

Reframing the moment

LEGACIES OF 1982 BLK ART GROUP CONFERENCE



photo of Eddie Chambers by John Reardon 1980

Saturday 27th October 2012

On Thursday 28th October 1982, a group of black art students hosted The First National Black Art Convention at Wolverhampton Polytechnic. Their purpose was to discuss 'the form, function and future of black art'.

Thirty years later almost to the day, on Saturday 27th October 2012 artists, curators, art historians and academics gather, once again in Wolverhampton, to share scholarship and research the 'black art movement' of the 1980s, its core debates, precursors and legacies.

**Lecture Theatre
Millenium Campus (MC)
Building
University of Wolverhampton
Wulfruna St
WV1 1LY**

Reframing the moment

LEGACIES OF THE 1982 BLK ART GROUP CONFERENCE
Saturday 27th October 2012

Programme

09:00 Registration Tea/Coffee

09:45 Welcome & Introductions

10:00 **Kobena Mercer: Keynote**

Perforations:

Mapping the BLK Art Group into a diasporic model of art history by looking at 'translations' of US Black Arts Movement ideas and the prevalence of a cut-and-mix aesthetic.

**PART
ONE**

11:00 **RAIDING THE ARCHIVE:** introduced and moderated by Paul Goodwin

Keith Piper *Pathways to the 1980s*

In a video-essay first presented as work in progress at the February 2012 Blk Art Group Symposium, Keith Piper will present a brief history of the Blk Art Group and discuss the socio-political moment of 1980s that heralded the cultural explosion of UK born and educated black artists.

Courtney J Martin *Art and black consciousness*

In 1982, Rasheed Araeen was invited by the Wolverhampton Young Black Artists to speak at the First National Black Art Convention in Wolverhampton. Araeen's theory of an all-encompassing political black art was tested against other proposals for art as he engaged the audience with his paper, "Art & Black Consciousness." The paper advocated a confrontational, post-colonial approach to art that was both criticized and supported by various convention attendees. Perhaps his staunchest critic was the painter, Frank Bowling, who, recently returned to London from New York, took offence at the suggestion of black art by any definition or parameter. My paper will frame their conversation throughout the Convention and its relevance for a generation of artists and debates in contemporary art.

Anjalie Dalal-Clayton *Black Skin/Bluecoat: Revelations from the Archive*

This paper investigates for the first time the critical exhibition history of Black Skin/Bluecoat, which took place at the Bluecoat (Liverpool) in 1985 and showed work by Sonia Boyce, Eddie Chambers, Tam Joseph and Keith Piper. The exhibition was a significant site for the assertion of positions that had been held by the Blk Art Group and the exploration of some of the (then) emerging debates of the 'Black Art Movement', but it has, until now, been overlooked in their historiography.

13:15 **Lunch: The Lighthouse**

PART TWO

14:15 ARTWORKS: introduced and moderated by Marlene Smith

Sonia Boyce *Rip it up and start again*

This talk will look at the ambivalent relationship between black art and modernism via an art work by Eddie Chambers. *Destruction of the National Front* is now considered as heralding the emergence of a raised-in-Britain generation of African and Asian artists that energised the British art scene in the 1980s.

Rina Arya *Auto Portraits in the work of Chila Burman*

In this paper I want to discuss the works of Chila Burman. In particular I would like to look at her auto-portraits, which in their simplest form constitute statements of unveiling where Burman is making her identity known. The self-portrait was widely used by black British artists to address the politics of identity and representation. It can be conceived of as an assertion of identity in the face of the threat of objectification; it is the most immediate act of naming.

Ella Spencer *Maud Sulter: Zabat, Poetics of a Family Tree*

Maud Sulter's photographs and photocollages seek out black women lost from history and absent from the archives; 'Putting black women back into the centre of the frame' as Sulter puts it. The voids in their narratives force Sulter to imagine the histories of black women. Playing with representation, the ambiguities of fact and fiction, history and myth, Sulter complicates their stories and our chronologies of knowledge.

Amna Malik *Re-conceptualising Black British Art through the Lens of Exile.*

The work of Gavin Jantjes, Mona Hatoum and Mitra Tabrizian was part of the interventions concerning race, identity and belonging in the 1980s but also made by artists whose practices could equally be engaged with the condition of exile. This paper considers how Edward Said's essay 'Reflections on Exile' (1990) might be mobilised to analyse their work.

