

No Direct Flight

A landmark BFI project exploring digital Blackness in the age of the internet



2-17 August – BFI Southbank

With visiting filmmakers: Jim Chuchu, Rhea Dillon, Amirah Tajdin, Tomisin Adepeju, Garrett Bradley, Petite Noir, Mbithi Masya, Crack Stevens and more

Thursday 27 June 2019, London.

During August **BFI Southbank** will present a landmark new cross-platform project exploring how the digital world is shaping the visual aesthetics of the African diaspora. The season will include screenings of features, shorts and music videos, VR installations, new short film commissions, a pioneering **Global Meet Up**, and will subsequently tour internationally to Nairobi and Philadelphia. **NO DIRECT FLIGHT**, which is presented in collaboration with the British Council and in partnership with Nowness and Black Star Festival, will seek to explore the themes and visual motifs that have been virally traded between Africa, the US and Europe, giving rise to a bold, black, globally influential aesthetic. **NO DIRECT FLIGHT** will pair classic pan-African features such as *Touki Bouki* (Djibril Diop Mambéty, 1973), *Black Girl* (Ousmane Sembène, 1966) and *Sankofa* (Haile Gerima, 1993) with their daring short-form offspring from some of the most exciting visual artists working globally today, including *Wanuri Kahiu* (*Rafiki*), *Cecile Emeke* (*Ackee & Saltfish*), *Khalil Joseph* (*Beyoncé's Lemonade*), *Jenn Nkiru* (*As Told To G/D Thyself*), *Bradford Young* (*When They See Us*) and *Terence Nance* (*An Oversimplification of Her Beauty*).

BFI Southbank Head of Cinemas and Events and NO DIRECT FLIGHT curator Gaylene Gould said: “I was involved in pan-African cinema’s first wave here at the BFI thirty years ago. Now I’m back a new one has emerged - bodaciously stylish, creatively influential, and one that may have traded social politics for a politics of aesthetics. **NO DIRECT FLIGHT** is designed to explore two things: the ‘lineage of aesthetics’ that connect the two generations and the role of the internet in connecting the next generation across geographic boundaries. The internet connects people in a way transport links still cannot.”

Features will be introduced by expert curators and filmmakers such as **Tendai John Mutambu**, **June Givanni** and **Grace Ladoja MBE**, while six thematic shorts programmes will be accompanied by a discussion with a selection of the artists whose work is being screened. The season will tour to Kenya and the United States over the forthcoming year and will also include three new short film commissions by Nowness. The season, which is curated by BFI Southbank’s Head of Cinemas and Events **Gaylene Gould**, and co-programmed by **Tega Okiti**, is divided into six themes, including **HOMEGOING**, **TIMECIRCLES** and **SONIC** with screenings of a Pan-African film as well as an accompanying shorts programme, and one-off special events:

THE LANDING SITE

No Direct Flight’s founding ideas explored

THE LANDING SITE will explore the season’s founding ideas, with screenings of *Touki Bouki* (Djibril Diop Mambéty, 1973), a pioneering **Global Meet Up**, a selection of VR work and a shorts programme – *Mothership Connection*. The season will launch with a weekend of events, starting with a screening of *Touki Bouki* (Djibril Diop Mambéty, 1973) introduced by curator **Tendai John Mutambu** on **Friday 2 August**. Djibril Diop Mambéty’s fantasy-drama follows young lovers Mory and Anta, who hatch wildly adventurous and indulgent schemes to facilitate their escape from post-

colonial Dakar to glamorous Paris. This daring film is widely regarded as a philosophical and aesthetic wellspring for global African visual culture, from screen to stage to fashion editorial.

On **Saturday 3 August** there will be a pioneering **Global Meet Up**, during which **BFI Southbank** will, with the help of global partners such as *Black Star Festival* in the US, virtually connect with speakers from across the African diaspora, from London and Bristol to Nairobi and Philadelphia. The afternoon will also include a screening of John Akomfrah's afro-fiction doc *The Last Angel of History* (1996), which heralded the dawning of the new digital age, as well as investigate how the internet has allowed new languages to develop across this global filmmaking community. There will also be an opportunity to view artworks that highlight future innovation in VR, establishing a network for creation and new forms of communication. VR experiences in the BFI Southbank foyer on **Saturday 3 August** as part of the programme *The (Un)real World* will include Ng'endo Mukii's *Nairobi Berries* (2017), Kenya's first 360° virtual-reality film incorporating animation and live-action and *Let This Be A Warning* (2017) by the **Nest Collective** which explores a future in which a group of Africans have left Earth to create a colony on a distant planet.

Afrofuturism's roots lie deep in African-American culture, but the shorts screening in *Mothership Connection* imagine a future world from the African perspective. Satirical, beautiful, glitchy and profound, this is how the world's youngest continent predicts our destiny. Shorts screening on **Saturday 3 August** include: *Hello Rain* (CJ Obasi), *Pumzi* (Wanuri Kahiu), *We Need Prayers: This One Went To Market* (Njeri Gitungo), *Loop Count* (Michael Omonua) and *Afronauts* (Nuotama Bodomo). The programme will be followed by a **Q&A** with selected filmmakers including the Nest Collective's **Jim Chuchu**, whose VR work *Let This Be A Warning* (2017) will be screening in the foyer.

