

TATE FILM

REWIND: SANKOFA ISAAC JULIEN: WHO KILLED COLIN ROACH? & TERRITORIES

Artist Film & Video at Tate Britain
Clore Auditorium, Tate Britain
Monday 7 September 2015
19.00–21.00



Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien. Still from *The Passion of Remembrance*, 1986. 95 min. Courtesy Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien



Isaac Julien. *Who Killed Colin Roach?* 1983. Still from Li-matic video, colour, sound, 34 min 42 sec. Courtesy Isaac Julien

ARTIST FILM & VIDEO UPCOMING SCREENINGS IN THE CLORE AUDITORIUM:

MAUREEN BLACKWOOD AND ISAAC JULIEN: THE PASSION OF REMEMBRANCE

Monday 5 October 2015, 19.00 – 21.00

MARTINA ATTILLE: DREAMING RIVERS

Monday 2 November 2015, 19.00 – 20.30

Artist Film and Video at Tate Britain
is curated by Zoe Whitley, Curator
and Jenny Lund, Assistant Curator,
Contemporary British Art at Tate Britain.
With thanks to the artists.

tate.org.uk/film

Thoughts, comments, reviews?

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Isaac Julien presents *Who Killed Colin Roach?* (1983), which poignantly documents the true story of a young man's suspicious death at the hands of the police. Julien will also screen his early experimental documentary *Territories* (1984–85), a visual and narrative manifesto for the Sankofa Film and Video Collective. Following the screening, Julien and Paul Gilroy, King's College Professor of American and English Literature, will discuss these seminal works and Julien's involvement with Sankofa.

REWIND: SANKOFA

This autumn season of screenings focuses on the visionary collective Sankofa Film and Video, established in 1983 by five aspiring filmmakers - Martina Attille, Maureen Blackwood, Robert Cruz, Isaac Julien and Nadine Marsh-Edwards. Sankofa's productions centered on the creation of new black subjectivities and introduced audiences to New Queer Cinema, black feminist theory and the politics and poetics of self-representation. The name 'Sankofa' refers to a mythical Ghanaian bird commonly represented bending its head backwards to reach an egg placed on its back. The bird symbolizes taking what is valuable from the past and applying it to the future.

WHO KILLED COLIN ROACH?

Isaac Julien (dir), 1983

Super 8 film transferred to digital, 34 min

Made while Julien was studying at Saint Martins School of Art, *Who Killed Colin Roach?* documents the protests following the death in police custody of Colin Roach, a young black man. Julien portrays the local

community's grief, anger and claim for justice as he interviews the Roach family, local campaigners, and the British Jamaican dub poet Benjamin Zephaniah. Questioning police tactics, the justice system and the mainstream media, the film works in part to demand an independent inquiry into Roach's death.

"I stumbled into the story of *Who Killed Colin Roach?*: I was coming out of an East End jumble sale one Saturday when a march passed by protesting a death in police custody. It turned out that Colin Roach, the young black man in question, had lived quite near my home. Which meant, of course, that Mrs. Roach could have been my mother, that his family could easily have been my own.

This took me back to the radical workshops of my teens and the whole idea of the camera as a street weapon. So I wanted to make work that would embody dual perspectives. One of these would be inside the black families' reactions to this death. The other would show responses to black community organizers. I insisted that my camera be engaged in the politics, so it was positioned very deliberately opposite traditional media.

This was at a time when video was still finding its language, when video art was still somewhat undefined. Yet I was determined to appropriate those early video-art techniques to make my campaign tape. I wanted to utilize this camera taken out of an art school context and repurpose its technology for the street. I wanted to redirect the gaze of the ruling media. My real aim was to turn that gaze on the police, because in *Colin Roach*, they are the people rioting.

That piece, in one way, was very much a local response, but it was also meant to contest some things I was being taught. Specifically, it was in reply to a tutor who had told me, 'Isaac, no-working-class person will understand these films.' Of course my works back then were just experimental films, scratches on film, really – and they were indeed quite arty. So part of me had been forced to think, Well...maybe she is right.

Colin Roach, however, was my demonstration against her view. It was made to say, 'I can do the same work as you and I can tell a tale. But I can also make quite experimental things.'" (Isaac Julien, *Riot*, MOMA, 2013, pp27-29)



TERRITORIES

Isaac Julien (dir), 1984-85

16mm film transferred to digital, 25 min

Cast: Maureen Blackwood, Andrea Julien, Kevin Graal, Nadine Marsh-Edwards, Antonia Thomas (Voices Off-Screen); Colin Newman, Bertram, Bruno, Pedro, Peoples War Sound System (Players).

