

Introduction to Contemporary British Art of Black and Asian Diasporas: focus on the 1980s

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The decade of the 1980s was a special and defining period of art practice for many artists of the African, Asian and Caribbean diasporas in Britain. An understanding of more recent visual culture and diaspora in this country might be framed by the art, events and issues of that decade. Key debates characterising the 1980s include those of patronage and public 'visibility'; the politics of historiography and art criticism; diverse visual practices; cultural difference and identity politics; and exhibition and display. Even a small cross-section of the literature offers a sense of the period's extraordinary diversity in visual technologies and processes, gendered and sexualised positions, and the role of ethnicity and 'race' in contemporary art making.

I would suggest just four themed areas to group a range of titles. These commonly appear in university art history libraries and are generally in print.

Exhibitions and display

Material is widely available relating to milestone exhibitions of the 1980s, survey shows, and important artists' monographs produced to accompany public events. Some suggested titles include:

Bailey, David and Kobena Mercer. (1995) *Mirage: Enigmas of race, difference and desire*. London: ICA and inIVA.

Chambers, Eddie ed. (1988) *Black Art: Plotting the course*. Oldham: Oldham Art Gallery, Wolverhampton: Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Liverpool: Bluecoat Gallery.

Mercer, Kobena. (1997) 'Keith Piper Witness at the crossroads: An artist's journey in Post-colonial Space'. In David Chandler ed. *Keith Piper: relocating the remains*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts.

Gupta, Sunil. (1995) *Joy Gregory: Monograph*. London: Autograph.

Hayward Gallery. (1989) *The other story: Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain*. London: Hayward Gallery

Kapoor, Anish. (1990) *Anish Kapoor*. London: Tate Gallery.

Karp, Ivan and Steven D. Levine ed. (1991) *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Nairne, Sandy. (1987) *State of the art*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Archer-Straw, Petrine. (1990) The other story. *Art Monthly* 133, Feb., 14-15.

Sealy, Mark. (1993) *Vanley Burke: a retrospective*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Sirmans, M.F. ed. (1997) *Transforming the crown: African, Asian and Caribbean artists in Britain 1966-1996*. New York: Caribbean Cultural Center.

Whitechapel Gallery. (1986) *From Two Worlds*. London: Whitechapel Gallery. Exhibition catalogue.

Specialised archives* offer more material relating to debates around the poetics and politics of display; the growing interest in curatorial practice as it developed during the decade; and critical and press responses to significant exhibitions.

Institutions, policies and reports

A less researched but nevertheless accessible set of titles exists on the public patronage of diaspora artists, multiculturalism and 'visibility', and material produced by or relevant to institutions such as the Arts Council of Great Britain, Greater London Council and Greater London Arts. These can be found in art magazines and journals of the time – many of which are still in print – or by request from the Arts Council.

Araeen, Rasheed. (1987) Why 'Third Text'? *Third Text* 1: 3-5.

Araeen, Rasheed. (1987) From Primitivism to Ethnic Arts. *Third Text* 1: 6-25.

Arts Council of Great Britain. (1989) *The Arts and Cultural Diversity*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain.

Arts Council. (1986) *The Arts and Ethnic Minorities: Action Plan*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain.

Commission for Racial Equality. (1983) *The arts of ethnic minorities: A reading guide*. London: CRE.

GLC. (1985) *New horizons: exhibition of arts*. London: GLC (Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee)

Hall, Stuart. (2001) 'Constituting an archive'. *Third Text* 54: 89-92.

Khan, Naseem. (1976) *The arts Britain ignores: The arts of ethnic minorities in Britain*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain.

Owusu, Kwesi. (1986) *The struggle for Black arts in Britain: What can we consider better than freedom*. London: Comedia.

Responses from artists, curators and so on to funding patterns and other initiatives, can be found at the specialist archives*.

Visual practices

Titles specific to visual media are widely available, such as those on film-making, photography, performance, installation and painting. Critical accounts on or by individual artists of these media and their technologies are well represented in quality and number, such as the well-illustrated artists' monographs published by inIVA.

Araeen, Rasheed and Eddie Chambers. (1988) 'Black art: a discussion'. *Third Text* Winter: 51-62.

Araeen, Rasheed. (1984) *Making myself visible*. London: Kala Press.

