

## Press Release

### *An Infinity of Traces* Curated by Ekow Eshun

Featuring artists:

Ayo Akingbade  
Ufuoma Essi  
Liz Gre  
Evan Ifekoya  
Liz Johnson Artur  
Jade Montserrat  
Emily Moore  
Sola Olulode  
Alexandria Smith  
Rhea Storr  
Alberta Whittle

13 April – 29 May 2021  
27 Bell Street, London

*An Infinity of Traces* is a group exhibition featuring UK-based established and emerging Black artists whose work explores notions of race, history, being and belonging. The artists address these themes through a variety of mediums, from moving image to sculpture and installation. Curated by Ekow Eshun, writer, broadcaster and former Director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts London, the exhibition reflects not only on the Black Lives Matter protests, but the existence of a more sustained antipathy to the Black presence that, in Britain, has deep roots in the nation's imperial past. With this legacy of hostility in mind, the artists confront topics such as self-care, kinship, and collective solidarity in their work.

The presentation offers a range of enquiries into the complexity of Black life and identity, recognising and highlighting Black identity as a multiple not singular condition, and one that is liable to continual redefinition and reimagining. The show takes its name from a quote by Antonio Gramsci who described how cultural identity is the consciousness of oneself as a multitude of historical processes, that creates, in turn, “an infinity of traces”.

The exhibition features film work by Ayo Akingbade, Ufuoma Essi, and Rhea Storr; visual and sound installations by Alberta Whittle and Evan Ifekoya; an experimental musical composition by Liz Gre; new photographic work by Liz Johnson Artur; new paintings by Sola Olulode, Jade Montserrat and Alexandria Smith; alongside painterly textiles by Emily Moore. The selection outlines some recent tendencies in contemporary practice, including most notably the centrality of Black feminism – in its various, expansive manifestations as politics, activism, theory and scholarship, ethics, the erotic, and creative discourse – as a key prism through which artists are making work and enquiring into society. Much of the work is newly commissioned for the show, or presented in London for the first time.

Gesturing back to the formative years of Black British contemporary art in the 1980s, *An Infinity of Traces* is presented as a conversation with the work of John Akomfrah, an artist who has consistently scrutinised issues of Black British identity and post-colonialism. Running concurrently with Akomfrah's new exhibition, *The Unintended Beauty of Disaster*, at 67 Lisson Street, *An Infinity of Traces* offers an opportunity to gauge how artists today are interrogating themes of history, identity and

belonging similar to those addressed by Akomfrah and his artistic peers four decades ago. Here, the Black body becomes the site of intersecting racial, sexual and cultural interpretations. And the question is asked, what does resistance to the anti-black present day look like? What might a de-colonial or anti-racist future look like? Can an exhibition be a site of liberation?

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## About Ekow Eshun

Ekow Eshun is a writer and curator. He is Chairman of the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group, overseeing the most prestigious public art programme in the UK, and the former Director of the ICA, London. He is the author of *Africa State of Mind: Contemporary Photography Reimagines a Continent* (Thames & Hudson) and *Black Gold of the Sun* (Penguin), which was nominated for the Orwell prize. He has contributed to publications on the work of Chris Ofili, Kehinde Wiley, John Akomfrah and Duro Olowu among others, as well to catalogues including *Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography* (Barbican); *Between Worlds* (National Portrait Gallery); *Linda McCartney: The Polaroid Diaries* (Taschen), *Seen: Black Style UK* (Booth Clibborn). Eshun's writing has appeared in publications including the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Independent*, *Granta*, *Esquire*, *GQ Style*, *Aperture*, *Wired* and *L'uomo Vogue*. He is a Contributing Editor at *Wallpaper* magazine and is a member of the Advisory Board of *Liquid Blackness* journal. His most recent exhibitions as a curator include *Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography* (Barbican) as adjunct curator; *Africa State of Mind* (NAE, Nottingham; MOAD, San Francisco); *Hassan Hajjaj: The Path* (Arnolfini, Bristol). Eshun is the recipient of an honorary doctorate from London Metropolitan University.

