

EXHIBITION WORKS LIST AND LOCATION OF GALLERIES

Gallery 1: Excavations

Signs of Empire

Black Audio Film Collective, 1982-84,
slide-tape, black and white, 30 minutes.

Handsworth Songs

John Akomfrah, 1986,
16 mm, colour, 60 minutes.

Twilight City

Reece Auguiste, 1989,
16mm, colour, sound, 52 minutes.

Gallery 2: Disenchantments

Seven Songs for Malcolm X

John Akomfrah, 1993,
16mm, colour, sound, 55 minutes.

The Black Room

Black Audio Film Collective, 2007
mixed media installation.

Vitrines

Adjaye Associates, 2007
Archive material courtesy of BAFC.

The Media Lounge: Interventions

*Inventories: Film and Video-Essays of
the BAFC 1991-1998,*

A Touch of the Tar Brush

John Akomfrah, 1991,
16mm, colour, sound, 40 minutes.

Mysteries of July

Reece Auguiste, 1991,
16mm, colour, sound, 54 minutes.

The Last Angel of History

John Akomfrah, 1995,
video, colour, sound, 45 minutes.

3 Songs on Pain, Light and Time

Trevor Mathison and Edward George, 1995,
video, colour, sound, 25 minutes.

Martin Luther King: Days of Hope

John Akomfrah, 1996,
video, colour, sound, 60 minutes.

Memory Room 451

John Akomfrah, 1997,
video, colour, sound, 25 minutes.

Gangsta Gangsta: The Tragedy of Tupac Shakur

Edward George, 1998,
video, colour, sound, 40 minutes.

Montage Mixer

Black Audio Online

Black Audio Film Collective Posters

Exhibition produced by The Otolith Group and FACT in partnership with :



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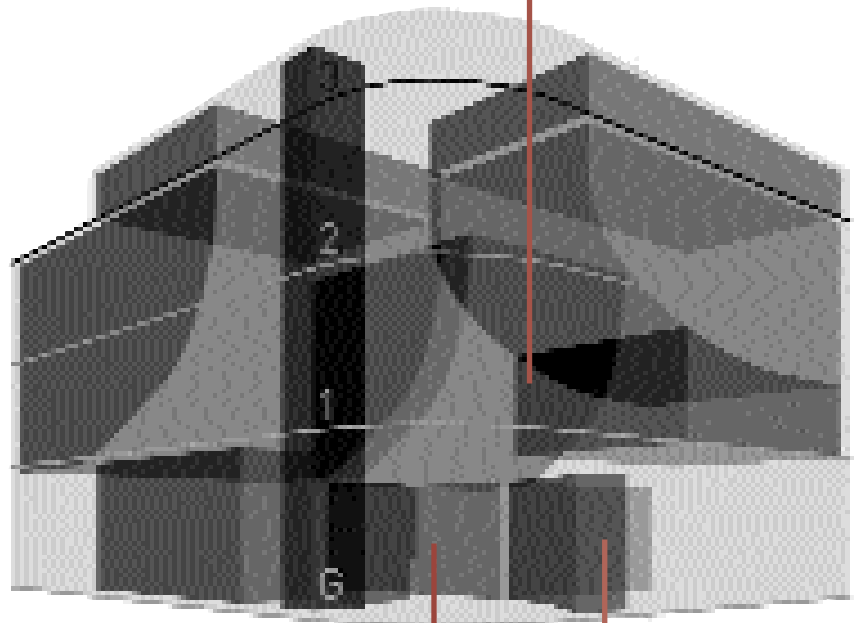
Whitechapel

inIVA

Exhibition production realised with support from:



Gallery 2 1st Floor



Media Lounge Ground Floor

Gallery 1 Ground Floor

This gallery guide, and entry to the galleries at FACT is FREE. If you would like to support the continuing work of FACT please place a donation in the box in the foyer. Thank you!

