

JOHN AKOMFRAH

ALL LISTENING NIGHT TO THE RAIN

EXHIBITION BOOKLET



THYSSEN-
BORNEMISZA
MUSEO NACIONAL

EVERY
ONE'S
MUSEUM

T ~ Thyssen
B Bornemisza
A Art Contemporary

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At once elegiac as it is urgent, *Listening All Night To The Rain* by John Akomfrah unfolds as a monumental, multi-screen filmic installation that weaves together questions of ecology, empire, and migration through a layered sonic lens. First commissioned for the British Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia in 2024, the work is reimagined here in Madrid for TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary.

For all of us involved, this presentation at TBA21 is more than an exhibition: it is an invitation to attend to the entanglement between our seemingly disparate histories and experiences, and to dwell in the charged space where sound, image, and memory converge. In doing so, it echoes TBA21's long-standing commitment to engaging with environmental imaginaries, global solidarities, and artistic practices that respond to the urgencies of our contemporary world.

On behalf of John Akomfrah, Lina Gopaul, David Lawson, and Ashitey Akomfrah of Smoking Dogs Films, I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza for her support of this ambitious body of work and for her invitation to present it in a city and community we take so much inspiration from. Our thanks also go to Markus Reymann and Rosa Ferré, Co-Directors of TBA21, whose leadership and vision have made this presentation possible. We are enormously grateful to Marina Avia Estrada, Claudia Schafer-Tabraue, and Clara Alseda, as well as the entire team at TBA21, for their tireless work, care, and dedication in bringing this exhibition to life.

Sincere thanks are due to the team at Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza - with the inimitable Guillermo Solana at the helm - for their generosity and support throughout this process. Thank you for enabling the presentation of landmark twentieth-century works from the museum's collection in dialogue with this exhibition: a vision long imagined, and now beautifully realised.

This exhibition has been conceived through the expertise and commitment of many. Particular thanks to Jessica Reynolds and vPPR Architects in London for their sensitive spatial design; Trevor Mathison and Gary Stewart of Dubmorphology for their sonic architectures; and Tony Myatt for the ambisonic sound design that so powerfully animates the work.

We are deeply grateful to all our supporters, with special thanks to the British Council and Lisson Gallery, notably Louise Hayward and Andrew Price, for their continued belief in this project and in John's practice.

Finally, to the many hands, seen and unseen, who have shaped this presentation: thank you. This exhibition stands as a testament to the power of collective vision - an act of listening, remembering, and imagining together.

**“WE KNOW OURSELVES AS PART
AND AS CROWD, IN AN UNKNOWN THAT
DOES NOT TERRIFY.
WE CRY OUR CRY OF POETRY.
OUR BOATS ARE OPEN, AND WE SAIL
THEM FOR EVERYONE.”**

POETICS OF RELATION (1990), ÉDOUARD GLISSANT (1928-2011)

CURATOR'S INTRODUCTION

ALL LISTENING NIGHT TO THE RAIN

TARINI MALIK

British artist John Akomfrah's (b. 1957. Accra, Ghana) monumental commission, entitled *Listening All Night To The Rain*, was first commissioned for the British Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia in 2024 and continues his abiding interest in post-colonialism, ecology and the politics of aesthetics with a renewed focus on the sonic. Drawing its title from Chinese writer and artist Su Dongpo's (1037 – 1101) poetry that meditates upon the transitory nature of life during a period of political exile, the exhibition is seen as a manifesto that encourages the act of listening as a form of activism. In five overlapping multimedia and audio installations arranged into 'cantos' or movements and reimagined for Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza's galleries, Akomfrah positions various theories of 'acoustemology': a portmanteau combining 'acoustic' and 'epistemology' coined by ethnomusicologist Steven Feld that denotes how the sonic experience mirrors and shapes our world. The exhibition weaves together newly filmed material with found still images, video footage, audio clips and texts from hundreds of international archive collections and libraries. Akomfrah juxtaposes these documented geopolitical narratives with imagined tableaux – often surreal or dreamlike in nature – in order to reposition the role of art in its ability to write history in unexpected ways, forming critical and poetic connections between different geographies and time periods. Through methods of bricolage (the reuse of diverse materials in order to produce new meanings), non-linearity and repetition, the artist tells stories from the five continents through the 'memories' of multiple filmed characters who represent the migrant community in Britain.

Evoking a sense of contemplation and reverie, *Listening All Night To The Rain* houses a series of sculptural installations with embedded screens that are inspired by the structure and form of altarpieces from religious architectures. Each gallery

space layers a specific colour field influenced by the paintings of American artist Mark Rothko (1903 – 1970) in order to point to the ways in which abstraction can represent the fundamental nature of human drama.

Canto I opens on the exterior of the museum's building, framing voices and imagery from the Global South as a meditation on empire, migration and the sonic traces of climate colonialism. Inside, the exhibition opens with a presentation of historic artwork drawn from the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza's collection, tracing formal and conceptual threads that connect to Akomfrah's practice. The selection reflects his sustained engagement with art history as both language and lineage - an archive through which he examines modernity and its role as a witness to history. Gestures of abstraction, rhythm and rupture that animate twentieth-century painting and sculpture find renewed resonance in Akomfrah's cinematic grammar, where modernism's aesthetic experiments are recast through postcolonial thought. For Akomfrah, art history is an active terrain - one he revisits to expose its omissions, expand its possibilities and imagine new genealogies of resistance and repair.



