

Rosa-Johan Uddoh

*Pink Tongue, Brown Cheek*

18 January - 1 April 2022

iniva, Stuart Hall Library, 16 John Islip St, London SW1P 4JU



Rosa-Johan Uddoh, *Brown Paper Envelope Test*, 2021, HD Video, 7 minutes 36 seconds, film still. Image courtesy of the artist.

iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts) are pleased to present *Pink Tongue, Brown Cheek* (18 January - 1 April 2022), showcasing the work of artist Rosa-Johan Uddoh. The exhibition explores the artist's research whilst in residence at the Stuart Hall Library in 2020, and the multidisciplinary processes within Uddoh's practice of performance, multi-media installation, and writing. The seven closed captioned performance video works exhibited in Stuart Hall Library at iniva explore Uddoh's ongoing interests in understanding and engaging people in cultural issues around black performance in 'postcolonial' spaces.

With its title punning on Franz Fanon's seminal text, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Uddoh's work in the exhibition explores masks and personas with tongue-in-cheek irony. One work that is central in the exhibition is *Practice Makes Perfect*, 2021, a video work where Uddoh explores popular culture and fantasy using a tongue twister based on an essential essay written by Stuart Hall titled '*What is this "Black" in Black popular culture?*'. Alongside her collaborator Louis Brown, Uddoh explores other themes such as the black curriculum as well as addressing questions of racism in popular culture.

*Performing Whiteness*, 2019 is a series of video works filmed at Tate Modern, where Uddoh performs as a professional presenter taking on a playful and lyrical characterisation. The video cuts from different angles and locations in Tate Modern and zooms into the presenter's face dramatically as if they are on the evening news.

*Brown Paper Envelope Test*, 2021 is a video work exploring themes of 'passing', referring to when a person 'officially' classified as a member of a racial group is accepted or perceived as a member of another group. "*Your whole future will be decided by this brown paper envelope*", says actor Josephine Melville, who joins Uddoh to play her mother in this video. In Britain during the 1950-60s there was a racist practice of comparing skin colour to a paper bag, and being the colour of the paper bag or lighter, would determine if you could hold public facing roles. Uddoh also touches on the phenomenon of DNA tests which survey a person's ethnicity and genealogy, and connects them to heritages they may not have known of previously.

*And I would've gotten away with it too if it wasn't for you meddling kids!*, 2020 is a video work made in collaboration with Art Assassins, a group of young creatives from South London. The work relates to objects in 'The Northcote Thomas Collection', and explores colonialism, separation, and their legacy. The collection comprises of objects taken from southern Nigeria and Sierra Leone by Northcote Thomas during his expeditions as a British colonial anthropologist between 1909 and 1915;

objects which on arrival in Britain, sat in their crates for around a hundred years. By using characters like Scooby Doo and riffing on the show's popular refrain "*And I Would Have Gotten Away with It Too, If It Weren't for You Meddling Kids*" to reveal this history, Uddoh and the Art Assassins examine colonialism in a way that is unambiguous.

***Black Poirot***, 2018-2021 is a work based on Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's character who is one of the first representations of an *outsider* that Uddoh came across on TV. This is highlighted especially by his background as a refugee, and a person who wants to be liked and does so by assimilating to British upper-class conventions of aristocracy. Uddoh highlights the experience of Poirot specifically in British media, and the tokenisation of him as an immigrant brought in for the sole purpose of solving crimes. In *Black Poirot*, Uddoh demonstrates that she resonated with the character of Poirot through exploration of her own feelings of tokenisation and its mental health consequences.

Other themes explored in this exhibition include the popularisation of characters and how they affect our self-formation, and through this Uddoh asks us to learn from characters we often see and explore the different ways blackness can exist.

Tobi Alexandra Falade, 2022.

Rosa-Johan Uddoh (b.1993, Croydon) is an interdisciplinary artist working towards radical self-love. She is inspired by Black feminist practice and writing. Through performance, writing and multi-media installation, she explores places, objects and celebrities in British popular culture, and their effects on self-formation. Collaboration is key to Rosa's work, often working together with children, activists, and other artists to explore themes that impact our communities and share knowledge.

Rosa is a lecturer in Performance at Central Saint Martins. She was a finalist for Arts Foundation Futures Awards 2021. Rosa was the Liverpool Biennial and John Moores University Fellow 2018-2019 and was the Stuart Hall Library Resident for 2020. She was a Sarabande: Lee Alexander McQueen Scholar.

