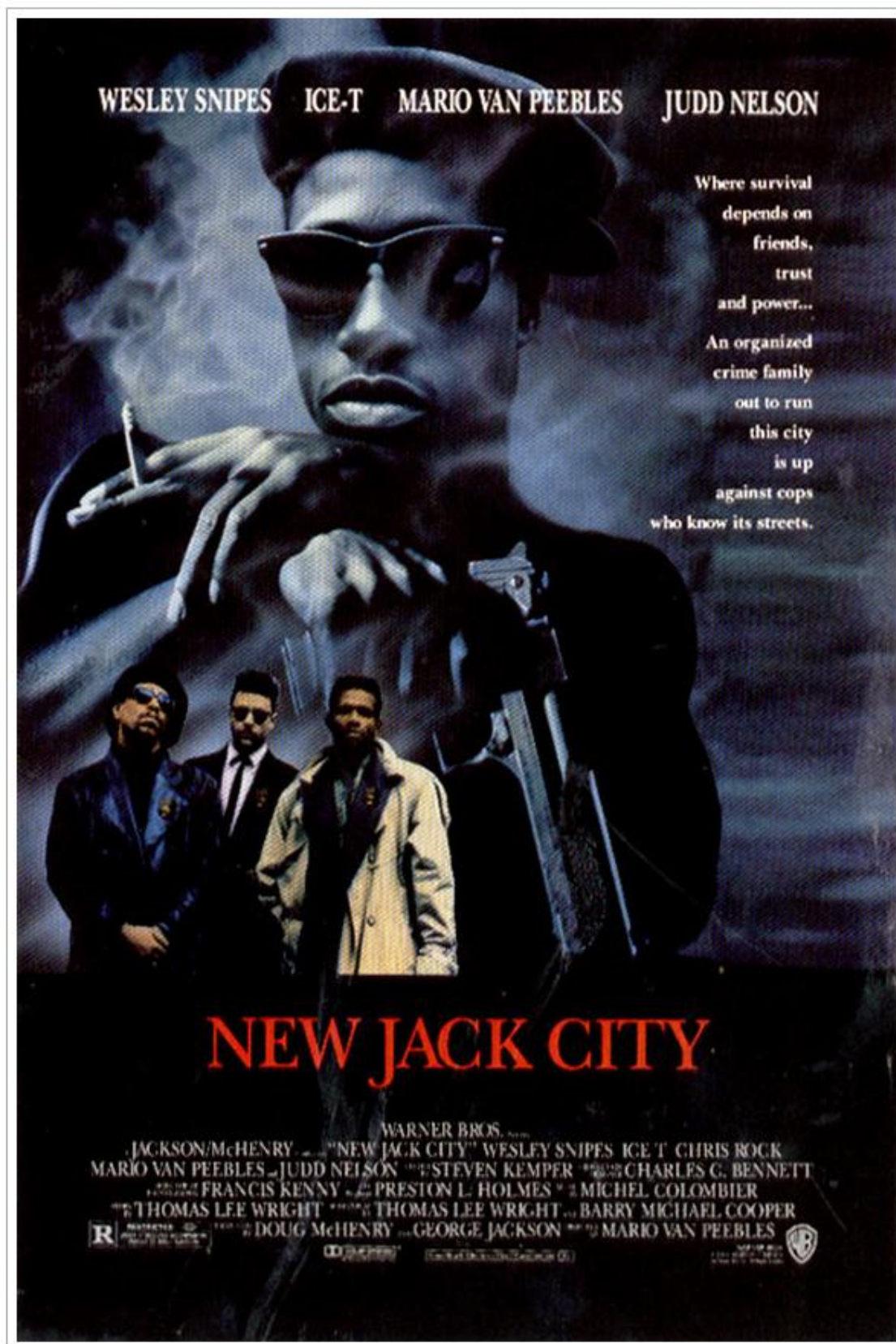
Sims has worked with *Spike Lee* many times. He has created posters for some of his greatest films like *Do The Right Thing* or *Malcolm X*. The last mentioned poster was very special at that time, because it did not feature any photo or actor's name, there was just a big letter X and the date of film release. Art Sims last collaboration with *Spike Lee* was a poster to the documentary about Hurricane Katrina titled *If God Is Willing and The Creek Don't Rise*. [13]

