

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

John Akomfrah

Listening All Night To The Rain

11 February – 11 April 2026
508 West 24th Street, New York

Our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting...

- ‘Choosing The Margin As A Space Of Radical Openness’ (1989), Bell Hooks (1952-2021)

British artist John Akomfrah opens the U.S. premiere of *Listening All Night To The Rain*, the critically acclaimed work first commissioned for the British Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia in 2024. Akomfrah brings a focused iteration to New York, debuting the central multi-channel film, *Canto VI*, which traces pivotal moments in the histories of colonised nations, focusing on the independence movements and uprisings that swept Africa and Asia from the 1940s to the 1970s, as well as the parallel history of women’s struggle for liberation. The presentation at Lisson Gallery coincides with Akomfrah’s continued engagement with histories of resistance in the United States; alongside this exhibition, The Baltimore Museum of Art and the Menil Collection have co-commissioned *John Akomfrah: The Hour Of The Dog*, an immersive multi-channel film installation exploring non-violent civil rights protests of the 1960s, including the work of young activists from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The project premiered at the BMA in November 2025 and travels to the Menil Collection from April 2026.

Described as “utterly captivating” by The Guardian, *Listening All Night to the Rain* continues Akomfrah’s abiding interest in memory, post-colonialism, ecology and the politics of aesthetics with a renewed focus on the sonic. Drawing its title from Chinese writer and artist Su Dongpo’s (1037 – 1101) poetry that meditates upon the transitory nature of life during a period of political exile, the exhibition is seen as a manifesto that encourages the act of listening as a form of activism. The exhibition weaves together newly filmed material with found still images, video footage, audio clips and texts from international archive collections and libraries. Akomfrah juxtaposes these documented geopolitical narratives with imagined tableaux – often surreal or dreamlike in nature – in order to reposition the role of art in its ability to write history in unexpected ways, forming critical and poetic connections between different geographies and time periods. Through methods of bricolage (the reuse of diverse materials in order to produce new meanings), non-linearity and repetition, the artist tells stories from the five continents through the ‘memories’ of multiple filmed characters who represent the migrant community in Britain.

Originally conceived for the British Pavilion, the exhibition transformed the space into a vessel for a series of sculptural film installations titled ‘cantos’ or ‘movements’, each addressing different aspects of twentieth- and twenty-first-century global histories. At Lisson Gallery New York, Akomfrah presents *Canto VI*, the central multi-channel film of *Listening All Night to the Rain* which specifically examines pivotal moments in the histories of colonized nations, focusing on the independence movements that swept Africa and Asia from the 1940s to the 1970s. Drawing on archival footage, the work reflects on the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, the Congo’s struggle for independence from Belgian rule, Nigeria’s path to nationhood and the catastrophic aftermath of colonial amalgamation, and the 1947 Partition of India, seen through figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru. These narratives are framed through the diasporic experience in Britain, where personal memory is entwined with the enduring legacies of empire.

Analogous to these narratives of anti-colonial struggle, *Canto VI* foregrounds another, interconnected history of liberation: the women’s rights movement. Akomfrah highlights pivotal yet often forgotten figures whose identities were shaped by migration and dispersed communities, acknowledging their profound influence on the cultural and political development of gender equality movements. By placing these stories in dialogue, the work underscores the entanglement of struggles for national independence, civil rights, and social justice.

“John Akomfrah: Listening All Night to the Rain” was commissioned by the British Council for the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, 2024. Co-commissioners: Lisson Gallery, TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary and Smoking Dogs Films.

About the artist

John Akomfrah is a widely respected artist and filmmaker, whose works are characterised by their investigations into memory, post-colonialism, temporality and aesthetics, and often explore the experiences of migrant diasporas globally. Akomfrah was a founding member of the influential Black Audio Film Collective, which started in London in 1982 alongside artist Lina Gopaul, later joined by David Lawson who he still collaborates with today alongside Ashitey Akomfrah as Smoking Dogs Films. Their debut film, *Handsworth Songs* (1986), examined the 1985 Birmingham and London riots through a layered mix of archive, stills and new footage, earning international acclaim and defining Akomfrah’s distinctive visual style. Subsequent works include *The Unfinished Conversation* (2012), a three-screen portrait of Stuart Hall; *Peripeteia* (2012), inspired by 16th-century Dürer portraits; and *Mnemosyne* (2010), which explores migrant experience in the UK.

Major later projects include the three-screen *Vertigo Sea* (2015), linking maritime history, migration and exploitation; *Purple and Precarity* (both 2017), addressing climate change and the life of jazz musician Buddy Bolden; and *Mimesis: African Soldier* (2018), commemorating African participants in World War I. Highlights since include *Four Nocturnes* (2019) at the Venice Biennale, the five-channel films *Arcadia* and *Becoming Wind* (2023), and *Listening All Night to the Rain* (2024), presented in the British Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale.

Akomfrah (born 1957) lives and works in London. Recent solo exhibitions have taken place at Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, US (2025); Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza Madrid, Spain (2025); National Museum Cardiff, Wales (2025); Glasgow Museum of Art, Scotland (2024); British Pavilion, 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, Italy (2024); The Box, Plymouth, UK (2023); Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Germany (2023); Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (2023) and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., USA (2022); Remai Modern, Saskatoon, Canada (2022); Towner Eastbourne, UK (2021); Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, Spain (2021); Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla, Spain (2020); Seattle Art Museum, WA, USA (2020); Secession, Vienna, Austria (2020); BALTIC, Gateshead, UK (2019); ICA Boston, MA, USA (2019); Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, Portugal (2018); New Museum, New York, NY, USA (2018); Bildmuseet, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden (2015, 2018); SFMOMA, San Francisco, CA, USA (2018); Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain (2018); Barbican, London, UK (2017).

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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