



Press Release:

Rosa-Johan Uddoh

'Practice Makes Perfect'

13 March to

23 May 2021

Subject to government advice



Rosa-Johan Uddoh *Brown Paper Envelope Test* 2020

Focal Point Gallery is delighted to present the first institutional exhibition of new work by Rosa-Johan Uddoh, an interdisciplinary artist working towards radical self-love, inspired by black feminist practice and writing.

'Practice Makes Perfect' explores the relationship of childhood education with popular ideas of the British nation, and how this forms British subjects. This develops Uddoh's practice exploring the effects of 'black British' popular culture on self-formation. Responding to the current debates about black history within the National Curriculum and urban space, Uddoh has approached the creation of new work for this exhibition as therapeutic 'wish fulfilment' in a time of uncertainty in education and wider racial tension.

During Autumn 2020, Rosa-Johan Uddoh worked with Year 8 pupils at Chase Secondary School in Southend-on-Sea to create performance-to-camera videos, developed through a series of workshops that considered the content and format of Uddoh's written work, *WINDRUSH: A TONGUE TWISTER*, as a means to express the wishes of the young participants around a diverse curriculum. Investigating the importance of the school experience and 'rehearsing' as 'becoming' or gaining subjectivity, this exhibition shares a collaborative process of acting on the potential of a dream education, according to the possibilities of the school schedule and the public gallery setting.

Another major new work by Uddoh investigates the historical figure of Balthazar who was, according to tradition, one of the three biblical Magi and later Saint, who visited the infant Jesus after his birth to offer the gift of myrrh. Depicted since medieval times as a lone black figure in artistic imagery of the Nativity scene, this King is also one of the first performed encounters by school children with a black person of importance. Historically, Balthazar is also a figure through which white artists and their patrons first constructed 'blackness'. Through her research, with the assistance of Nasra Abdullahi, Uddoh has found and catalogued around 150 historical 'Balthazars' previously tokenised in 'Adoration' paintings made throughout European history. Thinking about the real, black European sitters for these paintings, behind the Christian symbolism, Uddoh's billboard-style collage brings these black kings together in friendship groups on a long march to irreversibly change the West.

In connection with this exhibition, FPG and Book Works are pleased to launch *Practice Makes Perfect*, the first book by Rosa-Johan Uddoh, in partnership with Bluecoat, Liverpool and The Bower, London in Spring 2021. The book comprises a collection of scripts by Uddoh, each aiming to trouble how a particular character in popular culture performs (and produces) 'black British' identity. Presented as scripts, sheet music & instructional worksheets, the reader is encouraged to insert their own experiences and interpretations, in their head or through live performances of their own. Selected texts will also be exhibited as works on paper within the exhibition. The book is designed by Rose Nordin.

Commissioned by Focal Point Gallery, 'Practice Makes Perfect' is presented in partnership with Bluecoat, Liverpool where the exhibition will tour from 16 October 2021 to 23 January 2022.

The book is published by Focal Point Gallery and Book Works, in partnership with Bluecoat, Liverpool and The Bower, London

With thanks to support from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants.

About the artist:

Rosa-Johan Uddoh (born 1993, Croydon), lives and works in London. Through performance, film, installation and sound, Uddoh explores an infatuation with places, objects and celebrities in British popular culture, and the effects of these on self-formation. She is influenced by her architectural background, rooting stories in specific spaces and materials.

Solo presentations include 'Studies for Impartiality', Jupiter Woods and 'Sphinx at the Crystal Palace', Black Tower Projects (both in London, 2019). She has participated in group shows including: 'Learning by Doing: A politics of practice', 68 Institute, Copenhagen, 2019; 'Black Blossoms: If we are going to heal let it be glorious', The Royal Standard, Liverpool, 2017 and 'Mene Mene Tekel Parsin', Cambridge, 2017. Recently she has screened work at East London Cable's 'TV

Dinners E03' at Tate Modern, 2019; and performed at 'Art in the Age of Black Girl Magic' Tate Britain, 2019 and 'New Contemporaries', South London Gallery and Bluecoat, 2018. She was the 2020 Stuart Hall Library Resident

About Focal Point Gallery

Focal Point Gallery (FPG) supports the production and presentation of new and recent contemporary art that challenges us to think and feel differently about locality, our sense of self and the importance of communities. Our wide-ranging and pioneering artistic programme is relevant to local and national audiences alike, through exploring current concerns that also resonate internationally. Based in Southend-on-Sea on the Thames Estuary, FPG's activities take place in locations across the region with our reach extended by working collaboratively with like-minded partners.

FPG is located on the ground floor of The Forum building in Elmer Square, 100 metres from Southend Central Station. (Trains are every fifteen minutes from London Fenchurch Street, journey time fifty minutes.) As south Essex's only public funded gallery for contemporary art, FPG receives regular funding from Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation and is part of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council from which it receives ongoing support.

Opening hours: Wednesday to Saturday 10.00am to 5.00pm,
Sunday 11.00am to 4.00pm

For further information, please contact jamesravinet@southend.gov.uk
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