

# Migrating Worlds

A vertical photograph of a seascape. The top half of the image is dominated by a dark, turbulent sky filled with heavy, dark blue and black clouds. A thin, horizontal band of orange and red light, likely from a setting or rising sun, separates the dark sky from the sea. The sea below is calm, with gentle ripples and a light beige or tan color, extending to the horizon.

The Art of  
the Moving Image  
in Britain

THIRD-FLOOR GALLERY

<p><b>Alia Syed</b> <i>Panopticon</i> <i>Letters:</i> <i>Missive I</i></p>	<p><b>Zina Saro-Wiwa</b> <i>Karipko Pipeline</i></p>	<p><b>John Smith</b> <i>Lost Sound</i></p>
<p><i>Meta</i> <i>Incognita:</i> <i>Missive II</i></p>		<p><b>Theo Eshetu</b> <i>The Law of</i> <i>the Sea</i> <i>(The Slave Ship)</i></p>
<p><b>Zineb Sedira</b> <i>Mother</i> <i>Tongue</i></p>		
<p><b>Isaac Julien</b> <i>The Leopard</i> <i>(Western Union: Small Boats)</i></p>		

SCREENING IN  
FIRST-FLOOR LECTURE HALL

**Theo Eshetu**  
*Atlas Portraits*

**Rosalind Nashashibi**  
*Electrical Gaza*

**Charlotte Prodger**  
*SaF05*

# Migrating Worlds:

*Migrating Worlds* brings together works by eight leading film and video artists: Theo Eshetu, Isaac Julien, Rosalind Nashashibi, Charlotte Prodger, Zina Saro-Wiwa, Zineb Sedira, John Smith, and Alia Syed. The exhibition showcases some of the most innovative and experimental approaches to the moving image, reflecting the ever-expanding repertoire of time-based media being made in Britain today. On display is a diverse range of experimental film, video art, and installations that range from the visually poetic and affective to the conceptual. The concerns of these artists range equally broadly, from addressing questions of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity to geopolitics and environmental despoliation.

The selection for this exhibition gives particular emphasis on nature and its landforms, whether urban topography, wilderness, or the surfaces and depths of the seas, with geographical locations ranging from the East End of London and the mouth of the Thames to the Okavango Delta in Botswana and the Great Basin Desert of North America. These works collectively embrace an expansive global reach that interrogate notions of borders and raise questions about identity and belonging, of rootedness and dislocation, and of relationships between people and place. They invite reflection on issues of connectedness and channels of communication in a globalized world but also division and displacement, especially the movement of

## The Art of the Moving Image in Britain

people in light of the impact of colonial histories and its continued impact on both human communities and the natural world. On view are challenging works that both directly and obliquely explore the poetics of dislocation and examine the relationship between aesthetics and human suffering, with an emphasis on journeys across both land and sea, especially in the forced migration of the Middle Passage and the crisis facing contemporary refugees. Taking distinct approaches to the moving image and visuality, the artists in *Migrating Worlds* offer fresh perspectives on contemporary life and culture that encompass the diverse cultural histories that make up contemporary Britain.

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*Migrating Worlds: The Art of the Moving Image in Britain* is curated by Matthew Hargraves, Chief Curator of Art Collections at the Yale Center for British Art. The first exhibition at the Center dedicated to the art of the moving image, it coincides with the publication of *Artists' Moving Image in Britain Since 1989*, edited by Erika Balsom, Sarah Perks, and Lucy Reynolds (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and Yale University Press, 2019). The Center gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Rizvana Bradley, Assistant Professor of the History of Art and African American Studies at Yale University, in the planning of this exhibition.

