

Alberta Whittle

"Even in the most beautiful place in the world, our breath can falter".

The Modern Institute, Osborne Street

7th October 2023 – 11th November 2023

Preview: Friday 6th October 2023, 5-8pm

Being kind allows you to see the sunlight through the leaves.

- Jackie Kay, *Ten Poems of Kindness*, 2017.

Ten Poems of Kindness, a themed selection of verse, became a key touchstone for Alberta Whittle while developing her first solo exhibition at The Modern Institute. Alberta would read from the pamphlet and sit with its words before beginning to paint. The collection emerges from a tragedy, and from there sets out to map a territory – to emphasise the importance of a quality both vital but ever hard to define. Alberta's work unfolds from the poems of Norman MacCaig, Kae Tempest and Rabindranath Tagore, amongst others, forming a poetic consideration of place, belonging and memory.

Alberta's multifaceted practice is preoccupied with creating a personal response to the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade, and this exhibition further develops her unpicking of its connections to institutional racism and climate emergency in the present. This can be understood in terms of Christina Sharpe's 'wake work' which takes shape in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016). Here Sharpe's meditations on personal loss are set alongside a structural critique of anti-black violence which can be traced back to the Middle Passage.

In this presentation, connections across time and space come to the fore – in particular the artist's family and various aspects of Barbadian vernacular culture. The walls of Osborne Street have been painted in a multi-colour gradient of pink, orange and lilac, conjuring 'the fiery sunsets and moody dawns of the Caribbean' in the words of Daniella Rose King, whose newly commissioned text accompanies the show. A new tapestry, *Ring around the Rosy*, woven by Dovecot Studios, encompasses both a sense of childhood joy and a haunted quality – the nursery rhyme is widely understood to reference the Great Plague of London. The piece sits on a new gate, powder coated in municipal green, which references the Caribbean built environment as well as the architecture of incarceration.

Alberta's paintings engage with ideas around the Caribbean Gothic, a genre linked to the narrative device of the dead coming back to life – the oppressed resurfacing as zombies. The title of the exhibition and several of the paintings derive from Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) – a Gothic postcolonial novel set between Jamaica and England. Several family members feature in Alberta's paintings too, but their identity is always somewhat obscured – either hidden in darkness or masked by patterns calling to mind *veves*. The paintings are framed in wood which recall the fretwork found on the facades of many houses in Barbados. Together, the works represent an open offering which collects a variety of interconnected histories, presenting different forms of resistance and remembering.

Alberta Whittle (b. 1980 Bridgetown Barbados; lives and works in Glasgow) represented Scotland in the 59th Venice Biennale and is a 2022 recipient of the Paul Hamlyn Awards for Artists.

In 2020, Alberta was awarded a Turner Bursary and the Frieze Artist Award, she was the Margaret Tait Award winner for 2018/19.

Alberta is currently presenting a major exhibition of her career to date at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (Modern One), Edinburgh.

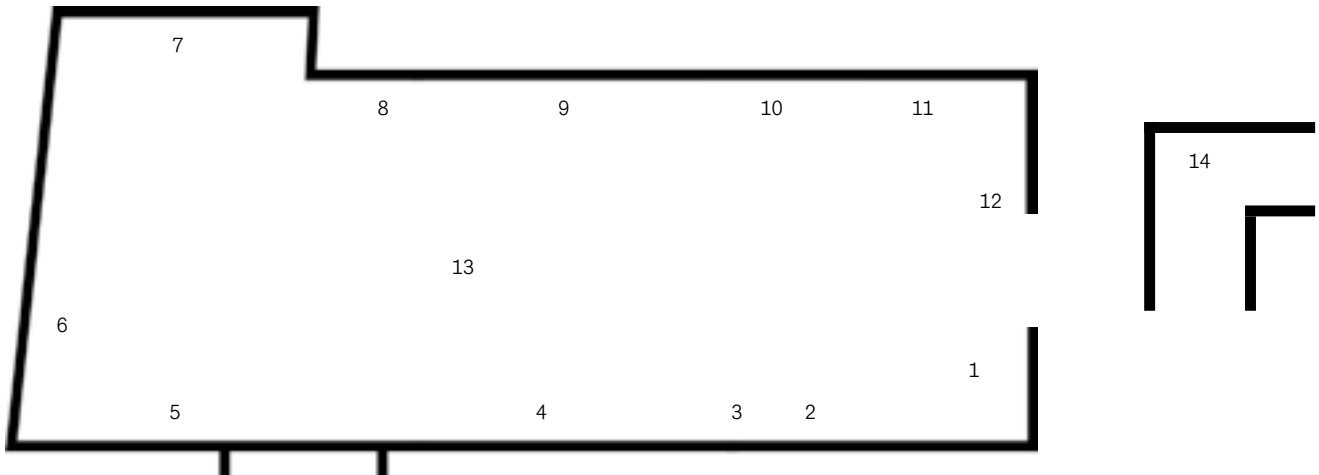
Selected solo exhibitions include: 'between a whisper and a cry', ICA, Los Angeles (2023); 'Dipping below a waxing moon, the dance claims us for release', The Holburne Museum, Bath (2023); 'deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory', Scotland + Venice, 59th Venice Biennale (2022); 'Congregation (Creating Dangerously)', Grand Union, Birmingham (2022); 'RESET', Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh (2021); and 'How flexible can we make the mouth', Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee (2019). Selected group exhibitions include: 'Black Atlantic: Power, People, Resistance', The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (2023); 'Soft and weak like water', 14th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju (2023); British Art Show 9, touring to Aberdeen Art Gallery, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, and The Box Plymouth (2021-2022); 'Moving Bodies, Moving Images', Whitechapel Gallery, London (2022); 'Black Melancholia', CCS Bard Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson (2022); 'Sex Ecologies', Kunsthall Trondheim, Norway (2021); and 'Life between islands: Caribbean British Art 1950s - Now', Tate Britain, London (2021).