LUCIO FONTANA. *VENICE WAS ALL IN GOLD*, 1961

Alkyd on canvas, 149 x 149 cm.

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

© Lucio Fontana a través de SIAE, VEGAP, Madrid

JOHN AKOMFRAH

John Akomfrah is a hugely respected artist and filmmaker, whose works are characterised by their investigations into memory, post-colonialism, temporality and aesthetics and often explore the experiences of migrant diasporas globally.

Akomfrah was a founding member of the influential Black Audio Film Collective, which started in London in 1982 alongside artists David Lawson and Lina Gopaul, who he still collaborates with today alongside Ashitey Akomfrah as Smoking Dogs Films. Their first film, *Handsworth Songs* (1986) explored events surrounding the 1985 riots in Birmingham and London through a charged combination of archive footage, still photos, newly shot material and newsreel. The film won several international prizes and established a multi-layered visual style that has become a recognisable motif of Akomfrah's practice.

Other works include the three-screen installation *The Unfinished Conversation* (2012), a moving portrait of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall's life and work; *Peripeteia* (2012), an imagined drama visualising the lives of individuals included in two 16th century portraits by Albrecht Dürer; and *Mnemosyne* (2010), which exposes experiences of migrants in the UK, questioning the notion of Britain as a promised land by revealing the realities of economic hardship and casual racism.

In 2015, Akomfrah premiered his three-screen film installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015), which explores what Ralph Waldo Emerson calls "the sublime seas." Fusing archival material, readings from classical sources and newly shot footage, *Vertigo Sea* highlights the cruelty of the whaling industry and juxtaposes it with scenes of many generations of migrants making epic crossings of the ocean for a better life. In 2017, Akomfrah presented *Purple* (2017), which addresses climate change, human communities and wilderness; and *Precarity* (2017), following the life of forgotten New Orleans jazz trumpeter Charles "Buddy" Bolden.

In 2018, Akomfrah participated in the UK-wide World War One arts programme 14–18 Now, with his multiscreen installation *Mimesis: African Soldier* (2018), which commemorated African and colonial participants who fought, served and perished during The Great War. In 2019 Akomfrah presented *Four Nocturnes* (2019) in the Ghana Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale, a three-channel piece reflecting on the intertwined relationship between humanity's destruction of the natural world and our own self-destruction.

In 2023, he premiered two major five-channel films at the 15th Sharjah Biennial: *Arcadia* (2023), reflecting on “The Columbian Exchange” between the Americas, Afro-Eurasia and Europe from the 1400s onwards; and *Becoming Wind* (2023), an allegorical representation of the Garden of Eden and its disappearance. In 2024 Akomfrah presented a new body of work entitled *Listening All Night to the Rain* in the British Pavilion in Venice, commissioned by the British Council for the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia.

Akomfrah (born 1957) lives and works in London.

Recent solo exhibitions include the National Museum of Cardiff, Wales (2025); Glasgow Museum of Art, Scotland (2024); Wrightwood 659, Chicago, USA (2024); British Pavilion, 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, Italy (2024); The Box, Plymouth, UK (2023); Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Germany (2023); Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (2023) and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., USA (2022); Remai Modern, Saskatoon, Canada



JOHN AKOMFRAH, AT HIS LONDON STUDIO, 2016

© Smoking Dogs Films;

Courtesy Smoking Dogs Films and Lisson Gallery.

(2022); Towner Eastbourne, UK (2021); Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, Spain (2021); Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla, Spain (2020); Seattle Art Museum, WA, USA (2020); Secession, Vienna, Austria (2020); BALTIC, Gateshead, UK (2019); ICA Boston, MA, USA (2019); Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, Portugal (2018); New Museum, New York, NY, USA (2018); Bildmuseet, Umeå University,

Umeå, Sweden (2015, 2018); SFMOMA, San Francisco, CA, USA (2018); Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain (2018); and Barbican, London, UK (2017).

Recent international group exhibitions include 'Ocean', Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark (2024); 'Entangles pasts, 1768-now', Royal Academy, London, UK (2024); 'Sharjah Biennial 15: Thinking Historically in the Present', Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2023); 'Global Ghana', The Africa Institute, Sharjah, UAE and Accra, Ghana (2022); 'Fault Lines', North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, USA (2022); 'Posteriority', Museum of Contemporary Art Busan, South Korea (2021); 'Family – Visions of a shared humanity', Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia (2021); 'Am I Human To You?', Art Museum KUBE, Alesund, Norway (2021); 'Affect Machine: Self-healing in the Post-Capitalist Era', Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan (2021); 'Terminal', City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (2020); Ghana Pavilion, 58th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2019); 'Strange Days: Memories of the Future', New Museum x The Store, London, UK (2018); 'Histórias Afro-Atlânticas', Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, São Paulo, Brazil (2018); 'From where I stand, my eye will send a light to you in the North', Te Tuhi Museum, Auckland, New Zealand (2018); Prospect 4, New Orleans, LA, USA (2017); 'Restless Earth', La Triennale di Milano, Milan, Italy (2017); 'Unfinished Conversations', Museum of Modern Art, New York City, NY, USA (2017); 'British Art Show 8' (2015-17); 'All the World's Futures', 56th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2015); 'Africa Now: Political Patterns', SeMA, Seoul, South Korea (2014); Sharjah Biennial 11, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2013); Liverpool Biennial, UK (2012) and Taipei Biennial, Taiwan (2012).