# Theo Eshetu

## *The Law of the Sea (The Slave Ship), 2015*

The sea has often been treated as the ultimate anachronic space with no beginning or end. But more than 11 million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic between 1514 and 1866, for whom the Atlantic became the channel to enslavement in the New World during the horrors of the Middle Passage. In *The Law of the Sea (The Slave Ship)*, Eshetu creates an immersive oceanic voyage into this history of colonialism, forced migration, and slavery by taking J. M. W. Turner's painting *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On* (MFA Boston) as his point of departure. Turner's painting of 1840 represents the slave ship *Zong*, which had become an emblem of the horrors of slavery after its captain threw 133 enslaved Africans overboard to drown in 1781 in order to claim insurance for the financial loss. While Turner's painting imagines the enslaved being lost forever to the ocean's depths, Eshetu instead evokes a kaleidoscopic history of the Middle Passage to redeem those victims of the slave trade. A semicircular projection finds its reflection in a mirror in this installation, creating a luminous orb redolent of both the sea captain's telescope and the cartographer's chart. Within it unfold views of ocean life and mysterious underwater landscapes along with images of the enslaved and of human suffering, juxtaposed with scenes of wharves and warehouses in Hamburg—a city that traded in both sugar and slaves. Eshetu's implication is that Hamburg's commercial waters, like those of all slaving cities, are now haunted by the ghosts of the drowned who return to accuse the present. The film's soundtrack combines Buddhist chant with the opening chorus of J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, a grand baroque lamentation, creating a contrast of phonic cultures and a reflection on tragedy and the poetics of human suffering.

## *Atlas Portraits, 2019*

Making its debut in this exhibition, *Atlas Portraits* belongs to a series of films that unpack social perceptions of ethnicity and cultural hybridity. The first film in the series was *Atlas Fractured* (2017), a digital video projected onto a discarded museum banner, originally produced by the Ethnological Museum of Berlin to hang on its facade. The banner featured photographs of five masks to represent five global continents—Asia, Africa, Europe, America, and Oceania—unwittingly reinforcing an outmoded model of global geography. *Atlas Fractured* projected the faces of the artists' friends on top of the promotional graphics, creating a complex layering of portraits to challenge the museum's ethnographic delineation of the world. In *Atlas Portraits*, Eshetu has again projected faces onto works of art from around the world, including sculpture from ancient Rome and ancient Egypt, sacred art from Buddhist India, paintings of the Virgin and Child from early Renaissance Italy, and masks from Africa and Asia. This montage of faces and objects results in a complex visual dissonance and creates an intercultural dialogue that challenges stereotypes and offers the possibility of new representations and ways of organizing the world. The work implicitly critiques museological preferences for classification and categorizing objects according to outmoded concepts. It asks us to question what the contemporary museum might look like if it reordered its categories and priorities.

# Isaac Julien

## *The Leopard* (*Western Union: Small Boats*), 2007

Julien's single-screen film takes its title from the film *The Leopard* (1963) by Luchino Visconti, which was based on the celebrated novel of that name by Giuseppe di Lampedusa, published in 1958. Made on the islands of Sicily and Lampedusa, the film explores the movement of people across the Mediterranean Sea, specifically refugees from Africa making the treacherous crossing by boat to reach Europe to escape war and famine. Playing dynamically with documentary realism and poetic lyricism, the film juxtaposes media footage with allusive imagery of the sea and beachfront. The Mediterranean appears both as an idyllic playground and a deadly force: *The Leopard* depicts scenes of beautiful shores that are later filled with shipwrecked, abandoned symbols of the past. The same white sands and sparkling blue waters become the settings of trauma and death for many who make the risky crossing in search of an alternative future. In homage to Visconti's sumptuous style, the film uses the same locations in the Palazzo Valguarnera-Gangi as the Italian director. This lush, visual quality is carried through into the haunting scenes of suffering, evoking the rhetorical mode employed by baroque artists to represent scenes of martyred saints. Just as Lampedusa and Visconti dealt with the shifting political currents of Sicily in the 1860s, Julien's film is a powerful reflection on the constantly changing identity of Europe and its symbiotic relationship to the African diaspora.

