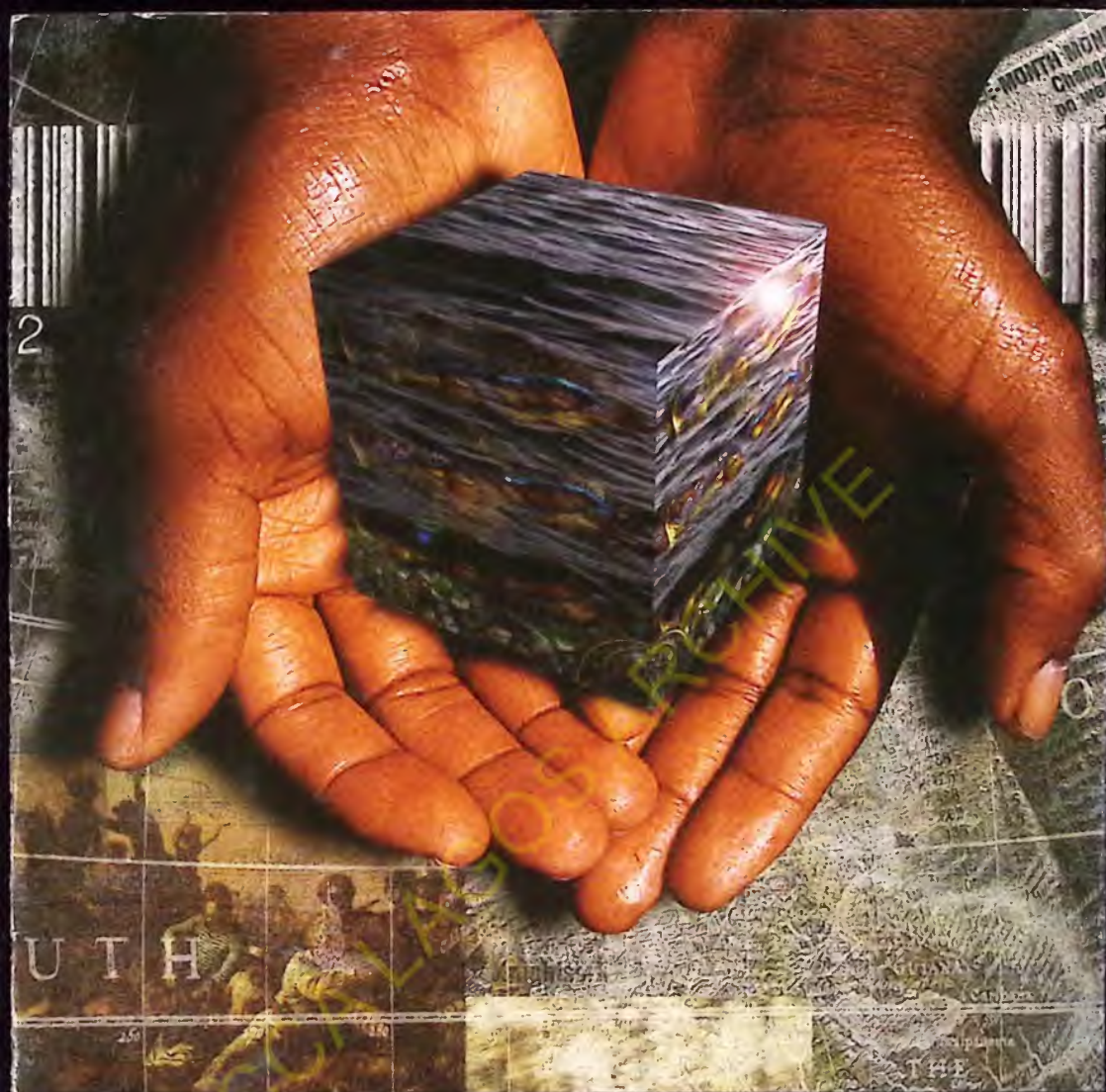




Keith Piper: Relocating the Remains

inIVA

A major solo exhibition re-presenting the artist's work in three new interactive installations, curated and produced by the Institute of International Visual Arts
18 July–13 August 1997

Keith Piper: Relocating the Remains

18 July–13 August 1997
Royal College of Art, London
(and tour)

OPENING TIMES

Monday–Sunday, 10am–6pm
On the evenings of the *Dialogues*,
the Gulbenkian Galleries will remain
open until 7.00pm

LOCATION AND TRAVEL

Upper and Lower Gulbenkian Galleries
Royal College of Art, Kensington Gore
London SW7 2EU

The Royal College of Art is adjacent to the
Royal Albert Hall.

