

nara roesler

isaac julien



isaac julien

b. 1960, London, UK, where he lives and works

Isaac Julien is one of the most important and influential British visual artists in the fields of installation and film. His work combines several disciplines, including cinema, photography, dance, music, theatre, painting and sculpture, which are captured in his audio-visual installations, documentaries and photographic pieces. The plurality of his work is not only present in the process of making, but also in the way in which it is exhibited, which includes several screens, with Julien being a pioneer in multiple-screen film installations.

The artist's works often emerge from in-depth investigations of historical personalities, including Langston Hughes, Frantz Fanon and Lina Bo Bardi, in a process that often aims to review history's official versions. Although films are the main form of his artistic production, photography also plays a fundamental role in Julien's oeuvre. In his photographs, he reinvents and redefines the aesthetics of his audio-visual production using techniques such as collage and digital photomontage.

His film *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) was awarded the Semaine de la Critique prize in the Cannes Film Festival. *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1996), which the artist co-directed with Mark Nash, received the Pratt and Whitney Canada Grand Prize. Julien was also awarded the McDermott Prize from MIT and The Golden Gate Persistence of Vision Prize (2014) during the San Francisco Film Festival. In 2015, Isaac Julien obtained the Kaino Prize for artistic excellence.

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cover installation view

Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement, 2019 [detailhe]
Photo © Jack Hems – courtesy of the artist and Victoria Miro,
London/Venice

selected solo exhibitions

- *Isaac Julien – Fantôme Afrique*, Ruby City, San Antonio, USA (2023)
- *What Freedom is to me*, Tate Britain, London, UK (2023)
- *Once Again... (Statues Never Die)*, Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, USA (2022)
- *Lessons of the Hour*, Metro Pictures; Memorial Art Gallery (MAG), New York, USA (2019)
- *Western Union: Small Boats*, ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark (2018)
- *To the End of the World*, Galerie Forsblom, Stockholm, Sweden (2018)
- *Ten Thousand Waves*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói (MAC-Niterói), Niteroi, Brazil (2016)

selected group exhibitions

- *Black Diasporas: 21st Century Art and Poeticas*, LACMA, Los Angeles, USA (2023)
- *Thinking Historically in the Present – Sharjah Biennial 15*, Sharjah, UAE (2023)
- *Sweat*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2021)
- 57th Venice Biennale, Italy (2017)
- *Gallery*, Birmingham, UK (2017)
- *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender and Identity*, Walker Museum, Liverpool; Birmingham Museum and Art, UK (2017)
- *The Shadow Never Lies*, Minsheng Museum, Shanghai, China (2016)
- Paris Triennial, France (2012)
- 7th Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2008)

selected collections

- Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, USA
- Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
- Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA
- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA
- Tate Modern, London, USA
- SFMoMA, San Francisco, USA
- Young Museum, San Francisco, USA

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once again...
(statues never die) 2022

Drawing on Julien's extensive research in the archives of the Barnes Foundation, the film explores the reciprocal impact of Alain Locke's political philosophy and cultural organizing activities, and Albert E. Barnes's pioneering art collecting and democratic, inclusive educational enterprise.

Starring actor André Holland (*Moonlight* and *Passing*) as Alain Locke, Danny Huston (*Succession* and *Marlowe*) as Dr. Barnes, rising star Devon Terrell (Barack Obama in *Barry*) as sculptor Richmond Barthé, and Sharlene Whyte (*Small Axe* and *Lessons of the Hour*) as the Curator, with a special appearance by singer and songwriter Alice Smith, *Once Again... (Statues Never Die)* explores Locke's engagement with the Barnes collection, honoring both Locke's contribution to the arts while inviting critical conversations around the African material culture that influenced the Black cultural movement. The installation spotlights Dr. Barnes's subsequent writings on the meaning and value of African material culture and its import to the African diaspora, which were reproduced in Harlem Renaissance periodicals including *Opportunity*.



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installation views
Once Again... (Statues Never Die), 2022
15th Sharjah Biennale, United Arab Emirates
photo: Henrik Kam © Isaac Julien,
courtesy of the artist and Victoria Miro





In the film, Julien revisits themes he approached in his landmark 1989 film *Looking for Langston* and continues his exploration of the queer subculture of the Harlem Renaissance in his reflection on the relationship between Locke and sculptor Richmond Barthé, for which Barthé's sculptures were staged at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA).

Imagining his installation as a form of what he calls ‘poetic restitution,’ Julien alludes to contemporary restitution debates – examining the display and significance of African material culture in western art museums – specifically as they relate to works looted in the Benin Expedition of 1897, in which British troops destroyed the centuries-old Kingdom of Benin. *Once Again... (Statues Never Die)* joins contemporary debates around colonialism and the display of African material culture in European museums with recourse to the 1953 film by Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, *Les statues meurent aussi (Statues Also Die)*, a groundbreaking work that was banned soon after its debut in France for its anti-colonial sentiment, but which raised important questions about the acquisition and display of African works in European museums. Combining an original script written by Isaac Julien and Martina Klich with recently discovered archival footage from the 1970 film *You Hide Me* by Nii Kwate Owoo, which drew attention to African material culture stored in the British Museum, *Once Again... (Statues Never Die)* engages with current restitution debates.