## Artist Biographies

### Ayo Akingbade

Ayo Akingbade is an artist, writer and director based in London. She is a graduate of London College of Communication and is completing a PgD at Royal Academy Schools. She has exhibited and screened widely, including presentations at Institute of Contemporary Arts, South London Gallery, Birkbeck University, Walker Art Center, Somerset House Studios and Instituto Tomie Ohtake, amongst others. Recent solo and group exhibitions include *Not Working*, Kunstverein Munchen (2020); *Towner International*, Towner Eastbourne (2020); *Archival Address*, National Gallery of Art Washington (2020); *No News Today*, Images Festival, Canada (2020) and *Institute of Contemporary Arts*, London (2018-9).

### Ufuoma Essi

Ufuoma Essi is a video artist and filmmaker from Lewisham, South East London. She works predominantly with film and moving image as well as photography and sound. Her work revolves around Black feminist epistemology and the configuration of displaced histories. The archive forms an essential medium for her as an artist and it's through explorations with the archive that she aims to interrogate and disrupt the silences and gaps of political and historical narratives. By using the archive as a process of unlearning and discovery she seeks to re-centre the marginalised histories of the Black Atlantic and specific histories of black women. Drawing from a range of influences including black popular culture, films, music, historical texts and black feminist theory from writers such as Claudia Jones to Daphne Brooks, Ufuoma's films have been screened and exhibited at film festivals, institutions and galleries in the UK and abroad such as the Barbican Centre, South London Gallery, MOCA Los Angeles, Black Star Film Festival, Croydon Art Store, CinemAfrica Film Festival and Chisenhale Studios.

### Liz Gre

Liz Gre (b. 1991) is a composer and vocalist writing genre-less compositions with Black Women for Black Women. Her practice is rooted in reflexive storytelling and the viscosity of the imaginary. As a composer and performer, her works have been presented by Omaha Symphony, Maurisa Mansaray (Cello), Queens Museum, the Center for Afrofuturist Studies, The Union for Contemporary Art, and the Omaha Under the Radar Festival. She has been featured as vocalist in Dameun Strange's opera, *Mother King*, and Tavares Strachan's *In Plain Sight*, for which she also composed and arranged for performance.

### Evan Ifekoya

Evan Ifekoya is an artist and energy worker who through sound, text, video and performance places demands on existing systems and institutions of power, to re-centre and prioritise the experience and voice of those previously marginalised. The practice considers art as a site where resources can be both redistributed and renegotiated, whilst challenging the implicit rules and hierarchies of public and social space. Through archival and sonic investigations, they speculate on blackness in abundance. Their ongoing investigation considers the somatic experience of listening, the healing potential of sound and the spiritual dimension of sexuality. They established the collectively run and QTIBPOC (queer, trans\*, intersex, black and

people of colour) led Black Obsidian Sound System (B.O.S.S.) in 2018. In 2019, they won the Kleinwort Hambros Emerging Artists Prize and in 2017 the Arts Foundation award for Live Art sponsored by Yoma Sasberg Estate. They have presented exhibitions and performances across Europe and Internationally including: Liverpool Biennial (2021); Gus Fischer New Zealand (2020); De Appel Netherlands (2019); Gasworks London (2018) Contemporary Arts Centre New Orleans as part of Prospect 4 (2017); Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town (2016); Studio Voltaire London (2015) and Castlefield Gallery Manchester (2014). Their work is held in a number of public collections, including Arts Council England and Walker Art Gallery Liverpool. Their moving image work is distributed by LUX.

### **Liz Johnson Artur**

Liz Johnson Artur (b. 1964, Bulgaria) lives and works in London. Her practice includes photography, film and installation works, capturing and engaging with people for more than 30 years. She went to the Royal College in London for an MA in Fine Art after studying photography at the Bayerische Staatslehranstalt für Fotografie in Munich. Johnson Artur has exhibited internationally, including group shows at the Serpentine Galleries, London; Barbican, London; The Photographer's Gallery, London; 10th Berlin Biennale; David Nolan Gallery, NY and Kunstverein Leipzig. In 2019, she had solo exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum in New York and the South London Gallery in London. She received the Turner Bursary in 2020 and was nominated for the Aimia | AGO Photography Prize in 2017. Her monograph with Bierke Verlag was listed by The New York Times in 'Best Photo Books 2016'.

