

PRESS RELEASE

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Goldsmiths and South London Gallery collaborate for 'Contemporary Africa on Screen'

Academics from Goldsmiths, University of London will collaborate with the South London Gallery (SLG) over the next 12 months to bring research-driven programming focused on contemporary creative production in Africa to local audiences in south London.

The project will be led by Dr Jennifer Bajorek, from the Centre for Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, and draws on her expertise and experience in contemporary African visual culture to explore questions of visibility and public space in urban Africa. It includes a strong educational and community outreach component, and is designed to take advantage of SLG's innovative education remit, which emphasises programming links with local communities.

The project's first programme, entitled 'Contemporary Africa On Screen', will begin in the 2010/2011 academic year with a year-long series of screenings, discussions and workshops held in SLG's new film theatre. The programme presents a rich mix of work, including narrative film, experimental shorts, documentary and docudrama produced in diverse geographic and cultural contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. Artists and work come from Senegal, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The programme explores the global relevance of African creative expression, paying particularly close attention to the conditions in which artists, filmmakers and other cultural producers are working in Africa today. Interrogating these conditions and the public spheres and spaces connected with them, 'Contemporary Africa On Screen' will foster discussion of issues directly relevant to the lives of Africans living on the continent as well as to those living in London in new diaspora communities.

The project is unique in its emphasis on spaces of commonality between contemporary London and many African cities. It seeks, like much of Bajorek's current research, to explore new publics for art in contemporary urban contexts in Africa, and to understand social and political aspects of visibility outside the dominant liberal and Eurocentric paradigms.

Both the 2010/2011 programme and the larger SLG collaboration grew out of Bajorek's research on photography in francophone Africa. For the past six years, she has been researching and writing about photography and political imagination in several francophone African cities. In research on archival materials and in her work with photographers of the independence generation, she learned that historical materials and practices connected with independence and decolonization remain contested in the

present and that photographic archives from this period are often in precarious institutional situations. Building on this historical work, Bajorek became increasingly interested in questions about contemporary display practices and publics for visual culture in contemporary Africa.

Several screenings in Contemporary Africa On Screen have been guest-curated by colleagues from Goldsmiths and the University of London. Dr Gareth Stanton, from the Department of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths, will present a session on Nollywood film, featuring a discussion with Nigerian actor, director and producer Adekunle Detokunbo-Bello.

Dr Ros Gray, from the Department of Art at Goldsmiths, is curating and introducing documentary films by Licinio Azevedo (Mozambique) and Katy Lena Ndiaye (Senegal).

Professor Annie Coombes from Birkbeck, University of London will screen and discuss the work of the Slum-TV media collective (Nairobi, Kenya) and will present a session with video artist Berni Searle, looking at her new work on xenophobic violence in South Africa.

Juma Bah, of Community Action Southwark, has guest-curated part of the programme and is the driving force behind workshops with young people and the Sierra Leonean community in Southwark, co-organized with SLG's Head of Education, Frances Williams. The workshops will lead to the production of a new film exploring experiences of Sierra Leonean independence, 50 years later, through intergenerational memory work.

'Contemporary Africa On Screen' has received funding from the LCACE seed fund and will lay the foundation of a longer-term knowledge transfer partnership between the South London Gallery and Goldsmiths. October programming will be linked to LCACE's Inside/Out festival and to other events in Southwark celebrating the UK's Black History Month.

Further information about Dr Bajorek:

Since 2007, Bajorek has done research in Africa and is involved in collaborative projects with museums and cultural institutions, including the Centre de Recherches et de Documentation du Sénégal (C.R.D.S.) in Saint-Louis, Senegal, and the École du Patrimoine Africain in Porto-Novo, Benin. These projects aim to intervene directly in cultural policy and to invent alternatives to the old North-South funding structures for African cultural institutions. These themes are also at the heart of another project, a book Bajorek is co-writing with Dr Erin Haney, a scholar of photography and independent curator, on the Rencontres de Bamako, the celebrated photography biennial held in Mali's capital city.

"Inevitably, historical questions lead to the present. The museum and other formal display spaces have always been colonial institutions, both in Africa and in Europe. The biggest challenges facing artists and other cultural producers (curators, museum

directors, and policymakers) working in contemporary Africa stem from this historical residue. What little money there is goes to projects and institutions that are readily recognizable within the old frameworks. Film and video in Africa, as in many non-European spaces, have long been successful in accessing wider publics and tapping into popular practices, outside officially-sanctioned spaces. Digital and new media have only furthered this trend. The process of decolonization goes on not only on the continent but in London and in Europe. Beyond the glaring disparities in resources, the way we think about and produce public art or 'do' visual culture in London is not always categorically different from the way artists and publics do these things in other parts of the world. Artists and publics in African cities, like those living in London, are working in transnational contexts as vibrant cultural producers.”