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Dearly Beloved or Unrequited? To Be ‘Black’ in Art’s Histories

Sonia Boyce and Dorothy Price

First Encounters

Black, Black-British, Black and Brown bodies, Black and Asian, Black and minority ethnic (BAME/BME), culturally diverse, diasporic, people of colour (POC): all phrases in the English vernacular that mark out difference from whiteness. They are also terms which the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded *Black Artists and Modernism* (BAM) project team grappled with, in an attempt to consider the structural differences in interpreting artworks by artists of African and Asian descent held in public collections in the United Kingdom.¹ These include works by practitioners whose cultural heritage, in part, relates to Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA region), as well as East, Central and South Asia. In her presentation to a BAM conference held at Tate Britain in 2016, and in relation to being framed as Black, the British Asian artist Perminder Kaur asked: ‘do I have a choice?’² During the same conference, delegate and curator Annie Jael Kwan queried the inclusion of East Asian artists within the context of a project defined by the term ‘Black’.³ Why, one might ask, has it been important to focus attention on epidermal signs of difference, as well as on the markers that corral different ethnicities under one umbrella? And how do such indicators relate to modern and contemporary art and its histories? This special issue of *Art History* is motivated by these questions (amongst others), and each of the contributions to this volume addresses many of the topics that were considered during the course of the BAM research project.⁴ As a nomenclature, ‘Black’ is an imperfect and contingent default position. However, the aim of this volume is not to provide definitive answers (if indeed they were ever attainable or even desirable), but rather to open up a space for discussion and potential lines of enquiry for future thinking, research and art-historical scholarship.

The etymology of the term ‘Black’ to describe a group of people is rooted in the early confrontations of racial difference between Africans and Europeans. On encountering the Bantu in sub-Saharan Africa in the fifteenth century, Spanish and Portuguese traders referred to them as ‘Negre’.⁵ With the onslaught of the transatlantic slave trade, the word became Americanized as ‘Negro’, ‘Colored’ and then ‘Black’. It replaced the nuanced ethnicities and geographies of African people across a vast continent of many different countries to become an abstraction, a homogenized skin colour (and not even an accurate one at that).⁶ Colonial discourses about race and the difference between Africans and Europeans became reduced to a binary system, an epidermal and corporeal schema in which African people and the African diaspora were continually positioned as inferior.⁷ ‘Black’ was relegated; it languished

**Detail from David Medalla,
A Stitch in Time, 1968–72.
Installation: *This Way Out
of England: Gallery House in
Retrospect*, London: Raven
Row, 2017 (plate 4).**

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as the 'other' to normative whiteness and continues to signify a deficit that speaks of difference.⁸ 'Black' bodies became matter out of place, interlopers to the recognizable norm, hived off as a form of symbolic boundary-maintenance.⁹ And 'Black' remained a pejorative term for centuries until it was discursively 'reclaimed' in the wake of the American civil rights and Afro-European liberation struggles of the post-colonial era.¹⁰ Yet in more recent configurations such as BAME or BME, the terms 'Black and Asian', or 'Black and Brown' bodies, suggest a doubling of displacement: a hierarchy within the abstraction of non-normative groups of people. If we attend once more to Kaur's comment, the term 'Black' is not only misplaced as a descriptor but also potentially discretionary. The question that Kaur poses ('do I have a choice?') only generates further queries: is it possible to side-step, or opt-out of hegemonic as well as counter-hegemonic frameworks at will? If so, then under what circumstances? As one of a generation of artists who emerged in the 1990s, Kaur complicates what had become the certainties or assumptions of preceding decades about strategic alliances and coalition cultural politics between Black and Asian people in the United Kingdom working together against racism. In her essay for this special issue, 'Locating a "Black" Artist in Narratives of British Art in the 1990s', Alice Correia confronts the question of 'blackness' as it pertains to the critical reception or otherwise of Kaur's work during this decade. She reminds us of 1980s identity debates around who could and who could not produce 'Black' art, and the subsequent refusals during the 1990s to confront issues of race at all. In particular, Correia considers how Kaur's work was co-opted within the racialized critical discourse of both decades at the expense of any close attention to how it might signify aesthetically, or indeed in any other registers at all.

Many cultural commentators (particularly in relation to dialogues between Britain and America) have noted the distinct nature of the term 'Black-British'. Adopted in the UK since the late 1970s, it is commonly understood as incorporating peoples of African-Caribbean as well as South Asian descent.¹¹ Whilst regarded in the USA as a surprising coalition, in Britain it is a strategic political alliance predicated on a recognition of common experiences of discrimination and occlusion, a 'politics of constituting unities-in-difference'.¹² This is a separate register from the United States where 'Black' primarily signifies being of African descent. Other non-European-origin communities in the USA coalesce around the term 'People of Color', a resurrection and reversal of the pejorative 'colored people' or 'coloreds', and a self-designation that is also gaining traction in Britain, alongside Black and Asian or Black and Brown bodies. Yet in the mid-1990s, across this economy of racial signs, artist susan pui san lok had also begun highlighting the invisibility of East Asians, and specifically Chinese, within considerations of what, within the British context, constitutes Black, Asia and Asian. In 'A to Y (Entries for an Inventionry of Dented 'T's)', first delivered at the 2001 *Shades of Black* conference at Duke University and subsequently published in *Third Text* in 2003, lok highlighted the continued discriminatory hierarchies operative within any racialized system of categorization.¹³ As she observes, 'if black can be Asian, but Asian is not always Asian, Chinese – among others – does a disappearing act'.¹⁴ It is this trope of disappearance – and how to recover, re-visibility and reattend to what has been erased – that became the strategic aims of the BAM project during its period of enquiry.

In his presentation for the *Shades of Black* conference, Kobena Mercer also laid bare how artworks by Black British artists had been inadequately served by art history.¹⁵ Taking his cue from Jean Fisher's plea to 'attend to the work before us', he argued that despite the recent 'normalization' of diversity, and discussions on cultural difference within the art world, art-historical amnesia had prevailed.¹⁶ For Mercer this did not

signify an absolute loss of memory but was rather a matter of forgetting the artistic object itself (in the case of Black British art) in favour of discussions that emphasized the ethnicity of the artist, the general problematics of race and identity politics, and the relationship of practitioners and Black audiences to the predominantly white art establishment. The results of this, he suggested, inevitably deflected attention away from the artwork and its relationship to the broader story of twentieth-century art and the narratives of diaspora that are among its crucial, if unrecognized, frames. The challenge for the *Black Artists and Modernism* project team in 2015 was to acknowledge Mercer's observations and become more practice-focused.

The lack of attention paid to the material and conceptual nature of artworks by Black British artists, and how their work has contributed to an understanding of twentieth-century art, became a backbone of the research project. The team also posed further questions including: what happens if we move beyond received wisdom about the identity of the artist and all of the familiar tropes that this encompasses? How can we look afresh to situate artworks more firmly within the genealogies of their own fields of practice, not in order to conceal their social and institutional contexts but to foreground and begin our investigations from the perspective of the artwork itself? What other narratives might be uncovered? Can we interrogate and integrate Black British artists' practice within the discourses of modernism? And if so, how can this be done without reverting to established canonical frameworks which position white American, British and European artists as sole purveyors of progressive development in the visual field?

