

this is a love poem,

Autumn Knight, Mona Benyamin, Rosa-Johan Uddoh, and Tanoa Sasraku
Curated by Cindy Sissokho

Sept 4 - Oct 16, 2021

this is a love poem, is a group exhibition that reclaims the language of humour through a Black feminist perspective through performance and poetry. It attempts to offer a response on how political satire is an unapologetic and poetic tool for resistance, and laughter, a measure to provoke unconscious discomfort from the receiver, as well as building solidarities and cohesion amongst racialised people.

The exhibition allows us to question and reflect how, through time, the Black body has fed colonial imaginaries within the realm of comedy through inappropriate representations, (forced) roles and caricatures from the use of blackface minstrelsy to cabaret and freak shows. Through the Western colonial gaze and spectatorship, the Black body performing only held space when performed by the White body, in highly problematic representations that are still shaping (collective) imaginaries today.

This exhibition radically rejects hegemonic forms of humor in the genuine process of encountering laughter. It is a refusal through other forms of communication and coding that are used through the poetic and rhetoric as articulation of struggle and dispossession. And it is through complexified narratives, in which the performative Black body exists, that it offers nuanced critiques on colonialism, nationalism, identity, and belonging.

It is a statement of how humor/satire is reappropriated today as a virulent tool for testimony, shifting narratives, manipulating and negotiating temporalities from mainstream to traditional formats. The performance is a space to “crack” time and reclaim space, in which “the moment of laughter [a]s a performative explosion or literal burst can stop, speed up, and even transport us to other times and spaces”. (Cracking Up Time: Black Feminist Comedic Performance and Queer Temporalities in the work of Wanda Sykes by Katelyn Hale Wood (2016)).

Take the time to laugh. Humor is a test to time.

Through four artists, we hit the spot through distinct usage of the language of humor with as predominant tools awkward gestures, exaggerated facial expressions, costumes and the body as a prop are all a part of the staging of humor with the virulent words that accompanies it. In this instance, it is also a language that takes shape collectively and collaboratively.

A virulent love language.

In the downstairs gallery, we are drawn by *O' Pierrot* (2019) by Tanoa Sasraku into a cinematic reappropriation of the Commedia Dell'Arte figure of Pierrot the clown and highly inspired by the aesthetic of avant-garde, queer film *Rabbit's Moon* (1972) by Kenneth Anger. A subversion played by the artists herself from her own perspective as a mixed-race gay woman having grown up in rural England, in which she “acts out the Sisyphean task of catching a falling Sycamore seed day after day, whilst being taunted by a black harlequin in white face”. (Quote from Dan Guthrie (2021)).

(Upstairs)

On the left-hand side gallery are *Troubles in Paradise* (2018), a dysfunctional sitcom set out to explore humor as a mechanism of coping with trauma, pain, and taboos in relation to the Nakba and the Israeli occupation, by posing three sets of jokes ranging from the classical misogynistic genre to anti-jokes and culturally specific humor; in order to examine why Nakba jokes never fully evolved as a genre and entered the Palestinian mainstream. The main protagonists of the film are Benyamin's parents who do not speak English and read the jokes from transliterated title cards and have gone through the Nakba (1948) and the Naksa (1967) and never shared their memories from these major events - an exploration of the blurred lines of language in the coding of humor.

Lit on the floor is a handout poster of *Distant Relatives (The Crying Boy)* (2020). In the 1970s, the painted face of a blue-eyed boy with a tear running down his cheek, known as the “Crying Boy,” appealed to the maternal and even paternal instincts of parents whose children resembled but little the Dickensian boy who found his home in the houses of the lower-class families in Palestine—among them Benyamin's aunts. Using an AI photo-editing app, she painted a smile on his face, in an attempt to challenge the culture of commercialized nostalgia, by disrupting the power balance between the viewer and the painting, where instead of triggering feelings of pity and sympathy, it triggers the uncanny and absurd.

In the right-hand side gallery is *Performing Whiteness* (2019), a series of three works inspired by the figure of Moira Stuart, the longest serving Black female broadcaster on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), that she impersonates successfully articulating a series of controversial facts with a witty attitude. It is a parodic analysis of media and broadcasting services. The humoristic rhythm is accompanied by

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excessive glamour. The works are alongside *My Hair is Beautiful* (2021) a short love poem to Kings that could never even dream of having beautiful afro hair.

