



PRESS RELEASE

MICHELLE WILLIAMS GAMAKER: OUR MOUNTAINS ARE PAINTED ON GLASS **31 MARCH – 18 JUNE 2023** **MAIN GALLERY**

In spring 2023, South London Gallery presents Michelle Williams Gamaker's solo exhibition *Our Mountains Are Painted on Glass*. Known for her skilful filmmaking and distinctive aesthetic, British-Sri Lankan artist Michelle Williams Gamaker (b. 1979) draws on her cinephile youth to create a visual celebration that also raises important conversations about race, representation, identity and agency.

The exhibition will premiere her significant new film titled *Thieves*, recipient of a Film London FLAMIN Production Award 2022 and co-commissioned by FLAMIN, the South London Gallery and Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA), where it will be shown in late 2023.

Taking inspiration from early Hollywood and British cinema, *Thieves* is a thrilling fantasy adventure based on the 1924 silent black-and-white and 1940 Technicolor films of the same name, *The Thief of Bagdad*. Chinese-American actor Anna May Wong and Indian-born American actor Sabu, who starred in the original films as marginalised characters, become leading characters in Williams Gamaker's compelling retelling.

The film sees a speculative union unfold between Sabu and Anna May Wong (acted by long-term Williams Gamaker collaborators Krishna Isthia and Dahong Wang) where the performers are recast and reimagined as 'brown protagonists', claiming their leading roles through direct action. Anna May Wong is found on set by Sabu, but there is something wrong: she is in black-and-white while everything else is in Technicolor, and both characters find themselves trapped in their screen images. Together, they must counter the structural violence of the industry (in this case, the casting of white actors to replace actors of colour) by overthrowing the set and holding the director and screenwriter to account.

"I see this mode of filmmaking as critical affection," Williams Gamaker notes. "I deeply love old cinema classics, but they are riddled with injustices that can no longer be overlooked. I lean heavily on the magic of cinema, and I turn the fiction machine on itself by sabotaging the casting process: the previously marginalised actors have a chance to come back: they have a voice, they are politically astute, and, crucially, their agency is restored."

Thieves evokes early cinema and Technicolor classics, blending practical and analogue methods of special effects with contemporary practices to combine past and present filmmaking. The film will be shown in a bespoke installation featuring sculptural works and cinematic ephemera that draw on elements of the film's set.

Thieves is the first film in Williams Gamaker's body of work titled *Fictional Revenge*. It follows on from the artist's acclaimed *Fictional Activism* series, which included 2021's *The Bang Straws* (Official Selection: BFI London Film Festival, Winterthur, London Short Film Festival, Raindance, and winner of Best Experimental Film, Aesthetica Short Film Festival, 2021) and 2017's *House of Women* (BFI London Film Festival, Winterthur).

Thieves was commissioned by Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN) with funding from Arts Council England, and co-commissioned with the South London Gallery (SLG) and Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA). Additional support from: National Lottery through Arts Council England; The Foundation Foundation; and The British Academy and the Wolfson Foundation. The film was produced by FLAMIN and Keep Rolling Studios.

Exhibition generously supported by Anastasia and Igor Bukhman, with additional support from the Michelle Williams Gamaker Exhibition Supporters' Circle.

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For further press information, images and interviews please contact Anna Jones, Head of Communications: anna.jones@southlondongallery.org

NOTES TO EDITORS

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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)

TikTok: [southlondongallery_](https://www.tiktok.com/@southlondongallery_)

About Michelle Williams Gamaker

Award winning moving image artist Michelle Williams Gamaker (b.1979, London) developed Fictional Activism to interrogate 20th Century cinema by retelling the histories of marginalised actors and by proposing critical alternatives to colonial storytelling in British and Hollywood studio films.

She is joint winner of Film London's Jarman Award (2020) and has an extensive national and international profile, including prestigious BFI London Film Festivals (2017, 2018, 2021), Aesthetica Short Film Festival (winner of Best Experimental Film, 2021) and Raindance (2022). Recent exhibitions include *I Multiply Each Day*, Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland (2021), Whitechapel's *The London Open 2022*, *Like There is Hope* and *I Can Dream of Another World* at Hauser & Wirth, and a major public

commission *Springfield Eternal* in the atrium of Springfield Hospital for charity Hospital Rooms, opening in 2023.

Our Mountains are Painted on Glass has been co-commissioned with Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA), where it will be shown in late 2023. Williams Gamaker's work is in the Arts Council Collection and her entire filmography has been recognised and preserved by the BFI National Film Archive. She is a Studio Artist at Gasworks, where she is also trustee. Williams Gamaker is Reader in BA Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and is currently a British Academy Wolfson Fellow. She champions emerging artists, most recently as Selector for the prestigious John Moore's Painting Prize (2020) and Bloomberg New Contemporaries (2021).

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. Its 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 programme for looked after children.

About Dundee Contemporary Arts

Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA) is an internationally renowned centre for contemporary art and registered charity that enables audiences, artists and participants to see, experience and create. With two beautiful large-scale gallery spaces, two thriving cinema screens, a busy print studio, an award-winning learning programme, and a packed programme of events, workshops, classes and activities aimed at all ages and abilities, DCA is a vibrant cultural hub open to all, located in the heart of the city.