Equally important for the epistemological framework of the project was Stuart Hall's essay 'Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three "Moments" in Post-War History' in which he proposed a conjunctural analysis of three generational 'moments' or 'waves' of Black British art.¹⁷ Hall drew on both Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser for his structural framework. Whilst Gramsci describes the period of French history between 1789 and the Paris Commune of 1871 as a cycle of revolutionary 'waves' and 'conjunctural fluctuations', Althusser uses the term 'conjuncture' to refer to the entanglement of concrete political-economic formations and social class relations 'to which political tactics must be applied'.¹⁸ For Hall, 'thinking conjuncturally involves "clustering" or assembling elements into a formation'. He states that 'there is no simple unity, no single "movement" here, evolving teleologically, to which, say, all the artists of any moment can be said to belong'. Rather, his intention is 'to assemble these three "moments" in their fused but contradictory dispersion'.¹⁹

Hall's essay signalled a demand that the BAM research team attend to the genealogies of artistic practices and the socio-historical contexts in which different generations of artists were operating. The post-war conjuncture of Black artistic practice in Britain was presented as a 'problem space' which, he proposed, shifted according to different generational perspectives. Referring to the first generation as the last 'colonials' who came to Britain 'after World War Two to join the modern avant-garde', he suggested that these artists considered themselves to be 'anti-colonial cosmopolitan' and firmly 'modernist in outlook'.²⁰ However, the reception of this generation by the British art establishment proved ultimately dispiriting. The assumed libertarian promise that frames modernism as a 'universal' language characterized by an 'International Style' and open to all is revealed to reach its limits when faced with the politics of racial difference. The second generation, those whom Hall refers to as the 'first post-colonials', were born in the UK, 'pioneered the Black Art Movement', were 'culturally relativist', 'identity driven' and seemingly (or at least rhetorically) anti-modernist.²¹ They were set to disrupt the status quo, firmly making the case for

'Blackness' as a rallying call. The third generation are positioned as less politically engaged than previous ones, yet more formally neo-conceptual. They emerged during a period in which 'theories of language and discourse; the post-Bakhtinian attention to the polysemic nature of language and the post-structuralist themes of "the slippage of the signifier" constituted the struggle over meaning'.²² It is perhaps with this generation that the limits of 'Blackness' as a collateral term were revealed, and where increasing evidence of its fissures surfaced.

In 'The Longest Journey: Black Diaspora Artists in Britain', which opens this special issue, Kobena Mercer attends closely to Hall's provocation. His argument picks up where Hall's ends. Mercer suggests that Hall's refusal to identify specific artists associated with the 'third wave' of his formulation is an act of refusing the pressure to deliver a conclusive end to his proposed framework for thinking through the 'three moments in post-war history' with which he begins. Mercer in particular warns against what he calls 'presentism', which he identifies as a 'reductive view of the present as somehow "redeeming" past problems'. What he argues for instead is an understanding of how transculturation, as an 'unfinalizable process', opens us all to the 'unforeseeable consequences of cross-cultural encounters' in which the future 'is always up for grabs'. Both scholars recognize that the model of genealogy that Hall employs suggests a future as yet unwritten, but one which retains its origins firmly in the past.

In order to take up Hall's baton and look more closely at a genealogy of Black British modernism as it has unfolded since the so-called 'first wave', the BAM research team focused on the frequently overlooked but nevertheless central experimental work of David Medalla. In particular, Medalla's participatory artwork *A Stitch in Time* (1967–72) offered the team an apposite case study as a work which originated in the late 1960s, but which has since taken on multiple lives in various locations across the globe. As an instance of an ongoing, open-ended, unplanned futurity within an artwork that sits amidst the problem spaces of post-war British modernism (within Hall's genealogy), Medalla's work offers an unparalleled example.

A Stitch in Time

In terms of the development of conceptual art after the Second World War, Medalla has played a central but often obscured role, particularly in terms of internationalizing radical art practices in 1960s Britain.²³ Along with Paul Keeler, Marcello Salvadori and Gustav Metzger, Medalla was a founding member of Signals Gallery (1964–66) on Wigmore Street in central London (plate 1). They were also joined later by the art critic for *The Times*, Guy Brett. The gallery was to become a beacon during the 1960s for alternative art practices, transnationalism and experimentation. As Isobel Whitelegg has commented, 'an important aspect of the founding context of Signals' was 'a collective sense of post-war survival, connecting the British context to both a wider Pax Europaea and the newer Western world of the Americas, North and South'.²⁴ Guy Brett remarked that 'Signals pursued a genuinely internationalist exhibition policy at a time when the British art establishment looked only to Europe and the USA'.²⁵ This wider international outlook and post-war optimism was highlighted in the gallery's accompanying publication *Signals: Newsletter of the Centre for Advanced Creative Study*, edited by Medalla, which sought to embrace 'the imaginative integration of art, technology, science, architecture and our entire environment'.²⁶ The international range of artists exhibited in its short life included Takis, Sérgio de Camargo, Mira Schendel, Liliane Lijn, Mary Martin, and Li Yuan-chia, among many others. Although at the time it was much more aligned with



1 Clay Perry, *Signals*, 39
Wigmore Street, London W1,
c. 1966. Photograph (editioned
2009). London: England & Co.

kinetic art, and would not have described its focus as participatory art, the gallery also introduced artists Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, and what has subsequently been termed 'relational art practice', to the capital's art scene.²⁷ In 1964, Lygia Clark, amongst others, was included in the *Second Pilot Show of Kinetic Art*, and in the following year she had her first major solo show at Signals, exhibiting approximately sixty works.²⁸ As such, the gallery played a major role in defining London in the 1960s as an international centre for radical artistic expression.