‘This project explores Dr. Barnes and Alain Locke’s storied relationship, its mutually formative critical dialogue, and its significant impact on their work as cultural critics, educators, organizers, and activists on behalf of various African American causes,’ says Julien.



installation views
Once Again... (Statues Never Die), 2023
Tate Britain, United Kingdom
photo: Henrik Kam © Isaac Julien,
courtesy of the artist and Victoria Miro



lina bo bardi – a marvellous entanglement 2022

Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement it's a multi-screen installation and a photographic series that looks through Bo Bardi's work, a visionary modernist architect and designer (1914–1992). The film is inspired by both official and anecdotal stories about Bo Bardi's life and work, who married Pietro Maria Bardi after the war and then moved to Brazil. There she would find elements that permanently changed her professional life and world view. Bo Bardi was compelled to bring the creative spirit of Brazilian folk cultures into her sophisticated, prolific practice that involves building, furniture, jewellery and stage design, as well as a powerful theoretical approach. Starring the acclaimed Brazilian actresses Fernanda Montenegro and her daughter Fernanda Torres that recite texts closely adapted from the architect's writings, *A Marvellous Entanglement* portrays Bo Bardi at different stages of her life.









The film is shot across seven buildings designed by the architect; four in Salvador in Brazil's northeast region of Bahia (Museum of Modern Art; the Coaty Restaurant; Benin's House and the Gregório de Mattos theatre), and three in São Paulo (São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), Sesc Pompeia and the Oficina theatre). Each one becomes a locus for a performance, intervention, enactment or reinvention of scenes that have shaped the history of, and the legends around, her architecture. The film establishes Bo Bardi's iconic staircase, designed for the Museum of Modern Art, Bahia, as the stage for an original work by choreographer Zebrinha and performed by the Balé Folclórico de Bahia. The Coaty, accommodates a series of performances by Brazilian art collective Araka. There is also a tribute to the Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco, murdered in 2018.

Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement looks at historical reparation through visual poetry, moved by the breadth and poetry of Bo Bardi's work, and a profound belief that her legacy has yet to be fully acknowledged.

installation view
Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement, 2019
photo © Jack Hems – courtesy of the artist and Victoria Miro, London/Venice

→
installation views
Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement, 2020
Maxxi Rome, Italy





lessons of the hour 2022

Lessons of the Hour is a poetic meditation on the life and times of Frederick Douglass, a visionary African American writer, abolitionist and a freed slave, who was also the most photographed man of the 19th century. The ten-screen film installation proposes a contemplative journey into Douglass' zeitgeist and its relationship to contemporaneity. The film includes excerpts of Douglass' most arresting speeches such as *Lessons of the Hour*, *What to the Slave Is the 4th of July?* and *Lecture on Pictures*, a text that connects picture-making and photography to his vision of how technology can influence human relations. The work was shot in Washington DC, at The Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, where Douglass lived late in life, and where his house in Cedar Hill has been kept conserved as it was during the abolitionist's time; and in Scotland, where he was an active member of the *Send Back the Money* movement, and where he delivered a number of anti-slavery speeches.

Lessons of the Hour
(*Lessons of the Hour*), 2019
photo courtesy of the artist,
Metro Pictures New York, and
Victoria Miro London/Venice



→
The North Star
(*Lessons of the Hour*), 2019 [detail]
Photo courtesy of the artist,
Metro Pictures New York, and
Victoria Miro London/Venice



Bell Pull

For Use in

Emergency Only



The character of Douglass interacts with other cultural icons of his time in allusion to his private and public milieus. Mostly women, these other characters were chosen for being representatives of ideals of equality, which were as important then as they are today. The film features: Anna Murray and Helen Pitts, two English Quakeresses who were respectively Douglass' first and second wives that enabled him to return to America as a free man; Susan B. Anthony, Douglass' longtime friend and one of the most important American suffragists; and Otilie Assing, a feminist friend and lover, who translated Douglass' autobiography into German. J.P. Ball one of the first African-American prominent photographers, a friend of Douglass, and a campaigner for anti-lynching also features in the film. Through extensive use of Frederick Douglass' timely words Julien gives expression to the zeitgeist of Douglass' era, his legacy, and ways in which his story may be viewed today.

To see ourselves as others see us
(*Lessons of the Hour*), 2023
photograph on gloss inkjet paper
mounted on aluminum
160 x 213,3 cm
63 x 84 in

→
installation view
Lessons of the Hour—Frederick Douglass, 2023
Tate Britain, UK
photo: Jack Hems © Isaac Julien,
courtesy of the artist and Victoria Miro



stones against diamonds 2015

Stones Against Diamonds is a meditation on Italian born Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi, whom the artist describes as a kind of “female Oscar Niemeyer.” The inspiration for the work stems from a letter written by Bo Bardi, in which she describes her love for semi-precious stones over more ‘precious’ gems such as diamonds, and recalls how she began, while still in Italy, a collection of these stones that later enabled her to rethink design in a most remarkable way. Apart from exploring semi precious stones and precious gemstones, the film also takes on a role of researching the subconscious process in the creative production. For Julien, Bo Bardi’s letter is performed through a metaphor of the unconscious, an inaccessible place of beauty that can be reached only through the process of psychoanalysis and artistic reflection.



