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Malangatana: Mozambique Modern

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Malangatana: Mozambique Modern is the third installment of *The Modern Series at the Art Institute of Chicago*. The free digital publication builds and expands on the physical exhibition held at the Art Institute of Chicago which showcased the work of Malangatana Ngwenya focusing on the artist's work from the late 1950s until 1975. Compelling and well-balanced, the visual design of the publication is effective as it embraces simple fonts and aesthetic choices focalizing Malangatana's works.



Digital exhibition header content featuring title of the exhibition on a gray background on the left with a reproduction of Final Judgment on the right.

The publication includes a forward by the museum director and an overview of the modern series which contextualize the specific exhibition within the series and provide information about the museum's relationship with the artist's works. The publication also includes five essays written by scholars, curators, and conservators who worked closely with the exhibition along with digital reproductions and installation views of the works. The digital format enhances the typical exhibition

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catalog by allowing for linkages between digital works and publications, particularly of note are the author bios linked to from each of the essays included in the publication. The ‘Essays’ and ‘Works’ sections of the publication include individual DOIs for persistent linking. Users can download the individual sections of the publication, however the publication is not able to be downloaded in its entirety as one document. As a whole, the publication is well-executed and provides a point of entry to Malangatana’s work for scholars and art historians not able to view the exhibition in person or who would like to critically engage further with the works and the artist.

The digital publication is optimized for use on a mobile device while remaining easy to use and navigate from a desktop view. Of particular note in the desktop view is the Table of Contents menu which operates separately from the main content, allowing the user freedom to browse through the publication and readily return or navigate to other sections efficiently. In the mobile view, users must rely on the Table of Contents hamburger menu in order to navigate through the publication, which does require scrolling to the top of the page. In future mobile editions, the designers may want to include an auto scroll feature that tracks along with the user. In the current iteration, the user must reach the bottom of the page before the autoscroll feature appears.

Malangatana:
Mozambique Modern
The Modern Series
at the Art Institute
of Chicago

ABOUT

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ESSAYS

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WORKS

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Works in the Exhibition

Installation Views



The table of contents, on the left side of the screen, operates separately from each webpage within the publication, shown on the right.

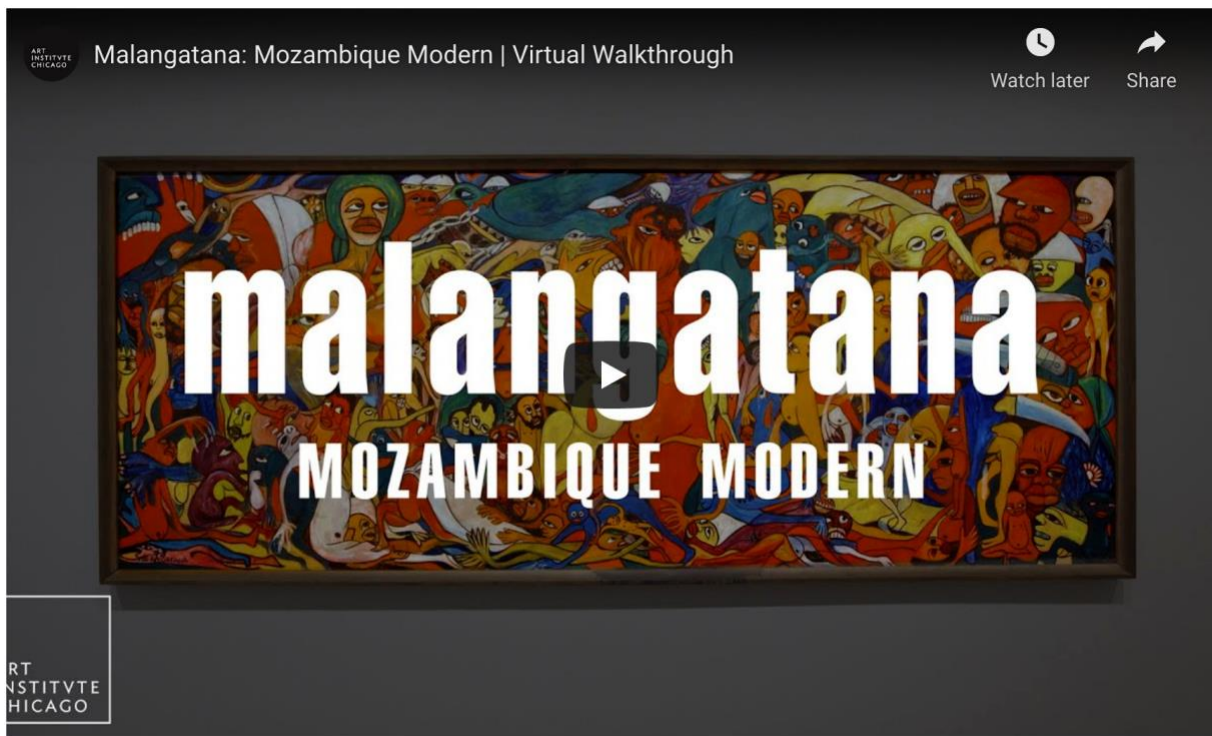
The five essays include linking within the publication which, in tandem with the Table of Contents menu, allows for user agency to determine the flow of the experience. Multiple pathways through the piece are possible, allowing the user to determine the order of their digital visit. Additionally, the essays include paragraph numbering and citation information, encouraging reference and engagement by scholars, researchers, and learners alike.

Users can explore photographed installation views of the exhibition and digital reproductions of the works grouped according to their placement within the exhibition. The digital reproductions can be expanded for further examination and include an information icon that when clicked displays the

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image caption. Images in a web view cannot be downloaded and do not allow the user to zoom in or out on the image. However, in the mobile view, users can zoom in or out on images. The image display reflects the curatorial perspective with images appearing in the same order as the show. To encourage user engagement, the creators might consider an additional customizable digital display that allows users to curate the works in order to explore how the pieces inform or differ from one another and to gain further insight into the artist's work through curiosity-driven comparison.

The most compelling use of media within the publication has to be the inclusion of the virtual walkthrough video on the Installation Views page. The video includes audio fragments from the artist (closed captions available) which imbues the works with life as you both listen and see. The impactfulness of this auditory experience brings to mind the question, could audio have been incorporated elsewhere in the publication? For example, the essays could have been recorded and existed as playable audio pieces while browsing the publication in order to marry the auditory and visual experiences of the exhibition.



Video tour of *Malangatana: Mozambique Modern*, with historical audio fragments of Malangatana Ngwenya (1936–2011).

Virtual walkthrough video of the exhibition.

Ultimately, this publication brings digital life to the works of Malangatana included in this exhibition and provides important contextual information in order to better understand and situate these works in both their modern and African context. It is easy to navigate and while there are possible additions to the work that might enhance it, its effectiveness is in its simplicity.

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