### 5.3.4 Legacy

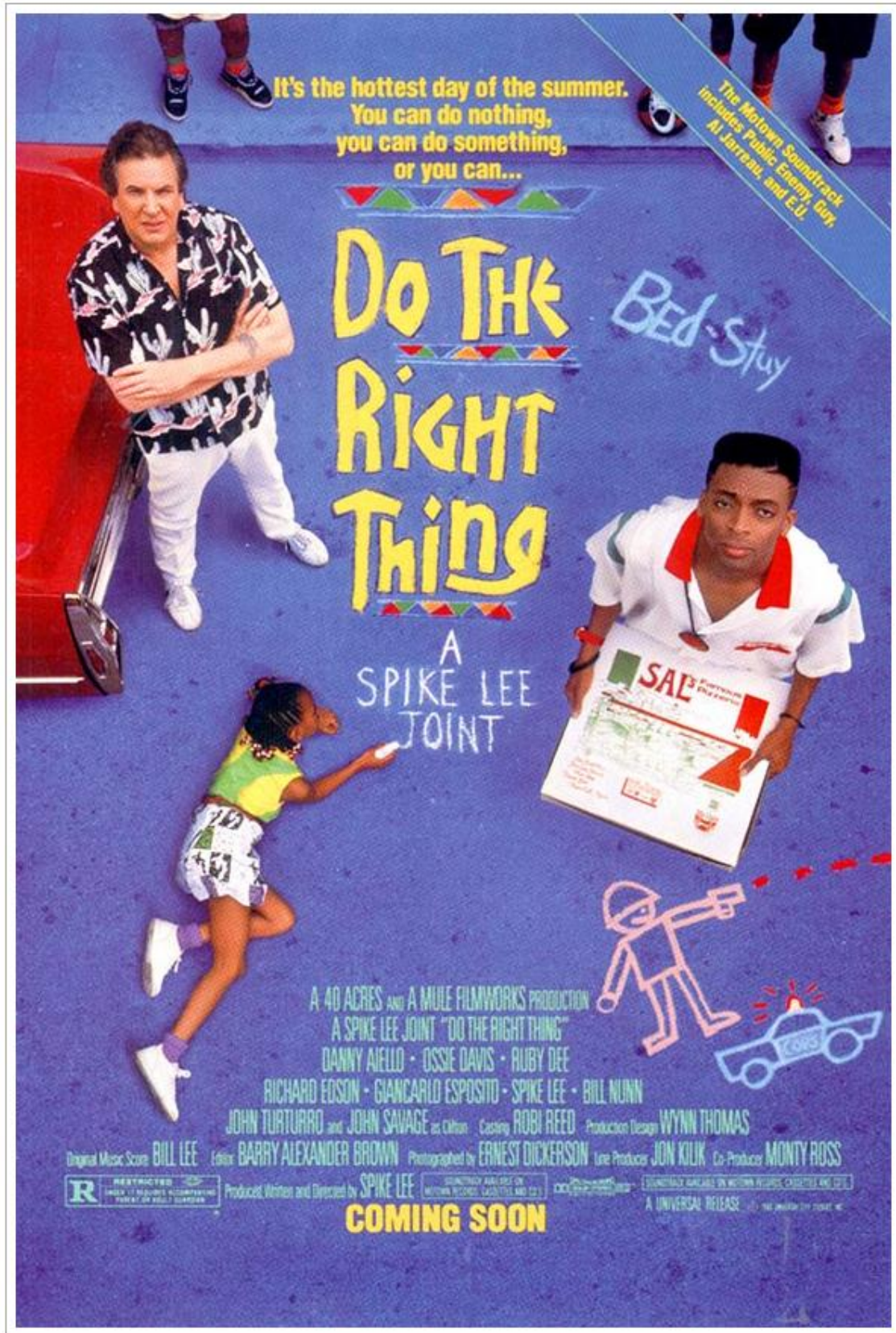
Today *Art Sims* is an award winning graphic designer, who was featured in many exhibitions. He has a great body of work with a large number of posters created for (not only) African American films (*Ali, He Got Game, Huey P. Newton Story, Dreamgirls, Freedom Writers, Black Dynamite, Lottery ticket, I Am Legend...*). Sims has decided to give back to the community by creating various projects to help others. He has created a new networking site for African Americans; a greeting card line; he has also decided to write scripts and produce his own films. *Art Sims* teaches graphic design in middle school for African Americans, and he is getting ready to launch a project designed to help and unite artists with students who don't have art courses at their school. *Mr. Sims* is committed to work and give back, without thinking about retirement in the near future. [13]