To see ourselves as others
see us *En Passage*
(*Stones Against Diamonds*), 2015
kodak endura premier
photographic print
180 x 240 cm
70.9 x 94.5 in

→
exhibition view
Stones Against Diamonds, 2015
ten screen ultra high definition
video installation
Rolls-Royce Art Programme during
Art Basel 2015, Basel, Switzerland





The work was filmed on location in Iceland, five hours' drive away from Reykjavik. With a team of more than 40 people working on the project, *Stones Against Diamonds* features actress Vanessa Myrie, an important figure in several of Julien's works, having appeared most recently in *True North* where she retraced the footsteps of African American explorer Matthew Henson who travelled to the North Pole in 1909. Here Myrie appears as a guiding figure that leads us on a spiritual journey amidst the breathtaking scenery of the glaciers, rocks, caves, and black volcanic sands. With a support from Rolls Royce, Isaac Julien was able to film in the depths of the ice cave, at the hearth of magnificent glacial formations. Together with his team, he introduced spiral staircases and glass easels as a reference to Lina Bo Bardi's architectural element, in contrast with the natural constituents of the cave.

Echo
(*Stones Against Diamonds*), 2015
photograph
160 x 160 cm
63 x 63 in

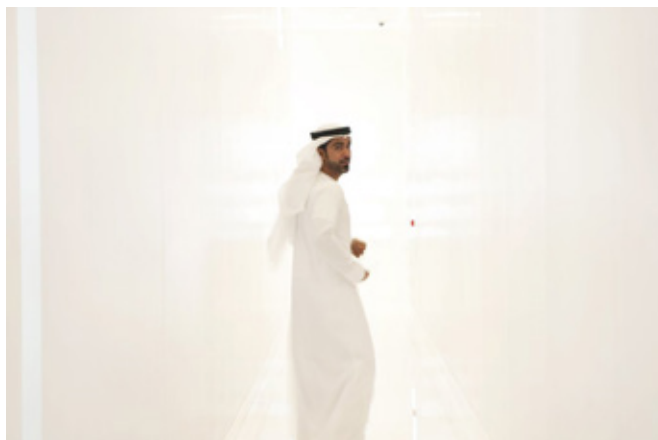
playtime 2014

Playtime is a film installation representing three cities and their relationships to capital: London, a city transformed by Thatcherism, neoliberalism, and bank deregulation; Reykjavik, where the 2008 financial crash stopped capital in its tracks; and the new art and financial center Dubai, an oil-fueled metropolis that sprang from the desert.

It features six main characters whose lives are entangled via the global flow of capital and labor: Maggie Cheung as a Hong Kong reporter who converses with Swiss auctioneer Simon de Pury (appearing as himself); Mercedes Cabral as a Filipina domestic laborer, who describes her workplace imprisonment in Dubai; an American art adviser, played by the debonair James Franco; Ingvar Sigurðsson as an Icelandic artist bankrupted by the financial crash; and a cocky black Brit hedge fund manager, played by Colin Salmon. 'Each character is based on extensive research in film, artworks, newspapers, and literary representations, as well as on interviews I conducted; the characters are both empirical presentations and archetypes.'





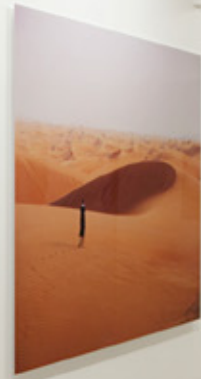


Playtime also has a sister project, *Kapital*, 2013, from which it was originally developed. In the piece, Harvey declares that the architecture of capital has not changed since Marx's *Capital*, but *Playtime* offers another possibility. In today's markets, digital technologies have given rise to the 'dark pools' described by author Michael Lewis in *Flash Boys* 'private securities-trading forums where the sheer speed of digital exchanges allows capital to reduplicate and perform itself in microseconds.' In *Playtime*, digital technologies similarly permit a diversity of special effects, creating slippages of meaning, significance, and identity.

All That's Solid Melts Into Air (Playtime), 2013
Eclipse (Playtime), 2013
The Abyss (Playtime), 2013
Emerald City / Kapital (Playtime), 2013
Icarus Descending (Playtime), 2013
Mirage (Playtime), 2013
endura ultra photograph, dia sec
160 x 240 cm each
63 x 94.5 in each

→
exhibition views
Playtime, 2014
Galeria Nara Roesler São Paulo, Brazil







kapital 2013

Kapital is a two-screen work centering around a conversation at the Hayward Gallery, London between Julien and renowned Marxist academic David Harvey (author of the book *The Enigma of Capital*). Julien opens the film by asking why capital is so difficult to depict, to which Harvey deftly replies: 'in the same way you can only really intuit gravity exists by its effects, you can really only intuit that capital exists by its effects.' Staged as part of a seminar entitled *Choreographing Capital* organised by the artist at the Hayward Gallery in 2012, the event saw notable interventions from theorists, critics and curators such as the late Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Irit Rogoff and Colin MacCabe. Julien has always made work in collaboration, conversation and exchange but this is the first time he has opened up the complex and rigorous research processes that lie behind his working methods.



