

A TIME FOR NEW DREAMS

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BY GRACE WALES BONNER

SERPENTINE GALLERIES  
19 JANUARY – 16 FEBRUARY 2019

These spirits live in the underworld, in the air,  
in the water, and in the fire.

MALIDOMA PATRICE SOMÉ

We ought to use time  
Like emperors of the mind:  
Do magic things that the future,  
Surprised, will find.

BEN OKRI



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ON THE OCCASION OF A TIME FOR NEW DREAMS  
AT THE SERPENTINE GALLERIES  
19 JANUARY — 16 FEBRUARY 2019

## A TIME FOR NEW DREAMS

Featuring: Chino Amobi, Black Audio Film Collective, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Michael-John Harper, Liz Johnson Artur, Rashid Johnson, Kapwani Kiwanga, Klein, Laraaji, Eric N. Mack, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Ben Okri, Ishmael Reed, Sahel Sounds, Sampha, Grace Wales Bonner.

Grace Wales Bonner is a cultural polymath, who sees fashion as a means to explore ideas of identity and self-expression. Through the course of her research, she has developed a design process that involves a rich cross-pollination of sources, bringing together literary, musical and visual references. Key to her practice are long-term collaborations with other practitioners who bridge multiple disciplines and genres. Each of her fashion collections is a meditation on cultural narratives, presented within a carefully considered scenography.

Wales Bonner is recognised as one of the most innovative designers of her generation who is changing the ways in which we understand this discipline. Inviting a designer to create an exhibition that culminates in a runway show is unprecedented within the Serpentine's near fifty-year history and marks a new commitment to fashion as part of an existing cross-disciplinary remit that already includes visual art, architecture, music and design. The collaborative nature of Wales Bonner's process makes this project an exciting beginning to this new thread within the Galleries' programme and follows on from her participation in the 2015 Transformation Marathon.

Designed by Jamie Andrew Reid, this publication comprises newly commissioned texts by Chino Amobi, Ben Okri and Ishmael Reed, together with a rhythmised composition by Grace Wales Bonner that takes the form of assembled extracts and images.

Themes of mysticism and ritual permeate Wales Bonner's exhibition, which explores magical resonances within black cultural and aesthetic practices. Taking its title from Ben Okri's volume of essays, *A Time for New Dreams* (2011), which in many ways is a proposition for how to live and dream, the exhibition focuses on the shrine as a symbolic pathway for imagining different worlds and possibilities. Over the course of one month, a multi-sensory assemblage of site-specific installations and shrines, as well as a series of happenings, invite contemplation and activate the gallery. Interested in the improvisations and uses of shrines throughout black histories, Wales Bonner views these spiritual structures as material portals into multiple frames of experience. Drawing upon the images and rhythms of rituals and ceremonies from all over the world, and on her rigorous research across multiple geographies and temporalities, she moves across time and space by bringing these references into dialogue.

The exhibition culminates in the presentation of Wales Bonner's forthcoming Autumn/Winter 2019 collection, *Mumbo Jumbo*. The collection conjures and explores various characters, their dress, and the worlds and spaces they inhabit, such as an artist-shaman, a West African spiritual healer, and a gathering of Howard University intellectuals. At its close, the exhibition becomes an environment for the characters to inhabit. The title of Wales Bonner's collection is taken from writer Ishmael Reed's seminal text of 1972, which through its satirical and collage approach traces a series of narratives in 1920s New York, encompassing Voodoo, Jazz music and white supremacy. Subverting political and historical fact with the poetics of magical realism, Reed's text, together with his notion of Neo-HooDoo, which posits 'every man...[as]...an artist and every artist a priest', are key informants to Wales Bonner's thinking behind this exhibition. As writer and musician Greg Tate states:

Hoodoo is what you call hope, what you call medicine, what you call the nine billion names of Gods... Who will have to also make myth, music, magic, muscle memory, race memory, and yeah, the English language do strange things, forbidden and unbidden things, unofficial and twisted creole things, thangs even, to steal a drink from freedom's cup? This is what we mean by Hoodoo.<sup>[1]</sup>

Music, magic and myth are assembled and disassembled throughout the exhibition, drawing upon a vast array of reference points in order to consider how spirituality can exist outside of definable faiths and how ritual manifests through artistic praxis. This far-reaching approach to spirituality and its variant manifestations is echoed by the extensive research of Robert Farris Thompson into African-Atlantic altars, whose 1993 publication, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* is foundational to Wales Bonner's own research into the different meanings of shrines. Central to Farris Thompson's definition of these structures is their dual status as both fixed and moving: 'fixed (tree, fire, stone, dais) and moving (ring shouts, dancing, handclapping, circling, ecstasy), leading ultimately to visitation by healing spirits under God.<sup>[2]</sup> Drawing upon this sentiment, *A Time for New Dreams* shifts continuously between collective and individual rituals – from the shared experience of a musical performance to the transformative encounter with a text or an image. As intimated by the title, Wales Bonner envisions a space where new dreams and potentially new worlds can emerge.

Claude Adjil and Joseph Constable, Serpentine Galleries



<sup>[1]</sup> Tate, Greg. (2008), 'Hoodoo is what we do' in *NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. p. 32.

<sup>[2]</sup> Thompson, R. F. (1993). *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*. Munich, Germany: Prestel Publishing: inside cover.

## INVOCATION FOR THE SHRINE

BEN OKRI

Everything here is kind of true.  
The true magic is the magic of you.  
The world is the shrine  
And the shrine is the world.  
Listen here to the revelations  
Of Saint Time.  
Still your hearts  
And breathe like new.  
Center yourselves  
In the part of you that's most true.  
Every cell of your body  
Is alive with vitality  
Every thought in your heart  
Helps shape reality.  
We're shaping a new reality today  
The way you shape a new shrine  
With the offering of your spirit  
And the magical works of your hand.  
We're going to start a new kind  
Of dreaming inna this land.

Awake! Awake! Awake!

Awaken the new brotherhood of dreams.  
From these flowers  
Draw new powers  
To build new towers  
Without fear.  
It's fear that darkens the shrine of the world.  
It's greed that darkens the shrine of the heart

Stone at your feet  
Stone in the mind  
Frozen blood in the veins  
Dark rock in the heart.  
We need a new miracle of being human.  
We need a new miracle of being alive.  
Ancestors sleep in these shrines.  
Us their dreams illumine.  
They planted these flowers  
Along the black paths of time  
Flowers that never die  
Flowers that open up into  
A thousand forms of art and living  
Music in the flowers  
And flowers in the music.  
Dedicate yourselves  
To the shrine of living.

