

words in mind, I can see the return of a different kind of imperialism. Here, one can bear witness to the futile figure of Donald Trump instrumentalising our trauma and bewilderment, turning it into a schematic for further violence and prejudice. Trump is and has become the distress that we fear most; he has proposed to erase the space of plurality, a place unequivocally free from pointed displays of violence. Will we resolve to let him do the "legislating"? Will we remain defeated? American poet Eileen Myles's "Each Defeat" ends with an apropos retort: "I see wild wild wild," she informs us.¹

It is in this wilderness that we—and by we, I must admit that I mean the intellectual left—find ourselves, bewildered by a world filled with xenophobia. One might ask: could Omar Mateen's violence echo the same conditions of prejudice leading to the referendum in the UK (my adopted home) to exit from the European Union? The narrative of "leave!" resounds with the violence of the "out" we can only imagine Omar Mateen heard in his own head.

This genre of absolutism is polemically coupled with the violent biopolitics used by Omar Mateen and other terrorists in the name of a so-called "holiness," a "holiness" that disavows the historical fact that queer difference has created a community of kinship bound together in a Ginsbergian belief in the "holiness!"

This we should ask of Omar Mateen and his legacy: Was he the enemy of the queers or of the state? Was he spooned from the inner crevices of every closeted boy's and girl's childhood, childhoods from the religious East to the deep American South, everywhere that bullying and bigotry have left so many wounds that there seems no path of escape? The queer artist and poet Eitel Adnan has written of her own paths of escape from civil-war-ridden Lebanon, from the scars of growing up a queer polyglot. In "The Manifestations of the Voyage", she evocatively anticipates our current mood, one of endless silences bookended by the ghosts of the dead:

we land in hell,
ascending to heaven.

*

Shadows move along ladders
under the silence of ordinary things
there is another silence:
it belongs neither to the leaves nor to the
dead²

For the dead who have suffered, Adnan instructs, we cannot stop our lament, nor our questioning. Society must return to the residual ritual, not of orthodox prayer but of poets and poetry, of pictures and their makers, of distribution and gathering. We will emerge in a place where dreams cross, where ideology reconciles itself with the affective power of faith in community, and where a sense of self rises to overcome the force of a political whim to alienate and annihilate. This is about salvation, and not only our own. It is about finding the words to help us collectively retrieve and map a way forward for not only the LGBTQI community but for a plural and polyphonic society at large, one where life is not merely at stake, but is persevered and protected. A world where we can carry each other.

1 Exhibition "Atlas: How to carry the world on one's back?", Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 26. 11. 2010 – 28. 3. 2011; ZKM, Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Karlsruhe, 7. 5. – 7. 8. 2011; Falckenberg Collection, Hamburg, 1. 10. – 27. 11. 2011.

2 C. P. Cavafy, "Waiting for the Barbarians", *The Official Website of the Cavafy Archive*, <http://www.cavafy.com/poems/content.asp?id=119&cat=1>, accessed 19 July 2016.

3 Eileen Myles, "Each Defeat", *Poetry Foundation*, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/52921>, accessed 19 July 2016.

4 Eitel Adnan, "A Return to Earth, a Linden Tree", in *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations of the Voyage* (Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press, 1990) p. 43.

Trump »die Gesetze geben« zu lassen? Werden wir uns geschlagen geben? In ihrem Gedicht »Each Defeat« gibt die amerikanische Lyrikerin Eileen Myles darauf eine treffende Antwort: »I see wild wild wild.«¹

In eben dieser Wildnis befinden wir uns – und ich gebe zu, mit »wir« meine ich die intellektuelle Linke – verstört durch eine Welt voller Fremdenangst. Man könnte fragen: Spiegelt Omar Mateens Gewalttat vielleicht auch das vorurteilsschwangere Klima wider, das zum Referendum über den EU-Austritt des Vereinigten Königreichs (meiner Wahlheimat) führte? Das »Leave«-Narrativ ist erfüllt von der Gewalt des »Out«, die vermutlich auch in Omar Mateens Kopf gespukt hat.