Medalla's declared interest in the intersection of art, science, technology, the spatial and sociality, as expressed in his first editorial of *Signals* journal (published in 1964), also provides insight into his own art practice. *A Stitch in Time* was originally staged in 1968 and has been reimagined multiple times since (plate 2).²⁹ Several critical accounts of the work have adopted the retelling of its mythic beginnings as if it were an originary or primal scene, one that invokes a network of cities, countries, transnational desires and same-sex encounters between friends, lovers and strangers. In an interview with Adam Nankervis in 2011, Medalla explained:

A Stitch in Time [...] reveals the 'atomic' nature of my artworks. In 1967 two lovers of mine came to London. One was on his way from California to India, the other was on his way back from Africa to New York. I arranged to meet them at Heathrow Airport [and] gave each one a handkerchief (one black, one white), some needles and small spools of cotton thread. I told them they could stitch anything they like on the handkerchiefs, on which I had stitched my name and a brief message of love [...]. One day many years later, while waiting for my flight back to England at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, I noticed a handsome young man who carried a backpack to which a column of cloth

was attached [...] with many little objects [...] and all kinds of embroidered messages. The young man said someone in Bali had given him the column of cloth and told him he could stitch anything on it. I looked at the bottom of the column of cloth and saw the black handkerchief I gave to one of my lovers with my name and message on it.³⁰

Medalla's narrative acts like a genesis story of homosocial and transnational encounters: multiple lovers and a fleeting conversation that are released from the constraints of a nationalist and heteronormative set of conditions, as objects and intimacies generate further tenderness, and exchanges take place between California and India, Africa and New York, England, Amsterdam and Bali. What is striking about this originary scene is that it is marked by a single material gesture, where the embroidered handkerchief stands in for the symbolic connective tissue of a sprawling



2 David Medalla, *A Stitch in Time*, 1968–72. Cotton, wood, steel and hemp, mixed media installation shown as part of *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain, Part I*, Gallery House, London, 1972. London: Arts Council Collection. Photo: Andrew Forrest

network across space and time, and an uncanny loop of affections and estrangement. Without stating it explicitly, the narrative suggests that the totemic memento – a private expression of closeness and care – is passed between transitory figures. It is even intimated that the stranger, ‘a handsome young man’, might have been a love interest of a former partner of Medalla’s, and one for whom the personalized and cherished memento – and by extension affections – may have been exchanged. In framing how one relation begets another, Medalla also unravels the ways in which spatial, racial, sexual and social attitudes were being fashioned and refashioned during this era.

Touch, Invitation and its Limits

Unlike the originary handkerchief, however, and more like a hammock, *A Stitch in Time* consists of a long stretch of cloth, suspended in a public place, not necessarily a gallery, with multiple spools of thread and needles hanging on string above it. Visitors are invited to stitch a small object or message of personal significance onto the cloth. The colourful and highly textured result of their contributions builds evidence of a collective mark that challenges dominant ideas about art’s production: the work shifts in the process of its making from a singular form of authorship to a collective form of production. The artwork is an invitation and a question, a choice between viewing at a distance or getting directly involved. Quoting Medalla, who stated that ‘people can walk in and out of my situations’, Guy Brett observed that ‘it was easy to enter and the invitation to sew took away all preconceptions associated with high art, yet the ambience exerted subtle psychological pressures’.³¹

The ‘pressures’ inferred were propositions to the viewer to give something of themselves, and to cross the threshold between self and the self-conscious production of an artwork in a public space. During the period of the work’s inception (and arguably still today), convention and regulation dictated that visitors to an exhibition maintained a certain distance and reverence towards art objects which were generally considered to be beyond the reach of an audience’s touch. The alternative to the invitation, or sense of pressure (depending on the viewer’s inclination), to participate was to keep one’s distance in detached contemplation. Medalla called these works ‘participation-production-propulsions’, thus converting individual acts of contemplative energy into a glorious collective force.³² He also referred to them as ‘atomic’ in nature, possessing a singular and irreducible component that contributes to a larger system.³³

A Stitch in Time might also be understood as a counter-narrative to the accelerated time of global travel and points of departure, those signposted in Marc Augé’s *Non-Places*, a text recalled through Medalla’s chance encounter at Schiphol Airport. In his now classic account, Augé characterizes the conditions of ‘supermodernity’ through an evocation of soulless airports in which millions of passengers transit daily on their way to multiple global destinations, travelling thousands of kilometres ‘in the blink of an eye’.³⁴ Instead, Medalla asks his viewers to stop, sit, give and make by hand in slow time. He provides a site, a sculptural event, through and around which friends and strangers can congregate via the act of sewing (plate 3). As he comments, ‘the thing I like best about this work is that whenever anyone is involved in the act of stitching, he or she is inside his or her own private space, even though the act might occur in a public space’.³⁵

A Stitch in Time has been shown on multiple occasions; as a consequence of its production and those who decide to participate, it changes with each iteration. Versions have been exhibited at *documenta 5* (1972) curated by Harald Szeemann in



3 David Medalla, *A Stitch in Time*, 1968–72. Installation: *Another Vacant Space*, Berlin, 2013. Photo: Adam Nankervis.

Kassel, and at Gallery House in London in the exhibition entitled *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain* (1972) curated by Sigi Krauss and Rosetta Brooks.³⁶ A slightly earlier version was also staged in the much-maligned exhibition *POPA at MOMA: Pioneers of Part-Art* (1971) at the Museum of Modern Art Oxford. It was here in particular, as Hilary Floe has pointed out, that emergent early questions about participatory art were tested.³⁷

In “‘Everything Was Getting Smashed’: Three Case Studies of Play and Participation, 1965–71’, Floe considers several exhibitions where instances of chaotic ‘over-participation’ occurred, including *POPA at MOMA* which closed almost as soon as it had opened. Its curators were keen to promote the most characteristic markers of this burgeoning genre and looked to the practices that had been foregrounded by Signals Gallery. Along with pieces by Medalla, the exhibition also featured works by Clark, Oiticica, John Dugger, Yuan-chia and Graham Stevens. An accompanying

poster announced its intention to break down the symbolic barrier around art objects. Medalla's deliberately polemical, hand-written declaration on the poster stated that 'PARTicipation ART is opposed to TOTALitarian ART' which 'implied newfound liberation from all conventions of artistic appreciation'.³⁸ As Floe explains:

At the opening, the largely undergraduate audience apparently took such statements at their word and buoyed by the complimentary wine and the energising effects of bouncing on Graham Steven's large inflatables, began to physically engage with works of art in ways unintended by their creators. Medalla and Dugger, who arrived at the exhibition three-quarters of an hour late, were indignant at what they saw. Medalla, a Buddhist, objected to the serving of wine at the preview and, according to the *Birmingham Post*, 'told the audience: "You are all Philistines. People should know how to treat works of art."' [...] Medalla and Dugger withdrew their works from the exhibition immediately, while Stevens pulled out the following day. Sensational headlines such as 'Art Preview Ends in Uproar' and 'Artists Call Spectators Philistines – And Quit' appeared in local and national newspapers.³⁹

The fraught relations between intention and outcome are very clear in this example and may go some way towards accounting for the proliferation of instructional art, an important hallmark of conceptual art as it developed.⁴⁰ Indeed this tension of how to behave in relation to art remains an open question, especially if one considers the continued public interest in Medalla's work to which we now turn.

Between the Body and the Object

Remarkably, in the critical reception of *A Stitch in Time*, very little has been said about the employment of needlecraft as its basis. In *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984), Rozsika Parker chronicled the devalued histories of women's involvement in needlecraft via mending, as well as through acts of destruction and resistance.⁴¹ She revealed the coded framing of repressed and displaced female sexuality as a projected representational trope that situates the lone figure of a mainly white middle-class female – a feminine ideal – waiting at home, presumably for her husband, quietly engrossed in the domestic activities of embroidery.⁴² Parker noted the historical division between the arts, where fine arts were pitched against craft, as a major factor in the marginalization of women's creative expression.