We always welcome feedback, if you would like to comment on this or any other FACT project please visit the comments box near the information desk.

Please note that photography is not permitted in the galleries.



THE GHOSTS OF SONGS

**A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE
BLACK AUDIO FILM COLLECTIVE**

02 February - 01 April 2007

A major touring exhibition launched at FACT

INTRODUCTION

FACT is delighted to present *The Ghosts of Songs*, the first exhibition devoted to the work of the Black Audio Film Collective, one of the most distinguished artist groups to emerge from Britain in recent years.

The Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) was founded in 1982 by seven undergraduates in Sociology and Fine Art: John Akomfrah, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, Reece Auguiste, Trevor Mathison, Edward George and Claire Johnson, who left in 1985 and was replaced by David Lawson. The Collective formally dissolved in 1998.

In many ways, BAFC were a unique group. Based initially in east, and later north, London, they produced internationally acclaimed, award winning slide-tape texts, films and videos; far more than any other artist group of the time. These explorations of belonging and intimacy combined a montage aesthetic with personal reflection to invent a new genre of moving image that challenged traditions of British documentary and drama, and profoundly influenced contemporary avant-garde film-makers and theorists.

In the 1980s, the collective were known as exceptional curators, whose film courses, seminar series and screening programmes brought avant-garde cinema, from India, Brazil, Cuba, Senegal and the USA, to London audiences for the first time. The desire to build an independent cineculture remained constant through the group's numerous theoretical, critical, speculative and fictional writings. Unlike other moving image artists, the collective was not restricted to a single cultural context, but operated within and between the cultural spaces of the international film festival, the art gallery and broadcast television.

The Ghosts of Songs invites audiences to engage with the Black Audio Film Collective through a series of chambers, installations, vitrines and digital interfaces, designed by the renowned architectural office Adjaye Associates, that allow a variety of encounters with the works.

The Ghosts of Songs has been conceptualised, curated and produced by Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar of The Otolith Group, which they founded in 2002. The Otolith Group is based in London and their work includes film, video, sound, text and curation, that examine different platforms for contemporary art practice. Their films and installations have featured in international exhibitions - including The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville, Spain, The Hayward Gallery and The Tate, London - and in 2006 The Otolith Group was the recipient of the Decibel Award from Arts Council England.



The Black Audio Film Collective, East London, 1989.

Front: David Lawson, Edward George; Middle from left: Trevor Mathison, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, John Akomfrah; Back: Reece Auguiste
Photo: Nigel Parry/© BAFC Trust

Gallery 1 *Excavations: 1982-1989.*

It consists of three chambers designed by Adjaye Associates. The first chamber screens *Signs of Empire*, (1982-4). The second chamber screens *Handsworth Songs*, (1986). The third chamber screens *Twilight City*, (1989). The exterior of each chamber is clad in black felt while the interiors are clad in coloured felt, relating to the lighting and emotional temperature of each film.

Gallery 2 *Disenchantments: 1990 – 1998.*

The fourth chamber presents *Seven Songs for Malcolm X*, (1993). The fifth work is an installation entitled *The Black Room*, conceptualised by all of the artists of the Black Audio Film Collective and realised by John Akomfrah, David Lawson and Trevor Mathison as an ironic commentary on the idea of the retrospective.

The Black Room reworks the installation of the same name, designed by Trevor Mathison and Edward George, first presented for the group exhibition *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1996.

A series of *Vitrines* display other resources from BAFC, such as scripts, photographs, publicity materials and awards.

The Media Lounge *Interventions.*

Here visitors can access and re-work archival material through the *Montage Mixer*, view further film and video essays, and also browse the BAFC website.

Gallery 1: Excavations

Signs of Empire

Black Audio Film Collective

Produced while the collective were undergraduates, it is the first of a two-part 35mm slide-tape text entitled *Expeditions*; part two is entitled *Images of Nationality*. The work toured England from November 1984 to March 1985, using a Kodak dissolve unit to sequence images into narrative. The sound-track to *Signs of Empire*, which consisted of tape loops of musique concrete and political speeches, was amplified to create a powerful environment of dread.