The exhibition presents works both at EXILE gallery and online with the parallel launch of the online platform **EXILE TV**, <https://tv.exilegallery.org/>

You are invited to see online the work *Autumn Knight*, *Sanity TV* (2018), an ongoing performance series that investigates the flexible boundaries of identity, psyche, normalcy, and reality through the format of a fictional talk show. The performance is improvisational in structure. The interviews unfold as responses to various prompts, then unravel toward something unrecognizable. The work uses irrationality as a way to make meaning in the contemporary situation. Power and relationships are negotiated through a constant restructuring of each moment. Laughter/occasional discomfort.

Here, you can also see the third episode of *Performing Whitness* (2019) by Rosa-Johan Uddoh.

LIST OF WORKS

Tanoa Sasraku: *O' Pierrot*, 2019. 8 mm film, 13:58min.
Tanoa Sasraku: film text transcription, 83 x 40 cm.

Mona Benyamin: *Trouble in Paradise*, 2019. Digital Video, 08:30min.

Mona Benyamin: *Distant Relatives (The Crying Boy)*, 2020. A2 Poster. (You are welcome to take a copy)

Rosa-Johan Uddoh: *Performing Whitness*, 2019. Digital Video, Three episodes, 09:55 min.

Rosa-Johan Uddoh: *My Hair Is Beautiful*, 2021. Print on paper, 45 x 14 cm.

BIOGRAPHIES

Born in 1995, **Tanoa Sasraku** examines the intersections of her identity as a bi-racial, gay woman raised in Plymouth (UK). Her practice shifts between sculpture, drawing and filmmaking, juxtaposing and performing British, Black, Ghanaian and queer cultural histories.

Sasraku's appliquéd, newsprint works are inspired by the visual and material structure of the Fante Asafo war flags of coastal Ghana, which the artist's paternal ancestors fabricated in resistance to British colonial rule. Her own flags map personal stories of a life lived in modern Britain, as classroom materials are fused together to create cryptic, ceremonial objects.

In her practice as a filmmaker, Sasraku engages in queer, black retellings of traditional folklore, as well

as producing more diaristic journeys through her past, via the medium of analogue film. The presence of her figure, set against the sublime, British landscape throws into question ideas of "deep" England and what it means to claim ownership over the rural.

Tanoa Sasraku is based in London, England. She graduated from the BA Fine Art course at Goldsmiths College in 2018 and will be commencing her studies at the Royal Academy Schools in 2021.

Mona Benyamin (b.1997) is a Palestinian visual artist and filmmaker based in Haifa. In her works, she explores intergenerational outlooks on hope, trauma and questions of identity, using humor and irony as political tools of resistance and reflection. Her recent works have been screened — among others — at MoMA, Another Gaze, Sheffield DocFest and Columbia University.

Rosa-Johan Uddoh (b.1993, Croydon) is an interdisciplinary artist working towards radical self-love, inspired by black feminist practice and writing and cultural studies. Through performance, writing and multi-media installation, she explores places, objects and celebrities in British popular culture, and their effects on self-formation. Central to Rosa's practice is collaboration, with activists, children and other artists. Rosa was a Sarabande Foundation scholar, 2020 Stuart Hall Library Resident and is currently a lecturer in Performance at Central Saint Martins, London.

Rosa's solo presentations include: 'Practice Makes Perfect', Focal Point Gallery (Southend-On-Sea, 2021), "'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) and 'Black Blossoms', The Royal Standard (Liverpool, 2017). Recently she has screened work at East London Cable's 'TV Dinners E03' at Tate Modern (London, 2019).

Rosa's first book 'Practice Makes Perfect', is due to be published by Bookworks and Focal Point Gallery in late 2021.

Autumn Knight is an interdisciplinary artist working with performance, installation, video, and text. Her video and performance work have been viewed within several institutions including The New Museum (NYC), Western Front, (Vancouver, Canada), Akademie der Kunst (Berlin), The Whitney Museum of American Art and The Kitchen (NYC). Her performance work is held in the permanent collection of the Studio Museum in Harlem. Knight is a recent recipient of The Nancy B. Negley Rome Prize.