

PRESS RELEASE:

Keith Piper: A New Exhibition at New Art Exchange

Artist Keith Piper, a pioneering figure in the Black Arts Movement, presents *Unearthing the Banker's Bones* at New Art Exchange this April. The exhibition comprises a new immersive three-screen video installation and accompanying "relic" objects, two new series of work in painting and digital drawing, and a restaging of Keith Piper's earlier work, *Robot Bodies* (2001-16). The result is a timely exhibition, offering a moment to reflect upon the times we live in. Looking through the perspective of someone living in the future and excavating our present, Keith Piper asks, whose history will be retold?

The centrepiece of the exhibition, also titled *Unearthing the Banker's Bones*, comprises a complex interweaving plot, seeped in symbolism and rich historic references. Set on the edge of the apocalypse in a desolate digitally constructed landscape, *Unearthing the Banker's Bones* uses science fiction as a device to understand the present. The video installation is accompanied by artefacts - from bones to ledgers, to imagined novels. Together, these exhibits explore ideas of real and imagined landscapes, suggesting physical evidence to support a fictional narrative. It provides clues to a fictional future, allowing viewers to piece together intriguing and mysterious fragments of information. It interrogates different forms of knowledge - who controls knowledge and how does it exist? Keith Piper explains:

"Unearthing the Banker's Bones is a work emerging out of a period of research into science fiction as a space in which metaphors around social, racial and class anxieties are played out. Weaving together references drawn from a diverse range of classic novels, films and other texts, I am attempting to employ visual montage to play with notions of landscape and history painting, to devise a narrative played out across a triptych of video screens. The story that unfolds will be one of exploration, excavation and autopsy as a way of examining the present from an imagined future."

The video installation centres on the character 'The Trickster' - a figure in folklore and religion characterised as a beholder of secret knowledge and deception. 'The Trickster' is presented as an omniscient and elusive character featuring in apocalyptic fiction including: Octavia E. Butler's unwritten book *Parable of the Trickster*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and The Last Poets' song *Beyonder*. The video installation's documentary-style narration describes these texts and the distinct contexts they belong to, yet presents 'The Trickster' as a character who overlaps cultures. Under many guises, 'The Trickster' consistently resurfaces as a fictional device which attempts to comprehend moments of social uncertainty. In contrast to 'The Trickster', a secondary character 'The Banker' represents an authoritative power that distorts codes and controls information until it is inaccessible to the common man. *Unearthing the Banker's Bones* envisions an apocalyptic future and considers what relics of society will be left. Whose story will be

told- will it be that of the rebellious trickster, or of the imposing banker? And furthermore, what artefacts will be left from our culture, and what will this reveal to future generations?

New Art Exchange is proud to exhibit Keith Piper, an artist who began his pioneering art practice in Nottingham as a student and, during this period, co-founded the ground-breaking BLK Art Group, a collective who challenged societal issues and fought to raise the profile of black artists. Piper has a long-standing relationship with New Art Exchange, having exhibited in their debut exhibition in 2008. Melanie Kidd, Director of Programmes at New Art Exchange explains the significance of the show:

“Our organisation - a venue dedicated to supporting culturally diverse artists and making art accessible to broader audiences - grew out of the thinking, activism and politics of the Black Arts Movement of the 1980s. Given Keith Piper was such a significant part of this moment, and a supporter of NAE in its earlier guise as Nottingham’s ‘Art Exchange’, we are thrilled to be hosting this rich solo exhibition of his work. At NAE we pride ourselves in creating opportunities for emerging artists as well as the most accomplished and established. As such it’s important to be taking this moment to celebrate Keith’s practice in such depth given his pioneering work with the BLK Art Group helped to shift thinking within the arts, paving the way for the new generations of culturally diverse artists we continue to support here at NAE today.”

Alongside *Unearthing the Banker’s Bones*, New Art Exchange will be exhibiting Keith Piper’s earlier work *Robot Bodies* (2001-16), adapted and updated for this showing. *Robot Bodies* is an interactive digital artwork exploring the rhetoric of “otherness” in discourses of race and science-fiction. Also on show are two new series: *Four Cartoons*, a selection of roughly-finished paintings on unstretched canvas which reference History Painting, and *Pulp Fictions (a bibliography)*, a selection of digital prints mimicking the covers of old science fiction novels.