Underground: South Kensington/High
Street Kensington (the college is located
within walking distance).

Buses: 9, 10, 52 (ask for the Royal
Albert Hall stop).

The Royal College of Art has
disabled access. For details please
call +44 171 590 4444

INFORMATION

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Keith Piper is an artist who works across
a wide range of media and disciplines
from video and CD-ROM through to
installation. He has exhibited widely in
the UK and abroad including *Cocido y Crudo*
(Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia,
Madrid, 1994/95), *The Exploded City* (Centre
181 Gallery, London, 1994), *A Ship Called*
Jesus (Ikona Gallery, Birmingham, 1991),
Interrogating Identity (Grey Art Gallery, New
York, 1990) and *The Other Story* (Hayward
Gallery, London, 1989). Keith Piper lives and
works in London.

MONOGRAPH AND CD-ROM

The exhibition is accompanied by a
combined CD-ROM and printed monograph
(including a major essay by Kobena Mercer)
which is available at the Royal College of Art
and from selected bookshops in the UK and
abroad or by mail order from the Institute.

£17.50

Special exhibition price £15.00

ISBN 1 899846 10 7

96 pp, 132 colour and b/w images,
220 x 310mm, paperback.

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UnClassified. Still from Relocating the Remains CD-ROM © Keith Piper 1997

KEITH PIPER: RELOCATING THE REMAINS

Through its richly textured and highly evocative environments, *Relocating the Remains* offers the viewer a challenging sensory journey into the work and ideas of Keith Piper. Strongly committed to questioning and subverting dominant notions of race, nation and history and exploring the enigmas of identity and difference, Piper has, over the past fifteen years, powerfully interpreted the iniquities of black diaspora experience and has engaged with the ambiguous interplays of power and resistance.

Unlike a conventional retrospective, *Relocating the Remains* does not contain works which follow a linear progression. In this exhibition, earlier works are revisited as part of a living, evolving body of ideas, and selected fragments and details are relocated within these new installations. The structure of the exhibition echoes the manner in which Piper himself works: past and present are intimately related and history forms part of a present that is continually being redefined. By coming to terms with the memories, myths and narratives that make up our collective past, Piper suggests, the present can be more easily negotiated.

Resonant with echoes of submerged histories, fragmented bodies, snatches of dialogue and strains of music, the work we see here is fluid yet disruptive, like water which has been recently disturbed. Through juxtaposition, layering and a cacophony of texts and voices, Piper has effectively cut, mixed and fused a variety of images and media, bestowing his work with a fluidity and mobility that never allows it to become completely fixed and encourages a multiplicity of readings. The interactive nature of Piper's work facilitates a genuine dialogue with his audience, and the viewer is engaged and implicated in various questions and challenges. The image of the open palm, which Piper frequently invokes, suggests a desire to reveal, to open up and be open to, as well as a willingness to communicate.

In the installations presented here, Piper revisits a number of themes which have informed his practice during the last ten years. *UnRecorded Histories* examines the gaps and omissions in the historical legacies of colonialism, revealing fragments of hidden narratives and exploring the relationships between personal memory and political events. *UnClassified* investigates the impact of new technologies on surveillance and



questions and encountering various obstacles along the way.

While rigorously interrogating new technologies and problematising questions of access, this installation also evokes a fascination with the activities of collecting and classifying. Perhaps Piper is suggesting a link between current strategies of identification, grounded in rendering 'the other' visible, and the practices of nineteenth-century anthropologists who constructed hierarchies of difference based on the obsessive measuring, observing and filing of faces and bodies, and the collection and display of empirical 'data'.

ANOTHER ARENA

Entering the stadium, we become enmeshed in the spectacle, engaged in dialogues about contests of territory and definitions of national identity. Here, these dialogues are interpreted through the metaphor of sport

and the inscription of the body of the black athlete as a vehicle for national aspirations. Through a reworking of *The Nation's Finest* (1991), Piper suggests that the sports stadium is an arena of both enfranchisement and enclosure. Within this arena, acknowledgement of the black sportsperson's athletic prowess is tainted by the belief that this power lies in an innate genetic order. Speed and strength are perceived as God-given gifts rather than skills cultivated through the intense discipline of rigorous training.