Akomfrah was awarded the Artes Mundi Prize in 2017 and a Knighthood for services to the Arts in the 2023 New Year Honours.

**“EVEN IN THE VAST AND MYSTERIOUS
REACHES OF THE SEA WE ARE BROUGHT
BACK TO THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH
THAT NOTHING LIVES TO ITSELF.”**

SILENT SPRING (1962), RACHEL CARSON (1907-1964)

TARINI MALIK

Tarini Malik is currently Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Royal Academy of Arts. She was the Shane Ackroyd Associate Curator of the British Pavilion at the 2024 edition of Venice Biennale working with artist John Akom-frah. Previously, she was a curator at the Whitechapel Gallery where she was responsible for the planning of artistic programmes, and at the Hayward Gallery where she organised a series of landmark group exhibitions, as well as the first solo presentations in the UK of several international artists whose practices deal with themes of post-colonialism and identity politics. From 2013-2017, Malik was Head of Exhibitions for artist Isaac Julien and Research Curator with Mark Nash on several major touring international exhibitions. In 2015, she was Research Curator for the main exhibition at the Venice Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor, entitled "All The Worlds Futures". Malik has also held curatorial posts at Fiorucci Art Trust, Frieze Projects and Serpentine Galleries. She has published her writing in various magazines and journals and lectured widely on cultural studies and curating.



TARINI MALIK OUTSIDE THE BRITISH PAVILION, 2024.

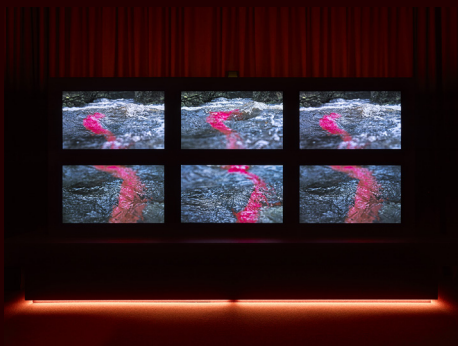
Image by Jack Hems

CANTO I: *Listening All Night To The Rain*

Canto I opens British-Ghanaian artist John Akomfrah's *Listening All Night to the Rain*, first presented at the British Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia in 2024. This series of interlocking video and sound installations explores the structural forces behind climate colonialism and forced migration, and how they register sonically. Framed as an intervention with the museum's neoclassical architecture, *Canto I* foregrounds imagery and voices from the Global South, honouring those marginalised by the legacies of imperialism. Akomfrah's signature filmic style of montage combines newly filmed material with archival photographs, footage, sound and text. Appearing as mist, rain, floods and open seas, water is a central motif of the artwork and forms the connective tissue that holds the many visual and sonic narratives together. Like sound, it moves in waves, echoing the dispersal of diaspora communities across geographies, and the fluctuations of time. *Canto I* introduces the exhibition's key themes, interweaving images of empire, protest, migration and racial injustice into a layered meditation on memory and resistance.

CANTO IV

In *Canto IV*, various figures appear on a coastal shoreline, surrounded by the remnants of past lives: fruits, vegetables, butterfly specimens, rubber ducks and defunct listening devices. Beneath the water, shoals of fish scatter amidst the sound of sea shanties and shipbuilding, evoking histories of exploration, labour and displacement. Archival images of ancestors are interspersed with contemporary characters: a young Inuit woman contemplates her place in a disenfranchised world, while a dockworker surveys a coastline transformed by industry, overfishing and the long shadow of empire. Exploring listening as a way of knowing and connecting across human and non-human worlds, Akomfrah's work collapses fixed notions of time and place by layering visual and sonic histories from diverse origins and styles.



JOHN AKOMFRAH, *CANTO IV*, *LISTENING ALL NIGHT TO THE RAIN*, BRITISH PAVILION 2024.
Image by Jack Hems

CANTO VII

Canto VII reflects Akomfrah's commitment to addressing pivotal moments in British history through a critical lens. Reframing narratives of mass migration, archival imagery revisits the Windrush generation; named for those who arrived from the Caribbean on the HMT *Empire Windrush* in 1948. Depicting the everyday lives of women and children, the work also highlights the racism and hardship migrants faced during Britain's post-industrial decline from the late 1960s onward. Filmed across Yorkshire and Scotland, these landscapes become imagined homelands for characters whose memories unfold on screen. The Canto concludes with fragments from speeches by Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, Angela Davis and others, connecting the black British experience to global movements for justice.



