

G A S W O R K S

NOSFERASTA

Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer with Oba

6 October – 19 December 2021



Gasworks presents the first UK commission by Brooklyn-based filmmakers Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer in collaboration with Oba. The exhibition launches their ongoing film *Nosferasta*, a nightmarish chronicle of colonial encounters dating back to 1492.

Nosferasta is the first iteration of a Rastafarian vampire film starring and co-written by Oba, a Trinidadian artist and musician based in Brooklyn. Spanning 500 years of colonial destruction, human trafficking and blood sucking, the film reimagines Oba's origin story. In the late 15th century, Oba is shipped as cargo from West Africa to the Caribbean, where he is bitten and converted by the vampire Christopher Columbus, ensuring his undying allegiance to the colonial project.

Oba claims he has three birthdays: the day he was born, the day he was bitten, and the day he killed his master. There is a dark irony in the fact that Columbus

is both a despotic father figure to Oba and his partner in crime. Engaged in unholy union, this unlikely duo spread vampirism across the Western Hemisphere, pulling the strings of 'New World' geopolitics until Oba's encounter with Rastafarianism, an anticolonial religion, enables him to break Columbus's spell.

In the film, period scenes are in tense dialogue with unscripted vignettes of Oba's post-vampiric existence in present-day Brooklyn. These portray Oba's real-life struggles with the colonial bureaucracy he once helped to build, including his quest for U.S. citizenship and literacy. Combining film forms and jumping across multiple timelines, locations and perspectives, *Nosferasta* tells the story of an ageing Rastafarian vampire at the decline of colonial empires. It examines the guilt of being complicit in imperial conquest, while acknowledging the extreme difficulty of unlearning centuries of vampiric conditioning. Ultimately, the film tackles an uncomfortable question: *How can you decolonise yourself, if it's in your blood?*

Leading to the film projection, an old roller shutter has been installed to recreate the entrance of Adam Khalil's apartment building in Brooklyn, which was painted without permission by Oba in 2015. Made to "beautify Adam's place, as it didn't look good enough", Oba's mural featured the title 'Nosferasta' against a Rastafari lion symbolising Haile Selassie. It also marked the beginning of Adam and Oba's friendship. In 2018, Oba starred in Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer's feature film *Empty Metal*, a sci-fi thriller set against a backdrop of racialised police brutality and mass surveillance. During its production, Oba insisted that *Empty Metal* was just a first step towards *Nosferasta*, a film telling his own story.

Welcoming the public into the gallery, Oba's votive sculpture *Nosferasta the Demon Dread Vampire* (2015–2021) combines a variety of objects including various forms of currency, from cowry shells to U.S. dollars, and telephones from different eras, alluding to the world-wide expansion of communication technologies as a result of global imperialism. Oba's demon incorporates in a single object of worship the entire universe of *Nosferasta*, providing a historical journey through colonial and vampiric entanglements since Columbus's time.

Within the sculpture, Khalil and Sweitzer have installed a sound work that whispers a timeline of major events in vampire history which have shaped colonial modernity to the present day.

Biographies

Adam Khalil is a filmmaker and artist from the Ojibway tribe in Northern Michigan; **Bayley Sweitzer** is a filmmaker from Southern Vermont. Recent screenings include the Museum of Modern Art, Anthology Film Archives, and e-flux (New York); Walker Arts Center (Minneapolis); LACMA (Los Angeles); and Tate Modern (London). Their work has also featured at international events including the Whitney Biennial, Toronto Biennial, Sundance Film Festival. Adam Khalil is a core contributor to the Indigenous collective New Red Order (NRO), for which Bayley Sweitzer acts as a regular accomplice.

Oba. Born Wendell Scotts in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, Oba is an artist, chef and actor based in Brooklyn. His paintings, sculptures and t-shirts have featured at Motel Gallery and Rumpelstiltskin, Brooklyn. From 2016 to 2018, Oba was lead singer of the avant-noise supergroup Dead Companionship. He starred as King Alpha in Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer's 2018 film *Empty Metal*. Oba's world-class corn soup has been slurped at the legendary Club Temptation in Flatbush, as well as fine establishments across the world.

