

# THE MISSING CHAPTER COLLECTIVE

The Missing Chapter Collective was formed from a call out for young artists to respond to Autograph ABP's The Missing Chapter Project. Autograph ABP is a London-based charity working on photography, cultural identity, race and human rights. The Missing Chapter is part of its research programme which showcased the Black Chronicles II exhibition, presenting a fresh perspective on the diversity of the Black experience in Victorian Britain. The collection consists of over two hundred portraits from the archives that had never been published before, thus combatting the invisibility of Black people historically in the UK. The collection has also been displayed at the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art in Atlanta (US). We were all inspired by the barrier that has been shifted because of the archive; it is our mission to navigate our own history and bring conversations around representation and agency.

Stuart Hall's legacy within the Black British art movement provided an important foundational aspect to our work as a recognition of what has been erased; of what we are re-remembering, but also a recognition that so much more

needs to be documented, questioned and created along the lines of cultural pride.

Our mentoring sessions involved us looking at what have historically been labelled 'spectacle' and 'spectator', and at how that binary has always excluded people of colour. We also explored the history of Blackface Coonery with historian S I Martin. We reflected on how this propaganda was incorporated into popular culture, making allegorical comparisons with certain forms of entertainment today, and thinking in particular about how this global concept of 'Black culture' is fetishised and sold as a commodity rather than an experience.

'The Missing Chapter Showcase' was held at Autograph ABP, (January 2016). The recent showcase featured the work of eight of the collective members: Heather Agyepong, Yasmine Akim, Lara Akinawo, Kariima Ali, Abira Hussein, Shanice Martin, Olivia Mathurin Essandoh and Patricia Ng'ang'a. The show was accompanied by a series of discussions about Agency, Archiving, Representation, Community and

Storytelling. As a collective, we are currently moving on to the next phase, in which we will expand as a safe space for women of colour and examine the missing pieces of our historical puzzles, in artistic, emotional and collaborative ways.

As black feminists, it is our aim to encourage other people of colour to be open about both their experiences and afflictions. In order to heal, we need

to collaborate and manifest positive change within ourselves in the face of hierarchical neo-liberal tendencies. We will do this by therapeutic means, because we must take action: academically and artistically as we owe it to ourselves. As a group, our work expresses the plight of the marginalised. We will continue to showcase our ideas publicly, be that through talks, exhibitions, or other means entirely.

## Patricia Ng'ang'a

The TMC project has birthed an interest in Archives, and their possibilities for healing and education; for the exploration of memories and 'histories, both individual and collective. It has also caused me to ponder the politics of history and storytelling, as many black histories have been told by the 'other'. What impact has this had? And what are we doing about it now? There are missing chapters in 'black' histories, and Archives offers a platform to think about memories, representation, sense of belonging, identity and sense of space and heritage. Who is archiving and holding our memories? It is time for self-representation. We must create safe spaces for dialogue about these issues. The problematic representation of black people has roots stretching back centuries; we cannot ignore ideologies and power structures that are involved in our representation.

Freedom is a theme that runs across my work - be it tackling issues of mental health, domestic abuse, human trafficking, FGM, or otherwise. I believe in the power of image and storytelling to create awareness, to start dialogues and as a backdrop to campaign for change. Freedom Now was inspired by, among others, Stuart Hall's keynote speech lecture on archives and cultural memory. I explore the relationship between Kenya and Britain through the umbilical connection of four generations, looking at the fragments and the missing chapters in that journey. (The photographic piece is accompanied by an audio piece).

There is power in visual representation, and power and knowledge are at hand in maintaining hegemonic discourse.

[www.patricianganga.com](http://www.patricianganga.com)

## Olivia Mathurin-Essandoh

'A home away from home' refuses to let the work of Amy Ashwood Garvey and Sam Manning be forgotten. In 1936 the pair opened the Florence Mills Social Parlour in Carnaby Street. The parlour was a cross between a community centre, a restaurant, and a jazz club. It was where you went to see familiar faces, find your favourite foods and to feel somewhat like being back home. There is no English heritage 'Blue plaque' anywhere but now we know, we mustn't forget. It is a project that reaffirms, celebrates and is a testament to the staying power of the pre-Windrush Black Britons.