Awaken your feet to the wisdom  
Of the earth  
Open your head to the wisdom  
Of the heavens  
Listen to the whispers  
Of the fragrance  
Of the survivors.

Windrush, chainrust, slaveburst.  
Ancestors dreaming in the shrines.  
Us their courage illumines.  
Shine a light so bright  
It burst all the darkness.  
Write the magic of our souls  
On the darkness of the night.  
Like stars the shrines  
Stream out the brilliance  
Of the ancestors  
Who with the clarity of their thought  
Opened up new futures.  
Those triple-locked steel doors  
That we open with the magic touch  
Of our light-charged spirit.

Oh but the spirits are singing in the hidden glow  
The more they keep us down  
The greater we will grow.  
They are rowdy and they know.  
They know  
They know  
They know

They know the revelations of Saint Time  
Things that every day are becoming true  
Things that are coming up through the shrine  
Coming up for me and you.

## SYMPHONIES OF WATER AND SPIRIT A RHYTHMISED COMPOSITION

GRACE WALES BONNER

*For my brothers*

A particular style of Mande and Mande-influenced narrow-strip textile, enlivened by rich and vivid suspensions of the expected placement of the weft-block — thus characterized by the famed off-beat phrasing of melodic accents in African and Afro-American music — introduces to the history of art an extraordinary idiom, unique to the black world.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] Thompson, R. F., (1984). *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Vintage Books, Random House. p. 209.

# The Afro-Atlantic Altar

Change, infused with spirit, generates extremely powerful iconic histories [1]



⋄ NEW TIME IS A COMING WHEN THE UP SHALL BE DOWN AND THE DOWN UP ⋄

Altars everywhere are sites of ritual communication with heaven, ancestors, and spirits, marking the boundary between the ordinary world and the world of the spirits. [1]

The shrine bends the truth of the world into the truth of the spirit §

Yoruba altars gleam with massed vessels whose fragility demands tact and delicacy in worship. In contrast, Kongo civilizations of Central Africa consider the altar to be a 'turning point,' the crossroads, the threshold to another world. Kongo worshipers make the tombs of their ancestors into altars, using a cross-in-a-circle pattern mirroring the passage of the sun to signify the cycle of life and chart the immortal journey of the soul [2]

## OF CEREMONIAL SPACES

The displacement of the virtuous self with Cartesian logic or rational secularism was a direct contradiction of what Vodou represents especially as personified by the use of the *Poteau Mitan* — the architectural and symbolic celestial center-pole found in the middle of *peristyle* — the public space of an *bounfor*, often marked with a *veve*, a drawing made of corn meal, flour, or coffee renderings placed on the ground. They and other ritual objects make the implicit calls for animating the Self and the world around us: marking our territories, defining allegiances with the *nacion of lwa* (nations of spirits), our ancestors, and sealing covenants among the living with polysemic, codified spaces of governance. In the process of activating energy, our spaces — physical and metaphysical, terrestrial and astral — become saturated with the virtue of the lwa and filled with Divine Presence. [3]

Serpents of the shrine, upwake!  
Serpents of the shrine, upwake!  
Serpents of the shrine, upwake!

# UPWAKE! §



[1] Thompson, R. F., (1988). *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*. New York: Museum for African Art. p. 27.

[2] Thompson, R. F., (1988). *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*. New York: Museum for African Art. p. 50.

[3] Désir, Dowiti. *Kenbe Alada: Supporting the Pillars of Heaven*. *Afro-Hisp. Rev.* 26, (2007): 203 – 212. JSTOR.

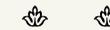
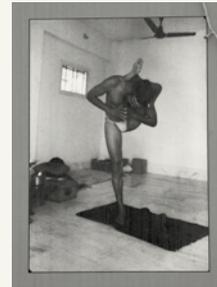
Aneho, Togo,  
 a coastal town known for its high concentration of Mami Wata devotees,  
 also boasts a strong diaspora space of India.  
 In this shrine room called 'India,'  
 Attissou explained that the walls were blue because we were below the sea.  
 Another doorway,  
 which led further into an even more sacred space was brimming with more posters of Indian gods,  
 perfumes,  
 powders,  
 alcohol,  
 candles,  
 statuettes,  
 stuffed,  
 plastic and ceramic animals,  
 and other offerings –<sup>[1]</sup>

Conjugating  
 Conjugating  
 Conjugating

Hindi  
 Hindi  
 Hindi

*T. patula* and *T. erecta* are also used in Hindu religious ceremonies. This 'holy flower'  
 is used as an altar decoration, and Harlan gives this account:  
 ...delegations from the various villages began to arrive with beating of drums and  
 blasts on the huge trumpets,... the village gods were reverently decorated with  
*garland of marigolds.*<sup>[#]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> Hawley, J. C., (2008). *India in Africa, Africa in India: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms*. Indiana University Press. p. 174.

<sup>[#]</sup> Neher, R. T., *The Ethnobotany of Tagetes*. Economic Botany Vol. 22, no. 4, (1968): pp. 317–325. JSTOR.

Neo-HooDoo is not a church for egotripping—it takes its ‘organization’ from Haitian VooDoo of which Milo Rigaud wrote:

Unlike other established religions, there is no hierarchy of bishops, archbishops, cardinals, or a pope in VooDoo. Each oum’phor is a law unto itself, following the traditions of VooDoo but modifying and changing the ceremonies and rituals in various ways. Secrets of voodoo.

Neo-HooDoo believes that every man is an artist and every artist a priest.  
Neo-HooDoo believes that every man is an artist and every artist a priest.  
Neo-HooDoo believes that every man is an artist and every artist a priest.  
Neo-HooDoo believes that every man is an artist and every artist a priest.

You can bring your own creative ideas to Neo-HooDoo. Charlie ‘yardbird (Thoth)’ Parker is an example of the Neo-HooDoo artist as an innovator and improviser.<sup>[A]</sup>



James Hampton in the 1950s with an early version of his monumental *Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly*.

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Hampton christened himself St. James and may have considered himself a prophet as well. He wrote in a mysterious script on tablets that may have been meant to suggest those on which the Ten Commandments were written. It has been speculated that this script alludes to God’s instructions to St. John when the Second Coming was revealed to him: he was to record all he saw in a cryptic language. It may also refer to the practice of speaking in tongues when possessed by the Holy Spirit. In either case, it seems clear that Hampton believed the future had been revealed to him and that he was preparing for his salvation even as he warned others to make ready.<sup>[Q]</sup>

<sup>[A]</sup> Reed, I., (1972). *Conjure: Selected Poems, 1963-1970*. Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press.