Handsworth Songs

John Akomfrah

Handsworth Songs' point of departure is the civil disturbances of September and October 1985 in the Birmingham district of Handsworth and in the urban centres of London. Running throughout *Handsworth Songs* is the idea that the riots were the outcome of British society's suppression of black presence and black desire in Britain. The film portrays civil disorder as an opening onto a secret history of dissatisfaction, associated with industrial decline and the crisis of documentary as a mode of address. The term 'Songs' refers not to musicality, but instead invokes the idea of documentary as a poetic montage of associations, familiar from the British documentary cinema of John Grierson and Humphrey Jennings.

Twilight City

Reece Auguste

By 1989, the Conservative government was three years into a programme of wealth creation and urban redevelopment unparalleled in 20th Century Britain. BAFC's third film, *Twilight City*, can now be seen as the first essay-film to map the cartography of the new London through an excavation of the psychic and historical strata of the Docklands, Limehouse and the Isle of Dogs. In its movement between archival image, fictional script, studio interview, transposed photographic tableau and travelling long shots, London is re-imagined as a city of night and light, bordered by a landscape of dreams and sequenced by electronic pulses.



Who Needs A Heart, 1991, ©BAFC Trust.



Seven Songs for Malcolm X, 1993, ©BAFC Trust.

Gallery 2: Disenchantments

Seven Songs for Malcolm X

John Akomfrah

The collective's seventh film envisioned the death and life of the African American revolutionary as a study in iconography as narrated by novelist Toni Cade Bambara and actor Giancarlo Esposito. The seven stylized tableaux that memorialise Malcolm's life referenced the early 20th Century funeral photography of James Van der Zee's *The Harlem Book of the Dead* and the elemental, static cinematography of Sergei Paradjanov's *The Colour of Pomegranates*.

The Black Room

Black Audio Film Collective

The Black Room is a new work by all seven founding artists of the collective. As a group authored space of memory, it commemorates ideas that informed group practice. The seven artists were invited to contribute 12 books and 12 pieces of music. It consists of two connected hexagonal chambers; the first chamber is organized around the texts important to the formation of the BAFC, the second is structured around the music that inspired the artists.

Vitrines

The Perspex vitrines designed by Adjaye Associates form a sculptural island that suggests a dialogue with the chamber for *Seven Songs for Malcolm X* and *The Black Room* in Gallery 2.

Vitrine 1 displays scripts, including *Signs of Empire*, *Handsworth Songs*, *Seven Songs for Malcolm X*, treatments for *Twilight City* and *Who Needs a Heart* and notebooks for *Who Needs A Heart* and *Testament*.

Vitrine 2 displays selected photographs of the BAFC at different stages of their career.

Vitrine 3 displays selected publicity from the film familiarisation courses and screening programmes curated by the group and designed by Edward George.

Vitrine 4 displays selected publicity from the films of the BAFC, including invitations and posters.

Vitrine 5 displays selected certificates and notifications of prizes awarded to the group across their career.

The Media Lounge: Interventions

Conceived and designed by artist Gary Stewart, *Materialities* is intended as a space for visitors to re-work and re-appropriate archival material. Audiences are invited to participate in the construction of memory, history and the future through intervention in these media. *Interventions* resembles a cutting room in that it offers the potential to produce change in what is viewed or heard.

Montage Mixer

Viewers are invited to re-work images via the interface of the *Montage Mixer*, designed by Gary Stewart, which contains sound files and photographic stills from the *The American Image*, *Photographs from the National Archives 1860-1960*, available online from the National Library of Congress. A continuous projection of BAFC screen tests immerses users of the *Montage Mixer* in the movement of images. BAFC film posters produced by screenwriter and designer Edward George are also integrated within the Media Lounge.