Dieses Genre der Lossprechung ist polemisch mit der gewalttätigen Biopolitik verbunden, die Omar Mateen und andere Terroristen im Namen dessen einsetzen, was sie »Heiligkeit« nennen. Es ist eine »Heiligkeit«, die die historische Tatsache leugnet, dass queere Differenz eine Gemeinschaft geschaffen hat, die von einem Ginsberg'schen Glauben an das »Heilige« zusammengehalten wird!

Daraufhin sollten wir Omar Mateen und sein Erbe befragen. War er der Feind der Queers oder des Staates? Entsprang er dem inneren Zwiespalt eines jeden heimlich homosexuellen Jungen oder Mädchens, einer Kindheit im religiösen Osten oder tiefen amerikanischen Süden oder wo immer Bosheit und Bigotterie so viele Wunden hinterlassen haben, dass man ihnen anscheinend nicht entkommen kann? Die queere Künstlerin und Dichterin Eitel Adnan hat über ihre eigenen Wege aus dem von Bürgerkriegen heimgesuchten Libanon geschrieben, über die Narben des Aufwachsens als queere Polyglottin. In »The Manifestations of the Voyage«, nimmt sie evokativ unsere gegenwärtige Stimmung vorweg, eine Stimmung endloser Schweigemomente, umrahmt von den Geistern der Toten:

... landen wir in der Hölle
während wir zum Himmel aufsteigen.

*

Schatten gleiten über Leitern
unter dem Schweigen gewöhnlicher Dinge
liegt ein anderes Schweigen:
es gehört weder den Blättern noch den
Toten.²

Wegen des Leids der Toten, so lehrt uns Adnan, können wir nicht aufhören zu klagen und zu fragen. Die Gesellschaft muss zu den Ritualen nicht des orthodoxen Gebets, sondern der Dichtung und der DichterInnen, der Bilder und BildermacherInnen, des Vermittels und Sammelns zurückkehren. Wir werden an einem Ort auftauchen, wo Träume queren, wo Ideologie sich mit der affektiven Kraft des Glaubens an die Gemeinschaft versöhnt und ein Selbst entsteht, das die Verletzungs- und Vernichtungsmacht politischer Willkür überwindet. Es geht um Erlösung, und nicht nur die eigene. Darum, die Worte zu finden, die uns helfen, gemeinsam einen Weg nicht nur für die LGBTQI-Community, sondern überhaupt eine plurale und polyphone Gesellschaft wiederzudeckeln und zu kartieren, einen Weg, auf dem das Leben nicht nur auf dem Spiel steht, sondern auch bewahrt und geschützt wird. Eine Welt, in der wir uns gegenseitig tragen können.

1 »Atlas: How to carry the world on one's back?«, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 26. 11. 2010 – 28. 3. 2011; ZKM, Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Karlsruhe, 7. 5. – 7. 8. 2011; Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg, 1. 10. – 27. 11. 2011.

2 Konstantinos Kavafis, »Warten auf die Barbaren«, in: *ders., Brichtst du auf den Ithaka ... Sämtliche Gedichte*, übers. v. W. Josting und D. Gundert, Köln: Ramiosini 1983, S. 98f.

3 Eileen Myles, »Each Defeat«, *Poetry Foundation*, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/52921> (Stand: 19. 7. 2016).

4 Eitel Adnan, »A Return to Earth, a Linden Tree«, in: *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations of the Voyage*, Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press 1990, S. 43. (Übers. W.P.)

Redefining the Photographed Black Figure

Black Chronicles. Photographic Portraits 1862 – 1948

National Portrait Gallery, London,
18. 5. – 11. 12. 2016

Made You Look. Dandyism and Black Masculinity

Photographers' Gallery, London,
15. 7. – 25. 9. 2016

by Christine Eyene

When it was first unveiled by Autograph ABP in September 2014, "Black Chronicles II" was not merely a project asserting the black presence in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, it was also making a claim both in the fields of photography history and the landscape of British art institutions. All the more at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), where a new display of this unique archive is currently presented alongside pieces from the NPG's collection. Part of Autograph ABP's mission to uncover "missing chapters" of British photography history, "Black Chronicles. Photographic Portraits 1862–1948", conceived by Renée Mussai, curator and Head of Archive at Autograph ABP, showcases over forty portraits of sitters of African and Asian descent, taken during the Victorian era.