installation views
Kapital, 2013
56th International Art Exhibition
la Biennale di Venezia,
All the World's Futures
photo © Alessandra Chemollo



The curator of the 56th Venice Biennale, Okwui Enwezor has anchored his show in one work of literature: Marx's *Das Kapital*. From the opening to the closing date of the biennial, a team of performers will stage daily readings from it, working their way through the entire text to, if not the end, as far in as they can get. The readings of *Das Kapital* will be read as a dramatic text by trained actors, directed by artist and filmmaker Isaac Julien whose two video installation, *Kapital*, is also on show at the biennale – one that contains footage of a public conversation between him and the Marx scholar David Harvey, enlivened by interventions from the late cultural theorist Stuart Hall.

The *Das Kapital* readings take place in a new performance space called the Arena, designed by British architect David Adjaye, in the biennale's central pavilion. They are accompanied by what Enwezor called 'annotations' – a range of events and performances that cast light on the text in their own way.

then thousand waves 2010

Isaac Julien's *Ten Thousand Waves* is a 9-screen installation shot on location in China. The work poetically weaves together stories linking China's ancient past and present. Through an architectural installation, the work explores the movement of people across countries and continents and meditates on unfinished journeys.



installation view
Ten Thousand Waves, 2010
MoMA, NY, 2013



Conceived and made over four years, *Ten Thousand Waves* sees Julien collaborating with some of China's leading artistic voices, including: the legendary siren of Chinese cinema Maggie Cheung; rising star of Chinese film Zhao Tao; poet Wang Ping; master calligrapher Gong Fagen; artist Yang Fudong; acclaimed cinematographer Zhao Xiaoshi; and a 100-strong Chinese cast and crew. The film's original musical score is by fellow East Londoner Jah Wobble and The Chinese Dub Orchestra and contemporary classical composer Maria de Alvear. Filmed on location in the ravishing and remote Guangxi province and at the famous Shanghai Film Studios and various sites around Shanghai, *Ten Thousand Waves* combines fact, fiction and film essay genres against a background of Chinese history, legend and landscape to create a meditation on global human migrations. Through formal experimentation and a series of unique collaborations, Julien seeks to engage with Chinese culture through contemporary events, ancient myths and artistic practice.

(Ten Thousand Waves), 2010
endura ultra photograph, dia sec
180 x 240 cm each
70.9 x 94.5 in each

The original inspiration for *Ten Thousand Waves* was the Morecambe Bay tragedy of 2004, in which 23 Chinese cockle-pickers died. In response to this event, Julien commissioned the poet Wang Ping to come to England and write *Small Boats*, a poem that is recited in the work. In the successive years, Julien has spent time in China slowly coming to understand the country and its people's perspectives and developing the relationships that have enabled him to undertake this rich and multifaceted work. Through conversations with academics, curators and artists both in China and the UK, Julien uncovered a symbolic body of material which he has used to create a work that explores modern and traditional Chinese values and superstitions. These are encapsulated in a fable about the goddess Mazu (played by Maggie Cheung) that comes from Fujian Province, from where the Morecambe Bay cockle-pickers originated. *The Tale of Yishan Island* tells the tale of 16th Century fishermen lost and in danger at sea. At the heart of the legend is the goddess figure who leads the fishermen to safety. Using this fable as a starting point Julien deftly draws on this story and the poignant connection between it and the 21st Century tragedy of Chinese migrants who died struggling to survive in the North of England.

installation view
Red Chamber Dream,
(*Ten Thousand Waves*), 2010
Metro Pictures, New York, 2011





Following ideas surrounding death, spiritual displacement, and the uniquely Chinese connection with 'ghosts' or 'lost souls', the film links the Shanghai of the past and present, symbolising the Chinese transition towards modernity, aspiration and affluence. Here, Julien employs the visual language of ghost stories, with recurrent figures and images appearing and disappearing. Mazu's spectral figure traverses time and space, serving as a guide through the interlocking strands of the work. Mirroring the goddess of the fable, a ghostly protagonist (Zhao Tao) leads us through the world of Shanghai cinema via the Shanghai Film Studio, to a restaging by Julien of scenes from the classic Chinese film *The Goddess* (1934), and finally to the streets of Modern and Old Shanghai. Isaac Julien is as equally acclaimed for his fluent, arresting films as his vibrant and inventive gallery installations. *Ten Thousand Waves* is his most ambitious project to date with the nine-screen installation forming a dynamic structure which choreographs the viewers experience of the multiple narratives. Julien deploys the visual and aural textures of the film to elicit a visceral response from the viewer, submerging them in the world of his making.

derek 2008

From Sebastiane (1976) to Blue (1992), Derek Jarman's films constantly interrogated time and art, and epitomised his own era. He was a painter, part of that moment that made sixties London a capital of the art world. He was a film-maker, perhaps the single most crucial figure of British independent cinema through the seventies, eighties and nineties. He lived as a gay man surfing the joys of Gay Liberation and the sorrows of Aids. He lived as a participant observer, noting with pen or camera all that passed before him – from punk to Thatcher, from Hampstead Heath to film premiere.