JOHN AKOMFRAH, *CANTO VII*, *LISTENING ALL NIGHT TO THE RAIN*, BRITISH PAVILION 2024.
Image by Jack Hems

CANTO VI

Canto VI traces pivotal moments in the histories of colonised nations, focusing on the independence movements and uprisings that swept Africa and Asia from the 1940s to the 1970s. Archival footage reflects on the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya (1952–1960) and the brutality of Britain's counter-insurgency campaign. In the Congo, it follows the struggle for independence from Belgian colonialism, highlighting Patrice Lumumba and the challenges of post-colonial nation-building. Nigeria's path to independence and the 1970 civil war reveals the tragic consequences of colonial amalgamation, while the Partition of India in 1947 is seen through emblematic figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru. Akomfrah frames these histories through the diasporic experience in Britain, connecting personal memory to the wider, enduring legacies of colonialism.

**“OUR STRUGGLE IS ALSO A STRUGGLE OF
MEMORY AGAINST FORGETTING”**

CANTO VIII

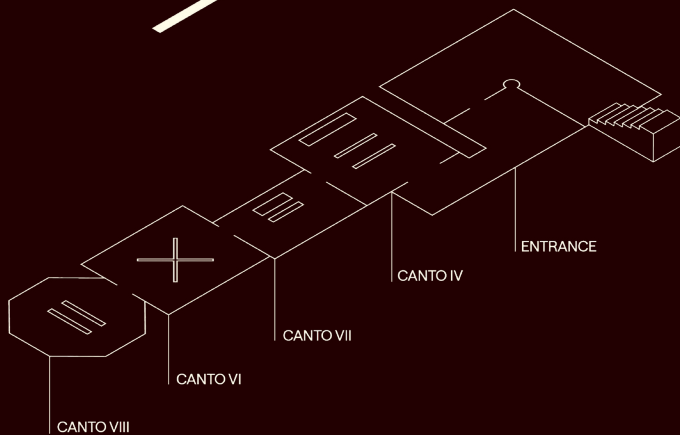
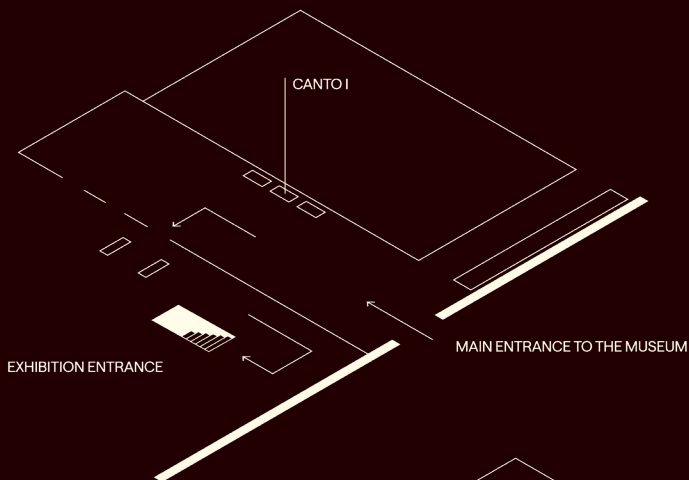
Underscoring the interconnectedness between military conflicts and ecological devastation - from ecocide to ecoterrorism - in *Canto VIII*, the artist reveals inalterable impacts on the environment. In the context of the Korean War (1950-53), Akomfrah highlights the devastating impact of the conflict, particularly the extensive bombing campaigns by the US that led to widespread destruction through pesticides like dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) in mass quantities. Footage from the Vietnam War (1955-75) emphasises how the war not only caused severe damage to human life, but also to the land. Surreal and dreamlike tableaux also recur throughout: a camera tracks over horizontal bodies in states of rest or death, framed by eclectic displays of anachronistic objects and a soundscape of echoes and reverberations, including recordings of environmentalists warning of ecological devastation.



JOHN AKOMFRAH, *CANTO VIII, LISTENING ALL NIGHT TO THE RAIN*, BRITISH PAVILION 2024.

Image by Jack Hems.

FLOORPLAN



TIMELINE

The following timeline is indicative of some of the multiple geopolitical narratives that inform *Listening All Night To The Rain* through the layering of a vast assemblage of archival material, as well as to the global socio-political and cultural shifts that have shaped John Akomfrah's artistic practice more broadly. They indicate various markers in time that point to patterns and cadences in history and the ways in which narratives from the Global South have influenced one another. The lives and work of cultural and political figures are woven through stories of wars, migrations and seismic moments in the preservation of our natural world, acting as ghosts or spectres of the past that materialise in our present.

1910s

1914

Jamaican Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA): the first mass movement of its kind to advocate for the empowerment and unity of people of African descent on a global scale.

1922

Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India's independence movement, was imprisoned for six years for his involvement in the "Non Cooperation" Movement, which aimed to resist British rule through nonviolent means such as boycotts, strikes and protests.

1940s

1945

The Fifth-Pan African Congress was held in Manchester, UK and was attended by leading anti-colonial activists from Africa and the Caribbean including: Kwame Nkrumah who became the first President of a liberated Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Jamaican Amy Ashwood Garvey (first wife of Marcus Garvey) and American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois who was hailed as 'the Father of Pan-Africanism'. Decisions made at this conference were instrumental in the success of multiple liberation struggles across Africa and the Americas.