This project is a start  
It is a provocation  
We need to re-remember  
Its significance deserves to be highlighted and celebrated.  
Saying its name keeps it alive.  
"They say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing and a second time, a bit later on, when somebody says your name for the last time."

This project is a highlights the importance of being our own family archivist. Each story is important, we need to look back and understand the past to make sense of the present.

[www.yesoliviawist.com](http://www.yesoliviawist.com)



Freedom Now - Patricia Ng'ang'a



## Shanice Martin

My work is titled: 'RBG: Black Screens'. Black Screens explores Black British television, representation of Black British people and cultures on terrestrial analogue TV between 1980 and 2000. The first 'episode' of this ongoing series of RBG: Black Screens focuses on production from the viewpoints of Nadine Marsh-Edwards and Campbell X in conversation. This episode, 'Production', takes the form of a video essay.

One of the images from the archive I was inspired by when producing RBG: Black Screens, was 'African Choir on tour in London' 1891. Looking at the personalities from the African choir, I saw that they were not projected naturally as being themselves. The clothes worn by the Africa Choir were not their own but bought in Britain to make the choir fit into a stereotype of how others felt African people were supposed to look, which I still find shocking. Looking into their faces you can tell that they have been just been put there - no sign of being comfortable, no palpable individuality or contentment. The representation of themselves that they were given was bestowed by people who chose to see members of the choir as objects; this is clear from the way they are positioned and posed. Personally the photo to me is a reflection of misrepresentation of black people in British television, both past and present: the minstrel show; Linford Christie's 'Lunchbox'; the lack of varied Black British content on television produced by black people themselves.



RBG Black Screens, (2013) Shanice Martin



Too Many Blackmoors - Heather Agyepong

## Kariima Ali

'Black cyborgs' is a reimagining of the early colonial portraits of Black Britons in the 19th century, with an exploration of cultural representations of Black people in Britain today, and of how diasporic issues of identity play a role. I was inspired by the portraits from the African choir and they made me reflect on ideas of identity: how it is very much reformulated through representation, but also cast upon us, and what that means for our own possibilities of 'representation' within art as Black beings.

I take after Black feminist Joy James in her notion of Black Cyborgs, emerging from a post-humanist tradition of transcending or looking beyond our current conception of 'human', and its tension with Blackness. In this world, to be human is to be not Black. Our task is to engage with this ideological territory contingent on antiblackness, while also creating a vision beyond it.

[www.kariimaali.com](http://www.kariimaali.com)



Black Cyborg #4 - Kariima Ali

## Heather Agyepong

'Too Many Blackmoors' was inspired by a 19th-century Carte-de-visite of Lady Sarah Forbes Bonetta. Sarah was the west African adopted god-daughter of Queen Victoria who came to live in England at a young age. The images are based on my own personal experiences as a young black woman, dealing with the macro and micro traumas of racism encountered while travelling around Europe. The format was based on Rosy Martin and Jo Spence's 'Re-enactment Phototherapy'. Too Many Blackmoors aims to challenge the 'strong, independent, black female' narrative that can burden and often entrap black women. With Sarah as my template, the project attempts to illustrate the effects of such perceptual limitations whilst exploring my own internal conflicts of falling short of such mainstream ideals.

Overall, the project is a response to my own idea of the Missing Chapter regarding the lack of multiplicity within Black female narratives. Personally, I have felt that there was always an expectation of me to be resilient throughout all situations which evoked a real sense of shame when I felt like I couldn't cope, especially when dealing with my issues surrounding mental health. I believe Black women have continued to be pigeonholed as these emotionless bodies, constantly overlooked or projected upon, and often bear the brunt of a lot of discriminatory behaviours that go unreported. Art can open the discussion about Black woman and mental wellbeing.