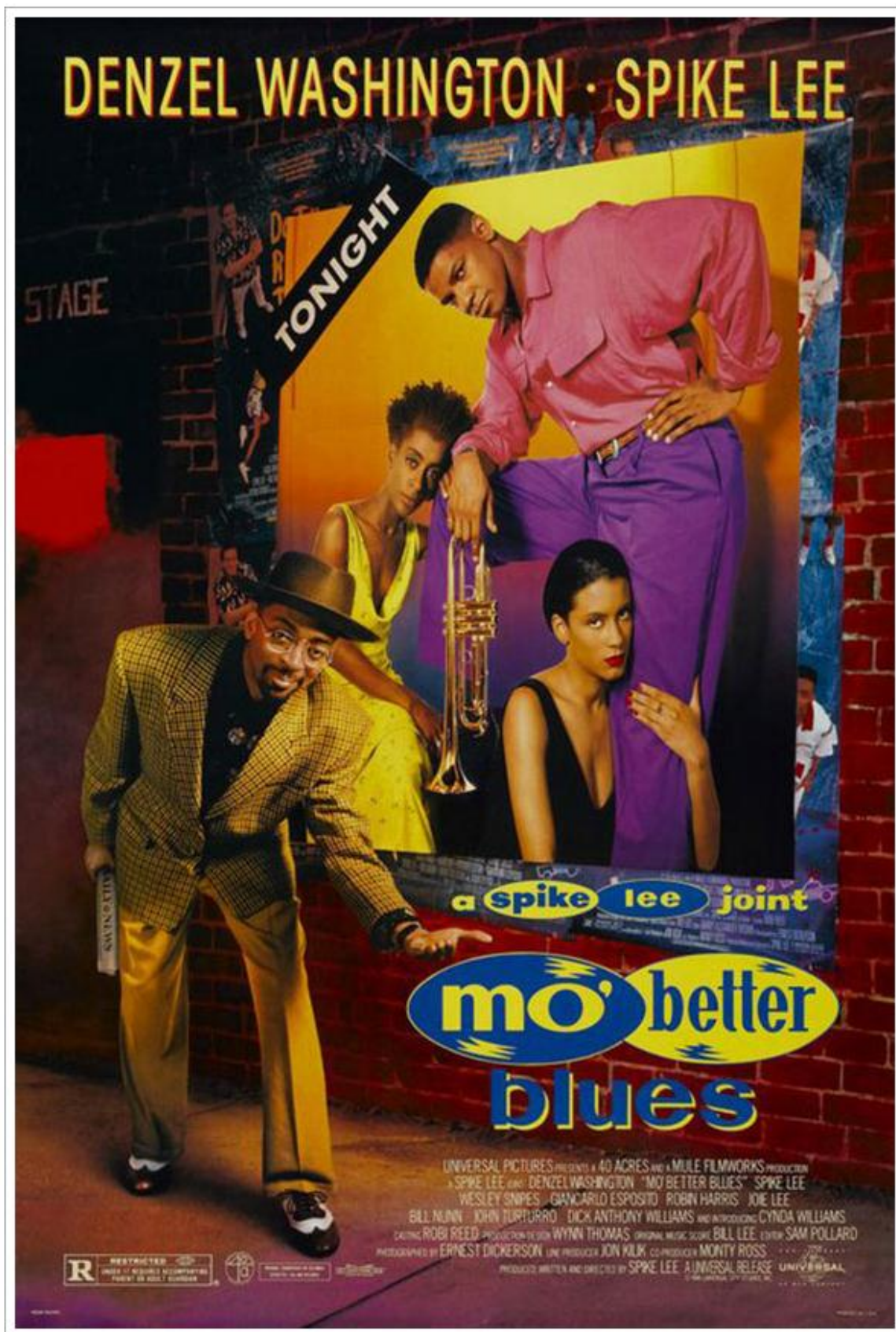
*Img. 29 The Malcolm X poster, by Art Sims*



Img. 30 The New Jack City Poster, by Art Sims



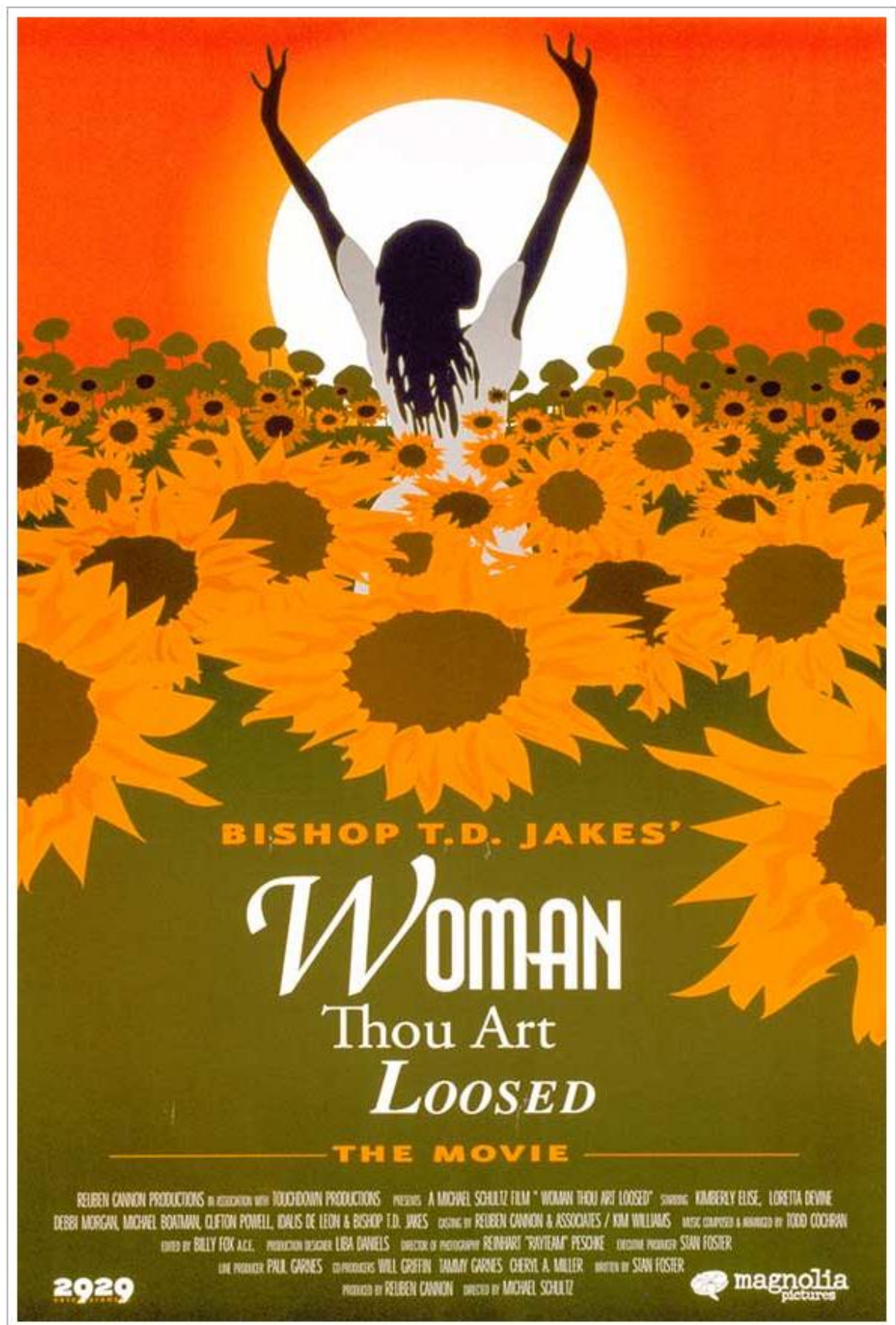
Img. 31 The Do The Right Thing poster, by Art Sims