As one walks up the gallery's marble staircase to the exhibition space, the eye catches a glimpse of a distinguished portrait from afar. Upon approaching the landing, one is met with Eleanor Xiniwe's portrait, flanked by that of her husband Paul Xiniwe—a South African social entrepreneur, political leader, and most senior member of the African Choir, as the accompanying label reads. The pair, alongside a group of seven other sitters, is now returning their gaze upon the viewers—some one hundred and twenty years after the portraits were taken in the London Stereoscopic Company studios, and the glass plate negatives, housed at the Hulton Archive/Getty Images, remained unopened until rediscovered by Autograph. The exhibition at the NPG is but a small fragment of a much larger collection. If the photographed subjects do not represent familiar faces to a contemporary mainstream audience, they are nonetheless celebrities in their own right. In large part, the selected images are comprised of portraits of members of the African Choir, an ensemble of fourteen young men and women who toured Britain between 1891 and 1893 to raise funds in order to establish a technical college back home. Most pictures are straightforward portraits in a traditionally composed style. The amazing sharpness of the images—a testament to the quality of archival conservation—and the elegant traditional attire donned by the sitters convey a sense of individuality and dignity that departs from the ethnographic imagery that brokered the first encounters between the black figure and photography for so long.

Here, no one is anonymous. All the sitters are named. Efforts are made to provide biographical elements and to state so when little is known about the sitter. Hung upon bespoke black walls

to set the display apart from the NPG's collection and reflect Autograph's curatorial signature, a very clear statement is being made from image selection to curatorial aesthetics and selected quotes from a 2008 keynote speech on archives and cultural memory given by cultural theorist Stuart Hall who was also Autograph's chairman. A 1998 diptych portrait of Hall by American photographer Dawoud Bey is also exhibited in the NPG's section "Artists and Sitters: Britain 1960–2000", extending Autograph's curatorial intervention. With pictures mostly taken before 1938, "Black Chronicles" testifies to a black presence in Britain that predates the wave of 1948 newcomers known as the Windrush Generation. It

also interesting to note the different messages conveyed by two portraits of Ndugu M'Hali (Kalulu), Sir Henry Morton Stanley's servant, both taken circa 1872. On the carte de visite, Kalulu is standing next to Morton Stanley. The explorer and journalist, celebrated for finding the disappeared David Livingstone, is dressed in typical colonial outfit, with a rifle under his left arm. Kalulu, smaller in size, is seen bare-chested, and the inscription on the card reads "Mr. H. M. Stanley, (with boy)." This is quite a demeaning form of representation, whereas the enlarged print from the London Stereoscopic Company's plate is a full length close-up of M'Hali dressed up in a western-style outfit, poised, leaning his



Kristin-Lee Moolman, Wayne Swart, from the OATH lookbook, 2015. Courtesy: the artist.

also clearly demonstrates black contribution to Britain's cultural scene in the Victorian era. And while this presence is closely intertwined with the history of the British Empire, slavery, colonisation, and the correlated undermining of black humanity, the portraits are infused with a sense of self-determination. Indeed, each biographical note informs us of the subject's education, talent, or status, making of the sitter a notable personality. Be it Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, British-born composer of Sierra Leonean descent whose portrait was taken by E. O. Hoppé; boxing champion Peter Jackson, born in Saint Croix (then Danish West Indies); or Sri Lankan-born Musa Bhai who travelled to England with the Booth family, founders of the Salvation Army. And of course there is the African Choir. Each played a significant socio-political role.