# Rosalind Nashashibi

## *Electrical Gaza*, 2015

*Electrical Gaza* was commissioned by Britain's Imperial War Museum to examine the impact of war and conflict on the lives of people today. Raised with dual nationality, Nashashibi is interested in national borders and the interconnectedness that people share when existing within the same confines. Gaza, with its closed borders, presented a particularly challenging but compelling subject. Her atmospheric, bustling clips encapsulate the daily life in Palestine that draws awareness to a community that thrives in the midst of a deeply unstable climate. Nashashibi happened to arrive in Gaza at a time of heightened tension with Israel. While filming, she was asked by the British Embassy to leave Palestine early, altering her initial plans for the film. Nashashibi uses film to express the energy that communities create by capturing the ordinary, daily moments of a country in political turmoil. Cameras pan over hot, arid cityscapes. A street vendor sells food outside the border to Egypt. A mother consoles a crying baby. A lost horse stands isolated in the tide of the water. *Electrical Gaza* represents the impending danger of Palestine's political turmoil as much as it represents its community. Forced to leave abruptly, Nashashibi introduces a dark circle into the corner of her film as a compositional device. The circle starts small, growing slowly before eventually encompassing a large portion of the screen while the footage of day-to-day activity in Gaza continues behind. The weight of the silent blackness covering the lives of the people and cityscapes represents the impending danger of the Palestinian conflict. Nashashibi describes her representation of Gaza as electrical to convey the excitement that such a vibrant community possesses while simultaneously existing in a politically fraught environment.



# Charlotte Prodger

*SaF05, 2019*

In the Okavango Delta in Botswana, five lionesses were identified as having grown a mane and exhibiting male behavioral tendencies. Prodger's *SaF05*, titled after the name given to one of the lionesses, is an extended meditation on these lionesses in their habitat and simultaneously a statement about queer identity. As the third film in a series that includes *Stonemollan Trail* (2015) and *BRIDGIT* (2016), *SaF05* considers the importance of identity, observation, and memory as a part of the queer experience. Prodger creates an extended autobiographical commentary on her own life through the lens of the maned lioness. She narrates field notes that conservationists made for the lion and supplements them with journal entries she made while growing up as a queer woman. Prodger suggests that the queer experience is made up of the subtle traits, actions, and observations of everyday life in the same way that a conservationist observes the particular characteristics of the lioness in its environment. This affinity is emphasized by the code names that Prodger uses in the film when referring to characters, mirroring the system that conservationists use to identify the lionesses. In a rural community like Aberdeenshire, queerness is a rift in the norm. Gestures, fashion choices, and phrases all make up forms of "code" as a secondary language for a queer person such as Prodger to identify others and feel secure in their respective community. Prodger reinterprets the lioness in the film's formal qualities as well as its content. As the locations shift from the Okavango Delta and the Great Basin Desert to the Ionian Islands and Scottish Highlands the footage also shifts, becoming blurry and pixelated, contradicting the typical clarity of style used when documenting nature. This subversion of the documentary genre echoes the way the lioness challenges society's expectations and allows the artist to find a formal language with which to represent queer identity.

# Zina Saro-Wiwa

*Karipko Pipeline, 2015*

Extending across five monitors, *Karipko Pipeline* relays the campaign by the artist's father for the redistribution of oil profits, local land rights, and the fight against the environmental despoliation caused by oil extraction in Ogoniland. The pipeline concerned is the West African Gas Pipeline proposed in 1982, and funded by the World Bank, to bring natural gas from the Niger Delta across West Africa as far as Ghana. Today the pipeline remains only partially complete. Ogoniland covers roughly four hundred square miles in southeastern Nigeria, and the Ogoni people make up a population of less than one million, who mostly make their living through farming and fishing. Oil was discovered there in the mid-1950s, shortly before Nigeria's independence from British colonial rule in 1960. But colonial rule was quickly replaced by competing global corporate interests in Nigeria's oil resources. Oil speculators and multinational petroleum corporations ravaged Ogoniland's environment. Ken Saro-Wiwa, the artist's father, was a prominent intellectual, journalist, politician, and environmental activist of Ogoni birth. In the 1990s his outspoken support for Nigerian democracy (at a time when Nigeria was ruled by military junta), Ogoni rights, and denouncement of Shell's environmental practices led to his judicial murder by the dictator General Sani Abacha, with what some alleged to be the connivance of the multinational corporation. *Karipko Pipeline*, shot with a drone, captures the Ogoni masquerade in which men imitate antelope, here played out defiantly against the crumbling infrastructure of the oil pipeline that has traversed their land. It suggests the complicity of politics in environmental despoliation and the continued suppression of local land rights but also the capacity of the Ogoni people to resist these incursions on their sovereignty.

