

Facilitating Intergenerational Dialogue

A conversation between Janice Cheddie,
Rita Keegan and Althea Greenan

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Janice

Hello everyone. My name is Dr Janice Cheddie. I was a custodian of the Panchayat Archive with Shaheen Merali from the mid-1990s to 2015. I would like to thank the invited participants and the Tate staff and library team for facilitating this conversation. Today we will explore the legacies of informal archiving of artists of colour in the Panchayat Collection and other informal collections, including the Women's Art Library, the Women of Colour Index and the Brixton Artist Collective.

I am joined in the conversation today by Dr Althea Greenan and Rita Keegan. Althea was born in Boston in the US. She came to the UK in 1972 as a student and has been here ever since. She works in the Special Collections and Archives at Goldsmiths University of London curating the Women's Art Library collection. Her research explores the role of digitisation in the assimilation of identity-based collections into institutional structures by asking: 'What can artists' 35-millimetre slide collections do besides represent artists' work?' I think that's quite a modest description – those of us who know Althea know her to be the doyenne of women's art library collections in the UK and we have many, many thanks to give her for her help and guidance in thinking about collections, structures and artists' work over the years. I'd like to thank Althea for all that work over decades (fig.1).



Fig.1
Althea Greenan in Amelia Beavis-Jones, *Costumes for Curators #3* 2015
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Rita Keegan is a leading figure in the Black Arts Movement in the UK. She was born in New York to Caribbean and Canadian parents and moved to London in 1980, having studied fine arts at the San Francisco Art Institute from 1969 to 1972. Her work explores memory, history, dress and adornment, often through the use of her extensive family archive, a photographic record of a Black middle class Canadian family dating from the 1890s to the present day. In the aftermath of the 1981 Brixton uprisings, Rita helped establish the Brixton Art Gallery, curating *Mirror Reflecting Darkly*, the first exhibition by the Black Women Artists Collective (we are talking about politically Black artists here). She was the co-founder in 1984 of Copy Art, a resource education space for community groups and artists working within the major technologies of computer scanners and photocopiers. From 1985 to 1990, Rita was a staff member of the Women Artists Slide Library where she established the Women of Colour Index. In the early 1990s she was the director of the African and Asian Visual Artists Archive. A solo exhibition of her work, *Rita Keegan: Somewhere Between There and Here* was presented at the South London Gallery in autumn 2021.

These collectives – the Brixton Artist Collective, the Women’s Art Library, the Women of Colour Index, the African and Asian Visual Artists Archive and others – were bases for exhibition making, creative practice and research. Often incomplete and idiosyncratic, they operated in the gaps between formal archiving and processing. I would argue that they were engaging in a process I call informal collecting. The question that we will explore today is: what happens to informal collections when they enter the hierarchical processes of the art institution, whether it be the university or the art museum? What is the interface between the formal institution and oppositional artist practices within informal collections; practices that inherently critique the historical art institution and its process of historicising artists and narratives of marginalisation and exclusion, its concepts of artistic practice and the boundaries of art historical research and exhibition making? The panel will seek to explore some of the challenges of shifting terminologies, fractured solidarities, cataloguing, access and creative expression, and explore how informal collective strategies can be preserved and utilised in a manner that both acknowledges their origins and original custodians while providing avenues for continuing research, creative intervention and critical, intergenerational dialogue. So, thank you Althea and Rita for joining me today.

I’d like to think about the context in which institutions such as the Women’s Art Library, Copy Art and the Brixton Artist Collective were operating – the wider context – and what could be called alternative institution building. Astrid Proll, in her 2010 book *Goodbye to London:*

Radical Art and Politics in the Seventies, talked about moving from Germany to London in the 1970s. She described a radical ecosystem that existed in London. There were feminist collectives, housing collectives, publishing collectives and workers' co-ops. She embedded herself and felt supported by them.¹ Where could we position collectives like the Women Artists Slide Library? What was their relationship to alternative institution building which was based on the Marxist socialist imperative of equality, widening opportunity, access to housing, and different ways of working? How do you think that informed our thinking of artist collectives in Brixton or the Women Artists Slide Library? Was there any connection?

Rita Well, I think of the Brixton Art Gallery which came out of one of the early uprisings in South London [in 1981]. There were always a lot of artists this side of the river, probably because of Goldsmiths and Chelsea and relatively inexpensive property. There was also the history of squats in Brixton. Lambeth was predisposed to people with a Marxist ideology because it was traditionally a Labour borough. But I remember when I first went to the Brixton Art Gallery, there were people from a wide range of age groups. Quite a few people were much older than I was. The history of performance art was very present. There were people like Ian Hinchliffe who had tried to be part of the establishment, but were rejecting Cork Street. They had that Marxist schooling.

For [Brixton Art Gallery] to call themselves a collective and to have a manifesto, in many ways, is Marxist in itself. There was also the currency of diversity and a desire for diversity, and an awareness, which meant that it was open to a lot of different people and levels of practice. They were trying to get rid of the hierarchy of the art establishment, then the hierarchy of art practice, which is why they showed ceramics and self-taught artists along with so-called professional artists. It was actively breaking the mould or perceiving to break the mould, but you still had people who wanted to be part of the canon. One did not dissuade you from the other. When we came together and had this show, it included the different groups, the Polish group, the performance group, the gay and lesbian group, the women's group. We had our separate little pieces of paper and our own separate little collections but they were all unified by showing at the Brixton Art Gallery or the 198 Gallery.

Janice I know you weren't one of the founders Althea, but what do you think was the impetus for the Women Artists Slide Library and was that informed by alternative institution building?

Rita I think that Pauline Barry and others were of the same age as the older group of people at the Brixton Art Gallery. They also had the Battersea Arts Centre. It was part of the South London discussion. I probably would have known Pauline, and Mary Kelly was at the first woman's work show. And a lot of the early feminist artists, Catherine Walker – Kate Walker –

and Monica Sjöö. It was a place where you could get involved with the old guard of practitioners and we, as young people (I'm trying to remember being young), were very conscious about learning from our older sisters.

Althea At the time I was a student down in Dorset. I was in Bournemouth. London was perceived as this hive of activity and very far ahead of its time in terms of where artists could see themselves as part of a changing world. I mean, we weren't taught to even think of art having a social role or having an inflection on current politics. But coming up to London you couldn't escape it. I remember the Brixton Art Gallery being one of the destinations and coming to those shows. It really was about the vibe and this sense of collaborative, collective thinking and action. Because it was very impressive, they had taken over these [railway] arches, they were underneath a railway track.

Rita There were three huge railway arches. I mean, they were huge.

Althea The availability of space is another factor to consider, as well as who was living in South London. I was part of a feminist women's art group that was coming together from all over the country. We would use Battersea Arts Centre as a meeting point. The Women Artists Slide Library was part of the Battersea Arts Centre's role in community action and community gathering. That is what I am gathering from research by a PhD student, Lily Evans-Hill, who is looking at the dynamics of those early groups, how they work and how they break up.² Those earlier years, even though it was maybe a matter of eight years before I started working with the Women's Art Library, felt like a completely different time because when I joined the Women's Art Library as an artist organisation, we were moving into the 1990s when even the idea of being a feminist was kind of a no-go.