Now those images will serve to place his art in his time, to produce a fascinating history that we can put to use. As well as the feature films and Super 8 films, which span three decades, there are the extensive video clips he recorded from the early seventies, for artists from the Smiths to the Pet Shop Boys, and from television to film festivals in Japan, Berlin and Cologne. There are also images of Derek, as he erupted into the viewfinder of the news media. This unique perspective will provide a counterpoint, as his own images are juxtaposed with the images of the history that generated them.





At the centre of the film, the thread from which it is all woven, is the time capsule that Derek left. Before his death, and in the midst of that great creative period that would produce *Edward II*, *Caravaggio* and *Blue*, he recorded a day long interview in 1990 with Colin MacCabe. It is his message in a bottle, a survey of his life from the point of view of his death, a talisman for the future.

The present is represented by a letter written to Derek by Tilda Swinton and read by her as a voiceover which provides a beguiling narrative thread throughout the film, bringing his life closer to a new generation, a new audience.

Using the skills he has accumulated in a career which ranges from narrative feature to video art, from museum installation to television documentary, Isaac Julien's new film will combine document with fiction, experiment with narrative to produce an enthralling work of art.

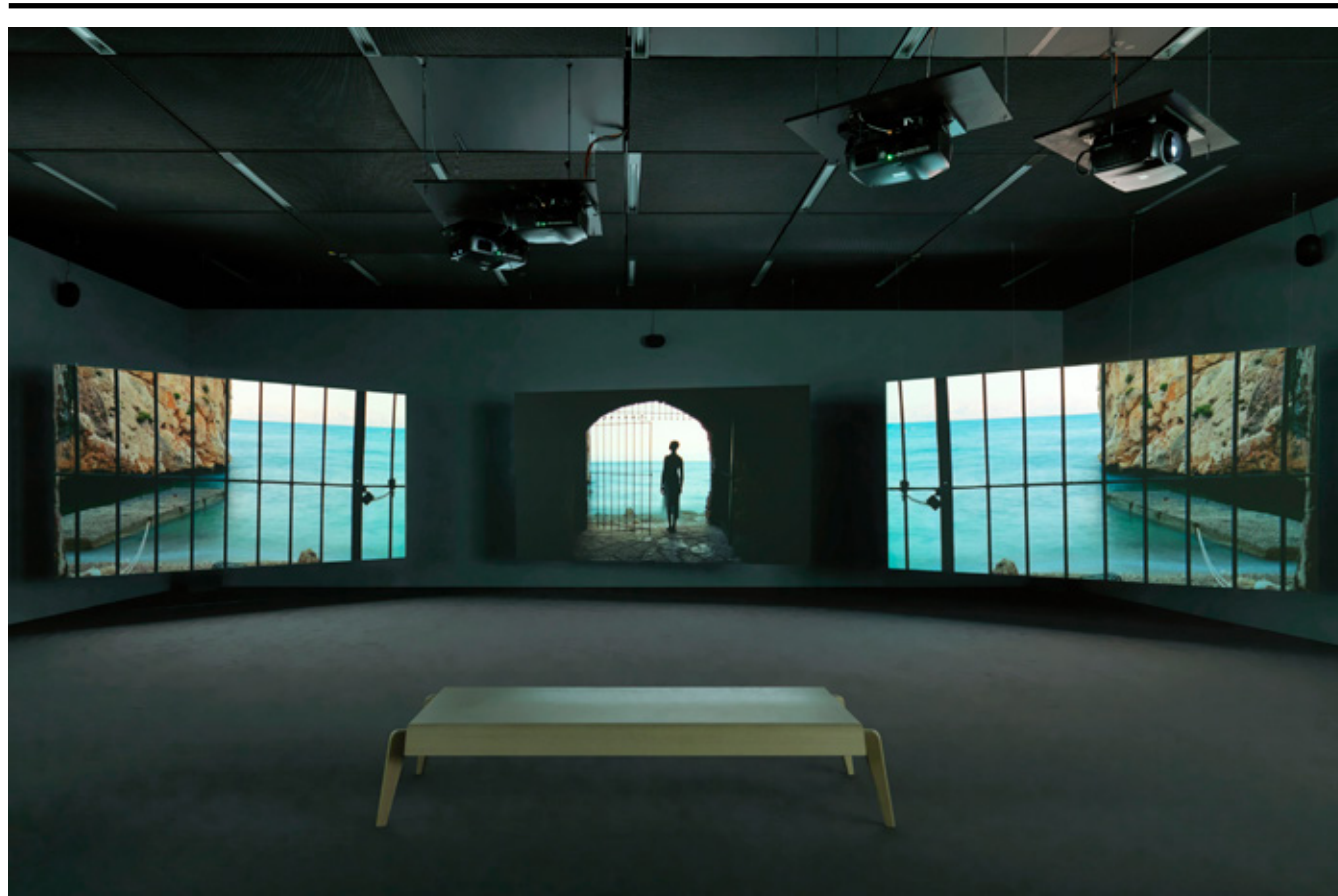
Derek, 2008 [still]
super 16 and 35 mm color film,
5.1 surround sound
76'5"

western union: small boats 2007

WESTERN UNION: Small Boats forms the final installment of Julien's compelling trilogy of audiovisual film installations which also includes *True North* (2004) and *Fantôme Afrique* (2005). The works explore the impact of location – both cultural and physical – to resounding effect through a juxtaposition of opposing global regions.