From one of the most playful images on display, a staged scene featuring John Xiniwe and Albert Jonas—the two children from the African Choir enacting a scene of a studio photo session where one pretends to be the sitter and the other a photographer—we are reminded that as dignifying as those portraits may be, they remain filtered through the prism of the western gaze. They certainly do speak from a perspective of self-esteem, but are not objects of self-representation from a production point of view. That being said, it is

right forearm against the back of a chair. Here he appears more assertive, although his serious face (in all the known pictures of him) seems to betray a sense of sadness. Other pieces in the display include a vitrine containing an 1862 daybook by photographer Camille Silvy, opened to pages marking the wedding of Queen Victoria's protégée Sarah Davies (née Forbes Bonetta)—given to the Queen as a gift from King Gezo of Dahomey—and her husband, Nigerian-Sierra Leonean merchant and philanthropist James Pinson Labulo Davies.

Further up, a display cabinet with pieces from NPG's collection of cartes de visite from the colonial era is presented in the section "Expansion and Empire". The selection mixes portraits similar in tone to the opening section of "Black Chronicles", but also includes uneasy pictures exposing visually discernible power relations between colonisers and colonial subjects. Although there is a clear intention to create a dialogue between those images and the NPG's permanent collection, in terms of display and occupation of space, the relation between the encased small-sized cartes de visite and the large paintings and imposing British officials' marble busts surrounding them only serves to reinforce the



Camille Sylvié, Sarah Davies (formerly Forbes Bonetta), 1862. Albumen print, 8.3 × 5.6 cm. Courtesy: National Portrait Gallery, London.

imbalance as to which narrative has a stronger hold in volume and on the walls. One would have wished for these chronicles to be woven within these historical moments and not seem as if they were an addition to the main story. Blackness is contained there, in the same way as in the first room: “The Armistice to the New Elizabethan”. Laid out in a vitrine are eight portraits of Berto Pasuka co-founder, with Richie Riley, of Les Ballets Nègres, the first all-black British ballet company, active in London from 1946 to 1952. Taken by Welsh photographer Angus McBean, these images push the representation of the black male body to the realm of performance and sensuality.

A fifteen-minute walk from the NPG, one can further delve into black male aesthetics at The Photographers’ Gallery. “Made You Look: Dandyism and Black Masculinity”, curated by Ekow Eshun, is arranged into three sections. From the outset, the opening room brings together a diversity of representations ranging from Henson Scales’s “Young Man in Plaid, NYC” (1991) and Isaac Julien’s “Hommage Noir” from his “Looking for Langston Vintage Series” (1989) to Liz Johnson Artur’s “Various” from the “Black Balloon Archive” (1991–ongoing), which features unnamed sitters that one can still recognise as renowned black cultural actors. Rare images from the Larry Dunstan Archive by an unknown photographer printed from glass negatives dated 1904 “thought to be taken in Senegal ... depict young men asserting a powerful personal presence through stylish dress, in response or possibly resistance to, archetypal colonial imagery.” Reading this interpretation in light of what could be considered classic “African photography”, as epitomised in Malick Sidibé’s work featured in the second section of the exhibition, I would argue that the statement asserting that the said pre-independence photography was a form of resistance to colonial imagery needs to be nuanced. Indeed, the paradox is that donning a western outfit—a suit that when worn by the late nineteenth–early twentieth-century black man would

earn him the label of dandy—is in itself the result of colonisation. Of course these images do provide a counterpoint to ethnographic imagery, but they do so because they reflect the reality of the new urban experience ushered in by Africa’s encounter with the West and the advent of modernity. Likewise, the selected male portraits by Malick Sidibé are part of a larger body of work depicting 1960s and 1970s Malian youth culture and emerging middle class, with their aspirations and self-assertion. One could not objectively say that Sidibé set out to particularly focus on black masculinity, bearing in mind that in terms of identity, blackness does not have the same meaning in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa as it does in the context of the diaspora. Nor could one claim that he developed a clear-cut discourse against colonial imagery. His was about documenting a reality that happened to have been (and to some extent still is) negated by the West.

