

Bluecoat

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International
Visual Arts

 Arts Council
Collection

PRESS RELEASE

17 October 2016

BLUECOAT AND INIVA PRESENT MAJOR KEITH PIPER EXHIBITION

EXHIBITION UNVEILS A NEW ARTS COUNCIL COLLECTION 70TH ANNIVERSARY COMMISSION

This October, artist Keith Piper will return to Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, with a major solo exhibition presented in partnership with Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts).

Unearthing the Banker's Bones (28 October 2016 - 22 January 2017), will comprise three new large-scale works spanning installation, digital works and drawings that address current anxieties about the impacts of globalisation. It will be the most substantial presentation of the artist's work in nearly two decades and celebrates the longstanding relationship between Piper and the two institutions which began over three decades ago.

Lending its title to the exhibition, the centrepiece of the show will be a new Arts Council Collection 70th Anniversary commission comprising of three synchronised high definition video projections, which depict a narrative of economic and social collapse — *Unearthing the Banker's Bones* (2016). Drawing on extracts from apocalyptic works by Octavia Butler and Mary Shelley, the film employs a science fiction device which invites viewers to imagine the excavation and dissection of modern life from a future point in time. Alongside the film, 'physical evidence' such as ledgers belonging to the banker of the title, will be displayed. These objects play off against the unfolding narrative of the film.

After premiering at Bluecoat, *Unearthing the Banker's Bones* (2016) will become a permanent part of the Arts Council Collection where it will be available for loan to museums, galleries and other spaces nationally and internationally.

Speaking about the new commission that forms part of the exhibition, Keith Piper said:

“Unearthing the Banker’s Bones (2016) is a work emerging out of a period of research into science fiction as a space in which metaphors around social, racial and class anxieties are played out.

“Weaving together references drawn from a diverse range of classic novels, films and other texts, I am attempting to employ visual montage to play with notions of landscape and history painting, to devise a narrative played out across a triptych of video screens. The story that unfolds will be one of exploration, excavation and autopsy as a way of examining the present from an imagined future.”

Other highlights of the exhibition at Bluecoat include *Robot Bodies*, Piper’s 1988 seminal interactive digital work – updated and re-programmed for this exhibition – in which the robot, android and cyborg are examined as metaphorical carriers of contemporary anxieties around racial difference; and a series of mixed media works on un-stretched canvas, ‘future projected history paintings of the present’, that reference 19th century history painting and have been commissioned by Bluecoat and Iniva.

Unearthing the Banker’s Bones is a continuation of the social and political concerns that have informed Piper’s practice, from the very beginnings of his career as part of Britain’s BLK Art Group in the 1980s. The group fought to raise the profile of black artists through exhibitions and conferences, a contribution whose significance is only now being recognised in the development of 20th century British art. Other artists associated with the group included John Akomfrah, Eddie Chambers and Marlene Smith.

The collaboration between Bluecoat and Iniva in bringing the exhibition to fruition celebrates the close relationship that both institutions have had with Piper since the start of his career in the 1980s.

Piper first exhibited at Bluecoat in *Black Skin, Bluecoat* in 1985. He returned in 1986 as part of *New Contemporaries* (which later went on to become *Bloomberg New Contemporaries*), when Bluecoat’s Artistic Director, Bryan Biggs, was a selector, and again in 1992 with the groundbreaking commissioned project, *Trophies of Empire*

Iniva first worked with Keith Piper on his first major solo show *Relocating the Remains* in 1997 and it toured internationally. It was accompanied by a monograph of the same name with an significant essay by renowned art historian Kobena Mercer. Later, Iniva and Piper collaborated on the *Keith Piper Club Mix*, a digital media intervention in night-clubs across the UK. He has also featured in a number of key Iniva exhibitions and publications including *Boxer* (1995) and *Exiles, Strangers and Diasporas* (2008)

Bryan Biggs, Artistic Director of Bluecoat, said:

*“Keith’s association with Bluecoat dates back to 1985 with *Black Skin, Bluecoat* and continued through significant projects like *Trophies of Empire* in 1992, so it has been a pleasure for us to work with him again to bring *Unearthing the Banker’s Bones* to fruition. We are especially pleased to be bringing the Arts Council commission to Liverpool for its debut, where Keith has exhibited many times before.*

“We are committed to working closely with artists to develop their work throughout their careers, and so we are delighted to see Keith’s challenging and vital work achieve such important recognition today after working closely with him for many years.”

Melanie Keen, Director of Iniva, said:

“At this moment in time, artists who challenge and renew people’s perceptions of diversity and globalisation are more needed than ever. Iniva supports artists at different moments in their careers, providing guidance and opportunities to present new work. Iniva has had a close relationship with Piper since the start of his career and I’m particularly thrilled to collaborate on this major exhibition as one of my first achievements as Iniva’s new director.”

