The most recent project in the Imaging South Africa series, Makeba comprises several collections, which initially focused on recordings by the South African singer and anti-apartheid activist, Miriam Makeba. A few years ago I was looking through records at a thrift store in Richmond, and came across the LP, An Evening with Belafonte/Makeba. It was two dollars. The album dated from 1965, and reading the liner notes on the jacket, I began to reflect upon how such a record cover had operated in the dissemination of a political message. How did these commodities, mass-produced in the Americas and Europe, help to create an awareness of the political realities of apartheid South Africa?

The project developed through an extensive search that ultimately led me to the international market, eBay. Assembled over two years of sifting through internet auctions and receiving thousands of emails, I collected Makeba recordings from all over the world. In an effort to map the journey of each record (and in particular Makeba’s voice), I catalogued where each was first recorded and where each was purchased. Numbering more than 400 individually acquired items, the collection includes 78 rpm discs, 45 rpm single acetate tapes, 8-track cartridges, cassette tapes, compact discs, and other exceptional discoveries like a steel-and-acetate demo recording.

I photographed all the labels of the items and, using pins, installed them chronologically from bottom to top and right to left, directly onto the wall. The collection became a document of Makeba’s life work but also formed a color field that was for me reminiscent of a kind of craft work in South Africa.

The second work produced from this archive consisted of the record covers and CD inserts, also assembled chronologically in a grid, which revealed Makeba’s changing portrait over time and the expanding global reach of her message. The liner notes on the back sides of the covers include a significant range of political content. Notably, when comparing different pressings of identical albums, potentially controversial information was edited out in some countries and foregrounded in others.

As the Makeba project progressed, I found myself slowly expanding the limits of the collection to include any audio artifact from South Africa—jazz, punk, plays, political speeches, sports commentary, etc. I eventually focused on unusual material that now includes over 600 rare 78 rpm shellac discs. I have begun what will be my ultimate goal for this ongoing archive of over 2,000 items: to document all the information and make it available as a searchable database on the web.

Notes on Makeba records on pages that follow:

p. 18: Miriam Makeba, self-titled LP, 1960. London Records, in this earliest iteration, features a hillside view by Bernd Wollheber and all quotes from Deep magazine (coverpage states “Though she speaks in many styles, she sings the Afrikaner songs of white South Africa.” “When Afrikaners sing in my language,” she says, “then I will sing in theirs.” This text is radically altered from US pressings and other Italian copies but is in its original form on the UK and New Zealand issues.

p. 19: Miriam Makeba, self-titled, CD, Columbia Records, 1997. The liner notes here are explicitly anti-apartheid. Though some of the text is notably absent from UK pressings and other Italian copies, in its original form on the US pressing as well as in the other pressings here, is not the text for this LP.

p. 20: An Evening with Belafonte/Makeba, LP, RCA Records, pressed in the USA, 1964. This LP is more commonly known as: The Voice of Africa, and features a different image from the same shoot. The yellow pins marked places where records were purchased through eBay and other sources.

p. 21: An Evening with Belafonte/Makeba, LP, RCA Records, pressed in the USA, 1964. This LP was released in South Africa as: Chants d’Afrique No. 2, and features a different image from the same shoot.

p. 22:

p. 23, 24: Makeba!, Installation view, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA.

p. 24:

p. 25: Makeba!, Installation view, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

2010 | Imaging South Africa: Records
BAK! Gallery, Bulaway, South Africa

2010 | Makeba! Az
Presented in conjunction with the exhibition
ArtMasters curated by Teddi Garabum
Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA
MIRIAM MAKEBA

ZA 0637

The Most Catching New Singing Talent to Appear in Years!

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An Evening with Miriam Makeba

Recorded in London in 1966. Conceived and arranged by Janet MacLeod, the album features the legendary singer Miriam Makeba, accompanied by a full orchestra under the direction of orchestra leader and arranger Jimmy Ellis. The album contains a mix of traditional African songs and more modern compositions, showcasing Makeba's impeccable voice and her ability to connect with a global audience.

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SIDE 2

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The album is a beautiful representation of the rich cultural tapestry of Africa, with Makeba's voice acting as a bridge between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. It is a true reflection of the continent's diversity and its ability to evolve while preserving its roots.

Chants d'Afrique n°2

Miriam Makeba

The album also includes a section titled "Chants d'Afrique n°2," highlighting the various melodies and rhythms that are integral to African music. This section further emphasizes the album's commitment to showcasing and preserving African musical heritage.

Overall, An Evening with Miriam Makeba is a timeless album that continues to resonate with listeners today, offering a glimpse into the rich cultural tapestry of Africa and Miriam Makeba's incredible vocal prowess.