

African And Asian Visual Artists Archive

VEENA STEPHENSON

Formerly based in Bristol, the African and Asian Visual Artists Archive (AAVAA) was founded in 1988 by Eddie Chambers, an artist and curator, with support from the Arts Council of Great Britain (now England) in collaboration with the Gulbenkian Foundation. AAVAA is the only independent arts organisation to focus on archiving the work of African and Asian artists in Britain. The origins of the archive lies in the prolific activities and contributions made by artists of African and Asian descent to the British Post-War art scene. Notably groups like the Caribbean Artists Movement (1966-1972) which focused its discussions around an arts journal *Savacou*, and key figures like Rasheed Araeen who during the 1970s ran the *Black Phoenix* magazine, and curated the much discussed *Other Story* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 1989. One can pinpoint an 80s generation, characterised by figures like Eddie Chambers, one of the founding members of the Black Art Group, along with Claudette Johnson, Keith Piper, Donald Rodney and Marlene Smith. Or one could also mention Lubaina Himid, who opened her own gallery the Elbow Room and established Urban Fox Press with Maud Sulter. These were all artist-led ventures. Throughout this time, and since, there has been a wealth of exhibiting and critical activity, inspiring a diverse range of cross-discipline debates. In a way AAVAA developed at a strategic moment to consolidate this history and to intellectually frame and map a number of relationships to the field of contemporary visual arts practice.

Since the post-war period, generations of students of African and Asian descent have studied at British art schools. What is worrying is that the work produced is still regarded and reduced in totality to questions of ethnicity and cultural difference, outside the historical context of contemporary art. We are working towards a time when the work displayed in exhibitions is no longer cordoned off from its contemporaries as a separate and marginal area of artistic production.

AAVAA is keen to encourage up and coming generations of artists, designers and writers to contribute to its future development, and we look forward to receiving material from graduates and young practitioners. The main body of the African and Asian Visual Artists Archive's work relies on slide documentation of the exhibition installations and individual works of art. We also house additional information in the form of audio tapes, artists' statements, artists' CVs, catalogues, posters, dissertations, critical texts and art publications. Our role is to ensure a national profile for the work in the archive and to make this wealth of information available to a wide constituency.

The African and Asian Visual Artists Archive has been re-launched at the University of East London (UEL). This move to London provides an excellent opportunity to bring together the documentation of work that has been done so far while being based in a culturally



diverse and vibrant academic community. The new directors David A Bailey and Sonia Boyce, anticipate that this new partnership between the art and design department at UEL and AAVAA will ensure the necessary infrastructure that an important resource like this needs.

The African and Asian Visual Artists Archive is based at the University of East London, Greengate St. London E13 0BG. Tel: 0181 548 9146. The archive is open to the public on Wednesdays from 10.30 am - 4.30 pm.

RICHARD HYLTON

Sonia Boyce