



Image credit: Clifford Owens, *Anthology (Nsenga Knight)*, 2011. Image courtesy of the artist.

Clifford Owens: Better the Rebel You Know

Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK, 10 May – 17 August 2014

Curated by Daniella Rose King

This summer Cornerhouse in Manchester will host the first major European show by American conceptual artist Clifford Owens, across all three of its galleries. Owens' work explores the intersection of photography, video, text and performance. His practice seeks to challenge the boundaries of performance, and the possibilities of interaction between artist and audience.

The exhibition will include an **exclusive UK iteration of Owens' work *Anthology***, which debuted at MoMA PS1's eponymous exhibition in New York in 2011. The work originated from a series of 28 performance 'scores': short, diverse sets of instructions (some specific, others open to interpretation) solicited by Owens from a selection of African American artists, from established to emerging figures.

Owens said: "This project originated over a decade ago. In 2000, my thesis research failed to find adequate evidence of black artists' investment in performance art since the 1950s, but this clearly wasn't due to a lack of involvement. Rather than lament the lack of historical interest in US-based black artists and performance art, I chose to imagine my own history.

"The artists who contribute the scores drive the emotional 'gestalt' represented in *Anthology*; I am the conduit for transmitting profoundly powerful messages from a group of enormously talented artists. My body is attached to this body of work; it is the container and conveyor of its meaning. The presence of and engagement with the audience in the live performances is also critical to the project."

For the UK edition, which will be the first time *Anthology* has been undertaken outside the US, Owens has gathered scores from 20 British artists, again from across generations, whose work considers ideas of race, class, difference, marginalisation, multiculturalism and Diaspora in the UK since the 1950s.

The artists include:

- 2013 Turner Prize-nominated **Lynette Yiadom-Boakye**, whose score instructs Owens to “Give people what they need. Emphasis on NEED, not want. Your care should know no bounds.” Owens will enact this score in Manchester prior to the opening of the exhibition.
- London-based artist and filmmaker **John Akomfrah OBE**, who founded the seminal Black Audio Film Collective in 1982 and whose latest film, *The Stuart Hall Project*, screened at Cornerhouse in 2013, who will contribute a new single screen video with sound designed for Owens to interact with.
- Artist **Sonia Boyce MBE**, whose score is in the form of a short sound piece titled *Freedom Again*.
- **Godfried Donkor**, who instructs Owens to "...investigate and research the 18th century American phenomenon of the 'battle royal'* , especially how it reflected the African American community from slavery onwards . Once the research is over Cliff should perform the 'battle royal' involving the audience whenever possible ..." (**a battle royal was a bare-knuckled fight between a number of blindfolded African American men, often slaves, staged as an entertainment*).

Other artists who have contributed scores are Qasim Riza Shaheen (who will also be showcased in a solo show of newly-commissioned work at Cornerhouse 6 Sep – 2 Nov 2014), Simon Fujiwara, Oreet Ashery, Larry Achiampong, Kimathi Donkor, Dinu Li, Hetain Patel, David Blandy, Humberto Velez, Shezad Dawood, Lubaina Himid, Jack Tan, Sonia Boyce, Doug Fishbone, Harold Offeh and Suki Chan. **Each artist’s score is available on request.**

Owens will spend two weeks at Cornerhouse in May 2014 to interpret and perform a selection of these scores in a white cube space in Gallery 3, which will be accessible to the public (see **Notes**). Still and moving images will capture these performances and be added to the exhibition as it progresses, alongside the full set of scores.

In Gallery 2, key **photographs, video and installations from *Anthology (2011)*, shown in New York**, will be displayed, including *Anthology (William Pope.L)*, *Anthology (Glenn Ligon)*, *Anthology (Kara Walker)*, *Anthology (Jacolby Satterwhite)* and an exclusive realisation of the only score not produced for the MoMA PS1 show, *Anthology (Lyle Ashton Harris)*.

Opening the exhibition, Gallery 1 will feature **the first UK iteration of Owens’ project *Photographs with an Audience***. In October 2013 the artist invited audience members to take part in the process of creating *Photographs with an Audience: Manchester* in two evening sessions at Cornerhouse, where he drew on their interpersonal dynamics to construct photographic compositions reflecting their experiences. Some of the resulting images are simple portraits while others capture Owens’ prompts and directives; presented in a series of diptychs and sequences, they seek to question the relationship between action and image.

Photographs with an Audience: Manchester is part of an international project undertaken by Owens with audiences in various cities, as a way of exploring the underlying social tensions and relations within divergent communities. Participant Damian Casserly said: “Cliff included the audience as both subject and object, reminding us of who is represented in photography. His reflections on shared human experiences that are difficult, and sometimes secret, answered the question: ‘what do these people look like?’ - as we participated, the answer was often ‘this is what we look like’.”

Exhibition curator Daniella Rose King said: “It has been an immense pleasure working with Clifford Owens on two significant new commissions – *Photographs with an Audience: Manchester* and

Anthology (2014), and realising these works for new, British audiences. As a prominent figure within the contemporary North American visual and performance art community, Owens' work offers countless opportunities for understanding and picking apart a recent history of performance practice. The social nuances of his work highlight the shared histories and trajectories with the UK, whilst bringing those divergences to light, too.

"*Better the Rebel You Know*, like the adage it plays with, seeks to explore Owens' role as an interlocutor and a polemicist, who often grapples with uncomfortable truths around human experience (such as intimacy, sexuality, race and representation) as well as those at the very heart of a performative and conceptual art practice."