List of Works

1. Oba, *G.H. Oba's Mural Representing to the Whole World*, 2015/2021. Reproduction of mural painted without permission outside of Adam Khalil's apartment building in Brooklyn, 250 x 250cm. Reproduced by Saelia Aparicio.
2. Oba, *Nosferasta the Demon Dread Vampire*, 2015–2021. Mixed media: cardboard, plastic skull, king's crown, princess doll (aka vampire queen), Buddha statuettes, vintage telephone, flip phones, smart phones, clocks, watches, conch shells, cowry shells, coins, blue emeralds, Jamaican sunrise crystals, bedazzled fabric, enamel paint, glitter, 185 x 66 x 49cm. Includes a sound installation by Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer.
3. Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer, *Nosferasta Timeline*, 2021. Poster, 42 x 29 cm. Overleaf image: Austin Sley Julian, *Vampyric Atlantic Transference Channel*, 2021.
4. Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer with Oba, *Nosferasta*, 2021. Single-channel film projection, sound, 32 min loop.

Events

Screening: Peggy Ahwesh

Tuesday 9 November, 7pm

Film scholar Erika Balsom presents a screening of 1990s films by Peggy Ahwesh, a major influence on Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer. This screening coincides with Ahwesh's retrospective at Spike Island, Bristol, and will serve to launch Ahwesh's first UK monograph co-edited by Erika Balsom and Robert Leckie and published by Spike Island and Mousse Publishing.

Screening: Anyab (Fangs)

Thursday 25 November, 7pm

Film curator Róisín Tapponi presents a screening of Mohammed Shebl's 1981 film *Anyab* (Fangs). A lost gem of Egyptian queer cinema, *Anyab* is an unfaithful remake of the musical cult classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Weaved into its camp aesthetics, horror genre tropes and 80s disco numbers, *Anyab* provides a running commentary on the social situation in Egypt, from youth unemployment to class struggle, while intersecting sexual politics into the mix.

Cooking with Oba: The Secrets of the Soup

Sunday 5 December, 4-8pm (live streamed)

Nosferasta collaborator Oba will host a live cookery show and artist's talk that will address his sprawling practice as a sculptor, filmmaker, musician, actor, and chef, all the while making a big pot of his world-renowned corn soup. The live broadcast will be interspersed with music videos, images, trailers, and other video excerpts from Oba's practice and collaborations with Bayley Sweitzer and Adam Khalil, as well as visits from some special guests.

Open Studios

Saturday 11 December, 12-6pm

Meet our artists in residence: Janaina Wagner (Brazil), Sarah Rose (New Zealand), Laima Leyton and Lexy Morvaridi (UK). Artists talks: 4pm.

Gasworks events are free to attend, no booking required. Please note that seats will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