<sup>[Q]</sup> Livingston, J. et. al., (1982). *Black Folk Art in America 1930-1980*. USA: Corcoran Gallery of Art. p. 45-6.

## Spiritual Epics

‘AIN’T GOT TIME TO DIE’  
THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY CHAMBER CHOIR

~

## *Shrines are where the gods whisper. §*

In the use of this material charged with spirit, Hammons, too, moved closer to a visual organizational schemata with strong affinities to so-called 'Pygmy' or San art of the East African Mbuti peoples in its free flowing non-exclusive form, and in its use of natural surfaces and materials: natural canvas, bark and natural pigments on one hand, and the remains of African American peoples and found materials on the other.

We see this in such works as *Hairpiece*, in which Hammons collected Black hair from local barbershops and inserted it in an all-over patterning of free standing wire rods. Inserting the wires into the ground in a densely packed grouping, Hammons arrived at a fundamentally Black Atlantic organizing principle: the use of a complex visual polyphony that eliminates the continued reference to foreground, middle and background, and instead favors more complex organizational schemata in which forms float through forms in a demonstration of inner pulse control. Additionally, the vertical of the supporting wires, coupled with the not quite randomly interspersed balls of hair, created a visual articulation of multiple meter and inner pulse control – yet another fundamental organizing principle of Black Atlantic art.<sup>[1]</sup>

An awareness of history has been of fundamental importance in the development of my creativity. The history of Africa and the Black race has been constantly distorted. Even in Africa, my education was given in English in Christian schools, as though the language and culture of my own people, the Yoruba, were inadequate or in some ways unsuitable for the healthy development of young minds. In exploring Yoruba history, I have rediscovered and revalidated areas of my experience. I see parallels now between my own work and that of the Osogbo artists in Yorubaland who themselves have resisted the cultural subversions of neo-colonialism and who celebrate the rich, secret world of our ancestors.<sup>[2]</sup>

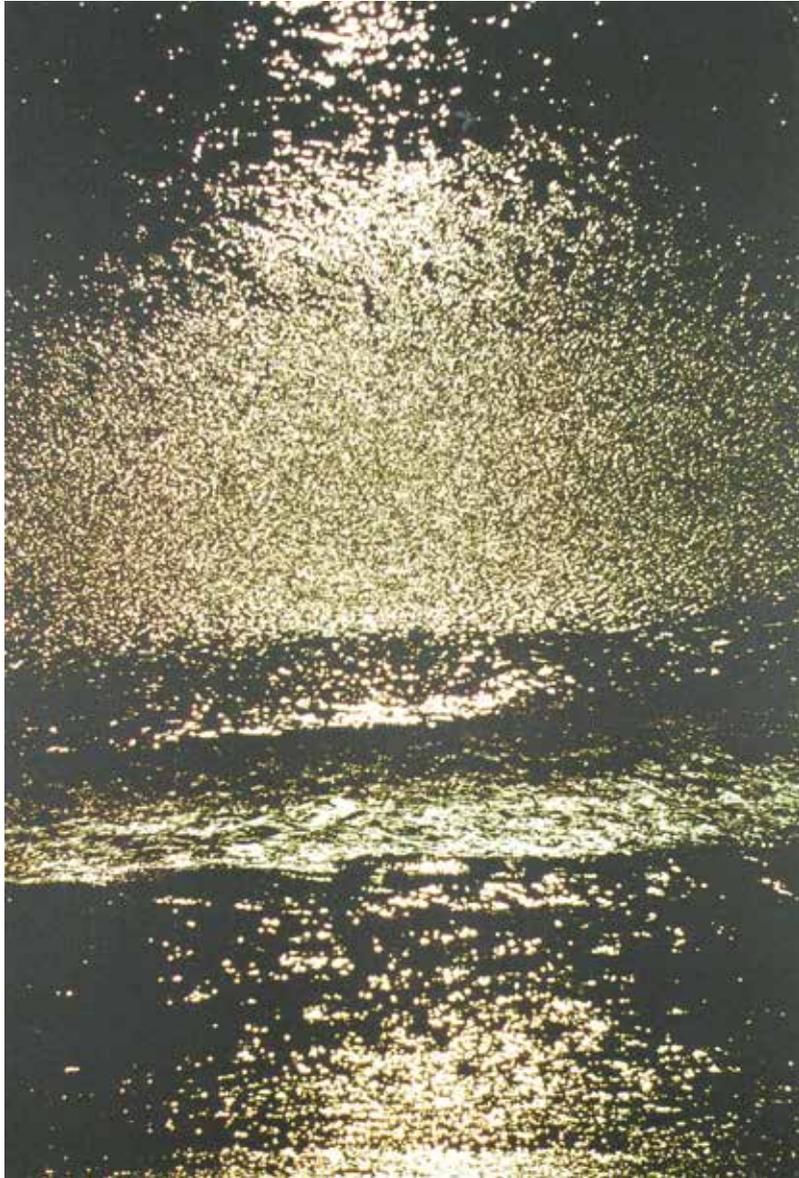
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<sup>[1]</sup> Bey, H. (1993). *In the Spirit of Minkisi: The Art of David Hammons*. In D. Hammons (Ed.), *David Hammons: Been There and Back* (pp. 38 – 46). Salzburger Kunstverein.

<sup>[2]</sup> Fani-Kayode, R. (1988) Essay reproduced courtesy of Ten.8 Magazine, No: 28 Rags & Desire, 1988.



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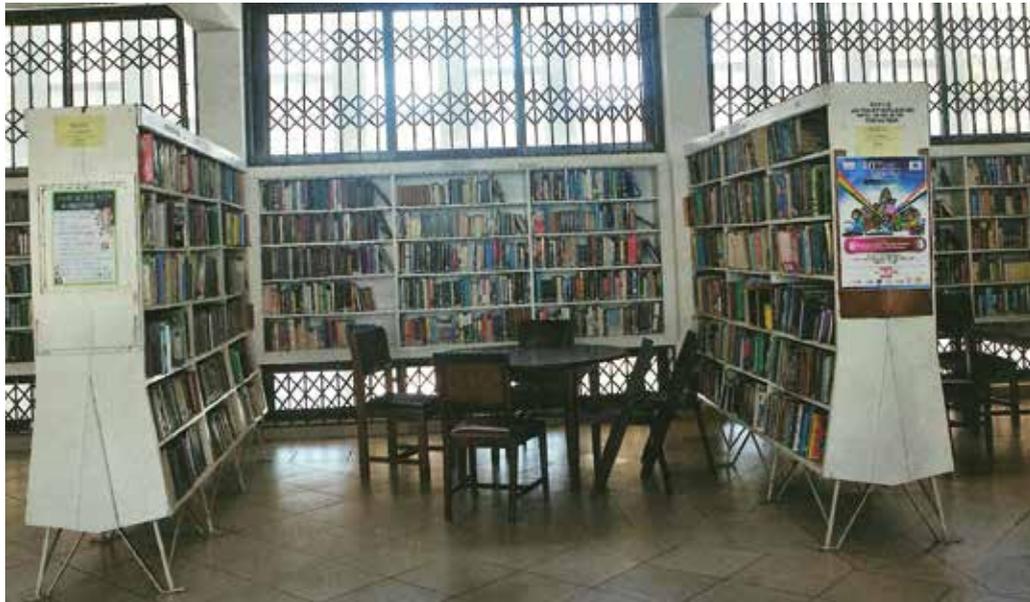