Rita People were talking post-feminist, I remember, in the 1990s.

Janice In terms of the structure of something like the Women Artists Slide Library, was it positively articulated that the structure was being built as an alternative? And was the alternative clearly defined or was it not defined and had to be established? What were the perceived barriers that this alternative seemed to be addressing within the structures of something like WAL [Women's Art Library]?

Rita There was a consciousness of scholarship from the 1970s into the early 1980s, books like *Old Mistresses*, *Subversive Stitch*, people like Griselda Pollock.³ So you had all this stuff being written, you started to have access to new books and were not just looking for old ones. Monographs of women artists became available. So, I wonder whether it could have happened ten years before because there may not have been enough books – current books – being produced. I think that it did come out of that wave of feminism from the 1960s and 1970s.

- Althea It is about recalling the lack of resources and how the 35-millimetre slide was the JPEG of that time. Illustrations in books such as *Women Artists: 1550–1950* – that Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris book – were no longer the only evidence of women’s art practice.⁴ These were the only texts that any of us had to be able to see women practicing the visual arts. The slide countered the limit of those images, it was also a way of building upon those images.
- Rita Dissemination?
- Althea Like dissemination.
Rita The slide was disseminating information and at one point perceived as easily portable. [laughs] You know, you could take your portfolio with you and most places you went into had a light box. So you could at least take that – it wasn’t like having to have the unwieldy portfolio. Also, they were relatively inexpensive. We all used them in our talks.
- Janice I was just wondering about the relationship between activism and developing what would be called knowledge? Because when I came into feminism it was through activism. There wasn’t that much material. Feminism was largely distributed through going to groups, discussions and conferences. What you find now, and this is a generational divide, is that people come to feminism through reading a book or following something on social media. I think this is separate from things like climate change, but there is really a disconnect from doing stuff, doing feminism. Like being the person who runs the crèche at the conferences or the person leafleting. That is what I mean by institution building, because the institution building is the boring stuff. It’s the admin, it’s the going to meetings, it’s having the keys to open up the things. And I was just wondering how that or does that inform the way the organisation functions and is that lost when it has to move into another space?
- Rita Well, being ten years older, I come from Black activism and from the civil rights movement and from the anti-war movement. It was only natural that feminism, which was part of the same discussion of equality, would formulate itself as active – I can’t imagine our generations being passive. You worked towards change, you didn’t expect it to be handed to you. Maybe because of social media it has become much more passive. We didn’t have that – you had to get out and go and you couldn’t necessarily do what we’re doing right here and participate like this.
- Janice But if you look at the history of WAL, Althea, do you think that level of self-organisation influenced the ways in which it articulates itself as an institution and in its collecting of women’s work?
- Althea I think I understand this as being about doing away with hierarchy and making a space to which people could contribute. So the very critical thing that I see is the survival of the Women’s Art Library as a project that

started off as a slide library. Very practical, very nuts and bolts. Artists don't make a living being artists, they make a living being teachers, you know, for the most part. So, it's about giving them the material to carry on their own kind of activism and to also situate themselves in their own teaching. I think that's the empowerment that this technology [enabled], you know, these little pictures that you could either project or save and put on a light table as Rita was describing, was kind of liberating too. So, it was a very canny strategy to think we're feminist artists and we don't see women being included in exhibitions. The problem is visibility and this is a device towards gaining visibility and not giving curators and professionals the excuse that, 'Oh, I wanted to include women artists but I didn't know of any'. That's the structure I understand as being what the whole thing was set up to challenge.

Janice But I think it is a self-help sort of model.

Althea Yes.

Janice But also, it's taking responsibility. I don't think one can deny things like ILEA or the GLC.

Althea So, you're talking about the Inner London Education Authority and the Greater London Council.

Rita Yes. Inner London Education would help fund things that were education-based. A library, an archive or dissemination of knowledge courses would have been an extra funding stream. It was open to that quiet type of activism – sharing books, book fairs, conferences – those things help to spread the information. The Women Artists Slide Library would do talks and presentation and if I was going someplace, I would take my slides was able to talk about the library or Black women artists. I would talk about Black arts and Black art in a political sense. There was a sense of flexibility both with the slides and the participants in the library.

Janice I do have this photograph that shows how the slide library was set up at Battersea Arts Centre (fig.2). It was the space that was available to look at the material of the actual slides.

Rita I remember walking through the rounded door – an archway and on one side there were filing cabinets and a desk. I mean, it was a closet, a bigger closet, wasn't it?

Althea What I love about this picture is how it's not about staying behind those doors and creating this little inner sanctum. It really was about coming out into the public space, Battersea Arts Centre, and showing posters of exhibitions that were being organised, or front pages of the actual newsletter that I still have back issues and copies of. It's really about tackling this problem with visibility on different fronts. At one point probably in the mid-1990s, they changed the name from the Women

Artists Slide Library to the Women's Art Library because there was so much other material that had been gathered and generated by this – it was essentially an artist organisation rather than an academic project. So, I always introduce the collection as it is now in Goldsmiths as really the product of artists organising. It is and was an educational project, but education as a social project, not fitting into any kind of institutional idea.



Fig.2
Photograph of the Women Artists Slide Library at Battersea Arts Centre in 1988
© Althea Greenan

Janice That brings me to two questions. The first one is, what is the problem of visibility, and how did WAL and the Women Artists Slide Library deal with that? Althea? Perhaps Rita you can talk about this in relation to the Women of Colour Index.

Althea I think it was a gathering of evidence, but as Rita mentioned, also dissemination. It wasn't [just] about hanging onto material or protecting it – it was really about giving a space or a sort of centre of gravity for women who identified as artists. This was another criterion in a sense, to feel that they could contribute to this collection of evidence, calling it a slide library because there were others – there was a National Art Slide

Library based in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was a recognised medium for teaching and for promoting your artwork and practice. That was the material of it being an institution and of course you gathered books and that newsletter would go out, and of course that became an archive of networking that also kind of made visible the fact that the artists were having exhibitions. The Black Women Artists Index, which was the original name of the Women of Colour Index that Rita coordinated, Rita, you can answer this – but I don't know whether it was the only project that really knuckled down to work with other curators or other projects outside of the WAL to represent [Black women artists], you know?

Rita The newsletter and the library went hand in hand and so I know at the Brixton Art Gallery we had a newsletter too and it was a way of disseminating information, if you could, and understanding that you may not be able to get there but you know what's going on. That was quite integral. We had to disseminate our own information, which ties into archives, because we couldn't count on being written about in *Time Out* and *City Limits*, the papers or anything, you know?⁵ So, we had our own newsletters and publications like *Artrage*.⁶ If you wanted to let your community know, whether it was made up of women or people of colour, you had to create your own network. A lot of that was done by photocopying sheets of paper.

Althea When I introduce the Women's Art Library to people now, I always bring out the full run of *MAKE*, the magazine of women's art. The publication started off as a folded A3, black and white sheet, printed on both sides.⁷ It was published in 1983 straight through to 2002 – that is quite a stretch of time. I always say that there's more politics in that sheet of A3 paper that I could reproduce on a photocopier today very easily and distribute. In fact, I have done that in classes as a gesture to the importance of print and text – seeing your name in text and seeing writing around women's art – which I did a lot of – just to create this discourse is important as well. I don't have an issue that I can grab at home, so you'll just have to imagine these three magazine boxes crammed with discussion about women's art practice. Not always in complimentary terms, but, you know, it was meant to be a critical space.