# Zineb Sedira

## *Mother Tongue, 2002*

Shown on three monitors, *Mother Tongue* tackles the way the geographic movement of people can disrupt connections across generations. Language barriers and pathways are displayed between the artist, her mother, and her daughter. Here, language becomes an obstacle rather than a means of communication. Each monitor involves a different conversation across three generations of the artist's family in three different locations: France, Britain, and Algeria. On the left, the artist talks to her mother in Algeria about her school days. Sedira speaks French, her first language or "mother tongue," but her mother speaks in Arabic. They are able to communicate given sufficient familiarity with both languages. On the central monitor, the artist and her daughter speak to each other in London about her experiences of school. Once again, Sedira speaks French while her daughter speaks in English, her "mother tongue." But on the right-hand monitor, when grandmother and granddaughter are brought together in Paris and attempt to discuss school, they cannot communicate at all. The former speaks in Arabic, the latter in English. Neither can understand the other's "mother tongue." The subject of school offers rich material for the stories that family's construct around childhood and identity, the narratives that define individual families across space and time and provide a sense of belonging. But here those stories are disrupted by language, which creates a painful gulf between them.

# John Smith

## *Lost Sound, (1998–2001)*

collaboration with Graeme Miller

*Lost Sound* explores the auditory landscape of East London, an area that has been home to immigrant communities to Britain for many centuries. The work was inspired by discarded audio tape found in different locations in this working-class neighborhood. The sounds retrieved from the discarded tape provide auditory glimpses of a place and moment in time. Smith uses the tape as a unifying thread linking each of his filmed streetscapes and their ambient noises, creating an audio-visual portrait of this small section of the East End. The juxtaposition of the "lost" sound with newly documented images and sounds from the streetscapes where the tape was found provokes questions about the movement of people and the shaping of British society and identity. The two sources of sound construct narratives about where the inhabitants of these places have come from. The format of the film both documents a section of London but at the same time rejects the conventions of the standard documentary genre. Toward the end of the film this rejection becomes more pronounced: the auditory landscape is underscored by a reversal of the captions that identify the locations being represented, thereby revealing the constructed nature of the entire film. As the first work that Smith edited digitally, *Lost Sound* brings into focus the imminent obsolescence of technology, represented by the analogue magnetic tape of the cassette.

# Alia Syed

## *Panopticon Letters: Missive I (2012–13)* and *Meta Incognita: Missive II (2019)*

*Missive I* and *II* belong to an incomplete trilogy of films that explore history, the environment, imperialism, and the place of the human in the contemporary world. The common visual link between the two works is the river Thames, filmed in real time. *Missive I* plays with the viewer's sense of truth in landscape representation by altering the horizon line in a manner that artificially connects sky and water. Different voices can be heard, relating seemingly disparate stories, yet they slowly reveal relationships between each other and the unfolding scenes. The dialogue includes excerpts from Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* of 1791—a treatise on the ideal prison, to be built on Millbank, a site now home to Tate Britain, and from where sections of the Thames were shot for the film. In *Missive II*, the Thames estuary is filmed close to the military testing ground off Foulness Island at dawn and dusk, where the river meets the North Sea. The film evokes the journeys of the Elizabethan merchant adventurer Sir Martin Frobisher, who attempted to find the Northwest Passage in 1576 on behalf of the Russia Company. But here the Elizabethan past meets a dystopian, militarized future through the voice of a fictive, renegade female captain who is transporting an unspecified, forbidden commodity from the Arctic circle to England. Global warming has now opened up the waters of the Arctic Archipelago to commercial cargo shipping. The scenes are shot in a conscious evocation of landscape painters such as J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851). It is by turns beautiful and sublime, with a storm scene in the middle, while the voices provide an arresting narrative about colonialism and environmental despoliation. Today the location where the film was shot is occupied by QinetiQ, an arms manufacturer, and excerpts from a log book from its testing ground also punctuate the film. A third and final *Missive* film, *Kala Pani: Missive III*, is currently in production.

