



## **The Black Subject: Ancient to Modern Tate Britain, Clore Auditorium**

*In partnership with the Equiano Centre*

**FRIDAY 20 February, 18.30-20.30**  
**Film screening of *Borderline***

*Borderline* (1930) is a ground-breaking silent film with an explicit theme of racial prejudice and an implicit homoerotic subtext. Directed by Kenneth Macpherson, it is highly influenced by the psychological realism of GW Pabst and Sergei Eisenstein's montage. *Borderline* tells the story of a tense, inter-racial love triangle and its deadly consequences. The result is a unique and complex matrix of racial and sexual tension moving between the boundaries of black and white, male and female, the conscious and the unconscious. This version of the film includes a score by jazz musician Courtney Pine.

18.30 Film screening

19.30 Discussion with **Prof Laura Marcus** and **Prof Sukhdev Sandhu**, chaired by **Sonya Dyer**

**SATURDAY 21 February, 10.30-18.00**  
**Symposium: The Black Subject: Ancient to Modern**

From characters from ancient mythology to the birth of modernism this symposium takes an interdisciplinary approach, exploring relationships between artists and models, multi-racial interwar communities, historical subjects, sexuality, gender and the work of previously neglected artists.

The symposium takes a broad historical sweep, using the Tate collection as a starting point for a discussion on depictions of people of African and Asian descent in British art, tracing a journey from subject to subjectivity.

10.30 Registration, coffee and tea served in the Clore Foyer

11.00 Welcome by Sonya Dyer

### Session one: On presence and absence

- 11.10 **Kimathi Donkor** *Andromeda Africana*
- 11.30 **Michael Ohajuru** *An interpretation of the Black Presence in the 1241 Domesday Abbreviato*
- 11.50 **Dr Temi Odumosu** *Tyranny of the Subject: Black representation both past and present* (video provocation, not recorded at speaker's request [click here for more information](#))
- 11.55 **S I Martin** *The Blackest subject: British Representations of the African in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*
- 12.15 **Prof Michael Fisher** *Asians in Britain as Portrayed by Pre-Victorian British Artists* (video slideshow)
- 12.35 Panel discussion and audience Q&A chaired by **Prof Sukhdev Sandhu**
- 12.50 Lunch break, delegates encouraged to visit library and collection galleries

### Session two: Victorians - a conversation

- 14.15 **Dr Caroline Bressey** *The Black subject in Victorian Photography*
- 14.35 **Jan Marsh** *Curating Black Victorians*
- 14.55 **Florian Stadler** *Representing the South Asian subject in late Victorian and early twentieth century photography*
- 15.15 Panel discussion and audience Q&A chaired by **David Dibosa**
- 15.30 Tea and coffee served in the Clore Foyer

### Session three: Model citizens – a panel

- 15.50 **Dr Gemma Romain** *Patrick Nelson: identity, queerness, and love in the life of a black artists' model in interwar Britain* (not recorded at speaker's request, [click here for more information](#))
- 16.10 **Dr Roshan McClenahan** *Sunita and Anita: Their Quest for Independence*
- 16.30 Panel discussion and audience Q&A chaired by Sonya Dyer

### Session four: Modernism

- 16.45 **Prof Partha Mitter** *Jamani Roy: negotiating the local from a global perspective*
- 17.05 Closing plenary chaired by Dr David Dibosa
- 18.00 Closing remarks by Sonya Dyer

## Abstracts

### **Kimathi Donkor** *Andromeda Africana*

Tate Britain's collection includes several artworks that reference the ancient Greek myth of Andromeda, who – according to the Roman poet Ovid – was an Ethiopian Princess rescued from a sea monster by the hero Perseus. In 2011, like many artists and scholars who have also been intrigued by the implications of this narrative for art history and contemporary culture, Kimathi Donkor began to explore Andromeda's African identity using photography, digital media, painting and drawing.