Whilst not suggesting that *A Stitch in Time* is explicitly or intentionally a feminist artwork, feminism reminds us that contemporary visual arts practices are never gender neutral.⁴³ Indeed, exhibitions like *Boys Who Sew* held at the Crafts Council in London (2004), and *Pricked: Extreme Embroidery* at the Museum of Art and Design in New York (2007), deliberately unsettled normative gender expectations around the practices of sewing and embroidery. In a review of *Pricked*, Karen Rosenberg noted that:

in the 70s artists who swapped their paint brushes for a needle and thread were making a feminist statement. Today, as both men and women fill galleries with crocheted sculpture and stitched canvas, the gesture isn't quite so specific.⁴⁴

Audiences for contemporary art have become accustomed to the protocols and invitations to become actively involved in artworks by entering installations, touching objects and performing the work of art in a way that they were not when Medalla was inviting them to do so in the mid-1960s.

When Signals exhibited Lygia Clark in 1965, Medalla wanted to share a dialogue with a kindred spirit who was also concerned with the liberating possibilities of group encounters as forms of art. Anna Dezeuze observes that 'in their shared interest' in 'human engagement with the world of things', Clark, Oiticica and Yoko Ono 'created works that set up a new space of "in-between-ness" – between subject and object, mind and matter, inside and outside'.⁴⁵ She continues:

This in-between-ness [...] can be usefully compared to the 'intermediate area of experience', that was delineated by British psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott in his notion of the 'transitional object'. Winnicott explained how a favourite toy, blanket or other object can play an important role in the process through which infants and small children gradually learn to differentiate themselves from their mother's bodies, and to perceive themselves as separate human beings.⁴⁶

One can easily align *A Stitch in Time* with this scenario of 'in-between-ness' and the meanings to be drawn from connected bodies and things: the stitcher; the cloth; the message; and its intended recipient.⁴⁷ Yet there is potentially also a different path that can be taken from the adult–child power relations indicative of transitional object relations theory. Again, according to Dezeuze:

The transitional object exists in an 'intermediate' area because it is perceived by the child simultaneously as two contradictory experiences. On the one hand, the transitional object appears to be totally controlled by the child, as in the infant's experience of being able to 'possess' and become at one with the mother's breast when it cries out to be fed. On the other hand, it exists in itself, separately from the child who chose it, just like the mother who is gradually perceived as a different (and sometimes absent) person.⁴⁸

Dezeuze argues that the artists with whom her account is concerned shift the focus away from works of art as commodities. Instead, they recognize that objects and subject–object relations have the potential for social transformation, whilst also underscoring an interdependency between self, other and the object as a replacement or intermediary device.

A different reading might also be one where transitory relations or temporary exchanges between people and objects (like those enacted in *A Stitch in Time*) have an alternative register than that specified in transitional object relations. Whilst still bearing an emotional connection, or expressing a personal situation through the stitching of intimate messages, transitory relations are shifted from the recriminations projected onto the mother's body for being either a 'good enough mother' or a 'bad mother': the figure who has neglected the child and is, thus, absent. There is a different kind of abandonment issue from the mother–child scenario, so favoured within psychoanalytic theory, because an ambivalence prevails in *A Stitch in Time*; it is both festive and disposable, hopeful in its polyvocal accumulations, and at the same time melancholic, as witnessed in the original story of Medalla's messages of love, intimacy and care. Sadness pervades the knowledge that an item that was quite personal and may well have been treasured (the stitched handkerchief) has been given up, its future status and originary interpersonal connections uncertain or, at worst, lost. By departing from the relational debates that are anchored on the mother's body, *A Stitch in Time* opens up other possibilities. It revels in the coexistence

of different cultural signs and meanings; its originary narrative validates homosocial and transnational spaces and offers a gender-contested context, eschewing sewing as a gender-specific activity. Instead, the work of art becomes an opening for potentially subversive encounters.

Between 2016 and 2017 *A Stitch in Time* finally gained long overdue recognition as a significant artwork of the mid-twentieth century: it became a nominee for the inaugural Hepworth Prize for Sculpture in Wakefield in 2016; it was shown in the exhibition *This Way Out of England: Gallery House in Retrospect* at Raven Row Gallery in London in 2017 (plate 4); and it was displayed in the Arsenale during the 57th Venice Biennale also in 2017 (plate 5). Of particular note in its reincarnation in Venice was the prominence of individual business cards that were now being sewn into the cloth, an aspect also observed by critics. In a review entitled 'The Venice Biennale: Contemporary Art Gets a Conscience' for the arts section of *The Economist*, the reporter remarked that 'the objects most commonly sewn on to Mr Medalla's "A Stitch in Time" were business cards, not the meaningful embellishments the artist intended'.⁴⁹ It is perhaps unsurprising in our neoliberal and social-media-dominated times that participatory practices, community engagement and the democratization of art's production might ultimately be co-opted by advocates of enterprise culture.⁵⁰ The audience reception of the work at the Venice Biennale reminds us of the importance of not only attending to its objecthood but also to its potential range of significations, including the economic, socio-political, institutional or other extrinsic contexts in which it finds itself. Meanwhile, the belated institutional recognition of the

4 David Medalla, *A Stitch in Time*, 1968–72. Installation: *This Way Out of England: Gallery House in Retrospect*, London: Raven Row, 2017. Photo: Sonia Boyce.