Janice I think the other issue was this idea of self-definition of an artist. Because I think that it's so taken for granted. Obviously, Rita you can talk about this. Particularly in the UK, you had to claim this idea of being an artist, which is now almost not even thought about. I was just wondering if you could speak to that Althea, and Rita you could talk about it as somebody who's involved in the Black Arts Movement through to WOCI – the Women Artists of Colour Index.

Rita I know that at Brixton Art Gallery we were considered quite radical because we showed all the work together, even if it was thematic. The idea that you would have photography next to painting, next to

printmaking. We would also have a performance that would be going on, listed as one of the events. So, we always crossed media and it doesn't seem like it's radical now, but in the 1980s it was.

Janice I'm more interested in this idea which we talked about last week – we were talking about women in particular, but also the Black artists in the 1980s – that you had to claim the space of being an artist. Could you speak to that? Because I think it is something which is surprising now.

Rita Well, there were very few places to show and the solidarity of showing as a woman or the solidarity of owning the title 'Black', which was always derogatory – the dismissiveness that there couldn't be any Black artists because they were too busy working. Also that your work or your subject matter would be dictated by your ethnicity or your gender. I mean it seems really bizarre to even talk about this, but the assumption that women did small flower paintings or domestic paintings and a lot of women – I mean, you get Georgia O'Keeffe who does giant flower paintings, you know? There were these labels that were put on via the establishment, but if you want to work in a particular medium and if you are serious about your medium then it's problematic when your work isn't perceived as legitimate. If a man did textile work then it was seen as a practice whereas for a woman it was a hobby. I think there were so few places to accept your work which is one of the successes of the Brixton Art Gallery.

Althea Yes. Being in art school and trying to become an artist through the British system was all about gaining some recognition from a gallery space. It was never about you assuming that you could be an artist. You weren't an artist until you were 'shown'.

Rita And you 'were shown', you didn't show. Somebody had to take your work and take it from you and translate your work.

Althea Because you were just raw material. It felt like a world away from the US – this assumption that you couldn't identify yourself as an artist without having that validation. Which is going back to the idea of the slides. Actually, the slides were the material that you validated your practice through as well. And I felt looking back over the slide collection recently in my doctoral research, in relationship to digitisation and looking at all this stuff, you can't even see the images anymore. There is this idea that it's a redundant collection; to me, there's so much around the slides that indicates what labour went into making them. Because doing this – photographing your work or getting your work photographed and then presenting yourself through slides – was part of the process of validating your own practice and stepping back, giving the work titles, making notes with their dimensions.

- Rita And knowing how to shoot your work, finding a white space to shoot it against, and not put it on the wooden panelled wall or in the garden. Asking yourself, how do you get the right lighting for your work?
- Althea The techniques of looking professional [laughs].
- Rita Learning how to crop your photograph, for instance. And after you get all that done, finding out if it came out as you had intended once it's been processed. But also slides were used by publicists who would look at work, or would have to be sent to galleries. They were the commodity.
- Janice I was just wondering, because the Women's Art Library, apart from the fact that it was just women's work, there wasn't really a formal collecting strategy, was there?
- Althea Oh, no.
- Janice So a lot of the stuff was just stuff that was given.
- Rita Part of the thing at this library was it was self-selecting. That was the whole thing. If you considered yourself an artist then what you decided to put in your slides constituted 'your slides'.
- Althea That was your showcase as well. I always felt that that space belonged to the artist when they were paying members. Now it's considered an archive and it's more fixed. But if anybody said, 'I can't stand the idea of those slides being on view or available to see', it wouldn't occur to me to say, 'Well, too bad, it's the property of Goldsmiths' or whatever. It's always the property of the artist just like intellectual property.
- Rita But those things went hand in hand. The slides were the intellectual property of the artists and the library was just the holding space. If you lived in Cornwall and you wanted somebody to see your work, they could go to the library and see the work. It had all the good intentions of being able to do that, but it never really was used as a marketing tool. Although, I know that I had some work that was seen through the slides for a women's press book, so, there were people that would call up often asking for a type of work – 'Do you know... we're looking... we would like to use a Black artist', or, 'we're looking for paintings of... we're looking for portraits', or, 'we're looking for certain things to illustrate a book'. We didn't get as many of those as we could have, but whenever we got them, we were there to facilitate.
- Janice This brings us to issue of access, I suppose – this is the same with Panchayat, with arts organisations the idea of access is unwritten largely – that there is open access to the artist and whoever wants to come and see [their work]. Was that true for the Women's Art Library?

- Rita The difference between the Slide Library and a lot of other places I worked at was that the library had specific hours and you could make an appointment, but also you could drop in; you were better off making an appointment, but people did just drop in. When we were at Fulham Palace it wasn't on the main drag so you actually had to purposely go there, you know? So, you had to make a trip to the library. But you knew the hours and you knew if you were looking for [someone]. I know that I tended to work possibly Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. I can't remember how many days I worked, that blotted out of my mind. But if you wanted me you could find me on those days.
- Althea And this is pre-emails, pre-internet accessibility. To justify itself to funders, it had to have this mission statement that was always reiterated – this formed the constitution of the organisation as well, which is registered with the Charity Commission, I guess. It was about promoting the practice of women artists. I remember the word promotion was meant to encapsulate this idea of collecting, but also outreach, the newsletter, trying to act as a network space. But also, as Rita described, not terribly effective as an artist agency. The opportunities for artists to do anything except teach in schools or do a bit of teaching in higher education were few and far between. There was the community arts movement, maybe.⁸ That kind of work.
- Rita People would come to look if they wanted to curate an exhibition. I remember someone wanting to do a goddess show and we had, like I said, Monica Sjöö, and lots of other books of women who made goddess-based work. So, even if you were quite specific, whether it was regarding subject matter or culture, you could come and look at the slides and then approach the artist afterwards. You could look at the selected work before you got in contact with the artist, you didn't necessarily have to go directly through the artist to see their slides.
- Althea That was the other thing. The idea of being accessible and having the obligation to be accessible. We were like a conduit between artists and a possible audience, as well as researchers. Once the collection is in an institution, it no longer works like that.
- Janice Althea, what you have described is that regardless of its former mission statement, the Women's Art Library functioned in a number of ways. It was about promotion, it was about collecting, it was about dissemination and it was also about dialogue around feminist debates. A lot of this, however, is implicit and not written down. The mode of operation – you could turn up, you could touch the slides, you didn't have to know about the collection to access it, you could browse. All those things are largely implicit. What happens when this organisation, which is largely filled, like Panchayat was, by people who are not formally trained as archivists, librarians or collections managers – that is more of an arts organisation, a working resource – moves into an institution where it has to deal with very formal academic structures – academic in terms of professionalised

archivist practice or librarian practice? I would say that [when Panchayat was moved into an institution] it was divorced from that idea that this was something which was open and needed to be accessible. Could you speak about your experience? You moved with the collection from its independent base. Was Fulham the last independent base?

Althea No. Central Saint Martins. We had that year there.