Artistic Director for Visual Arts and Film, Sarah Perks, said: "Cornerhouse is delighted to have commissioned and produced the first European solo exhibition by Clifford Owens, an extremely important and significant artist at work in the US. It offers a unique opportunity to encounter his work, which is pushing and reinvigorating the boundaries of 'performance art' and garnering important attention and critical responses. Owens promises to be a major contributor to the increasingly visible and diverse canon of performance work which Cornerhouse, and its future incarnation HOME, is developing, in its role as a major centre for the exploration and innovation of performance art."

ENDS

Notes for editors

Clifford Owens will be in Manchester 5 to 19 May 2014, and available for interview. He will perform scores for *Anthology* in Gallery 3 Fri 9 to Sun 11 May, and Sat 17 to Sun 18 May, in sessions lasting at least an hour (days and times TBC).

Many of the artists providing scores will attend the exhibition launch at 6.00pm on Fri 9 May, and the opening weekend, and be available for interview. Biographies of these artists are available on request.

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Example scores from the New York iteration of *Anthology*:

- William Pope.L instructed Owens to, "Be African-American. Be very African-American."
- In Glenn Ligon's *Untitled*, Owens was told to, "Annotate an existing performance/score. Perform that performance annotated. For example: Yvonne Rainer dancing *Trio A* while telling the audience what she is feeling as she is doing it, what moves she can't do because she is older, etc." This score became a vehicle for Owens to explore David Hammons' infamous piece *Pissed Off* (1981).
- Kara Walker's INSTRUCTION told Owens to, "French kiss an audience member. Force them against a wall and demand Sex. The audience/viewer should be an adult. If they are willing to participate in the forced sex act abruptly turn the tables and assume the role of victim. Accuse your attacker. Seek help from others, describe your ordeal. Repeat." The piece attracted some controversy and media interest (see below:

<http://galleristny.com/2012/03/kara-walker-withdraws-involvement-from-clifford-owens-performance/> and <http://galleristny.com/2012/03/clifford-owens-and-kara-walker-at-moma-ps1-an-epilogue-with-roselee-goldberg/>)

About Clifford Owens

Clifford Owens was born in Baltimore in 1971, and lives and works in New York City. He studied at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Mason Gross School of Visual Arts Rutgers University and the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. He was an artist in residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem, and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

His solo exhibitions include *Anthology: Clifford Owens*, Museum of Modern Art New York PS1 (2011-2012) and *Perspectives 173: Clifford Owens*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (2011). Group exhibitions include *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (2012), and The Studio Museum in Harlem (2013) and *Deliverance*, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center (2012).

Clifford has received numerous grants and fellowships, including the William H. Johnson Prize, Louis Tiffany Comfort Award, New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship and the Rutgers University Ralph Bunche Distinguished Graduate Fellowship. He has written for exhibition catalogues and the *New York Times*, lectured widely (including at Yale University), was a guest critic at Harvard and held visiting artist faculty positions at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Recently, he completed *Seminar*, a project about the pedagogy of performance art, during his residency at Pioneer Works in Brooklyn.

About Daniella Rose King

Daniella Rose King is an independent curator and writer. In 2012 she was Program Curator at MASS Alexandria, an independent study and studio programme for artists in Egypt, where she curated a seven-month series of workshops, lectures, screenings and discussions, the group show *Exhibition 2* and project managed dOCUMENTA (13)'s *The Cairo Seminar: Studium and Seminar* in Kassel, Alexandria and Cairo. King holds a BA in History of Art from The University of Manchester and an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Art in London. Between 2009-2011 she was Assistant Curator at Nottingham Contemporary where she worked on exhibitions including *Uneven Geographies*, *British Art Show 7*, *Anne Collier*, *Jean Genet: Act 1 & Act 2* and *Klaus Weber: Already there! & If you leave me I'm not coming*. She also produced the first UK performance of Jack Goldstein's *Two Boxers* and *The Panthers + Cinema* season curated by Kodwo Eshun. She recently contributed to Adel Abidin's exhibition catalogue *Symphony* at Lawrie Shabibi Gallery (Dubai 2013), Hatje Cantz's *On One Side of the Same Water: Artistic Practice between Tirana and Tangier* (Germany, 2012), and an interview with John Akomfrah for *The Right Dissonance* (London, 2011) a collection of interviews between emerging curators and artists. She has written for *Frieze*, *Art Monthly*, *Art-Agenda*, *Universes in Universe – Worlds of Art*, *Portal 9*, *Harper's Bazaar Art* and *Contemporary And*.

About Cornerhouse

Cornerhouse is Greater Manchester's centre for international contemporary visual art and film. It is a place where all can engage with contemporary ideas, through a unique, risk-taking, cross art-form and culturally diverse programme of high quality art and film.

In copy please refer to '**Cornerhouse**' and not 'The Cornerhouse'. www.cornerhouse.org

About HOME

In 2015 a new centre for contemporary art, theatre, film and books will open its doors in Manchester. It will be called HOME, and is the product of the merger of two of Manchester's best-loved arts institutions: Cornerhouse and the Library Theatre Company.

HOME's new building will include a 500-seat theatre, a 150-seat flexible studio space, a 500m², four metre-high gallery space, five cinema screens, education spaces, digital production and broadcast facilities, a café bar, a restaurant and offices. It will provide new opportunities for artists and audiences to create work in different ways together and serve as a social and cultural hub; in one building visitors will be able to see original new work across the visual arts, theatre and film.

HOME will be located in a lively new development at First Street, just off Whitworth Street, which will include a public square ideal for events, activities and performances. It will anchor the development of a dynamic creative quarter for Manchester, which draws together creative energy emerging from Knott Mill to the west and the Palace Theatre to the east. HOME will change the cultural landscape of the city and the region, and have positive impacts nationally and beyond. www.HOMEMcr.org