A Touch of the Tar Brush, 1992, ©BAFC Trust.

Black Audio Film Collective Online

A dedicated computer in the Media Lounge offers access to the BAFC website, which includes video-essay streaming, an online poster gallery and never before seen out-takes, location footage and photographic tests.

Inventories: Film and Video-Essays of the BAFC 1991-1998

Audiences are invited to access further film-essays and video-essays of the collective via the *Inventories* programme.

A Touch of the Tar Brush

John Akomfrah

In his 1933 travelogue *English Journey*, J.B. Priestley recalled visiting a school in Liverpool, where he spoke with a number of bi-racial schoolchildren. John Akomfrah visited Liverpool to explore the very community Priestley described in his book. Through a mixture of archival footage and interviews with the great-grandchildren of Priestley's encounter, *A Touch of the Tar Brush* challenges the notion that racial purity is a necessary constituent of English national identity.



The Last Angel of History, 1995, ©BAFC Trust.

Mysteries of July

Reece Auguste

Mysteries of July begins with the enigmatic death of young males in police custody. The film enacts an elaborate ritual of cinematic mourning that indicts the judicial failure and acknowledges the melancholia of lives lived without redress.

The Last Angel of History

John Akomfrah

The Last Angel of History was BAFC's most influential work during the 1990s. The group's experimentation with the chromatic possibilities of digital video is set within the form of a mythology that opens lines of connection between musicality, futurity, technology and the limits of the human.

3 Songs on Pain, Light and Time

Trevor Mathison and Edward George

A video portrait, in deliberately unbalanced colours, of the life and work of renowned black British artist Donald Rodney, before his death from sickle cell anaemia in 1998, aged 37.

Martin Luther King: Days of Hope

John Akomfrah

The collective's idea of colour cinematography informed by a monochromatic palette became a reality in this video-essay. *Days of Hope* is part account of the complexities of Dr Martin Luther King Jr and part experiment with the tonality, texture and timbre of shadow and light.

Memory Room 451

John Akomfrah

Memory Room 451 is the most extreme vision of the Neo-Expressionist aesthetic the BAFC pursued throughout the 1990s. Set in a dystopic world, dreams of hair become the new media platform of the 23rd Century and time travel is no more than poorly paid shiftwork.

Gangsta Gangsta: The Tragedy of Tupac Shakur

Edward George

BAFC's final video-essay explored the death and life of 26 year old Tupac Shakur, the volatile hiphop MC and actor whose unsolved murder transformed him into a posthumous legend of the global music landscape.

Exhibition Monograph

The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective

Edited by The Otolith Group, *The Ghosts of Songs* is a fully illustrated volume that explores the entire body of work from one of Britain's most influential artist groups.

