

# Surviving Art School: An Artist of Colour Tool Kit



Publication with Collective Creativity  
and Nottingham Contemporary

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**Collective Creativity: a QTPOC (Queer, Trans\* Intersex People of Colour) artist collective – which aims to create radical, grass roots space for queer artists of colour to interrogate the politics of art, in relation to queer identity, institutional racism, and anti-colonialism.**



Art Education - Melvin Edwards

Collective Creativity, is dedicated to creating space for conversations that challenge institutional racism and white supremacy within a cultural framework. It started its journey researching Britain's history of radical political Black art, as so many of us found it had been missing in our own art educations. How do we decolonise our art educations, unlearn the histories that replicate the colonial gaze, with creative production being saturated with white names and male forces?

There is a very specific distilled isolation, that describes the art student experience, being perhaps only one of very few people of colour at very white, and largely very privileged art institutions in the UK. With scarce support, validation or affirming politics - amidst the abundance of racism and micro aggressions – it is an experience that so many artists of colour now and from the past still describe as a trauma they had to endure and fight through for survival.

In the exhibition curated by Glenn Ligon: *Encounters and Collisions*, on view at Nottingham Contemporary in 2015, there is a Melvin Edwards piece named *Art Education*. The twisted writhing metal, heavy like an anchor, sharp and blunt at the same time, speaks volumes. With not enough reflection of colour in the curriculum, or tutors and lecturers of colour who can speak from this experience, we, Collective Creativity, wished to create a workshop with current art students of colour at Nottingham Contemporary, and share the ways in which we tried to survive art school and white arts institutions. How do we change this cycle, and reach out with intergenerational conversations, that re-situate the British narrative of Black art history and its knowledges?

Often the most cited British Black art is by men: Yinka Shonibare, Chris Ofili, Steve McQueen, John Akomfrah, all very extremely talented artists, many of them household names. But where is the legacy that filled the gaps before then? And where are the voices of those who are women or queer? The few women who are mentioned in the main history books, for example Sonia Boyce, are obviously not representative of the entire picture, of the wealth and breadth of Black British art and feminism, and the Black Arts movement.

The erasure of Black women and queer people of colour's art in history is systemic and normative in varying fields, but there is something particular that, as a discipline of the elite, as a playground for investors, the art world feels very much like the White Male Institution. For many, it is clear that there are people whose art production is steered by the market, and serves a certain palette we cannot escape. Art created by the radical art practices of those with marginalised identities, Black women, queer trans artists of colour, disabled artists, who often make work the way they do to survive; the work – often critical and political – is usually silenced by history and the market. This includes many marginalised voices, and a great number of works that make us question what kind of work does need to be made, and how is it deemed valid? But what does a queer, feminist postcolonial art practice look like? How can we re-format our own art educations, as artists of colour dealing with depoliticised art schools, and a re-positioning of this canon? Perhaps we can create new histories, out of material that was always there, our own canon of ideas that are not solely centred on Western thought.

*Collective Creativity, longed to un-archive the history of British artists of colour and had started with looking at writings from namely Stuart Hall and Rasheed Araeen. In which we saw the shattering struggles that British artists of colour had been waging to break the ground to enable us to follow the path it created in its wake: making art and carving political Black space in art history. Clusters of artists that cropped up in the 70's and 80's all over the Midlands who were reaching out and working together.*

*We began to further excavate this legacy; through finding resources, entering archival spaces, and embarking upon researching queer, feminist and post colonial histories. To do this we drew from The African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain archives at Chelsea College of Art; the Making Histories Visible archive at University of Lancashire – Professor Lubaina Himid's own collection; and the specifically Black Queer materials archive Ruck-us! created by artist Ajamu and kept at the London Metropolitan archives. From feminist publications, letters, papers, back catalogues, and by speaking to the artists of that time, a Black feminist history of artists who stirred a storm in the 80's/90's was revealed. Re-visiting the Thin Black Lines exhibition, showed how politically nuanced artworks could be showcased in history, with those that spoke from histories of difference, and where migrant and gendered subjectivities were given precedence, in a space like Tate Britain.*

*This finding of representation was fundamental to understanding the legacy of the Black Arts movement, to understand what had come before, and to build on the foundations that had already been laid out. For young people, students and emerging artists of colour, it's crucial to feel this history is our own, and not be burdened with starting from the beginning as many pioneering artists have done before us.*

*So, upon discovering artists like Maud Sulter, Claudette Johnson, Sutapa Biswas, Sonia Boyce, Lubaina Himid, Zarina Bhimji, Chila Kumari Burman, Ingrid Pollard, Poluoumi Desai we realised that these are still only the ones that made it into books (and if you look you will find them you will find them)...but there are many more. Knowing their work cements a sense of history, of knowing that there were artists in the 80's at the height of race politics, making subversive critical work about identity; you have a legacy that is yours, that you can refer to. It's more than representation, it's seeing people who reflect your own story, in those big glossy art books, people, who have names like yours. It gives a sense of connection, rather than a sense of constant loss, and mourning; which is what living in a neo-colonial hetero-patriarchal world feels like.*

*The quest to fill in the gaps has led Collective Creativity into self organising and re-distributing resources. Through excavating the histories and legacies of queer artists of colour in Britain, this research in turn has helped bolster our individual practices as artists and activists. Guided by the knowledge of the radical work the Black arts movement in Britain had laid down before us, for us, in the 70's, 80's and early 90's.*

*Understanding and critiquing the Black arts movement and the hidden or nuanced queer threads within it, has allowed us to flourish in this knowledge of previous history as British artists and QTPOC activists, to heal and grow. Our work in recreating these conversations of reflection enables us as queer trans artists of colour to look forward in our own (un)archiving, and in creating radical spaces for QTPOC creativity in forms of research, workshops, visual documentation and exhibitions.*

*In the pages that follow you will find our own reflections on surviving art school as well as current art students enrolled at Nottingham Trent University who participated in a collective workshop at Nottingham Contemporary in April, 2015. We would like to thank them for this time we spent together.*

*You will also find a transcript of the conversation of an event on the Politics of the Art School that we held to coincide with the workshop, in which we hosted members of the Black Arts Movement from the 1980s including Claudette Johnson, Said Adrus and Keith Piper in a discussion with people living and working in Nottingham.*

**Raisa Kabir - Collective Creativity**



## Interview with Said Adrus by Raju Rage

How do we want our art to be framed as artists?

I've been working with archives with South Asian history and the context of War ( WW1) and I'm having difficulty with how it is perceived and pursued in certain spaces but it hasn't stopped me making it. Is it relevant today to frame our art as visual artists? Considering the discourse is about 'Black' and artists of Colour in UK / Europe , I think it's for individuals to decide! However as the Seminar tried to explore the history of Black artists (Asian,African- Caribbean) around the 1980 s vis a vis Now, then there seemed a strong sense of collective political conscience that perhaps resulted in this position.

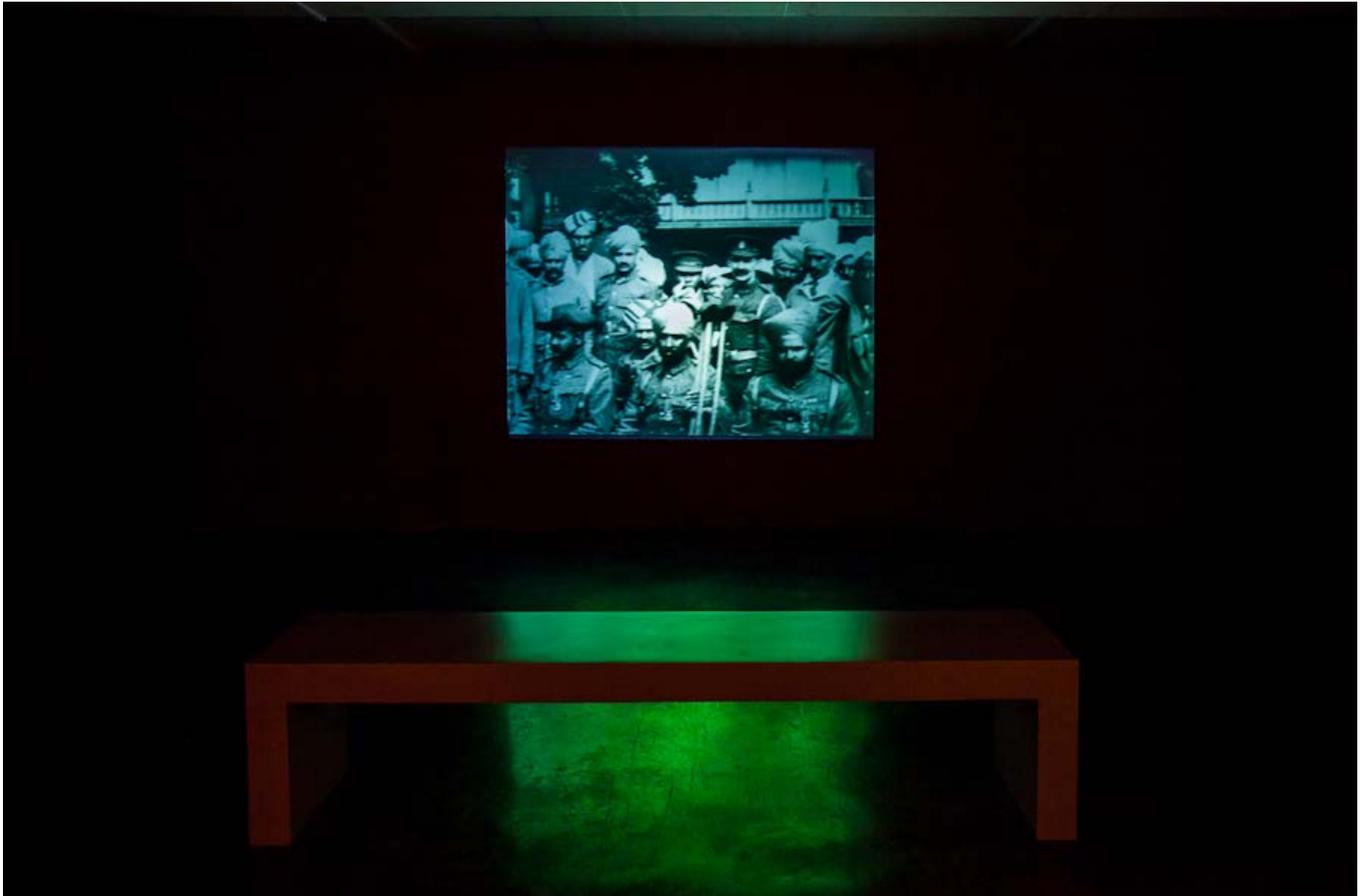


It's just not easy to study art as a person of colour or from a certain class, due to high fees & financial implication! Then it's tough to make a living out of it. There are a majority of us, who may not work in a total commercial way with certain galleries (where you produce work to sell to private collectors and museums). In fact the activity outside of them is important too here to remember, as we are often bombarded with 'star system' field. However It's useful to look at how people have survived in making their art over the years . One can still embark on work independently with some social con-

science and be 'political' but it's not an easy path to tread. Then there are public artists (Artists who work in the Public realm) who are hardly talked about, where you work with Commissioning Agencies , Local Authority or Councils with a strong consultation process. This is often undertaken with close partnerships with communities and the aims to create something almost architectural within a specific environment. The fee has a R & D aspect and you are paid professionally which is very good but one has to learn along the way the structure of proposals, negotiations, consultations and overall project management. Artists aren't necessarily trained in that way but are often great at adapting to the situations.

I'm not sure in the Art world if it is considered art, but nowadays the irony is that they all want to be Public artists! Some years back I was involved in a Public Art project entitled 'Cultural Mapping' project in Leicester. This was really interesting as it was a new and challenging area to be engaged in which was outside the so called 'mainstream' art world and the Art College! The local within this setting was encouraged with a proactive affinity with the community rather than a detached approach 'plonk ' a sculpture anywhere. It's important, this process as it explores a grass roots consultation and also because those communities have to live with this creation/art work, which in turn hopefully gives them a sense of ownership. So eventually the consultation with local schools and community organisation had a positive impact on the outcome.

The more experience one gathers in working with a community (as mentioned above) on a project that sits outside a gallery context , it offers ways that were unheard of during my college training. This practice or process is an emerging field now but due to our 'austerity' times currently and the political mindset it's come to a reduced commissioning generally. Some artists create an image around them and through a particular statement would want to frame their works and I think I have realised over the years that there will always be people who try to represent or define you in a certain way. Ultimately I cannot deny my origin, I'm Said Adrus, an individual and with my



background, though people are always asking me where I am from but not satisfied as they want to locate you easily . Well some of my works and projects attempt to challenge this creatively! Personally, I have a complex migration history with India, East Africa, Switzerland and UK I would say I 'm British artist, but ultimately you're an artist, yes origin can have an impact on creativity with certain ideas that are influenced by it but times are different now and maybe it's not necessary to define yourself as we may have done in the past. Also, it feels that it's about the art work and the quality of it that matters . Of course the extremely important issue of presentation and reception of the work is valid and in what context!