### **Jade Montserrat**

Jade Montserrat is the recipient of the Stuart Hall Foundation Scholarship which supports her PhD (via MPhil) at IBAR, UCLan, (Race and Representation in Northern Britain in the context of the Black Atlantic: A Creative Practice Project) and the development of her work from her black diasporic perspective in the North of England. She was also awarded one of two Jerwood Student Drawing Prizes in 2017 for No Need for Clothing, a documentary photograph of a drawing installation at Cooper Gallery DJCAD by Jacquetta Clark. Jade's Rainbow Tribe project – a combination of historical and contemporary manifestations of Black Culture from the perspective of the Black Diaspora is central to the ways she is producing a body of work, including No Need For Clothing and its iterations, as well as her performance work Revue. Jade was commissioned to present Revue as a 24 hour live performance at SPILL Festival of Performance, October 2018, a solo exhibition at The Bluecoat, Liverpool, (Nov – 10 Mar 2019) which toured to Humber Street Gallery (July-sept 2019) and was commissioned by Art on the Underground to create the 2018 Winter Night Tube cover. Iniva and Manchester Art Gallery have commissioned Jade as the first artist for the Future Collect project (2020).

### **Emily Moore**

Emily Moore is a painter who was born in 1983 London, UK. She graduated from The Royal College of Art in a Masters of Painting this year 2020. Emily has defined her own term 'wildness' in contemporary painting, which she says speaks both to her approach within her practice but also suggests the state of contemporary painting through the lens of art history and its current context within the immediate conversations surrounding painting. She was awarded the Valerie Beston Award 2020 and will have her debuting London Solo show at Ordovas Gallery in 2021. Recent selected shows include Tomorrow: London at The White Cube London, Grads now at Saatchi Gallery, Without a painter at The Fitzrovia Gallery London, Begin again at Guts Gallery, 50/50 at Fold Gallery and Snapshot at The Hockney Gallery London.

### **Sola Olulode**

Sola Olulode's dreamy queer visions explore embodiments of British Black Womxn and Non-Binary Folx. Working with various mediums of natural dyeing, batik, wax, ink, pastel, oil bar, and impasto she develops textural canvases that explore the fluidities of identities. Drawing inspiration from lived experience, friends, and cultural reference points to centre Black Queer Womxn, Olulode emphasises the integral need of representation and celebration of queer intimacies. Her utopian scenes celebrate relationships that transcend crude notions of queer sexuality, her figures exemplify the warm embrace of queer love, a temporal space to bathe in memories of intimacies abundant with scenes of profoundly deep tender connections. Envisaging a world reflective of the celebration of her own identities Olulode brings to life representation and visibility of Black Queer lived experiences. Her figures represent multifaceted complex individuals and the energy they hold in their bodies relishing in a boundless temporality of self-validation and joy. Olulode received a BA in Fine Art Painting from the University of Brighton in 2018. Since graduating she has succeeded residencies with solo shows: von Goetz, *Moving in the Bluish Light* (2018); Lewisham Art House, *Hold My Hand* (2019); V.O Curations, *Where the Ocean Meets the Beach* (2020); and featured in the V&A's *In the Palm of Your Hands* (2020). Various group exhibitions include: *BBZ BLK BK: Alternative Graduate Show* (2018); *Twilights of the Idols* (2020), Alice Black; *Blacklisted: An Indefinite Revolution* (2020), Christie's Education. All in London. Upcoming in 2021 Alessandro Albanese. Milan and Breakfast Under The Tree. Carl Freedman Gallery. Margate, Kent. Home Is The Body, Sapar Contemporary. NY.

