

Report:

Looking Further, Looking Harder

A series of discussions around collecting

#1. Women of Colour

23rd November, 2-5pm

Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge
Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DF

A round table discussion of invited attendees

As the New Hall Art Collection works towards Accreditation status this series of round table meetings are aimed at generating conversation around areas of collecting; issues that arise both from the historical growth of a collection to the responsibility of representation going forward.

A small group of invited guests (25) met at Murray Edwards College for a discussion about the New Hall Art Collection and representation of BAME artists, specifically women of colour (WOC), in Collections.

We are looking at the Collection from different perspectives - students, alumna, artists, curators - and asking what it means to address, and how to constructively address, representation, or lack of in, in Collections. We hope to interrogate the language and current dialogues.

The discussion was be recorded and uploaded to our website and those of our partners.

This event is held in collaboration with A Woman's Place project, a South East wide two-year project which presents a series of participatory events in 2017 before launching six new artists commissions at National Trust's Knole, Sevenoaks in 2018.

Related programme at New Hall Art Collection

9/16/23 November – Artist Barby Asante hosts workshops with students who identify as women of colour. Part of Barby's project, 'As Always a Painful Declaration of Independence: For Ama. For Aba. For Charlotte and Adjoa,' takes its title from Ama Ata Aidoo's poem.

The poem speaks of independence in terms of the political rupture between Africa and it's colonial rulers, and through the personal break up of lovers. Dedicated to the poem's protagonist Ama it presents the possibility of a woman defining her own political, cultural and social agency.

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Attendees:

Barby Asante	Artist, currently working on a series of workshops at Murray Edwards College for the New Hall Art Collection (see below)
Maria Azcoitia	New Hall Art Collection
Ashleigh Barice	Arts Professional
Amy Botfield	Arts Council England
Lucy Day	A Woman's Place Project
Eliza Gluckman	Curator, New Hall Art Collection
Sarah Greaves	College Administrator, Murray Edwards College
Lotte Juul Petersen	Curator, Wysing Arts Centre
Permindar Kaur	Artist (work in New Hall Art Collection)
Harriet Loffler	Curator (contemporary), Norwich Castle and Chair of NW Cambridge Public Art Panel
Semine L-Callensen	Student, Murray Edwards College
Ali MacGilp	Independent Curator
Stephanie Moran	Library and Information Manager, Iniva's Stuart Hall Library
Sophie Niang	MEC student
Eleanor McGrath	Senior Programmes Manager (Acquisitions), Art Fund
Precious Oyelade	Alumna, Murray Edwards College, current student at SOAS in African Studies
Bee Tajudeen	Founder and Creative Director, Black Blossoms
Christine Takegny	Contemporary Art Society
Seana Wilson	Artist, Curator (New Hall Art Collection)

Apologies

Gayle Chong Kwan	Artist (work in New Hall Art Collection)
Maryam Monalisa Gharavi	current Wysing artist in residence
Melanie Keen, InIVA	
Mattie Loyce, Project Mission Gallery	
Hammad Nasar, Paul Mellon Senior Fellow/BAM	
Ashai Nichols, Arts Council England	
Harold Offeh, Artist	
Dr. susan pui san lok	Artist, contributor Black Art and Modernism
Nadia Romain	Collector, writer, producer, strategic consultant and founder of Everything I Want
Deborah Smith	Independent Curator
Jessica Taylor, Curator (Diaspora Pavilion, Venice)	– cannot attend will extend to network

AGENDA

2.05-15

5 min Intro from Eliza - about New Hall Art Collection and A Woman's Place project

5 min group introduce themselves - warm up

2.15-40

LABELS - what's in a name - Diversity/ BAME/ Women of Colour...

suggested contributions (5 mins)

Generational overviews/ (inter)National perspectives

Barby Asante

open table (Chair Perminder Kaur, artist)

2.40-45

Personal perspective - Bee Tajudeen

Founder and Creative Director, Black Blossoms

2.45-3.10

STATISTICS - what do the numbers tell us?

suggested contributions (5 mins)

