

Revisiting the Work of Black Artists in Scotland Through New Collecting

Barby Asante; Tam Joseph; Donald Locke; Maud Sulter;
Lisandro Suriel; Alberta Whittle; Aubrey Williams;
Matthew Arthur Williams; Ajamu X

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Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow
Co-curated with Mother Tongue

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‘Revisiting the Work of Black Artists in Scotland Through New Collecting’ showcases artworks which have entered into the collection of Glasgow Museums, co-curated by GoMA and independent curatorial duo Mother Tongue.

Since 2012, Mother Tongue has been responding – through exhibitions, texts and events – to the whiteness of existing Scottish art history narratives. Following research in archives and collections, they continue to compile a chronology of Black-Scottish artists, from the 1860s onwards, who lived, studied, travelled through and exhibited in Scotland. Many of the artists included within this narrative did not stay permanently, one factor in the lack of local recognition experienced by many Black artists included in this project, with their time in Scotland largely omitted from Black-British art histories.

In 2018, Mother Tongue proposed a research affiliation with GoMA primarily to highlight existing work by Black artists in the city’s collection. From that work, Mother Tongue proposed a series of new acquisitions made between 1963 and 2019. These, alongside a newly-commissioned moving image work from Barby Asante, have been made possible by support from Art Fund’s New Collecting Award.

The works on show span a 60-year period, and include moving image, photography, painting and ceramics. They reflect complex dialogues around race, post-colonial legacies, Empire and independence through the acquisitions, each of which brings with them wider socio-political narratives. Mother Tongue were awarded an Art Fund New Collecting Award in 2018 in affiliation with Glasgow Museums. These awards offer 100% funding for focused collecting projects, enabling curators to expand collections into exciting new areas or deepen existing holdings in significant new ways.

The curatorial research underpinning the acquisitions and exhibition began in 2012, as part of the broader exhibition ‘What We Have Done, What We Are About To Do,’ at the CCA Glasgow. This was part of an AHRC research project with Glasgow School of Art, looking towards alternative art histories for Glasgow, contending against the “Glasgow Miracle” catchphrase as coined by Hans Ulrich Obrist. During archival research in preparation for this, Mother Tongue consulted artworks,

documentation and other ephemera from exhibitions at the CCA Glasgow and its former iteration as the Third Eye Centre concerning the work of two artists: Maud Sulter and Oladélé Bamgboyé, which spurred a reflection on their absence from Scottish art historical narratives despite having grown up in Scotland and contributing to the arts locally through exhibitions and being involved in artist-led initiatives, such as Transmission Gallery and Street Level. The archival sources highlighted their experiences of working as Black artists in Scotland, and that their experiences of being based in Scotland led to them leaving for elsewhere, either permanently or for extended periods of time.

The research behind the 'Revisiting the Work of Black Artists in Scotland Through New Collecting' show seeks to bring into a single place for the first time, the work, presence, activity, and exhibition histories of Black artists in Scotland, working historically up until the present. This research responds to a general amnesia surrounding the many Black artists who were born, lived, worked, studied, exhibited and curated in Scotland. At present, this chronology begins in the 1860s, with the African-American painter Robert S Duncanson, who under the influence of Walter Scott and the patronage of the Duchess of Argyll, produced some of my most well-received work, painting landscapes from the Scottish Highlands. The renowned Nigerian sculptor Ben Enwonwu participated in the 1938 Nigerian Pavilion as part of the Empire Exhibition. African-American illustrator Ashley Bryan studied at The Glasgow School of Art temporarily during WWII, whilst stationed in Glasgow after been called up for military service, interrupting his art studies at Cooper Union. Antiguan artist Frank Walters visited Scotland during the late 1950s, and in 1959 Donald Locke enrolled on a joint postgraduate programme between the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh College of Art, later returning to ECA on a British Council ceramics bursary. During his time in Edinburgh, Locke participated in local exhibitions, and also curated exhibitions, such as The West Indian Federation Commemorative, at the Paperback Gallery & Bookshop in 1962, bringing the work of his peer Frank Bowling to Scotland for the first time. Bowling would subsequently go on to exhibit as part of The Edinburgh Open 100 organised by Richard Demarco at the Hume Tower and participate in a three-person show at the Commonwealth Institute, Edinburgh, formerly at 8 Rutland Square. The

Commonwealth Institute's programme also included a group show of artists from Trinidad & Tobago, running October – November 1974. The Nigerian artist and printmaker Uzo Egonu also exhibited at the Commonwealth Institute, the first of a succession of Edinburgh-projects, the last of which was Africa '97 at Edinburgh College of Art.

