

# EXPLORE BEING HERE

Please leave in gallery for others to enjoy.

## AN INVITATION TO EXPLORE FROM BLACK SOUTH WEST NETWORK

We invite you to spend some time with the people that Barbara Walker features in her drawings and paintings, just like she has spent time with them.

Unlike a photograph captured in an instant, Walker lovingly takes time to draw and paint each stroke, using her observational skills to capture people's natural features. Some works are small, enticing us to find the figures and stories within them. Some are enlarged and impossible to ignore, forcing us to face the people and the systems that affect us. Detail is contrasted with empty spaces, with this absence redirecting our focus and inviting us to reconsider who or what is important.

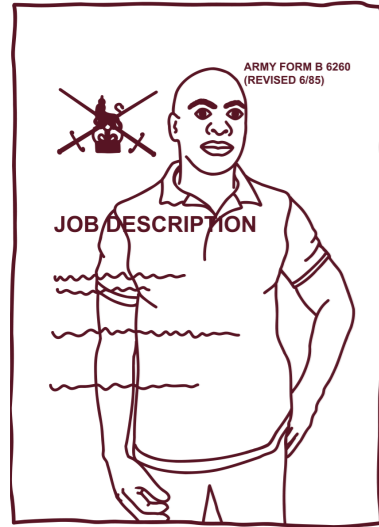
You can walk around and meet these people, choosing how long to spend with each - you may even begin to hear their voices in your head, sharing their stories. These people are Walker's family, friends, and neighbours, people who would have been missed by history, or forgotten subjects in an old painting, photograph or news story.

Walker's figures and scenes capturing everyday lives highlight people of African heritage's impact on Britain and Britain's impact on them. For Walker, news stories don't just happen to people 'out there'. This is personal, with stop and search coming literally to her doorstep. Walker uses her work to elevate her subjects from characters to human beings with stories of their own.

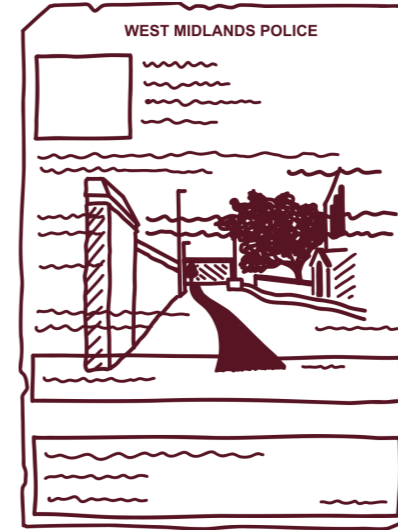
Likewise, Black South West Network has been working toward racial justice for twenty years, by supporting Black and racialised social entrepreneurs in the region. We have grown to appreciate how changing narratives and representation contributes to racial justice, which is why cultural heritage and creative expression have become more central to our work. We invite you to explore Walker's work and change some narratives in your own lives.

Black South West Network (BSWN) is a racial justice organisation dedicated to advancing equity and inclusion through research, policy, enterprise, and cultural heritage. They facilitate platforms that centre underrepresented voices, ensuring that their stories are preserved and celebrated. They have been working with Arnolfini since 2023.

We invite you to engage with Walker's artwork and to share your responses with others, enjoying different ways in which to experience the work.



Some of the works in **Louder Than Words** explore how a place doesn't always feel the same for everyone or for different groups of people. Where is your favourite place in Bristol and why?



**Burden of Proof** highlights a particular moment when Black communities haven't been made to feel welcome in the UK. How can we make Bristol more welcoming for everyone?



**Show and Tell** explores how people express their sense of self through clothing. In what ways do you express your personality?

Absence and presence are themes explored in **Shock and Awe**. Consider why Walker has chosen to highlight the presence of black figures in her drawings.



Walker documents people dear to her such as her family, friends and community in Birmingham (her home city) in **Private Face**. You can use the materials in our Community Workshop to draw your own portraits of people who are important to you.



**Soft Power** celebrates individual people's stories and our collective histories. What are the stories that make you proud to be who you are?

**Vanishing Point** addresses representation of Black people in paintings from the 16 and 18C. Where do you see yourself represented in everyday life?



# SHARED HISTORIES

The stories in *Being Here* come from many sources. These include personal accounts from individuals who are part of the 'Windrush' generation based in Manchester, Walker's son's experiences of stop and search in Birmingham, or images of black servicemen and women found in our national archives. Each story echoes just as loudly within Bristol's own Black history.

## A HUB FOR BLACK CREATIVITY

From the late 1940s onwards, Bristol became a home for many Caribbean migrants invited to permanently live and work in the UK after the second world war. Many settled in St. Pauls which later became known as a hub for Black culture and creativity.

For example, **Arts Opportunity Theatre** established in 1981 provided skills and training in theatrical arts for unemployed local young people.

**Black Pyramid** established in 1991 developed out of the need for Black communities to find ways to gain access to and participate effectively in the film and video industry.

**The Bamboo Club** which opened in 1966 was an iconic blues and reggae club famous for hosting artists like Bob Marley and the

Wailers and Jimmy Cliff. It was also the original headquarters of the Bristol West Indian Cricket Club.

**Bristol Black Writers** group founded in the 1980s was a collective of poets and writers based at the Kuumba Centre.

**The Malcolm X Elders Forum** which started in 1999 is a social club for people over 55. The group engages in a wide range of activities including Tai Chi, sewing, singing, bingo and dominoes making it a vibrant community group. Arnolfini are proud to work with some of these communities, including Black South West Network and Curiosity UnLtd, supporting their work around racial and social justice.



Explore **Being Here** can be downloaded on our website or listened to as an audio guide using the QR code.

Please return the materials and this guide after you have explored the exhibition.

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