Janice Could you speak to that transition in terms of what you think happens in that interface between this organisation which has a very different way of operating and a very different way of presenting the collection, different from academic users who are used to, you know, browsing through databases. What was your experience of moving into that formal situation and was it a positive one, largely?

Rita I mean, I think to a certain level in the library – the Slide Library – we were playing at being an institution.

Janice Right.

Rita We were an institution, but we also came out of an anarchic background and we wanted people to be active. And we were conscious about not being gatekeepers and we even were aware of the term gatekeepers whereas in a lot of institutions it doesn't even occur to them that they might be. I also know the difference – as a practitioner, having an exhibition at the British Museum – I was invited into the place where the keepers were, it was a lot more informal than had I been an outside person asking for information. Once you're sort of within the inner sanctum that place becomes very different.

Janice I wonder, Rita, if you could talk about your cousin's experience when she came here to do some research on Keith Simon, your uncle?

Rita Well, in my recent exhibition I invited my cousin to show a few pieces of my uncle's work. My uncle lived here in the 1950s and 1960s and left in the early 1970s.

Janice So this was Keith Simon, the British artist.

Rita Keith Simon. He was a painter and showed at the ICA in the early 1950s. He showed with Picasso, it was quite a major show. But when she made appointments to go to the ICA archive that Tate had and has, she never actually got a chance to see the work. It was quite difficult for her to get access to the things that he was in. Also, a lot of the work hadn't been digitised and granted an organisation like Tate must have so much of a backlog and the amount of people it would take to digitise all their stuff is just frightening when I think about digitising the things that I have – but, you know, if you want things to be accessible then you have to find a way to do it that does not damage the archive. But if someone gives

somebody an archive, there's a duty for it to be accessible, you're not giving them an archive so that they can hide it away. When I hand over my archive to Althea, I want people to be able to use it and I am aware that if I just give you the box it's going to be twenty years if not more, if ever, that someone's going to go through the boxes and archive it. And who knows what media they'll use by then? Probably back to slides [laughs]. But there is so much stuff even in one shoe box. Once you actually take it apart there's masses and masses of paper and ephemera.

Althea I think that there will always be tension between the stuff itself and the organising structures that it's supposed to become visible through. You know that I love the art, I wouldn't expect every single item in a box to ever be described really or photographed, but I would expect for those items to come to light in more informal interactions. So, a keen researcher who was interested in Rita Keegan's Copy Art, for example, and dives into that and finds all this material that maybe isn't visible in a catalogue – that's where the work of the archive gets done. It's really about how, when people come in to look at it and work with it, as long as they're allowed to do the photography, also create their own kind of digital records. And a lot of institutions are very wary, a lot of trusts in charge of the estate of artists or musicians or whatever are very wary of reproduction. Whereas, I think, what happened with the Women Artists Slide Library, maybe coming out of that informal collection practice that Janice is trying to describe here, is the fact that we're proliferated like hell. You know, we all – we've never had anybody working with an artist's archive file that didn't have a photocopier right in that room as well. It was all about generating more and more material and when I showed people the Women of Colour Index and people say, 'Ooh, it's the archive!' And I say, 'Well, you know, it's not unique material and you don't always call reproduced material legitimate archive stuff'. All these terms have become kind of loosened anyway, which I personally don't think is a bad thing. You will find a lot of photocopies and that's precisely what the strategy was. To create the files by photocopying that particular artist's section in a group show catalogue because we didn't have any monographs [on these artists].

Rita When I started teaching at Goldsmiths in the last millennium, you had a photocopy book and you'd get permission to photocopy articles – this would be the reader for your class because there was no internet. So, you couldn't find the thing on the internet. You couldn't find the article other than if you saw it in some bizarre publication and you photocopied it and got permission, and you would have a reader.

Janice Althea, what happens to that practice [of informal archiving, distribution and methodologies of access], which I think the librarians at the Tate would completely freak out about. What happens when this way of organising material (which isn't the Dewey system or whatever method of cataloguing) – when it enters this [formal/institutional/categorical system]? I'm talking particularly about the material at this point because

I want another discussion about the wider access. Where is the friction or do you just fit really easily into the existing system? If there is any friction, and where are the points of friction?

Althea

I think I've described to you and loads of others how it felt like a culture shock coming with the Women's Art Library collection into Goldsmiths [library]. Not into an art department as some of the other – we had got other proposals from feminist academics who wanted to rescue the collection [as a research resource based in their academic departments]. So, the scenario was, the organisation [WAL] was coming to an end, the funding was getting cut, the magazine stopped production and really what we were left with was this so-called archive, i.e. books and slides and press cuttings. And stuff that nobody had written about. Only the people who had used it knew what was in there as well as me, having worked with it and facilitated everybody else's use of it. We knew the value of it and so did those academics.

I think we were fortuitous that it wasn't incorporated into a strategy for creating a visual study centre or an academic centre. It was coming into a library that was extending their special collections. They really didn't have many special collections that related to the visual arts – they had very strong Russian music and folk music collections, so it was a strategy on the part of the librarians to enhance their special collections. The key was that the subject librarian, Jacqueline Cooke, was particularly conscious because she was married to an artist, trained as an artist herself, and was also a feminist. The books that were available about visual arts were lacking in women's art practice. (Not artist book publishing, which is a whole other industry.) Ephemera, the value of ephemera and this stuff that's generated by practice [was not represented]. I love quoting from [Cooke's] thesis on the importance of art ephemera, about what made her decide that having the women's art collection in the library would be a valuable thing. She writes:

As an art librarian, I am always aware that however many art books, magazines, slides, and videos I acquire for the library, more actions, events, and thoughts remain undocumented here. I realised that if I do not engage with this problem, not only will I be unable to provide current readers with information on the artists they are interested in, but my collections are likely to divulge only a simplified and reductive history to future researchers.⁹

Rita

I think what was always problematic about the library when I worked there was that it didn't have the rest of women's art. It didn't have the rest of 'world art' to be part of, and needed to be part of the canon as a whole. If you were looking at seventeenth-century, eighteenth-century painting, then you needed to see Fragonard art along with Le Brun, you know? It shouldn't be separate. You also need to be able to see the rest

of world art and where it fits in. So, actually being in a library of other creative work can only benefit the WAL.

Althea Well, I think in retrospect now because of what's happened, the explosion of interest in the Women of Colour Index, the Women's Art Library has been instrumental in, you know, being able to raise awareness and scholarship around the emergence of Black art in the UK from the eighties onwards too. Because when the students discovered the Women of Colour Index and X Marks the Spot...I know we're going to talk about that later. Those artists hadn't been exposed to those artists through their own art education, you know? They didn't even know who Lubaina Himid was at that point, you know? So, I feel that the Women's Art Library collection has countered what Jacqueline was afraid would be a reductive version of history, I think that it's great that it's opening up beyond women. I never think of it as being strictly about women's art practice, it's really about those practices that are represented through ephemera and the by-products of practice and self-documentation.

