

YOSSI MILO

For Immediate Release:

Samuel Fosso

September 3 – November 8, 2025

Opening Reception: Wednesday, September 3, 6-8 PM

Yossi Milo is pleased to announce Samuel Fosso's debut solo exhibition with the gallery, which opens to the public on Wednesday, September 3, 2025, with a reception from 6-8 PM. This is Fosso's first solo exhibition in New York in more than two decades, and spans more than thirty years of his practice, showcasing works from his series *70s Lifestyle* and *African Spirits*. The exhibition follows the unveiling of an installation of the artist's photographs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's newly renovated Michael C. Rockefeller Wing earlier this year; the exhibition also precedes the artist's inclusion in *Ideas of Africa: Portraiture and Political Imagination*, a survey of African studio photography at the Museum of Modern Art curated by Oluremi Onabanjo and opening on December 14, 2025.

Over his decades-long career, Cameroonian-Nigerian photographer **Samuel Fosso** (b. 1962; Kumba, Cameroon) has deployed self-portraiture to innovate on storied traditions of studio photography from West Africa and beyond. Since the debut of Fosso's work on a global stage when he was awarded First Prize at the Rencontres de la Photographie in Bamako, Mali in 1994, the artist has used his practice as a conduit for questions central to identity: How can self-representation reclaim African identity from colonial imagery? How is Fosso's personal history reflected in collective history? And, critically, how does photography assist in resisting erasure? Collector and author Artur Walther writes in his foreword for *AUTOPORTRAIT*, a 2020 monograph of the artist's work: "Since the days of his experimental self-portraits, made as a teenager in the 1970s in a commercial studio in Bangui, the Central African Republic, [Fosso] has constantly explored the mythmaking potential of the camera. In his self-portraits, he amplifies himself and yet becomes someone else entirely."

Across all his work, and beginning with his earliest series *70s Lifestyle* (1975-78), Fosso intuitively pulls back the curtain, collapsing subject and subjectivity by depicting himself, the photographer. *70s Lifestyle* was inceptioned in 1975 at Photo Studio Nationale, the photography venture the artist opened at just thirteen, three years after fleeing from Nigeria's civil war to Bangui, the Central African Republic. After hours busy with customers taking headshots, portraits, and passport photos, Fosso would photograph himself with the last few frames in a roll of film to send to his grandmother in Nigeria. Over time, the practice took on the capricious qualities of a true artist's process. In an interview with the late Okwui Enwezor, curator of the 56th Venice Biennale, Fosso shared: "Sometimes when I made photographs I was not satisfied with, where I didn't feel beautiful inside, I would cut up the negatives instead of printing them... I did not know I was making art photography. What I did know is I was transforming myself into what I wanted to become." Fosso's early interest in photography was driven by his own exclusion from photographic record: as a child, Fosso, partially paralyzed, disabled, and displaced, was not pictured until he was ten years old. Eventually, this erasure would spell out the social value of representation to the artist, and self-portraiture would show a way to enter himself into an archive with agency.

In the vintage black-and-white self-portraits of *70s Lifestyle*, Fosso shows his keen understanding of the fashion of the time, of his body, and of the formal qualities of the photographs themselves. Every image varies despite their consistent elements: figure, outfit, backdrop, lights. The trappings of the studio are transfigured by Fosso into shapes influenced by imported magazines and popular African singers. The artist screens himself behind dividers, dresses up and down, holds props, and, most critically, looks directly into his camera's lens. This produces a gestalt that reflects a pop sensibility and uses the commercial as a site of metamorphosis. *70s Lifestyle* makes the processes inherent to studio photography self-aware and self-referential, and brings Fosso and the viewer into a mutual contract of observation.

Fosso would continue this reflexive notion of spectatorship would continue in the following decades, which over time would continue to expand in the scope of its inquiry. The artist's landmark series *African Spirits* (2008) orients his practice of self-depiction towards a politically-minded act of channeling. Across fourteen stark monochrome images, Fosso casts himself as figures key to African and diasporic histories. By

YOSSI MILO

inhabiting visages like Angela Davis, Miles Davis, Martin Luther King, Jr., Patrice Lumumba, Nelson Mandela, Tommie Smith, Malcolm X, and more, the artist connects a web of historical movements into a unified arc of Black liberation on a global scale. The series was initially conceived as an investigation into the global impact of slavery, and grew into an inspirational review of figures committed to human dignity and the reclamation of culture. Ultimately, it sought to correct a problem of institutional underrepresentation. Though concerned with history, each of these images is only a partial restaging of its source, a *détournement* from icon into iconography. Fosso strips away the backgrounds behind each subject, lending each composition a graphic quality. Streamlined and simplified, these figures become the symbolic forms they take in collective memory.

Fosso's oeuvre becomes an evaluation of the deep significance of photography in the modern era, from the historic to the contemporary; from the documentary to the constructed. A thread emerges in tracing the evolution from *70s Lifestyle* through *African Spirits*: an emergence of the self-portrait as something more, an advancement of concern from the personal to the historical. In an almost atavistic process, Fosso harnesses this essential power of photography to show collective and historic truths.

Works by Samuel Fosso are held in permanent collections around the globe, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art; Studio Museum in Harlem; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; J. Paul Getty Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; as well as the Musée des Beaux-Arts; Tate Modern; Victoria & Albert Museum; Musée National d'Art Moderne; Centre Pompidou; Fondation Louis Vuitton, and Deutsche Bank, among others. Fosso has mounted solo exhibitions at institutions including the Walther Collection; National Portrait Gallery; Princeton University Art Museum; Museum der Moderne; Museo de Canal, and Jack Shainman Gallery, among others. In 2023, the Menil Collection, presented a solo exhibition of Fosso's entire *African Spirits* series. Fosso has exhibited work in prominent group exhibitions internationally, including at the International Center of Photography; Art Institute of Chicago; Fotomuseum; Barbican Art Gallery; Museum of Contemporary Art; Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art; Museum of Contemporary Art; Stephen Friedman Gallery, and Gagosian Gallery. The artist has been awarded prizes such as the Prix Afrique en Créations in 1995; First Prize for photography at the Dak'Art Biennale de l'Art Africain Contemporain, Dakar, Senegal in 2000, and Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize in 2023. Fosso lives and works between Bangui, Central African Republic and Paris, France.

For more information, please contact Jack Cassou at 212.414.0370 or jack@yossimilo.com, or visit the gallery's website at www.yossimilo.com.