Other Commonwealth-related activity included Aubrey Williams presentation as part of the 1964 Commonwealth Arts Festival at Gilmorehill Hall, University of Glasgow. Nigerian artist Ben Osawe was part of the same project, and also participated in an exhibition at the Royal Scottish Museum, now known as the National Museum of Scotland. In a similar timeframe, the Richard Demarco gallery held exhibitions of artists such as Nigerian painter Twins-Seven-Seven and later Makonde: Wooden Sculpture from East Africa (1990).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Transmission Gallery held a number of exhibitions of ground-breaking Black-British artists including Keith Piper, Eddie Chambers and Lubiana Himid. At CCA Glasgow and its predecessor the Third Eye Centre, artists including Sonia Boyce, Janine Antoni, Veronica Ryan, Maud Sulter and Oladélé Bamgboyé presented exhibitions, with some of these artists also contributing texts concurrently to Variant magazine, formerly a free cultural magazine based in Glasgow, founded in 1984.

These selected artists and stories from Mother Tongue's archival research named above have informed the acquisitions on show in Gallery 1, GoMA – it marks for example the first work of Donald Locke and Aubrey Williams to enter a Scottish art collection, and the first time the moving image work of Maud Sulter has been collected. The acquisitions process is ongoing, and appointments to view these works and more can be requested at the Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, Nitshill.

Please follow the webpage for this project for further reading material during the run of the exhibition.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Maud Sulter (Glasgow 1960; d. Dumfries 2008) was an artist and feminist activist of Scots-Ghanaian heritage. She left Glasgow at the age of 17 to study at the London College of Fashion, and later graduated with a Master's degree in photographic studies from the University of Derby. She started her career as a poet and published her first volume (which won the Vera Bell Prize), *As a Blackwoman*, in 1985. That same year she took part as a visual artist in *The Thin Black Line*, curated by Lubaina Himid (b. 1954), the first major exhibition to feature contemporary women artists from ethnic minorities in a British public institution, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.

Another significant step in her career came in 1990 with the publication of *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity* by Urban Fox Press, her own publishing house. This groundbreaking publication was the result of the Blackwomen's Creativity Project, which she started with photographer Ingrid Pollard (b. 1953) in the 1980s. In 1999-2000, she opened a gallery, *Rich Women of Zurich*, in the Clerkenwell area of London, with a view to exhibit her own works and those of other artists from her community.

Notable works by Sulter include *Zabat* (1987; London, V&A), a series of Cibachrome photographic portraits of contemporary Black artists, musicians and writers, posed as a theatre of ancient muses; *Sycas* (1994; Wrexham and Portfolio Gallery, Edinburgh), a set of montages and texts linking the horrors of African slavery with the European persecution of minorities in the 1930s and 1940s; *Jeanne Duval: a melodrama* (2003; Scottish National Portrait Gallery). This last was a series of dramatically beautiful self-portraits as Baudelaire's muse, Jeanne Duval.

Her photographic work earned her widespread recognition and several distinctions, including the British Telecom New Contemporaries Award and the MoMart Fellowship at Tate Liverpool in 1990.

maudsulterpassion.wordpress.com

Alberta Whittle (b. 1980 Barbados) is an artist, researcher and curator. She was chosen for the Margaret Tait Award for 2018/9, the Turner Prize 2020 bursary, the Henry Moore Foundation artist award 2020 and the Frieze Artist Award 2020. Her creative practice is motivated by the desire to manifest self-compassion and collective care as key methods in battling anti-blackness. Oscillating between cutting humour and sensitive poetics her work ranges across media and across continents.

