

How can anyone approach such matters when the culture in question is not their own? Issues of cultural ownership come to the fore in this timely exhibition, *Re-Recordings*, curated by Liz Ward, accompanied by a series of accessory displays curated by the Exhibition Studio Workshop in the MA Curating & Collections at Chelsea College of Arts. The matter of responsibility for cultural artefacts emerges not because so many viewers of exhibitions in London nowadays have an intermittent relationship to the city but more because living mid-way into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century makes many of the preoccupations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century look like they took place in a different era.

The long-gone era of communitarian politics, bringing together an urban medley of disabilities rights, lesbian and gay movements alongside the advancement of a black cultural agenda, can be seen as an historic high-watermark in Britain's social democracy. Such a view of the past becomes particularly acute, especially when one is reminded that much activism built connections broadly, aligning with struggles such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), Greenpeace and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. Images of Greenham Common Women's peace camps, Anti-Apartheid vigils and Gay Pride marches, populate memories of Britain in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century alongside the soundtrack of the period, 'Maggie, Maggie, Maggie... out, out, out.' Now same-sex marriage is lawful, in Britain as well as in Ireland, and Mrs Thatcher is dead.

So whose past is it? Does the cultural legacy remain with curators, librarians and cultural professionals, who, alongside Liz Ward, took responsibility for collecting much of material documenting historic exhibition activity? In many ways, the work of *Re-Recordings* is to refuse the apportioning of cultural ownership to this group or that group, to one set of artists or to another. Rather, the exhibition works as an invitation to partake in another moment of activism, albeit not the activism of the street march or the benefit gig or the pitch-and-tent demo. Instead, *Re-Recordings* asks us to engage with the activism of spectatorship, demanding of us to abandon the idle browsing of weekend pastimes and on-line shopping, replacing it instead with a viewing that becomes an appraisal of history.

Dr David Dibosa

### **Black artists in British Art. Some problems with history and its treatment of Black-British artists.**

In seeking to contribute to the researching and establishing of more substantial and credible histories of black artists in the UK, the would-be researcher is faced with a number of difficulties and issues. These difficulties and issues begin with the question of terminology. Strictly speaking, 'Black artists', as a self-declared and self-identified body of practitioners, did not emerge in the UK until the early 1980's. Before this time, there were no 'Black artists' as such. There were, instead, 'Afro-Caribbean' artists, 'West Indian' artists, 'African' artists, 'Asian' artists and so on. And within artist signified as 'African' or 'Asian', there were, oftentimes, more specific labels of nationality such as 'Nigerian', 'Ghanaian', 'Ceylonese', 'Indian', and so on. This particular history of Black artists in Britain begins with those young artists from African, Asian, and Caribbean countries of the then British Empire, who made their way to Britain in the decades of the mid twentieth century, to begin, or continue, careers as visual artists. Without exception, none of these artists referred to themselves, or their practice, as 'Black'. Many of these artists presupposed, or imagined, that they were part of a cosmopolitan, metropolitan art world in which seemingly blunt labels of 'ethnic' or 'racial' difference had no substantial place. A history of Black artists in Britain, stretching back to the mid twentieth century, tends to presuppose that 'Black' artists existed as such, over the duration of many decades. With 'Black artists' only emerging and being so named in the early 1980's, there is perhaps a need for circumspection in the use and application of labels, as well as adjectives such as 'Black'.

Eddie Chambers