[We talk more about what the art world considers art]

How do we sustain our practices during university and beyond? (Experiences of university and current practice).

There were hardly any tutors who were artists of Non European background at Art College. There was an absence of them and of our art history that we related to so we had to dig our own subject matter and we had to also learn about western art history, American and European focused. In our year at Trent I recall only Keith Piper and myself were Black. It seemed we were one of the new generations of 'post -colonial 'communities to go to Art School , especially in Midlands.

Only slowly, post- college, did I get to know about different kind of artists such as MF Hussain or David Hammons Art / works even though they were active at that time. I also found out about Indian artists (from India who had settled in Britain) after college. Now there are at least some archives, 'Making Visible' in Preston, the one at Chelsea and Stuart Hall Library, so you have access to research materials compared to us 30 years ago where there was a total absence. At the same time there were Panchayat archives that I was part of trying to develop and there was Salida (south Asian literature and art archive, with another name now). Saadha? In Nottingham I was involved in a lot of projects with young people doing art workshops and we had collective called Asian Artists Group (AAG -meaning Fire).



In one way you had Amitabh Bhachan Bollywood film posters in Birmingham and London and inner city music posters with over laying of image & text . Also the aesthetic of then the urban environment with images of Music and Film events started to happen and reggae music amongst the disturbing racist football graffiti on the walls. This crazy overlay which I found interesting to embark on .That race paradigm and conflict was out there on the streets. That was the reference point, urban content, not the art history we were learning in school. How the uprisings were being portrayed in the media and so on. That was something I reckon some of us were trying to express and talk about in our work. There was an urgency and rawness in this work. It had a spontaneous feel to it so we just did it and expressed ourselves. I was focused on urban and social context and that is how my work has developed. At the time we had access to things like James Baldwin's writing and a lot of non-visual art political work, such as Bob Marley lyrics & Blk musician s because there weren't a lot of art references for us. You couldn't even talk to the tutors about this absence because if you would mention it they weren't aware of it so it was a awkward to say the least. The reference points were people like Andy Warhol and R Rauschenberg as they used Silkscreen, print media with image and text etc. For me visually this aesthetic was quite attractive to expand on.

Or for example, it appeared that one of our tutors was interested in Temples, deities and monuments in India, not even Contemporary Indian artists or African artists (we laugh) so how would they be able to communicate with us? But we became politically aware through the wider social politics around the Uprisings in London and other major cities (they also happened in Nottingham in the past). There was a lot of disenfranchisement and discontent around police racial harassment which was quite radical for us. I came from Switzerland, and was born in East Africa so I wasn't brought up in UK and so I faced different attitudes towards 'Race' in Europe than in UK so this interested me.

I was later influenced by Rasheed Araeen and Gavin Jantjes' works about race and identity and politics. I also came across the work of Native American artist called Jimmy Durham! Some of this activity was really focused in the Midlands (they were organising shows in the Midlands and the North). London had some shows but it appeared a lot was actually happening initially outside of the capital!

Post college, various 'Black art' events were happening, exhibitions and so on and there were more networks. So there were debates, conferences, exhibitions and discourses that came out of them. It was a breath of fresh air in this climate and there was a certain sense of energy in the artworks that were being discussed and shown. However, there was also criticism from certain press and media about doing this work just because we were 'Black' rather than the content/ artistic quality of our work, but I am proud of being part of certain exhibitions.

Many South Asian artists were also involved with arts shows that Eddie Chambers had curated for with similar political alignments and it wasn't just about your backgrounds. There were many artists from various backgrounds making political art, possibly considered 'Black' art. History & Identity being one of these exhibitions. There was a lack of documentation so the emphasis was also on producing catalogues for/with especially Public galleries, just like you are doing now.

One of my major projects in recent years, in many ways an ongoing project has been the Pavilion Series (2004-2014)... Film, Video Installation which explored the hidden history of British ASIAN SOLDIERS in WW1 & WW2. The work comprised of photo panels, Archives and also dealt with Memory, Contemporary issues of sites & Location. It also explored the issue of Muslim Soldiers as part of British Army and the subsequent desecration of their graves in Woking, Surrey. These had been shown previously in Southampton and at the The Lightbox in Woking but a newer version was shown in Nottingham recently at New Art Exchange in 2014/15 and also in London at 198 Gallery.

Also I had been engaged in a Public Art through Cultural Mapping project (Sacred Spaces) in Leicester. This was in collaboration with the artist Bhajan Hunjan who has been very active with initially Asian women artists in UK then as a tutor and Public artist over the years, providing a challenging approach to Public Art with a strong community consultation process. In some ways it is this space between Gallery/Museum shows and Art College that perhaps needs a viewpoint, from a practice oriented perspective.

Some of these works had been temporary installations but a lot of these have been permanent in Leicester, Slough (Town square) and in East London in recent times through Bow Arts.

A letter to a future younger self

Dear Evan,

I'm writing this to you to let you know about a book I wish I'd known about when I was studying in Winchester.

It's called 'Passon;Discourses on Blackwomen creativity'. I think if you had known about it then, you wouldn't have felt so lonely. You would in a sense, because you would still have been surrounded by middle class whiteness but at least you would have known that artists with passion, energy and drive, who were coming from a similar place as you existed.

You would have learnt about the amazing work of artists such as Lubaina Himid and Ingrid Pollard. You were already aware of Maud Sulter, because of the 'Syrkas' series but you didn't know about the movement they had created, the pivotal bringing together and organising of black female artists work.

It would have helped to hear about their struggles and persistence and it will help you to keep going when you feel like you can't anymore.

With Love,

Evan (a future you)

Lubaina Hirnid. Mand Sutter. Ingrid Pollard. Chila Kumari Burman  
Sonia Boyce. Subram Biswas. Claire. Keith Piper.  
Said Adnan. Rashid. J.  
Rashid. Steve McQueen  
Boswell. R. R.  
Jacob v. J.  
Larry A.  
Sanaa. A.  
Bennett. Shepherd. Nambi  
Project 0 - Jamila Johnson  
Jennifer Allen aka Qu  
Maria KheirKhah. The 1-  
Frank Bowling. New Lo  
Oluwade Popoola. Rehab  
Michael Bryan. Anni M  
Selina Thompson. Sorry  
Squid De La Mer. Onyeka Ig  
Stephanie Turner. Nikki Farquharson. Amanda Holiday.

THERE IS NO  
NEED, TO  
REINVENT  
THE WHEEL



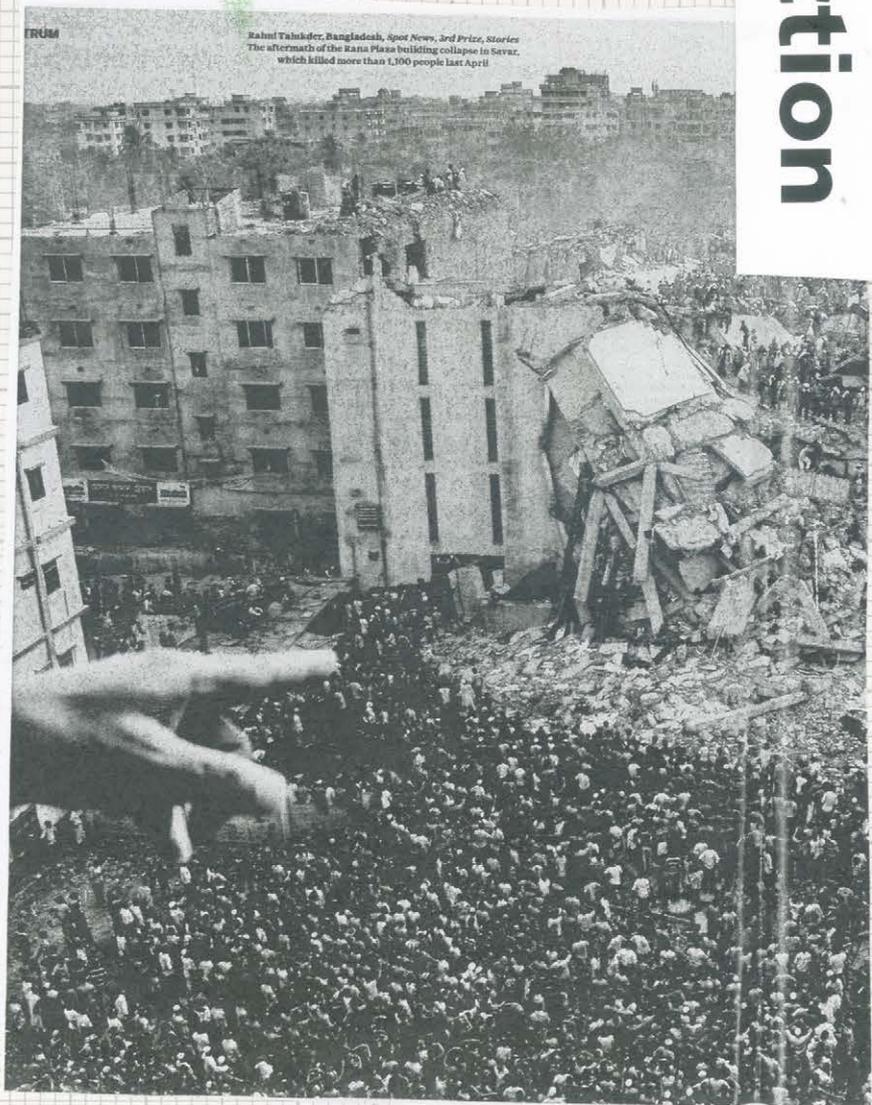
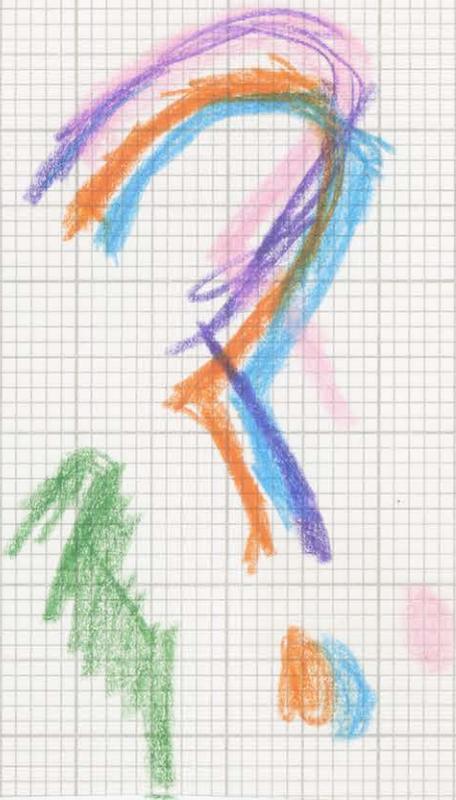
People of Colour artists whh work/ed in a British context

Lubaina Himid. HAROLD Offeh. Maud Sulter. Ingrid Pollard.  
Chila Kumari Burman. Sonia Boyce. Sutapa Biswas. Claudette  
Johnson. Keith Piper. Said Aduz. John Akomfrah. The Otolith  
Group. Rasheed Araeen. Steve McQueen. Lynette Yiadom Boayake.  
Phoebe Boswell. Raju RAGE. Raisa Kabir. Rudy Loewe. Marlene  
Smith. Jacob V Joyce. Isaac Karuki. Zinzi Minott. Jade  
Montserrat. Larry Achiampong. Zadie Xa. Zarina Bimji. Zineb  
Sedira. Saana Himid. Barby Asante. Imma Abasi Okon. Beverley  
Benett. Shepard Manyika. Junior Boakye Yiadom. Project O.  
Jamila Johnson Small. Alexandrina Hemsley. Jennifer Allen aka  
Quilla Constance. Ajamu. Ope Lori. Maria KKeirkhah. The lonel  
y Londoners. Mo Juicy. Jay Bernard. Frank Bowling. Hew Locke.  
Keith Jarett. Dorethea Smartt. Olumide Popoola. Rehana Zaman.  
Poulomi Desai. Ain Bailey. Michael Bryan. Anni Movsisyan.  
Marcia X. Ria Hartley. Selina Thompson. Sorryyoufeeluncomforta  
ble collective. Hayley Reid. Rebecca Ubuntu David. Squid de la  
mer. Onyeke Iqwe. Roshini Kempadoo. Stephanie Turner. Nikki  
Farquharson. Amanda Holiday.

Inevitably and unfortunately people will be missing from this  
list.

Please photocopy it and pass it on, adding names in the space  
above as you do.

# Means of Production



**TRUM**  
Rahim Tahsder, Bangladesh, Spot News, 3rd Prize, Stories  
The aftermath of the Rana Plaza building collapse in Savar,  
which killed more than 1,100 people last April

Dear Raisa Aged 20

A few points to remember....

- 1) Believe in the conviction of your ideas, and don't let yourself be consumed with doubt. You have something to say! keep saying it!
- 2) Don't get too comfortable! Even if everything is going great, don't drop the ball, don't stop being critical, keep on pushing yourself and your boundaries, but please be kind to yourself, you can only do what you can do, and that's still amazing.
- 3) Believe in your self, your work and your ideas, they are "never" "too subjective". You make art to survive and because of that, it's political you will find others who understand you, and respect your vision.

