

TATE FILM

REWIND: SANKOFA MARTINA ATTILLE: DREAMING RIVERS

Clore Auditorium, Tate Britain
Monday 2 November 2015
19.00–20.30



Jake Auerbach, still from FRANK ©Jake Auerbach Films Ltd



Corinne Skinner-Carter in *Dreaming Rivers* (1988), directed by Martina Attille. Film still courtesy the artist and Women Make Movies. Photo by Christine Parry

ARTIST FILM & VIDEO UPCOMING SCREENINGS IN THE CLORE AUDITORIUM:

MUSEUM PREMIERE: FRANK
Thursday 10 December 2015, 19.00–21.00

ZINA SARO-WIWA: ALT-NOLLYWOOD
Monday 18 January 2016, 19.00–21.00

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.

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In director Martina Attille's own words *Dreaming Rivers* 'illustrates the spirit of modern families touched by the experience of migration.' Awarded a prestigious Filmdukaten at the XXXVII Internationale Filmwoche Mannheim (1988), the film evocatively weaves together the ambition-fuelled dreams and memories of Caribbean-born Miss T. and her family.

The screening is followed by artist Sonia Boyce MBE, Professor of Black Art and Design at University of the Arts London (and set designer on *Dreaming Rivers*) in conversation with Dr. Amna Malik, Senior Lecturer in Art History and Theory at Slade School of Fine Art.

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REWIND: SANKOFA

This is the third screening in our autumn season that focuses on the visionary collective Sankofa Film and Video, established in 1983 by five aspiring filmmakers — Martina Attille, Maureen Blackwood, Robert Crusz, 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.

DREAMING RIVERS Martina Attille (dir), 1988, 16mm film, 30 min

Writer/Director: Martina Attille
Assistant Director: Isaac Julien
Cinematography: Nina Kellgren
Set design: Sonia Boyce
Costume design for Miss T.: Lorna Lee Leslie/
Bodyscape
Featuring: Corinne Skinner-Carter, Stegan Kalipha, Angela Wynter, Nimmy March and Roderick Hart. Additional performances by Dionne Desantos Campbell, Darren Leahy, Leanna Samuel and voice over by Marie Attille, Rosemary Julien and Peggy Octave
Music: Shirley Thompson
Distributor: Women Make Movies (NYC), Third World Newsreel (NYC)

Dreaming Rivers opens on the wake of Miss T. In the space implied by the camera's positioning, Miss T.'s children speak directly to their late mother; contemplating aspects of her life — her beauty, her religion, and her love alongside their own deep longings. The static framing of her children is intercut with fluid tracking shots of Miss T.'s domestic setting while she was yet living. The bittersweet gathering unites past, present and future: from optimistic dreams of life in a new country, to an acute sense of displacement and life left behind, and finally charting emotional distances as experienced between first and second generations for whom 'home' has different meanings.

Writing about the film in "Migratory Aesthetics: (Dis)placing the Black Maternal Subject in Martina Attille's *Dreaming Rivers* (1988)", Senior Lecturer Amna Malik highlights how Martina Attille shifts the focus of the inter-generational dialogue already present in Sankofa's earlier films by focusing on a middle-aged black woman; anchoring the 1950s as the moment from which the present is articulated.

Malik writes: "What interests me greatly about [...] Attille is her concern with the past, the generation of post-war immigrants to Britain that marked the Windrush era, and, more specifically, her attention to the microcosms of life lived in the everyday as a form of resistance. Arguably, this had already been examined at length by the Centre for Cultural Studies in Birmingham through the focus on subcultures; but the difficulties of simply existing, of living on a day-to-day level, were not generally acknowledged amongst a younger generation coming to voice in the 1980s. In *Dreaming Rivers*, love is the motive for migration and dislocation from home: Miss T. came to England to be with her now-absent husband; and love is why she stayed: to bring up her children. It is through their eyes that she negotiates and locates herself whilst she goes about her rituals of self-adornment, lighting candles before a mirror, braiding her hair, and donning a floral dress; but love is also what keeps her from belonging to England."

Amna Malik, "Migratory Aesthetics: (Dis)placing the Black Maternal Subject in Martina Attille's *Dreaming Rivers* (1988)" in *'Black' British Aesthetics Today*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2007), p251

As an allegory of migration, *Dreaming Rivers* was inspired by several key moments marking the dynamism and activity of the UK's Black Arts Movement during the 1980s. Chief among these were visual art exhibitions that rendered visible the black female experience in Britain including *The Thin Black Line* (ICA London, 1985); *Starring...Mummy & Daddy* at The Black Art Gallery (London, 1986); *Unrecorded Truths* (Elbow Room, London, 1986); and *From Generation to Generation* (The Installation), which toured nationally (Caribbean Focus '86). Also formative for Attille was Theatre of Black Women, founded by Patricia St. Hilaire, Bernadine Evaristo and Paulette Randall. The character of Miss T. is in part a composite drawn from interviews with first generation Caribbean immigrant women held in Attille's own archive. Equally influential were works by artists Sonia Boyce and Marlene Smith. Boyce's pastel self-portrait *She Ain't Holding Them Up*, *She's Holding On (Some English Rose)* (1986) reveals with beautiful vulnerability how family provides the artist's bedrock of stability and strength. Smith's installation *Good Housekeeping I* (1985), likewise balancing black female strength and fragility — comprised of domestic materials such as jay cloths and a framed family photograph, includes a stark line: 'My Mother opens the Door at 7a.m. She is not Bulletproof'.