What we are faced with here with Eshun’s curatorial statement is one perspective, and in fact a very valid one, that proposes to reframe representations of the black male body across ages and geographies to counteract the negative effects of widespread stereotypes in mainstream media and society. The stigmatisation of the black male figure, from its demeaning to its demonising, from the hyper-sexualised muscular empty shell to its criminalisation, has played a major part in the psyche of a dangerously powerful fringe of society that has chosen to completely deny black men their humanity. The tragic cases that have brought the Black Lives Matter movement into existence bear testimony to this. Against this background, Eshun’s invitation to consider aspects of black male subjectivity through images that convey ideas ranging from sensitivity to “a willed flamboyance that flies in the face of conventional constructions of the black masculine” is a much needed form of counter-imagery especially in today’s climate. Samuel Fosso’s after-studio-hours self-portrait experiments; Hassan Hajjaj’s series born out of his interest in documenting his friends’ dual cultural identity as expressed through clothing; Colin Jones’s portraits of a marginalised black youth for whom style was an integral part of one’s sense of dignity; Kristin-Lee Moolman’s androgynous figures rejecting fixed racial and gender labels: all partake in the counter-discourse articulated by this exhibition.

Elegance, playfulness, dandyism, extravagance are also performed in the fields of fashion, music, and global culture for which, Eshun reminds the visitor, black men have been influential trendsetters. This is notably illustrated in the final room, a small space fitted with shelves displaying magazine spreads and vinyl record sleeves marking defining moments in both music and aesthetics, from Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers, Max Roach, Isaac Hayes, Rick James, and Prince to rappers Erik B. & Rakim and the phenomenal Kendrick Lamar’s “To Pimp a Butterfly”. A selection of books including Eshun’s own *Black Gold of the Sun* is given an echo through quotes by W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison, reproduced on the opposite wall. And in between, the words: “Stay laced in the best, well dressed in finesse”, lyrics from a track by Hip Hop artist Nas that give the exhibition its title. These words encapsulated the paradox of the black male stereotype as defined both in urban culture and by the outside gaze: between “gangsta” and “bling” cultures, between the perceived threatening body and its vulnerability. Two sets of extremes of which Eshun’s

project reveals the complexity, while bringing in nuance and subjectivity.

Exhibited in these London mainstream venues, both “Made You Look” and “Black Chronicles” contribute to giving a western audience that would probably never look beyond certain visual codes reified by media misrepresentations the opportunity to discover more complex visual narratives than first meet the eye.

Mapping the Body. The Body in Contemporary Life

Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck,
11. 6. – 28. 8. 2016

by Marina Vishmidt

How to open, once again, the question of the body in contemporary life by means of contemporary art? It is found to be a paradoxical one. “The body” is already a discursive abstraction, beholden to countless iterations of feminist, queer, and post-human philosophy, while the terminology of “bodies” is at the heart of today’s discourses of resistance—from Judith Butler to Black Lives Matter. The body might still perform as a stamp of authenticity, while its dematerialisation on the social web as a data body subjects it to “authentication” procedures instead. The body is a site of mutability, yet it is the suffering and precarious body that is stuck without a future in our “crisis of ordinariness”. As the exhibition introduction notes, the staging of the body “as a place where conflicts are realized and the search for identities is reconstituted” is a core issue for this fluently curated and adroitly pedagogical group show. It is one which deflects a historicising impulse, avoiding the *locus classicus* of 1970s–1990s “body art” to focus tightly on interventions that date back no further than the current decade. There is a sense, then, that the exhibition finds its premise in the “absolutely contemporary”; and its engagement with synthetic biology, social media platforms, and imaging technologies, which replicate and disperse the authoring self, testifies to this. However, this *au courant* reckoning using the prism of the body gives the platform to artists deploying a speculative approach, enfolding the biopolitical into research programmes that formally and methodologically take note of the discover-



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Ed. by Galerie im Taxispalais, Julia Brennacher, Lena Nievers, Jürgen Tabor.

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