1948

The ship known as HMT Empire Windrush arrived in the UK marking the first significant mass migration of West Indian peoples to the UK to help with the post-war reconstruction of the country, subsequently forming the diasporic group known as the 'Windrush Generation'.

1947

The partition of the British Raj into two separate nations of India and Pakistan was primarily based on religious groupings and enforced by the British parliament, leading to mass displacement, extreme violence and loss of life.

1947-2017

A sequence of economic development plans, known as the 'Five Year Plan', was implemented by Jawaharlal Nehru after India's independence following the depletion of resources by western occupation forces.

1948-1994

The South African apartheid, a system of institutionalised racial segregation, was enforced by the National Party: a white supremacist political group primarily led by Dutch-descended Afrikaaners.

1950s

1950-60s:

Caribbean sound system culture arrived in the UK during the post-war migration from the Commonwealth. Filling the void left by mainstream media's neglect of black culture, particularly radio, the rise of sound systems became a symbol of resistance and cultural pride by diasporic communities.

1954-1968

The US Civil Rights Movement was a social movement and campaign to abolish legalised racial segregation, discrimination and disenfranchisement. The movement sought to achieve full citizenship rights for Black Americans and other marginalised communities.

1956

The Suez Crisis was a diplomatic and military conflict between Egypt on one side and Britain, France and Israel on the other. It erupted when Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal, prompting a military intervention by the Western powers to regain control in an attempt to maintain colonial influence..

1950-53

The Korean War was a US-backed conflict between North and South Korea that culminated in the division of the Korean Peninsula. The US military sprayed thousands of tonnes of hazardous DDT pesticide on Korean soil.

1952-60

The Mau Mau Uprising was an armed anti-colonial movement against British rule in Kenya, led primarily by the Kikuyu people.

The brutal British counterinsurgency campaign employed collective punishment and executions.

1955-75

A deadly conflict in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, as well as proxy war between the US and the Soviet Union, the Vietnam War is one of the most commonly referred to examples of ecocide due to the US Air Force spraying over 75 million litres of toxic herbicides over the region

1957

Led by Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African nation to gain independence from British colonial rule, inspiring liberation movements across the continent. Nkrumah served as an inspiration to Martin Luther King Jr., who often looked to his leadership as an example of nonviolent activism.

1960s

1960

Stuart Hall, became the editor of the *New Left Review* in London and published pioneering studies on the role of film, television and mass media in determining cultural identity.

1962

The Sino-Indian War, also known as the China-India war, was an armed conflict contesting bordered territories between the two nations, notably the McMahon line: a borderline established by the British between Tibet and India.

1964

American Muslim civil rights activist Malcolm X visited occupied Gaza, Palestine and was deeply impacted by the displacement and suffering caused by the 1948 Nakba. He declared, "Our problem in America is a problem that is worldwide", drawing parallels between the Palestinian struggle and those of Black Americans.

1965-75

The Black Arts Movement in the US, led by poet Amiri Baraka, celebrated black culture in the face of systemic racism and oppression. John Coltrane's jazz album *A Love Supreme* was central to the movement, going on to inspire various resistance movements around the world, notably in apartheid South Africa where jazz was highly censored.

1960

Patrice Lumumba, a leading figure in the fight for Congolese independence, assumed office as the inaugural Prime Minister of Congo, marking the country's liberation from Belgian occupation.

1962

Rachel Carson's groundbreaking book *Silent Spring* was published, exposing the dangers of pesticides and setting the stage for the modern environmental movement.

1963

The Republic of Kenya was established on 12 December led by the first Prime Minister: anti-colonial activist Jomo Kenyatta.

1965

Shortly after Congo's independence, a series of secessionist movements led to the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, and a coup d'état by the autocratic leader Mobutu Sese Seko who changed Congo's name to Zaire in 1971.

1960-1970s

1966

The Black Panther Party was founded by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton in the US. Advocating for black rights, socialism and armed self-defence, particularly against police brutality and systemic discrimination, there were multiple international chapters including in the UK and Algeria.

1968

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in the UK, spurred by events in the US, was formed to combat institutional sexism and fight for equal pay. Two important events this year organised by women workers galvanised the country: the Dagenham Ford Plant Strike by machinists and a campaign in Hull over local fishermen's safety.

1971

The self-determination movement in East Pakistan resulted in the formation of the nation state of Bangladesh, separating it from West Pakistan. This resulted in a bloody civil war and a humanitarian crisis of ten million displaced people.

1966

After leading Ghana to independence, Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown due to his increasingly authoritarian rule by the National Liberation Council in a violent coup d'état.

1966-70

The Nigerian Civil War, or the Biafra War, was primarily driven by ethnic tensions with the Igbo (Biafra) ethnic group following the colonial amalgamation of land in 1914. Concurrent to the Vietnam War, this was one of the first wars in human history to be televised to a global audience..

1968

Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated due to his prominent role in advocating for civil rights and racial equality in the US.

