



PRESS RELEASE

RITA KEEGAN: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THERE AND HERE

17 September – 28 November 2021

Fire Station Galleries, South London Gallery

Free

Rita Keegan's first solo exhibition in more than fifteen years features artworks that reflect the intersection of new media experimentation, feminist practice and the Black Arts Movement of the 1980s.

Combining digital animation, textiles, painting and copy art with experiential media such as scent, Keegan's tactile practice grapples with the elusive and enduring powers of memory, often drawing on her extensive family archive: a photographic record of a Black middle-class Canadian family from the 1880s to present day. With these images, Keegan charts the politics of dress, adornment and self-definition, bringing this personal history to bear on self-portraits and conceptual clothing that create affirmative and complex representations of Black female identity. As Keegan articulated in a 1987 interview; *'What else do we have? We have no property, no money, no bodies of our own. We have to work from ourselves and speaking from my own experience it is not easy for large, Black, women to celebrate ourselves!'*

Alongside paintings and copy art collages – some never previously exhibited – will be a new mixed-media installation revisiting the work *Cycles* (1992) originally presented at the Bluecoat, Liverpool as part of *Trophies of Empire* curated by Keith Piper. Keegan describes *Cycles* as an attempt to *'personalise issues of the African diaspora'*, collaging family photographs with historical images relating to the enslavement of African people, and embedding this material within an installation of spices such as turmeric and cumin, mounds of sand, tar-stained shipping ropes and wax print fabric designed by Europeans for the African market. At the heart of Keegan's reimagining, will be a *Social Fabric* constructed from A4 patchworks donated by a global network of friends, family and collaborators. This collectively crafted textile makes material the many threads of Keegan's kinship relations, while also calling for more communal understandings of art-making and identity, as Keegan acknowledges: *'I'm made of many places, people and things.'*

The importance of family histories is explored further in a presentation of paintings by Keegan's uncle Keith Simon (1922 – 2013), a contributor to the Harlem Renaissance who lived in London from 1952 – 1972 and exhibited widely, including the Lawrence Alloway curated, *Collages and Objects*, Institute of Contemporary Arts (1954) and *Caribbean Artists in England*, Commonwealth Art Gallery (1971). Simon's estate is managed and cared for by his niece, artist Lorraine Brooks, described by Keegan as 'the family historian' and partner Jana Michele King. For this exhibition, Simon's paintings are presented alongside archival ephemera, poetry and a short new film produced by Brooks contextualising his life and work.

This exhibition is curated by the Rita Keegan Archive Project, a social history and curatorial collective that seeks to preserve, exhibit, and share the collections of the artist Rita Keegan. Its members include Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski, Dominique Zenani Barron, Lauren Craig, Gina Nembhard and Naomi Pearce. The Rita Keegan Archive Project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. <https://ritakeeganarchiveproject.com>

As part of the Rita Keegan Archive Project, a new essay collection and archival sourcebook, *Mirror Reflecting Darkly* – containing a range of essays, artworks and rare archival material, edited by Rita Keegan, Matthew Harle and Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski – will be published by Goldsmiths Press on 1 September 2021: <https://www.gold.ac.uk/goldsmiths-press/publications/-mirror-reflecting-darkly-the-rita-keegan-archive/>

NOTES TO EDITORS

Rita Keegan

Rita Keegan (b.1949, Bronx, New York) is an artist, lecturer, and archivist of Caribbean and Black-Canadian descent who has lived in London since 1980. She co-founded the Brixton Art Gallery in 1982, established the Women of Colour Index (WOCI) in 1987, and was Director of the African and Asian Visual Arts Archive (AAVAA) until 1994. For many years, she was a lecturer in multimedia arts at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has exhibited at the Horniman Museum, London (2000); Iniva and the British Museum, London (1995); the ICA, London (1993); Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol (1992), Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (1992) and in the US at the Studio Museum in Harlem and Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (1997).

About the South London Gallery

The South London Gallery (SLG) was founded in the 19th century by philanthropist William Rossiter to 'bring art to the people of south London'. Today the gallery comprises its original site at 65 Peckham Road; the Fire Station which opened to the public in 2018; Art Block, a space for local children and families on Sceaux Gardens Estate and two permanent gardens.

The SLG has an international reputation for its contemporary art exhibitions by established, mid-career and younger artists and programme of film and performance events. It's highly regarded, free education programme includes a peer-led young people's forum; family workshops; artist-led projects and commissions on local housing estates; and a BBC Children in Need-funded programme for looked after children.

The South London Gallery is a registered charity, which raises more than half of its income from trusts and foundations, sponsors and fundraising events.

PRESS CONTACT

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South London Gallery, Fire Station
82 Peckham Road, London, SE15 5LQ

The gallery is open Tuesday – Sunday.
www.southlondongallery.org

Social Media

Twitter: [@SLG_artupdates](https://twitter.com/SLG_artupdates)

Instagram: [@southlondongallery](https://www.instagram.com/southlondongallery)

Facebook: [South London Gallery](https://www.facebook.com/SouthLondonGallery)

IMAGE SHEET

RITA KEEGAN: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THERE AND HERE

Captions and credits:

1. Rita Keegan with Lily in the studio, 2021 Photography credit: Lewis Khan
2. Untitled, 1986. Photocopy mono-prints on sugar paper, 29 x 21 cm.
3. Untitled, 1986. Photocopy mono-prints on sugar paper, 29 x 21 cm.
4. Untitled, 1986. Photocopy mono-prints on sugar paper, 29 x 21 cm.
5. Rita Keegan, Love Token, 1996, photo album and photocopies hand-tinted with watercolour and colour pencil

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