Seana Wilson - will ref the ArtNews article 'What is Curatorial Activism' stats by Maura Reilly and read the stats on women artists from the 2013 Great East End Art Audit

susan pui san lok stats from the Black Art and Modernism findings

Funders – ACE, Art Fund etc

open table (Chair? volunteer needed)

3.10-15

Personal perspective - Precious Oyelade (Phd topic and being a student at MEC)

3.15-3.45

Cup of tea and a quick trip up to the Dome to see some works

3.50-4.00

Personal perspective - artist Perminder Kaur

4.00-4.35

Collections / Collecting

Eliza on conversation at MEC last week with Anthea Hamilton

Christine Takengny – Contemporary Art Society

Valeria Napoleone XX fund, for which CAS acquired work by Martine Syms and acquisitions of BAME female artists whose work CAS gifted to collections. The questions and discussions I have with museums around this. Also, we recently acquired South African artist Dineo Bopape at Frieze and I can talk about this as well and the work acquired by Lubaina Himid for Gallery Oldham. (5-10mins)

Ali MacGlip – *will discuss the Leeds CAS women in collections study day and also mention the What Should White Culture Do? Symposium at the RCA last weekend. (5 mins)*

open table (Chair? volunteer needed)

4.40 -5.00pm

WRAP UP - identify main concerns, opinions and actions

ANNOTATED NOTES from the discussion

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Labels: what's in a name?

What are the differences between feminism and black feminism? Whilst women artists are underrepresented; black women artists are hardly seen.

The use of the term 'Black and Minority Ethnic' clearly denotes the labelling of a minority. There is a need to navigate through the meanings and issues created by the use of this label; 'black' means so many different things globally.

Museums and galleries seem to use the term 'diversity' to define acquisition policy rather than in terms of the ideology that it represents. Display and acquisition become 'tick-box' exercises ensuring that appropriate genres are being appropriately represented to ensure funding is allocated. Many exhibitions by artists of colour are curated according to the clearly defined classification of identity and if an artist does not conform to this, it is more difficult to get work shown. It is important to go beyond identity without the political edge, as seen in the Diaspora Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale.

It is important to have exhibitions by women artists of colour to provide them with a presence for these discussions. Diversity should not be about separately defined cultures and histories but an exploration of the influences that these have on each other within the art historical canon.

Statistics

Most collections have less than 1% BAME artists – Arts Council Collection has 4.3%, British Council Collection has 3% - whilst 14% of British population identify as 'not white'.

Nationally the number of BAME applications to the Arts Council is in line with the population averages but success rates are not as high as those for white artists. However, in the South East, the awards are higher than the national average. There are higher ineligibility rates for funding from BAME applications and the Arts Council are investigating why this is the case, especially as funding is based purely on artistic merit.

Within the Art Fund, artists are not categorised by race or ethnic background. 36% of acquisitions last year were for female artists compared to those from male artists or collectives. The Art Fund is cautious about labelling, as well as audience development plans from museums that are designed to appeal to specific groups. However, it is recognised that labels are important in defining statistics and monitoring trends.

Does art education contribute to the issues surrounding how BAME women students see themselves and how they are perceived by others? Many enter with similar qualifications as their contemporaries yet leave with lower degrees. One reason could be the imposition of the traditional forms of art teaching on artists whose work does not conform to that identity and ideology.

Art schools need to educate women students about how to survive in a predominantly male, white art world. It is important that practising artists work with students to discuss living and financing life as an artist.

Collections

Griselda Pollock states that the cultural norm is white and male and this needs to be addressed. It is not to the norm in life and collections need to address this.

The Contemporary Art Society has approximately 70 member museums that they collect with. Before 2013, work was acquired purely on the basis of media. However, post 2014, the Society has worked with various collecting initiatives and clear themes have become apparent. These are led by curatorial decisions around gender and race. The Valeria Napoleone XX scheme and the Collections Fund at Frieze encourage museums to reconsider gender imbalance, in particular. CAS has also started working with museums based in areas with large BAME populations, in an attempt to engage artists with these communities.

It is important to create and develop shared histories. It is often apparent that curators are unaware of different artists and genres, due to lack of funding, time or location. This is unintentional discrimination because of ignorance. The artist should work alongside curators as cultural informants.