1969

David Oluwale, a Nigerian immigrant to Leeds, drowned in the River Aire after sustained harassment and abuse by police officers, leading to a landmark legal case of institutional racism in the UK.

1980s

1981

Riots erupted across England due to the ongoing discriminatory violence inflicted on black people by the police. The April Brixton riots in London were followed by protests in Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester.

1987 ONWARDS

Severe flooding in Bangladesh due to climate change exacerbated by the Global North resulted in catastrophic damage to both the landscape and its people.

1982-98

In response to the growing civil unrest and socioeconomic inequalities in Thatcherite Britain, the Black Audio Film Collective was formed and backed by a concerted effort from Channel Four Television and local councils to amplify black representation in the arts.

1990s

1990

The Kogi, an indigenous group in Colombia, warned the world of the first signs of environmental collapse in the BBC documentary *From the Heart of the World*.

FROM 1994 ON

Nelson Mandela became the first Prime Minister of South Africa and the first democratic elections in the country were held..

1990

Poetics of Relation, by Édouard Glissant is published. Reacting against the exclusion of black people from the cultural domain, Glissant challenges rigid notions of identity within Caribbean culture, promoting hybridity and the shared experience of postcolonial identities through poetic sensibilities.

2010s

2018

'The Windrush scandal' exposed the British government for wrongfully detaining, denying legal rights and deporting migrants from the UK to the Caribbean.

PUBLIC PROGRAM

The public programme accompanying the exhibition *Listening All Night To The Rain* by John Akomfrah presents a diverse array of events including performative walkthroughs, a film cycle in partnership with the Filmoteca Española, discussions, and workshops. At its heart, the programme explores the structures and enduring legacies of climate colonialism—including extractivism, forced displacement, environmental racism, and collective memory—with particular attention to their manifestations in Sudan and Palestine. By bringing together artists, dancers, historians, and activists, the public programme aims to foster a space for critical inquiry, collective listening, and transformation.

ARTIST TALK WITH JOHN AKOMFRAH AND TARINI MALIK

03/11/2025. 6:00 PM

AUDITORIUM

Museo Nacional Thyssen Bornemisza, Madrid

Registration

By invitation

Access

By invitation only, until capacity is reached

Recommended age

All audiences are welcome

Language

English with simultaneous translation into Spanish

Curator Tarini Malik and artist John Akomfrah will engage in a conversation tracing the ideas, images, and histories that shape *Listening All Night To The Rain*. Moving between discussion and reflection, this artist talk opens up Akomfrah's creative process—his use of montage, sound, and archival material to weave together personal and collective memory. Together, they will reflect on the poetic and political dimensions of listening, and on how sound and image can become acts of remembrance and connection

NOCTURNAL WALKTHROUGHS

SATURDAY EVENINGS.

Two sessions: **9.00 and 10.00 pm.**

Approximate duration of **45 minutes** each session.

29 NOVEMBER, 2025

17, 24, AND 31 JANUARY, 2026

7 FEBRUARY, 2026

Museo Nacional Thyssen Bornemisza, Madrid

Rather than traditional interpretive or guided tours, the *Nocturnal Walkthroughs* offer constellational readings that position Akomfrah's work within pressing contemporary contexts. Following an open call held this past summer, three interdisciplinary proposals were selected to activate the exhibition space and bring fresh perspectives to Akomfrah's practice. By experiencing the exhibition through these alternative lenses, the program seeks to foster dialogue and highlight the urgency of understanding today's interwoven global crises.

The activity will take place at Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid on Saturday evenings. Two sessions: 9.00 and 10.00 pm with an approximate duration of 45 minutes each session.

SONIC WALKTHROUGH WITH HANNAH KEMP-WELCH

29 NOVEMBER 2025, 9:00 PM AND 10:00 PM

EXHIBITION SPACE, FLOOR -1
Museo Nacional Thyssen Bornemisza, Madrid

Registration

[Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza's website](#)

Access

Free activity with prior registration required

Recommended age:

All audiences. Groups of 20 people

Language

Spanish and English

Hannah Kemp-Welch's *Sonic Walkthrough* invites visitors to respond to the exhibition *Listening All Night To The Rain* through sound. Participants can select sounds within the works while also adding their own using microphones and short-range radio transmitters. As they move around the gallery, participants enter different zones of broadcast from others, creating combinations of sounds that blend with the works and form unique layers of transmission and delay. Collectivity is central—we find a sense of flow in the exhibition, moving together-in-sound and exchanging responses to its themes from a plurality of experiences. Drawing on Kemp-Welch's focus on listening as a form of social action, the activity invites visitors to explore the interplay of receiving and transmitting, and to consider how listening and sounding together shapes the experience of the exhibition.