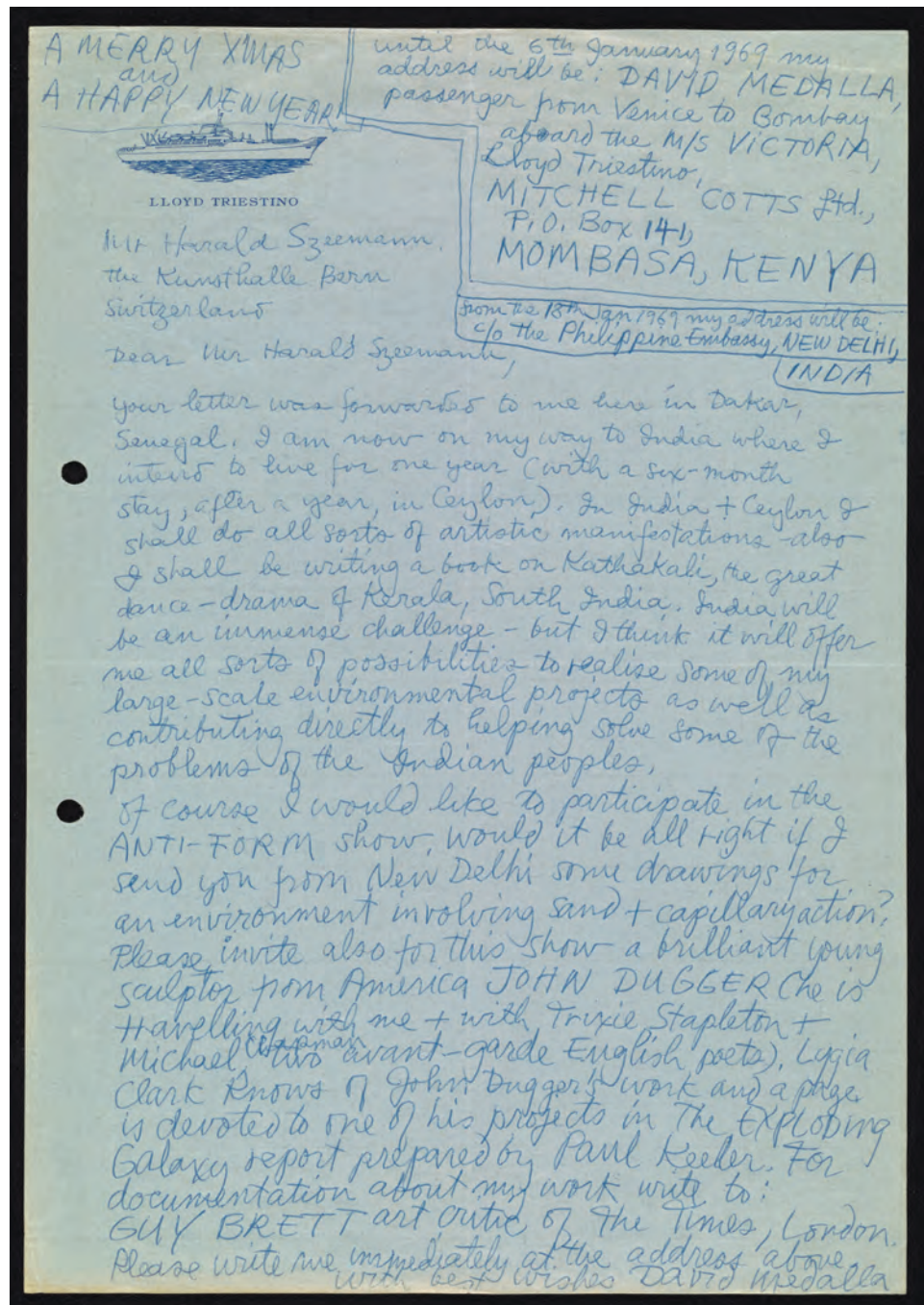
5 David Medalla, *A Stitch in Time*, 1968–72. Installation: 57th Venice Biennale, 2017. Photo: Adam Nankervis.

significance of Medalla's work in general, although to be celebrated with some caution, has neither been without problems nor has it been universal.

What's Conceptual Art Got to Do with It?

Orthodox accounts of conceptual art almost always include Joseph Kosuth, Art & Language, Piero Manzoni, Joseph Beuys, Hans Haacke and Sol LeWitt in their register of key names (sometimes nodding towards gender balance with the inclusion of Yoko Ono and Hanne Darboven).⁵¹ Historically this often-rehearsed canon has left little room for revision or interrogation. In her introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue *Power to the People: Contemporary Conceptualism and the Object in Art* from 2011, Hannah Mathews noted six key tropes of conceptual art as follows: it is often language-based; images are often black and white, and print-based; it involves the use of lo-fi technologies; the works are executed via instruction; it is experiential; and finally

it often exists outside the gallery context in order to question the nature of art and how we experience it.⁵² According to these parameters, *A Stitch in Time* employs at least three or four such strategies. Yet Medalla still occupies a nebulous position within the dominant narratives of conceptual art.⁵³ It is often forgotten or downplayed that he was at the forefront of its development. A trenchant example is that he was one of the invited artists to participate in the landmark exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form (Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information)* curated by Harald Szeemann in Bern in 1969. As Eva Bentcheva notes, Guy Brett recalled Medalla's submission to Szeemann's exhibition as consisting of 'a small object in an envelope, a woven paraffin mantle to be sprinkled with blue pigment and set alight'.⁵⁴ Medalla posted his work with a handwritten letter to Szeemann reprinted in the exhibition's



6 David Medalla, letter to Harald Szeemann (reproduced in *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, Bern: Kunsthalle, 1969, page 105). Los Angeles: Harald Szeemann Papers, Getty Research Institute (2011.M.30). Photo: GRI.

catalogue (plate 6), denoting what had become his trademark journeying – from Venice to Bombay, Mombasa in Kenya, the Philippine Embassy in New Delhi, Dakar in Senegal, Kerala in South India, and Ceylon – as well as his ongoing collaborations with artists and writers including Guy Brett from London and John Dugger from the United States, whom he exhorted Szeeman to invite to participate in the exhibition.⁵⁵

Although clearly central to early international inceptions of conceptual art, Medalla has nevertheless been displaced from this genealogy, as witnessed most recently in Tate Britain's ill-conceived 2016 exhibition *Conceptual Art in Britain, 1964–1979*. As Rosetta Brooks presciently commented in 2000, 'it could be argued that when the art world attempted to dump Gustav Metzger, John Latham and David Medalla at the end of the 1960s, they buried the existential roots of Conceptual art in Britain'.⁵⁶

Medalla's *A Stich in Time* serves as a case study, then, for the kinds of problems and reframings that the BAM research project was designed to engage with, and which the authors of the essays in this volume have similarly confronted in relation to their own subjects. These include essays on the artists Denis Williams, Kim Lim, Verdi Yahooda, Gavin Jantjes, Vong Phaophanit and Claire Obussier, Permendar Kaur and Lubaina Himid. As a work that has only been recovered and re-remembered recently, the intimacy of the origins of *A Stich in Time* is often forgotten, and whilst it thoroughly fulfils contemporary curatorial demands for participation, a secure place for it within normative art histories of conceptual art still remains fragile and elusive.

Rethinking British Art

The position that Black artists continue to hold within orthodox narratives of modern and contemporary art is opened up in David Dibosa's essay 'Gavin Jantjes's *Korabra* Series (1986): Reworking Museum Interpretation'. Taught by Joseph Beuys at the Hamburg Art Academy between 1970 and 1972, a close dialogue with an emergent German style of neo-expressionism can be seen in Jantjes's series of paintings. Dibosa foregrounds a methodological approach taken by the BAM team to engage collectively in a close reading of the artworks and their museum settings from a range of specialist viewpoints. The combination of varying perspectives on the same artworks undertaken by artists, art historians and curators in dialogue with one another led to an enriched understanding of the meaning and significance of the *Korabra* series. Taking extant gallery labels and wall-texts as his cue, Dibosa asks whether institutional interpretations of social and political subject matter in Jantjes's paintings have led to an over-determined interpretation of them at the expense of other forms of contextualization, for example stylistic, formal, aesthetic and art historical.

