



Galerie Rudolfinum Presents Arthur Jafa's First Exhibition in the Czech Republic

ARTHUR Jafa: A Series of Utterly Improbable, Yet Extraordinary Renditions (featuring Ming Smith; Frida Orupabo and Missylanyus)

17. 1. – 31. 3. 2019

Galerie Rudolfinum

Opening: 16 January 2018 at 6 pm in the Rudolfinum foyer

Exhibition curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Amira Gad. Presented by the Serpentine Galleries (London) and Galerie Rudolfinum (Prague). Curator in Prague: Petr Nedoma

Admission free thanks to J&T Banka.



How do we imagine things that are lost? What kind of legacy can we imagine despite that loss and despite the absence of things that never were? Arthur Jafa

Galerie Rudolfinum presents the first exhibition by the acclaimed American filmmaker, cinematographer and artist Arthur Jafa in the Czech Republic. Arthur Jafa was taken with the space of the Galerie Rudolfinum, and he decided to do his exhibition in Prague as an original artist's installation based on his exhibition in London at the Serpentine Galleries curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Amira Gad in 2017. Arthur Jafa's exhibition in Prague is presented as part of his European tour; after London, the exhibition was held at the Julia Stoschek



Collection in Berlin in the summer 2018, and after Prague, it continues to Moderna Museet Stockholm in early April.

“I am excited that we managed to get Jafa’s key works to be shown in Prague: the eight-minute video *APEX*, a quick sequence of hundreds of images of objects, people and events, and especially the one minute shorter *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*. It is a video composed of footage of concerts, marches, police operations or YouTube clips edited by Jafa against the soundtrack of gospel-inspired Ultralight Beam by Kanye West. The fact that it is being shown expands the original exhibition concept of the Serpentine Galleries,” notes Petr Nedoma, Director Galerie Rudolfinum and exhibition curator in Prague.

Across three decades, Jafa has developed a dynamic and multi-disciplinary practice comprising films, artefacts and happenings. His work is centred on the question how culture sees identity and race. Underscoring the many facets of Jafa’s practice is a recurring question: how can visual media, such as objects, static and moving images, transmit the equivalent ‘power, beauty and alienation’ of Black music in US culture?

In his cinematic work, Jafa makes present the image of African-American identity and culture through a broad spectrum of contemporary footage and found images. Jafa answers the question what it means to be a part of a complex landscape of Black representation, and, by extension, the landscape of any other otherness. He attempts to relay the history of the Afro-American visual aesthetics and help reframe this question in a new context. His assemblage of fragments of popular icons, major events of the Black history and anonymous bodies in various states of exaltation and despair, Jafa brings a synthesizing view of the American experience of the Black community, while seeking to make visible - or emancipate - the power embedded in modes of African expression with reference points ranging from Fang sculpture to Mississippi juke joints, Duchamp’s urinal to jazz.

Jafa is a filmmaker with a unique understanding of how to cut and juxtapose a sequence to draw out maximum visceral effect. Jafa works from a set of source books of images he has been assembling since the 1980s and this ongoing archive has proved an enduring resource for *Picture Books*, the new films premiering at the Serpentine and *Love is the Message, The Message is Death* (2016), which was shown at Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York, and at MOCA, Los Angeles.

The exhibition title *A Series of Utterly Improbable, Yet Extraordinary* references the feeling of emptiness, which, according to the author, is characteristic of the Black life. The word ‘rendition’ refers to the artist’s interpretation of the aesthetics associated with Black being, which are historically-inscribed in images, objects and artefacts. By re-performing these narratives in the present, Jafa imagines and constructs new possibilities for making them visible.

As Jafa himself said about his art in an interview for Galerie Rudolfinum: “I mean I am a bit resistant to say my topic is black people, because, you know, if you had another artists their topic is not white people it’s just their topic whatever it is. I mean ... one of the things I share with associates of mine like Kerry James Marshall and John Akomfrah is that as black artists we have always felt we should not have to make work that is not about black people in order for to be universally received. We think it is important to make work about our experiences our specific sort of understanding of the world so that people have an opportunity to develop ‘their muscle – the sympathy’, the capacity to see yourself in someone else’s experiences. I think it is like really important.”