Janice When Panchayat entered the University of Westminster library it didn't bring a person with it. Shaheen and I taught at the University of Westminster for a couple of years, but we weren't tasked to work on the archive as such. It seems like you had a slightly different experience, but there are similarities. I think when the University of Westminster decided that it wanted the Panchayat collection to be moved out, and Maxine Miller, who was a manager at the Tate Library, came to see the collection, it was exactly because of the ephemera, which largely is open-source material. It's not original material, it's not handwritten letters from artists. But it was the photocopies, the postcards, the other stuff, the press cuttings that she recognised as really important. This was, as she said, evidence of the existence of this whole ecology of practice outside formal institutions. But in late 2014 when Shaheen and I went into the collection to look at it and then do some work on it and sort it out for the move, they presented us with quite a large number of boxes of ephemera which they just did not know what to do with – they actually described the collection as 'things'. For them, it didn't fit into any cataloguing or classification. Because it was open-source material, it didn't have value.

I was just wondering, what was the culture shock, if you could dig deep into that, when you arrived at Goldsmiths? What was the culture? Obviously like us, you've got this very sympathetic librarian who's aware of the importance of artists' work and of artists' ephemera. And Maxine has a long history with working with Black artists and Black art institutions. And I think without your Jacqueline Cooke; without Maxine, I think it would be a different story. What was still the culture shock when you arrived at Goldsmiths in relationship to the collection?



Fig.3
The Women's Art Library at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2021
© Althea Greenan

Althea

As you can see this is a kind of empty space (fig.3). The first thing was that I was very isolated. Thankfully, I was allowed access. Whether I was a paid member of staff or not, I was given over a month to ease in there. And this was justified because we brought money with the collection when it was gifted to Goldsmiths. I think that was a very critical thing. We also withheld money. It feels so strange to talk about it now, but money was deliberately withheld by the volunteer trustees – the so-called executive committee – that was looking after the Women's Art Library as an arts organisation and overseeing the transition of closing down with the guidance of the London Arts Board and everything else.¹⁰ It was quite a complex procedure and so there were monies held back on the condition that they could see that Goldsmiths was adhering to the Deed of Gift which was drawn up between the lawyers.

The Deed of Gift is really about ensuring that the collection was kept together, but also that it would remain accessible to the general public and not be just for academic use. Because it was really trying to retain the sense that it was a kind of crowd-sourced collection – the stuff was never paid for, it was donated. So it was about retaining that sense that

it belonged to a public and that there was a public out there that needed to be able to access, especially their own [material]. So, I personally felt that I was answering to that public far more than I was answering to the library because the library didn't need very much from me except knowing where stuff was. It feels a little strange to describe it now. But I suppose the culture shock came whenever I organised an exhibition or some sort of display or a talk publicising the collection, I still felt that because it was artists' material it needed promoting. I never felt that I could walk away from that initial mission of the whole collection, the whole *raison d'être* of it. But people working in a library are not committed to their collections in that way at all. They are committed to the organising or cataloguing, and being critical about terminology.

I see younger library workers and they're not always qualified, coming through and questioning the whole use of controlled vocabularies. But when I first got there, it was very much old school. You waited until somebody came along to ask for the material, you didn't go and seek out a public, so to speak. There was a disinterest, but nobody told me to stop doing it and I was able to gradually build a programming routine out of this material; because otherwise the material would have sat in a climate-controlled room that nobody visits. I just carried on the initial mission of the Women Artists Slide Library as best as I could and there were a lot of allies out there who were teaching or people who – when introduced to it – understood the value of it straight away. But that wouldn't be your colleague sitting next to you, apart from one person who does stand out and her name is Elizabeth Williams. She was looking at Black history and Caribbean studies, finishing up her thesis on the British anti-apartheid movement, the Black British anti-apartheid movement, which became a book.¹¹ And actually, thinking back, Elizabeth got it straight away and said, 'What have you got on Black artists?' So you just find your connections, and they sustain you. But as a culture I still feel edgy and I always introduce myself as somebody who didn't train as a librarian. I'm not trained as an archivist and I'm holding on to the simplified class mark system that the books have and all the other little things about archive cataloguing that retain the sense of integrity as well.

Rita

I mean, it's like when I was invited to do the Black women artists' selection at the library because they got funding for it and they felt that it was important that a person of colour would do it. When I did it, and I have no hesitation in admitting to being dyslexic so I always found it quite interesting that here I am being an archivist that's dyslexic... and with a love of books. But I went to Liz Ward who was at Chelsea School of Art, London, and she had started a collection of Black ephemera. I said, 'I am doing this alphabetically because I figure it's the easiest and people can find their way through it – do I need to do it Dewey Decimal?' And she said, 'No, just the simplest way is the quickest way into it', so I just continued doing it alphabetically.

I worked there for close to five years and when I left in 1990, I hoped that the information was clear. I would photocopy, as you say, from catalogues. Let's say I had a catalogue for [the exhibition] *Intimate Distances* and Maxine Walker, Sutapa Biswas and, I think, Zarina Bhimji.¹² I would photocopy each artist and put them in a file of their own and the catalogue would already be there, but I would separate things out. So, when you wanted to find Maxine Walker then you could find her. You wouldn't have to find the catalogue and then go to the things. So the photocopy meant it was separated, but it was as close to an artist monograph as you could get. Also, if I ever ran into any of the artists, I let them know that that they had information that was available at the slide library and that I wasn't part of the CIA, that it was just basically there as monographs of their work. The transparency of it was important for me, and the collection was quite important. When the women from X Marks the Spot came to me and asked me about it, I was just shocked that the thing that I had done in 1990 was relevant thirty years on. The result was the book *Human Endeavour: A Creative Finding Aid for the Women of Colour Index* (fig.4).¹³

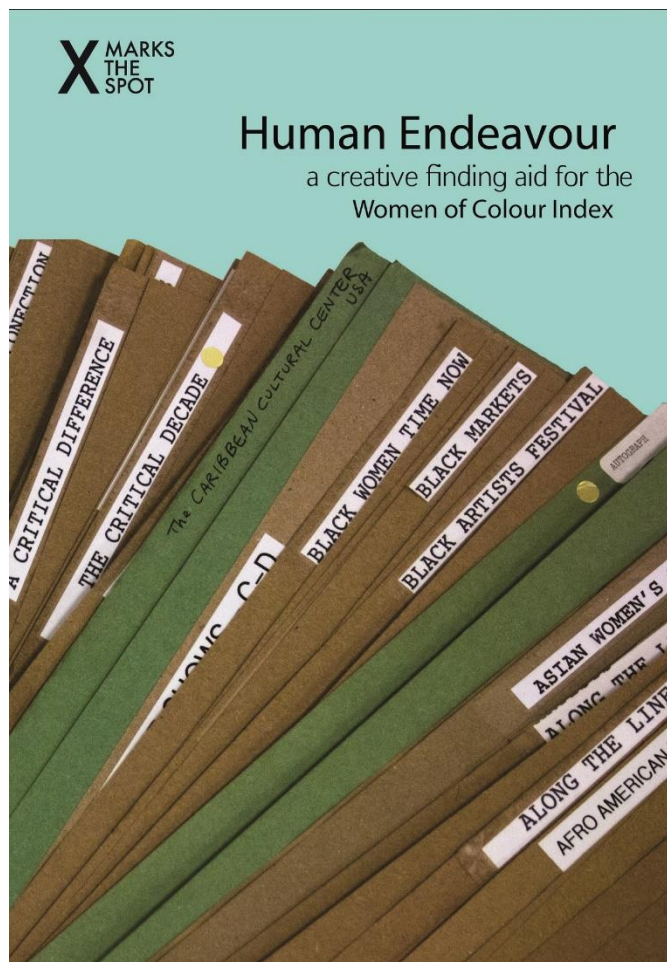


Fig.4
Cover of the publication *Human Endeavour: A Creative Finding Aid for the Women of Colour Index*
© X Marks the Spot: Lauren Craig, Mystique Holloway, Zhi Holloway, Gina Nembhard, Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski
© Rita Keegan