Such acts of reframing interpretation in this way were prompted in part by a desire of the research team to deflect terms like 'Black modernism' from simply reinscribing artworks within yet another art-historical ghetto or enclave of separateness. Indeed as early as 1988, Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer had already provided a stinging critique of the dichotomy between being 'inside or outside' in their essay 'De Margin and De Centre'.⁵⁷ As they observe, 'a binary relation produces the marginal as a consequence of the authority invested in the centre'.⁵⁸ And in *Timed Out: Art and the Transnational Caribbean*, Leon Wainwright highlights the problems inherent in the familiar trope of Europe and the USA as central to modernist avant-garde practices in opposition to the spaces of colonial/post-colonial art practices outside the dominant frame. Within this binary, the latter are positioned as temporally behind and as inferior pastiche.⁵⁹ So in the narratives of 'belatedness' or 'marginality' for the diasporic subject, how then are we to make sense of the neglected position of those artists whose artistic formation takes place within the centralized establishment of art world power?

Allison Thompson's essay for this special issue, 'Constructing a Human World', takes the painter Denis Williams as a resonant case study in this regard. Williams studied at Camberwell School of Art between 1944 and 1946 and subsequently took part in key developments of British abstraction throughout the 1950s. Yet as Thompson demonstrates, despite Williams's participation in major exhibitions such as *This is Tomorrow* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1956, the artist ultimately became dissatisfied with 'the tightly constrained place he felt he occupied within modern British and European art' in which he was constantly labelled 'primitivist'. Similarly frustrated was Kim Lim, the subject of Singaporean curator Joleen Loh's visual essay for this special issue. Lim came to London to study at Saint Martin's School of Art at the age of eighteen before moving to the Slade School of Fine Art. Her frames of artistic reference came from being 'inside' Britain and Europe where the artistic training that she acquired sat firmly within the self-referential and formalist concerns of mid-twentieth-century modernism. Her explorations of the relationships between art and nature through sculptural abstraction made her a central figure in the UK art scene during the 1970s. Nevertheless, she also fell victim to the systemic amnesia first outlined by Kobena Mercer in *Shades of Black* and used as a springboard for his essay in this special issue of *Art History*.⁶⁰ More recently, however, Lim's work is being reappraised and restored to public consciousness.⁶¹ In her essay Loh explores a selection of previously unpublished travel photographs that Lim took which reveal the diverse reference points for her sculptures. Since the photographs remained a private undertaking across five decades of her practice, the expanding critical literature on Lim's work has not yet attended to their role and significance. Loh comments that 'as ephemera relating to Lim's interests in sculpture, they are essential to the way we encounter her practice today and reveal her approach to minimalism outside its burgeoning developments in Euro-American contexts'. She considers what the photographs 'suggest is at stake for us now' as well as 'what kinds of engagement' they enable with Lim's work today.

In addition to Loh's photo-essay on Lim we have decided to include reprints of two extracts from *Passion: Blackwomen's Creativity of the African Diaspora*, a special issue of *Feminist Art News* guest edited by Lubaina Himid and Maud Sulter in 1988.⁶² The issue brought together an array of transnational Black feminist artists and writers active in the 1980s and captured the spirit of urgency of the period. A persistent refrain from many of FAN's contributors was the limited availability of resources for Black women artists as well as the precarity of visibility, or worse still, the condition of invisibility. The magazine remains a classic example of art and publishing as insurgency; it can perhaps be regarded as part of a continuum of artists' activist publishing that stemmed from earlier models including Medalla's *Signals* journal and Rasheed Araeen's *Black Phoenix*. Maud Sulter's piece in FAN entitled 'Call and Response' cites Audre Lorde's essay on the uses of erotic power as central to the political imperatives of Black women to document their own histories and forge their own futures since, as Sulter notes, 'no one will document our future but ourselves'. Her essay was published at a key moment within the histories of the Black Arts movement in 1980s Britain in which creative women of colour, gaining strength from American exemplars, fought to ensure that their art remained visible through collective action.⁶³

The particular relevance of Himid's essay 'Fragments' for this special issue of *Art History* rests in her exploration of the global centrality of Black women's creative practices of 'gathering and reusing' for the purposes of political change. Celebrated modernist strategies are held up to the light and found wanting by Himid as she reiterates that 'there has always been Black creativity and it has always been an important influence

on the world' despite Western attempts at occlusion. She stresses a need 'to link the past to the future through the difficult present' via Black female creativity. Dorothy Price's essay for this special issue explores Himid's work further in a focus on issues of time, temporality, belatedness, creativity and revolutionary futures within Himid's painterly and collage practices across several decades. Specific strategies for materializing temporal political engagement cited by Himid in *FAN* include making mosaics out of broken pots, creating masks from shells, sewing patchwork quilts from old cloth and pasting collages out of cut-up magazines and newspapers. Price's essay explores Himid's use of these strategies via a close reading of the 1987 cut-out and collaged figure of revolutionary hero Touissant L'Ouverture and Himid's more recent painterly responses to African textile traditions in a selection of *Kanga* paintings from 2017.

In 'Three Decades, Four Moments', an edited transcript of two interviews with Vong Phaophanit and Claire Obussier, Susan Pui San Lok discusses the nature of collaborative practice over several decades with the artists 'at turns identified as individual, collective and collaborative'. Her contribution represents a significant address to Hall's 'Three Moments' essay in its consideration of the 1990s generation of diaspora artists in Britain about whom Hall remains largely silent. Phaophanit was born in the former French colony of Laos before being sent to France as a child to receive a Western (colonial) education. However, he decided to circumvent parental expectations to be an economist and attended art school. Having trained 'as a painter in the classical French system', he was 'at once expected' by his art school tutors to identify with an established French 'school', and 'to produce "Laotian art"' simply because of where he had been born. As he remarks, 'from that moment on I resisted this and it had a really strong impact on the work that came afterwards'. Working from a position of resistance from the outset, not as Obussier comments 'as an aggressive rejection', but as the 'space in which we found ourselves' and 'in which we've stayed', their practice has instead focused on material explorations of non-traditional media. For both of them the role of collaboration and dialogic encounter is particularly significant as a strategy for the production of artwork that refuses the straitjacket of identity politics. As Phaophanit remarks, 'collaboration challenges' in that 'the cultural identity of the artwork moves away from the identity of the solo artist'.

In her essay for this special issue, Katy Deepwell discusses Verdi Yahooda's *Photo Booth Classic*, a series of private photographic self-portraits undertaken by the Yemini-born Jewish artist every month between 1974 and 1990 and then quarterly from 1990 to the present. Deepwell explores the durational aspects of British-based Yahooda's practice over the same decades mapped by Stuart Hall. She suggests that considered in the light of Hall's 'three moments', Yahooda's work 'raises many interesting questions: about identity politics, "otherness", shifting definitions of "Black" and the experience of different generations of diaspora, as well as how works or groups of artists are positioned at key historical moments'. By reading Yahooda's work only in relation to the model of 'identity politics' ascribed by Hall to the generation of Black diaspora artists in Britain in the 1980s, Deepwell argues that there is a risk of over-simplification that ignores 'any other possible readings'. Alternative ways of thinking about Yahooda's *Photo Booth Classic* series are explored: ones that focus more specifically on the artist's representational strategies; and on the role of photography 'as a tool for documenting everyday processes in conceptual art'. As Deepwell concludes, by focusing on the conceptual processes involved in the production of this artwork, rather than on discourses of marginalized (Jewish diaspora identity), we can draw out its unique and singular nature 'as a work of art'.