THE SACRED, WITHOUT WORLD

ACT III by Vir Andres Hera

24 JANUARY 2026 AND 07 FEBRUARY 2026,
9:00 PM AND 10:00 PM

EXHIBITION SPACE, FLOOR -1,
Museo Nacional Thyssen Bornemisza, Madrid

Registration

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza's website

Access

Free activity with prior registration required

Recommended age:

All audiences. Groups of 20 people

Language

Spanish

Vir Andres Hera presents *THE SACRED, WITHOUT WORLD - ACT III*, a nocturnal performance that interweaves oceanic sounds, seismic vibrations, voices, and sound loops to weave a polyphonic narrative where fragmented bodies attempt to reconstitute themselves. The action unfolds as a listening ritual: a gesture of "re-membering" dismembered bodies and confronting the silences of colonial archives. Inspired by the radical method of Marlene Nourbese Philip, the performance becomes a living archive where the boundaries between the living and the dead, the human and the more-than-human, dissolve. A space of vibration and memory where sound becomes testimony and threshold.

LISTENING ALL NIGHT TO THE MARASSA WITH INÉS SYBILLE AND MALVIN MONTERO

17 AND 31 JANUARY 2026, 9:00 PM AND 10:00 PM

EXHIBITION SPACE, FLOOR -1,
Museo Nacional Thyssen Bornemisza, Madrid

Registration

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza's website

Access

Free activity with prior registration required

Recommended age

All audiences. Groups of 20 people

Language

Spanish

Listening All Night to the Marassa is a dance activation of John Akomfrah's exhibition *Listening All Night to the Rain*. Dancers Malvin Montero and Inés Sybille glide through the moving iconography of the Marassa twins from Haitian-Dominican Vodou. The philosophical, aesthetic, sonic, and choreographic variations of this mysterious pair dive into echoes and samples from Akomfrah's aquatic body-archives. Like a diasporic network of connection, Angola's Kuduro, Jamaica's Dancehall, and Dominican Dembow allow them to flirt with machetes, horns, and laments. Within the syncretism of this jumble of codes, Malvin and Inés mobilize and produce memory, reterritorializing a spirituality that is erotic, protective, and strategic.

FILM CYCLE IN COLLABORATION WITH THE FILMOTECA ESPAÑOLA, “TESTIMONIES: JOHN AKOMFRAH IN DIALOGUE”

Curated by Tarini Malik, this three-part film program explores cinema as testimony, resistance, and an alternative archive in the face of oppression, revolution, and exile. The first session focuses on protest movements in Britain and India, revealing state violence and authoritarian dynamics through archival and narrative works. The second centers on Malcolm X and Patrice Lumumba, tracing connections between Black activism and revolutionary leadership through essayistic and poetic cinema. The final program brings together films from Palestine and the Black Audio Film Collective, reflecting on exile, dispossession, and testimony as strategies of survival. Together, these screenings affirm cinema as a tool against erasure and colonial memory.

TESTIMONIES OF RESISTANCE: NIGHT ONE

Session presented by **Tarini Malik** (online connection)

13 JANUARY, 2026, 7 PM

Cine Doré, Madrid

TESTIMONIES OF RESISTANCE: NIGHT TWO

Session presented by **Conciencia Afro**

20 JANUARY, 2026, 7 PM

Cine Doré, Madrid

TESTIMONIES OF RESISTANCE: NIGHT THREE

27 JANUARY, 2026, 7 PM

Cine Doré, Madrid

TESTIMONIES OF RESISTANCE: NIGHT ONE

Session presented by Tarini Malik (online connection)

13 JANUARY, 2026, 19:00H — CINE DORÉ, Madrid

Access	Ticket sales at the box office until full capacity is reached
Recommended Age	All audiences are welcome
Language	Original version with Spanish subtitles

From Britain to India, these films expose how state power and authoritarianism are contested through the archive, testimony, and insurgent acts of resistance, revealing cinema as a weapon against erasure and repression.

HANDSWORTH SONGS

Black Audio Film Collective (UK, 1986, 59 min)

A landmark essay film weaving archival footage, newsreels, and testimonies to narrate the uprisings in Birmingham and London, dismantling mainstream media's portrayal of Black communities.

INTERVAL

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Anand Pathwardan (India, 1978, 40 min)

Patwardhan's first film to be widely screened in India, it emphasised the widespread policies of arrest and torture both before and after Indira Gandhi's dictatorship.

TESTIMONIES OF REVOLUTION: NIGHT TWO

Session presented by **Conciencia Afro**

20 JANUARY, 2026, 19:00H — CINE DORÉ, Madrid

Access	Ticket sales at the box office until full capacity is reached
Recommended Age	All audiences are welcome
Language	Original version with Spanish subtitles

Two visionary figures remembered through cinema's counter-archives, mapping Black activism across continents

SEVEN SONGS FOR MALCOLM X

Black Audio Film Collective (UK, 1993, 52 min)

A poetic, multi-layered portrait of Malcolm X that brings together archival footage and re-enactment to examine Black radical politics across the Atlantic.

SHORT INTERVAL

LUMUMBA: LA MORT DU PROPHÈTE

Raoul Peck (Congo, 1990, 69 min)

An essayistic meditation on Patrice Lumumba's assassination and its reverberations, blending archive, voiceover and personal reflection.

