

Notes for Teachers: Autumn 2019

Exhibitions:

Mimesis: African Soldier

27 September – 31 December 2019



Mimesis is a multi-media installation that remembers the millions of Africans and people of colour from across the globe who took part in the First World War as soldiers and labourers. This war was fought between empires that were global in their ambitions and reach. Between 1914 and 1918, millions of African and colonial soldiers served in long campaigns that spanned the whole of the African and European continents, contributing to victories throughout the First World War. These soldiers, from British and French African territories, were brought to Europe's western front, where hundreds and thousands lost their lives alongside unknown, unheralded and undocumented African labourers and carriers. Many were treated unfairly and experienced brutality and discrimination.

The term *Mimesis* refers to a basic theoretical principle in the creation of art. The word is Greek and means "imitation" but in the sense of 're-presentation' rather than of 'copying'. In *Mimesis: African Soldier* the film-maker is re-presenting and commemorating these Africans and colonial soldiers who fought, served and died during the First World War.

The artist John Akomfrah CBE (b. 1957) is a British artist, writer, film director, screenwriter, theorist and curator of Ghanaian descent. According to the Guardian newspaper he "has secured a reputation as one of the UK's most pioneering film-makers [whose] poetic works have grappled with race, identity and post-colonial attitudes for over three decades."

Akomfrah is best known for his multi-screen installations, such as *Purple* (2017), *Precarity* (2017) and *Vertigo Sea* (2015). Since founding the influential Black Audio Film Collective in 1982, his work has taken on a multi-layered visual style that fuses archival material and newly shot footage. Continuing this practice, *Mimesis: African Soldier*, sees Akomfrah use historic film, including material from the Imperial War Museum's extensive archive, to tell some of the lesser known stories of the First World War.

The work is co-commissioned by New Art Exchange, Nottingham, Smoking Dogs Films and 14-18 NOW, the UK's arts programme for the First World War centenary, with additional support from Sharjah Art Foundation. It was first shown at the Imperial War Museum, London in 2018.

When the Snow Melts: The World Wars, Empire and Muslim Soldiers

27 September – 31 December 2019



This exhibition has developed from Jagdish Patel's ongoing Heritage Lottery Funded project called 'The Muslim Memory Project' which aims to record the experience of Muslim World War II Servicemen (and Servicewomen) and their families from across Nottingham and Derby. As an artist and researcher, Patel has been documenting their contribution to the war effort, their experiences during the war and of post-war Britain: *"By charting their personal histories, we are trying to see how servicemen (and women), their families and their siblings move from colonial India and settle into modern Britain, and over time negotiate issues around race and identity"*.

When the Snow Melts aims to highlight local stories and also comment on the process of war memorialisation and archiving which have left out the contribution of Black and Asian servicemen and women for much of the past century. This occurred not just in Britain, but also, until relatively recently, in many of the former colonial states themselves. The exhibition will also incorporate war poetry from the diaspora. Urdu was the most popular language amongst educated South Asian migrants throughout this period as it was the common script

of North British India, and this continued in the post-war period. A local Sikh man opened an Urdu library in Lady Bay during the 1960s.

Other exhibits include prints incorporating photography and painting to tell the stories from local families and these have been produced collaboratively by Patel, local artist Farida Makki and the communities involved in the project. Portraits of these family members will also be included in the show, alongside personal items such as medals, ID cards and helmets.

Connections with the National Curriculum:

History:

KS2-3 Students will learn how people's lives have shaped this nation and how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world. They will gain historical perspective by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts, understanding the connections between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social history; and between short- and long-term timescales. Connections may be made with the lives of Walter Tull and Noor Inayat Khan.

KS3 Students will gain understanding of abstract terms such as 'empire' as they see colonies move towards independence in the twentieth century.

Geography:

KS3-5 These exhibitions can help improve students' understanding of the ways in which values, attitudes and circumstances have an impact on the relationships between people, place and environment, and develop the knowledge and ability to engage, as citizens, with the questions and issues arising. It will also be possible for students to investigate the importance of the meanings and representations attached to places by people through cultural and artistic approaches to representing place.

Art and Design:

- **KS2** This is a chance to learn about the work of a range of artists, where students can describe the differences and similarities between different practices and disciplines, and make connections with their own work.
- KS3-5** Students will learn about a significant contemporary art form: multi-media art. The term describes artwork made from a range of materials and including an electronic element such as audio or video, as can be seen in the work of contemporary artists such as Steve McQueen, Bill Viola and Susan Hillier.

Citizenship:

KS3-4 These exhibitions are a stimulating context in which to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments.

PSHE:

KS2-4 In a gallery visit the following will be covered: learning about other people's feelings and becoming aware of the views, needs and rights of other people.

N.B. Exhibition notes for teachers are going through a process of development. Please send your feedback and suggestions to ruth@nae.org.uk