Her work is part of The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow Museums Collections, The UK Arts Council Collection, St Andrew's University, The Contemporary Art Research Collection at Edinburgh College of Art and McManus Museum in Dundee. Whittle is currently a Research Associate at The University of Johannesburg. She was a RAW Academie Fellow at RAW Material in Dakar in 2018 and her writing has been published in MAP magazine, Visual Culture in Britain, Visual Studies, Art South Africa and Critical Arts Academic Journal.

Current and upcoming projects include *Fragments of Epic Memory*, AGO, Toronto; *We are History*, Somerset House, London; *Sex Ecologies*, Kunsthal Trondheim; *Life Between Islands*, Caribbean-British Artists 1950s - now, Tate Britain, London; *British Art Show 9*; *Life Support: Forms of Care in Art and Activism*, Hayward Gallery Touring.

In 2022 she will represent Scotland at the 59th Biennale di Venezia.

www.albertawhittle.com

Donald Locke (b. Guyana 1930; d. Atlanta 2010) belonged to a generation that grappled with the legacy of colonialization and the dawn of independence in the Caribbean. Locke enrolled in Guyana's free Working People's Art Class at age eighteen. He later said, "I was converted instantly. I became an artist, all in my head of course, and my life was changed forever." Locke received scholarships to study art at the Bath Academy of Art in England and then at the Edinburgh College of Art between 1959-1964. He studied painting, pottery, and sculpture, all practices that

remained important throughout his artistic development. He later returned to Edinburgh College of Art through a British Council Ceramics bursary. During his studies, Locke participated in local exhibitions, whilst also organising exhibitions of fellow Caribbean artists in Scotland, such as the West Indian Federation Commemorative at the Paperback Bookshop and Gallery in Edinburgh in 1962. His links to Edinburgh continued, for example with his participation in the retirement exhibition of his ECA tutor Katie Horsman 'Cone 9 Down' at New 57 Gallery on Market Street in 1976.

His 'Plantation' series – group of paintings and sculptures featuring forms held in strict lines and grids, connected as if with chains or a series of bars, analogous he has said, to the system whereby one group of people are kept in economic and political subjugation by another – is one of his most noted series.

Disillusioned with the slow progress of his career in the UK, he moved to America in 1979 when he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1990 he moved from Arizona to Atlanta, where the work of African-American vernacular artists made a dramatic impact on him. In 1990, he relocated from Arizona to Atlanta, where he maintained a studio practice while teaching at Georgia State University. Locke's work in varied media—including sculpture, ceramics, painting, collage, and drawing—plumbs the depths of cultural interchange between European and American modernism and Guyanese, African, and Amerindian practices.

www.donaldlocke.com

Aubrey Williams (b. Guyana 1926; d. London 1990) began drawing as a child, taking lessons from a restorer of religious paintings in Guyanese churches, before joining the Working Peoples' Art Class, aged twelve. Alongside developing an art practice, Williams trained as an agronomist, in 1944 taking up a post as Agricultural Field Officer on the coast. His encouragement of exploited farmers to claim rights against British-owned sugar plantations soon resulted in his banishment to the remote north-western rainforest settlement of Hosororo. There, Williams met

indigenous Warrau Amerindians whose history and culture came to inform much of his work.

Williams arrived in London in 1952 as part of the Windrush generation. He went to St Martin's School of Art and was exposed to the German Expressionists at Marlborough Gallery and the Abstract Expressionists at the Tate and Whitechapel Galleries, and travelled Europe extensively. In the early 1960s he began to exhibit widely to critical acclaim, but soon became marginalised as a Commonwealth artist. Increasingly he worked in Jamaica, then Florida. The large, abstract paintings made there in the 1980s include his three best known series: Olmec-Maya, Shostakovich and Cosmos. The seminal exhibition "The Other Story" at the Hayward Gallery in 1989 began a process of overturning this marginalisation, and Williams is now regarded as one of the most important British artists of his generation.

Williams' recent and upcoming exhibitions include: *The Gift of Art* (2018) at the Perez Museum; *Get Up, Stand Up Now* (2019) at Somerset House; *Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art 50s – Now* (2021) at Tate Britain; *Post-War Modern New Art in Britain 1945–1965* (2022) at the Barbican; and *Fragments of Epic Memory* (2021) at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

octobergallery.co.uk/artists/williams

Barby Asante (b.1975) is a London-based artist, curator, educator and occasional DJ. Her work is concerned with the politics of place, space memory and the histories and legacies of colonialism. Asante's work is collaborative, performative and dialogic, often working with groups of people as contributors, collaborators or co researchers.