This touring exhibition has been produced and organised by Bluecoat and Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts). It features a major new Arts Council Collection 70th anniversary commission. Iniva’s Director, Melanie Keen, explains why they are pleased to be working with New Art Exchange.

“As co-producers of the exhibition Unearthing the Banker’s Bones, Iniva and Bluecoat are excited that Keith’s work is being presented at New Art Exchange in Nottingham where he established his early artistic practice. Like NAE, Iniva and Bluecoat are committed to supporting artists at different stages in their careers.”

The exhibition runs 1st April – 11th June 2017

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Editor’s Notes

A selection of **images** can be downloaded from Dropbox: <http://bit.ly/2l6KlrD>

For further images and to arrange interviews/photo opportunities contact Laura-Jade Vaughan:
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About Keith Piper

Keith Piper is an artist, curator, critic and academic. He was born in 1960 in Malta and studied at Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham and the Royal College of Art, London. He was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Arts by University of Wolverhampton in 2002. Since 2006 he has been Reader in Fine Art and Digital Media at Middlesex University, London. Along with fellow artists Eddie Chambers, Marlene Smith and Donald Rodney, he was a founder member of the BLK Art Group, an association of black British art students, mostly based in the West Midlands, 1980-1984. He has exhibited widely, including solo and group exhibitions in the UK, Europe and USA. His work was included in *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic*, Tate Liverpool (2010) and *Migrations: Journeys into British Art*, Tate Britain (2012).

About New Art Exchange

A contemporary art space committed to stimulating new perspectives on the value of diversity within art and society. New Art Exchange is the largest space in the UK dedicated to culturally diverse contemporary visual arts, and is rooted in the community with a strong history of working with minority communities. Past exhibitors include: Yinka Shonibare, Zarina Bhimji, John Akomfrah, Christian Marclay and Elizabeth Price (British Art Show 7), Rashid Rana, Zineb Sedira, Leo Asemota, Raghu Rai, J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere, and Hetain Patel. NAE's mission is to raise the impact, profile and development of culturally diverse contemporary visual arts and artists in a global context by: nurturing and promoting creative talent locally and worldwide, creating thriving creative businesses, and engaging minority ethnic communities as audiences and patrons of art.

About Iniva

Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts) is an evolving, radical visual arts organisation dedicated to developing an artistic programme that reflects on the social and political impact of globalisation.

With the Stuart Hall Library acting as a critical and creative hub for our work, we collaborate with artists, curators, researchers and cultural producers to challenge conventional notions of diversity and difference. We aim to engage a wide audience, particularly young people, in discourse and debate on issues surrounding the politics of race, class and gender. Through our programme we work predominantly with British-born and British-based visual artists of African and Asian descent supporting them at different stages in their careers. We offer residencies, commission new work and promote existing practices enabling artistic ambition and development. Founded in 1994, under the leadership of renowned academic Professor Stuart Hall, Iniva is a non-profit organisation based in East London. It has established itself as a pioneering arts organisation in the artistic environment in the UK and beyond. Now Iniva looks towards the future whilst acknowledging its 22-year history and legacy.

www.iniva.org

About Bluecoat

Bluecoat is Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, supporting and presenting visual art, music, dance, live art and literature, as well as practices that fall in between these categories. The past few years have seen the organisation show internationally renowned artists such as William Kentridge, Sonia Boyce, John Akomfrah and Mark Leckey. At the same time Bluecoat has worked to engage with audiences from the most vulnerable communities, from those with dementia to families facing disadvantage, through its participation programme. Bluecoat is the UK's oldest arts centre, with a rich artistic history; early exhibitions include the first showing of the Post Impressionists alongside their UK peers in 1911. The building will celebrate its 300th anniversary in 2017.

www.thebluecoat.org.uk

The Arts Council Collection

The Arts Council Collection is the largest national loan collection of modern and contemporary British art. With nearly 8,000 works it is one of the most widely circulated of all national collections and can be seen in exhibitions and public displays across the UK and abroad. Founded in 1946, the Collection has continued to grow, acquiring innovative works each year and includes paintings, sculptures, original works on paper, prints, photographs, film and video and installation works. The Collection includes important work by many of the most influential British artists from the mid-twentieth century to the present day.

New Art Exchange receives support from Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation.