LETTER TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF:

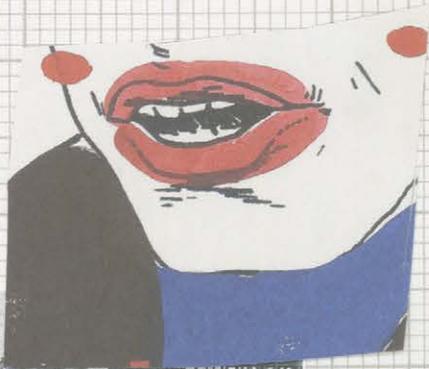
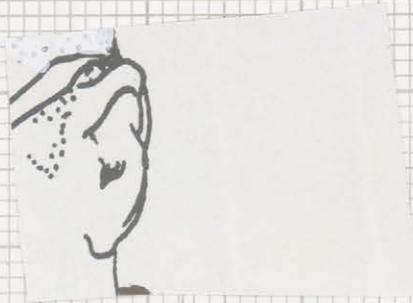
- 4) Racism is real, and the trauma of finishing university will be difficult as a South Asian queer woman, but you will finish your work, you won't fail, you will have made work that stopped you from dying, but perhaps nearly killing yourself in the process. Making Art is healing and it won't always be like this. Trust yourself, be kind, be perceptive. You have gained and will have learnt from this knowledge.

Love Raisa aged 26

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TRUST X YOUR  
TRUST YOUR  
TRUST YOUR  
TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

# LETTER TO A FUTURE YOUNGER SELF

1. Find your community - the one you are reflected in, the one in which you are **ENOUGH**.
2. Make the work you want to make - your work might be completely different to everyone else's - THAT'S OK.
3. Speak up - **DON'T BE AFRAID TO BE A RABBLE ROUSER.**
4. Know who your work is for - Be honest & **ASK YOURSELF AGAIN AND AGAIN.**
5. Know why you make work - **COMMUNITY, MONEY, COMPULSION, SURVIVAL**, this matters.
6. Be playful - Give yourself time to **EXPERIMENT.**
7. Art is your language for what you want to say.
8. Have fun but have content that matters.

For the moment

Dear YiYing

Before you came to UK, you try your best to pass the English test. It's must hard part in your life, even in that time you only 22. Facing the University gradition and your need to find somewhere to go (for future). Thanks !! You have lovely family who support you without hesitate. Last year you make the dream came true. Congratulation, you got the offer (visa) to UK to create more ~~pos~~ opportunity to you work & your future.

Enjoy ur life as usually

Good luck

Ellen

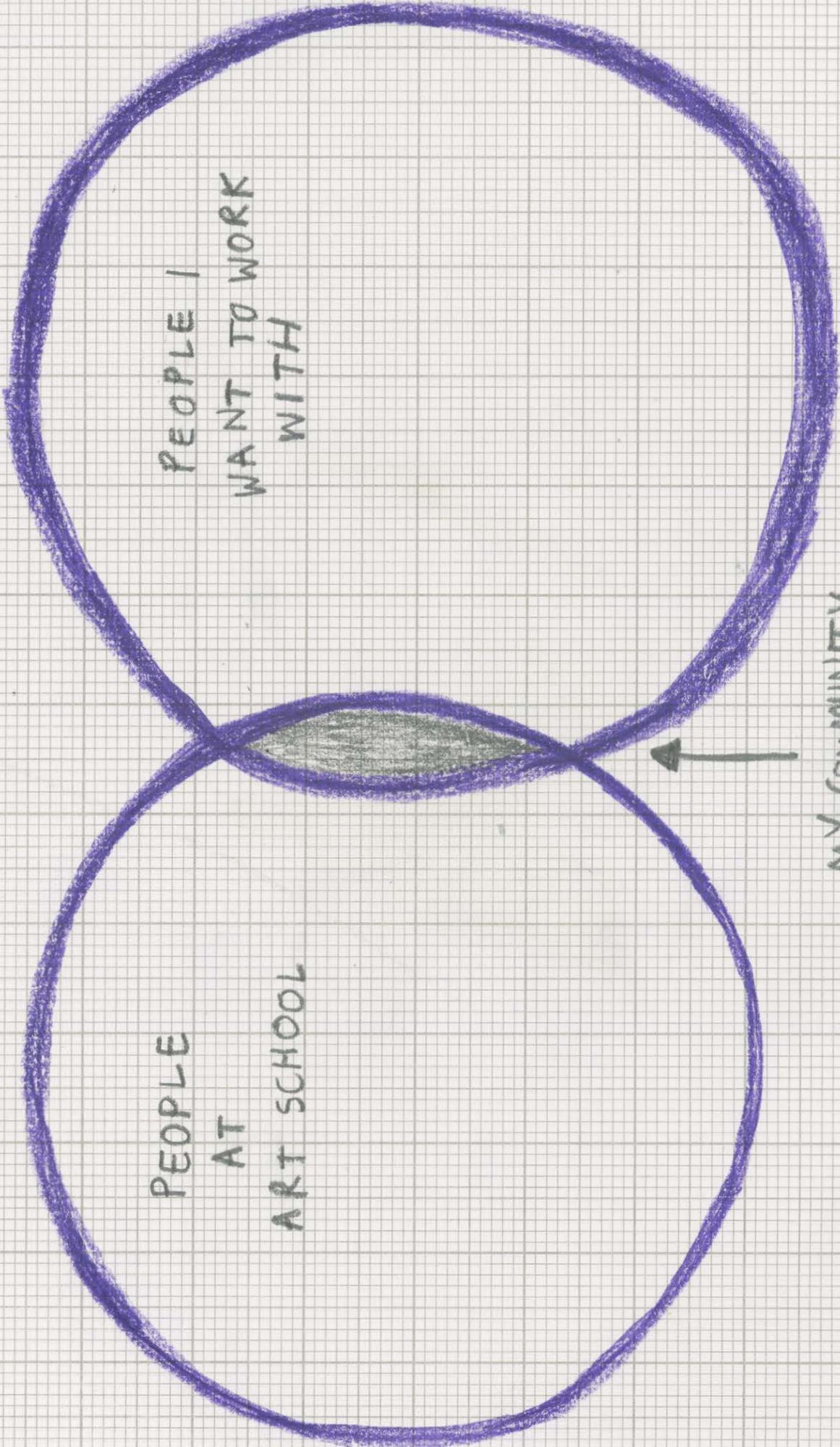


2015/04/29

PEOPLE  
AT  
ART SCHOOL

PEOPLE I  
WANT TO WORK  
WITH

MY COMMUNITY  
AT ART SCHOOL



# \*ARTIST OF COLOUR ART SCHOOL

## READING LIST \*

Perception ↗

- MERLEAU-PONTY, MAURICE - Phenomenology of
- FRIERE, PAULO - Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- HOOKS, BELL - Killing Rage, Ending Racism
- (Edited by) BAILEY, DAVID A. & BOYCE, SONIA - Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain
- DOY, GEN - Black Visual Culture: Modernity and Post-Modernity
- OWUSU, KWESI - Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader
- (Edited by) SAULTER, MAUD - Passion (URBAN-) Discourses on Black Women's Creativity
- BROWN, H. RAP - Die Nigger Die
- (Edited by) MICOSSÉ - AIKINS, SANDRINE & OTOO, SHARON DODUA - How To Be An Artist The Little Book of Big Visions and Revolutionize The World
- BATCHELOR, DAVID - Chromophobia
- SACKS, OLIVER - The Case of the Colorblind Painter
- EMIN, TRACEY - Strangeland
- SAID, EDWARD W. - ORIENTALISM

Sophie:

Now I am in an art school in another country. I still remember when I was in China, people laugh some artists who could not sell their art work and ~~that~~ his life became difficult. To make sure your work beautiful and popular in art market was the important thing. Now. I have to say I just realized recently why I want to go back to an art school in here. Why I want to make art work. It is not for an escape. It is not for survival. It is not about selling things. It is just ~~like~~ like every stories when I was go to sleep my mom told me. Because ~~you~~ I find peace and art gives me good dreams.



2015. 29. April  
Sophie Jiang

*'Politics of the Art School - Black Arts Movement Then and Now'*

*Chaired By Raisa Kabir with artists; Evan Ifekoya, Rudy Loewe, Raju Rage, Said Adrus, Keith Piper and Claudette Johnson*

*Nottingham Contemporary, The space, 30 April 2015*

**Raisa Kabir:** "Okay, I'll just welcome you all and thanks for coming to The Politics of the Art School: Black Art Movement Then and Now."

I'm Raisa Kabir I'm part of Collective Creativity, which is a QTIPOC Artist Collective. I'll just read a little introduction for it: "which aims to create radical grassroots space for queer artists of colour to interrogate the politics of art in relation to queer identity, institutional racism and anti-colonialism."

This event today is just going to bring Collective Creativity, which I brought some people here from the Collective whom I'll introduce later, and some members from the Black Arts Movement from the 1980s.

So what we're gonna start with is a film that us, Collective Creativity have done. And this is called "Redefining Legacy: Navigating Practice As 'Emerging' Artists Of Colour" and this was done with the help of the "A-N Go and See" Bursary Fund and we did this as part of researching the archive, looking into people of colour artists and black artists, and at the Making Histories Visible archive in Preston at the University of Lancashire.

So I'm just going to play this film and I hope you enjoy it.

[Plays FILM – 16mins]

Okay, well, I will introduce the rest of our panel. So we have **Evan Ifekoya**, **Rudy Loewe** and **Raju Rage** as well as me, part of Collective Creativity.

And also we've got **Keith Piper**, **Said Adrus** and **Claudette Johnson** who were part of the Black Arts Movement and working in Nottingham during the 1980s. So I can invite those three to come and sit at the table, and what I'll do is I'll get everybody to talk a little bit about themselves and their practice.

Before I go into that, a little bit on the format of today: what we tend to do at Collective Creativity in the sessions that we hold, as you'd have seen in the film, are quite informal, very conversational and audience-participatory. So we are encouraging people to get involved and not be afraid to ask questions.

So we'll start from this side. We have an image up here, a poster, so each people can talk a little bit about their work and who they are."

**Evan Ifekoya:** “Hi! My name is Evan Ifekoya. I am an artist. I work primarily in video and performance and I investigate a lot of different things. I do a lot of stuff with archives and kind of appropriated imagery, historical or popular contemporary imagery. I work with that stuff quite a lot in my work. I also work as an arts educator so I do a lot of stuff with young people around arts, and addressing politics of identity and whatnot, through different artworks. Yeah, that’s it about me.”

**Rudy Loewe:** “I’m Rudy Lowe. I’m a visual artist and an arts facilitator. I do a lot of work around Black British identity and history, and around mental health in the context of queer black identity. I work a lot with libraries and archives and community spaces, so I’m kind of interested in making those links between Black British Identity, you know, using archival material. I mainly do drawings, making zines and print making. Yeah, that’s it really.”

**Raju Rage:** “Hi, I’m **Raju Rage** and I am a visual artist and also a writer. I work with performance, live art and unspoken narratives, and I use sculpture in various forms in my work. I’m very interested in the use of interruption in my work. So I try to work with space and gaze, doing public interruption in different spaces. Using embodiment and using my own body, my gender non-conforming body in the space. I also work with archives and I’m very interested in migration and the politics of migration, such as migration of labor, migration of cloth and I use archival images that I project directly on my body to I guess, examine the tension and conflicts that come up with the Diasporic body. Thanks.”

**Keith Piper:** “Hi, I’m **Keith Piper**. And I would really like to thank the Collective for inviting us this evening. I’m an artist and, a lecturer now. I suppose the kind of context for me, and Said Adrus being here, is that both of us were actually here at College in the 1980s. In fact I think we started at the same time.

**Said Adrus:** “Yeah, around 80.”

**Keith Piper:** So we were here in that period from, 1980 to 1983, which were actually really key times in terms of the formation of all of these arguments and hopefully we can get into a conversation as to what made those particular years and the kind of years which came just before that (the late 1970s) so key in terms of all of these conversations. So I’m really fascinated now in terms of the way that you as younger artists reflect back at that moment. I also teach now at Middlesex University on the Fine Art Department. Something strange has happened there over the last three years in that suddenly there seems to have been an influx of young black artists in that university. I mean, they were there in the past, whose concerns have been the normal concerns of young artists. However, in the last three years there’s suddenly a clump of artists making work around these (more political) issues. They actually formed themselves into a group called the Black Nation, and they scare me to death because they’re even more extreme than we were in the 1980s. Or so it seems to me just because I’m old. And so it’s really interesting just to reflect on that

and why at this particular moment in 2015, young folk are re-engaging in a sense with those kinds of ideas. So I'm really interested in that."

**Said Adrus:** "Thank you. I'm Said Adrus. Thank you all, the group here, the Collective, as you introduced yourselves, and Keith for introducing, I don't want to repeat myself and Keith said that I was at Trent."

