

John Akomfrah in conversation with Manuela Ribeiro Sanches

6.30 pm, 9 November 2018

Hangar – Artistic Research Centre, Lisbon

John Akomfrah will be in conversation with Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, on the occasion of his solo show 'Purple' at Museu Coleção Berardo in Lisbon. By looking at both earlier and more recent works, the talk will address Akomfrah's decade-long aesthetic and ethico-political engagement with histories and memories of slavery, colonialism and anti-colonialism; post-colonial diasporic formations; and the intersections of racism, capitalism and environmental destruction.

John Akomfrah (born 1957, Accra, Ghana) lives and works in London. He is a hugely respected artist and filmmaker, whose works are characterised by their investigations into memory, post-colonialism, temporality and aesthetics, and often explore the experience of the African diaspora in Europe and the USA. Akomfrah was a founding member of the influential Black Audio Film Collective, which started in London in 1982, alongside the artists David Lawson and Lina Gopaul, who he still collaborates with today. Their first film, 'Handsworth Songs' (1986), explored the events surrounding the 1985 riots in Birmingham and London through a charged combination of archive footage, still photos and newsreel. The film won several international prizes and established a multi-layered visual style that has become a recognisable motif of Akomfrah's practice. Recent works include the three-screen installation 'The Unfinished Conversation' (2012), a moving portrait of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall's life and work; 'Peripeteia' (2012), an imagined drama visualising the lives of individuals included in two 16th-century portraits by Albrecht Dürer; and 'Mnemosyne' (2010), which exposes the experience of migrants in the UK, questioning the notion of Britain as a promised land by revealing the realities of economic hardship and casual racism. In 2015, Akomfrah premiered his three-screen film installation 'Vertigo Sea' (2015) that explores what Ralph Waldo Emerson calls 'the sublime seas'. Fusing archival material, readings from classical sources and newly-shot footage, Akomfrah's piece focuses on the disorder and cruelty of the whaling industry and juxtaposes it with scenes of many generations of migrants making epic crossings of the ocean for a better life. In 2017, Akomfrah unveiled 'Purple', an immersive six-channel video installation addressing climate change and its effects on human communities, biodiversity and the wilderness. More recently, Akomfrah debuted 'Precarity' at Prospect 4 New Orleans. Through archival imagery and newly-shot footage, 'Precarity' follows the life of forgotten New Orleans jazz singer Buddy Bolden.

Akomfrah has had numerous solo exhibitions, including: New Museum, New York, USA (2018); Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden (2018); Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC, USA (2018); SFMOMA, San Francisco, CA, USA (2018); Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain (2018); Barbican, London, UK (2017); Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK (2017); University of New South Wales, Paddington, Australia (2016); Turner Contemporary, Margate, UK (2016); The Exchange, Penzance, UK (2016); Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen, Denmark (2016); STUK Kunstcentrum, Leuven, Belgium (2016); Arnolfini, Bristol, UK (2016); Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden (2015); Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan, USA (2014); Tate Britain, London, UK (2013-14); and a week-long series of screenings at MoMA, New York, USA (2011). His participation in group shows has included: 'The 1980s: Today's Beginnings?', Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands (2016); 'British Art Show 8' (2015-17); 'All the World's Futures', 56th Venice Biennale, Italy (2015); 'History is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain', Hayward Gallery,

London, UK (2015); 'Africa Now: Political Patterns', SeMA, Seoul, South Korea (2014); Sharjah Biennial 11, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2013); Liverpool Biennial, UK (2012); and Taipei Biennial, Taiwan (2012). He has also been featured in many international film festivals, including Sundance Film Festival, Utah, USA (2013 and 2011) and Toronto International Film Festival, Canada (2012). In 2007, he won the Artes Mundi Award.

Manuela Ribeiro Sanches taught at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon, from 1981 to 2016. Having obtained her PhD with a dissertation on the traveller and revolutionary Georg Forster, her interest in travel literature and related topics, such as the epistemologies that sustain the subjective processes of perceiving and narrating the described objects, led her to broaden her research to the field of the history of anthropology, which she articulated with a cultural studies approach from a postcolonial perspective. Having taught and researched on the effects, until the present, of the processes of (de)colonisation on a cultural and political level, and widely published on these issues, more recently, she became interested in the transnational processes that also marked nationalist anti-colonial movements. Her research interests also include African film, and questions of migration and racism in Europe from a comparative perspective. Recent publications: 'Europe in Black and White: Immigration, Race, and Identity in the "Old Continent"' (Intellect, 2011) and 'Malhas que os impérios tecem. Textos anti-coloniais, contextos pós-coloniais' (Edições 70, 2011). She is now editing a collection of essays on Cabral, Césaire and Du Bois due in 2018.

This is the second event of the series **Thinking from the South: Comparing Post-Colonial Histories and Diasporic Identities through Artistic Practices and Spaces**, organized by **Ana Balona de Oliveira** within the framework of the research line 'Transnational Perspectives on Contemporary Art: Identities and Representation' of the research group Contemporary Art Studies (CASt).

This series of talks and lectures intends to open up a comparative discussion on the ways in which artistic practices and spaces – most notably those whose programming is centred on anti-racist, feminist, diasporic and migratory politics – have been working towards an epistemic decolonization. With speakers from different generations, geographical contexts and professional backgrounds, the series will provide an opportunity for sharing knowledge and experiences on colonial, anti- and post-colonial histories and diasporic identities, and for looking into transnational and trans-disciplinary strategies of decolonization through artistic, curatorial, activist and academic practices. It departs from the premise that cultural production has a fundamental role to play in political, social and economic arenas.