Collectively, the essays in this special issue consider the problematics of the umbrella term 'Blackness', and the nuanced variations that are very quickly revealed

when the categories of Blackness are interrogated. They also consider the possibilities of more productive ways of thinking through the artworks produced by artists who can be broadly mapped within the frame of Stuart Hall's 'three moments' of 'Black Diaspora artists' in post-war Britain. Such artworks can be clearly shown to have stemmed from the legacies of conceptual and performance-related practices, amongst other genres, yet most frequently appear to have been severed from those connections within standard art-historical narratives. Rasheed Araeen, who has been one of the most prominent voices in this regard, has described Black art as:

A specific contemporary practice that has emerged directly from the struggle of Asian, African and Caribbean people (i.e. black people) against racism [...] the work itself specifically deals with and expresses a 'human condition': the condition of black people resulting from their existence in a racist white society or/and, in global terms, from Western cultural imperialism.⁶⁴

In this definition, cultural context, a politically aware approach to art-making, and subject matter are inextricably linked. What can be drawn from this statement is that as a practice 'Black art' positions itself within the contours of the art establishment in the West as an active and – we would argue – productive paradox. As a mode of practice that (like feminism) is not medium-bound, 'Black British' art argues for and articulates the necessity for societal change through discursive forms of representation with a strong emphasis on institutional critique, not specifically as an art practice but as a collectivizing politics. The essays brought together in this special issue of *Art History* can be read as examples of such a strategy in action.

Notes

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- 1 Black Artists and Modernism (BAM) was a three-year research project (2015–18) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as a collaboration between University of the Arts London and Middlesex University; see <http://www.blackartistsmodernism.co.uk/about/>.
- 2 Perminder Kaur, 'Altering Contexts', talk given as part of the conference *Now & Then ... Here & There*, organized by the Black Artists and Modernism project, 6–8 October 2016, Tate Britain, London. For a recording of Kaur's talk, see <https://vimeo.com/194321526>; for further information on the conference, see <http://www.blackartistsmodernism.co.uk/now-then-here-there-black-artists-and-modernism-london-conference/>.
- 3 Annie Jael Kwan, 'A Collage of Constellations: Now & Then ... Here & There: Black Artists & Modernism', 24 October 2016: <https://www.iniva.org/blog/2016/10/24/a-collage-of-constellations-now-then-here-there-black-artists-modernism-2/>.
- 4 See <http://www.blackartistsmodernism.co.uk/now-then-here-there-black-artists-and-modernism-london-conference/>.
- 5 David Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese, 1483–1790*, Oxford, 1966; and Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440–1870*, London, 2006.
- 6 For more on the complexities of the Atlantic world, see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Benjamin Breen, 'Hybrid Atlantics: Future Directions for the History of the Atlantic World', *History Compass*, 11: 8, 2013, 597–609. We thank Cécile Fromont and Esther Chadwick for drawing our attention to this research.
- 7 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London, 1991.
- 8 See Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, London, 1997; and also Stuart Hall et al., *Different*, London, 2001.
- 9 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, 2002.
- 10 Ben L. Martin, 'From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming', *Political Science Quarterly*, 106: 1, Spring 1991, 83–107.
- 11 Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *ICA Documents 7: Black Film, British Cinema*, ed. Kobena Mercer, London, 1988, 27.
- 12 Stuart Hall, 'Minimal Selves', in *ICA Documents 6: Identity – The Real Me: Postmodernism and the Question of Identity*, ed. Lisa Appignanesi, London, 1987, 45.
- 13 susan pui san lok, 'A to Y (Entries for an Inventionry of Dented "I"s)', *Third Text*, 17: 1, 2003, 63–70.
- 14 susan pui san lok, 'A to Y (Entries for an Inventionry of Dented "I"s)', in *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, ed. David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom, and Sonia Boyce, Durham, NC and London, 2005, 61.
- 15 *Shades of Black* conference, organized by the African & Asian Visual Artists Archive (University of East London) at the John Hope Franklin Center, Duke University, Durham, USA, 2001.
- 16 Jean Fisher, 'The Work Between Us', in *Trade Routes: History + Geography*, exhibition catalogue for the Second Johannesburg Biennale, curated by Okwui Enwezor, 1997, 20–23.
- 17 Stuart Hall, 'Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three "Moments" in Post-War History', *History Workshop Journal*, 61: 1, 2006, 1–24.
- 18 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks [1929–1935]*, New York, 1971, 13 [no. 17]; and Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière et al., *Reading Capital [1965]*, trans. Ben Brewster, London, 1970. According to Koivisto and Lahtinen, 'as an analytical tool, the concept of conjuncture can expand the capacity to act politically by helping examine the conditions of an intervention in their complexity', and thus 'open up the possibilities for action'; see J. Koivisto and M. Lahtinen, 'Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism', in *Historical Materialism*, 20: 1, 2012, 267 and 274–275.