**Keith Piper:** "Sorry."

**Said Adrus:** "No, no, it's okay, it's good. Thank you! I work across media, and of course to a certain extent, I was kind of influenced by some of the work that was happening around, like Keith said, the late 70s, isn't it? You know, that image and text, all that kind of issues about race and culture, and subsequently some of the work that I was doing or one was doing and then overlapping. I think Keith was involved radically in some of it. So that kind of early influence of history and politics or what we might maybe call uprisings, from the 1980s or whatever in Handsworth (Birmingham), and in London, that had kind of an impact on some of my works over the years. Nottingham, I lived, actually I went away briefly after graduating and then I came back and stayed here for like 10 years or so. 80s, 90s, and then did work with youth communities and recently with the New Art Exchange in the last few years. So anyway, I'm glad to be part of this conversation."

**Raisa Kabir:** "Thank you, Said. Claudette Johnson is running a little late but she'll join us as soon as she can. Here is an image of her work. So, Collective Creativity, as a collective, for people and artists who do identify as queer, trans or intersex, is about, as I said in the beginning, creating space and creating space specifically for conversations and dialogues, and with that, you may have seen in the film, us talking about being disenfranchised with the arts education that we've received. And you know why we are here at Nottingham Contemporary, which we are really excited and happy to be at, with the Glenn Ligon exhibition, looking at the role of politics and art, and you know, the decolonization of our education and why it is so centred on whiteness and maleness as well. And so we're going to start off... we've got like, some questions lined up that we can centre some conversations around. I'm going to spend around 20 minutes on each question but really they are quite broad, they're just to get us to have a dialogue between some artists from the Black Arts Movement and the Collective Creativity here today.

So I'm going to start off with looking at the global and the local, looking at the representation of UK POC artists. What we find a lot of times is that artists from the US tend to be given privileged coverage and they tend to be centred in the exhibitions that are shown in the UK.

**So you know, the US versus the UK: who shapes the discourse on black art and is that important? Why is it important to build and create our own British story narratives in terms of anti-racism politics in our work?**

**Keith Piper:** Who is gonna start on that one?

**Raisa Kabir:** “So if anyone wants to jump in or have any thoughts on it, or, you know, because I know we’ve talked a lot about this...

**Keith Piper:** “Are you talking about a particular narrative which is being shaped now? I mean like, in the wake of last year, this year, the kind of main act that just shows Black American artists, which happens in London... Was it last year that you had all those wonderful shows at the same time?

**Raisa Kabir:** Yes. Yes.

**Said Adrus:** Just now?

**Keith Piper:** “Yeah, the David Hammons, the Glenn Ligon... at Camden all those shows... It’s amazing! Show after show after show, it’s amazing. So there is that kind of thing now, but are you talking about the influence of American artists to the shaping or the initial shaping of the discourse in the early 80s?

**Raisa Kabir:** Maybe a little bit of both. The fact is, we have seen a rise or an upsurge of American artists being shown all over the UK and that’s amazing but also, you know, when we talk about who shapes the discourse on black arts, it tends to be, we always look to across the pond. You know, the artists seem to do better there, or they’ve got more established resources there rather than perhaps concentrating on what’s happening here when there is such an amazing legacy of British Black Artists or POC artists and I guess it’s about joining those two threads together and if we could have a conversation about it.

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah, because, you know, something that I’ve noticed as well, being in London working around different kinds of institutions in London, actually, when you do have a major exhibition of kind of Black or people of colour art, it is always kind of outside of the United Kingdom. And I kind of wondered well... are there not loads of really amazing, you know Black British artists who have really established practices? Why is it that the major institutions always kind of look to the Glenn Ligon here who also has had a show at the Camden Arts centre recently, Kara Walker... You know I’m not trying to take away from those really amazing artists and their work, it’s just interesting how you know, I’d just like to see some major shows from people like you guys! You know what I mean? I just wonder do we think there is a reason for that? Is it coincidental?

**Member of the audience 1:** “It’s racism.”

**Evan Ifekoya:** Okay...

**Keith Piper:** I’m not sure if it is. There is something else there.

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah, I think it’s more complex than that.

**Keith Piper:** It's not an obvious one. It's economics. All of these artists, and there are a couple obviously also in this country like Steve McQueen and Chris Ofili, etc, they are all backed by extremely wealthy commercial galleries and what is happening now is that all art funds are squeezed for all these institutions. And the extremely rich commercial galleries can come along and say: "Here is a show of our artists." And they can bank roll a lot of that stuff. You know, they have the financial muscle to kind of bank roll art and big shows for artists. It comes into centres where their particular budget is squeezed and I'm not sure if that's the case, is that the case? I don't know! I've just heard that as...

**Member of the audience 1:** It's the two together. Racism and economics.

**Member of the audience 2:** No!

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah!

**Said Adrus:** Can I just say something?

**Keith Piper:** Yeah, go on.

**Said Adrus:** Anyway, it's quite interesting this debate. I think that, anyway, not only mentioning there are 30 years when we were at Trent, or whatever, in Nottingham, and in the last 10 or 5 years the practices changed for any artist of colour or any artist generally. And there is a tendency, I might be wrong, but there are 200 people or 200 galleries, I don't know, who control the art world generally. And in a way, there are influential people in London or the UK and in the States. The US is a much more commercial, kind of driven society in terms of culture or visual arts, whatever, historically. - I mean, I'm talking historically since post war. - So it has had a kind of major influence, they are much more larger, from my kind of experience or overview, in terms of geographical, even money and patronage, etc. It's really interesting what Keith has just said, about these certain artists like David Hammons whose work that I like, very kind of influential and political work that he used to do and continues to do from the States, here in a show in a so called blue chip gallery which is the White Cube in London recently. So in a way these kinds of artists like Steve McQueen do not want to be called Black Artists, I have a feeling, or Chris Ofili...

**Keith Piper:** Well, look at the work.

**Said Adrus:** Yeah, I know, of course! The imagery, the subject matter etc, but it's quite interesting that the generation of the 90s time, and I think that Eddie Chambers has commented and a few other people about that sort of commercial what you call patronage is in one way, and in another way is that today we have an example, that we're sitting here discussing these issues which has been important then in the 80s and even now; issues about race and representation. But interestingly, we've got these sorts of artists from the US in a major space here in Nottingham.

So in a sense it's quite an interesting junction, and whatever. Why isn't there a kind of... I'm not saying, Rasheed Araeen, whoever, that's not what I'm saying. We could discuss this kind of legacy of this particular work. So it kind of overlaps. I don't know who is calling the shots in the States or from here. I think the energies are in both ways. Interestingly, if I may say so, Eddie Chambers, who wrote a lot about this, and he's been a curator and I work with him, and of course, Keith has worked with him for many years... He teaches in the States at the moment, in Texas somewhere. And he's researching and he kind of writes, so it's interesting to view his kind of position or his writings and things like that, because he's been in both places.

**Raju Rage:** "I mean, I would like to step in here and say something to draw on your point about racism (pointing at audience member) and there is racism in the institutions and I can – I don't know the answer for sure – but what I can say is that, you know speaking about people like Rasheed Araeen who was really critical of the institutions. You know... I feel like he became quite bitter about the whole art world here. And I think there is something to be said about local, you know, the local versus the global. Local artists often are not heard or given space because they raise critical issues about society and art institutions directly. And it's interesting, I noticed in my experience there are, I am getting a lot of work within Europe and outside of the UK and when you want to do something here people don't really want to hear what you have to say. And I think that it does come down to, maybe we're making political work and being critical. I think maybe it's different when there are economic considerations, there are other considerations but there is something to be said about, there is racism.

**Member of the audience 2:** I certainly get your point about getting opportunities in Europe because I graduated from Art College in 79 in Europe. Why I said that I didn't feel it was racism was because quite a lot of these artists like Ellen Gallagher, Donald Locke, Kara Walker, Wangechi Mutu... are brilliant artists. I want to see them. I'm glad they came. But I did feel why aren't we given those opportunities. So you see, it's complicated. And I said to myself: "maybe they're being backed by billionaires or something, and that doesn't happen to us." So I feel nervous about calling it racism, but certainly, and I was discussing this with a colleague this evening, there is a vicious classism or something operating in Britain, in the arts world which excludes us even more than we feel, for example in Europe or Africa or America. That's what I think about it.

**Rudy Loewe:** I guess to build on what Raju was saying as well though, in terms of the racism maybe part of it is you know it's, in terms of being a racialised artist or having racialised art is easier for institutions here to deal with the idea of this sort of foreign racism and being able to say: "Oh, well look by bringing in these black artists from America, look how racist America is!", without having to have something that's really affronting and local, you know.

**Raju Rage:** And then they can send them back and not deal with it.

**Raisa Kabir:** I mean it's interesting because we were at the V&A at that talk which was "Disseminating Black Identity" and the way they framed it, one gallery owner was like: "When we talk about Frank Bowling, we had to call him an American artist, and that's how we had to sell him".

Is there anyone else in the audience who wants to speak or comment?

**Member of the audience 3:** I would just like to say I think if we look at the background where Chris Ofili comes from, the educational background, that Steve [McQueen] comes from, I think there are a lot of institutions, my lecturer said to me: "if you want to be an artist, you can't stay in Derby, you can't stay in Nottingham, you can't stay locally. You have to stretch yourself, you know?" London has a huge art scene internationally. So I think it's much to do with the educational background and the kind of I guess the profiling of the universities these artists are coming from. Because if we look at like 30 years ago, when they had the erm... in Goldsmiths when they had the, you know, the Young British Artists coming out it was also the institution they were coming out of. It wasn't just about them being great artists but having a platform of support, the institution. My friend who is in Newcastle, she's gone to the MoMA to do an internship so it's also about having a platform, I think and the classism I do agree with because there is a lot of classism within institutions, you know, the Tate gets backing from the public. They get their funding from the public but also from the amount of publicity you know. Because there are a lot of great artists out there that don't get the publicity. You know what I mean. There's lots of people sweating everyday, trying to pay for their studio space and they're not getting that backing. So I think it's also a lot of people coming from say a rough area and they're almost scared maybe to kind of go for this opportunity. Say "MoMA! No way! Not me!" Do you know what I mean? "That's not gonna happen!" I think it's about putting confidence and giving young people and artists the platform. You know and these institutions need to support artists more, these institutions need to reach out. It's these kind of things it's collectives that help create a platform for people to have dialogues and platform for artists to actually voice out. So I think it is really a thing about your educational background that really has to do with what institutions, because at the end of the day, they do see a form. Before they see you, they see your application, before they see you they see what's on the paper. So if what you've got on the paper reads well, you have a sort of advantage, I guess than other people. That is my opinion.

**Raisa Kabir:** Yeah, that's really great.

**Evan Ifekoya:** Keith, do you want to respond?

**Member of the audience 4:** I just want to kind of put together a few things from this evening. Because I feel like I'm in a bit of a time warp and it's not in a negative

sense, well maybe, because I remember having these conversations and thinking a bit like you know, where is the support and how am I gonna work as a black artist when I used to work more in the live art arena and I'm kind of really surprised I'm hearing artists that are a few years after myself saying there's no support, we haven't got this, because I remember saying those things and I just think that's shocking, to be completely honest. And I think that I kind of hear what you're saying as well the whole thing about education... I went to Nottingham Trent, I had some really good lecturers, I was really supported, I came out, I did work, I networked, I found people, and I did my thing and I think more than anything I want to say be yourselves, do what you've got to do, but I kind of, I'm really intrigued as to where is the arts council? I read not too long ago and put it on my facebook page because they were saying we need to support you know, diversity, artists, and my question is where is the representation here today? And perhaps you need to use your voice to speak to them and knock on the doors saying, "This is what we need, can you bring it please because we want to say what we have got to say." And that's just what I want to throw in.

**Raisa Kabir:** That's great.... I know I went to a London institution and a lot of times when we were having our conversations as Collective Creativity it was about institutional racism, you know, Chelsea Fine Art didn't have a single home black student on their course of fine art but I know that **Sonia Boyce** went to Wolverhampton, was it? You went to Nottingham... so maybe, like, a few years ago, 30 years ago or whatever, you went to a school in the Midlands or the North and it still worked out, it was still okay but a lot of institutions can be really harsh. Who wanted to respond? Was it Keith?

**Keith Piper:** I think this is an incredibly important conversation. The conversation around how the art world is constructed, how, as artists, we navigate or don't navigate our way through the various gateways, etc. I'm kind of caught between understanding how important that conversation is. I'm actually feeling a little depressed by that conversation at the same time, even though it's so important simply because whilst we're having this conversation it seems that once again we're actually not excavating down to the actual themes and ethics of the work itself. And in a sense there is a really interesting thing raised here around the sort of aesthetic and conceptual dialogue which takes place between artists here, artists in the States, artists in the Caribbean, artists in Europe, and the way that has actually shaped the way that these histories have evolved. That's a really interesting conversation! It was an interesting conversation in the 80s because those were the moments when we began to become aware of those external artists, it was interesting in terms of the dialogue around the Anglophone Diaspora, which is here, the Caribbean and the States and so it's really a fantastic thing that we're seeing these shows that we can be exposed to and all this work. I really would like a conversation about what is the

work doing and how does it then feedback to what young artists are doing here and how does it feed this history? Because in a sense, all of this is dependent on the work becoming more and more interesting. And the work becomes more interesting by building on the stuff that has already been made.