Territories explores and critiques traditional representations of black culture. Inspired by the Brixton riots and focusing specifically on the Nottingham carnival and the race riots at Notting Hill in August 1976, the film uses the 'carnival' to address and challenge established values and hierarchies concerning race, gender, sexuality and class.

"Every summer Carnival took place in this emotional moment, one that was always situated between pleasure and danger. Because its displays were threatening, this became a regular confrontation through ritual. Yet at the same time, it was extremely exciting and it gave you license to express yourself in the daylight. Rather than tucked away in the dark, you were on a public stage. There, I came to see how violent disturbances could seem like new ways of articulating a self." (Isaac Julien, *Riot*, MOMA, 2013, pp24-26)

While the theme of the carnival serves as an opportunity to work through and subvert normative values and behaviors and communicate desires, the film formally presents itself as an alternative documentary. It refuses conventional narrative, seeking instead to present a multiplicity of views and voices. Original and archival material are juxtaposed and superimposed creating a complex visual and sensory experience. Reacting against medium specific and purist tendencies at the time, Julien experimented

in *Territories* with the formal qualities of the moving image – he shot the film on Super 8 film, transferred it to video and then refilmed it on 16mm. Responding retrospectively to the reception of the film, which included charges of it being too 'Godardian' and experimental, Julien has said:

"That's when I began to question the whole idea of what might seem most 'appropriate' for the person who is black. In my hands, the poetic approach of *Territories* – its representation of black subjectivity – was suddenly somehow seen as being suspect. But in fact I was very interested in the formal questions. I wanted to experiment, to create different visual auras, play with time, play within the film using factual material. I wanted to find out how things could be visually poeticized. My ultimate aim, really, was to create a style for political remembering." (Isaac Julien, *Riot*, MOMA, 2013, p32)

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Isaac Julien (b.1960, London, UK)

Isaac Julien studied at Saint Martins School of Art from 1980 to 1984. His work draws from and comments on a range of disciplines and practices (film, dance, photography, music, theater, painting, and sculpture) and unites them in dramatic audiovisual film installations, photographic works, and documentary films.

Isaac Julien has won numerous prizes and awards including the Semaine de la Critique Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), the Golden Gate Persistence of Vision Award (2014), and the Kaino Award for Artistic Excellence (2015). Julien was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2001 for his works *The Long Road to Mazatlán* (1999), and *Vagabondia* (2000). His work has been included in Documenta 11 (2002), the 7th Gwangju Biennial (2008), and the Paris

Triennial (2012). In addition, Julien has had various solo exhibitions at institutions such as the Art Institute of Chicago (2013), the MCA San Diego (2012), the Bass Museum, Miami (2010), and the Centre Pompidou (2005) among others. In the winter of 2013-14 his installation *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010) was on view at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Isaac Julien's recent exhibition at the De Pont Museum entitled *Riot* was a survey show spanning thirty years of his career. For the 56th Venice Biennale, Julien collaborated with curator Okwui Enwezor and directed a series of performances, readings and screenings based on Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, along with an installation of his work, *KAPITAL* (2013). His latest installation piece, *Stones Against Diamonds* (2015), was also premiered during the Biennale. Julien's work is included in numerous museum collections including the Tate collection. In 2013, a monographic survey of his career to date, *Riot*, was published by MoMA, New York. Isaac Julien is currently Chair of Global Art at University of the Arts London.

Paul Gilroy (b.1956, London, UK)

Paul Gilroy is currently professor at King's College London. Previous appointments include Giddens Professor of Social Theory at the London School of Economics (2005-12), Charlotte Marian Saden Professor of African American Studies and Sociology at Yale (1999-2005), and Professor of Cultural Studies and Sociology at Goldsmiths College (1995-99).

Professor Gilroy's scholarly interests encompass postcolonial studies, particularly with regard to London, postimperial melancholia and the employment of English victimage; the literature and cultural politics of European decolonisation; African American intellectual and cultural history, literature and philosophy; the formation and reproduction of national identity especially with regard to race and "identity"; and the literary and theoretical significance of port cities and pelagics. Gilroy has also published on art, music and social theory.

Gilroy is the author of *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (1987), *Small Acts* (1993), *The Black Atlantic* (1993), *Between Camps* (2000), and *After Empire* (2004) among other works. Gilroy was also co-author of *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 1970s Britain* (1982), a path-breaking, collectively produced volume published under the imprint of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, where he was a doctoral student working with the Jamaican intellectual Stuart Hall. His current projects include research on the American writer Alain Locke, the cultural significance of aerial bombardment, and autobiographical writing generated by colonial wars.