Julien's new work, *WESTERN UNION: Small Boats* concerns journeys made across the seas of the Mediterranean. The journeys and stories of so-called 'clandestines' who leave Libya, escaping wars and famines. They can be seen as economic migrant workers, along with certain Europeans – 'Angels' in Walter Benjamin's terms – who bear witness to modernity's failed hopes and dreams, and who now travel across oceanic spaces some never to arrive or return.





Expanding the themes of voyages, excursions and expeditions, *WESTERN UNION: Small Boats* is being produced at a time when advances in global telecommunications and new technologies are continually celebrated. One of the major questions arising from this development is the part individuals may play in this flow of information. Questions surrounding the circulation of human lives, the movements of bodies, and their personal stories, are timely when immigration policies generate controversy on a daily basis, and the relationships between nations are the source of much debate.

installation view
Western Union, 2007
Museum Brandhorst, Munich, 2009

fantôme créole 2005

'*Fantôme Créole* is a four-screen installation which juxtaposes African and arctic spaces. The two actor-protagonists (Vanessa Myrie, who also appears in *Baltimore*, 2003, and dancer Stephen Galloway) are not characters with dialogue and implied interiority, rather they serve to link scenes together between African city and desert-scapes, and between the arctic north and the arid south. The lack of narrative connection signals an intellectual proposition concerning issues connecting these spaces, as well as Julien's interest in 'creolised' vision – to create new ideas from the movements and connections between spaces. The 'disjunctive juxtapositions' (in film parlance, 'parallel montage') put the spectator in the position of constructing meaning and, through a positioning of screens which forces the viewer to change position to grasp the totality of the presentation, challenge the fixed position that single-screen work entails.'

Mark Nash

Fantôme Créole Series
(*Papillon No. 2*), 2005
lambda print on gloss paper
119,5 x 119,5 cm each
47 x 47 in each



→
installation view
Fantôme Créole, 2005
Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, 2011
photo: Laila Meyrick/Velour



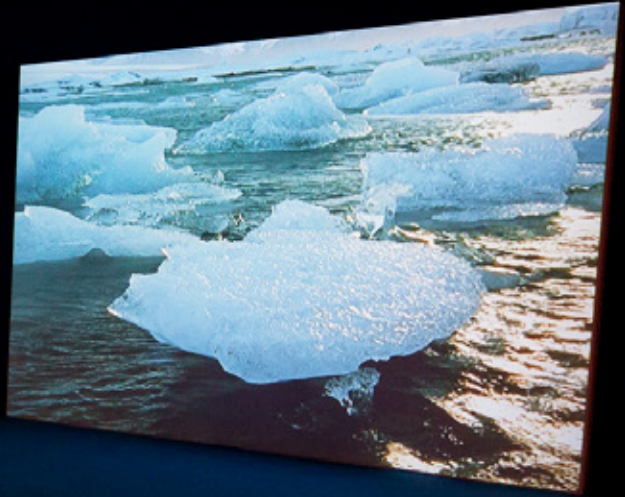


Fantôme Créole Series
(Cinema Cinema), 2005
lambda print on gloss paper
119,5 x 119,5 cm each
47 x 47 in each

fantôme afrique 2005

Fantôme Afrique weaves cinematic and architectural references through the rich imagery of urban Ouagadougou, the centre for cinema in Africa, and the arid spaces of rural Burkina Faso, and is punctuated by archival footage from early colonial expeditions and landmark moments in African history. Renowned choreographer and dancer Stephen Galloway (Ballet Frankfurt) and actor Vanessa Myrie (Baltimore) figure as 'trickster/phantom' and 'witness' in this carefully composed meditation on the denationalised, de-territorialised spaces born of the encounters between local and global cultures, where the ghosts of history linger amid the realities of the day.





true north 2004

'*True North* is meditative and comprises reflective images of the sublime, and, like Julien's accompanying piece, *Paradise Omeros*, uses the landscape as a key location and theme. Loosely inspired by the story of the black American explorer Matthew Henson (1866–1955), who accompanied Robert Peary and was one of the first people to reach the North Pole, later writing an account of his experience. In this fragmented narrative, Julien contemplates on ideas and histories of the hierarchical as well as in the struggling figure we find a succinct metaphor of endless traversing, symbolising the voyage of the modern that has to be experienced by others. The installation offers a fascinating new visual reading of space and time and its relation to counter histories. Here, the sublime moment of cognition of the image is presented to the mind which, in turn, can only comprehend the absolute of magnitude which itself defies conceptualisation. The installation contests binaries which are present in many notations of the expedition and of adventure that clutter the history of discovery – here reason, order and stability are replaced by irrational meanderings, symbolic gestures from shamanistic tropes and the constant seeping inertia of the ice.'