Bailey, David A. (1990) 'Photographic animateur: the photographs of Rotimi Fani-Kayode in relation to Black photographic practices'. *Third Text* 13 Winter: 57-63.

Bowling, Frank. (1988) 'Formalist art and the Black experience'. *Third Text* 5 Winter: 78-94.

Cross, P. and Tawadros, Gilane., ed. (1997) *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*. London: inIVA.

Gilroy, Paul. (1990) 'Art of darkness: Black art and the problem of belonging to England'. *Third Text* 10: 45-52.

Johnson, Claudette. (1991) 'Issues surrounding the representation of the naked body of a woman'. *FAN-Feminist Art News* 3 no.8: 12-14.

Nead, Lynn. (1995) *Chila Kumari Burman: Beyond two cultures*. London: Kala Press.

Pollard, Ingrid. (1989) 'Ingrid Pollard: Pastoral Interludes'. *Third Text* 7: 41-46.

Roberts, John. (1987) 'Interview with Sonia Boyce'. *Third Text* 1: 55-64.

Tawadros, Gilane. (1996) 'Beyond the boundary: The work of three black women artists in Britain'. In *Black British cultural studies*. Ed. Baker, Diawara and Lindeborg. London: University of Chicago Press. 240-277

Tawadros, Gilane. (1997) *Sonia Boyce: Speaking in tongues*. London: Kala Press.

Tawadros, Gilane and Clarke, Victoria eds. (1999) *Run through the jungle: selected writings by Eddie Chambers*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts.

Histories and positions

The theme with the most widely disseminated titles. They range from predominantly polemical pieces to historical surveys and debates around criticism and its importance.

Araeen, Rasheed. (1989) 'Our Bauhaus, others' mudhouse'. *Third Text* 6.

Araeen, Rasheed. (1979) 'Problems facing Black artists'. *Art Monthly* 26.

Biswas, Sutapa. (1989) 'The Presence of Black Women'. *Art Monthly* February. 11.

Chambers, Eddie, Tam Joseph and Juginder Lamba eds. (1988) *The Artpack: A history of Black artists in Britain*. London: Haringey Arts Council.

Gilroy, Paul. (1989) *Small acts: Thoughts on the politics of Black cultures*. London: Serpent's Tail.

Gilroy, Paul. (1990) 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at: The dialectics of diaspora identification'. *Third Text* 13, Winter.

Hall, Stuart. (1988) 'New ethnicities'. In *Black film/British cinema, ICA documents 7*. Ed. Kobena Mercer. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Himid, Lubaina and Maud Sulter eds. (1988) Special issue on Black women's creativity. *FAN (Feminist Art News)* 2 no. 8.

Julien, Isaac and Kobena Mercer. (1988) 'De Margin and De Centre. The Last "Special Issue" on Race?' *Screen* 29, no. 4: 2-11.

Keen, Melanie and Elizabeth Ward. (1996) *Recordings: A select bibliography of contemporary African, Afro-Caribbean and Asian British art*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts and Chelsea College of Art and Design.

Mercer, Kobena. (1994) *Welcome to the jungle: New positions in Black cultural studies*. London: Routledge.

Williamson, Judith. (1988) 'Two kinds of otherness: Black film and the avant-garde'. *Screen* 29, no. 4.

More general texts, not specific to diaspora artists and Britain, but serving to outline discourses of the period include:

Anderson, Benedict. (1983) *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso

Bhabha, Homi. (1994) *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. (1982) *The empire strikes back: Race and racism in 70s Britain*. London: Hutchinson.

Dabydeen, David. (1987) *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in eighteenth-century English art*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.

Fanon, Frantz. (1986) *Black skin, white masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press.

Fryer, Peter. (1984) *Staying power: The history of Black people in Britain*. London: Pluto Press.

Gilroy, Paul. (1987) *'There ain't no Black in the Union Jack': The cultural politics of 'race' and nation*. London: Hutchinson.

Spivak, Gayatri. (1988) 'Can the subaltern speak?' In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Three archives in the London area specialising in visual culture and diversity in Britain are

- AAVAA
<http://www.uel.ac.uk/aavaa/index.htm>
- inIVA
http://213.161.73.222/library/library_about.html
- Chelsea College of Art and Design
<http://lib.linst.ac.uk:8001/www-bin/che32>