The Making of a Fugitive

In September 1970, *Life* magazine's cover featured a photograph of scholar and activist Angela Davis, recently added to the FBI's "Most Wanted" list, with the headline "The Making of a Fugitive." This exhibition takes its name from the iconic cover and presents works by artists who consider how language and the framing of images in the media influence our understanding of criminality, safety, and surveillance.

Fugitives are not simply guilty or innocent: they run from the law to evade capture, flee from injustice, and seek refuge. The artworks in *The Making of a Fugitive* take up the contested "wanted" figure and the ways that pursuit and escape are represented in contemporary visual culture. The exhibition, which features works made since the 1960s in a variety of media, expresses the pervasiveness of this subject matter and the complex questions it continues to raise. Artists have long used the outlaw as a romantic metaphor for the artist in society. These works take up the concept of being a fugitive more broadly, inviting you to consider how categories of safety and danger, desire and fear, and complicity and action have been visually constructed.

This exhibition is organized by Faye Gleisser, Marjorie Susman Curatorial Fellow.

Being a fugitive is never a simple act of being on the run. The term carries legal connotations and serves as a metaphor for a figure, image, or idea that defies containment. Often, our perception of fugitives depends on how we've been taught to recognize them. For example, the cover of *Life* displayed below presents a carefully positioned headline over a photograph of activist, author, and scholar Angela Davis. The combination of incriminating text and the dramatically cropped picture of Davis visually codes her as untrustworthy, despite her innocence. Inside, the article confirms the cover's message by reproducing her "wanted" poster (p. 21), while an excerpt from an interview with Davis (pp. 26–27) provides an alternative perspective—her own—albeit abbreviated by the magazine's editors.

Often our thinking is shaped by what is not explicitly stated in visual culture but is instead implied by pictures paired with words. Reading is a recurring theme in these works, which tackle social prejudice and highlight the importance of everyday acts of interpretation. Look for prompts in the labels to start a conversation about the ways visual media shape our ideas and biases. Respond to the prompts to enrich the dialogue and share your thoughts with the museum @MCAChicago.