Asante's projects include; *The South London Black Archive* (Peckham Platform / Tate Modern, 2012) an archive project, mapping black music and memories in South London, through an invitation to audiences and local people to create the archive of black music memory collaboratively. *Baldwin's Nigger RELOADED* (Iniva, Nottingham Contemporary, Framer Framed/ Art Rotterdam 2014-

onwards) with the London based collective sorryyoufeeluncomfortable, using Horace Ove's 1968 film Baldwin's Nigger as a start for a contemporary study of Baldwin's provocation, through a reflective re-enactment ritual of transcribing, rewriting, re-staging and re-performing the original event.

Her current artistic research is focused on her long term project, *As Always a Painful Declaration of Independence : For Ama. For Aba. For Charlotte and Adjoa*. This is being realised in a series of project episodes, including *Intimacy and Distance (Diaspora Pavilion, Venice, 2017)* *For Ama. For Aba. For Charlotte and Adjoa (Dolph Projects, London, 2017)*, *The Queen and the Black Eyed Squint, (Starless Midnight, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts, Gateshead, 2017)*, *Get up Stand Up Now, Somerset House, London 2019, GOMA, Glasgow, 2021*) and *Declaration of Independence (Diaspora Pavilion, Venice, Feminsist Emergency, Birkbeck, London, Sonic Soundings, Venice, 2017, Library of Performing Rights, LADA, London, Resisting Narratives, The Horse Hospital, London, 2018, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts, Gateshead, 2019, Bergen Kunstsall, 2020)*. The project explores the social, cultural and political agency of women of colour, as they navigate historic legacies of colonialism, independence, migration and the contemporary global socio-political climate, through performative actions that engage with historic spaces, archives and collections.

Asante has taught on Fine Art and Critical Studies programmes in London, Berlin, Gothenburg and Rotterdam. She is co founder of agency for agency, a collaborative agency concerned with ethics, intersectionality and education in the contemporary arts who were mentors to the sorryyoufeeluncomfortable collective. Asante is on the board of the Women's Art Library and 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning. She is also a PhD Candidate in CREAM, Westminster University, London.

www.barbyasante.com

The work of **Tam Joseph** (b. Dominica 1947) has been the subject of, and included in, numerous exhibitions in the UK and Internationally. Described as a uniquely talented, multidimensional artist by art historian Eddie Chambers, Tam Joseph has

contributed a number of memorable paintings that locate themselves at the centre of socio-political commentary, often making work that shocks as it amuses, amuses as it shocks. Two of his best known paintings are "Spirit of the Carnival", a reference to the Notting Hill Carnival and 'UK School Report.' Joseph has exhibited as part of solo and group shows in Scotland, including 'From Two Worlds,' Fruitmarket Gallery (1986); 'Shock to the System' at Maclaurin Art Gallery (1991); 'Blast from the Past' Glasgow Museums (1992); the solo show 'Learning to Walk,' Smith Art Gallery and Museum, Stirling (1994); and 'Where do I end and you begin?' at the City Art Centre Edinburgh, as part of Edinburgh Art Festival, 2014.

Born in the Commonwealth of Dominica, Joseph came to London at the age of eight, where he still lives and works. In 1967 he studied at the Central School of Art and Design, following this with a BA course at the Slade School of Art which he left after a few months. He worked on *Yellow Submarine*, the 1968 animated film featuring the Beatles. He travelled in Europe and the Far East during the 1970s, and subsequently enrolled at the London College of Printing, graduating with a Dip AD in Typographic design. While working for the magazine *Africa Journal* in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he travelled extensively in Africa. In 1979 he illustrated Buchi Emecheta's children's book *Titch the Cat*, published by Allison and Busby.