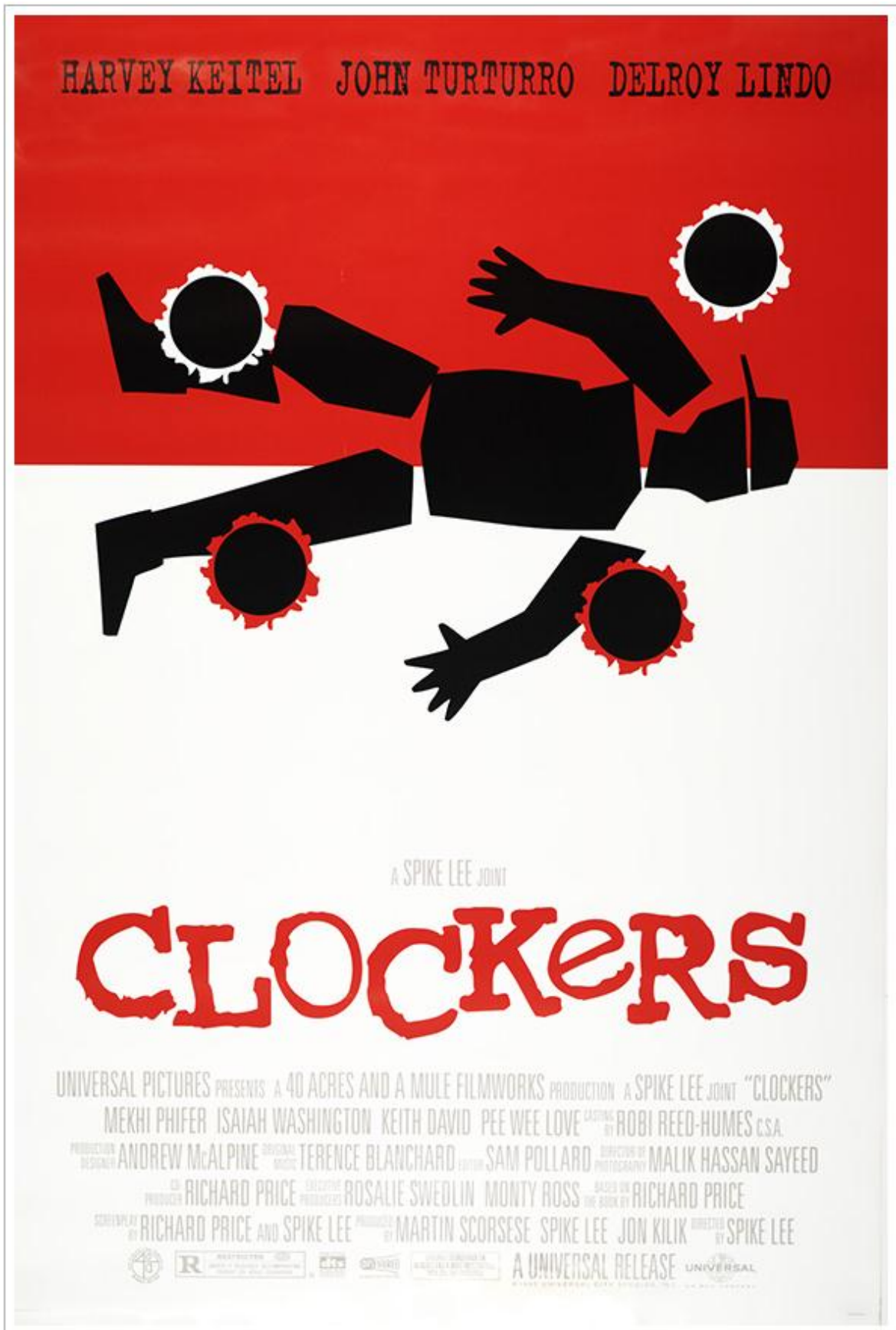
Img. 32 The Mo' Better Blues poster, by Art Sims