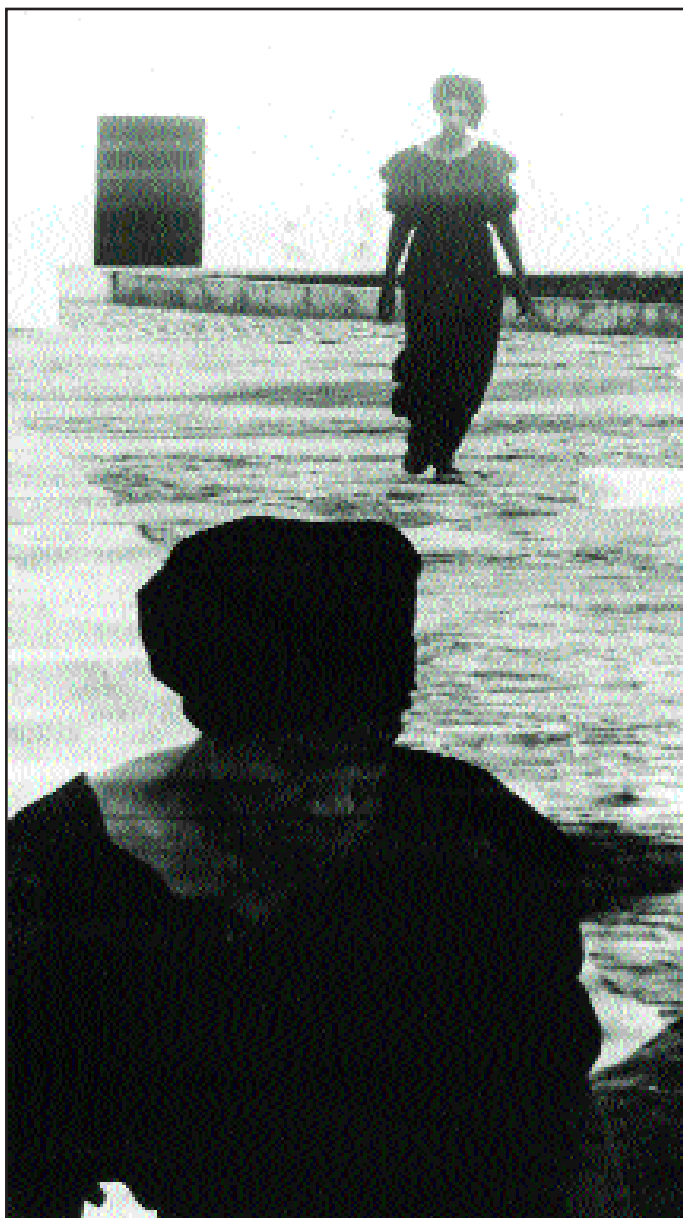
Published by FACT, Liverpool University Press and Chicago University Press, the publication is available from the FACT shop and online from www.liverpool-unipress.co.uk.

£25.00

240 pages, 260 illustrations

Essays by Okwui Enwezor, Jean Fisher, Kobena Mercer and Kodwo Eshun.

Created to accompany the first retrospective of the Black Audio Film Collective, curated by The Otolith Group and launched at FACT, before touring to Arncliffe, Bristol and London.



Testament, 1988. ©Smoking Dog Films



Memory Room 451, 1997, ©BAFC Trust.

Related Events

Breakfast With The Artists: The Black Audio Film Collective in conversation with The Otolith Group

Screen 2 02 February 11.00am – 1.00pm
£7.00 / £4.00 (Members & concessions)

To launch the world premiere exhibition of *The Ghosts of Songs: A Retrospective of the Black Audio Film Collective* at FACT, the curators of the exhibition, Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar of The Otolith Group, chair this unique panel discussion on the pioneering work of the Black Audio Film Collective, with the artists themselves reunited especially for this event.

Artists John Akomfrah, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, Reece Auguiste, Trevor Mathison, David Lawson and Edward George expand upon their practice as a collective and some of the significant factors that influenced their art work during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Gallery Workshop for 14 – 17 year olds

The Box 17 February 1.00pm – 4.00pm
FREE Entry (Pre-booking essential)

Inspired by the exhibition, bring your own videos, photos and sounds to mix - with amazing archive material from the BBC, BFI and Channel 4 - into a new video which can be played, performed and remixed from a keyboard. This workshop is being run by interactive artist Gary Stewart and sound designer Trevor Mathison, from the BAFC.

For more information contact: Karen Hickling, Education Manager on (0151) 707 4408, or email: hickling@fact.co.uk.

As part of FACT's SEEN programme we will be screening selected films of the BAFC.

Seen

A Touch of the Tar Brush

with guest speaker, former World Light Heavyweight Boxing Champion, John Conteh.

The Box 28 February 6.30pm
£4.00 / £3.00 (Members & concessions)

The Last Angel of History

Memory Room 451

The Box 14 March 6.30pm
£4.00 / £3.00 (Members & concessions)

SEEN tests the boundaries between art and cinema through regular screenings of experimental film and artists' film and video.