

The single most important stage in the development of an artist's practice is arguably having their work exhibited and subsequently documented in some form so that it stakes a claim for recognition in the world. Only by having support structures in place, such as a sympathetic curator and/or writer with provisory space, can an artist expect to realise this goal. This has been particularly true of work made by artists who are of African, Afro-Caribbean and Asian descent.⁽¹⁾ However, each artists' story unfolds with varying degrees of acceptance, exclusion and finally recognition. Within Recordings, a document of documents, those stories reveal themselves by whom and what have been documented, written about and subsequently published.

Documenting the work of black artists practising in Britain has sometimes been 'do-it-yourself' in nature. Some earlier catalogues, produced as xerox copies, reflect the resourceful character of individual artists and the firm hope that their document would be collected. On another level, the notion of DIY practice refers more profoundly to taking the initiative and being able to recognise a gap in the range of books that deal with contemporary art practice; when there was no one there to do it for you, you would do-it-yourself. As time has passed, catalogues have changed in their appearance – they are more sophisticated now in terms of the print technology and materials used to produce them, mainly because of the money made available that helped fund the production. When publishing these catalogues and books, how could the 'producer' be certain that they would be collected? The fact is that many art libraries in Britain are poor resources for those researching not only contemporary black British artists, but artists from a plurality of cultures.⁽²⁾

Library users often have to demand that these documents are collected, but these demands are not always heard. The archive which has fed into Recordings was established in 1985 at the St. Martin's School of Art

library, before it became part of the London Institute. Establishing the archive was the result of demands made by black students for documentation that recognised the contributions made to British art by their contemporaries and predecessors. Also new directives on multi-cultural education introduced by the ILEA – the now defunct Inner London Education Authority – affected the development of this resource. Having supportive and sympathetic librarians ensured that the archive grew and found a permanent home at Chelsea School of Art once the London Institute was formed. This is not to say that the responsibility of collecting rests firmly at Chelsea's library door. While there are other organisations such as the African and Asian Visual Artists Archive (AAVAA) and the library at The Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA) who are collecting widely and systematically, it does not mean that the onus remains on either or all of these collectors. Other institutions need to re-evaluate their own collections and this bibliography can assist them in that task.

Recordings is separated into three main sections plus an index: a chronology, a list of individual artists and general texts. The chronology has recorded, as comprehensively as the availability of material has allowed, group exhibitions that black artists participated in from 1971 to early 1996, with accompanying reviews and articles. Earlier documentation about first-generation Afro-Caribbean artists have been recorded in Anne Walmsley's invaluable book *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966 – 1972: A Literary and Cultural History*. On the whole, printed matter promoting this work has consisted of theme-based group shows: a predominance of these appeared in the 1980s. By the same token, there were exhibitions that centred on the geographical location of the artist, such as *Caribbean Expressions in Britain (1986)* or the medium of their practice, for example *Sculptors' Drawings (1994)*.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the exhibition spaces that were dedicated to showing black artists were either the Commonwealth Institute, the Africa Centre and DRUM Arts Centre in London. The emergence of spaces and organisations in the 1980s, such as the Black Art Gallery, the Horizon Gallery, the 198 Gallery, Creation for Liberation and The Elbow Room (more of a conceptual space), all located in London, marked the independent initiatives that black artists had to create for themselves. They successfully galvanised existing talent and provided spaces for exhibitions that were otherwise non-existent. Concurrently, publicly funded museums and galleries were responding to the call from their funding bodies to make space for black artists. However, not all exhibition selections were predicated on politicised imagery or race but on the nature of the artists' practice. Today, the aforementioned London spaces no longer exist, with the exception of the Commonwealth Institute, the Africa Centre (though neither appears to have a regular contemporary exhibition programme), and the 198 Gallery, having fallen victim to the volatile fluctuations of the funding system. Instead, what remains are some sympathetic parties who realise the value of exhibiting work which reflects the cross-cultural currents within contemporary art practice.

There was discussion as to whether the exhibitions listed here would be 'black only' exhibitions. Exhibitions where black artists were the only participants were and still are necessary for placing these artists on the map of contemporary art practice. The pattern has changed to some extent and this is reflected by constructing a chronology that lists exhibitions where black artists were not the only participants. It is for the prospective researcher to discern the historical significance of this pattern. However, philosophical considerations have meant that an over-arching category of 'black only' exhibitions would necessarily locate the practice of all the

artists herein within a particular frame of reference that is not wholly representative of those practices.

Use of the term black does not denote any specific characteristics in the work of the artists featured in this bibliography. Debates surrounding the definition of 'black art' as an art form have been both intense and inconclusive. Its validity as a way of describing the practice of some contemporary black artists remains equivocal, though not fully undermined.⁽³⁾ Conversely, there are other black artists who have operated beyond that framework, preferring not to be defined by their race or categorised by the work they produce, work which may or may not deal explicitly with black cultural experiences. Thus, a defining characteristic cannot be imposed on the work of all the artists referred to in this bibliography: to impose such homogenisation would be to refuse the particular character of each individual's practice. Understanding this *mélange* is to recognise the significance of the active contributions these artists have made to post-war British art as individuals, and not simply as a lumpen collective fighting to be heard. The artists listed in this publication reflect the diversity of British visual art practice, which incorporates film and video, performance art and the development of new technologies alongside more traditional visual art forms.