**Raisa Kabir:** Definitely. Yes, concentrating on the work is entirely paramount and I think what we were talking about it earlier today is that, I don't know, students in art schools now, even after I've been to art school and going back, and speaking to the students there, there is a resurgence in, I don't know, something is going on, people want to have these conversations. Moving on to our next question, which is: **How do we want our art to be framed, as artists? – Because it seems to be very broad, you know, as POC artists, as Queer artists, as Qtipoc artists... We're making the work that we want to make. What happens when galleries or curators contextualise it in a different way or reframe it in a way that you don't want it to. How do we want our art to be framed, as artists?**

Rudy and Raju want to start?

**Rudy Loewe:** I guess one of the things that it makes me think about is that there is a lot of young artists at the moment who are working in universities and who are recent graduates who are kind of taking hold of this idea of being a Qtipoc artist and making work around that particular identity. And maybe... What is that in the context of Black LGBT artists who have already been working and have been established? How does that differ and how has the conversation kind of moved on? That is what it makes me think about.

**Raju Rage:** Oh, is it me?

**Rudy Loewe:** Yeah.

**Raju Rage:** Oh! I didn't realise. Okay. Yeah, for me, I would just like to re-question what "art" is and how we define art because I feel like a lot of people get left out of the art industry or the art world and the kind of work that they're making might be different to the kind of conventional sense of what art is. So I would like to, I guess for me, I would like to re-evaluate what that is. Because I make work that I don't necessarily want to be in a gallery setting. I do public interruptions into public spaces and you know, is that considered art? Or is that considered activism? You know, what is that and how do I then show it in a gallery? But then, you know, there's lots of other people making different kinds of art using the Internet, showing their work online, so for me, I guess that is the question that it's raised for me.

**Raisa Kabir:** Yes, the problem is also when your work is essentialised and different parts of your identity become erased. Or people literally just put work in a certain... ticked box and sort of leave it there and say: "this is black art. This is separate to the rest of the art world." I don't know whether Said, would you like to talk anymore?

**Said Adrus:** Yes, I think I welcome a couple of points raised here by the panel. I feel that after so many years, I think that art in itself was the kind of debate around the early days of the 80s when we were talking more about the politics and not the actual artwork and I feel that somehow today it's very important that the work itself has to be good quality-wise. At least in discussing what we're trying to do now. And rather than get bogged down too much with issues about racism or whatever, that exists! It's not to undermine or underplay. There's a very complex network in terms of operating as a visual artist or any kind of visual person or creative generally, in a lot of places, the UK, Europe, the States... Today we're facing with this sort of star system. Maybe it always was there but it's more prominent now. So that the art schools... I have taught at art schools here. I taught part time even at Trent many years ago and in Norway and Switzerland, so you know, I do kind of now and again teach at art schools. Lately I'm not quite sure of the latest development but in some ways in art schools, when I was there, there was hardly any talk, I mean the time was different then in terms of how you practice outside when you leave that course, or kind of institution. Of course there are more opportunities, there are more frameworks today, but it's much more competitive as well. And in my case, talking personally, I could do work, what you would call Art Povera which is really cheap even today! But I'm just saying, in those days maybe I didn't really worry about making money from my paintings and maybe the living conditions were cheaper. I was in Nottingham for 10 years, I think I produced something interesting and I was quite happy with it rather than being in a bigger city. There might be more opportunities in New York and in London but it was much more competitive and I avoided that. Maybe it's partly due that I used to live in Europe, in a small country and decentralised metropolis. It's not a metropolis, Switzerland! And the other thing is that somebody mentioned something about Europe. My experience in Germany or Switzerland, Italy... I don't know, there are regional towns and cities that have got some commercial galleries much more than British cities like Birmingham or Manchester. They are public institutions in Germany, in Frankfurt, in Koln, it's much more decentralised the visual arts practice. And Munich... It's not only Berlin or Koln that's important, that might have shows! And Italian cities are like that. So I think in London everything is on a focus. It's a very much kind of centralised mentality. Maybe it's something historical, due to politics or sort of... So that in itself filters down to the practice of the artist. The colleges might be all, you know, there are good colleges all over the country in the UK but the infrastructures vary. So anyway, that kind of has an impact on how you practice and that's talking from personal experience.

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah! And I think as well to kind of touch on that and also on Raisa's question on how do we want our art to be framed and also what you're saying about is this a question of what is art? I think actually it's more kind of how do we position ourselves. Because I feel like Art is you know, that's kind of an existential question! Because actually how do we want our work to be positioned? You know,

I think we have to be quite active or kind of have agency in how we want to position our works, and I don't know! Can it be?... Can we leave it up to somebody else to determine whether what we do is art? You know, I think that has to be our own choice and that has to be a kind of active positioning. And also sometimes it can be taken away from us, that choice, about where we get to go, where we get to sit. And I also think that you know, today I think that, people have kind of touched on people like Steve McQueen, Chris Ofili, who actually when they were coming out, they made active decisions to not position themselves in relation to the black arts movement. They very consciously didn't want to be connected with that and I think that actually has something to do with their fame! I would say, actually. Because they actively took this separate stand and wanted to see themselves as you know, emerging in isolation, which for me is kind of problematic and that's partly why we do this work. We don't want to see ourselves in isolation. But actually I think that you know, it can do something to you, when you make that decision.

**Rudy Loewe:** I guess as well, looking at, you know, something that Said was saying about how hard it is especially in some parts of the country now just to get by as an artist. How does that process change the way that people want to be framed as artists, whatever that means? You know, people strategically frame themselves in a way because they know that they're going to be making more money if they do that. And how, you know, what is the effect of the politics of people's art when people are framing themselves in this way where they think: "Okay this is gonna be the most beneficial thing to my career, because if I frame myself in this context then it means that I'm gonna make more money."

**Raisa Kabir:** Oh, yeah there's a question over there.

**Member of the audience 5:** So I found it quite interesting when you talked about Chris Ofili distancing himself from the Black Arts movement because I feel like since sort of the YBAs, and Saatchi and all that, it kind of made people go "that's what the art world is about." That kind of hyper-capitalistic, post-Thatcher sort of thing. And it's made it all very... I remember in my... I studied at Brighton University and I think in the whole 3 years there was only two people of colour on the course. Since then I've noticed how the scenes that were made from that university and that course have just sort of, really worked with that post-Saatchi culture to help each other up and get as a scene and have it very much Southern, very much in London, living in Dalston and all that. You know... I don't know. I just found that kind of interesting and I thought it might be an interesting thing to talk about.

**Raisa Kabir:** Certainly this idea of a nuanced or a covert politics, or something that is kind of under the surface that doesn't speak out or isn't very explicit in its politics. As you were saying, the hyper-capitalist, neo liberal way of looking at art as you know, a very commercial product. I guess, you know, one thing is when we make art as a product of healing or a product of surviving.

Are there any other points the audience would like to chip in? Yeah, this person and then this person. And anyone else who hasn't spoken before, you are welcome to.

**Member of the audience 6:** I just wanted to chip in quickly on Chris Ofili's behalf. Because I keep trying to see but I don't see that he was positioning himself in any way. His work is explicitly black; he's chosen to live in Trinidad...

**Said Adrus:** Who's that?

**Keith Piper:** Chris Ofili.

**Member of the audience 6:** ... so that's not someone who is not racially positioning himself away from identity.

**Keith Piper:** I never... I mean, the argument, which I made, the argument, which I was making absolutely, is that if you look at the work, very specifically, you know, it's clearly a conjuring with a black aesthetics and always has been.

**Member of the audience 6:** I'm supporting what you're saying. Let's just take him out of that equation.

**Keith Piper:** Well, it's all of those artists in a sense! I mean all of them are dealing in a way with black subject matters. And in terms of Steve McQueen, even though in a lot of his works a lot of black art has been there, however it hasn't dealt overtly with themselves as art objects. In terms of his film, the latest one, you know, the greatest piece of work ever produced by a black artist at any time? In terms of *Twelve Years a Slave*, you can't get anymore of a black piece of work than that! Absolutely! It's just incredible. So in a sense how he has very intelligently positioned himself in a place where he could then make the most powerful statement that's possible to make. You know, because he could access the money...

**Member of the audience 6:** I just want to flag that up whereas people like Dinos and Jake Chapman whom I also when to college with and taught with, clearly were just running after the money. So that's the point.

**Said Adrus:** Who are they?

**Keith Piper:** I don't know if that's true.

**Said Adrus:** Anyway you know *Camilla Versus* said the YBA was Young Black Artists. (Laughing)

**Keith Piper:** Young Black Artists! (Laughing)

**Said Adrus:** Quite interesting. Yeah, the YBA phenomenon. I heard that there was some English artist from London who had to go to the States because the YBA was so strong in London. And unless you come from a certain college or a certain period, certain artists found it very difficult. But that's a different issue as well!

**Raisa Kabir:** But I guess we're still talking about men here, you know... We need to talk about some of the women artists or the people who had more of a Queer perspective, the ones who get left out of that kind of you know... At the forefront of your mind, these are black artists, you know, if we're only gonna be talking about, you know, Chris Ofili, Yinka Shonibare and Steve McQueen, I think that you know, multiple identities are people who you know, have a politics that's centred on so many different fronts and that gets lost. If what gets pigeonholed as "that is just black art" then what if they're talking about gender? What if they're talking about sexuality? What if they're talking about, you know, class? And disability? These are things that I think are really important to talk about as well.

**Keith Piper:** Yeah! I don't think any of us would argue that. What I would argue against that is that we were speaking about those artists because those are the artists that's the Art mainstream...

**Raisa Kabir:** That's why the mainstream still picks that up.

**Keith Piper:** and that was that conversation.

**Raisa Kabir:** I wasn't criticising what we were talking about here, I was just making like these are the things... straight away these are the names that come up! I just wanted to move the conversation along towards multiple identities.

Evan do you want to talk about that? Or Raju?

**Raju Rage:** Yeah, I was just gonna say but you basically said it. You know, the fact that me as a person... I talk personally about myself. I'm an artist who makes work about race, I also make work about gender, I also make work about, you know, lots of different things. And sometimes I feel like, okay, I have to kind of only fix on one of those things and I can't. It's like leaving parts of yourself at the door and I really struggle with that as an artist. And I think we talk about that a lot in terms of, you know, we being invited to spaces as PoC artists but then talking about being Queer or talking about sexuality as something that gets erased or...

**Raisa Kabir:** And then the work is misinterpreted.

**Raju Rage:** Yeah. That's happened to us.

**Raisa Kabir:** Someone saying, "Oh, your work is just about Muslim women." No it's *not!*

**Evan Ifekoya:** And I think that, to kind of continue on with that, because I guess it's something that I feel like I'm noticing anyway amongst our contemporaries is that there is a lot of really great kind of people of colour artists in collectives working and operating and I'm talking really just specifically about London you know but what I'm noticing in terms of the media representation of those artists and collectives is that it's those who focus on solely on exploring their racial or interrogating

or deconstructing racial identity, when quite often what they're critiquing is the lack of intersectionality in the wider arts discourse. Yet, when it comes to their own you know, kind of interrogation is actually not that intersectional. You know and this kind of goes back to what we were saying about either the lack of cross analysis in relation to gender and sexuality and ability and things like that... Yeah, I don't know, it's not necessarily a question, it's something that I'm noticing and I feel like there is a tension there.

**Rudy Loewe:** I guess as well that feeds into what becomes the sellable point.

**Evan Ifekoya:** Oh! Claudette!

**Raisa Kabir:** Claudette! Come and sit down!

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yes, please come and sit down.

[Claudette Johnson arrives]

**Raisa Kabir:** I'll introduce Claudette Johnson. She was one of the artists part of the Black Arts Movement. She studied here in Nottingham?

**Claudette Johnson:** No I studied at Wolverhampton.

**Raisa Kabir:** Ah, Wolverhampton!

**Evan Ifekoya:** You were part of an exhibition here at Trent, weren't you? At the gallery here?

**Keith Piper:** At the Midland Group!

**Claudette Johnson:** Yes!

**Keith Piper:** The Midland Group Exhibition.

**Evan Ifekoya:** Do you want to maybe introduce yourself briefly?

Everybody laughs.

**Raisa Kabir:** I think she just needs to sit down and get settled!

**Claudette Johnson:** (Laughs) That's fine!

**Raju Rage:** Shall we recap?

**Raisa Kabir:** Okay. So for, Claudette, we shared a film on Collective Creativity. Which, I think you've seen. And we've just been doing some discussion the global and the local, looking at who gets to frame the discourse on Black Art, trying to sort of foster on what's happening in Britain and the British art narrative and we've just been discussing about how do we want our art to be framed, as artists, and again, trying to get away from essentialising of it being "this is just black art", "this is just

feminist art” or “this is just Queer art”, and kind of try to get those threads together. And the kind of difficulties, some people have done really well and their art is specifically about race and that’s good, really great and some people, parts of themselves have been erased or had been pigeonholed in a certain way.