[www.heatherageypong.com](http://www.heatherageypong.com)



Neither Here nor There - Yasmine Akim

## Yasmine Akim

It is a triumph that the stunning portraits from the Black Chronicles Archive have been given a new lease of life. These artifacts exude personality – they rectify an emotional mirror-into the stories of Black people who were once forgotten. I was interested in the dignified aura of the subjects within the collection and was drawn to the portraits of people with their guard down, as it was a way for me to connect to my own history.

Several of the sitters were unnamed, leaving me to feel alarmed yet again by what mainstream history has disregarded as unimportant. As Stuart Hall said in his lecture on archives and cultural memory - 'We have a story of ourselves, to tell ourselves'. Photography from a humanitarian perspective is limited in its immediacy, but it is undeniably crucial in the way that it broadens the possibility of empathy between people from different walks of life.

Both the masses and the powerful are engaged in a repetitive mechanism of world domination, which responds to and perpetuates the hierarchy of gazes both historically and currently within the neo-liberal status quo. 'Powerful white men' are victims in their own right, as they are contaminated by rigid delusional views of what should take place in order for them to sustain their privilege. I am interested in the freedom manifest in radical expression, yet I am also aware that this agency derives from conflict; complacency is not an option for me.

My series 'Neither Here nor There' is an exploration of how I am perceived and how I perceive myself. I am concerned with the way that the marginalised are represented visually; whitewashed signifiers have a negative effect on us all. I am a mixed race woman. From my experience I can say that most people recognise my blackness before my whiteness and even my gender. This gaze sparked off conflicting identity issues within me when I was a child. Although I am still in the process of recovery, it is my aim to abolish my own social conditioning. I believe that in the pursuit of a better future, both politically and creatively, change stems from within the chaos.

[www.vaginadentatayasmineakim.tumblr.com](http://www.vaginadentatayasmineakim.tumblr.com)  
[www.yasmineakim.tumblr.com](http://www.yasmineakim.tumblr.com)

## Abira Hussein

Healing Through Archives was a concept developed to address the trauma associated with being part of the diaspora community. For the child of a refugee that has left everything behind, their connection to their cultural background is through their mother tongue, which they cannot speak. Trauma exists for the one who remembers the stray bullets, coming to a land where building a new home feels like digging concrete with your bare hands. The archive is their connection to history, a place where the community can rehabilitate. Studio photographs were collected from individuals and families that were taken in the Somali peninsula before the civil war.



## Lara Akinnowo

The title of my short art film, Systematic Remembering, is a nod to Stuart Hall's idea of Systematic Forgetting, in which he alludes to the wilful neglect of certain histories by the mainstream. I think that the process of systematically re-remembering our histories would have to be a conscious and intentional one. It would require us to take control of our archives and modern technologies, and interrogate each of them. These are the themes I aimed to explore in the film.

In the cyber world of Systematic Remembering the avatars represent both the search engines and the search results. In a way, they allude to our need to conduct our own research and narrate ourselves, as Frantz Fanon stipulates, in order for decolonisation of our minds to be possible.

I was influenced by sci-fi aesthetics and ideas of afro-futurism, imagining black people in a technologically advanced world, in which they take control of those technologies for their betterment. Musicians such as Janelle Monae, Sun Ra, and J Dilla inspired me to think about the relationship between blackness and technology. Afro-futurist films like Pumzi allowed me to imagine Black people in the future. The overwhelming black influence within certain social media; Twitter and Instagram, for example, felt noteworthy to me, when considering blackness and technology.

I am currently working in film post-production, and developing some ideas for future art films. I am, of course, also looking forward to future collaborations within the TMC collective. I'd really like us to collaboratively figure out a way to encourage people to take control of investigating and telling our own histories.'



Archival image, 1975 © Abira Hussein