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|----|---|----|--|----|--|
| 1 | <i>Muddy caresses at Dunloe Lane</i> , 2023
Acrylic on linen, painted wooden frame with fretwork
75.5 x 65.5 x 5.5 cm
29 3/4 x 25 3/4 x 2 1/8 in framed | 2 | <i>A conjuring, a transformation, a wiggle in the universe</i> , 2023
Acrylic on linen, painted wooden frame with fretwork
115.5 x 106 x 5.5 cm
45 1/2 x 41 3/4 x 2 1/8 in framed | 3 | <i>The soil reclaims her children</i> , 2023
Acrylic on linen, painted wooden frame with fretwork
115.5 x 106 x 5.5 cm
45 1/2 x 41 3/4 x 2 1/8 in framed |
| 4 | <i>There is always another way</i> , 2023
Acrylic on linen, painted wooden frame with fretwork
166.5 x 148.5 x 6 cm
65 1/2 x 58 1/2 x 2 3/8 in framed | 5 | <i>Totems of Brass (Part one)</i> , 2023
Cowrie shells, shackles, beads, pearls, calabash, wire, key, tambourines, bells, conch shells, driftwood, fabric doily, blue chalk, pyrite and rope
Dimensions variable | 6 | <i>Autumn Equinox - an awakening</i> , 2023
Acrylic on linen, painted wooden frame with fretwork
196 x 196 x 6 cm
77 1/8 x 77 1/8 x 2 3/8 in framed |
| 7 | <i>Autumn Equinox - abolition invocation</i> , 2023
Acrylic on linen, painted wooden frame with fretwork
196 x 196 x 6 cm
77 1/8 x 77 1/8 x 2 3/8 in framed | 8 | <i>Only the magic and the dream are true</i> , 2023
Acrylic on canvas, raffia
100 x 27.5 x 5.5 cm
39 3/8 x 10 7/8 x 2 1/8 in | 9 | <i>Set yourself free, you, now</i> , 2023
Acrylic on linen, painted wooden frame with fretwork
115.5 x 106.5 x 5.5 cm
45 1/2 x 41 7/8 x 2 1/8 in framed |
| 10 | <i>Under the full moon, I am born anew</i> , 2023
Acrylic on linen, painted wooden frame with fretwork
166.5 x 148.5 x 6 cm
65 1/2 x 58 1/2 x 2 3/8 in framed | 11 | <i>Only the sun was there to keep us company</i> , 2023
Acrylic on linen, painted wooden frame with fretwork
115.5 x 106 x 5.5 cm
45 1/2 x 41 3/4 x 2 1/8 in framed | 12 | <i>Totems of Brass (Part one)</i> , 2023
Cowrie shells, shackles, beads, pearls, calabash, wire, key, tambourines, bells, conch shells, driftwood, fabric doily, blue chalk, pyrite and rope
Dimensions variable |
| 13 | <i>Ring around the Rosy</i> , 2023
Tapestry woven by Dovecot Studios
Wool, linen, cotton, cowrie shells, children's hair clips, crystal; powder coated steel gates
Gate: 246 x 236 x 74 cm
Tapestry image: 143 x 152 x 2 cm | 14 | <i>Opening the way requires a wish</i> , 2023
Clay mask, beads, cowrie shells, shackles
Installed: 52 x 28 x 10 cm | 15 | Sound piece:
<i>Everyday is a new day</i> , 2023
Audio recording
Duration: 3 mins 35 seconds |