

returns to Ghana after years of exile in Britain. She finds herself drawn back towards 'the war zone of memories', revealed through flashbacks and archive newsreels that document the rise and fall of Pan-African socialism in post-Independence Ghana.

WHO NEEDS A HEART is BAFC's most controversial film. It envisions the forgotten moment of British Black Power as a series of near silent micro-dramas of affectation and affiliation that deflected the demand for historical truth. The magnificent soundtrack combines avant-garde jazz and Tibetan ritual music with electronics and gospel. It stands as the Collective's most far reaching exploration of the expressionist potential of sound.

MYSTERIES OF JULY explores the fatal enigma of young male deaths in police custody during the month of July in London.

THE LAST ANGEL OF HISTORY is BAFC's experimentation with the chromatic possibilities of digital video. It takes the form of an information quest that opens connections and associations between musicality, futurity, technology and the limits of the human.

3 SONGS ON PAIN, TIME AND LIGHT is a video portrait in deliberately unbalanced colours of the life and work of renowned British artist Donald Rodney, completed before his untimely death from sickle cell anaemia in 1998 aged 37.

MARTIN LUTHER KING: DAYS OF HOPE is an account of the complex life of Dr Martin Luther King Jr and an experiment with the tonality and timbre of shadow and light. This film may be seen as a proposal for a new form of digital Neo-Expressionism in which colour cinematography is informed by a monochromatic palette.

MEMORY ROOM 451 is another example of the neo-Expressionist aesthetic that BAFC pursued in the 1990s. It is a dystopic fable of a world in which dreams become the new media platform of the 23rd Century and time travel is a new kind of poorly paid shift work.

GANGSTA GANGSTA: THE TRAGEDY OF TUPAC SHAKUR is a meditation on the turbulent life, Faustian ambition and violent death of Tupac Shakur.

This leaflet is intended as an introduction to the exhibition. Please ask a Steward if you have any questions. There is further information about BAFC in the Reading Room on the Second Floor. An interview with Kodwo Eshun of The Otilith Group can be downloaded from Arnolfini's website.

A catalogue, *The Ghost of Songs*, is available from the Bookshop. Price £25.00.

Introduction to the exhibition

**THE GHOSTS OF SONGS:
A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE BLACK AUDIO FILM COLLECTIVE**
Curated and produced by The Otilith Group

28 April - 24 June 2007

Galleries 2,3,4,5 and Dark Studio

The Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) was founded in 1982 by seven undergraduates in Sociology and Fine Art: John Akomfrah, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, Reece Auguiste, Trevor Mathison, Edward George and Claire Joseph who left in 1985 and was replaced by David Lawson. The Collective formally dissolved in 1998. Based in East London, the group produced internationally acclaimed, award winning films, video-essays and slide-tape work, initiated courses and workshops, curated film programmes and participated in debates around independent, alternative cine-culture.

THE GHOSTS OF SONGS is the first exhibition devoted to the work of the Black Audio Film Collective. As well as archival material and an interactive digital element, it brings together films and installations made for different

contexts - cinema, gallery and television - enabling viewers to experience the body of works made as well as individual films in their entirety.

Through the works in THE GHOSTS OF SONGS, the BAFC questions ideas of memory and belonging in order to challenge the recording of stories and the authority of documentary.

GALLERY 2

Made while BAFC were still studying at Portsmouth Polytechnic, **SIGNS OF EMPIRE** was originally presented using tape recorders and slide projectors. It has been remade as a DVD for this exhibition and combines archival images, spoken word, text and a composed soundtrack. The images include colonisers and 'natives': tea pickers, industrial workers and public

monuments as well as details from maps, childrens' books and postcards. They have all been altered in some way, projected onto hands, arms or drapery, covered with a coloured gel and rephotographed at an angle. Words have been added using rub-on transfers.

The soundtrack uses music and spoken word. The voices come from different times and places. One is from a television interview with Conservative politician Ronald Bell from the early 1980s. The other is from Lord Frederick Lugard speaking in the early 20th Century about the colonial subjects of the newly formed Nigeria. The two voices use similar words to express different attitudes. The former expresses the bewilderment of British Authority confronted with the discontent of post-colonial youth, the latter reveals an anxiety at the heart of imperialism.