Img. 33 The Black Dynamite Posters, by Art Sims

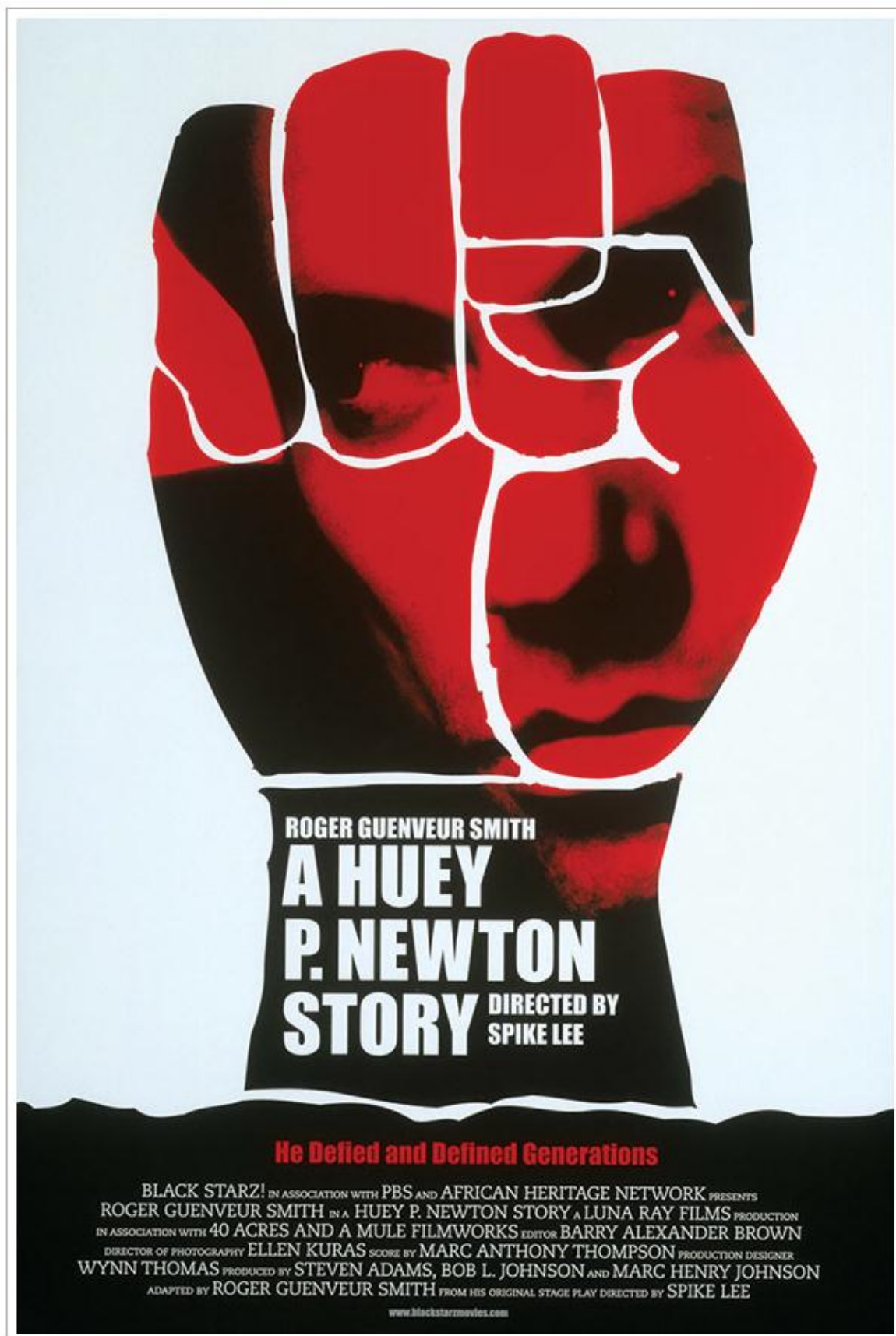


Img. 34 The Woman Thou Art Loosed poster, by Art Sims

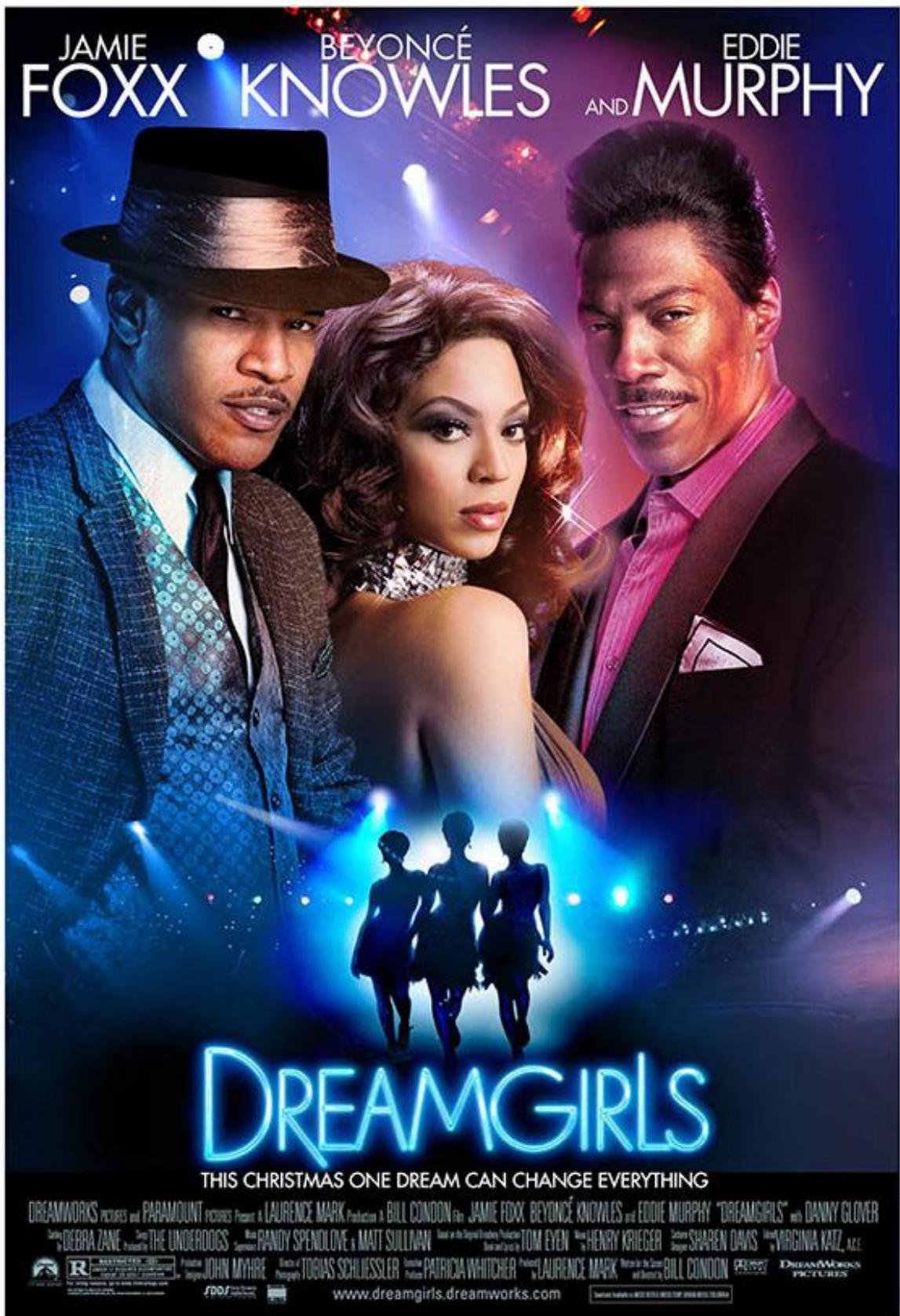


Img. 35 The Clockers poster, by Art Sims





Img. 36 The Huey P. Newton Story poster, by Art Sims



Img. 37 The Dreamgirls Poster, by Art Sims

## 5.4 Interview with Gregory Javan Mills

*Thank you for your time Gaetano, could you introduce yourself please?*

Gregory Javan Mills, the founder and CEO of the African American Cinema Museum in Harlem, New York.

*Are you familiar with the African and diaspora cinematography?*

I'm not familiar with African film making, but I enjoy watching films produced, directed and starring individuals from the African diaspora.

*Do you have a favorite African film or film director?*

I'm not at this point, have a favorite film director. However, I have over the years appreciated the renowned film works of Ousmane Sembène. One film I saw way back in 1976 while a student at an Upsate Community College in New York.

The film is *Black Girl* is a 1966 by the Senegalese writer and director *Ousmane Sembène*, starring *Mbissine Thérèse Diop*. Its original French title is *La Noire de*, means „*The Black Girl*“. The film centers on a young Senegalese woman who moves from Senegal to Paris, France, to work for a rich French couple and becomes disenchanted.

It was the director's first feature-length film and it became a cult classic film in the independent film markets and cultural film festivals very successful story line.

*Do European and Hollywood films have influence on African films? Are they completely different and independent?*

The answer is Yes and No!! It all depends on the film markets and funding for the films. If European or Hollywood are backing the film then there is all possibility for influence.

(If the films are produced by and there is full creative control from an African director and filmmakers point of view), the story and the treatment is surely to remain different and largely independent produced.