Jill Constantine, Head of the Arts Council Collection, said:

“Eight new artworks, in total, have been commissioned by some of the most celebrated artists living and working in the UK today and will be on shown across England during 2016 before becoming a permanent part of the Arts Council Collection. These works are available for loan to galleries across the country and will enrich their own programmes. It has been a real pleasure to work with the artists from the very beginning of the process and with institutions like Bluecoat and Iniva to bring these commissions to fruition.”

Unearthing the Banker’s Bones will continue into January 2017, marking the start of Bluecoat’s 300th anniversary programme. Also showing at Bluecoat from 28 October 2016 – 22 January will be *Adham Faramawy: Janus Collapse (the juice-box edition)*, which explores how identity is constructed in the 21st century.

Ends

For more information, or to attend the press trip on Thursday 27 October, please contact:

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Editor’s Notes:

About Keith Piper

Keith Piper is an artist, curator, critic and academic. He was born in 1960 in Malta and studied at Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham and the Royal College of Art, London. He was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Arts by University of Wolverhampton in 2002. Since 2006 he has been Reader in Fine Art and Digital Media at Middlesex University, London.

Along with fellow artists Eddie Chambers, Marlene Smith and Donald Rodney, he was a founder member of the BLK Art Group, an association of black British art students, mostly based in the West Midlands, between 1980-1984. He has exhibited widely, including solo and group exhibitions in the UK, Europe and USA. His work was included in *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic*, Tate Liverpool (2010) and *Migrations: Journeys into British Art*, Tate Britain (2012).

About Bluecoat

Bluecoat is Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, supporting and presenting visual art, music, dance, live art and literature, as well as practices that fall in between these categories.

The past few years have seen the organisation show internationally renowned artists such as William Kentridge, Sonia Boyce, John Akomfrah and Mark Leckey. At the same time Bluecoat has worked to engage with audiences from the most vulnerable communities, from those with dementia to families facing disadvantage, through its participation programme.

Bluecoat is the UK's oldest arts centre, with a rich artistic history; early exhibitions include the first showing of the Post Impressionists alongside their UK peers in 1911. The building will celebrate its 300th anniversary in 2017.

www.thebluecoat.org.uk

About Iniva

Iniva is an evolving, radical visual arts organisation dedicated to developing an artistic programme that reflects the social and political impact of globalisation. With the Stuart Hall Library acting as a critical and creative hub for our work, we collaborate with artists, curators, researchers and cultural producers to challenge conventional notions of diversity and difference. We aim to engage a wide audience, particularly young people, in discourse and debate on issues surrounding the politics of race, class and gender.

Through our programme we work predominantly with British-born and British-based visual artists of African and Asian descent supporting them at different stages in their careers. We offer residencies, commission new work and promote existing practices enabling ambition and artist development. By cultivating innovative thinking, we are committed to disseminating research across a wide cultural spectrum and geographical network. Our ambition is to build a greater body of knowledge around each of the artists with whom we work to ensure the legacy of their practices for future generations of researchers and audiences.

Founded in 1994, under the leadership of renowned academic Professor Stuart Hall, Iniva is a non-profit organisation based in East London. It has established itself as a pioneering arts organisation in the artistic environment in the UK and beyond. Iniva has worked with internationally renowned artists and curators early in their careers including David A Bailey, Sonia Boyce, Sheela Gowda, NS Harsha, Isaac Julien, Steve McQueen, Chris Ofili, Yinka Shonibare, Kobena Mercer, Okwui Enwezor, and Guy Brett.

Iniva is a registered charity and an Arts Council England National Portfolio organisation. Iniva is also supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Elephant Trust. www.iniva.org

About the Arts Council Collection's 70th anniversary

The Arts Council Collection, the UK's most widely-seen collection of modern and contemporary British art, is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. The celebrations include 8 new commissions that will be on display across the UK throughout 2016; two new touring exhibitions, *Night at the Museum*, curated by Ryan Gander, and *Drawn from Life: People on Paper*; and the National Partners programme, which will deepen the Collection's long-standing relationship with key museums and galleries around the country. In addition to Keith Piper, the other 7 artists who are making new work for the Arts Council Collection's 70th Anniversary Commissions are: John Akomfrah, Hurvin Anderson, Marvin Gaye Chetwynd, Ryan Gander, Mark Leckey, Katie Paterson and Heather Phillipson. The commissions will open at different venues across the UK before becoming a permanent part of the Arts Council Collection where they will be available for loan to museums, galleries and other spaces nationally and internationally. Half of the artists selected for the commissions - John Akomfrah, Hurvin An-

derson, Katie Paterson and Heather Phillipson - will be joining the Collection for the first time, the others contributing major new works. More information about the Arts Council Collection and its 70th anniversary celebrations can be found at www.artcouncilcollection.org.uk