Also located in the mezzanine gallery is *Robot Bodies*, Piper’s seminal 2001 interactive digital work which has been updated and re-programmed for this exhibition. Here the robot, android and cyborg are examined as metaphorical carriers of contemporary anxieties around racial difference. Visitors can step into the installation and interrogate three constantly morphing bodies by way of a trackball interface; clicking through layers of information and revealing fragments from key science fiction films and texts.

The Little Robots Diary, a constantly looping video and text sequence on a monitor form a preamble, not just to *Robot Bodies*, but to the exhibition as a whole. Through it we are introduced to one of the show’s central tropes, the unit of simple brute labour but also of revolutionary potential: the ‘little robot’.

This touring exhibition has been produced and organised by Bluecoat and Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts). *Unearthing the Banker’s Bones* (2016) is a major new Arts Council Collection 70th anniversary commission.

To learn more about Piper and this exhibition, please visit our resource area (ground floor) or join any of the free events listed in the NAE brochure and online. As our events are popular, we advise you book in advance – see reception or [www.nae.org.uk](http://www.nae.org.uk).

To see earlier work by Piper and other artists associated with the Black Arts Movement of the 1980s, please visit Nottingham Contemporary’s exhibition, *The Place is Here*, open until 30 April 2017.

Moving upstairs into the mezzanine gallery there is a new view of the Four Cartoons paintings through the window, plus two further bodies of work starting with *Pulp Fictions* (a bibliography). 2016. This series of digital prints mimic the covers of old science fiction novels to form an index of thematic strands emanating from and feeding into the exhibition as a whole. Turning the idea of the bibliography on its head, these imagined books suggest extended bodies of research, storytelling, essay writing and ultimately history painting that ‘riff’ on the core science fiction themes.

*Keith Piper, Pulp Fictions (a bibliography), 2016, book covers. Image courtesy the artist, Iniva and Bluecoat.*

*Keith Piper, Robot Bodies, 2001-2016, interactive video installation, monitor still. Image courtesy the artist.*

**KEITH PIPER**

**UNEARTHING THE BANKER’S BONES**

**MAIN GALLERY, MEZZANINE GALLERY & FOYER**

1 APRIL – 11 JUNE 2017
Lending its title to the exhibition, the centrepiece of the show, located in the main gallery space, is a synchronised high definition three-screen video installation. Unearthing the Banker’s Bones, 2016, addresses contemporary anxieties about society, race and class through the perspective of a fictional future. Piper adopts this science fiction device of looking back on the present from the perspective of a speculative future to excavate and dissect modern life. Weaving a narrative of social and economic collapse, the work has emerged from Piper’s research, drawing on extracts of apocalyptic fiction by writers as diverse as Octavia Butler and Mary Shelley.

“Weaving together references drawn from a range of classic novels, films and other texts,” Piper says, “I am attempting to employ visual montage to play with notions of landscape and history painting, to devise a narrative played out across the three video screens. The story that unfolds is one of exploration, excavation and autopsy as a way of examining the present from an imagined future.”

Completing the Unearthing the Banker’s Bones installation is a room containing vitrines that display three books – a journal, ledger and inventory – belonging to the Banker of the work’s title, accompanied by sculptures of human bones. This ‘physical evidence’ plays off against the unfolding narrative of the film in the adjacent space.

New Art Exchange is pleased to welcome Keith Piper back to Nottingham with a showing of the touring exhibition, Unearthing the Banker’s Bones, the most substantial presentation of Piper’s work in nearly two decades.

Graduating from Nottingham Trent University (then Trent Polytechnic) in 1983, Piper spent his university years living here in NAE’s local neighbourhood of Hyson Green. During this period, along with artists Eddie Chambers, Marlene Smith and Donald Rodney, Piper co-founded the groundbreaking BLK Art Group, an association of black British art students, mostly based in the West Midlands, between 1980-1984. The group fought to raise the profile of black artists through exhibitions and conferences, a contribution whose significance is only now being recognised in the development of 20th century British art.

Unearthing the Banker’s Bones comprises of four installations of both new and existing work presented across the main gallery, mezzanine gallery and reception/foyer space. Collectively the selection continues to examine the social and political concerns that have informed Piper’s practice since his time with the BLK Art Group. It features a major new video piece and other new works using digital print, painting and installation, together with an older digital work re-made for the show.

In the foyer area, Piper explores his interest in history painting. Four large, roughly-finished paintings are pinned high on the walls; their position and unfinished quality (un-stretched and un-primed canvases) alluding to protest banners. Titled Four Cartoons, 2016, the works reference history painting, a genre of large-scale, often allegorical paintings – the equivalent of epic or tragedy genres in literature – that depict moments of drama from recent or contemporary history.

As future projected history paintings of the present, Piper’s work plays with the traditional notion of the cartoon as a preparatory drawing towards a proposed final master work. Referencing major 19th century history paintings by French artists Courbet and Géricault, the paintings depict stages in a narrative, leading to the eventual demise of the metaphorical Banker. During the presentation of the work at Bluecoat last year, the paintings were accompanied by a ‘workstation’ – a trestle table overlaid with canvas on which were a range of objects and paintings of these objects, made directly onto the canvas overlay- hinting at some of the contradictions inherent in history painting as an activity.

Keith Piper, Unearthing the Banker’s Bones, 2016, installation views at Bluecoat. A 70th anniversary commission for the Arts Council with Bluecoat and Iniva © the artist.

Keith Piper, Unearthing the Banker’s Bones, 2016, installation view at Bluecoat. A 70th anniversary commission for the Arts Council with Bluecoat and Iniva © the artist.

Keith Piper, Front cover Keith Piper, Unearthing the Banker’s Bones, 2016, film still. A 70th anniversary commission for the Arts Council with Bluecoat and Iniva © the artist.

Keith Piper, The Archivist meets the Little Robots (a working drawing), 2016, acrylic on unstretched canvas, 2800 x 2740mm. Image courtesy the artist, Iniva and Bluecoat.

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