I wanted to bring a question of, I guess, the archive. As Collective Creativity, we started this research project into looking at the Black Arts Movement because it had been missing from our art education. I know, from speaking to some people, it was part of their art education but for some people it was just a one-hour lesson. You know, and that’s it. That’s just not really good enough. But again, about the archive, about searching for some sort of representation something to kind of like, reflect the struggles and the politics that you want to see from art, that you don’t see in the mainstream. Of course there are some people who have done well in the mainstream but as we were just saying before, they tend to be men. Even if they are people of colour. So yeah, again, searching... we’re searching for Queer artists of colour in Britain and not just being about America, and we’re searching for a radical politics. People who wore their politics, it was in their arts, it was nuanced, it was on the sleeve but there was a sense that they had something to say. And it wasn’t just about this neo hyper capitalist, neo liberal, commercialised art world, which has always existed, don’t get me wrong, but that just seems to be really dominant right now. There seems to be a different flavour from what we were uncovering that was the 80s and the 90s and all this great stuff that was being written, all these exhibitions that people were self organising and again that kind of collective, people being in a movement, in a collective. And the solidarity that brings and that’s why, you know, working in a collective as Collective Creativity has brought us a lot of, I guess, power. Power for ourselves. And you know, having people to support each other with...

**Raju Rage:** And also growing...

**Raisa Kabir:** Growing and also nourishing and healing, and that being part of the conversation rather than celebrity big name artists, that just being this one person who got it and did it all by themselves. So that’s kind of where we’re at.

**Keith Piper:** So in a sense, well I think Claudette needs to come in. But I think that answers your question in terms of art framing. I mean, you have done your own framing or in the process of doing your own framing, which is so important now in terms of art practice and in terms of the kinds of tools that artists have to do that framing themselves. We are no longer producing just the raw material to be framed by someone else, to be framed by an artist or a curator or a critic. Artists now are far more able to be active in terms of frame. I think you guys are a real example of that.

**Claudette Johnson:** Yeah, I was thinking about that framing question on the way here and thinking that... well when I was part of the Wolverhampton Young Black Artists which is what the Black Art group was before it became the Black Art Group,

the idea of coming together as a group was because, that we do share some ideas about the importance of talking in your work about the black experience, the experience of being in art college as the sole black person in your year and so on. And the question of framing the work, I think was part of when we defined ourselves as a group; we were trying to frame the work in that process. (To Keith) weren't we wouldn't you say?

**Keith Piper:** Yes, the conversations and the conventions. There were two conventions that we did and also the symposiums...

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah the Pan African connection?

**Claudette Johnson:** Yeah, so I suppose I feel that you kind of move things along in terms of being really, really vocal in writing and speaking about your work more volubly than I think we did at the time. I think at the time it was a lot of just about getting together, making the work and sometimes getting it out, not worrying too much about how it was going to be talked about or defined. And over the past 30 years I can see that that's created not gaps exactly but it's created a space for people to define work in ways that maybe we wouldn't have chosen to define it.

**Keith Piper:** Could be but the Black Art Group - the BLK art group was really a really small part of what was a much wider generational thing and the people in that movement was extremely vocal. If you look at the kinds of things for instance that the Black Audio Film Collective was saying. Lubaina and Sonia and all those kinds of artists who were very good at saying...

**Claudette Johnson:** Yeah, I thought I was saying very narrowly about that group...

**Keith Piper:** Yeah because the Black Arts group was only 3 or 4, 5 people...

**Claudette Johnson:** Yeah, you, Eddie Chambers, myself...

**Said Adrus:** Yeah but the first Black Arts convention had so many different artists. Wasn't it the first? Across the board. And black communities...

**Keith Piper:** Yeah, it was very interesting...

**Said Adrus:** I'm kind of interested and not quite sure, I might have gotten this wrong there, is there something called Black Art now? I mean, in some ways, a lot of issues are raised you know... From your points of view as a collective, did you come across that? You kind of defined it a little bit now and again...

**Raisa Kabir:** I mean one of the biggest, the first sessions that we did, at the Tate, I think it was, which Keith attended, we were looking at then, we were looking at now. What does the Black Arts Movement mean to artists today now, and that was one of the biggest questions. We don't want to get bogged down in what is considered black and what is considered PoC or Person of Colour, but that tends to be the

framework that we're using now and I guess people are looking at politics not from just a single issue, it's about, kind of, I don't know, identity as a whole. You know, we're talking about economics, class, disability, feminism, gender, and, you know, an intersection of politics and not just like one lens.

I think there's someone who wants to comment in the conversation (pointing at audience). You had your hand up. We'll get you the mic. Thank you.

**Member of the audience 7:** Yeah, I just want to say I was sitting here thinking: is there a difference between black art and black artists? Is there a difference, because a black artist who may not particularly work that directly overtly racial, or directly overtly gendered... are they included in this movement? Is it about giving a space for black artists or is it about giving a space for black art? Does that make any sense? Yes? No?

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah, yeah, yeah! I feel that I can kind of touch on that a little bit because I think that's something that we're constantly grappling with and actually I know that for me going through art school I found myself really at odds with that tension with this idea of being a black artist. I would definitely separate black art aesthetics from what it is to be a black artist because I think that to kind of take... I think is a position! I think again, coming back to this idea of positioning yourself, I think it's an active choice to say "I'm gonna present myself, I'm gonna frame myself as a black artist." I mean, there's plenty of artists working today whose work draws on black aesthetics in the sense that they might paint black people but I don't think they would describe themselves as black artists, do you know what I mean? I think there's a real distinction there and I think that's why... something that I've written down here is actually "to be a black artist, is that inherently political?" I don't know if it is because I think you have to make that choice whether you want to engage with the politics of what it is to exist in a racialised body. I think it's an active choice or not to put that in your work and to interrogate that. In aesthetic terms it has to be a choice. Definitely.

**Raisa Kabir:** Just going back to that V&A talk... someone was talking about that their tutor was telling them that their work was too subjective, "you need to make your work less black", and that person was a black person but didn't identify their work as being black art. They were just making work about themselves. This idea of as racialised artists, we're never (free from that position)... people can tell us that, our tutors, or galleries, or whatever, institutions, or the arts council: "oh this is too political, this is too (much) about your identity", but that's who I am! I'm never gonna get away from that. That's a double-edged sword.

There is a question just at the front here! It is just a point and then the person with the purple hair.

**Member of the audience 8:** Oh it's just... first of all, very reassuring to see this discussion happening here at Nottingham Contemporary but with a new collective of thinkers. Of consciousness, whether it's black consciousness or all the other terms you defined, with the old guard...

**Keith Piper:** (Laughs.) Very old guard!

**Member of the audience 8:** Actually, there's no such a thing because actually, the concept of what we're talking about here is very much a conversation as trying to define or re-define. And I just think that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a moment where we're constantly re-defining and being undefined. We're having a very undefined definition of what Blackness is. We're drawn into this mass media, post-black even, but the issues and the points of action still remain the same. Inequality within black communities seems to be still there. The shootings and killings in America seem to be prevalent. Police brutality here I'm sure it continues. Etc. There's disharmony still. So for me today, to sit here, sitting between the ages of Keith and the collective here, although I may look more ancient than any of you...

**Keith Piper:** Not at all! I though you were the same age as them! (Pointing at the Collective) (Laughs)

**Member of the audience 8:** ... I have to say it's a nice equation but I think this whole thing is about the journey for me. It's the journey that we're on. And what the new collective is learning, because I don't think there's that many collectives that are talking about consciousness around the idea of Black Arts so I just wanted to make that point that it's important that this conversation is happening, particularly in this space here, in Nottingham. There's much more to say.

**Raisa Kabir:** Thank you so much for your contribution.

**Said Adrus:** Somebody else?

**Raisa Kabir:** The person with the purple hair.

**Member of the audience 9:** "The person with the purple hair"... (Laughs)

I just wanted to say that, a bit what you were talking about, I think work is always racialised, no matter what. It cannot *not* be racialised. I think there is a temptation to see work that's produced by white people as being default human, yeah, and...

**Raisa Kabir:** Neutral?

**Raju Rage:** Normative?

**Raisa Kabir:** Universal...?

(Laughs)

**(Member of the audience 9:** Exactly! All of those things. But it's white art. It's not called white art. That's what I call it.

**Raisa Kabir:** Completely. I'll be really interested in seeing when white artists start talking about race in their work, whether that work is racialised as white. I'm still waiting for that. Well, I'm not waiting! Anyway... (Laughs) This will really...

**Evan Ifekoya:** Keith?

**Keith Piper:** Yeah, I just said that I've seen artists who are doing that now.

**Raisa Kabir:** Yeah, Yeah! I have as well. (it's just not across the board yet)

**Others agreeing:** Yeah the Critical whiteness workshops

**Keith Piper:** Yeah there's a lot of stuff around whiteness and critical whiteness and other kinds of subject positions. I think we're in an interesting moment, in terms of that.

**Said Adrus:** I was just thinking about one thing, a couple of things you might have mentioned regarding archives. Because in some ways the film that we saw earlier, of course it was in Preston, in the research centre? Led by Professor Lubaina Himid. So in a sense from that point, and particular perspective to the 90s we're talking about, and this has been mentioned just a while ago, that the different stories that were present then, and of course they are across the time and now. There's this dialogue. So the definition issue was even there, so in a way it's interesting that from your investigation, from your film and your interviews, it's a very important aspect of this excavation. And talking to Professor Lubaina Himid... so in a sense it's the one way in which things are catalogued and articulated and people have access to that reference material. So in a way that is in a way, in the process. It's one of the ways through an individual or collective effort or institutional effort that has happened. So in a way, unless there is that kind of position, does that mean that we have to have different positions in different places like that? I mean the material can be disseminated but in terms of the archive in one way and the passing of the information.

**Raju Rage:** In our archiving? Is that what you mean?

**Said Adrus:** Yeah, it can happen in different levels and in different ways. I think it touches on the issues of definitions and understanding of that particular period, not only then and now, but in a kind of juxtaposition.

**Raisa Kabir:** And then the point is it's not that you can't say then and now, but really, everything is kind of moving and evolving and overlapping and it's a graduation and the fact is you guys are still making work, it's not like you've finished, or retired, it's not as if you're handing over the baton.

The other thing is that access to these histories, access to these archives, the impact that has on young artists of colour. So I'm just going to move on to our third and final question which is **how do we sustain our practices during university and beyond?** – That's about a survival toolkit we're mentioning the cross generational conversations which are happening here. Yeah... How do we sustain our practices during university and beyond? I know a lot of us have struggled in isolation at universities being one or two, one of two people of colour in our arts institutions and then the struggle after that, which I think, I don't know, I want to change that. I want to see how people can move forward or move away from saying "Oh my institution is really racist, this happened to me..." – What can we do to sustain that practice and beyond? After that? Collective working, that kind of thing...

**Rudy Loewe:** I just wanted to say something about something that Claudette had mentioned which relates as well to this idea of accessibility and how we sustain our practices. Which was, Claudette had said something about our generation being more vocal now and I was thinking about social media and technology and in what ways do those things make it possible to be more vocal? Do those forms of technology make it more possible for certain kinds of information to be accessible and accessible to whom? Because I work with a lot of marginalised young people who don't have computers at home, for example who don't have the Internet. And so the kinds of conversations we have, are sometimes are really difficult because they are not necessarily accessing the wealth of information, which is online, where these conversations are happening. And then I look to see some young artists who are on Tumblr who are having these amazing dialogues and are finding the space to have these dialogues for themselves. But how do we navigate it so we can take those dialogues also *off* the Internet. Especially when you think about it in a cross generational context, because maybe, for whatever reason, there's lots of different people who wouldn't be online. And so how do we work across generations but also across different technologies and geographically as well. How do we bring all of those things in together to try and sustain the conversation?

**Raju Rage:** That's a really good point Rudy. I guess just to follow up on that, I think the whole creation of the collective and us coming together was through the isolation that you mentioned. And also this erasure of history and legacy that we have been unarchiving and doing this work, I think that makes, like you were saying Claudette, makes us more vocal about our work and what we're doing and how we're organising and I think we do that because we have to, but then we're also reflective. It's like learning from uncovering what you're all doing. So it's more important for us to also document and archive our work and use technology and use social media/mediums but also wanting to have these conversations. Because I think we just really wanted to have a cross-generational conversation to really find out how the Black Arts Movement was depicted, co-opted, whatever words you want to

use, and what actually happened, to hear from you, from the artists, about what happened. So I think we're conscious of the "younger generation" or whatever, the future generations and how we want to unarchive and archive at the same time, right?