Section two is a listing of individual artists. The section includes cross-references to the previous chronology as well as books and catalogues from both group and solo shows – again with accompanying articles and reviews. Each listing refers to an artist's writing and curatorial practice, if any. Bearing in mind that this bibliography is a selection of what is already held in the archive, the list of artists is not exhaustive or conclusive. A complete listing of all the artists covered in catalogues held in the archive can still be found at Chelsea College of Art & Design. Unfortunately, the space allowed here cannot fully accommodate the contributions made by all those

artists within this period. Maybe, updated versions of this bibliography (published or otherwise) will expand and redefine itself to encompass artists of non-European origin practising in Britain, whose work has been overlooked not only by mainstream institutions but by their inability to fit neatly into designated categories.

The third and final section is 'General Texts'. This has been separated into ten sub-sections that identify strands which have affected and valorised the development of these artists' practices. Periodicals such as *Third Text* (incorporating *Black Phoenix*, the three editions of which are held in the library and predate *Third Text*), *Artrage*, *Bazaar*, *Ten.8* and *Black Arts in London* (all now defunct except *Third Text*) dealt specifically with the work of black artists; however, the scope of *Ten.8* and *Third Text* extended to a broader cultural perspective.⁽⁴⁾

Debates around postmodernism, feminism, cultural difference, national identity and internationalism have already produced a body of writing that analyses the cultural context in which these artists' work operates, i.e. the conditions of reception. The writers of these texts have produced seminal works that have been published in anthologies, periodicals and monographs and are brought together in the Art History and Critical Theory section. Within the area of visual art practice, there have been significant developments in film and video, photography and performance, and several important texts have emerged in recent years. Certain journals and books stand out as having recognised the importance of these media; *Black Film, British Cinema*, (1988), *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity*, (1990), *Ten.8: Critical Decade*, *Black British Photography in the 80s*, (1992), and *Let's Get it On: The Politics of Black Performance*, (1995). Within the fields of new technology and public art comparatively little has been written which embraces these art practices; however, separate sections have been included to highlight the significance of these forms of production.

Other strands running through the bibliography include the various institutional strategies which have affected the development of black artists. Within the sections on art administration and art education there are reports on the impact of funding and training. It also includes articles and published correspondence on responses to these institutional manoeuvres. Conferences and public debates, focused on issues ranging from art and immigration to black artists and white institutions, have played a pivotal role in consolidating ideas and objectives.

As only one of a kind at present, Recordings is important in tracing a documented history, but above all it is a reference book. Some of the material is difficult to obtain, such as certain unpublished conference papers, graduate and undergraduate dissertations or non-indexed periodicals, yet they can mostly be found in Chelsea's archive. The ephemera content within the archive is considerable as it was not always possible for artists to have catalogues produced; sometimes the only indication that a show had actually happened was a listing in a magazine, a press release or a private-view invitation. While this bibliography does not claim to be definitive, the wealth of material, which includes both primary and secondary sources of slides, videos, essays, catalogues, monographs, ephemera and periodicals, testifies to the breadth and calibre of black British visual art practice.

(1) From this point onwards I will use the word 'black' – with a lower case *b* – to describe people of African, Afro-Caribbean, South East Asian and Asian descent while acknowledging it as a contentious issue and that other expressions may have been used in its place. For an introduction to the genealogy of the term see Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Black Film, British Cinema*, edited by Kobena Mercer, ICA Document 7, (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988), pp.27-30 and Kobena Mercer, 'Introduction: Black Britain and the Cultural Politics of Diaspora', in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.1-32.

(2) See Paola Barbarino, 'Focusing on Plurality and Internationalism: A New Resource in the Field of Contemporary Visual Art, The Library and Archive of the Institute of International Visual Arts', *Art Libraries Journal*, 20, no.3 (1995), 28.

(3) See Rasheed Araeen & Eddie Chambers 'Black Art: A Discussion', *Third Text*, no.5, (Winter 1988 – 1989), 51-77; Kobena Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation' in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.223-258; Paul Gilroy, 'Cruciality and the Frog's Perspective: An Agenda of Difficulties for the Black Arts Movement', in *Small Acts: Some Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), pp.97-114. These are some key texts to name a few though there are other writers who have dealt with the contradictory position held by the black artist working in a British context.

(4) The last editions of *Artrage*, *Bazaar* and *Ten.8* held in the library are dated February 1995, Autumn 1992 and Spring 1992 respectively. It would appear that no subsequent copies have been published.