The artist is suggesting that black athletes may temporarily come to symbolise the hopes and desires of the nation and may momentarily be worshipped as national heroes. However, this bestowal of acclaim is constrained by a sense of fascination with the black body, reverberating with echoes of the 'exotic', which still insist on rendering it as 'other'.



UnRecorded C.K. Piper 1997

policing in the modern city, and questions the wider implications of classification and collecting on the labelling and control of identities and on definitions of 'belonging'. Another Arena recreates the stadium and presents the spectacle of sport as a terrain where definitions of race and nation are contested. The body of the black athlete, it is suggested, may temporarily become a vehicle for national aspirations.

Using strategies of reclamation and revelation, Piper presents us with evocative points of departure; open-ended transitory moments rather than coherent solutions or prescriptive certainties, and challenges us to encounter what may previously have been unacknowledged or inaccessible.

UNRECORDED HISTORIES

The artist invites us to enter a darkened space where we encounter an antique desk standing on an ornate carpet before a network of screens. Having conjured up an illusion of authority and officialdom, Piper proceeds to subvert this by encouraging the viewer to select fragments from a number of works which deal with the gaps in 'authoritative' and 'official' histories. In this way, he offers up the possibility of a personal reclamation of the past in the face of dislocation and loss. Through the works he has relocated in this installation, Piper asks us to explore the ways in which personal identities may be liberated from the constraints imposed on them by narratives of history and tradition.

In *A Ship Called Jesus* (1991), materials as wide ranging as photographs taken from the family album and apocalyptic fragments of Biblical texts are juxtaposed through a narrative which explores three particular historical phases in the relationship between peoples of the African diaspora and the institution of the Christian Church, moving from England's first slave-trading voyage in 1564 to the politics of the Black Protestant Church. At certain points an attempt is made to problematise this relationship while at other moments it is celebrated, and Christianity is invoked as both an enslaving force and a source of collective resistance.

Episodes from *Trade Winds* (1992) may also be called up here, as further narratives are woven into the texture of the environment in which we find ourselves immersed. As submerged remnants gradually resurface, Piper explores the colonisation and commodification of the black body and acknowledges the historical relationship between imperial expansion and the development of the industrial base of the British economy. Countering the notion that history is a coherent, sequential narrative, the artist reconstructs the past as a series of overlapping and recurring visual and textual fragments which include segments of bodies, and barely decipherable hand-written inscriptions which only hint at their sinister origins as the log books of slave ships, invoices and bills for the sale of human cargo.

Evoking the resonances of lived experience in the form of a father-son conversation, *Go West Young Man* (1987) reconstructs the historical in terms of the personal. Through the charting of a journey, Piper investigates the contradictory ways in which personal definitions of identity are influenced by historically imposed stereotypes.

UNCLASSIFIED

The shelves stacked high with numerous boxes containing various items and articles suggest the processes of classification and

collection, and create an atmosphere of order and control, a sense of boxing things up and then labelling them, for purposes of identification. In this installation, viewers can interact with several of Piper's works which interrogate questions of access and control, investigate the impact of new technologies on policing and surveillance and critically explore the realm of cyberspace.

Surveillances: Tagging the Other (1992) and *The Exploded City* (1994) challenge the notion that the city is an environment characterised by diversity, freedom and limitless possibility. Rather, Piper portrays the city as an arena of terror and confinement presided over by technologies of surveillance and control. He draws our attention to the segregating discourses of safety, civility, and the maintenance of order, and highlights the use of new technologies in perpetuating societal divisions and visually identifying those who 'do not belong'.

Piper expresses an ambivalent attitude towards digital technologies. In his own practice, he has utilised the computer as a powerful and evocative tool for manipulating and subverting dominant discourses. However, the encoding of visual information onto computer files is seen as highly problematic in other contexts. The ongoing power of the photographic image to fix and categorise, to criminalise and name as 'other' is, the artist believes, expanded upon and amplified through the integration of photography with new computer technologies, especially when operated by those in control of boundaries of exclusion. When identification becomes a form of control, as at international borders, the power of vision, of visibly identifying someone as not belonging and not being welcome, emerges as a central strategy.