### **Michael Ohajuru** *An interpretation of the Black Presence in the 1241 Domesday Abbreviato*

This presentation looks at how the black presence as marginalia in the 1241 Domesday Abbreviato might be understood in relation to other Medieval black presences and contemporary images.

### **Dr Temi Odumosu** *Tyranny of the Subject: Black representation both past and present*

This video presentation, provided in absence, is a meditation on the visual memory of colonial representation and its affect and legacy in the work of contemporary Black artists. The questions posed are a call for rethinking Black subjectivity both within and beyond cultural institutions.

### **S I Martin** *The Blackest subject: British Representations of the African in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*

This presentation looks at the depiction of the Black subject in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It will aim to show how images of African men and women served to represent Britain's self-image as the country became both the largest retailer of enslaved African lives, as well as a major centre for abolitionist organisation. This will be done by examining the political and cultural purposes which the African image served in the work of Gainsborough, Zoffany and Reynolds, as well as popular caricaturists of the period.

### **Dr Michael Fisher** *Asians in Britain as Portrayed by Pre-Victorian British Artists*

Asians have been visiting and settling in England since about 1600, about as long as Englishmen have been sailing to India. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, between 20,000 and 40,000 men and women from India had reached Britain. This talk explores the diverse ways that British artists portrayed the many classes of people from India from the 1600s through the 1830s.

### **Dr Caroline Bressey** *The Black subject in Victorian Photography*

In this presentation I will be illustrating some of the forms of photography that depicted Black Victorians, men and women of African and Asian descent, in the long nineteenth century. The range of images of Black Victorians is broad – from members of the imperial elite such as Sarah Forbes Bonnetta and her husband James Davies to the working classes and the marginalised poor who found themselves in institutions such as children's homes, prisons and asylums. Yet, all these photographs form an immediate and important challenge to the pernicious argument that multicultural Britain began in 1948.

### **Jan Marsh** *Curating Black Victorians*

This paper looks at portraits, history painting, genre subjects, studies; presences and absences; representation and interpretation; research, curation and reception.

### **Florian Stadler** *Representing the South Asian subject in late Victorian and early twentieth century photography*

This presentation will engage with the depiction of the South Asian subject from the late Victorian period to the 1920s. It will trace how depictions shifted with the development of photography away from portraiture and studio shots towards a mode of representation that

captures images ranging across divides of class and gender. Offering a window in on how, at the zenith of Empire, this technology addresses changes in perception in the ideological construction of the South Asian subject in public discourse, these images are now an important repository to trace the little known history of early South Asian settlement in Britain.

**Dr. Gemma Romain** *Patrick Nelson: identity, queerness, and love in the life of a black artists' model in interwar Britain*

This paper explores some the life experiences of Black Jamaican artist model Patrick Nelson, who first moved to Britain in 1937. It focuses on exploring his experiences of sexuality, love and identity, focusing on a series of letters sent to his former lover and life-long friend the Bloomsbury group artist Duncan Grant, as well exploring portraits of him by Duncan Grant and Edward Wolfe (the latter which is included in the *Spaces of Black Modernism* display at Tate Britain).

**Dr Roshan McClenahan** *Sunita and Anita: Their Quest for Independence*

Sunita and Anita came to Britain as an act of independence from their background, and to allow them the freedom to think and do what they wanted. They modelled for a number of famous artists, in particular Epstein and Matthew Smith. Many stories have been told about these models, often made up by themselves. This speaker destroys some of these myths, and although she cannot tell you much about her aunts' views of the artists, she tells you what has been described of their lives in Europe. The talk is illustrated with examples of works for which they modelled.

**Prof Partha Mitter** *Jamini Roy: negotiating the global from a local perspective*

I will speak on the great modernist painter of British India, Jamini Roy (1887-1972). His innovative formalism, based upon primitivist re-imaginings of folk art, mediated between the global and the local. Jamini Roy constructed a consistent anti-colonial ideology based on his interpretation of primitivism. German Primitivists and Roy shared certain key ideas though they were totally unaware of one another. They had arrived at their respective critiques of modernity through different historical routes. What possible connection could they have? I describe their similarities as 'structural affinities in a 'virtual global community', since neither knew the existence of the other. They were 'virtual cosmopolitans' who shared their resistance to global capitalism and the alienation of urban existence.