In one photo that Grace shared with me, a man engaged in an African ritual sits next to a portrait of an Indian God or Goddess.

Am I religious? I ran across a Yoruba parable in which a man stranded in another country found that he couldn't depend upon his gods and so had to rely on his mind. The mind should be treated as an Orisha (Ori, 'The Head') but instead of feeding it rum, or pigeons or the materials with which you honour your personal Orishas, Saints and Loas, you feed it knowledge, because the greatest curse is ignorance. You might call it Ori-ism.

ISHMAEL REED





## IMAGE CREDITS

P9 – 16

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P11 & 17

Reece Auguiste, *Twilight City* (still), 1989. Copyright Reece Auguiste, Black Audio Film Collective; Courtesy Smoking Dogs Films and Lisson Gallery.

P12

Photograph: courtesy Nick Sethi

P14

Photograph of the artist James Hampton with *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly*. 1950s. Washington DC, Smithsonian American Art Museum. Courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum; copyright 2018. Photograph: Smithsonian American Art Museum/Art Resource/Scala, Florence.

P18 & 20

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Liz Johnson Artur, *Paris*, 2012. Courtesy the artist

P22 – 23

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SHRINE  
CHINO AMOBI

And I, a mortal man, neither ablaze with the strength of strong lions nor learned in their exhalations, consented not to be a single being, indefatigable profana, inextinguishable, fully alive and existing full of life; with a flame the colour of the swirling air, brightly, thirteen hundred years below, burning in the gentle breeze, and as inseparable from the phosphorescent fire as a human being is inseparable from his inner organs. And I saw the shining flame glow black, a noetic orgy of black angels entangled in divine ecstasy under gauzy cold-waxed premonitions of the Bauharoque. The consummation of Fred Moten's *Universal Machine*, shivering polyrhythmic twelve-tongued chorus refracted through methane brown fog, incandescent blistering incantations of Anambra, fattened wave foams at the still point of the turning world, conjuring month zero. Suddenly a blinding dark sphere of air appeared under golden meskels, huge in size, thirty-four brass-coated years to the right of stolen life, upon which the shining flame struck many blows, a nightmare of optimism prophesied through the lives of many, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted, possessed antikeimena. We uncontrollable, black sexuality bleached through the tongues' grey pythons. Ten billion rising bushels of shimmered quicksilver debauched. A terrible lucidity, ringing through the nursery. The force of the history of the universe to produce total non-existence. Face pressed against circumcised knowledge. Parabolic teaching expressed through fraternal ferment, fervent communal sculpture, the spirit venerable, scintillating ocean, earth tug and earth pull, conjoined endless ecstasy, acoustic black endless flat eyeworm, ejaculation of knowledge. Dervish Yoruba eyebeam, sea swirling in gorgeous information, sea swell fuelled by generations of ever-changing libido, all that is in all research, an extremely bright light penetrating pearlescent veridian midnight, dull orific shrine, collective oracular epistemology in front of a face that is looked at as an estimation of value. A secret seal on the vision – and I heard great voices speak to me in six slit seraphic drums: 'Of this generational mystery you may not see any more than is granted you through the miracle of belief'. And at each erotic blow, a spark flew up so that soon the circle of ancestors was brought up sideways, whirling bitchy to completion in waves of poisoned musicality, the two zero one beat, heaven and decrepit earth shone forth in glowing lewd fullness of perfection redacted. Decreation, glistening Abyssinia. To Carthage I came burning. Transubstantial saturation, no-thing-ness, university gathering, burning masquerade the colour of fresh blood, praying in Toni Morrison's shadows, the white chicken does not realise its age. Occult university, unhonoured, unpropitiated by worshippers of the machine. The way upward and the way downward are one and the same, the self-effacing Magnus Opus of Ishmael Reed's Instability. Eshun playing roulette with our last pound in the wilderness. Negative flight itself is a seven-point organ to organ on the coastline that makes his cathedral rock, his worshippers moan and shutter, his stain glass windows crack. The students walked through the walls of James Hampton's Golden Thrones. Vertiginous teleogy. I showed these things to the Abiku Spirit Children. Prophetic gift drawings wrapped around their craving realms of struggle and desire. Let eight thousand years come down to them in blistering diamond conche shells. Let the agonising force between the two opposites be stretched. True liberation is not the resolution of opposites into a mean but the attempt at the extremes and then the total abandonment of the opposites at the level attained providing the degree of liberation. And in this way, from living fire in the shrine's smoke of zero aromatic brightness, a great communal will was kindled.

## THE MIND AS AN ORISHA

ISHMAEL REED

I was a captive of your typical Colonial education, which held that learning began in Greece, was transmitted to the Romans, who spread it throughout Europe, which, of course, didn't account for Algebra. We grew up with a big illuminated banner behind our foreheads that read 'The Glory of Greece and the Grandeur of Rome'. It wasn't until I was in my twenties that I began to study another Pantheon, which included hundreds of Orishas, Loas and 'Saints', which are emissaries of the Gods of Africa.

Classical mythology meant the gods of Greece and Rome, but at the University of Buffalo, I was introduced to the Celtic Revival, the answer to Colonial domination supplied by W.B. Yeats and his colleagues. Their aim was to revive the myths, legends and folklore of Ireland. After many trips to Europe, I found that Yeats and his circle weren't alone. There was no consensus about the Greek myths as foundational European myths, including The Odyssey. In the North, there were the Sagas. In the East, the Kalevala, etc. But it was Celtic resistance that got my early attention.