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Theo Eshetu (b. 1958), *The Law of the Sea (The Slave Ship)*, 2015, single-channel HD video (approx. 14 min., 28 sec.)

Theo Eshetu (b. 1958), *Atlas Portraits*, 2019, 4K single-channel video, color, and sound (29 min., 15 sec.)

Isaac Julien (b. 1960), *The Leopard (Western Union: Small Boats)*, 2007, single-channel video on Super 16 mm color film transferred to HD, 5.1 sound (20 min.)

Rosalind Nashashibi (b. 1973), *Electrical Gaza*, 2015, single-channel 35 mm film in 4:3 format, Dolby SR (17 min., 53 sec.)

Charlotte Prodger (b. 1974), *SaFo5*, 2019, single-channel video, film industry camera, static camera traps, drones, smart phone (45 min.)

Zina Saro-Wiwa (b. 1976), *Karipko Pipeline*, 2015, five-channel video installation (27 min., 31 sec.)

Zineb Sedira (b. 1963), *Mother Tongue*, 2002, three-channel video on flat screens in 4:3 format, color and sound (5 min.)

John Smith (b. 1952), *Lost Sound*, 1998–2001, single-channel SD video in 4:3 format, color, stereo (28 min.)

Alia Syed (b. 1964), *Panopticon Letters: Missive I*, 2012–13, single-channel video on 16 mm film transferred to HD video in 16:9 format, color, stereo (24 min.)

Alia Syed (b. 1964), *Meta Incognita: Missive II*, 2019, single-channel video on 16 mm film transferred to HD video in 16:9 format, color, stereo (approx. 55 min.)



## BIOGRAPHIES

### Theo Eshetu (born 1958)

Born in London, Theo Eshetu spent portions of his youth in Ethiopia, Senegal, Italy, Britain, the Netherlands, and the former Yugoslavia. This formative experience of growing up in Africa and Europe profoundly shaped Eshetu's work, which addresses questions of anthropology, especially concepts of the sacred, the intersection of cultures, and the ways in which technology and the media shape identity and perception. After working as a photographer in New York during the 1970s alongside artists and musicians, such as Andy Warhol, the Velvet Underground, and David Bowie, Eshetu graduated with a degree in communication design from the North East London Polytechnic in 1981. He began focusing on media art in 1982 after relocating to Rome. Eshetu has received numerous awards and fellowships, including first prize at the Berlin Video Festival in 1993, an Award of Merit at the Verona Film Meeting, and a Residency at the Tarabya Cultural Academy in Turkey in 2017. He has exhibited globally, including at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the Venice Film Festival, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian Museum of African Art in Washington, DC. Eshetu has taught at the Università La Sapienza in Rome, at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Carrara, and the Accademia Nazionale del Cinema in L'Aquila. He currently lives and works in Berlin.

### Isaac Julien (born 1960)

Born and raised in East London to parents from St. Lucia, Isaac Julien has been a key figure in film and video art since the early 1980s, using the moving image to break down the conventional boundaries between different mediums. Trained in film and fine art at Central St. Martin's College of Art and Design, Julien founded the Sankofa Film and Video Collective with Martina Attille, Maureen Blackwood, Nadine Marsh-Edwards, and Robert Cruz in 1983. Julien quickly rose to prominence for innovative, experimental short films tackling class, gender, race, and sexuality such as *Territories* (1984), *This is Not an AIDS Advertisement* (1987), and the seminal *Looking for Langston* (1989), which established him as the leading figure in queer cinema of the 1980s and 1990s and put him at the forefront of independent filmmaking. In the mid-1990s, Julien became a pioneer of museum and gallery installations using multiple screens in films that have addressed the politics of black identity, masculinity, sexuality, and the global movement of people. His work is distinctive in its frequent exploration of pleasure and its commitment to beauty, often grappling with the complex relationship between visual beauty and human suffering. Julien's work has been exhibited globally and is held in collections including Tate Britain, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington DC, the Foundation Louis Vuitton in Paris, the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art in Cape Town, and many others. He has also taught with institutions such as the University of Arts, London; Goldsmith's, University of London; Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe, Germany; Harvard University; and, most recently, at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He was awarded the Brudner Prize at Yale University in 2016 for his artistic accomplishments in the service of the LGBT community. He lives and works in London.