*What are African films mostly about? What genres are filmed the most?*

The more that ten I've have screened and enjoy are usually about every day like drama. Love, greed, betrayal and politics with a Western ideology based on materialism.

Then there are some that are rich in stories of culture and traditional village life and mystical works of rituals and lore.

*Do you pay attention to film posters?*

Yes. It is the advertising that promotes the film in more ways than one. It a first glance look that the film, sort of a still photo of the actual film.

film poster are a very important aspect of pitching the film to markets.

The use of the WWW make it an instant market for views to see film clips or the movie before it is in the theaters and or still being produced??

*Do you have any or multiple favorite film posters?*

Honestly, no. But I look at the poster some time before reading a full text to get a quick idea of the film.

*What is the purpose of a movie poster, how do you look at it?*

As mention before the only purpose is to advertise the film as a first glance to get views attention. The view look for many things such as the film title, the cast, and who produces, directs and what film studio is financing the film production.

*Do you consider movie posters as a masterpiece?*

In the classic sense, I would have to say Yes. Movie posters of the early years of cinema or film are collectors items, as they are rare to find and are considered masterpiece, because of the era and time that posters were created.

Poster, today are just slick advertisement created by computers and software buttons.

*What about African film posters, have you ever seen any?*

No, I have not had the opportunity to see a full size poster. However with the utilization of the Internet and magazines there is a chance.

*But if you could imagine it, how would it look like?*

Again, it all depends on the subject matter. Most posters including film poster illustrate the basic information. Film title, a central illustration, photo of some design element typical of the film content. A listing of text, citing the cast, producer, director and where the film is opening.

*Do you have other thoughts on the African cinema, posters? Its future?*

Nigeria is becoming a market called Nollywood!!!

There is much opportunity for growth, considering if there is regional stability and strong economical markets to support the industry.

*Thank you once again for your time Mr. Mills.*

## **II. PROJECT**

## 6 DOCUMENTATION

When I started to work on this project I had several consultations with *Mr. Eliska*, who is my supervisor. I showed him my sketches and ideas on how the final project was going to look like. My mind was made up, and I was convinced about the process and the final look of what I'm doing. But there are a few things I completely forgot! I am doing the African Poster! The African Poster has to look African, so I had to switch my mind and think as an African artist, instead of being European. *Mr. Eliska* helped me a lot, because he told me to benefit from my artistic freedom. So I did! I started to record myself with my *ipod* while working. I recorded every process of the work, from reading e-mails from *Jepchumba* (who is my supervisor of the theoretical part), to drawing and printing processes. I finally asked one of my classmates who studies photography (*Vit Hasek*) to edit the video. The final result is a short document in which you can slowly see the process of writing, drawing and other interactivities involved in this project.



*Img. 38 Documentary*

### 6.1 Illustration

My illustrations celebrate some of the most important African and diaspora filmmakers.

I chose 8 filmmakers and figures involved in the African cinema from different countries (*Oscar Micheaux – U.S.A., Spike Lee – U.S.A., Raoul Peck – Haiti, Ralph Nwadike – Nigeria, Leadre Alain Baker – Congo*). These illustrations were hand drawn with a ball pen on paper, after scanning and “cleaning” in the computer they were ready to be printed. I didn't print my illustrations as usual posters. Instead I chose to really dedicate it to Africa, so they were printed on textile rags. These posters are multifunctional, once they can be used as a decoration,

secondly they can serve for some simple purposes in a household (towel, rag, tissue ect...). Though their goal does not change, they are still made to celebrate the African cinema.



Img. 39 Posters



## 6.2 T-shirts

While working on my illustrations I decided to also put them on T-shirts. It is the easiest way to get my stuff out there and share my thoughts with different people. As a graphic designer I have always paid attention to what people wear, or what images do they have on their T-shirts. Basically I want to popularize my project, so a lot of people know or become interested in African or diaspora cinema.



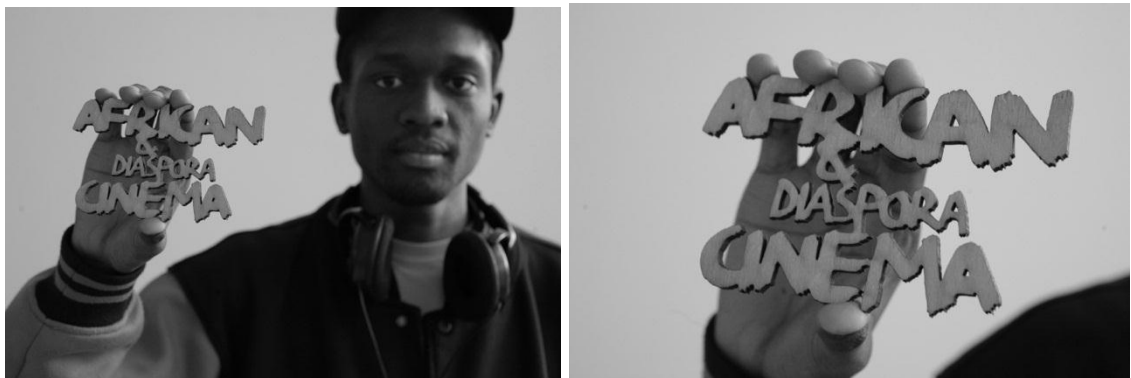
*Img. 40 T-shirt sample*

## 6.3 Wooden badges

Wooden badges are names of filmmakers I illustrated. It was made as an unconventional accessory. These names were hand drawn with ink and brush. I decided to graven them in wood with a laser machine. I like the result, because you can still smell the burning wood.