Dreaming Rivers had its first public screening at Institut Français in London on 28 April 1988.



Corinne Skinner-Carter in *Dreaming Rivers* (1988), directed by Martina Attille. Film still courtesy the artist and Women Make Movies. Photo by Christine Parry

"Dreaming Rivers was my best thing."
Corinne Skinner-Carter, *Staying Power*, Black Film Bulletin, Summer/Autumn, Volume 6, Issue 2/3, 1998

In celebrating 20 years since its release, the film was presented at the 68th Annual Convention of The College Language Association, (Re) Roots and (Re) Routes: Transatlantic Connections in Language and Literature (2008).

About the participants:

Martina Attille
(born 1959, St Lucia)
Lives and works in London

Born in the Caribbean island nation of St Lucia, before its full independence from colonial rule, filmmaker Martina Attille has lived in London since 1961. She graduated in 1983 from Goldsmiths University, London, and entered the media profession in 1984, as a trainee with Large Door, working on three programmes for *Visions*, a documentary series on world cinema for Channel Four. As a visiting professor in the Visual Art Department, University of California San Diego (1990), Attille designed a programme of study for undergraduate students titled *Contemporary Dialogue: Constructing The Frame*. She also collaborated with Sonia Boyce on *I'm Almost Blushing*, a site-specific installation devised with students, for the Mary Lou Williams Center, at Duke University Durham (1992). Attille continues her work in film education and research in the UK. A key member of Sankofa Film and Video Collective, Attille designed the peer-to-peer public seminar *Power and Control* (London, 1985) that introduced members of the newly formed collective to the Workshop Sector.

With Maureen Blackwood and Nadine Marsh-Edwards, she also organised the peer-to-peer 16mm film production workshop *Black (feminine) — Exploring Images of Black Women* (London, 1986).

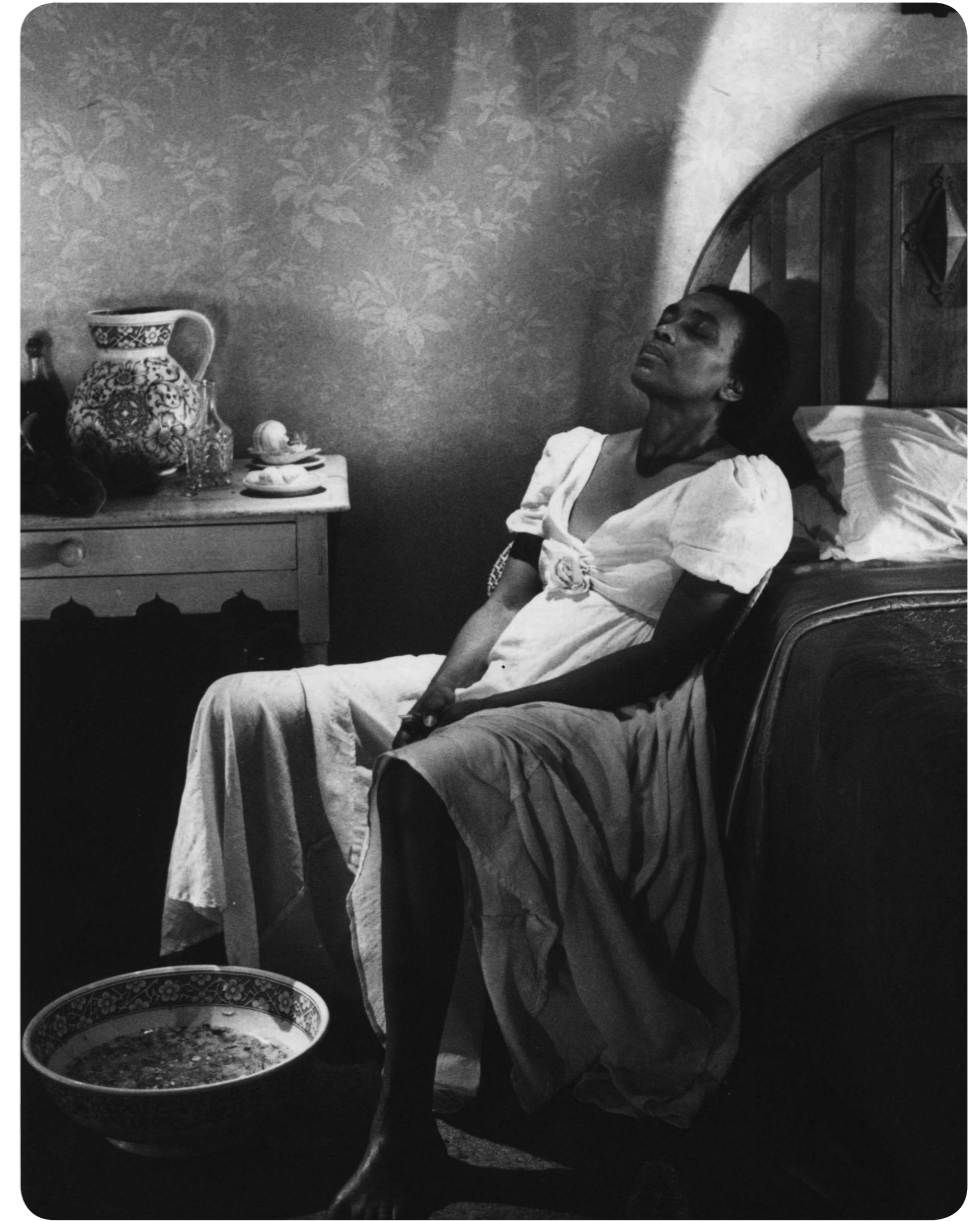
Active in public debate at home and abroad to promote the work of collective film practice, Attille notably contributed to artist and writer Coco Fusco's touring exhibition *Young British and Black* (1988), which showed works from the Sankofa Film and Video Collective and Black Audio Collective. Attille also participated in the conference *High Culture/Popular Culture: Media Representation of the Other* at the Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio, Italy (1989).