SWIMMING IN YOUR SKIN AGAIN

Beauty as the new global African aesthetic

SWIMMING IN YOUR SKIN AGAIN will feature a screening of Andrew Dosunmu's feature debut *Restless City* (2011), which delves into the fringes of New York's thriving pan-African community. Djibril, a West African immigrant, hopes to make it as a musician, but his dreams are thwarted by the harsh realities of urban life and star-crossed love with a local sex worker. Acclaimed cinematographer Bradford Young (*Arrival*, *Selma*) – a founding father of contemporary Black aesthetics – adds a touch of magic to this rich study of complex community dynamics. The screening of *Restless City* on **Monday 5 August** will be introduced by cinematographer **Joel Honeywell**.

The *Swimming in Your Skin Again* shorts programme will offer studies of black beauty on screen, from a set of transatlantic audiovisual auteurs who discard the rulebook altogether. Shorts screening on **Monday 5 August** include: *Process* (Rhea Dillon), *Contact* (Seye Isikalu), *Embroidery for a Long Song* (Amirah Tajdin), *Serious Tingz* (Abdou Cisse), *Brood* (Michael Omonua) and *Swimming in Your Skin Again* (Terence Nance). The programme will be followed by a **Q&A** with selected filmmakers including **Rhea Dillon** (*Process*) and **Amirah Tajdin** (*Embroidery for a Long Song*).

HOMEGOING

The African longing for elsewhere. The diasporic longing for home

HOMEGOING will seek to study the diasporic longing for home on film. The seminal first feature from Ousmane Sembène *Black Girl* (1966) dealt with the fraught relationship between Europe and Africa. Diouana's dream of freedom is cruelly undermined by the life of servitude she faces as a house girl in France. The dehumanising effect of post-colonialism was a persistent theme for Sembène's generation. The screening of *Black Girl* on **Thursday 6 August** will be preceded by an intro from **June Givanni**, curator **June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive**. The associated shorts programme, *Homegoing*, shows how today's filmmakers subvert that perspective.

For any diaspora, the ties that bind you to your homeland also have the power to create conflict and separation: you're neither here nor there, yet always motivated by a deep sense of belonging. This curated collection presents the work of filmmakers who, with artistic flare, precision and playfulness, reflect the bittersweet diasporic condition. Shorts screening on **Wednesday 7 August** include: *Entitled* (Adeyemi Michael), *House Girl* (Koby Adom), *Process* (Khalil Joseph), *Polyglot* (Amelia Umuhire), *Appreciation* (Tomisin Adepeju). The programme will be followed by a **Q&A** with selected filmmakers including **Tomisin Adepeju** (*Appreciation*).

TIMECIRCLES

Non-linearity and African People's Time

In *Sankofa* (1993) Mona, an African-American fashion model on a work trip to Ghana, is transported into the body of an enslaved plantation girl 100 years prior. There she must learn, the hard way, how to claim her forgotten identity. Much of today's black visual aesthetic can be laid at the feet of Haile Gerima, who trained a new generation of filmmakers to 'decolonise the gaze', including lauded cinematographer Bradford Young, and director producer Jenn Nkiru. A screening of *Sankofa* on **Thursday 8 August** will be introduced by **lecturer and filmmaker Imruh Bakari**.

The *Timecircles* shorts programme will examine how in African culture, time comes full circle. The connection between the past, present and the future is a deeply-mined seam that offers up visual and sonic experimentations employed by countless African makers. Shorts screening on **Friday 9 August** include: *Giverny I* (Ja'Tovia Gary), *Highlands* (Zandile Tisani), *America* (Garrett Bradley), *Black Mary* (Khalil Joseph) and *The Ancestors Came* (Cecile Emeke). The programme will be followed by a **Q&A** with selected filmmakers including **Garrett Bradley** (*America*).

SONIC

Music and the aesthetic baseline

Music is the baseline of the black aesthetic – so no surprise that some of the leading visual creators are musicians themselves, or work closely with music artists. Acclaimed music video director Hype Williams' feature debut *Belly* (1998) stars legendary rappers Naz and DMX as friends and gangsters, who navigate the dangerous underworld on the path towards spiritual awakening. Twenty-three years on, *Belly* exists as a genuine artefact of hip-hop culture at the dawn of the millennium, and it still has a visual influence on black cinema today. The screening of *Belly* on **Saturday 10 August** will be introduced by **Creative Director Grace Ladoja MBE**.