16:15 Tea

PART THREE

16:30 REASONING: For the **Plenary** convened by **Paul Goodwin**, presenters from earlier sessions will join a panel of Conference Respondents: **David Dibosa, Lubaina Himid, Roshini Kempadoo** and **Shaheen Merali**, to review the day's themes and discussions.

Closing Remarks

Mark Sealy, curator and Director of conference partners, **Autograph ABP** will close the conference and introduce part four.

PART FOUR

18:15

SOCIAL:

Complimentary bus service to MAC for a drinks reception and special viewing of *By The Rivers Of Birminam* the first major retrospective of the work of documentary photographer, Vanley Burke.

After conference party, location to be announced.

Participant Biographies

Conference Host Marlene Smith

In 1982 Marlene Smith joined the fluid line up of students; Eddie Chambers, Claudette Johnson, Wenda Leslie, Keith Piper, Donald Rodney, Janet Vernon, that is today referred to as The Blk Art Group. In 1985 she exhibited alongside ten other black women at the ICA in Lubaina Himid's Thin Black Line and organised *But Some of Us Are Brave*, the first exhibition of women's work at the Black Art Gallery. In 1986 she collaborated with Keith Piper to curate *The Image Employed: the use of narrative in black art*. She spent 4 years running the West Midlands' "minorities arts service" WEMAS, was Programmer at Croydon's Clocktower arts centre, Director of Black Art Gallery and worked briefly with David A Bailey and Sonia Boyce at the African & Asian Visual Artists Archive at UEL before joining the team developing *The Public*, a £multi-million regeneration project in one of the countries poorest boroughs. She set up Public Gallery Ltd in 2006; a company working to explore collaborative practice. In 2009 she spent 6 months in Shanghai as part of a NESTA fellowship in Cultural Leadership. In 2011 she set up Blk Art Group Research Project with Claudette Johnson and Keith Piper.

Conference Chair Paul Goodwin

Paul Goodwin is an independent curator, urbanist and writer based in London. From January 2008 until August 2011 Goodwin was Curator of Cross Cultural Programmes and then Curator of Contemporary Art at Tate Britain. Goodwin's curatorial and research work currently concerns questions of migration, globalization and urbanism in contemporary art. His recent curatorial projects include the exhibitions *Migrations: Journeys Into British Art and Thin Black Line(s)*, at Tate Britain, London 2011 and 2012; *Go Tell It On The Mountain: Towards A New Monumentalism*, 2011 and *Ways of Seeing*, 2012 for the 3-D Foundation Sculpture Park in Verbier, Switzerland where he is Curatorial Director; *Coming Ashore*, 2011 at the Berardo Collection Museum in Lisbon, Portugal. He is an Associate Research Fellow in urbanism at the Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths College and teaches the MA Curating course at Chelsea College of Art and Design.

Keynote Speaker Professor Kobena Mercer

Professor in History of Art and African American Studies Yale University, Kobena Mercer writes and teaches on the visual arts of the black diaspora, examining African American, Caribbean, and Black British artists in modern and contemporary art. His courses and research address cross-cultural aesthetics in transnational contexts where issues of race, sexuality, and identity converge. His first book, *Welcome to the Jungle* (1994), introduced new lines of inquiry in art, photography, and film, and his work features in several interdisciplinary anthologies including *Art and Its Histories* (1998), *The Visual Culture Reader* (2001) and *Theorizing Diaspora* (2003). Mercer is the author of monographic studies on Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Isaac Julien, Renee Green, and Keith Piper, as well as historical studies of James VanDer Zee, Romare Bearden, and Adrian Piper. He is the editor of the *Annotating Art's Histories* series, published by MIT and INIVA, whose titles are *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (2005), *Discrepant Abstraction* (2006), *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures* (2007), and *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* (2008). An inaugural recipient of the 2006 Clark Prize for Excellence in Arts Writing awarded by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Massachusetts, he is currently working on an essay collection, *Travel & See: Writings on Black Diaspora Art*, and will contribute a chapter to *The Image of the Black in Western Art: Volume V, The Twentieth Century* (Harvard University Press).