Assimilation is still admired by the powerful Manhattan clique that has been foisting tokens upon Blacks for nearly a hundred years. The result has been the smothering of a variety of Black voices. Members of my generation, who created the Black Arts Movement, rejected imitation Black modernism. Our elders boasted of their influences from Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, T.S. Eliot and Henry James, in which they were apprentices to White literary masters. We wanted something Black. We had different ideas about what that meant. For some, it meant anti-Whiteness, which served to give a promotion to ethnics, who at the time were still campaigning for that status.

While Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin had problems with Africa, Askia Touré's *Dawn Song*, which is as close as one might come to a Black Arts manifesto, heralded a return to the African past as a route to a new non-colonial poetry. I wrote poems that included Egyptian allusions and icons: Thoth, the god of writing, whom I used as a logo for my publishing company; Queen Hatshepsut, 5th Pharaoh of 18th Dynasty Egypt; the Jackal-headed god Anubis, and Osiris, a myth that formed the basis for my best selling poem, 'I Am A Cowboy In The Boat of Ra'. Some of this Egyptology shows up in my novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, an experimental uppercase Who-Dun-It, which, like quilt makers, took scraps, in this case, the pulp novel, and refashioned them. This was one of the earmarks of postmodernism, giving a different interpretation of popular culture, like raising comic books to museum status.

I began to search for something more local than ancient Egypt. After all, the leaders of the Celtic Revival, which became international, found inspiration from sources close to home. I came up with something I called Neo-Hoodooism, based upon my experience of growing up, when I heard the elders, immigrants from the American south, whispering about a faith that didn't sound Christian. This had something to do with placing curses on people. Hoodoo played a key role in my family's history and possibly that of many southern families. My mother, Thelma V. Reed's book, *Black Girl From Tannery Flats*, reports of a Hoodoo curse being placed upon her mother, making her ill. My mother sought help from her relatives in Alabama, who sent her to a woman who could lift the curse.

Hoodoo was considered evil. Hollywood's version of African religion was all about sticking pins into dolls, a custom that might have been brought to New Orleans by the Irish. I was part of a generation that, in an act of defiance, transferred those things that were considered negative into something positive. Betye Saar, my collaborator since the 1970s, sent me one of her paintings in which a watermelon appears, a fruit which, along with chickens, was apparently so craved by Blacks that they'd resort to theft. This stereotype was meant to amuse Whites and made its way into advertising, and even into a 1916 film starring Black comedian, Bert Williams. Saar inverted this stereotype. Her watermelon was part of a sacred meal. Joe Overstreet put a machine gun into the hands of Aunt Jemima, another caricature meant to mock Blacks.

I brought up Hoodoo as something that could be the basis of a fresh aesthetic without realising that others had beat me to it. The people in the South knew about Hoodoo. One of the major sources for Southern Hoodoo is the Anglican minister Harry Middleton Hyatt's *Hoodoo—conjuration—witchcraft—rootwork: Beliefs accepted by many Negroes and white persons, these being orally recorded among Blacks and whites (Memoirs of the Alma Egan Hyatt Foundation)* 1970. The five volumes sell for \$5,000 on Amazon.

I wrote 'The Neo-Hoodoo Manifesto', a rambling document based upon reading materials about New Orleans, in the summer of 1967, while living alone in an apartment located in the Echo Park section of Los Angeles, while my partner Carla Blank was teaching drama at a summer camp in the mountains. It was a mish-mash of ideas, an experiment aimed towards organising an aesthetic. Little did I know that Neo-Hoodoo would become the basis of an extensive visual art exhibition at MoMA PS1 (October 2008 – January 2009) that would include Santeria (a fusion of Yoruba and Catholic beliefs) as well as a painting by John Cage called *Zen*, and that Yale University Press would publish an art book based on the manifesto. 'The Neo-Hoodoo' manifesto was first published in The Los Angeles Free Press. In 1971, Steve Cannon, Quincy Troupe, Curtis Lyle and I made a pilgrimage to New Orleans, where we paid homage to the Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveau. In those days, a trip to her tomb in St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 was free and open to the public; nowadays the Catholic church charges \$35 per tour.

My novel, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*, which I called a Hoodoo western, was published in 1969. In it, I employed forms from Haitian religion. Joe Overstreet's paintings included 'ververs', which some have described as landing strips for the Loas (or Saints) who take over the bodies of the possessed. This showed me that this Hoodoo was more complex than my primitive and hap-hazard research had led me to believe.

Nobody told us that African Religion had survived the slave trade and was the faith of millions of followers throughout the hemisphere, from the bodegas in New York to Brazil, where African religion competes with Catholicism as the state religion. Rites to Oshun, a daughter of Olodumare, who is associated with the sea, are held in Brazil, Nigeria and Atlanta, Georgia. This realisation led me to *Mumbo Jumbo*, which interprets the US Jazz Age as a manifestation of the medieval dance epidemics.

The novel presents the clash between cultural and historical forces in the guise of a pulp detective novel, and though some critics found it anti-White, it is a tribute to Emperor Julian, who attempted to revive the Greek mysteries at a time when Christianity was becoming the official religion of the Empire. I cited the Greek mysteries as close to the African religion that was carried to the Americas by African captives. I called it my 'Ragtime' novel. *The New York Times* called it 'a pioneer graphics novel'. It took the shape of a collage because the painters whom I had befriended in New York were collagists.

My education in what I thought was a lost faith continued when I travelled to Haiti in 1978 and met psychiatrist Louis Mars, whose book *The Crisis Of Possession in Voodoo*, I had published in 1977. I also published a book by the Haitian poet Boadiba entitled *Under Burning White Sky* in 2005. The late filmmaker Kathleen Collins translated it from the French and used the theory of the book in her groundbreaking film *Losing Ground*. I took Yoruba lessons from Adebisi T'Olu Aromolaran. He guided me through a translation of Daniel O. Fagunwa's Igbo Olodumare (*The Forest of God*) In 1998, I travelled to Nigeria, and as a result of the trip, published two books, *25 New Nigerian Poets* and *16 Short Stories by Nigerian Women*, whose contents were selected by Toyin Adewale-Gabriel and edited by Carla.

In my new novel, *Conjugating Hindi*, Hindu, Haitian and Greek legends intersect. It includes a fresh interpretation of the Krishna legend, but also calls up Bridget, a sexually robust figure who has a fondness for red peppers and top hats.

She is one of the few White 'Saints' in the Vodoun pantheon and is married to Baron Samedi, whom I have traced to the Yoruba figure Iku (*eniti ile re mbe lagbedemeji Aiye on Orun*, 'the mediator between heaven and earth'). I've come a long way since fumbling around in an attempt to give my work an indigenous sound yet be connected to an international aesthetic, which, for me, is what Blackness is all about: cosmopolitan, absorptive. In one photo that Grace shared with me, a man engaged in an African ritual sits next to a portrait of an Indian God or Goddess.