These techniques of combining historical and contemporary fragments with BAFCs own words and interventions run throughout this exhibition.

Addressing every aspect of film making, BAFC's use of composed, collaged and spoken word soundtracks is one of the ground-breaking aspects of their new form of documentary. Trevor Mathison's **GRAPHIC SCORES** are a visual translation of this process of composition and **TOTEM II** presents a piano hammer, one of the instruments used.

TOTEM I is made in the style of a monument and lists many of the varied, international film makers and films that have influenced members of BAFC.

Further demonstrating the group's impact and achievements, a series of **VITRINES** display other resources from BAFC, such as scripts, photographs, publicity materials and awards.

GALLERIES 3 AND 4

Like **TOTEM I**, **THE BLACK ROOM II**, represents many of the diverse influences on the Collective. Conceptualised by all of BAFC and realised by John Akomfrah, David Lawson and Trevor Mathison it brings together selections of books, journals and records, represented by their covers. These indicate the wide variety of influences and interests within the Collective.

The point of departure for **HANDSWORTH SONGS** is the civil disturbances of September and October 1985 in the Birmingham district of Handsworth and in the urban centres of London. Running throughout this work is the idea that the riots were the outcome of British society's suppression of black presence and black desire in Britain.

As does much of BAFC's film work, this work uses a documentary format, but each element is tested and challenged. Instead of an authoritarian, all knowing voice over, there is a more poetic approach. The spoken text links past and present. As well as the eyewitness accounts and on-the-ground footage, there are staged tableaux. As in **SIGNS OF EMPIRE**, these moments of stillness halt the narrative and allow moments of reflection.

The film also shows other filmmakers at work. Reporters appear to be gathered only for sensational images and headlines. One overheard conversation between television staff suggests the number of black faces in the audience might make it difficult to light the event for the film cameras.

In **HANDSWORTH SONGS**, BAFC can be thought of as making a work offering a different way of examining a situation, through sound and image. Conventional political documentary often attempts to 'explain' causes of discontent but here, as the voice over states, "there are no stories in the riots, only the ghosts of stories ...".

TWILIGHT CITY is a film 'map' of the Docklands, Limehouse and the Isle of Dogs areas of London. At the time of making this work, these areas were going through huge changes. As in other works, **TWILIGHT CITY** mixes real and fictional accounts to examine both historical and psychic landscapes and stories. London is re-imagined as a city of night and light, bordered by a landscape of dreams and sequenced by electronic pulses.

In addition to examining situations, ideas and places, BAFC also made biographical documentaries. In **SEVEN SONGS FOR MALCOLM X** they focus on the life and death of the African American revolutionary. It is a study of iconography as narrated by novelist Toni Cade Bambara and actor Giancarlo Esposito. Continuing their experiments with re-stagings and re-creations, the

film uses seven stylised tableaux as its structure. These memorialise Malcolm's life and are influenced by the early 20th Century funeral photography of James Van der Zee's *The Harlem Book of the Dead* and the elemental, static cinematography of Sergei Paradjanov's *The Colour of Pomegranates*.

GALLERY 5

Conceived and designed by artist Gary Stewart, **THE MEDIA MONTAGE MIXER** enables people to re-work and re-appropriate archival material. Using methods of composition similar to those found in BAFC's works, visitors can use the keyboard to access and mix sound and image files. The images are from *The American Image, Photographs from the National Archives 1860-1960*, available online from the National Library of Congress. The sounds are a combination of atmospheric compositions and voice-overs from writers such as Toni Morrison, Fernando Pessoa, Phyllis Wheatley and Ralph Ellison as well as philosophers like W.E.B DuBois, Maurice Blanchot and Achille Mbembe.

There is also access to the BAFC **WEBSITE** and a comprehensive retrospective of BAFC **POSTERS** as designed by the Collective.

DARK STUDIO

A rolling programme of films with further opportunity to view the extensive body of works made by BAFC.

TESTAMENT shows former activist turned television reporter Abena