

# FINANCIAL TIMES

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## The artists finally finding fame in their

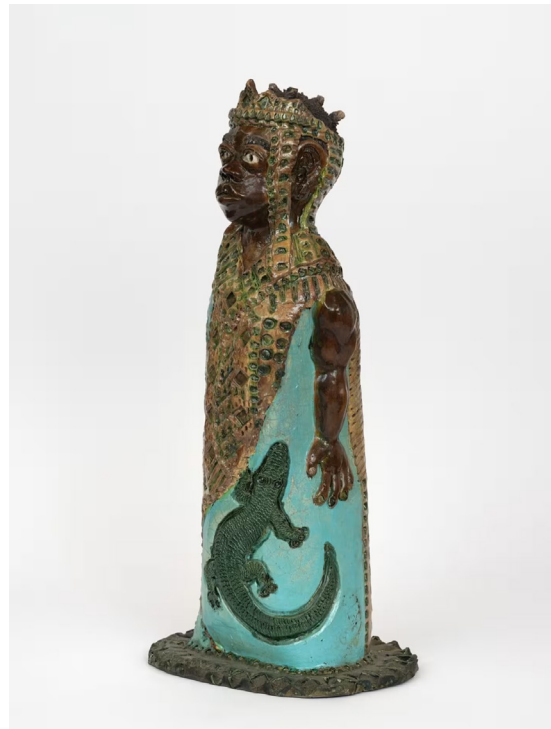
### 80s

From a Vietnam war veteran turned ceramicist to a sci-fi-loving minimalist, there is a deep well of life experience at Frieze New York

**Jacoba Urist**



American sculptor Akinsanya Kambon, now aged 80, in his studio in Long Beach, California © Photo by Sean Rowry



'Sobek: Ancient Ruler of the Crocodile Cult' (2017) by Akinsanya Kambon

Akinsanya Kambon's sculptures, in the fair's main section (presented by Marc Selwyn Fine Art and Ortuzar), represents a deep well of life experience. Born Mark Teemer in 1946 in Sacramento, California, he contracted polio at the age of three, leaving the left side of his body and face paralysed. "When I started kindergarten, I got teased all the time," says Kambon, who won the Hammer Museum's 2023 *Made in LA* biennial Mohn Award. "But I got to a point where I just put my head down on my desk and started drawing."

Years later, as a Marine in Vietnam, where he also worked as a combat artist, he "found out that they had been destroying some of the drawings I made because they were so graphic . . . but I would redraw them later, mailing them home to my mother."

On returning from Vietnam, Kambon joined the Black Panthers. In 1970, he faced the prospect of death row after he was arrested in connection with the shooting of a police officer, but was later acquitted. On his release, Kambon enrolled at Sacramento City College. There, he discovered his calling as a ceramics artist during a pottery class. Several years later, Kambon travelled around Africa for the first of many trips to hone his craft, carving wood and casting bronze with village artisans (and receiving his Yoruba name).

Today, he is celebrated for raku-fired vessels and figures with pearly metallic glazes. On May 28, *Akinsanya Kambon: Soul Sessions*, a two-venue career survey opens in New York at the SculptureCenter and the Center for Art, Research and Alliances. It includes the 1973 painting of a soldier with a newspaper, “Detroit Blue”, a nickname for a fellow Marine. “He was older than us and realised a lot of the brothers that got drafted to Vietnam were illiterate,” says Kambon, who couldn’t read. “He took us under his wing and read us the stories in the Stars and Stripes newspaper that came every day.”