

## MoAD: Stories in Fragments between Visual and Visuality

MoAD is the acronym of [Museum of the African Diaspora](#). It is based in San Francisco, on the central and crowded Mission Street. Since opening, in December 2005, MoAD became one of the most interesting cultural places of the Bay Area, like de Young Museum, MOMA and Legion of Honor. In the multicultural socio-cultural San Francisco's context, it has a relevant role to face the question of the African diaspora and African American culture in US. "Our goal is to explore and celebrate the beliefs, practices, traditions and customs connected to these movements" - this is the Museum's statement expressed in the website. MoAD housed several interesting expositions: "Drapetomania" (2014), curated by Alejandro de la Fuente, on the visual and cultural movement "Grupo Antillano"; "Crosscurrents" (2014) about the Black Americans struggles for freedom from the American Revolutionary War to the civil rights movement; "J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere", curated by Olabisi Silvia, dealing with the relationship between African fashion and personal display of independence. I have visited MoAD in February 2015 and seen two expositions: "The Art of Elizabeth Catlett" and "Beyond" by Lava Thomas. The first one is dedicated to one of the most important African American artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her work blends art and social consciousness, confronting the most disturbing injustices against African Americans in 1960s and 1970s. Samella Lewis, Art Historian and Collector, talk about Catlett in this interview: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/116916782> .

The other exposition, curated by Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins, weaves together early and new works by West Coast artist Lava Thomas. Her 'beyond' is closely connected with body's limits in terms of memories and lost things. In fact, Thomas' attempt - using several media such as drawing, photography, sculpture and installation - is to argue the tracks and signs of the body in passages through spaces and times. One is struck by these fragments of a past: the mother's lock of hair, a tooth or a bunch of dreads, and also three black installations that represent lungs and breasts. Body become an involuntary generator of visuality that others will interpret. This tension between a time over and others permanently rewritten - by different subjects (survivors, but also curator, audience, etc.) - is a topic very interesting. In order to problematise this topic, we can adopt the theoretical gaze suggested by [Nicholas Mirzoeff](#) with significative differences between visual and visuality. In particular, Mirzoeff states: "Returning to my earlier formula of the visual subject being constituted by the intersection between the agent of sight and discourses of visuality, it now appears that such an encounter is not a geometric figure, such as that famously drawn by Jacques Lacan, so much as a space or area. That area is not bounded by constant time but rather 'time as lived, not synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicities and simultaneities, its presences and absences' (Mbembe, 2001: 8, original emphasis). In dealing with this complexity, 'the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself' (Chakrabarty, 2000: 109)". In this sense, visuality is the "a time-based medium" that can disclose a range of "connected and dispersed lines": it is a network that we can use to study, for example, the relationship between authors with past and present civil rights movements – in the case of Catlett's work. Otherwise, the same visuality can be used to

connect a subject with others, which is not immediately declared or expressed by the author/curator. In the case of “Beyond” one can think to the [Museum of Migration of Lampedusa and Linosa](#)- which is made up of objects (written sheets, shoes, photographs, bottles, clothes, etc.) belonged to bodies that have attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea.