

AKINSANYA KAMBON

Bionarrative

b. 1947, Sacramento, CA, lives and works in Long Beach, CA

Born as Mark Teemer in Sacramento, California, Akinsanya Kambon is a former Marine, Black Panther, and art professor. Stricken with polio as a child, he turned to drawing for comfort and ultimately his therapy. He frequently visited the Crocker Art Museum as a child which fascinated and showed him the human potential in creating art. In 1966, Kambon was drafted and served a tour of duty in Vietnam with the United States Marine Corps, as an infantryman and combat illustrator, until 1968. Sharing experiences of racism with other Black servicemen inspired Kambon's activism upon returning to the United States.

Shortly after his service ended, Kambon joined the Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, after growing more frustrated with the harsh mistreatment and brutality of black people locally and nationally. In the Panther Party, Kambon served as Lieutenant of Culture. He created *The Black Panther Coloring Book* to bring attention to racial inequality and social injustice. After the Panther Party was dismantled, from 1983 to 2010, Kambon worked closely with youth and gangs in Southern California in the areas of violence prevention and conflict resolution. Alongside notable members and founders of both Bloods and Crips, Kambon raised efforts to redirect negative activities and gang retaliations. He dedicated himself to Pan-Africanism, teaching African spirituality, religions, history, and culture through multimedia art. In 1984 he founded Pan African Art in Long Beach, California, providing free programs for youth in art, leadership, and culture.

Despite being only semi-literate in his youth, Kambon went on to earn his Master of Arts from California State University, Fresno. In more recent years, he was featured in *Wartorn: 1861–2010*, an HBO documentary screened at the Pentagon on post-traumatic stress disorder in veterans. Today, Kambon's work is as rich and varied as his personal history, expressed through drawings, paintings, bronze sculptures, and ceramics. The pieces included today are clay sculptures fired using the Western-style raku technique — a challenging, dangerous, and unpredictable process that creates prismatic and iridescent glaze finishes. He performs kiln firings in a ceremonial manner, breathing life into ceramic figures that typically represent African deities and spirits and, sometimes, American history and religious subjects. Drawing heavily on narrative tradition and personal experiences, including extensive travels throughout Africa, Kambon's work celebrates perseverance through hardship, cultural pride, and his gift as a storyteller.