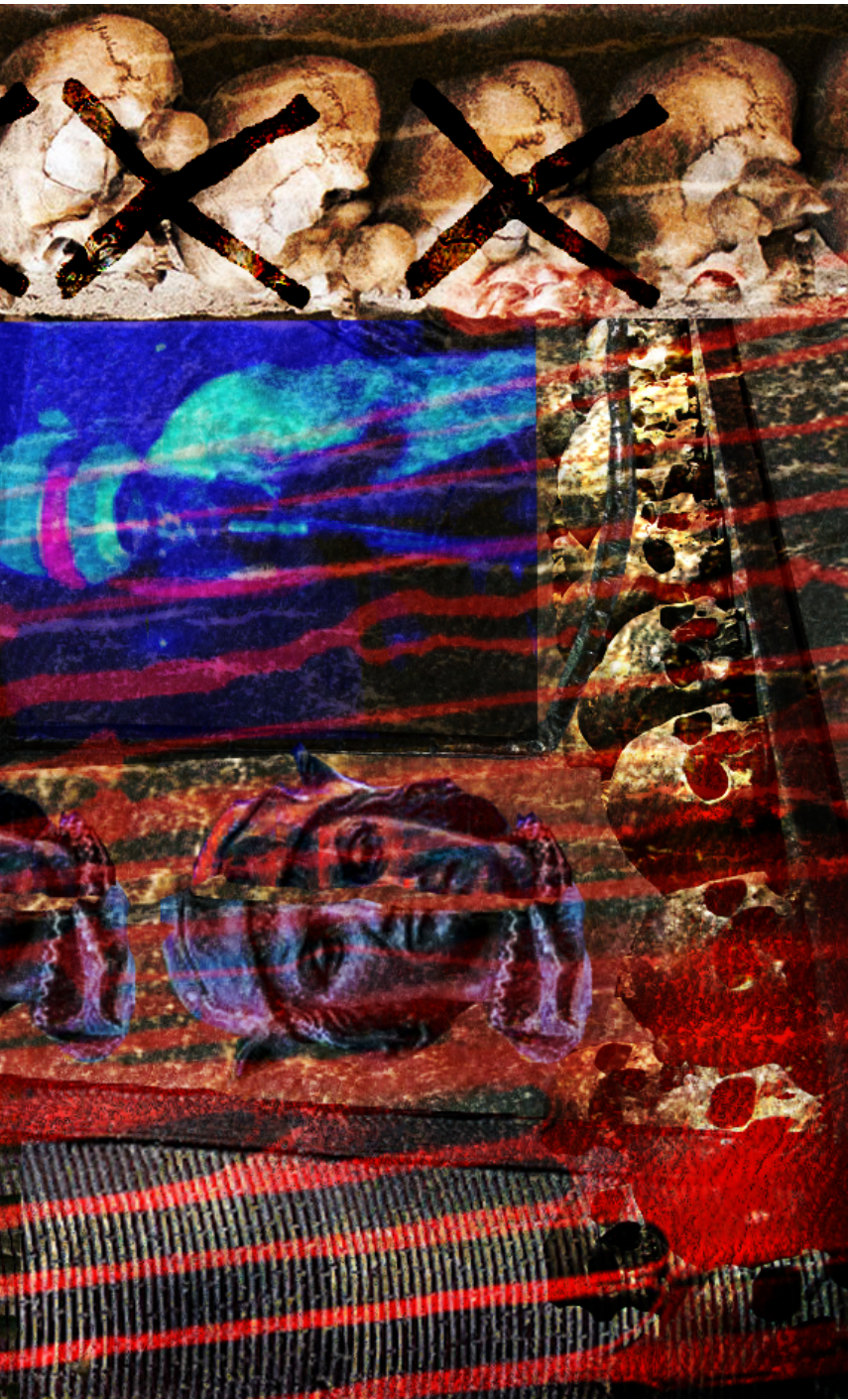
Nosferasta: The Book

Marking the first UK commission by Brooklyn-based filmmakers Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer, Gasworks is publishing a 176-page book that explores the ever-expanding vampiric universe of *Nosferasta*.

Interspersed with excerpts from Oba's literacy diaries, this book features critical essays, speculative fiction and visual contributions by Peggy Ahwesh, Lou Cornum, Alex Esco, Sabel Gavaldon, Adam Khalil, Mutabaruka, Oba, Austin Sley Julian, Bayley Sweitzer, and Laura Vallés. Designed by fag tips.

Printed copies will be available at the gallery from 17 November. Also available to download as an e-book on Gasworks' website.





Austin Sley Julian, *Vampyric Atlantic Transference Channel*, 2021. Digital collage. Courtesy of the artist.

Nosferasta is commissioned and produced by Gasworks, London and Spike Island, Bristol, as part of the European Cooperation project *4Cs: From Conflict to Conviviality through Creativity and Culture*, co-funded by Creative Europe and the Royal College of Art. The film is also supported by Creative Capital and Cinereach.

Nosferasta will travel to Spike Island, Bristol (5 February – 8 May 2022).

Gasworks commissions are supported by Catherine Petitgas and Gasworks Exhibitions Supporters.

Commissioning partners and exhibition supporters



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