

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

John Akomfrah

24 June – 12 August 2016
504 West 24th Street, New York

Lisson Gallery New York presents the first major exhibition in the United States by acclaimed British artist and filmmaker John Akomfrah. Akomfrah first came to attention in the 1980s as a founding member of the influential Black Audio Film Collective alongside the artists David Lawson and Lina Gopaul, with whom he still collaborates today. Known for his use of archival film footage, still photography and newsreel combined with new material, Akomfrah's works are informed by their investigations into memory, post-colonialism, temporality and aesthetics and often explore the experience of the African diaspora in Europe and the United States. He recently garnered international acclaim at the 2015 Venice Biennale for his three-screen film installation *Vertigo Sea*, which uses the sea as a vehicle to comment on the cruelty of the whaling industry and the diasporic condition.

For his American debut, Akomfrah will present two film installations rich with historical reference and contemporary resonance. Characterized by beautifully composed imagery and immersive sound design, these recent films uniquely employ original footage rather than archival imagery. *The Airport*, a three-screen film installation conceived as a meditation on Greek history and its recent financial crisis, is set around the landscapes of Southern Greece and an abandoned airfield near Athens. Accompanied by a new soundtrack composed by Akomfrah, the film's elliptical narrative weaves together cinematic, literary, philosophical and artistic traditions, where spaces of human ruin and natural beauty abound. Populated by displaced and anachronistic characters, including an elderly man in a tuxedo who re-lives moments from his past and his future, a wandering astronaut, marauding gorilla and forlorn travellers, the film contemplates the significance of empire and the ghosts which linger in our collective consciousness – both physically through architecture and metaphorically through traces of previous generations. The film's elastic sense of time references Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), while Angelopolous' technique of employing constant movement between camera, characters and locations is also employed to a poetic effect.

The second work, *Auto Da Fé* (2016) or *Acts Of Faith*, is a diptych that looks at migration through the lens of religious persecution and continues Akomfrah's longstanding interest in the transmutations brought about by relocation. Presented as a lyrical period drama, the film lays bare colonial and post-colonial experience through its documentation of eight historical migrations over the last 400 years, starting with the little known 1654 fleeing of Sephardic Jews from Catholic Brazil to Barbados and ending with present day migrations from Hombori, Mali and Mosul, Iraq. As the film develops, viewers are presented with multiple tales of displaced populations and attendant feelings of dislocation and alienation. The work is inspired by the writings of George Lamming, who wrote about the quotidian nature of 20th century life in Barbados and migrants' hopes for a better future, only to find harsher conditions when arriving elsewhere. The work was filmed on location in Barbados, but the landscape is deliberately anonymous, reflecting the universal nature of these stories.

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About the artist

Akomfrah (born 1957, Accra, Ghana) lives and works in London. He has had numerous solo exhibitions including the Exchange, Penzance, UK; Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen, Denmark; STUK Kunstcentrum, Leuven, Belgium and Arnolfini, Bristol, UK in 2016; Bildmuseet Umeå, Umeå, Sweden (2015); Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan, USA (2014); Tate Britain, London, UK (2013-14) and a week long series of screenings at MoMA, New York, USA (2011). His participation in international group shows has included: 'The 1980s: Today's Beginnings?', Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands; 'British Art Show 8', Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (2016); 'British Art Show 8', Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds; 'All the World's Futures', 56th Venice Biennale, Italy (2015); 'History is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain', Hayward Gallery, London, UK (2015); 'Africa Now: Political Patterns', SeMA, Seoul, South Korea (2014); Sharjah Biennial 11, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2013); Liverpool Biennial, UK (2012) and Taipei Biennial, Taiwan (2012). He has also been featured in many international film festivals, including Sundance Film Festival, Utah, USA (2013 and 2011) and Toronto International Film Festival (2012).

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, it 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. In its second decade it introduced a generation of significant UK and European artists, including those collectively known as the New British Sculptors, including Anish Kapoor, Richard Deacon, Shirazeh Houshiary, Julian Opie and Tony Cragg. Across two exhibition spaces in London, one in Milan and a fourth under the High Line in New York, the gallery supports and develops 51 international artists including Marina Abramović, Allora and Calzadilla, Ai Weiwei, Nathalie Djurberg and Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Tatsuo Miyajima, Rashid Rana, Pedro Reyes and Santiago Sierra.

Summer opening hours: Monday – Friday, 10am – 6pm.

For press enquiries, please contact

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