## Rosalind Nashashibi (born 1973)

Rosalind Nashashibi was born in South London to an Irish mother and Palestinian father. The formative experience of her family and the urban environment of her youth has informed much of her work. Nashashibi graduated from Sheffield Hallam University in 1995 with a degree in painting and then received an MA at the Glasgow School of Art in 2000. It was while studying at Sheffield that she first began experimenting with film using a Super 8 camera and soon turned to filmmaking, retaining a preference for 16 mm film. In 2003, Nashashibi became the first woman to win the Beck's Futures prize for contemporary British art. Her films emphasize the inner life of particular communities, using collaged, poetic montages rather than straightforward documentary-style narratives to explore notions of enclosure among often isolated people. She represented Scotland in the Venice Biennial in 2007 and was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 2017. Her work has been shown widely, including at the Imperial War Museum in London, which commissioned her as a war artist; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Kunsthalle, Basel; the Institute of Contemporary Art in London; Tate Modern; and GRIMM Gallery in New York. She lives and works in London and is a senior lecturer in fine art at Goldsmith's, University of London.

## Charlotte Prodger (born 1974)

Charlotte Prodger was born in Bournemouth, England, and raised in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Prodger studied at Goldsmith's, University of London, before attending the Glasgow School of Art. Her work documents and analyzes the queer experience in experimental film, using both 16 mm as well as digital video, including her own iPhone, to create her work. Prodger is fascinated by the way in which the technicalities of cameras relate to and resemble the complexities of the human body. The way she documents her own life through the smudged lens of a camera or accidental finger in a video frame, for instance, demonstrates the increasingly entangled relationship between technology and the body in the postmodern world. Prodger is also interested in landscape both urban and rural, giving subjectivity to the landscapes she captures with their own defining characteristics. Her autobiographical film *BRIDGIT* (2016) won the Turner Prize in 2018, using iPhone footage over the course of a year to document her everyday life as a queer woman alongside narrated excerpts from her diary. Her works have been shown in both solo and group exhibitions throughout Great Britain, Europe, and the US, including at Kunstverein Düsseldorf in Germany, Kendall Koppe Gallery in Glasgow, Artists Space New in York, Chelsea Space in London, and Tate Britain. She has been awarded two Over Park Artist residencies, received the Paul Hamlyn Award in 2017, and won the Turner Prize in 2018. She represented Scotland at the fifty-eight Venice Biennial in 2019. She lives and works in Glasgow.

## Zina Saro-Wiwa (born 1976)

Zina Saro-Wiwa grew up in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, home to the Ogoni indigenous people. It was while being educated in Britain in 1995 that her father, Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Nigerian writer and activist, was executed by Nigeria's military regime after protesting oil extraction in Ogoniland. This pivotal event in Saro-Wiwa's life, and for Nigeria, would ultimately fuel her interest in using art to grapple with her own emotional conflict and continue her family's political struggles. After completing her secondary education in Britain, Saro-Wiwa attended Bristol University and then worked for BBC radio as a journalist and broadcaster. Her documentary *This is my Africa* (2008) marked her transition from journalism into professional art. Saro-Wiwa's work draws on themes rooted in deeply personal experience, using the moving image as a tool that analyzes the relationship between self and environment. Her Nigerian roots and relationship with indigenous people and environmental politics influence the themes of her work at the intersection of nature, technology, and cultural tradition. She has shown her work at the Guggenheim in Bilbao, the Southampton Art Center in the UK, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Blaffer Museum in Texas, and Nikolaj Kunsthal in Copenhagen. Saro-Wiwa created the Mangrove Arts Foundation to promote the regeneration of the Niger Delta and through it, in 2014, established Boys' Quarters Project Space, a contemporary art gallery in Port Harcourt. She is the founder of the alt-Nollywood movement, the film movement that uses traditional Nollywood cinematography to address subversive, politically relevant topics. Saro-Wiwa was the recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship in 2017. She divides her time between New York and Port Harcourt.