How visible are the specific smaller projects and should they be taken into larger institutions? Larger organisations are led by who is being employed, who's in the room and who will advocate for specific causes. If Boards remain the same, the collections will not change. Bards are selected on many criteria and dialogues with smaller groups may not be high on the list of priorities. The Royal Standard Gallery in Liverpool changes its directorship every two years which brings in different groups and discussions to the table.

Sarah Greaves, College Administrator, Murray Edwards College

Feedback, suggested reading & Notes from contributors

Hammad Nasar contribution by email:

In the midst of curating an exhibition in conversation with the BAM project and mostly coming from four public collections (in Manchester and Bradford) I am wrestling with the problems of public collections' gender bias (of any colour). We cannot simply repeat and perpetuate it. Such repetition of bias is itself a sort of violence. But how does one intervene in ways that are organic and expansive, and do not become tokenistic and instrumentalist gestures? These are some of the questions around which I feel the urgent need for us to think in public.

Amy Botfield, Relationship Manager, Visual Arts, Arts Council England email after event:

Hi Eliza,

Thanks again for inviting us all to discuss collecting work by black and minority ethnic women. The discussion was much broader and covered many of the barriers and opportunities to supporting diverse artists, as well as models we could expand or replicate:

- Funding surgeries in art schools and other DIY educational/professional contexts
- Collective discussion about the 'creative case for diversity' and how to evolve it (or scrap it and start again, again?)
- Diverse critical dialogue
- Support for new collaborations between organisations/networks/collectives/universities/colleges
- Temporary alliances between different types and scales of organisation
- Workforce development for diverse producers, curators, directors, publicists, writers
- Collaborative, polyphonic teaching
- Board development
- More funding of every type for diverse-led and focussed organisations
- Celebration and recognition of the diverse DIY sector

If you would like to discuss funding for new initiatives to support diverse women artists (so many labels), let me know.

I'm also available to give Grants for the arts advice in universities, colleges, arts centres, galleries, studio facilities and almost any other context in the South East.

I would also be really happy to attend or host a regular forum.

Very best wishes, Amy

Links from Ali MacGilp (CAS)

<https://art.tfl.gov.uk/media/what-should-white-culture-do/> - conference at RCA 'What should white culture do?'

<https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/questions-asked-answers-avoided-white-culture-symposium> - article re conference above

<https://jademontserrat.com/>

<http://www.contemporaryartsociety.org/event/sackler-cpd-programme-study-day-women-collections/>

Eleanor McGrath, Senior Programmes Manager, Acquisitions, Art Fund

I can confirm that the Art Fund wish to stay in contact, in the loop, or as part of the discussion- I think it is vital those considered 'gatekeepers' can see the broader picture and consider how our programme responds to dialogue, activism and the latest views that were present at this last gathering.

I am not sure if you have yet had much feedback about resources- but clearly there are many pockets of information and initiatives that are bubbling and building, which would be wonderful to share.

New Hall Art Collection at Murray Edwards College
University of Cambridge

The New Hall Art Collection is the largest collection of works by women in Europe. The Collection is housed within Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge and began in 1986 with the acquisition of a work by Mary Kelly. Historically women artists have been excluded from academic research, art historical books and institutional museum programming; an issue currently on the agenda of most international art institutions. With over 500 works, a third on public display, the New Hall Art Collection has an emphasis on modern and contemporary art.

Contacts:

Eliza Gluckman, Curator eg477@cam.ac.uk
Sarah Greaves, College Administrator skg22@cam.ac.uk

A Woman's Place is a catalyst and umbrella for cultural projects and advocacy where equality provides the contextual backbone. Working with artists, heritage, education, environmental and community partners we nurture ambitious high quality projects which support women, and people who identify as women, who work in the arts, with the aim to create better, fairer working practices.

Launching in May 2018 and a key part of The National Trust's *Women and Power* programme, A Woman's Place at Knole shines a light on historical women's voices, marking 100 years since the *Representation of the People Act* that gave women the vote in the UK for the first time. 2017 Turner Prize winner Lubaina Himid joins five other commissioned artists responding through different media – sculpture, film, interventions and a website, with works that encompass love, betrayal, class, gender and inheritance.

Eliza Gluckman and Lucy Day