Shaheen Merali



True North Series,
Ice Project Work No. 9, 2004
duratrans image in lightbox
123 x 247 x 7 cm
48.4 x 97.2 x 2.7 in

→
installation view
True North, 2004
MAK Center for Art and
Architecture in Los Angeles



baltimore 2003

Baltimore is rich in urban imagery and, like Julien's earlier pieces *Vagabondia* and *Three*, uses museums as a key location and theme.

Inspired by blaxploitation movies while he was filming his documentary *Baadasssss Cinema*, Julien appropriates the styles, gestures, language and iconography of the genre to create a work that defies easy categorization. Starring veteran black actor and director Melvin Van Peebles, *Baltimore* was designed in part as homage to Van Peebles' movies. It unites three Baltimore institutions – the Walters Art Museum, the Contemporary Museum and the Great Blacks in Wax Museum – with blaxploitation cinema, the tough talking, hard-living symbol of black empowerment that Van Peebles helped usher in with his 1971 movie *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*. *Baltimore* is ironic and funky, nostalgic and futuristic, rough and fine. It is characterized by oscillation and an insistent formal play with linear perspective which also pays homage to Piero della Francesca and more particularly, a painting of unknown authorship, c.1500, known as 'View of an Ideal City', which features in the collection of the Walters Art Museum.



Baltimore, 2003
video installation (03 projections)
11'56"



paradise omeros 2002

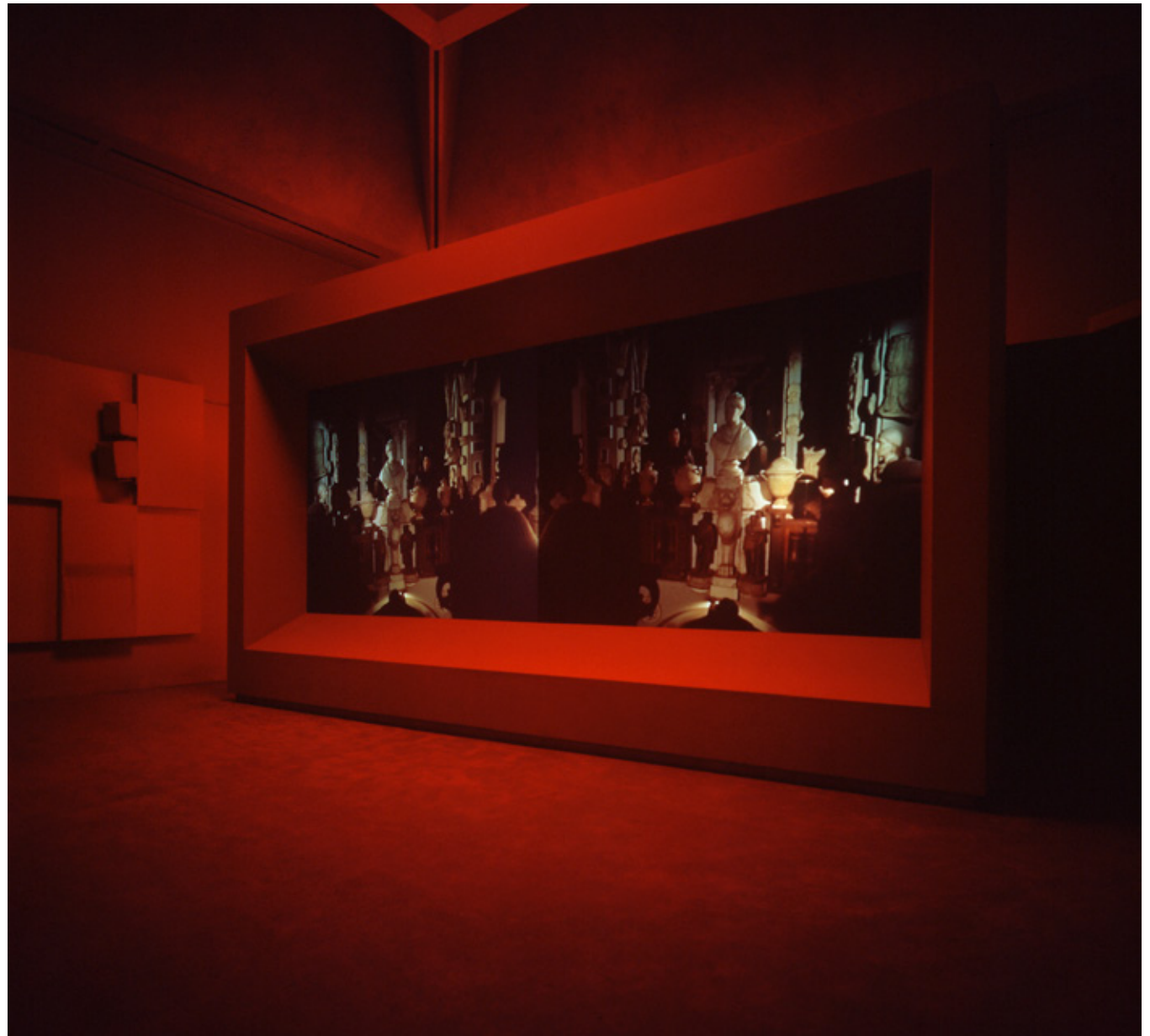
Paradise Omeros delves into the fantasies and feelings of 'creoleness': the mixed language, the hybrid mental states, and the territorial transpositions that arise when one lives in multiple cultures. Using the recurrent imagery of the sea, the film sweeps the viewer into a poetic meditation on the ebb and flow of self and stranger, love and hate, war and peace, xenophobe and xenophile. Set in London in the 1960s and on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia today, *Paradise Omeros* is loosely based on poems from Omeros (1990), by the Nobel Prize winning poet Derek Walcott. Walcott and the musician and composer Paul Gladstone Reid collaborated on the text and the score. The piece is coscripted by Isaac Julien and Grischa Duncker.