## Zineb Sedira (born 1963)

Zineb Sedira was born in Paris to Algerian parents, who moved to France shortly after the close of the Algerian War (1954-1962). She relocated to London in 1986 and studied at Central Saint Martin's College of Art, where she received a degree in fine arts in 1995 and an MFA in media from the Slade School of Fine Art in 1997. Sedira pursued further research in photography at the Royal College of Art to 2003. Her practice is rooted in her combined French, Algerian, and British backgrounds, drawing on her experiences to examine how culture is transmitted or lost through the movement of people. Sedira has deployed film, installation, photography, and video to explore displacement, especially in relation to the experiences of women. Today she divides her time between London, Paris, and Algiers, having returned regularly to Algeria since 2002 after the end of its civil war. In 2011, she founded Aria, or Artist Residency in Algeria, a program to support the development of contemporary art and foster cross-cultural exchanges and collaborations in Algeria. Sedira's work has been exhibited in both solo and group contexts around the world and is found in institutional collections including the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh, the Blaffer Art Museum in Houston, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in New York City, and the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris. She has shown at the Venice Biennale (2001) and was nominated for the Marcel Duchamp award in 2015.

## John Smith (born 1952)

John Smith was born in London and went on to study at the Royal College of Art, when he became an active member of the London Film-makers' Co-op (LFMC, founded in 1966). His experimental films have always been concerned with the formal properties of filmmaking, drawing attention to their own constructed nature while mimicking the forms of documentary, thus challenging concepts such as truth or fiction, or visual categories such as representation or abstraction. The influence of the LFMC shaped his preference for ambient, meditative films that defy the conventions of illusionistic, high-tech, high-budget cinema. He is particularly known for interrogating the role of sound in the environment and in film practice. This exploration of the way sounds can create meaning in an audiovisual context is demonstrated in Smith's innovative uses of narrative and spoken word. His work has been shown in both solo and group exhibitions at major institutions throughout Britain, Europe, and North America, including the Whitechapel Gallery in London and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Cleveland, Ohio. Smith's works are in the collections of Tate Modern and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 2011, he received the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists and won Film London's Jarman Award in 2013. He lives and works in London.

## Alia Syed (born 1964)

Born in Swansea, Wales, Alia Syed moved to London as a teenager to attend the University of East London, from where she earned her degree in fine arts in 1987. Later, she received a postgraduate higher diploma in mixed media from the Slade School of Fine Art in 1992. Since then, Syed has taught and lectured at Central St. Martins College of Art, Chelsea College of Art and Design, and at Southampton Solent University, where she is currently an associate lecturer. Syed is concerned with storytelling and time and their relationship to identity, especially the phenomenon of holding multiple cultural identities simultaneously. Her experimental films challenge conventional narratives with their simple notions of beginning and end, and frequently point up the illusions of reality created by the genre of film. Often her films involve the juxtaposition of sound that is discontinuous with the visual images to explore and redefine how communication and storytelling may be expressed and interpreted across cultures. Syed's work has been exhibited at the Los Angeles Contemporary Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, the Hayward Gallery in London, the 2006 Sydney Biennial, and the 2013 Moscow Biennial. In 2015, Syed was shortlisted for the Film London Jarman Award. She currently lives and works in London.

all texts: Matthew Hargraves and Abigail Miranker

cover image: Alia Syed, film still (detail) from *Panopticon Letters: Missive I* (2013), 16 mm film & HD video, Courtesy of the artist and Talwar Gallery, New York | New Delhi

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