**Keith Piper:** I just have a quick point to make about this thing, the online domain. I think it's a real issue. It's a real issue still that there are people, groups, age groups, etc, who don't have access to this online domain and we need to think around strategies of exposing folk to the kind of rich array of stuff which is there. However, I just think now in terms of one of the modules I run, the first thing which I ask young artists to do is bring in a URL of a website which influences them. Just to kind of get the conversation going. And I've been astounded by the kind of range of things in terms of visual arts practices which these young artists are into. They're seeing all of this stuff, which is completely outside of the radar of what is the mainstream commercial... they're bringing in all kinds of websites. "What's that?!" So this whole idea that there is this really rich exchange, a visual exchange happening out there that is online, I am optimistic because more and more folk are getting online now. It was always a huge issue from the start that this was going to be an elite space, which it still is, of course, however, it's also becoming more and more ubiquitous. I'm just really fascinated by the way that is working now, it's really spread, what the young folk are looking at. And also the ability of young people to place their content online for other folk to look at. I think that's really important.

**Claudette Johnson:** There is a... My thoughts about how we can sustain our practice, particularly during university, I tend to think about the efforts I made to try and locate some kind of art practice that talked about black experience that I could relate to and I remember thinking at the time that the US artists that I could find in the library at the time, I didn't feel very connected to the work they were doing, the work of Robert Johnson and others but when I read people like Tony Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, I thought that spoke directly to my experience and that kicked off a whole stream of work that was linked to the foreground in the black experience in the way they had. And what I found was that at university, when the tutors weren't able to talk to me about the content of the work, they would talk about the form but not the content. And that echoed again when you said you're talking about identity. And I found that what they would agree to do was to bring in, I think one tutor was married to a black woman, who was a poet, so she came in and she talked to me about my work. It was a really valuable discussion and I really appreciated it. So I think seek out lecturers and tutors from any discipline whose work speaks to you in some way.

**Raju Rage:** Should we mention the workshop we did yesterday?

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yes!

**Keith Piper:** Yes!

**Said Adrus:** Sorry, someone wants to say something? (Pointing at audience)

**Raisa Kabir:** Yes, there's someone waiting here.

**Member of the audience 10:** I was going to take the conversation in a slightly different way. Carrying on the debate, it's quite interesting to hear the conversation between the two ends of the table go in some ways. To some extent a lot of the frustrations you have about showing your work and it all is the same frustrations that people would have had in the 80s. The New Art Exchange and other galleries have taken years and years and years to develop. You just have to get on with it. That's the nature of the work in some ways. It is a shame though. There isn't something like a black Bell Hooks for this country, there isn't those writers and stuff but there is so much opportunity to get work out there. Now it's much easier than it used to be in some ways. But the conversation and the point I wanted to make is that one of the interesting things about the 80s to a whole lot of us was that you talked about the 80s being a conjuncture point when the generation born in this country talked to the generation who came from the colonial lands. And there is that meeting point between the people who want to build a life here, making that connection to the past. And there is something that hasn't happened between the second generation now talking to the younger. There is that conversation. Maybe this is the start of that type of conversation. But that is the conversation that hasn't really developed now, 20 years later.

**Evan Ifekoya:** And I wonder if part of that is the fact that okay, there are many people of colour going to university but there is no more people of colour studying in arts and in turn becoming professors, lecturers, you know. Because I feel that, like we said, learning about the Black Arts Movement was not part of our curriculum and something I am really interested in thinking through is the racism embedded within the arts curriculum. And I think that is in part and parcel because most art lecturers and professors are white. There are so few... well, if I can kind of refer just to London, in the central London art colleges, I don't think there are any black professors other than Keith. Okay there's Sonia [Boyce], there is like a few but in terms of the practice, the arts practice, there is very few.

**Said Adrus:** I think, I mean, I've come across a few. I've been to colleges. But I think there is a tendency. I don't know exactly, if those so-called artists of colour lecturers were teaching, how would they feel? In a sense it's kind of: where does one align one's work? In terms of your own practice. And another within that, another kind of setting, I might be the wrong person to comment only because I am not really fully aligned with the colleges at the moment, so in a way, in a sense, it's an interesting debate. I kind of remember when I was a student that I hardly had any black artists coming to talk. I can't remember, to be honest with you! So, in a way, some of the arguments then would be that there aren't any! And from certain exhibitions and certain writings over the years, there were people practicing. So in a sense that sort

of dilemma, ironically, still exists today. It's quite pivotal in terms of, not only with archives, writings and certain exhibitions that have taken place over the years, there is this debate about the kind of art school and the position in terms of lecturing and the staffing and the sensitivity towards issues of this subject matter.

**Keith Piper:** Just quickly. It is an issue; it is a massive issue in terms of the numbers of people of colour or whatever...

**Raisa Kabir:** Teaching, full stop, at university...let alone about art (education)

**Keith Piper:** It's going to become more of an issue because the number of teaching jobs is going to reduce.

**Said Adrus:** Really?

**Keith Piper:** You know, all of us are expecting our P45s any day now...

(Laughs)

**Keith Piper:** Simply because of the way the Art is funded, that art schools are funded. There is however, a very interesting project, which is just about to be started, led by Sonia Boyce. And a part of that is looking at diversity within the curriculum. So I think that is going to be really important. We all should keep our ears to the ground about that.

**Raisa Kabir:** Is that at UAL? At Chelsea?

**Keith Piper:** UAL stroke Middlesex. Some of it, at least.

**Raisa Kabir:** There's a couple of questions (looking at audience).

**Member of the audience 11 (Janna Graham):** I just wanted to ask a question in terms of survival. Claudette, you were talking about the relationship between literature and sort of looking to literature. I am also wondering about the two specific moments of now and the 80s and the relationship to political and social movements that are taking race as a central issue or the intersection of race and other kinds of identity as intersectional, political movements. So I'm kind of interested to hear a little bit more about that kind of moment of the 80s because I think there is a kind of feeding off each other that happens when there is a kind of broader social consciousness. I'm also wondering about Collective Creativity. Is your practice fuelled by that to some extent, or is it separate from that? I'm kind of interested to what extent do you see yourselves as part of a wider social movement and political movement, or as artists kind of engaging those issues separate or on the side of those movements?

**Raisa Kabir:** That's really great. I mean this idea of like, I don't know, sometimes I call myself an art activist or you know, are you an artist or an activist? The is a wider

social movement definitely going on and I've definitely been part of the "Black Lives Matter" type of things and other things that are going on with housing protests in London and not feeling that these things need to be separate at all. I don't know if anyone wants to come back to that?

**Keith Piper:** Likewise. In the 80s when I was here, when we were here, it was at the same moment as there was a whole range of things like the Peace Camp, the Greenham Common, the Miners Strike, all those guys, and so it wasn't just us. We had students who were going off to Greenham Common; we had folk who were engaged with the stuff around the Miners Strike. We had folk who were engaged in political actions across the board. It was that kind of particular sort of moment. It was interesting to then compare it to this moment. In a sense there is a new engagement with...

**Said Adrus:** Like Rock against Racism!

**Keith Piper:** Yes! There was Rock against Racism! (Laughs) You went yo Leeds? You were too drunk to remember... (laughs) We went up together!

**Said Adrus:** Yes, in the national bus or whatever.

**Keith Piper:** He forgets all these things.

(Laughs. Indistinctive talk)

**Said Adrus:** Crazy times

**Evan Ifekoya:** I mean... For me, I don't feel...

(Keith Piper drops his water)

**Said Adrus:** Really cool experience!

**Keith Piper:** I'm spilling stuff all over the place!

(Laughs. Indistinctive talk)

**Said Adrus:** I think it's really interesting. Does it have to be that one has to be aligned with a group today? Then it wasn't necessary. It helps, of course, and it's great to be in a collective because we as artists or writers generally tend to work in isolation and that in itself is a debate which has kind of been raised a little bit about what happens post-college, do you know what I mean? After. In a way we are kind of in a setting, which is sort of, we might use the word, comfortable. In terms of the art college when we're studying, etc. Then you're in a collective, you've got your space, you're always fighting for a little bigger space or whatever and when you come out the reality is harsher and it always has been and always will be for individuals no matter where you come from. Your race, your politics or whatever. And even if you have money, let's assume, it's harder to maybe create you know, the

work. In a sense this idea of isolation and collectivity and dialogue, I think that's really important because in a way college really has a kind of structure and now you have to create your own structures and objectives. That in itself is a challenge, I think.

**Raisa Kabir:** And one of the biggest things is because... I'm going to let Raju talk... (Laughs). I want to link that up together! About you know, the fiercer the cuts get, in our Tory government, we are looking at wider social things, but the effect in our art schools, you know, fees going up, resources going down, student spaces disappearing and again, the art schools are not so much this "safe cushion". But then obviously when you leave university, even if you are in a collective...

**Raju Rage:** Can I just say?...

**Raisa Kabir:** Yes!

**Raju Rage:** Okay! So... Yes, I think coming out of university, the main issue, as an artist of color is resources. And I think that's probably why most people go to university and whether they get those resources or not is questionable. We've debated that. But I think when you come out it's about resources and I think connecting to wider social movements I think we have been community organisers. We organise spaces, we create platforms, we created a collective, we do residencies because we have to. So we're connected to activism or organising because of those reasons, to create space and carve space for ourselves. And I think for me, personally as an artist, resources is the biggest thing, and access to resources. And I think a lot of that then it comes down to class and all these other issues of accessibility and why people don't choose to make art, which is why I was raising the question of "what is art". Because I think a lot of people fall short of that and don't make work because they don't consider themselves artists or capable of making art, to get the resources. So for me it's about how can we gain resources and how can we get resources? Being a part of those wider social movements, it's really instrumental.

**Raisa Kabir:** Being radical outside of the institutions but within institutions, you know, how can we get out of them when we're in them? Did you want to come back?

**Rudy Loewe:** Can I say something?

**Raisa Kabir:** Yeah!

**Rudy Loewe:** But yeah, also I think that there is a problem around art as activism which then sometimes it takes these social issues, political issues and then putting them into certain spaces is like making them palatable. So for example, with Black Lives Matter, there has been a lot of Black Lives Matter artwork. On the one hand some of that has been really powerful and has been really useful for the movement but then at the same time, sometimes it becomes this consumable object. At what

point does that become a problem? When you can actually buy something that says Black Lives Matter on it?

**Raju Rage:** Commodification.

**Rudy Loewe:** What kind of power does that have behind it anymore? And I think that kind of exchange then between art and activism and trying to find the point at which, you know, is it useful to call art activism or at some point does it become a bit of a problem?

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah... I mean I think for me that's something I struggle with, this idea of art as a kind of activism and just to connect with what Raju was saying, I think we're all kind of connected and invested in what's going on but I know that for me personally, I'm not at the frontline everyday but that doesn't mean all these issues don't feed in, permeate the reason why I make my work, because they are. It's just that I channel my energies; I channel my political energies through my work. And that's also what, for me, is also important that I'm not directly hijacking the languages of what's going on but actually kind of transform or translate this in a different way because of these exact reasons that I think for me is a little problematic, I think. Because in a way whether it's a kind of financial capital, in a way you're kind of profiting of social capital, whatever you're profiting of. It's what's going on which for me I find a little ethically precarious. (Laughs)

**Keith Piper:** I've just got a quick resource question...

**Raisa Kabir:** That person has been waiting for a while to speak (pointing at audience)

**Member of the audience 12:** It was just really following on the question about sustainability and where you go as artists. I think it comes back to that kind of "No man is an island" so we are fed by society and the influence you have on people around you, your family and friends and the people or even institutions you engage with on a day to day basis. And I think there are still many issues to be addressed within the arts, clearly the black presence in gallery spaces and arts administration. There's loads of issues to be addressed and that shouldn't really be undermined. And then as for the individual artist, I think you get to a point where it's your passion what drives you forward. You find your own subject matter. But then it's always going to be driven by your passion to follow that subject matter.

**Raisa Kabir:** Did you want to speak? (Pointing at another member of the audience) Can you bring the mic over here?

**Member of the audience 13:** I'll quickly throw my two pence in. I may need your help Said. (Laughs)

**Said Adrus:** Yeah.

**Member of the audience 13:** At Radio Nottingham in the 80s I made features. I worked there. The features were mainstream. The subject matter. But they were thrown into Asian programs or non-white programs, non-mainstream programs because of my colour or whatever. And that was automatic. You know sometimes stuff got spun off but even when things were syndicated to World Service, they'd go into Indian or Asian. But in the States anything I did, nobody gave a damn about whether I was brown, black or whatever. You know when we did the thing at Westbeth it wasn't like you know "Hey this guy has made a movie"... Westbeth is a big art space in Manhattan and I showed some films I'd made there. You can call them Indie films. Said showed some work at the same time. There was never any thought about whether our background or our colour... I don't know how this contributes to everything that we've been talking about now but I just wanted to throw that in. And I know other guys you know, who have a brown or a black background in the States and... actually when I think about it I think about Said and I think about "Okay he is brown or black and he applies because he gets grants because he's brown or black" and I think in the States, I remember saying to him once, I don't know how this is relevant but again I'm going to throw it out there, "Man these guys are on the streets in SoHo selling their work for more than you are and they are not even artists, man!" So it's like, you make a bit of work. Who's buying it? I wonder if there is a background to a lot of these conversations here where I'm black or I'm brown and I feel it works in Europe like this from living on the continent as well as but especially here. You get a grant or you get a pass or whatever because you're brown or black but in my experience in the States, and I realise all my experiences are myopic, they are my experiences. Every brown, black or yellow or whatever person out there... you get your money for your work if there's somebody buying it, end of story.