installation view
Paradise Omeros, 2002
Moderna Museet,
Estocolmo/Stockholm

vagabondia 2000

A conservator imagines ghosts of 18th century Black London including a dancing vagabond figure. Choreography by Javier De Frutos.

Filmed in the Sir John Soane museum in London, *Vagabondia* is a film in which curation meets choreography. A black female conservator imagines the buried stories and the hidden histories within the museum's cornucopia of colonial plunder. Filmed with fluid camera movements and a sensuous attention to lighting-camera work, Julien makes of the museum a world of shadows, mirrors and frames-within-frames where the statues also dream and the vagabond spirit of colonialism's repressed memory comes dancing, jerkily, back to life.



long road to mazatlan 1999

‘A fantasia on the American Southwest that focuses with characteristic ambivalence on the social construction of masculinity in popular representations of that mythic landscape.’

David Deitcher

The long Road to Mazatlán, a video collaboration between Isaac Julien and the choreographer Javier de Frutos, is a fusion of movie and movement, a dance of gazes. Shot in and around San Antonio, Texas, it mixes familiar images of the West – the cowboy, the cattle yard, the dirt road - with a more contemporary and homoerotic iconography, unsettling each one. A tale of frustration and loss, the work offers no prescription for stable identity or for the satisfaction of desire, but the sensuality of its images and form is hearteningly seductive.

Long Road to Mazatlan, 1999
video installation (03 projections)

frantz fanon,
black skin white mask 1996

Interviews, reconstructions and archive footage tell the story of the life and work of the highly influential anti-colonialist writer Frantz Fanon, author of *Black Skin, White Mask* and *The Wretched of the Earth* and his professional life as a psychiatric doctor in Algeria during its war of independence with France.

'*Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* is a seventy-minute drama-documentary film we produced in 1996. The impetus for the film project was to restore to academic and artistic discourses a recognition of both the originality and contradictory nature of this major thinker. It was initially conceived as a reflection on the revival of interest in Fanon's ideas in black visual and performance arts. The black arts movement in Britain and North America had sought a more substantial basis for reflection on the black body and its representations. In development, the film's mandate became broader to include other aspects of Fanon's influence and legacy.'





looking for langston 1989/2016

Looking for Langston is a lyrical exploration – and recreation – of the private world of poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist Langston Hughes (1902–1967) and his fellow black artists from the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s. Julien often works with advanced pre and post-production technologies. To create the large-scale photographic works on display, he has used both digital and analogue techniques creating an immersive, cinematic experience. Also, he has worked simultaneously with photographers and cinematographers to make his still and moving picture artworks. Working with Nina Kellgren (cinematographer) and Sunil Gupta (photographer), Julien shot *Looking for Langston* in the 1980s in London but set it in the jazz world of 1920s Harlem. His use of low-key lighting and sculptural smoke further complicate historical periodisation, infusing the work with a 1940s film noir feel.

Pas de deux with Roses (Looking for Langston Vintage Series), 1989/2016
ilford classic silver gelatin fine art paper,
mounted on aluminum and framed
58 x 74,5 cm
22.8 x 29.3 in

The imaginative combination of epochs creates a kind of 'creolisation' of photographic forms as well as a potent and self-conscious timelessness. It is possible to see a direct relation between images imbued with references to the history of 1930s black-and-white African American photography and 1980s Queer cultures. *Looking for Langston* was made when the AIDS crisis was at its height and several of its actors died after the film was made. For Julien, the photographs made in the process act as 'memorial sites'. Sometimes they reveal facts behind his fictions and explore the creative process, at other times they zero in on a portrait or go deeper into a moment of contested history.

Looking for Langston became the hallmark of what B. Ruby Rich named New Queer Cinema, and is also regarded as a touchstone for African-American Studies have been taught widely in North American universities, colleges and art schools for nearly 30 years.



Film-Noir Angels (Looking for Langston Vintage Series), 1989/2016 [detail]
kodak premier print, diasec
mounted on aluminum
180 x 260 cm
70.8 x 102.3 in

nara roesler

são paulo

avenida europa 655,
jardim europa, 01449-001
são paulo, sp, brasil
t 55 (11) 2039 5454

rio de janeiro

rua redentor 241,
ippanema, 22421-030
rio de janeiro, rj, brasil
t 55 (21) 3591 0052

new york

511 west 21st street
new york, 10011 ny
usa
t 1 (212) 794 5038

info@nararoesler.art

www.nararoesler.art