TESTIMONIES OF EXILE: NIGHT THREE

27 JANUARY, 2026, 19:00H — CINE DORÉ, Madrid

Access	Ticket sales at the box office until full capacity is reached
Recommended Age	All audiences are welcome
Language	Original version with Spanish subtitles

Bringing together films from Palestine and the Black Audio Film Collective that confront exile and dispossession. Each work insists on testimony - personal and collective - as a form of resistance

TESTAMENT

Black Audio Film Collective (UK, 1988, 88 min)

Following a Ghanaian exile returning home after years in Europe, this essay film explores colonial legacies, dislocation, and fractured memory, intertwining documentary testimony with poetic reflection.

SHORT INTERVAL

THEY DO NOT EXIST

Mustafa Abu Ali (Palestine, 1974, 25 min)

Shot in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, this seminal work of revolutionary cinema documents everyday life alongside military resistance, reclaiming images of a people whom official histories sought to erase.

BIOGRAPHIES

HANNAH KEMP-WELCH

Hannah Kemp-Welch is a sound artist with a social practice. Her projects develop collaboratively with communities, considering how listening might lead to social action. She likes to work with analogue tools like radio transmitters and wind-up cameras, valuing their ingenuity and openness to collective experimentation. Recent projects include *All Under One Magnetosphere* (2025), a BBC Radio 4 feature produced with Oliver Sanders, tuning into the Earth's natural static, and *Nomadic Listening* (2024), a community project and sound installation for Manifesta 15 in Barcelona. Hannah is a member of Shortwave Collective, an international feminist radio art group.



PORTRAIT OF HANNAH KEMP-WELCH
by Jonathan Crabb

VIR ANDRES HERA

Vir Andres Hera (MX-FR) works between expanded cinema, installation, and critical writing. His work explores diasporic consciousness, gender identity, and memory through audiovisual montages that intertwine personal and collective archives, destabilizing colonial narratives. A graduate of Le Fresnoy, Mo.Co., and UQAM, they have exhibited at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Gaîté Lyrique, Mimosa House, and Luma Foundation, among others. In 2025, they held residencies at CIAPV and the Carasso Foundation, and are preparing Incwadi, their next installation. They are a member of the teaching staff at Villa Arson and the editorial committee of Qalqalah قَلْقَلَة.



PORTRAIT OF VIR ANDRES HERA
by Philippe Munda. Triangle France

INÉS SYBILLE & MALVIN MONTERO

Inés Sybille is a dancer, cultural researcher, and teacher. Born in Barcelona to a Catalan mother and a Haitian father, she lives between Barcelona and Lisbon. Through her choreographic practice—drawing from Angola's Kuduro, Ivory Coast's Coupé Décalé, and Jamaica's Dancehall—she creates inquiries that seek to attune with the deities of Haitian Vodou.

Born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (Los Mina), **Malvin Montero** is a choreographer, dancer, and educator. He began his career in 2003 at the Alina Abreu Dance Conservatory and later trained at Rey Juan Carlos University (ISDAI)

in Madrid. He directs the platform Zebra Prieta, through which he expands his poetic work and diasporic imagination.



PORTRAIT OF INES MALVIN
by Leticia Diniz

CONCIENCIA AFRO

Conciencia Afro is a cultural initiative, founded in 2016, focused on reclaiming, celebrating and disseminating the realities and knowledge of the Black, African and Afro-descendant community from Spain.

**“I’M LIKE A LITTLE BOAT
SENSING AN EXPANSE
OF ENDLESS WATER
HERE UNDER GROVES OF TREES
FACE TO FACE IN THE BEDROOM
LISTENING ALL NIGHT TO THE RAIN”**

ABOUT TBA21

TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary is a leading international art and advocacy foundation. Established in 2002 by philanthropist and art patron Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, the foundation stewards the TBA21 Collection and its outreach activities, which include exhibitions as well as educational and public programming.

TBA21 is based in Madrid, working in association with the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, and has other important hubs in Venice, Italy, and Portland, Jamaica. All activity at TBA21 is collaborative and fundamentally driven by artists and the belief in art and culture as catalysts for social and environmental transformation and ultimately in the service of a culture of peace, understood as a continuous practice in the affirmation of life, diversity, and coexistence.

TBA21-Academy, the foundation's research arm, pursues a better understanding and deeper relationship with the Ocean and wider ecologies by working as an incubator for transdisciplinary inquiry, artistic production, and environmental advocacy. For over a decade, the Academy has catalyzed new forms of knowledge emerging from the exchanges between art, science, policy, and conservation in long-term and collaborative engagement through new productions, exhibitions, public programs, fellowships, residency programs, and other activities in a wide range of formats.

Some of its flagship projects are Ocean Space, an center for Ocean literacy trough the arts and sciences in Venice; the independent studies program Organismo | Art in Applied Critical Ecologies in collaboration with Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, *The Current* Pacific/Mediterranean/Caribbean; the online initiative Ocean-Archive.org, with OCEAN / UNI; and the European project Bauhaus of the Seas Sails. TBA21–Academy offers artists' residencies at the Jamaican-based Alligator Head Foundation; an organization which TBA21 helped launch in 2015. This foundation is devoted to the conservation of marine ecosystems and its practice focuses on the intersection of science, art, and community.

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