### **Alexandria Smith**

Alexandria Smith is a mixed media visual artist based in London and New York. She earned her BFA in Illustration from Syracuse University; MA in Art Education from New York University; and MFA in Fine Arts from Parsons The New School for Design. She is the recipient of numerous awards including the 2018-2019 Queens Museum/Jerome Foundation Fellowship, a Pollock-Krasner Grant, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Fellowship, the Virginia A. Myers Fellowship at the University of Iowa and the Fine Arts Work Center Fellowship. She has been awarded residencies including MacDowell, Bemis, Yaddo and LMCC Process Space. Alexandria is currently Head of Programme, Painting at the Royal College of Art. Noted collaborations include Alexandria Smith (Monuments to an Effigy, Queens Museum), Tavares Strachan (In Plain Sight, Marian Goodman Gallery London, 2020), Zalika Azim (100 Years| 100 Women, Park Avenue Armory), and Enam Gbewonyo (Lynette Yiadom-Boake's *Fly In League With the Night*, Tate Britain). Currently, she is a PhD student at City, University of London studying how auto-ethnographic composition can best answer questions around the Black Woman immigrant/expat/trans-national identity. She is originally from Omaha, NE, US and is currently based in London, UK.

### **Rhea Storr**

Rhea Storr is an artist filmmaker who explores the representation of Black and mixed-race cultures. Masquerade as a site of protest or subversion is an ongoing theme in her work. So too, is the effect of place or space on cultural representation. On occasion she draws on her own rural upbringing and British Bahamian heritage. Rhea Storr often works in 16mm film; she considers that analogue film might be useful to Black artists, both in the aesthetics it creates and the production models it facilitates. She is currently undertaking a PhD entitled 'Towards a Black British Aesthetic: How is Black Radical Imagination realised through 16mm filmmaking practices?' She is a co-director of not nowhere an artists' film co-operative, London, that has a particular focus on analogue film. She is resident at Somerset House, London and occasionally programs at Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival. She is the winner of the Aesthetica Art Prize 2020 and the inaugural Louis Le Prince Experimental Film Prize. She was educated at Oxford University and the Royal College of Art.

### **Alberta Whittle**

Alberta Whittle is an artist, researcher and curator. Her interdisciplinary practice aims to develop a visual, oral and textual language that questions accepted Western constructs of history and society. This work is undertaken with an acute understanding of how formal historical records produced by privileged white men have always sought to replace more ancient and informal ways of comprehending the past. The artist's wider research questions the authority of postcolonial power, its implications and its legacy. Whittle's work often considers conditions in the afterlife of slavery where the racialised black body can become suspended in a state of stress that directly impacts upon physical, mental and emotional health. Within her work, the artist connects these ideas of black oppression with meditations on survival; championing the idea of healing as self-liberation. / She was awarded a Turner Bursary, the Frieze Artist Award and a Henry Moore Foundation Artist Award in 2020. Alberta is a Research Associate at The University of Johannesburg. She was a RAW Academie Fellow at RAW Material in Dakar in 2018 and is the Margaret Tait Award winner for 2018/9. Her creative practice is motivated by the desire to manifest self-compassion and collective care as key methods in battling anti-blackness. She choreographs interactive installations, using film, sculpture and performance as site-specific artworks in public and private spaces. Alberta has exhibited and performed in various solo and group shows, including at Grand Union (2020), Eastside Projects (2020), DCA (2019), GoMA, Glasgow (2019), Pig Rock Bothy at the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (2019), 13th Havana Biennale, Cuba (2019), The Tyburn Gallery, London (2019), The City Arts Centre, Edinburgh (2019), The Showroom, London (2018), National Art Gallery of the Bahamas (2018), RAW Material, Dakar (2018), FADA Gallery, Johannesburg (2018), the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg (2017), FRAMER FRAMED, Amsterdam (2015), Goethe On Main, Johannesburg (2015), at the Johannesburg Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale, Venice (2015), and BOZAR, Brussels (2014), amongst others.

### **About Lisson Gallery**

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, two in New York, one in Shanghai, as well as temporary spaces opened in 2020 in East Hampton and London's Mayfair district. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estates of Leon Polk Smith, Ted Stamm and Roy Colmer. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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