The works of Tam Joseph are in private and public collections including: The Arts Council; Victoria & Albert Museum; The Museum of London; Wolverhampton Art Gallery; Ben Uri Gallery; Contemporary Art Society; Sheffield City Art Gallery; Camden Libraries; Bradford City Museum; Newlyn Orion.

www.tamjosephartlive.com

Matthew Arthur Williams (b. London, 1989) is a Glasgow-based visual and sound artist, photographer, and DJ. They co-produced *PR 4 US* with Christian Charles Noelle in 2019, a short film commissioned by LUX Scotland and BBC for *Now & Next*, and self-published the zine *Soor Plooms* in 2020. Between 2018-19, they worked photographer and co-cinematographer for Alberta Whittle's *Between a*

Whisper and a Cry, commissioned as part of her award and subsequent solo exhibition How Flexible Can We Make the Mouth at Dundee Contemporary Arts.

In 2020, they undertook The Bothy Project/Transmission Gallery Residency on Eigg, and in 2021 held a CCA Glasgow Primary Performance Residency. During the residency at The Bothy Project Eigg, Williams was joined by invited mentor Ajamu X and

Matthew Arthur Williams spent time at Sweeney's Bothy in March 2020. He was joined for some of that time by invited mentor Ajamu X. The work produced as part of this residency was later presented in the exhibition, In guide of Land, Johnston Terrace Garden, Edinburgh, as part of the 2021 Edinburgh Art Festival, curated by Associate Programmer Tako Taal.

www.matthewarthurwilliams.com

Lisandro Suriel (b.1990, Netherlands) is a contemporary visual artist and artistic researcher from the Caribbean whose current project, Ghost Island, seeks to build a framework with which to document and process the dynamic and unseen influences of Caribbean identity. Suriel earned his Bachelor's degree in Photography at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague and received his Master's of Art by research in Artistic Research and Art Studies at the University of Amsterdam. As part of his Master's thesis he analysed early 20th-century illustrations of West-Indian mythology in relation to cultural aphasia. This research forms the foundation of his ongoing artistic project Ghost Island.

Selected exhibitions include Ghost Island: Memoria, Stella Jones Gallery, New Orleans, LA, USA and Prospects & Concepts, Mondriaan Fund, International Art Fair Art Rotterdam, The Netherlands (2020); Ghost Island: Memoria, Casa de Castro Alves, Salvador, Brazil (2019); Amongst Ghosts and Robots, Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, The University of Amsterdam (2015);

Suriel was the 2019 recipient of the Tilting Axis fellowship, organized by the Tilting Axis committee, Mother Tongue, CCA Glasgow, LUX Scotland, Glasgow School of Art and the University of St. Andrews.

www.lisandrosuriel.com

Ajamu X (b. 1963Huddersfield) is a British artist, curator, archivist and activist. His photography which explores same-sex desire, the Black male body, and takes an archivist-activist approach to documenting the lives and experiences of black LGBTQ people in the UK.

He studied Black History and photography in Leeds. While in Leeds, he and two friends created the magazine BLAC, an acronym for Black Liberation Activist Core. In October 1987, after seeing it advertised in the newspaper Caribbean Times, Ajamu attended the first, and only, National Black Gay Men's Conference held at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre in Camden.

In 2000 Ajamu and Topher Campbell co-founded rukus! Federation an "arts company dedicated to celebrating and showcasing the best in challenging, provocative works by black lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gender artists nationally and internationally." Ajamu was the Archive Manager "The Black LGBT Archive Project", a major initiative to develop an archive collection on "Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-Gender heritage, history and lived experience in the UK". In 2008 Ajamu co-curated the exhibition Outside Edge: a journey through Black lesbian and gay history at the Museum of Docklands. The rukus! Black Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Cultural Archive was deposited at London Metropolitan Archives in 2010. Ajamu was part of the curatorial team behind the major survey of Maud Sulter's work, 'Pasion,' in 2015-16, held at StreetLevel Photoworks; Autograph ABP and Impressions Gallery.

Ajamu was the subject of Topher Campbell's first film The Homecoming: A Short Film about Ajamu in 1995. The documentary film Brixton Recreation with Ajamu, directed by Danny Solle, featured his experiences of cruising and sex as an out Black

gay man in Brixton. His fine art photography is in national and international collections including the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow, Autograph ABP, and the Neuberger Museum of Art in New York. Ajamu is co-chair of Centred, an LGBTQ community organisation, in London's Soho.

www.ajamu-studio.com

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