Inspired by her work with Maureen Blackwood and Nadine Marsh-Edwards on *Black Women & Representation* (1984) and *Black (feminine) — Exploring Images of Black Women* (1986), Attille continued to focus on the representational strategies of black women alongside her peers in the visual arts forum, Black Women Artists Study Group (1995 – 1997). Attille has contributed to publications including *The Fact of Blackness: Franz Fanon and Visual Representation* (1996) and *Rhapsodies in Black: the Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (1997). Her presence within the visual arts community has been documented in imagery produced by artists Sonia Boyce, Lubaina Himid and Ingrid Pollard.

Sonia Boyce
(born 1962, UK)
Lives and works in London

Sonia Boyce studied art at East Ham College and Stourbridge College of Art until 1983 and became a key figure in the 1980s Black-British art scene, with artworks that spoke about race and gender. Since the 1990s, her practice typically relied on the documentation of performative collaborations addressing the relationship between sound and memory, and the dynamics of space and the spectator.

Selected recent exhibitions include *The Impossible Community*, Moscow Museum of Modern Art (2011); *8+8 Contemporary International Video Art*, 53 Art Museum, Quanzhou (2011); *Play! Recapturing the Radical Imagination*, Göteborg International Biennial of Contemporary Art 7 (2013); *Sonia Boyce: Scat – Sound and Collaboration*, Rivington Place, London (2013); *Speaking in Tongues*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow (2014); *S/N: Signal to Noise*, Whitney Museum of Modern Art/The Kitchen, New York (2015); *Liberties – 40 Years Since the Sex Discrimination Act*, Collyer Bristow Gallery, London (2015); and *All the World's Futures*: 56th Venice Biennale, Arsenale/Giardini (2015) where she is currently



Corinne Skinner-Carter in *Dreaming Rivers* (1988), directed by Martina Attille. Film still courtesy the artist and Women Make Movies. Photo by Christine Parry

exhibiting *Exquisite Cacophony* (2015) a single-channel video, plus a set of live performances. Boyce's work is represented in the Arts Council Collection, The British Council Collection and Tate collection, among others.

In 2007, Boyce received commendation for the edited volume *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Art in 1980s Britain* (Duke University Press/Iniva) and in the same year received an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List, for services to art. She is Professor of Fine Art at Middlesex University, Chair of Black Art and Design at the University of the Arts London and is the Principal Investigator on a 3-year AHRC-funded project, *Black Artists and Modernism*.

Amna Malik
Lives and works in London

Amna Malik is Senior Lecturer in History and Theory of Art at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL. She specialises in twentieth century and contemporary art and diaspora and has published a number of essays on

African American and Black British art. Her articles include "Migratory Aesthetics: (Dis)placing the Black Maternal Subject in Martina Attille's *Dreaming Rivers* (1988)" in *'Black' British Aesthetics Today*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2007); "Dialogues between 'Orientalism' and Modernism in Shirin Neshat's *Women of Allah*" in *Global and Local Art Histories*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2007); "Conceptualising Black British Art through the lens of exile" in *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, Iniva (2008); "Ritual and Repetition Beyond Conceptual Art: On Idris Khan" in *Portfolio Contemporary Photography in Britain* Vol. 52 (2010); and "Kobena Mercer" in *Fifty Key Writers on Photography*, Routledge (2012).

Her recent online project *Transnational Slade: mapping the diaspora of an art school* examines the presence of Asian and African artists at the Slade in the 1950s. Malik is currently working on a book that explores aesthetics and art practice across diasporas from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.