Originally trained as an architect, Jafa made his cinematic debut as Director of Photography for Julie Dash's 1991 film *Daughters of the Dust*, for which he won best cinematography at the Sundance Film Festival. Jafa has also collaborated with directors ranging from Spike Lee (*Crooklyn*, 1994) to John Akomfrah (*Seven Songs for Malcolm X*, 1993) and artists including Kara Walker and Fred Moten. He has also been recognised for his work on the Solange Knowles videos, *Don't Touch My Hair* and *Cranes in the Sky* (2016).

The exhibition also includes the work of three additional voices: the photographer Ming Smith, @nemiepeba - the Instagram feed of artist Frida Orupabo - and content from the YouTube channel of Missylanyus. Together, these three 'platforms' or 'guests' are integral to Jafa's presentation in the Gallery, and acknowledge the influence of others within his own practice.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied with a collection of texts containing the interview by the Serpentine Galleries curator Hans Ulrich Obrist with Arthur Jafa and the texts by John Akomfrah, Tina Campt, Ernest Hardy, Fred Moten and Yana Peel in the graphic design by 20YY Designers (Petr Bosák, Robert Jansa, Adam Macháček).

ARTPARK

During the exhibition at Galerie Rudolfinum, ARTPARK will be redesigned to suit the theme of Arthur Jafa's art which will be interactively presented to all, including the smallest visitors. The ARTPARK Galerie Rudolfinum installation and programme was created in collaboration with FreeCinema, our project partner. There will of course be associated programming or schools and the public as well as the popular children's workshops. ARTPARK remains a place of creative recreation for visitors to the Galerie Rudolfinum.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Arthur Jafa

Mississippi-born Arthur Jafa is based in Los Angeles. His first solo exhibition at Gavin Brown's enterprise took place in 2016. He was selected for the 2016 Made in L.A. Biennial at the Hammer Museum, and in 2015, he presented *APEX redacted*, a public video installation for Flux Night in Atlanta. Additionally, his work was included in Kara Walker's exhibition *Ruffneck Constructivists* at the ICA Philadelphia and he has shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2001); Media City, Seoul (2000); Black Box, CCAC Institute, Oakland (2000); and Artists Space, New York (1999). Selected works as a film director include: *Slowly This, Smile*, *Until*, *Deshotten*, *Dreams Are Colder Than Death*, *Adrian Young*. As a cinematographer, he has worked with featured-film directors, John Akomfrah, Julie Dash, Andrew Dosunmu, Haile Gerima, and Spike Lee. Jafa is also a principal member of studio collective TNEG (along with Elissa Blount Moorhead and Malik Hassan Sayeed), a trans-Atlantic university lecturer; and has published a scribe of critical theory manifestos.

Frida Orupabo

A sociologist and artist living and working in Oslo, Norway. Her work consists of digital collages in various forms, which explore questions around race, family relations, gender, sexuality, violence and identity.

Ming Smith

Detroit-born Ming Smith is a New York-based photographer known for her informal, in-action portraits of Black cultural figures, from Alvin Ailey to Nina Simone and a wide range of jazz musicians. Smith's career emerged in 1973 with the publication of the *Black Photographer's Annual*. Her work was included in *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography* at Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2010 and she has had numerous solo



exhibitions including The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama (2013); June Kelly Gallery, New York (2010) and the African American Museum in Philadelphia (2003). Smith's work is held in collections at Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York; the Smithsonian Anacostia Museum & Center for African American History and Culture, Washington, DC, and the AT&T Corporation.

Special thanks to: The Julia Stoschek Collection, Berlin

Caption: Video still, Arthur Jafa, Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death, 2016, Video, 7'25", colour, sound. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York City, Rome

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