Janice We spoke about 'giving power back to the individuals'. Althea, do you want to speak more to what you mean by that and do you have any examples of how the collection does that? I was thinking about the fact that you taught, is it Jean Spencer's granddaughter?¹⁴

Althea I think you can facilitate the material to do the work as much as you can. This becomes a matter of a direct experience between the researcher and who they think the artist is or what they're thinking, their understanding of the artist, their connection to the artist. A recent example of this is when [Hannah Waters], the granddaughter of the artist Jean Spencer came to look at a file of material that Spencer's sister brought to Fulham Palace as a donation to the Women's Art Library in the 1990s. It is important to understand that the collection didn't just represent contemporary artists, it also represented artists who were no longer living, as well as historical artists. I guess this is an example of the cultural difference: I could have said, 'Right. I'll get this Jean Spencer material out for you. It's out on the table in the office, I don't come in on Thursdays but if that's the only day you can make then a colleague of mine will hand it over to you.' That is a perfectly normal way of making this material accessible. But I wanted to see this woman, I wanted to speak to her – I wanted to be able to tell her the story of the material arriving in the collection because I was there.

This is a bit of information about the connection that I have that I can share with this younger researcher. I also wanted to understand what she wanted from this material. Sometimes there's something else that you have that they don't know you have so it's only in that exchange that you get it. But as it happens with researchers coming into this collection, I get more out of it – I get something unexpected out of it in the same way that [researchers] do when they come in. Hannah had been to the collection of the Tate – Jean Spencer was a successful artist so there's also a collection of archived material at Chelsea School of Art, UAL. So, the Women's Art Library wasn't the only place that had some material and I believe a lot of it was photocopied so it's not super unique. But for her there was a real thrill, she said, in sitting down and being able to touch it. When she had been to, I think it was the Tate archive, there was a white glove policy. This seems kind of trivial now and there are plenty of researchers who love the gloves thing – you know, they come in and say, 'Where are the gloves?' But it's not necessary with this kind of material. Also the white gloves can make you a little clumsy in handling paper.

But that was something that was very important to her because her granddaughter was an artist herself. She's a performance artist. I think the reason she's revisiting Jean Spencer's – her grandmother's archives is that she lives with her grandmother's paintings and she is studying. She's looking at how we embody knowledge, how we absorb knowledge of our practice. And the ephemera was absolutely critical to her as a supplement

to the fact that she was so connected to actual artworks by Jean Spencer. And being able to touch and sit down with it as well. I do have to reiterate that this space, what I call the study space in special collections, and the knowledge that there's a whole load of material on women's art next door does seem to inflect how people understand that study space. I don't go around whispering, I don't impose silence on people particularly, and I consciously feel that I am working against those protocols which seem to characterise other spaces for looking at archives. I just don't want to replicate that personally.

Janice Do you think that's implicit?

Althea This is the problem, that it's implicit, I think. I can only reinforce it through practice and I come across as maybe eccentric or annoying or kind of different. But I thank you Janice for this conversation. I can reiterate and describe it but it's certainly not something that you can write into a protocol around a collection. Or maybe you can.

Janice I was just wondering, because it strikes me that a lot of the collections come with what would be classified in anthropology as intangible cultural heritage; practices transmitted when you join the collection. I've worked in a number of collectives and each collective has its own idiosyncrasies and hierarchies, but it's intangible. And I was just wondering if that principle of access which formal institutions find really problematic – and what I mean by access is that, you know, you can browse the collection, you can go touch it. Whereas here it's highly regulated what you can do with the collection, and it also assumes that you have a body of knowledge. There's these implicit intangible heritage practices which have been transmitted through these generational practices that come from a whole range of things... which are not visible, you know, when we handle the collections, but annoyingly I'm sure for the Tate are really important to how you think the collection is and how its future is. I don't know how to resolve that, but I think that is – that it's a problem, I think.

Rita As someone who has a collection and is about to hand it over, going through it there are things that I consciously collected, things that collected themselves, things that survived by default, and things that I have no idea how and why I managed to have. Doing the book over the last couple of years really highlighted what was there. The jigsaw [pieces] fit together. I guess I was lucky enough to have other people looking at it and could see through their eyes what the collection was and how it could have a life outside of me.

Janice I think that brings us nicely to that idea of intergenerational dialogue, because I know both of you have been working on that with different groups of women. And what struck me in our last conversation is that you both talked about the importance of the collections being evidence – so that the generations coming after would not have to reinvent the wheel. And also you used the term that they're kind of like 'touchstones'

to remind particular generations of the work that has gone before. Do you want to expand upon that Althea? What you meant by that? Because we were talking about shifting terminologies, shifting debates around practices.

Althea The collection is working on so many levels at the moment and one of them is to do with the so-called analogue, the material versus the digital. The 'touchstone', the idea of something that is a stable body of evidence, relatively stable is, I think, really important in order to maintain intangible practices. From my part it's maintaining a connection with the artists, and of course that could be all sorts of generations – it can be people coming in to revisit material they've had in the collection. These projects are all about re-materialising. It's certainly about restructuring the information.

Janice Somebody asked me this once and I think they were quite surprised at my answer. When you have a collection and if you have an implicit remit that is about that relationship with the artist, the material isn't precious, it has a story to tell but it isn't your story. Each researcher that comes along will tell a story within that material. It's not my story that is going to be told. Maybe if we think about this through terminology, we see within those collections, whether they be Panchayat, Brixton Art Collective or your own collection Rita, there are shifts in terminologies [such as understandings] of [the term] 'Black'. As in what we understood in the eighties as a political concept, is now very much an ethnic descriptor, in a way that was never meant in the eighties but has suddenly become. And you can talk about this shift in terminology and debates around sex and gender.

In some ways the debates were always [present]. The eighties are characterised as this kind of very, you know, 'right on' [era], where there were rigid categories and there were clear demarcations, you know, there was right and wrong. But actually, if you look back into those archives there's just a huge number of debates going on about everything. You know, whether it be about sexuality, about women's-only spaces, about, you know, Blackness. There were just huge debates going on. And that's what I meant about this 'touchstone'. Rather than having a generation saying that 'we are reinventing how women's art is presented', actually you need to move the debate on rather than reinvent the wheel and say, 'well, there's no women's history'. That's what I meant. Is that dialogue between younger researchers part of the debate or is there something else going on? I wonder.

Rita Well, language is always quite difficult. I mean, when I was invited to do the Black Women's Archive...

Janice Oh, it was originally the Black Women's Archive and then it became the Women of Colour Index.