The *Sonic* shorts programme will be a loud and proud mixtape that flings down some daring creations designed to push boundaries and shift souls. Shorts screening on **Saturday 10 August** include: *Shake It Up* (Lex Francis), *Peau de Chagrin / Bleu de Nuit* (Baloji), *Soak it Up* (Filmawi), *Until the Quiet Comes* (Khalil Joseph), *Black to Techno* (Jenn Nkiru), *La Maison Noir: The Gift and the Curse* (Rharha Nembhard and Timothy Weyer), *Gallons* (Kojey Radical) and *As Told to G/d Thyself* (Jenn Nkiru, Bradford Young, Terence Nance, Marc Thompson). The programme will be followed by a **Q&A** with selected filmmakers including *Petite Noir* (*La Maison Noir: The Gift and the Curse*), then there will be a late night **No Direct Flight Sonic Party** in the BFI Bar and Kitchen; this celebration of the next generation of global African rhythms and dance will be inspired by contemporary visual music artists like Baloji, Blitz the Ambassador and Tracy Sada.

PAST SPIRITS

Folklore, tradition and the ancestral realm

The close link between the human and the spirit world grounds the work of African diaspora makers. The spirits walk among us, sometimes as guides and at other times as demons, but they always provide inspiration for the imagination. In *Kati Kati* (Mbithi Masya, 2016) Kaleche wakes up in the wilderness with little memory. She stumbles to Kati Kati, a nearby lodge, where she meets an assorted group of residents, but realises she must find out how to break free. Following a screening on **Sunday 11 August** director **Mbithi Masya** will take part in a **Q&A** about this impressive work, which deftly navigates the spiritual conventions of traditional African storytelling to create a modern and deeply affecting tale of love and redemption.

The *Future Spirits* shorts programme will further explore folklore, tradition and the ancestral realm on film and will include: *Diasporadical Trilogia* (Blitz Bazawule), *Klein – Marks of Worship* (Crack Stevens), *Waves/The Water* (Sutra, Edem Dotse), *Shaitan* (Abba Makama), *Boneshaker* (Nuotama Bodomo) and *You and I and You* (Terence Nance). The programme on **Sunday 11 August** will be followed by a **Q&A** with selected filmmakers including **Crack Stevens** (*Klein – Marks of Worship*).

In collaboration with:



A cross-platform project in partnership with the British Council, Nowness and Black Star Festival

– ENDS –

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Press Contacts:

Liz Parkinson – PR Manager, BFI Cultural Programme
liz.parkinson@bfi.org.uk / 020 7957 8918

Elizabeth Dunk – Junior Press Officer
elizabeth.dunk@bfi.org.uk / 020 7957 8986

About the BFI

The BFI is the UK's lead organisation for film, television and the moving image. It is a cultural charity that:

- Curates and presents the greatest international public programme of World Cinema for audiences; in cinemas, at festivals and online
- Cares for the BFI National Archive – the most significant film and television archive in the world
- Actively seeks out and supports the next generation of filmmakers
- Works with Government and industry to make the UK the most creatively exciting and prosperous place to make film internationally

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter. The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.

BFI Southbank

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £13.75, concs £11.25 including Gift Aid donation. Members pay £2.20 less on any ticket - www.bfi.org.uk/southbank.

Young people aged 25 and under can buy last minute tickets for just £3, 45 minutes before the start of screenings and events, subject to availability - <http://www.bfi.org.uk/25-and-under>.

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

BFI Shop

The BFI Shop is stocked and staffed by BFI experts with over 1,200 book titles and 1,000 DVDs to choose from, including hundreds of acclaimed books and DVDs produced by the BFI.

BFI Reuben Library

BFI Southbank is home to the BFI Reuben Library which holds the world's largest collection of books, journals and digitised material about film, television and the moving image. The library is free to access and hosts a year-round programme of talks and events.

'Not just for movie nerds - this huge collection of film and TV books, periodicals, scripts, stills and posters is full of inspiration for anyone involved in the creative arts' – Evening Standard Magazine

The BFI Reuben Library is open 10:30-19:00, Tuesday-Saturday.

The benugo bar & kitchen

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

BFI Mediatheque

Free to access BFI Mediatheques offer users an opportunity to explore the digital collections drawn from the BFI National Archive and partner collections, at select UK-wide locations.

About the British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We work with over 100 countries in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Last year we reached over 75 million people directly and 758 million people overall including online, broadcasts and publications. We make a positive contribution to the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. Founded in 1934 we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. We receive 15 per cent core funding grant from the UK government.

www.britishcouncil.org

About Nowness

Launched in 2010, Nowness is a multi-platform, global video channel for the culturally curious. With an international audience of over 20 million people, we work with exceptional talent across film, music, fashion, architecture, dance, art & design to create progressive, cinematic storytelling, provoking debate and inspiration. Nowness collaborators include Björk, Mykki Blanco, Devendra Banhart, Florence Welch, Frank Gehry, Lil Buck, David Lynch and Jenn Nkiru.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank can be found via the link below:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fkyvhczu0m42dfa/AACHIDpAFBx349_fJqNjqY9Ta?dl=0

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