# AFRICAN & DIASPORA CINEMA

*Img. 41 The Title*



*Img. 42 Wooden badge*

## CONCLUSION

The African cinema is not dead! That is what I say to myself while working on this project. Every time I go to sleep I try to figure out how hard was it, or what did most of the people I write about went through. I chose this project for a simple reason, it is my job to educate or tell stories about this issue to people around me. Even though I did not manage to touch on everything regarding the African or diaspora cinema it is still important. My main focus was the continent of Africa. I was always interested about how are movies made and why. Since my childhood I used to watch blockbusters with famous Hollywood superstars. Action movies, science fiction, comedies and other genres.

I did not pay attention to African films, well maybe I did but not so much. It wasn't important to me. This is actually the main problem amongst Africans, and it was proven to me many times. *Leandre Alain Baker* a Congolese filmmaker, said that Africans don't care about films made by Africans. They don't have a reason to watch those films or even pay attention to it. Which is very sad. We don't embrace or love our own culture, because we were never taught to. It is not just the Africans from the continent, but we can spot this issue in diasporan films too. In *Spike Lee's film Mo' Better Blues* the main character *Bleek Gilliam* complains about the audience at the nightclub where him and his quartet play. The majority of visitors are white. Black folks rarely come to support other Blacks. *Lascony* said this to me many times, "*we don't know our past; we think that African history starts with slavery*". Which is very false!

With the time things have changed, we start to realize and accept our identity and we begin to love what is African.

My project is made to showcase and celebrate the African art; that is the first and most important reason why I created this project.

Secondly I wanted to open a subject regarding African film posters. Which was very difficult, because I did not find as much information as I wanted through my researches. We can spot the difference between Ghanaian and African American film posters, since these are the only countries I talk about in terms of motion picture advertisement. Film posters as paintings made on old used potato bags are what represents Ghana. The originality and diversity is seen through a large genre of film posters. The most notorious are posters for African films which deal with witchcraft. There is a lot of blood and mystic figures. On the other hand we have hand painted posters for American action movies, with big

muscled guys with guns. The last group of posters represent Asian Kung-Fu films, which have always been very popular in Africa. I have never found the reason why. Of course, this is only one part of African film posters, we have posters for *Nollywood* films, which are not so good. Most of them are made of pictures of the movie's main characters with the text over it. Which is not so creative, I blame it on the *Nollywood* film industry and the film distribution. Because there are 1000 films produced each year, in this case the quantity is not always the quality. Although the history of the African American film posters takes us back to *Oscar Micheaux's* films I decided to stop and look at *Art Sims*. His work speaks for itself and there is much more than just beautiful pictures. I will continue to work on this project, even if it's for my school or just for my personal use. The story is not told, I just drew a little sketch to open one huge subject. If you decide to go and purchase one of the films I mentioned in my work, please watch it, once, twice as much as you want. You are doing a right thing.

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**LIST OF IMAGES**

*Img. 1* <http://www.answers.com/topic/pierre-savorgnan-de-brazza>

*Img. 2* <http://noirestyle.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=38&t=1593>

*Img. 3* <http://mubi.com/lists/19988>

*Img. 4* <http://www.mapsofworld.com/flags/congo-brazzaville-flag.html>

*Img. 5* [http://en.loadtr.com/\\_Brazzaville\\_Congo-420159.htm](http://en.loadtr.com/_Brazzaville_Congo-420159.htm)

*Img. 6-17* GHANAVISION, Bongout GmbH, *Hand-Painted Film Posters from Ghana*, 2009  
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*Img. 18* [http://www.mperience.com/view/The\\_Betrayal\\_\(film\)](http://www.mperience.com/view/The_Betrayal_(film))

*Img. 19* [http://www.mperience.com/view/God's\\_Step\\_Children](http://www.mperience.com/view/God's_Step_Children)

*Img. 20* [http://www.mperience.com/view/Lying\\_Lips\\_\(film\)](http://www.mperience.com/view/Lying_Lips_(film))

*Img. 21* [http://www.mperience.com/view/The\\_Girl\\_from\\_Chicago](http://www.mperience.com/view/The_Girl_from_Chicago)

*Img. 22* [http://www.mperience.com/view/The\\_Exile\\_\(1931\\_film\)](http://www.mperience.com/view/The_Exile_(1931_film))

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*Img. 29-37* <http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/design-journeys-art-sims#6>

*Img. 38* Documentary

*Img. 39* Posters

*Img. 40* T-shirt samples

*Img. 41* The Title

*Img. 42* Wooden badges