## Biographies

**Dr Caroline Bressey** is a Reader in historical and cultural geography at University College London. Her research focuses upon recovering the historical geographies of the Black community in 19th century Britain, especially London. Parallel to this are her interests in ideas of race, racism, early anti-racist activism and identity in Victorian society which were the subject of first book *Race, Empire and the politics of Anti-Caste*. She has collaborated on displays with the National Portrait Gallery, London and the Museum in Docklands as well as the *Spaces of Black Modernism* display at Tate Britain.

**David Dibosa** trained as a curator after receiving his first degree from Girton College, University of Cambridge. He was awarded his PhD in Art History from Goldsmiths College, University of London. During the 1990s, he curated public art projects. He is currently Course Leader for MA Art Theory at Chelsea College of Arts at University of the Arts London. He is also a Researcher in University of the Arts London's Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAIN).

**Kimathi Donkor** is a London based painter who re-imagines encounters, mythologies, sites and figures drawn from African and black Diaspora history. Recent solo exhibitions include *Daddy, I want to be a black artist* at Peckham Platform (London, 2013) and *Queens of the Undead* with Iniva at Rivington Place (London, 2012). Group exhibitions include *What's Going On* at the Usher Gallery (Lincoln, 2014) and the 29<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial at the Ciccillo Matarazzo pavilion (Brazil, 2010). Donkor received the 2011 Derek Hill Painting Scholarship for The British School at Rome. His PhD at Chelsea College of Art explores African identity in Tate Britain's collection.

**Sonya Dyer** is Curator of Public Programmes, Tate.

**Dr Michael Fisher** holds Danforth Chair in History at Oberlin College, USA. He has published many books and articles on settlers and visitors from India in Britain, from the earliest times onward. Among his books relevant to this talk are: *The Inordinately Strange Life of Dyce Sombre: Victorian Anglo Indian M.P. and Chancery 'Lunatic'* (Hurst, 2010), *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (University of California Press, 1997) and *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) in India, Ireland, and England* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

**Prof Laura Marcus** is Goldsmiths' Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford. She has published extensively on aspects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture, including life-writing, modernism, the history of psychoanalysis, and early film and film cultures. Her book publications include the co-edited anthology *Close Up: Cinema and Modernism 1927-1933* (Continuum, 1998); *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford University Press, 2007) and *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (2014).

**Jan Marsh** is curator of *Black Victorians: Black People in British Art 1800-1900*, an exhibition at Manchester and Birmingham Art Galleries 2005-6. Currently working on the Later Victorian Portraits online catalogue at National Portrait Gallery. Related papers: 'For the Wolf or the Babe he is seeking to devour? The Hidden Impact of the American Civil War on British Art', in *Re-framing the Pre-Raphaelites*, 1995. 'Ruskin and Turner's Slavers: Patriotic, Political and Pictorial Issues', *Visual Culture in Britain*, vol.2, 2001, 47-63. *Art Against the Slave Trade in Painting 1760-1860*, 2007. 'Pictured at Work: Black models' employment in Art 1800-1900', *Immigrants & Minorities*, volume 28/2, 2010. Related exhibitions include *From the Magi to Miss LaLa*, National Gallery 2013; *Albert Challen's portrait of Mary Seacole*, National Portrait Gallery, forthcoming.

**S I Martin** is an author and researcher who has undertaken projects, research and training for numerous heritage organisations including the Black Cultural Archives, the National Maritime Museum, the Museum of London, the National Archives, several London boroughs and the BBC amongst others. He is the author of the novels *Incomparable World*, *Jupiter Williams* and *Jupiter Amidships* as well as the non-fiction title *Britain's Slave Trade*. He is the founder of the 500 Years of Black London tours.