Rita Black was – it was an inclusive term, it was a political term, it was a self-defining term. But then there was the question of whether you capitalise the B and then somewhere in the mid-eighties or late eighties you started hearing ‘people of colour’. In the end I felt it was much more inclusive – it used to be non-white. You weren’t Black, you were non-white, you know? You weren’t in little check boxes so there was an inclusiveness to ‘women of colour’. But also, my birth certificate, it says ‘coloured’, you know, and I remember being a Negro, I remember being Black and, you know, African American. These terms, especially as an American, they’re always fluid but they tend to mean the same thing. I found it quite ironic that all of a sudden people of colour became Black, which was what was on my birth certificate to begin with. So, there is the issue of naming and owning the name – I think that becomes part and parcel with it. But also there were always issues of women-only spaces and Black-only spaces and the issue of feeling comfortable within your discussion. This had a lot to do with why you had women-only spaces.

Althea That’s critical. Creating the space for being comfortable for the dialogue, for the discourse, for anything that you wanted to thrash out. I think people come to the Women’s Art Library because of this notion of the space and I think that really hit me when Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski, who was really a critical force in the X Marks the Spot research collective that came and recovered the Women of Colour Index. When Ego describes how their research was facilitated she doesn’t say, ‘Oh, Althea knew where everything was, and she was very useful in finding the stuff’. I mean, she does say that, but what she also says, I think, is that ‘Althea gave us the space’ because the space was emotional, you know, enabling. There was so much attached to this idea of the space and I always feel that the space isn’t – it’s physical, you know, like a safe space to be able to talk and not be interrupted and have access to the materials and there’s no restrictions and you work with it. But I think the space is also this thing that you’re contributing to, and that to me goes back to the informal collection practices. That is what’s really important about them – how you didn’t have to have a qualification to come in and mount slides, which is how I started as a volunteer at the Women Artists Slide Library. I didn’t know anything about library practices or archives, or, you know, picture agencies or women artists. I didn’t know any. These are spaces of exchange, but also of learning, and you don’t have to have some qualification to be welcomed in and you’re contributing.

Rita It’s almost Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, you know? It is about having that space to do whatever you want in it; to study, to make, to just be.

Althea And not always having to do it very perfectly. Going back to your idea of the touchstone Janice, I found one strange box that I never thought would see the light of day again (of course, here we are with circulars about terminology or themes), the ‘Motherhood’ box. The way boxes work in the Women’s Art Library is as a pre-digital way of cross-referencing. You

had the box and you threw in anything that kind of related to that thing, because you were being asked about that thing constantly. In the last year, partially as a response to COVID and climate change, a student wanted to set up a reading group on whether or not to become a mother. This is quite powerful. There are lots of readings that she was going into but one of her first research forays was, in between all the lockdowns, to get into the Women's Art Library and look through this box and get a broader view of how it works with art practice. In addition to putting her in touch with the box, I also [connected her to] mother artist groups that have been in touch over the years. So what's exciting for me is that I understand the role of these ephemera or these collections in networks that are working today to explore things [in conversation with the past] so that they don't have to reinvent all that discourse.

Janice I was just wondering, Rita, about your collaboration with X Marks the Spot – it's both an archival project in terms of the archive of your work, but also an historic intervention, rethinking the position of Black art, women and transatlantic networks.¹⁵ It includes your uncle, a forgotten member of the Caribbean Artists Movement, Keith Simon. I just wondered if you wanted to talk about that because there's multiple dialogues going across space, you know, the space of the diaspora.

Rita Well, I was really taken aback when a person who I had met before came up to me and asked me about this archive, this job that I had done in 1990. And I'm thinking, 'What did I do?' As a freelance worker you do your job and no matter how much it meant to you, have to walk away from it. All you can do is hope it will do what you wanted it to do, but you've got to let it go. Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski, Lauren Craig, Gina Nembhard and the other women that were involved actually got what I wanted out of this archive and that it was still relevant thirty years on. I mean, it's very rare to actually see and experience that. I was really taken aback that it was of some use and that it did what I wanted it to do. And that I wasn't all over the archive, it was an object within itself. And yes, I made it, but it wasn't about me. And I've known enough people who collect make it about themselves and I purposely try to make it about the individual that I had information on. I mean I didn't necessarily expect it to be added to after I left because I know the way things were. You know, I hoped that it was quite clean in the way it was finished. But then working with them and seeing what they got out of it and then the other groups that have worked with it, and that it can be added onto has been really amazing. And then working with the women in my exhibition, it was great to feel a continuance and a legacy – you really can't ask for more than that, you know?

Janice This is a kind of personal and slightly cheeky question. The three of us weren't born here. I mean, I've spent most of my life here but part of my presence and my understanding of my own self is a migrant experience and having a mother who wanted and didn't want to be here. Does that [have an] impact? And we are all in charge of what is now considered

British collections, which just came to me this morning. Has that in any way impacted the idea that we're custodians of these collections, do you think?

Rita

Well, I think we all bear witness, you know (fig.5)? There's a special place for people who are within it but without it, and maybe because we were placed as witnesses and we have a different perspective of how we view the place that we're in, you know, for good or ill. And, I guess it's not an accident that we straddle that place.



Fig.5
Projection of Lauren Craig's *Women of Colour Index Slide Show* onto former site of the Centre for Caribbean Studies, Goldsmiths, Laurie Grove, London on the occasion of the launch of Human Endeavour, October 2015
© Lauren Craig
Photo © Lesley Ruthven

Janice

Althea?

Althea

I feel like I'm still catching up. It was my way of becoming part of something. It's never stopped being a kind of challenge, and I thought this morning how weird it was that I actually felt compelled to do a PhD, and that is a direct result of being in that institute of higher education. But I focused the PhD on the stuff that I thought was going to get overlooked, which is the slide. So, it is really a matter of understanding where we are.

Janice

There's that slight sense of being outside, does it give you a different perspective on providing evidence of your own existence through the work or is it just a question of – as you say, you always feel as if you never know, because that outsidership that you feel means that you need to know more and more about the stuff in a way that somebody who was born and bred here may not have that same impulse, I suppose.

Rita

Well, many, many, many years ago I had my hair dyed but with all sorts of amazing colours. And when I had my hair purple and people stared at

me, I could put it down to the fact that my hair was purple. Not that they didn't stare at me before or after, but it meant that 'Oh, that's why they're staring at me – it's not because I am wearing all sorts of strange clothes and being me'. One's foreignness is a good [excuse] to think, 'Oh, well, that's why I'm doing this'. But it might just be the way I am. We're also all artists. We are. We participate, we stand back, we analyse. And I think it is all part of our nature.

Althea I think you're more of an artist than me though because I just feel like I have to listen to artists. The artists are the leaders here and I think that's what the collection has taught me more than anything. So how can you keep up with the artists? It is impossible.

Rita I have no respect for them. [laughs] But I do. I love them.

Althea Mm. It's a lovely question.

Rita To do all this and have a practice has been incredibly difficult, which is probably why I don't have a PhD. Because, you know, I've been too busy doing the work and making and trying to fit all these things into place. And also, you know, academia – it likes me for a little while but – you know, it kisses me, but it doesn't put a ring on it. [laughs]

Janice Last year I attended an online seminar by a young group of women of colour Fine Art students at the University of Leeds. They invited Griselda Pollock to talk and one of the questions from the audience to Griselda was about her legacy, because Griselda had just retired. She said something which really surprised me. She said that she didn't want to have a legacy and that she felt that over time she would just disappear like water almost and dissolve. I'm going to be cheeky – what's your legacy, do you think, at the Women's Art Library?

