

KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS

28 January – 18 March 2023

RENE MATIĆ upon this rock

Rene Matić's solo exhibition *upon this rock* continues the artists long-term interrogation of 'Britishness', exploring how the nation's past manifests in its present. Presenting Matić's work for the first time in Austria, the works investigate how family histories reverberate through different generations placing both subculture and spirituality in dialogue. While recognising the pitfalls of both, it positions subculture as religion, as saviour or guide, and vice versa. Matić notes: "it appears there is faith and soul both in the best and worst of things. There are parallels between finding the church and finding the pub. Or finding God and finding subculture. And in the end, I understand it as the search for something greater than yourself, something that won't fail you when you are being failed."

The new film work, *Many Rivers* (2022) takes the figure of Matić's father, Paul, as a starting point to reflect on diaspora and the experience of growing up as a mixed-race person in Britain in the 1960s. Paul's father Julien emigrated to the UK from St Lucia in the Caribbean in 1958. Paul's mother, a white Irish woman called Patricia, gave birth to Paul in 1962 at the age of nineteen. Patricia - who was Catholic - feared stigma and expulsion from her religious community due to giving birth to a Black baby 'outside of wedlock', and ultimately returned to Ireland leaving Paul with Julien and his new partner. This story is told from four perspectives: that of Paul; Matić's mother Ali; their grandfather Julien; and their aunt Lulu. Matić says: "Paul doesn't know when he was moved to Peterborough. He doesn't know when Julien was there and when he wasn't. He doesn't know who's related to him. He doesn't know about his Blackness, and he doesn't know about his whiteness." Through this film's four-way dialogue the gaps in Paul's story are partially filled.

Two vitrines, *New Town*, (2022) contain archival images related to Matić's life. The artist notes: "I am always looking for where I've come from. There are very few photos from my Dad's side of the family, things got lost or left behind. And so, what I have is what I am offering and is that enough? Is it enough to construct an identity, or a life, or a country? This family archive reiterates an existence – a building of a church upon a rock... against all odds."

The framed photograph *Destination / Departure*, (2020) shows the artist's tattooed back. The image was taken by British photographer Derek Ridgers who documented subcultural movements including skinheads throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The tattoo itself was carried out by Lal Hardy, who tattooed many punks and Skinheads in England in the same era. By inscribing the far-right slogan '*Born British Die British*' on the mixed race, queer body Matić's irreverently derides and problematises the myth of a pure unadulterated Britishness, while simultaneously claiming the phrase as their own. The act also critiques violence enacted on Black and Brown bodies throughout British history and into the present day. By commissioning Ridgers to take the photograph, Matić inserts himself into a specific visual history of Skinhead subculture.

Also featured are new images from the artist's ongoing photography series entitled *flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do* (2018 – ongoing). This series is a personal diary documenting Matić's community and family (chosen and otherwise), as well as being a portrait and deconstruction of contemporary Britain.

The exhibition is a collaboration with South London Gallery, London and it is supported by Concrete Projects, Stadt Wien and the BMKÖS.

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Rene Matic

Rene Matic (b. 1997, Peterborough) is an artist, writer and poet based in London. Their work spans across photography, film and sculpture in a meeting place they describe as rude(ness) – to interrupt and exist in/between. Matic often takes their departure point from dance and music movements such as Northern soul, Ska and 2-Tone, using them as sites to queer and re-imagine the intimacies between West Indian and white working-class culture in Britain. Recent solo exhibitions include upon this rock, South London Gallery, London, UK (2022), soul time, Studio Voltaire, London UK (2022), in spite of, instead of, Quench Gallery, Margate, UK (2022), flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do, Arcadia Missa, London, UK (2021), Born British Die British, VITRINE Gallery, London, UK (2021). Recent group exhibitions include *Queerdirect*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK (2022); *Arcadia*, Bold Tendencies, London, UK (2021); *Bloomberg New Contemporaries*, South London Gallery, London, UK (2021) and *Friends and Friends of Friends*, Schlossmuseum, Linz, AT (2020). Matic's work is in several prominent collections including Tate, London, UK; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, FR; UK Government Art Collection, London, UK; Arts Council Collection, London, UK; Martin Parr Foundation, Bristol, UK; University Arts London Collection, London, UK.

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