Speakers

Keith Piper

Visual Artist, Reader in Fine Art and Digital Media and Course leader, M.A. Fine Art, Middlesex University, Keith Piper was a founding member of The Blk Art Group (1979-1984) and with Claudette Johnson and Marlene Smith created the Blk Art Group Research Project. As an artist he adopts a research driven approach to respond to specific issues, historical relationships and geographical sites. Over the past 30 years his work has ranged from painting, through photography and installation to a use of digital media, video and computer based interactivity

Professor Courtney J Martin

Assistant Professor, Vanderbilt University, USA, Courtney J. Martin's research on twentieth century British art is complemented by research and writing on modern and contemporary art and architecture. Prior to her appointment at Vanderbilt, Professor Martin was Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow in the History of Art department at the University of California at Berkeley (2009-2010); a fellow at the Getty Research Institute (2008-2009); and a Henry Moore Institute Research Fellow (2007).

Anjalie Dalal-Clayton

Anjalie Dalal-Clayton is a doctoral researcher at Liverpool John Moores University, working in collaboration with the Bluecoat. Her research explores current practices of exhibiting black British artists in British art museums/galleries, particularly the ways in which black artists are both critically and historically positioned in contemporary exhibitions. She completed her MA in the arts of the African diaspora at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2006, and she has held several posts in the arts and cultural sector, including at Tate Modern, where she curated exhibitions and events designed to create understanding about Tate Modern's current capital project.

Professor Sonia Boyce

Sonia Boyce came to prominence in the early 1980s as a key figure in the burgeoning black British art-scene of that time – becoming one of the youngest artists of her generation to have her work purchased by the Tate Gallery, with paintings that spoke about racial identity and gender in Britain. Since the 1990s her art practice has relied on working with other people in collaborative and participatory situations, often demanding of those collaborators spontaneity and unrehearsed performative actions. Abbreviated exhibitions and writings include: *Sonia Boyce: Speaking in Tongues*, (Gilane Tawadros, Kala Press, 1997); *Crop Over*, Harewood House, Leeds and Barbados Museum & Historical Society (2007/2008); *For you, only you* (ed. Paul Bonaventura, Ruskin School of Drawing & Fine Art, Oxford University and tour, 2007/2008), *Sonia Boyce and Crop Over* (Allison Thompson, Small Axe, Volume 13, Number 2, 2009); *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic*, Tate Liverpool and tour (2010); *Migrations: Journeys into British Art*, Tate Britain (2012); and *There is no archive in which nothing gets lost*, Museum of Fine Art Houston (2012). Over the past 30 years, Boyce has taught Fine Art studio practice from undergraduate level to PhD practice-based research in many art colleges across the UK. Boyce has recently completed an AHRC Research Fellowship on the ephemeral nature of collaborative practice in art at Wimbledon College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London, with a concluding project *The Future is Social*. She remains a Research Fellow at University of the Arts London, and has recently become Professor of Fine Art at Middlesex University.

Dr. Rina Arya

Reader in Visual Communication, Wolverhampton University, Rina Arya is an art theorist who has a background in theology. She is interested in a number of different subject areas including art, theology and spirituality, Francis Bacon, Georges Bataille, gender studies, aesthetics, critical theory, visual communication.

Dr. Amna Malik

Lecturer in Art History and Theory at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL. She has published a number of articles examining contemporary art practice from the perspective of diaspora. She is currently researching two book projects: 'Art and the post-colonial imaginary' examines the work of diaspora artists who have disappeared from mainstream narratives and postcolonial accounts of art history; 'Proximity' is a study of documentary film and the politics of affect in contemporary art. She is also a member of the editorial board of *Third Text*.

Ella S. Mills

Ella S. Mills's PhD research involves the so-called 'Black Arts Movement' in 1980s Britain and the contemporaneous interconnections of feminism, migration and diaspora. Taking her lead from the artists and writers of the movement itself and the challenges they have presented to the British field of art history, her research investigates the visibility of the movement, and in particular the negotiations and interventions of women artists, within British higher education institutions and 'mainstream' galleries and museums. Ella holds a BA English Literature (University of East Anglia), BA Fine Art & Art History (University of Plymouth), and MA Art History from the University of Leeds.

Conference Respondents

Dr. David Dibosa

David Dibosa trained as a curator, after receiving his first degree from Girton College, University of Cambridge. He was awarded his PhD in Art History from Goldsmiths College, University of London. During the 1990s, he curated public art projects. He is currently Course Director for MA Art Theory at Chelsea College of Art and Design and a Research Fellow in the University of the Arts Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAiN). David Dibosa's research interests focus on issues of spectatorship in relation to contemporary visual culture. He was a Co-investigator for Tate Encounters, an AHRC funded research project, looking at migration and national identity in relation to the display of British art and is a co-editor (with Andrew Dewdney and Victoria Walsh) of *Post Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* (Routledge, 2012).