**Dr Roshan McClenahan** came to London from India in 1965 to study speech therapy. A Masters degree and then a PhD followed, with several research publications. When she retired from her consultant's post, she continued to sit on the National Research Ethics Committee for Camden & Islington, from which she recently retired. She is interested in art, theatre, opera and food, and is currently researching for a book on her aunts, Sunita and Anita. She has a supportive husband and two sons, and reports that the best reasons for living in England are Radio 4, the NHS, English husbands and raspberries.

**Prof Partha Mitter** (Hon. D.Lit. Courtauld Institute) is Professor Emeritus, University of Sussex and Honorary Research Fellow, Victoria & Albert Museum, London. He has been Radhakrishnan Memorial Lecturer, All Souls College, Oxford; Mellon Fellow, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton; Fellow of Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California; Fellow of Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts and Fellow, Centre for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. He began his career as Junior Research Fellow, Churchill College, Cambridge and Research Fellow, Clare Hall, Cambridge. His publications include *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977; Chicago University Press Paperback, 1992; Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2013; *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922: Occidental orientations*, Cambridge University Press, 1994; *Indian Art*, Oxford University Press Art History Series, Oxford, 2002; *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde – 1922-1947*, Reaktion Books and Oxford University Press, 2007.

**Dr Temi Odumosu** is an art historian and creative education consultant with a passion for bringing to light hidden histories that have the power to transform perceptions of cultural identity and citizenship. Her international research and curatorial practice is concerned with the politics of recognition, Black aesthetics, and the psychosocial consequences of distorted representations. Working in the spaces between archives, collective memory and the creative imagination, she also uses innovative technology as a tool for activating and bringing to life history and culture in the present. Temi is currently experimenting with augmented reality (AR) as a tool for public engagement with Black representation and colonial histories, through her research for the *Living Archives* project at Malmö University in Sweden.

**Michael Ohajuru** was a successful senior executive in the mobile communications industry before retiring in February 2013 to carry out voluntary work in the arts and for the Black community. Born in Liverpool, England he holds honours degrees in Physics (Leeds University, 1974) and Art History (Open University, 2008). He is an arts blogger who specializes in the Black African presence in Renaissance Europe in particular the Black Magus in Adorations images from the period. He regularly writes on these matters also speaks on those themes at the Victoria & Albert Museum (where his work is referenced), the British Library and other institutions. Currently working with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in running a series of workshops – What's Happening in Black British History? <http://www.BlackMagusBlog.com>

**Dr Gemma Romain** is a researcher in Caribbean and Black British history, with a particular interest in modern Black histories and visual culture, the nineteenth century Caribbean, Jewish histories in modern Britain, and histories of sexuality. She is based at The Equiano Centre, Department of Geography, UCL and is an Honorary Fellow of The Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations, University of Southampton. She has a particular interest in public history, curating, museums and archives and is co-curator of *Spaces of Black*

*Modernism* at Tate Britain. Her biography of Patrick Nelson will be published by Bloomsbury Academic.

**Prof Sukhdev Sandhu** is Associate Professor of English Literature at New York University where he also directs the Colloquium for Unpopular Culture. His books include *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined A City*, *I'll Get My Coat* and *Night Haunts: A Journey Through The London Night*.

**Florian Stadtler** is Lecturer in Global Literature at the University of Exeter. With Susheila Nasta he has co-written *Asian Britain: A Photographic History*. The book stems from the AHRC-funded projects, *Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad* and *Beyond the Frame: Indian British Connections* and two exhibitions co-created with the British Library, which toured Britain and India. He has published on South Asian and British Asian Cinema, Literature and History, most recently, *Fiction, Film and Indian Popular Cinema: Salman Rushdie's Novels and the Cinematic Imagination*. He is Reviews Editor of *Wasafiri: The Magazine of International Contemporary Writing*.



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