Am I religious? I ran across a Yoruba parable in which a man stranded in another country found that he couldn't depend upon his gods and so had to rely on his mind. The mind should be treated as an Orisha (Ori, 'The Head') but instead of feeding it rum, or pigeons or the materials with which you honour your personal Orishas, Saints and Loas, you feed it knowledge, because the greatest curse is ignorance. You might call it Ori-ism.

In his music practice, Chino Amobi combines experimental electronic music with a rich assemblage of styles and voices. This collage approach is evidence of Amobi's fluid and open interpretation of musical genres, which is encountered by the visitor to Wales Bonner's exhibition as part of a newly-commissioned sound piece within the designer's shrine. The sound piece

'functions as a conflating portal between disparate rhythmic lineages, lived histories, redacted geographies, intellectual schools of thought, and spiritual realms. This spherical circumference, imagined as a living oratorical tide conjured through sonic ritual, is activated through the polyphonic voices and incantations of entities spanning ancestral coast lines and ports of entry throughout the Global South and The Global North' (Amobi)

Amobi is an American musician, artist and co-founder of the independent record label NON Worldwide. He is best known for his EP *Airport Music For Black Folk* (2016) and debut album *Paradiso*, released in 2017. Founded in 2015 by Amobi, Angel-Ho and Nkisi, NON functions as a record label, art project and social network, underpinned by a drive to re-write black history and fight against the silencing of African culture.

Black Audio Film Collective is a group of artists, filmmakers and writers formed in 1982, and was based in East London from 1983 to 1998. Characterised by an interest in memory, history and aesthetics, the collective created a series of experimental works that engaged with black popular and political culture in Britain. The group were also instrumental in bringing an awareness of avant-garde film from Africa, India and South America to the UK. Practitioners associated with the group include John Akomfrah, Reece Auguiste, Edward George, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, David Lawson and Trevor Mathison.

Presented within the exhibition is Black Audio Film Collective's third work, *Twilight City* (1989), directed by Reece Auguiste and produced by Avril Johnson. By 1989, the Conservative government was three years into a programme of wealth creation and urban redevelopment unparalleled in twentieth-century Britain. *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. Bringing together documentary footage, personal recollections with black and Asian intellectuals, such as Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Gail Lewis, and George Shire, and a series of tableaux vivants inspired by the photographer, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, *Twilight City* builds a series of vignettes into a poetic meditation on London, its people and the stories that are woven into its fabric.

Reece Auguiste is a documentary filmmaker and scholar with a focus on national cinemas and the transnational contexts of production and film reception practices. Auguiste's fields of interests are film theory and criticism, aesthetics, digital media, and the ephemeral poetics of the moving image. His current investigation explores minority discourses, the nationality question and the articulation of subaltern voices/representation within various national cinemas. He is particularly interested in the political and aesthetic practices of the Soviet avant-garde, African cinema and cinemas of the African Diaspora, documentary cinema, Iranian cinema and Chinese cinema. In addition to *Twilight City*, Auguiste is the director of *Mysteries of July*, as part of Black Audio Film Collective (1991).

Rotimi Fani-Kayode (1955–1989) arrived in Brighton aged 11 in 1966, having fled Nigeria's civil war. After coming out as gay, he left the UK and studied fine art and photography at New York's Pratt Institute. Returning to the UK in the mid 1980s, he began exhibiting his complex and emotionally raw work.

The Kayode family were the keepers of the Shrine of Yoruba Deities and priests of Ife. Rotimi Fani-Kayode understood his cultural heritage. He did not have an 'identity crisis'. He knew exactly what he was and what he represented, and how his lifestyle and work would affect those around him.

'On three counts I am an outsider: in terms of sexuality; in terms of geographical and cultural dislocation; and in the sense of not having become the sort of respectably married professional my parents might have hoped for.' He was aware of the systems he was trying to penetrate and that he was someone who occupied contradictory spaces. He wrote, 'Europeans faced with the dogged survival of alien cultures and as mercantile as they were in the days of the Trade, are now trying to sell our culture as a consumer product. I am inevitably caught up in this.'

Kayode was at the forefront of blowing apart the stereotype. He resisted categorisation and labelling. He was not an afro-essentialist and spent most of his life in the West. He was an African man with a camera who took the time and trouble necessary for developing his technique. Kayode was no young pretender, but understood photography both in technical terms and historically. He did not expect some fast track to success. He wanted his work to have an impact and, at the same time, to educate both in the West and the 'Third World'.

'Both aesthetically and ethically,' he said, 'I seek to translate my rage and my desire into new images which will undermine conventional perceptions and which may reveal hidden worlds. Many of the images are seen as sexually explicit – or more precisely, homosexually explicit. I make my pictures homosexual on purpose. Black men from the Third World have not previously revealed either to their own peoples or to the West a certain shocking fact: they can desire each other.'

Text by Dr Mark Sealy, Director of Autograph ABP  
Reproduced with permission of the author. This text is an edited version of an essay originally published in the exhibition catalogue *Rotimi Fani-Kayode: Communion* (1995).

Michael-John Harper is a Berlin-based performance artist, classically-trained dancer, movement director and model. Harper brings together movement, spoken word and moving image in his performances, allowing for his unique form of self-presentation to reside between choreography and visual art. In the closing week of Wales Bonner's exhibition, Harper will take residence within the Gallery, performing a daily ritual of movements. Harper has previously collaborated with Wales Bonner, choreographing her previous presentation, *Blue Duets* (Spring/Summer 2018), inspired by ideas of searching, cruising, and romanticism.

Harper began his training at Michael's Academy for the Performing Arts. In 2010, he joined the Alvin Ailey II Junior Dance Company in New York and in 2010 became a member of Wayne McGregor | Random Dance (now Company Wayne McGregor) where he remained until 2015. Harper has toured the world extensively with performances in venues such as MoMA and the Guggenheim. Since moving to Berlin in 2015, Harper has presented works at galleries, including Blain|Southern, Souvenir By, and most recently The Schinkel Pavillon. Harper has also performed with the Bavarian State Opera and the Komische Oper Berlin.

## LIZ JOHNSON ARTUR

Traversing a plethora of subjects, locations and situations – from weddings, birthdays and nightclubs to life on the street – the Russian-Ghanaian photographer Liz Johnson Artur's images capture the nuances of daily life, subtly bringing forth a certain magic that shifts our gaze beyond the materiality of the everyday. With an intimate approach to her subjects, Johnson Artur's practice is driven by an unrelenting curiosity and sensitivity with those that she photographs, compiling each image into a rich compendium that is both a living archive of black life over the last 25 years, and a document of normality, with its inherent beauty.