- 19 Hall, 'Black Diaspora Artists in Britain', 3.
- 20 Hall, 'Black Diaspora Artists in Britain', 1–2.
- 21 Hall, 'Black Diaspora Artists in Britain', 2.
- 22 Hall, 'Black Diaspora Artists in Britain', 21.
- 23 Medalla's internationalism is noted in most critical accounts of his work including Guy Brett's essay, 'Internationalism among Artists in the 60s and 70s', in *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, ed. Rasheed Araeen, London, 1989, 111–114. See also the section on David Medalla in Nick Aikens, Susan San Pui Lok, and Sophie Orlando, eds, *Conceptualism – Intersectional Readings, International Framings: Situating 'Black Artists and Modernism' in Europe*, Eindhoven, 2020, 244–311.
- 24 Isobel Whitelegg, 'Signals London – Signals Latin America', in *Radical Geometry*, ed. Adrian Locke, London, 2014, 61.
- 25 Guy Brett, 'David Medalla: On a General Attitude and Two Works in Particular', in *Carnival of Perception: Selected Writings on Art*, London, 2004, 74.
- 26 David Medalla, 'Editorial', *Signals: Newsletter of the Centre for Advanced Creative Study*, 1, August 1964, 1.
- 27 For an introduction to relational art, see Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon, 1998.
- 28 See <https://www.alisonjacquesgallery.com/exhibitions/137/overview/>.
- 29 See Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, 2012, 178–185; and also <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2017>, accessed 12 April 2019.
- 30 David Medalla, quoted in Adam Nankervis, 'A Stitch in Time, David Medalla', *Mousse*, 29, Summer 2011, <http://moussemagazine.it/david-medalla-adam-nankervis-2011/>, accessed 12 April 2019.
- 31 Guy Brett, 'Life Strategies: Overview and Selection', in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel, London, 1998, 197–225.
- 32 Medalla, in Nankervis, 'A Stitch in Time'. See also Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 178.
- 33 Medalla, in Nankervis, 'A Stitch in Time'.
- 34 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super-Modernity*, London 1995, 3.
- 35 Medalla, in Nankervis, 'A Stitch in Time'.
- 36 For a brief account of the significance of *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain*, see Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia, 'Introduction', in *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain 1965–75*, London, 2000, 7.
- 37 Hilary Floe, "'Everything Was Getting Smashed': Three Case Studies of Play and Participation, 1965–71", *Tate Papers*, 22, Autumn 2014, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/22/everything-was-getting-smashed-three-case-studies-of-play-and-participation-1965-71>, accessed 26 March 2017.
- 38 Floe, 'Everything Was Getting Smashed'.
- 39 Floe, 'Everything Was Getting Smashed'.
- 40 For more on this, see Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, London, 1998, or Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the Sixties and Seventies*, London, 2001.
- 41 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, London, 1984. For more recent work on the historically gendered associations between women and needlecraft, see Elizabeth Robinson, 'Women and Needlework in Britain, 1920–1970', unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2012, <https://repository.royalholloway.ac.uk/items/47fc4d88-eea0-e510-6d8f-0bfcc950f7cc/7/>.
- 42 See also Robinson, 'Women and Needlework in Britain, 1920–1970'.
- 43 Feminist critiques of artists like Mike Kelley, admonished for appropriating radical feminist art strategies that have recouped methods such as stitching and knitting as part of their critical armoury, warn us to be attentive to the contexts in which needlecraft is employed within art practices. For more on this, see Joseph McBrinn, "'Male Trouble": Sewing, Amateurism, and Gender', in *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts*, London, 2015, 35.
- 44 Karen Rosenberg, 'Needling More Than the Feminist Consciousness', *New York Times*, 28 December 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/28/arts/design/28embr.html>, accessed 27 November 2019.
- 45 Anna Deuze, 'Play, Ritual and Politics: Transitional Artworks in the 1960s', in *The 'Do-It-Yourself' Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*, ed. Anna Deuze, Manchester, 2010, 32.
- 46 Deuze, 'Play, Ritual and Politics', 32.
- 47 Or indeed through other projects initiated by Medalla such as *Exploding Galaxy* (1967–68), a collective of artists, musicians, poets and dancers who focused on shared creative expression in an effort to circumvent the commodification of the art market. In *99 Balls Pond Road: The Story of the Exploding Galaxy*, London, 2014, Jill Drower chronicles the collective and its protagonists, who lived together as a community, and for a short time blurred the boundaries between art and life. In later conversation with Rasheed Araeen in 1979, Medalla commented that 'I started the Exploding Galaxy, which I thought was fun. It was a kind of laboratory, to see how people behaved collectively. It was very anarchical, which is, I think, my main criticism of it'; Rasheed Araeen, 'Conversation with David Medalla', *Black Phoenix*, 3, 1979, 12.
- 48 Deuze, 'Play, Ritual and Politics', 32.
- 49 'The Venice Biennale: Contemporary Art Gets a Conscience', *The Economist*, 20 May 2017, <https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2017/05/20/contemporary-art-gets-a-conscience>.
- 50 Indeed, the nature of capitalism revolves precisely around such an avaricious process of co-option, working to gain sovereignty over anything and everything, including practices that are regarded as radical alternatives, and making them capitulate to the captive demands of the market. Numerous examples abound, such as the photographic prints made from the aerial photographs of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* for instance. For more on this, see Andrew Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945*, Oxford, 1998.
- 51 See, for example, Alex Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge, MA, 2000; and Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*.
- 52 Hannah Mathews, *Power to the People: Contemporary Conceptualism and the Object in Art*, Melbourne, 2011.
- 53 See, for example, Andrew Wilson, ed., *Conceptual Art in Britain, 1964–1979*, London, 2016, which omitted Medalla altogether.
- 54 See Harald Szeemann, ed., *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form (Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information)*, Bern, 1969, 105.
- 55 For a typed transcript of Medalla's letter to Szeemann, see Eva Bentecheva, 'Conceptualism-Scepticism and Creative Cross-Pollinations in the Work of David Medalla', in *Conceptualism – Intersectional Readings, International Framings*, ed. Aikens, Lok and Orlando, 280, note 5. Bentecheva also comments that 'in a conversation with Adam Nankervis, Medalla described performing a series of impromptu performances featuring found objects, poetry and dance while travelling around Africa and South Asia in the spring of 1969, and has confirmed that he posted letters and objects to Harald Szeemann while en route'; see Bentecheva, 'Conceptualism-Scepticism', 280, note 6. Bentecheva's sources are Guy Brett, *Exploding Galaxies: The Art of David Medalla*, London, 1995, 194, as well as conversations carried out with David Medalla and Adam Nankervis, London and Berlin, April 2017.
- 56 Rosetta Brooks, 'An Art of Refusal', in Phillpot and Tarsia, *Live in Your Head*, 32.
- 57 Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer, 'Introduction: De Margin and De Centre', *Screen* ['The Last Special Issue on Race'], 29, 4, Autumn 1988, 1–10.
- 58 Julien and Mercer, 'Introduction: De Margin and De Centre', 3.
- 59 Leon Wainwright, *Timed Out: Art and the Transnational Caribbean*, Manchester, 2011. Indeed, principal investigator and co-editor of this special issue, Sonia Boyce, remains ever mindful of an informal conversation she had with cultural theorist Stuart Hall where he proposed that modernism should be thought of as having an epochal reach rather than emanating from a specific geographical place.
- 60 Kobena Mercer, 'Iconography after Identity', in *Shades of Black*, ed. Bailey, Baucom, and Boyce, 49–58.
- 61 Other recent reassessments of Kim Lim's contribution to the development of abstract sculpture include: Joleen Loh, 'Relocating Kim Lim: A Cosmopolitan Perspective', *Southeast of Now*, 2: 2, October 2018, 33–62; Hammad Nasar, *Speech Acts*, Manchester, 2018; Darren Leak and Biancha Chu, eds, *Kim Lim*, London, 2018; Jo Baring and Sarah Victoria Turner's *Sculpting Lives* podcast, March 2020; and Elena Crippa 'Kim Lim', *Tate Etc.*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-50-autumn-2020/kim-lim-preview-tate-britain>.
- 62 Lubaina Himid and Maud Sulter, eds, 'Passion – Blackwomen's Creativity of the African Diaspora', *Feminist Arts News*, 2: 8, 1988.
- 63 Examples of this include the many exhibitions that Himid and Sulter either participated in or organized during this period, such as *Five Black Women* (1983), *The Thin Black Line* (1985) and *Unrecorded Truths* (1986), amongst others.
- 64 Rasheed Araeen, *The Essential Black Art*, London, 1988, <https://chisenhale.org.uk/exhibition/essential-black-art/>, accessed 1 December 2016.