**Said Adrus:** Maybe there were I think, in terms of... I saw a photograph, I mean, this is kind of one example of the Black Panther movement, but they, I mean, it's hard for me to comment on what was happening or on what's happening in terms of finance or grants in the States. It's very complex. But I think there were places where, I'm sure there were aspects in which people could develop certain types of work, music or whatever expression they were working on. It wasn't that it doesn't exist, I think, of course it exists, and there has been a great challenge even for artists in America to confront Washington museums or whatever, you know, collections, etc. So it's kind of interesting you mentioned that, it's really complex and it kind of touches on a couple of works of them, the themes, certain photographs and certain artworks that are in this exhibition. Important to what you've just said. There has been that dynamics of politics, etc, yeah...

**Raisa Kabir:** There is a difference in politics to think, you know, when you have a very capitalist system in America when everything is valued by its monetary gain, there is this idea of colour blindness being progression, "we don't see race, you're

just an artist and we just take your value as face value” and that actually can be detrimental. It’s not because people get a grant from the ACE because they are black or brown, you know, it’s because they have written a great proposal. But like, the idea that “there is colour blindness and so the work is what it is, we don’t see race”, I think takes away from the fact that certain works are made by certain people and the background or the culture, the migration, or the stories, the race behind that person impacts the end product. I think, you know, if you’ve got white artists making appropriative work about black people, it’s gonna be interpreted as racist, it’s gonna be interpreted as a difference from this work being made by a black person. But I guess, you know, there are different models of history, colonialism, racism, that happened in the UK and Europe and happened in the US so there’s going to be different conversations about that. So you know, we don’t have, we have about 5 or 10 minutes to like, wrap up and things... I want to go back to looking at universities and at kind of like, surviving at university... I think Kimathi Donkor, I think it is, when he was at Goldsmiths, I think he lectures now at UAL in London. He always recounts this experience in the 90s about when he wrote this letter and wrote down “We want...” (Pause)

**Evan Ifekoya:** I thought Keith wanted to say something...

**Keith Piper:** No, no, no, I was listening.

**Raisa Kabir:** Oh, okay, sorry. ... Saying: “Oh, we want these tutors, we have no black art lecturers, we want Sonia Boyce, this person and this person to come in and teach us” ... and he spelled people’s names wrong and I think people... I think Sonia Boyce was teaching there after that in the 90s. And we come back to now, we’ve got certain people are teaching, people are going to, you know, eventually do their amazing PhDs and be teaching in these institutions and you know, certain universities are, have got initiatives like Shades of Noir, which are about retaining and employing and getting more people of colour professors and studentships and tutors, you know, working in art schools and beyond, so yes... (Pointing at Keith)

**Keith Piper:** I just had a really prosaic and quick question, It goes all the way back to Raju’s question about resources and shared resources and isolation. The question I have is of space, the physical space. How are you guys as a collective now finding issues around space or as a collective do you find that you’re able to collectively access space? Do you think it’s one of the kind of key ways in which artists Post University can really form a community and it’s actually becoming almost an alternative to university. Because if you think about, if university costs, the MA now costs 9 grand a year or whatever you know, if there are 5 artists who kind of pitch together their 9 grand, you could get some nice space for that! (Laughs)

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah yeah that’s true (Laughs)

**Raisa Kabir:** We don’t have 9 grand! (Laughs)

**Keith Piper:** Invite the people you want to see. Well, you don't have 9 grand of course, you know, just incrementally... So there is this other alternative thing, which can happen now in terms of artists engaging in mutual support and creating new kind of structures, which are now away from the formal university in a sense.

**Said Adrus:** And also the exchange of knowledge.

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah! I mean it's something that we're constantly thinking about really, the space. I think in the past we kind of held sessions informally in kind of institution spaces that we've had access to get hold of for free. You know, we've done kind of residencies here and there, you know at different spaces in London as well but at the moment this kind of question you know, of a constant space that we can use to work from, use to hold events, you know, things like that, is something that we're thinking about, but you know, the reality is that it's like, living in London, things are so expensive. We are living in a time where sometimes we can barely pay our rent let alone kind of have this space where we can work from you know, every day or whatever... Yeah, it's definitely a challenge.

**Keith Piper:** Quick question for the Nottingham folk. (Pointing at audience) What's Nottingham like now in terms of space? Are there artists collectives as such? There used to be some great spaces!

**Member of the audience 14:** It's great, I think so. It's quite good.

**Member of the audience 15:** There is One Thoresby Street gallery, which has been open by...

**Said Adrus:** Which gallery, which studio is it?

**Member of the audience 15:** Thoresby. It's like, just down from the Ice arena. It's very that sort of like...I don't know, I find it quite Saatchi-ish.

(Laughs)

**Keith Piper:** Saatchi-ish?

(Laughs)

**Member of the audience 15:** It's got that kind of mentality, like, yeah, Saatchi-ish.

**Member of the audience 16:** Can I just talk about space? There's Surface Gallery. It's actually an incredible space. I'm a volunteer there; it's all volunteer-led. It also has a residency upstairs. And we had the London Revolutionaries come to speak, and that was just amazing. It's just like you can go there, they welcome anyone, you know, you can go in there, walk in and say: "I want to get involved". Doesn't matter the background you're from, I think it's about making art accessible. I think that's the most important thing when we talk about reaching and spaces. It's about

actually being innovative in what space you're using. Because at the end the art is everything and anything, you know. You can be so creative with the space you're using and intervention, I think is so key to kind of getting a message or getting whatever you're doing out there. And actually being innovative in creating situations in what space you're using because I think that's something that actually contemporary artists have been doing more lately, you know, I've seen garages converted and you know, old buildings turned to something new and you know, public intervention, public dance or music and it's beautiful! I think Nottingham has a great movement and everywhere to be fair, more people are getting into art, more people have something to say and young people and everyone is driving that, you know, there's a lot of youth centres, a lot of community centers that are driving that force so I think that's quite an important thing. Anyway...

**Raisa Kabir:** Thank you! We are pretty much... we have 1 minute left. So we can either let someone speak or we can wrap up, what do you think? (Looking at panel)

**Rudy Loewe:** Can I? Yeah, I just wanted to say about people setting up their own spaces you know, because Keith has touched upon people not being able to go to university because of the 9 thousand pound fee a year but then that again brings up its own problem because there's a lot of these kind of free schools starting up, you know, Open School East in London, for example, but then the problem arises of who can afford to do virtually a full time course without it being accredited? Who has the money then to fund that for themselves? So there are some people who are setting up their own schools but then that sometimes can become a privileged activity and then the other kinds of space, you know, things like how squatting law has changed and gentrification and people getting pushed out of spaces so you know a lot of spaces like my studio is a network rail space. You know, network rail are making a lot of changes which means that a lot of those spaces are disappearing. How gentrification really closes down the amount of spaces that people have access to as well.

**Evan Ifekoya:** I think there's somebody... (Pointing at audience)

**Raisa Kabir:** Okay, one last.

**Evan Ifekoya:** I think there's two.

**Raisa Kabir:** Okay the last two.

**Member of the audience 17:** Hi, I just wanted to say, the question of space was actually a really key question for me. I just wanted to say that I had attended the symposium in Sheffield the one at Wolverhampton, you know, looking at the reflection of the Black Art Group research and I remember being at the symposium, conference rather at Wolverhampton and having a conversation with my friend Kristie and we were asking the question where were the young voices. Because whilst it was all

very kind of, like, where are these voices going to come from? Who are these artists basically? So it was really amazing that this is happening. For me personally, you know, as somebody who wants to kind of engage with the conversation, with what's happening, particularly in the UK, not just across visual art but across various different art sectors. I'm quite involved in the dance side of things. But I guess what I'm trying to say is the fact that this is happening is great and I think that the fact that Nottingham Contemporary who are supporting this, I guess there was a question for me kind of, of, who approaches you? And whom are you approaching? Where is your home for these conversations? And are these conversations going to be migrating across the country because you know, we need to be able to hear the voices across the whole country not just the voices in London and it's brilliant that this is happening here. And I think that... I'm so excited! (Laughs) But it is! Because there is a huge legacy here and that needs to be... it has been in mind because it has been very much part of I think shaping this particular institution. There are certain individuals that you know, have had a great input into the manifestation of this in I guess its programmes, no doubt. The other thing as well for me is really encouraging to hear Skinder Hundal down there! (Laughs) Because I was looking around and wondering "Is there a representative of the New Art Exchange here?" and it's really great that people are sort of coming out. Sorry, am I waffling? But, I wanted to say about the conversations, you know, travelling around the country. I also would like to say something about joining the dots really, across the Atlantic, that sort of in between the spaces of the biennales and everything. Because I spend quite a bit of time over in Gambia, West Africa and Senegal, and there are artists there that are kind of struggling with the idea of even being an artist let alone, about creating work and how to have conversations about it. And then, just to sort of quickly just make a mention about the issues that you were talking around education. There are other kind of links that are taking place within different sectors as well you know, with for instance, the association of dance for the African Diaspora, kind of linking up with the critical dance organisations in the UK to be able to examine the deficits that are taking place within that sector, and I just wonder about joining those dots within the sector as well where the same conversations are being had across the different sectors. So, you know, for instance like, State of Emergency at the moment are creating work "Where is Home?", looking at stories from here, America and Johannesburg. I know that I might have kind of waffled quite a bit but I guess I'm trying to ask a bit about where is that whole thing about home and who is approaching you, who are you approaching and what other kind of opportunities for the institutions to open up and have you present in the programme and you know, the decisions of the programming, basically. Sorry that was really long!

**Raisa Kabir:** That's okay. Thank you. I'm just going to take this question and then we'll be able to wrap up.

**Member of the audience 18:** It wasn't a question. I was actually...

**Raisa Kabir:** A point, sorry.

**Member of the audience 18:** About Nottingham and space.

**Raisa Kabir:** Amazing, yeah.

**Member of the audience 18:** Apart from Surface Gallery, there's the Backlit Studio, there's several studios. Because I've been looking for studios within the past year at reasonable prices and I finally after... I've had about 4 studios over 30 years, and there's a lot of good studio space available in Nottingham right now at reasonable prices. Far better than London.

(Laughs!)

**Said Adrus:** Yeah, I was gonna say, is there anybody from Trent staff here? I'm just interested to know. Because it sort of links to that. This conversation started with that and I'm just wondering.

**Keith Piper:** Yeah. Any Trent people?

**Said Adrus:** Any Trent students?

**Keith Piper:** Oh look! Yeah! There you go.

(Laughs)

**Said Adrus:** Staff and students?

**Member of the audience 19:** Student of Literature.

**Keith Piper:** Oh, Literature? Not Fine Art?

**Said Adrus:** And where is literature based? The City or Clifton?

**Keith Piper:** Clifton.

**Said Adrus:** Ah, that's very interesting.

**Raisa Kabir:** Okay, amazing. (Someone in the audience says something)

**Said Adrus:** Sorry?

**Raisa Kabir:** Oh, okay, one last person who is gonna talk and then we're definitely gonna have to wrap up! (Laughs)

**Member of the audience 20:** I'll make this really quick. Just responding to what that lady was saying about starting the conversation. My name is Conney I am curator of the Wolverhampton art gallery. I am curating the Black Art project, which is a HLF Collecting Cultures project. I want to do some sort of inter generational conversation group or something. The project is still very embryonic. I've started in early

March and so if anyone is interested in doing something, do come and sort of corner me at the end of the evening I am quite happy to sort of talk with you guys and see where we can go from this, so... hello!

**Raisa Kabir:** Amazing.

**Said Adrus:** Are you curating something?

**Member of the audience 20:** Yes I am. There is no exhibition yet; we're hoping to acquire some artworks for our collection. Because even though Wolverhampton was so central in the Art Group, we don't actually have any work as a reflection that represents that. So we identified that...

**Keith Piper:** There's an excellent show on there now though. I was there.

**Said Adrus:** What was it?

**Keith Piper:** Yara El-Sherbini.

**Evan Ifekoya:** Oh yeah! Was that the one that was at the Art Exchange?

**Keith Piper:** Oh yes, it was!

(Indistinctive Talk)

**Said Adrus:** Yeah, Yara El-Sherbini, with the quiz show.

**Evan Ifekoya:** Yeah you know, we can carry on the conversation over a drink. I think we do have to...

**Keith Piper:** What's the train time?

(Laughs)

**Raisa Kabir:** Is there anyone on the panel who wants to do any closing? I mean Claudette or...? (Laughs)

I just really want to give... A big thank you to Janna, Mercé and Nottingham Contemporary for having us, for showing our film, we were able to do a workshop yesterday with some young students, younger students. That was really brilliant. We're just excited to be having these conversations. It doesn't stop here. We'll keep doing them, we'll keep having them, we record them, we're filming today, this will be in our blog, so yeah, keep in touch, we're on twitter and all that malarkey. Thank you very much!

**Evan Ifekoya:** Thank you! (Pointing at the other speakers)

**Said Adrus:** Thank you as well!

(Applause)





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