Johnson Artur is interested in ideas of self-presentation. Her portraits are always underpinned by an act of empowerment, allowing those that she photographs to self-define themselves as subjects, whose presence she then establishes within the space of the image. Her approach to image making is cumulative, made over time, with the photographs themselves becoming a flexible working material. In the exhibition Johnson Artur presents a photographs, objects and ephemera that together become a shrine within the space, holding the energy of their creation and the artist's process of making.

## RASHID JOHNSON

Rashid Johnson is an American artist working across painting, sculpture, photography and video, exploring the idiosyncrasies of personal identity within a wider context of African American intellectualism and creativity. His works often incorporate everyday material and objects, such as African shea butter, CB radios, tropical plants and record covers, which conflate collective and personal histories. In Johnson's words, he 'hijacks the domestic' in order to expand these references to the wider black experience, whilst subtly questioning the very foundations of this experience. Through his work, Johnson also engages with the academic impact of certain black intellectual figures throughout history. For example, his ongoing series *The New Negro Escapist Social and Athletic Club* comprises a series of photographic portraits that evoke the sporting, intellectual and secret societies embedded within American varsity life. It is within these pervasive ideas of brotherhood, fraternity and ritual that Wales Bonner accesses the aesthetic and conceptual rudiments of her forthcoming Autumn/Winter 2019 collection.

At the Serpentine, Johnson presents a series of works using found carpets, objects, and day beds. Simultaneously referring to the exoticisation of African aesthetics within Western therapeutic practices, encouraging contemplation and reflection within the exhibition, these works are arranged in a procession around the Gallery.

## KAPWANI KIWANGA

Kapwani Kiwanga is a Franco-Canadian artist based in Paris. Her work often manifests as installations, sound, video, and performance. She intentionally confuses truth and fiction in order to unsettle hegemonic narratives and create spaces in which marginal discourse can flourish. As a trained anthropologist and social scientist, she occupies the role of a researcher in her projects. Her methodology includes fashioning systems and establishing protocols as in scientific experimentation to delineate lenses through which one can observe culture and its characteristic propensity toward mutation. Afrofuturism, anti-colonial struggle and its memory, belief systems, vernacular and popular culture are but some of the research areas which inspire her practice. At the Serpentine, Kiwanga presents a new iteration of her ongoing series, *Flowers for Africa* (2012–present), where the artist recreates floral arrangements of cut flowers based on images which document an event or ceremony related to the independence of an African country. In *Flowers for Africa*, Kiwanga's rigorous research processes draw our attention to the peripheral nature of these floral adornments within the charged constellation of a past event. Left to wilt over the course of the exhibition, the flowers reactivate a certain moment in time whilst their demise trace the fading memory of an historical moment and the fragility of sovereignty.

## KLEIN

Composer and playwright Klein is an artist whose neoteric vision has seen her quickly become one of the UK's most intriguing and unpinnable producers and performers. She uses collagist techniques to assemble recordings of her own vocals and instrumentation into unique soundscapes with references ranging from Mythology to Pavarotti and the very ideology of the defunct TV network, 'Trouble'. As part of the exhibition, Klein will perform a reading as an invocation inside the Gallery.

Musician, multi-instrumentalist, mystic and laughter meditation practitioner, Laraaji, will lead a series of performances and workshops throughout the opening days of Wales Bonner's exhibition within a site-specific shrine realised in conversation with the designer. Informed by ideas of healing and devotional offerings, this material assemblage will act as a carrier of Laraaji's ambient sounds.

Based in New York City, Laraaji attended Howard University, a historically black university in Washington D.C, on a scholarship to study composition and piano. Laraaji began playing music on the streets in the 1970s, improvising trance-inducing jams on a modified auto-harp processed through various electronic effects. It was during this time that he began to study Eastern mysticism, believing that he had found a new path for his music and life. In 1979, Brian Eno saw Laraaji playing in Washington Square Park and invited him to record an album for his seminal Ambient series (*Ambient 3: Day Of Radiance*, released in 1980). Eno has continued to influence Laraaji's music, as has the work of Alice Coltrane, Constance Demby, Iasos, Harold Budd and J. D. Emmanuel. It was also at this time that Laraaji was invited to the new age bookshop, Tree of Life, in Harlem, where he would donate music to accompany live readings. Two of the brothers who owned the shop intuited a past life within Laraaji and came up with the name that he goes by today.

A celestial music pioneer whose work traverses the monastic and the ecstatic, Laraaji has continued to expand his mystic studies with gurus such as Swami Satchidananda and Shri Brahmananda Sarasvati, founder of the Ananda Ashram in Monroe, New York.

Eric N. Mack's tactile works made from found and pre-used fabrics are hung, draped and suspended within the exhibition. Traversing both painting and sculpture, whilst referencing traditions of abstraction, Mack transforms worn clothes, rags and textiles into architectural assemblages that dance through space; their dynamic form suggests the presence of bodies performing, passing by, or gathering together. Interested in fashion from an early age and sometimes working in his father's discount clothing store, Mack's approach to material and form is informed by the worlds of art, fashion and design, how identity becomes embedded within material possessions and how our everyday experiences, both visual and sonic, weave in and out of our material surroundings.

Mack and Wales Bonner first met during their participation as the two youngest artists of *Making & Unmaking: An exhibition curated by Duro Olowu* at Camden Arts Centre, London, in 2016, and have since continued a dialogue and exchange. Mack collaborated with Wales Bonner on a presentation of her collection, *Des Homme et Des Dieux*, at 5 Carlos Place in October 2018, and in January 2018, they created a site-specific installation for her Autumn/Winter 18 show as part of London Fashion Week Men's. A second collaboration with Wales Bonner titled *Blue Duets* recently took place at Totokaelo in New York to celebrate the launch of the designer's new Spring/Summer 18 collection. Mack and Wales Bonner are currently working together on a forthcoming fashion collection.

Paul Mpagi Sepuya is an American photographer whose work focuses on the production of portraiture in the artist's studio as a site of homoerotic social relations, and the potential of blackness in the space of the 'dark room'. Centred upon a series of intimate engagements with representation and identity, Sepuya utilises the studio as a social environment, employing mirrors to confuse the boundaries between artist and subject. Moving beyond a simple surface of reflection, these mirrors act as portals into multiple frames of reality and temporalities, which the artist allows to coalesce within a single composition. Following poet Hilton Als' words in *James Baldwin / Jim Brown and the Children*, the photographer makes 'work out of the real, but they push aspects of the real out of their frames so as to better concentrate on an aspect of the world that no one would see without them'. Sepuya's images are embedded with this sensibility, of simultaneously revealing and shrouding, archiving and regenerating, staging and collapsing. Mpagi Sepuya and Wales Bonner share a research interest in ideas around black masculinity, whilst he introduced her to the work of Rotimi Fani-Kayode, whose work is also on display in the exhibition.