Professor Lubaina Himid

Lubaina Himid is Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Central Lancashire. During the past 30 years she has exhibited widely both in Britain and internationally with solo shows that include Tate St Ives, Transmission Glasgow, Chisenhale London, Peg Alston New York and St Jorgens Museum in Bergen. She represented Britain at the 5th Havana Biennale has shown work at the Studio Museum in New York, Track 17 in Los Angeles, the Fine Art Academy in Vienna and the Grazer Kunstverein. She has work in several public collections including the Tate Gallery, Victoria & Albert Museum, Arts Council England, Birmingham City Art Gallery, Bolton Art Gallery, New Hall Cambridge, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Whitworth Art Gallery Manchester, Manchester Museums Platt Hall. Recent exhibitions include: *Moments That Matter - Trophy Cups* - Harris Museum & Art Gallery, *COTTON: Global Threads* - Kangas From The Lost Sample Book, Whitworth Art Gallery Manchester, 11 February -13 May 2012; *Migrations*, Tate Britain London 31 January - 12 August 2012; *Thin Black Line(s)*, Tate Britain London 2011/12.

Dr. Roshini Kempadoo

Roshini Kempadoo is a photographer, media artist, and lecturer. She is currently Reader in the School of Arts and Visual Industries at the University of East London. Her research, multimedia, and photographic projects combine factual and fictional re-imaginings of contemporary experiences with history and memory. Having worked as a social documentary photographer for the Format Women's Picture Agency, her recent work as a digital image artist includes photographs and screen-based interactive art installations that fictionalise Caribbean archive material, objects, and spaces. They combine sound, animations, and interactive use of objects, to introduce characters that once may have existed, evoking hidden and untold narratives. She is represented by Autograph ABP, London.

Shaheen Merali

Shaheen Merali is both a curator and writer, currently based in London. Between 2003-8, he was the Head of Exhibitions, Film and New Media at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany curating several exhibitions including *The Black Atlantic; Dreams and Trauma- Moving images* and the *Promised Lands and Re-Imagining Asia, One Thousand years of Separation*. In 2006, he was the co-curator of the 6th Gwangju Biennale, Korea. He is currently researching a major exhibition for the Birla Academy of Art and Education on its International Collection to be presented in India (2012). Merali is a regular contributor to the Art Journal (of India) and to Art Tomorrow (Iran) and has edited several publications, including *Far Near Distance, Contemporary Positions for Iranian Artists* (2004); *Spaces and Shadows, Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia and About Beauty* (2005), *New York – States of Mind and Re-Imagining Asia* (Saqi Books 2007) and the seminal *Everywhere is War (and rumours of war)* for BodhiMumbai, India. (2008).

Closing Remarks

Mark Sealy

Mark Sealy is Director of Autograph ABP. Mark has a special interest in photography and its relationship to social change, identity politics and human rights. At Autograph he has initiated the production of over 40 publications, produced exhibitions, residency projects and commissioned artists globally. During his time with the organisation, Sealy has jointly initiated and developed a £7.96 million capital building project (Rivington Place) in partnership with the Institute of International Visual Arts. He has guest lectured extensively throughout the UK and abroad including The Royal College of Art, Sothebys Art Institute and Harvard University. Recent projects curated by Sealy include *Disposable People: a Hayward Gallery Touring exhibition* which opened at Royal Festival Hall in London Oct 08 and *Bangladesh 1971* for Autograph ABP at Rivington Place. Sealy was recently awarded the Hood Medal for services to photography by the Royal Photographic Society and is currently a PhD candidate at Durham University. His research focuses on photography and cultural violence.

The Blk Art Group Research Project was set up by former 'Blk Art Group' members, Claudette Johnson, Marlene Smith and Keith Piper in 2011. This coincided with a retrospective exhibition held at the Graves Gallery Sheffield entitled 'The Blk Art Group' from August 2011 – March 2012, and a symposium examining the history and activities of the group held on the 22nd February, 2012.

www.blkartgroup.info

WWW.BLKARTGROUP.INFO