Dispelling the myths which promote cyberspace as a utopian realm equally accessible to all, the artist invites the viewer to navigate a journey, answering



Four Corners, Still from Relocating the Remains CD-ROM © Keith Piper 1997

As well as exploring the spectacle of race and nation as enacted within the stadium, Piper has made a number of works which present the boxing ring as an arena across which these narratives are played out. *Transgressive Acts* (1993) and *Four Corners* (1995) examine the shifting parameters within which prevailing perceptions of black masculinity have come to be defined over progressive decades. By evoking the personas of various boxing icons, Piper exposes the roped-off canvas square as a site of political struggle where identities and visibilities are contested.

In his evocation of Muhammed Ali, the artist suggests that while the boxer's brash persona and humour rendered him highly marketable, his declaration of political and cultural realignment with the Nation of Islam radically altered the public's perception of him. The 1965 fight between Muhammed Ali and Floyd Patterson became, Piper tells, a symbolic battle between the renegade and the respectable, the Muslim and the Christian, and the East and the West. Ali's public refusal to be drafted to fight in

Vietnam and the subsequent stripping of his title turned him into a martyr and a symbol of opposition.

CARGO CULTURES

The two bodies solemnly encased in lightboxes seem to encapsulate a number of themes explored by Keith Piper in this exhibition. They suggest the commodification of the body and the classification of identities, but also hint at the transportation and transformation of meaningful fragments.

In these installations Piper has innovatively reclaimed evocative moments and relocated powerful and resonant fragments from earlier works. At the same time, he has created new and provocative environments in which we as viewers are actively immersed. Through encountering the works we become engaged in numerous questioning and revelatory dialogues which will resonate long after our visit to the exhibition.

Rohini Malik is a freelance writer and research assistant at the Institute of International Visual Arts.

TALKS

A weekly programme of talks takes place throughout the course of the exhibition exploring key issues in Keith Piper's work.

Dialogues present in-depth analysis and criticism of the artist's work by established writers, academics, and cultural theorists.

THURSDAY AND TUESDAY EVENINGS AT 7.00PM
Lecture Theatre Two, Royal College of Art.

Thursday 24 July 1997

Depicting History: Mapping the Spaces of the Post-colonial Experience

Looking at the question of how to represent history and disrupt linear narratives, this discussion investigates issues surrounding identity politics and its place within a conscious black art practice. *Speakers include Jon Bird and Jean Fisher (Chair).*

Thursday 31 July 1997

Superfly, Heavyweight, Victim(iser): The Black Male as Hero and Thug in Contemporary Culture
This panel discussion questions the commodification of the black male body in popular culture and, within that context, examines the representation of the black man as both victim and victimiser, sporting hero, and thug. *Speakers: David Dibasa (Chair), Richard Dyer and Ekow Eshun.*

Tuesday 5 August 1997

In the Cut-and-Mix: Possibilities in Collage, Multimedia and Digital Technologies
Focusing on Piper's practice, this discussion charts the possibilities in the artistic application of digital technology as well as the transformative impact of digital media on the development of Piper's work. *Speakers: Kobena Mercer (Chair), Keith Piper and Gary Stewart.*

TICKETS

£3.00 (£2.00 concessions) for one talk or
£8.00 (£5.00 concessions) for all three talks.
Places are limited and booking is essential.
Please telephone +44 171 636 1930.

The Gulbenkian Galleries will remain open until 7.00pm on the evenings of these talks.

Viewpoints will give writers, curators and artists the opportunity to present personal perspectives and insights into Piper's work to a gallery audience.

SUNDAY AFTERNOONS AT 3.00PM
The Gulbenkian Galleries, Royal College of Art.

Sunday 20 July 1997

Richard Hylton, artist and curator/fellow in Visual Arts, Bradford University.

Sunday 27 July 1997

Caroline Smith, New Media Editor, *Creative Camera*.

Sunday 3 August 1997

TBC

Sunday 10 August 1997

Sean Cubitt, Reader in Video and Media Studies, John Moores University.

The *Viewpoints* series is free.

For further information on the *Dialogues* and *Viewpoints* series, please contact Melanie Keen on +44 171 636 1930.

NAVIGATORS

A team of artists/guides are on hand every day in the gallery to assist exhibition visitors in navigating the individual artworks.