Poet and novelist Ben Okri has devised a series of invocations that are presented in the Gallery through text and sound, building a poetic narrative thread throughout the space. Drawing upon ritualistic acts of devotion that can be both meditative and ecstatic, Okri's words permeate Wales Bonner's exhibition, encouraging slowness and contemplation within the visitor, whilst highlighting the significance of activity and movement to shrines and their uses. A central inspiration and informant to Wales Bonner's thinking around ideas of shrines and magic, Okri's collection of essays, *A Time for New Dreams*, gives the exhibition its title, and his extended conversations with the designer have helped shaped the conceptual foundations of this project.

Okri is an acclaimed poet and novelist who plays with post-modern ideas of storytelling and metaphor in his work, describing it as obeying a kind of dream logic. His fiction is pre-occupied with the philosophical conundrum: 'What is reality?' He has invented a new form of storytelling called the 'Stoku', which is a cross between the short story and the haiku. Born in 1959 in Minna, Nigeria, to an Igbo mother and Urhobo father, Okri grew up in London. His early work responds to and explores political violence within his home country, which he witnessed first-hand during the Nigerian civil war, and his work since has continued to explore themes such as disintegration, chaos and the relationship between identity and nationality. Okri's writing continues to inspire Wales Bonner's own practice, in particular the novel *The Famished Road* (1991) and its central figure of the spirit-child, or abiku, from Yoruba mythology.

## ISHMAEL REED

Ishmael Reed is one of America's most significant literary figures. He has published more than 30 books of poetry, prose, essays, and plays, and penned hundreds of lyrics for musicians ranging from Taj Mahal to Macy Gray. Reed's books of poetry include *Conjure* (1972), nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award, *Chattanooga* (1973), *A Secretary to the Spirits* (1978), *New and Collected Poems* (1988), and *New and Collected Poems 1964-2007* (2007), which won the California Gold Medal in Poetry. Reed's many novels include *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), *The Terrible Twos* (1982), *Japanese by Spring* (1993) and *Juice!* (2011). Recent essay collections include *The Complete Muhammad Ali* (2015), *Going Too Far: Essays About America's Nervous Breakdown* (2012), and *Barack Obama and The Jim Crow Media: The Return of the Nigger Breakers* (2010). Reed has also edited numerous anthologies, among them *Black Hollywood Unchained: Commentary on the State of Black Hollywood* (2015). His many awards and honours include fellowships from the MacArthur Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He has won the *L.A. Times* Robert Kirsch Lifetime Achievement Award, the John Oliver Killens Lifetime Achievement Award, the Barbary Coast Award, the Blues Songwriter of the Year Award, the Phillis Wheatley Award, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award, the Langston Hughes Medal, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Poetry Association. He is currently Distinguished Professor at The California College of the Arts.

## SAHEL SOUNDS

Sahel Sounds is a record label and online platform that explores arts and music of the Sahel region through non-traditional ethnographic fieldwork. Founded by Christopher Kirkley in 2009, the work of Sahel Sounds is centred upon an examination of contemporary popular music in an evolving technological landscape, working with musicians such as Mdou Moctar and Les Filles De Illighadad. Sahel Sounds' work explores the interplay between localised musical traditions, transglobal influences and new media models of cultural transmission. For the Serpentine exhibition, Sahel Sounds present a focused area or shrine of sound that considers the different ways through which music comes into existence and is transmitted from mobile phones to radios.

## SAMPHA

Sampha is a singer, songwriter, musician and record producer who lives and works in London. His debut album, *Process*, was released on 3 February 2017, through Young Turks and won the 2017 Mercury Prize. Sampha is known for his collaborative work with Drake, Kanye West, Solange and others. Sampha has released two solo EPs: *Sundanza* (2010) and *Dual* (2013).

Sampha and Wales Bonner are long-term collaborators and have continued to work together on various projects, including *Shy Light* (2017) a zine that was developed after spending time in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and which visually explores Sampha's album, *Process*, working with art director, Jamie Andrew Reid, and photographers Durimel. Sampha also contributed the soundtrack to Wales Bonner's Autumn/Winter 2017 fashion show, *Spirituals II*.

## GRACE WALES BONNER

As part of her exhibition at the Serpentine, Wales Bonner has created a 'research shrine' incorporating texts, images, objects, sounds and moving image, which highlight a selection of practitioners who have been foundational to her thinking around ideas of mysticism, ritual and magical realism. Wales Bonner's shrine brings together material by and about artists, writers and musicians, including the Black Audio Film Collective, Chino Amobi, James Hampton, amongst others. The material included within Wales Bonner's shrine connects to an intellectual and ancestral lineage through black histories, tracing a certain idea of brotherhood that she accesses and presents within a site-specific display.

## LIVE PROGRAMMES

### FRIDAY 18 JANUARY

Opening Preview: 6-9pm, featuring a deep listening experience with Laraaji  
Serpentine Sackler Gallery

### SATURDAY 19 JANUARY

8-11pm: Devotional Sound with Laraaji  
St John's Hyde Park, 18 Hyde Park Crescent, London, W2 2QD  
Hosted by Store X and Young Turks

### SUNDAY 20 JANUARY

11am and 4pm: Laughter and gong meditations with Laraaji  
Serpentine Sackler Gallery

### WEDNESDAY 23 JANUARY

7:30pm: Klein  
Serpentine Sackler Gallery

### TUESDAY 12 – SATURDAY 16 FEBRUARY

At intervals: Michael-John Harper  
Serpentine Sackler Gallery

Details of forthcoming live programmes can be found at [serpentinegalleries.org](http://serpentinegalleries.org)

## SATURDAY TALKS

Free talks take place at 3pm on selected Saturdays to explore the exhibitions in greater depth. BSL interpretation is available on request for all our Saturday Talks. For more information visit: [serpentinegalleries.org/visit/bsl-tours](http://serpentinegalleries.org/visit/bsl-tours)

26 JANUARY, 3PM

Claude Adjil

9 FEBRUARY, 3PM

Joseph Constable

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A project by Grace Wales Bonner, curated by Claude Adjil, Curator at Large, Live Programmes and Joseph Constable, Assistant Exhibitions Curator

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