

ALSO ON AT THE SLG

Alice Theobald: IL Y AURA (There will be)
9 Mar – 5 Jun 2022
Main Gallery, Main Building
Free

Céline Condorelli, with Ben Rivers and Jay Bernard: After Work
4 Mar – 5 Jun 2022
Gallery 2, & 3, Fire Station

SHAMICA RUDDOCK DECIPHERING A BROKEN SYNTAX

8 APR - 12 JUN 2022
GALLERY 1, FIRE STATION
FREE

EXHIBITION GUIDE

South London Gallery
65–67 Peckham Road, London SE5 8UH
Fire Station
82 Peckham Road, London SE15 5LQ
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southlondongallery.org

SLG

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SHAMICA RUDDOCK DECIPHERING A BROKEN SYNTAX

Tracks:

Event A: Inwards Lurking, 5m 1s

Event B: Wading Undergrowth, 3m 45s

Event C: Across from Within, 9m 10s

Event D: Recurrent Thoroughfare, 4m 54s

Event E: Outwards, 4m 48s

Recess, 1m 52s

Following six months as the eleventh SLG Postgraduate Artist in Residence, Shamica Ruddock, presents an exhibition on the ground floor of the Fire Station. A newly-commissioned installation consists of a sound work housed within a purpose-built listening environment. Visitors can travel through sonic and cosmic worlds via the 30-minute soundscape in this meditative space.

Shamica is a research-based artist often working between sound, text and moving image. During the residency, they continued to investigate Black Technopoetics, the relationship between race, technology and sound, looking at the history of Black sound culture through the narratives of sci-fi and spiritualism. A vinyl record including sounds from the installation and inserts that hold contextual cues will be distributed during the exhibition's run.

As a starting point, Shamica considered the structure of a vinyl record, taking the record sleeve, liner notes and the record itself as inspiration to think about sound spatially. Outside of the gallery space, the fire station windows show diagrams produced from Shamica's research. The circuit board maps use a language of technology, referencing the creation of the tracks with synthesisers, drum machines and computer programming. They also nod to the influence of sci-fi, particularly the writing of American author Octavia Butler. Written between the 1970s and early 2000s, Butler's novels and short stories feature time travel narratives that centre on Black experiences. In *Kindred*, Butler uses time travel to reconcile the protagonist's family history of slavery. "Like much great speculative fiction," author Kat Solomon writes, "the fantastic in *Kindred* functions as both an opportunity for the unfolding of an unusual story while also serving as a kind of foundational metaphor, in this case for the ways that the history of slavery continues to assert itself in the present."¹ This way of writing becomes a method for thinking through alternative political, cultural and social structures. Connected to speculative fiction, Shamica builds counter-narratives to contested events, places and communities.

Shamica uses sound as a means of transportation through time, cultures, and space. Their use of drum patterns in the audio work points to the long history of Black sound culture and music production. Working with funk and disco drum pattern books from the 1960s and 1970s, they have drawn from various forms of Black sound culture to collapse different temporalities into the present. This approach speaks to how Black music has been pivotal in developing many contemporary genres, such as the evolution of disco into house music. Shamica looks at the production of Black sound culture and its relationship to Black history by using audio techniques as metaphors for Black experiences. For example, in the making of Dub music, there is a process of removal through over-dubbing. Shamica is interested in the connection between this removal and the history of forced displacement in Black history.

Inspiration for the shape of the listening dome comes from a bulbous fruit called the calabash gourd. For at least 10,000 years, the calabash, or bottle gourd, has been used in African-Caribbean cultures to eat, create domestic objects and musical instruments. It also has spiritual significance related to cosmogony, the branch of science that deals with the origin of the universe, especially the solar system. Shamica draws from references of Jamaican-born Canadian fiction writer Nalo Hopkinson, whose work draws on Caribbean history, language, and storytelling traditions. Hopkinson writes of the calabash in relation to Afro-Caribbean folk practices, where characters travel to new worlds such as Guinea land, an ancestral spirit world. The curved forms of the calabash echo the shape scientists believe black holes take and are similar to hourglasses. The dome also provides acoustic and enveloping qualities. Being in the dome invokes an experience akin to being in the area just before reaching the dance floor in a music venue, like a corridor or stairwell. Here the architecture channels the music, signalling a physical and metaphysical journey. The installation offers listeners a different space and context to consider the cultural poetics of the sound work, away from typical club or music scenes; an invitation to the listener to imagine or journey into a new world.

1. Solomon, K. (2020, March 2). Time Traveling in Octavia Butler's 'Kindred'. Retrieved from The Millions: <https://themillions.com/2020/03/time-travelling-in-octavia-butlers-kindred.html>

GLOSSARY

Black Technopoetics: a term established by Louis Onuorah Chude-Sokei in his book *The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Black Technopoetics*. The book explores the histories of race and technology in a world made by slavery, colonialism, and industrialisation.

Cosmogony: is any model concerning the origin of the cosmos or the universe.

Deciphering: to discover the meaning of something written badly or in a difficult or hidden way.

Dubbing: in sound recording, dubbing is the transfer or copying of previously recorded audio material from one medium to another of the same or a different type. It may be done with a machine designed for this purpose, or by connecting two different machines: one to play back and one to record the signal.

House (music): a genre of electronic dance music characterised by a repetitive four-on-the-floor beat. It was created by DJs and music producers from Chicago's underground club culture in the 1980s, as DJs from the subculture began altering disco songs to give them a more mechanical beat and deeper basslines.

Speculative (Realism): speculative fiction is a broad category of fiction encompassing genres with elements that do not exist in reality, recorded history, nature, or the present universe. Such fiction covers various themes in the context of supernatural, futuristic, and other imaginative realms.

Syntax: the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence.

Techno (music): a genre of electronic dance music that features a fast repetitive beat and synthesised sounds usually without vocals or a conventional popular song structure.

Worldbuilding: the process of developing a coherent imaginary environment to act as the setting for a work of science fiction.

BIOGRAPHY

Shamica Ruddock recently completed Open School East Associates Programme and has studied at Kings College, London and the University of California, Los Angeles.

Previous presentations include Margate NOW Festival, Margate, UK, New Contemporaries, South London Gallery, London, UK and Treasure Hill Artist Village, Taipei, Taiwan. Ruddock has received the Flamin Fellowship, Film London; the Eccles Centre Visiting Fellowship, with The British Library; a Jerwood Creative Bursary, Jerwood Arts and the Francis Chagrin Award, Sound and Music.

RESIDENCY

Since 2011, a six-month residency at the SLG has been available to postgraduate artists. This opportunity is open to artists who have recently completed an accredited or non-accredited programme of study from an institution, collective or art school in the UK. Application details are advertised on the SLG website every summer.

The Postgraduate Residency is supported by the Paul and Louise Cooke Endowment.