Rosa's solo presentations include: 'Practice Makes Perfect', Focal Point Gallery and to Bluecoat (Southend-on-sea and Liverpool 2021-2022), 'Black Poirot' at Workplace Gallery, "'She is still alive!'", Destiny's (Oslo, 2020), 'Studies for Impartiality', Jupiter Woods and 'Sphinx at the Crystal Palace', Black Tower Projects (both London, 2019). Group shows include: 'Brand New Heavies', Pioneer Works (New York, 2021), 'Learning by Doing', 68 Institute (Copenhagen, 2019), New Contemporaries (London & Liverpool 2018) and 'Black Blossoms', The Royal Standard (Liverpool, 2017). She has screened work as part of Lubaina Himid's Tate Late in 2021, and East London Cable's 'TV Dinners E03' at Tate Modern, 2019. Rosa's first book 'Practice Makes Perfect', co-published with Bookworks and Focal Point Gallery will be published in 2022.

**Rosa-Johan Uddoh**

***Pink Tongue, Brown Cheek***

**List of Works**



***Performing Whitness 1***, 2019, HD Video, 39 secs.

Co-produced with Louis Brown and Jos Bitelli of East London Cable, Edited by: Jos Bitelli, Sound: Toby Burroughs, Camera: Anne Tetzlaff. Commissioned by East London Cable as part of TV Dinners E03. At Tate Modern as part of the Nam June Paik major retrospective. As part of the Terra Foundation for American Art Series: New Perspectives. Most recently exhibited at Brand New Heavies, Pioneer Works, New York, curated by Deux Femmes Noires (Mickalene Thomas and Raquel Chevremont).

***Performing Whitness 2***, 2019, HD Video, 3mins 44secs.

Co-produced with Louis Brown and Jos Bitelli of East London Cable, Backing Vocalists: Shantelle Palmer & Sujitha Selvarajah, Edited by: Jos Bitelli, Sound: Toby Burroughs, Camera: Anne Tetzlaff. Commissioned by East London Cable as part of TV Dinners E03. At Tate Modern as part of the Nam June Paik major retrospective. As part of the Terra Foundation for American Art Series: New Perspectives. Most recently exhibited at Brand New Heavies, Pioneer Works, New York, curated by Deux Femmes Noires (Mickalene Thomas and Raquel Chevremont).

***Performing Whitness 3***, 2019, HD Video, 5mins 14secs.

Co-produced with Louis Brown and Jos Bitelli of East London Cable, Backing Vocalists: Shantelle Palmer & Sujitha Selvarajah, Edited by: Jos Bitelli, Sound: Toby Burroughs, Camera: Anne Tetzlaff. Commissioned by East London Cable as part of TV Dinners E03. At Tate Modern as part of the Nam June Paik major retrospective. As part of the Terra Foundation for American Art Series: New Perspectives. Most recently exhibited at Brand New Heavies, Pioneer Works, New York, curated by Deux Femmes Noires (Mickalene Thomas and Raquel Chevremont).

**Reception**



***And I would've gotten away with it too if it wasn't for you meddling kids!***, 2020, Rosa-Johan Uddoh and the Art Assassins, HD video, 23mins 36secs.

**Main Library Desk**



***Practice Makes Perfect***, 2021, Rosa-Johan Uddoh and Louis Brown, HD video, 20 mins.

A Chicken Nuggie Production. Starring: Baboucarr, Charley, Daisy, Halla, Jemimah, Mariya & Patrik, with special guest appearance from Mrs Quarrell. Writing: Rosa-Johan Uddoh, Camera: Louis Brown, Pressure cam: Baboucarr, Colourist: Julija Steponaityte, Sound: Joseph Namy, Editing: Louis Brown, Additional Graphics: Jos Bitelli. With thanks to Chase High School, East London Cable, Focal Point Gallery, Bluecoat and Arts Council England.

### **Informal Library Television**



***Brown Paper Envelope Test***, 2021, HD Video, 7mins 36 secs.

Starring Rosa-Johan Uddoh and Josephine Melville. Writing by Rosa-Johan Uddoh, including quotation from Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929). Camera: Louis Brown, Colourist: Julija Steponaityte, Editing: Jos Bitelli, Sound editing: Joseph Namy, Sound recording: Len Usselman.

### **Informal Library Wall**



***Black Poirot***, 2018-2021, HD Video, 21mins 26 secs.

Remastered & re-edited for Brand New Heavies, Pioneer Works, New York, curated by Deux Femmes Noires (Mickalene Thomas and Raquel Chevremont). Sound by Joseph Namy, Creative captioning by Creative Text, Animation: Daniel Hughes, Additional Graphics: Christian Noelle Charles.

### **Study Room**