Althea I think it'll just be that PhD with the pink cover, because I got it covered especially for the collection. The rest was custodianship that has to be passed on. It's something I'm thinking about now because I know I can't hold it forever. I'm keeping an eye out for the person that might be able to use it and make it useful. But legacy is intangible perhaps. I understand that feeling that Griselda has and feel that it's very dispersed. And when it comes back, like for you Rita, when people come back to you and say, 'Oh, you made a big impression me', you know, at some point in some encounter, that is intangible.

Rita As a person who makes objects, I make because I don't know how not to make, you know? I always have, and I always do. But as I've gotten older, I've had to think about what to do with the stuff that I make. And I guess that came up when I met X Marks the Spot, you know, that I had this stuff and it would be the perfect add-on. Just because I left the library it didn't mean I stopped collecting.

Althea That's what was so brilliant about X Marks the Spot. They didn't understand the archive as the set of stuff that was in a box and that had a beginning and an end. Because that's part of archive cataloguing, is that you describe the dates that these are relevant to. They saw the whole thing as being part of someone's practice and that practice included other things like being an artist. [laughs] That's what I found so interesting about their work with the Jo Spence archive, which is why it was such a perfect encounter, I think between that group and the Women of Colour Index (which really is Rita) and Ain Bailey paying tribute to the Lambeth Women's Project.¹⁶ It's, again, a dispersed kind of legacy but a dispersed understanding of what archives are constituted of.

Janice I think for me what was really interesting was that they didn't see, as you say, a finished point, it was a beginning for them to develop other ideas and other relationships and other thinking. And I think in some ways if that's all the archive does and even if they don't necessarily produce a book or anything, if that's all it does, perhaps that might be its use in terms of thinking about embedding itself in a history, but at the same time moving forward in ways that you can't sanction or prescribe in anyway, but it's just that.

Rita It does have to be a continuum, because it's all about not having to reinvent the wheel, you know? I remember meeting this young woman, about ten, fifteen years ago and she was photographing herself and stuff like that. She was at one of the major colleges and I asked, 'Have you seen the work of Jo Spence?' And she said, 'No'. And I thought, you know, I'm not saying that your work is like hers, but if you had seen the work of Jo Spence or Rosy Martin, you could have taken your work to another level. And that's the advantage of having an archive and also the advantage of having a library and having this art practice as part of the canon. That you don't have to keep on reinventing the work, you know? Seeing the stuff that Black artists did in the eighties and the nineties, seeing the anti-apartheid work, seeing work that women did on pornography and on the body, motherhood, it is about a legacy, but it's also about being able to continue a practice, being able to move it onto the next space. And it's not that you can't revisit it, but it's about having choice, having a bigger vocabulary, you can choose to use one word over the other and if profanity is the right word, then you use that or you use something else. It is about having an arsenal and being able to tap into a brighter, wider range of resources and see other things reflected at you as opposed to, you know, the artist as a young man.

Janice I think that's really good place to leave it. So thank you very much, I know it's a conversation that we are going to continue.

Rita Hopefully with a cocktail. [laughs]

Janice [laughs] Or some cake, anyway.

NOTES

¹ See Astrid Proll (ed.), *Goodbye to London: Radical Art and Politics in the Seventies*, Ostfildern 2010.

² For more on Evans-Hill's research, see <https://courtauld.ac.uk/people/lily-evans-hill/>, accessed 19 December 2022.

³ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, London 1981; and Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, London 1984.

⁴ Eighty-three artists from twelve countries were represented in this first international exhibition of works by women artists held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the University Art Museum in Austin, the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh and the Brooklyn Museum in New York during 1976–7. See Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550–1950*, exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1976.

⁵ *City Limits* magazine (1981–93) was an alternative weekly event listings and arts magazine for London. It was founded by former staff members of the weekly London listings magazine *Time Out* after the owner of *Time Out*, Tony Elliott, stopped running the magazine according to its original co-operative and equal pay principles. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Limits_\(magazine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Limits_(magazine)), accessed 3 October 2022.

⁶ For more information on *Artrage: The Inter-Cultural Arts Magazine*, see the National Archive catalogue record <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/dfcebae0-9cf4-4b15-be63-c164ea863b39>; and the UAL library catalogue, <https://ual-test-upgrade.koha-ptfs.co.uk/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=96623>, both accessed 3 October 2022.

⁷ *MAKE* magazine was the main publication produced by Make, the organisation for women in the arts that was formerly the Women's Art Library or Women Artists Slide Library prior to 1992. For more see <https://www.gold.ac.uk/make/magazine/>, accessed 3 October 2022.

⁸ Organisations like the Public Art Development Agency (PADA) exemplify how critical gallery education became a way for women artists to support themselves. See Felicity Allen, 'Situating Gallery Education', *Tate Encounters, Edition 2: Spectatorship, Subjectivity and the National Collection of British Art*, no.2, February 2008, https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-encounters/edition-2/tateencounters2_felicity_allen.pdf, accessed 19 December 2022.

⁹ Jacqueline Cooke, 'Ephemeral Traces of "Alternative Space": The Documentation of Art Events in London 1995–2005, in an Art Library', unpublished PhD thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London 2007, <http://research.gold.ac.uk/3475/>, accessed 19 December 2022.

¹⁰ Regional Arts Boards were subdivisions of the Arts Council of Great Britain (1990–2002). See 'History of Arts Council England', Arts Council England, London, June 2004, https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20090804182015/http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/regions/information_detail.php?rid=2&sid=1&id=52, accessed 3 October 2022.

¹¹ Elizabeth M. Williams, *The Politics of Race in Britain and South Africa: Black British Solidarity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*, London 2014.

¹² *Intimate Distance: Five Female Artists*, Photographers' Gallery, London, July – September 1989, <https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/whats-on/intimate-distance-five-female-artists>, accessed 3 October 2022. The exhibition featured work by Zarina Bhimji, Sutapa Biswas, Mona Hatoum, Ingrid Pollard and Maxine Walker.

¹³ X Marks the Spot, Joan Anim-Addo and Althea Greenan (eds.), *Human Endeavour: A Creative Finding Aid for the Women of Colour Index*, London 2015, https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/19685/1/XMTS_HumanEndeavour_e.pdf, accessed 19 December 2022.

¹⁴ Hannah Waters, 'Encountering the Jean Spencer Archives', Animating Archives research project, undated, <https://sites.gold.ac.uk/animatingarchives/hannah-waters-encountering-the-jean-spencer-archives/>, accessed 19 December 2022. Jean Mary Spencer (1942–1998) was a British artist known for her abstract paintings and relief sculptures; see <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/jean-spencer-2697>, accessed 3 October 2022.

¹⁵ For more information, see <https://ritakeeganarchiveproject.com/team/>, accessed 24 October 2022.

¹⁶ See 'Jo Spence Work (Part I and Part II)', in *Not Our Class*, research project, Studio Voltaire, London, no.1, 2012, <https://studiovoltaire.org/resources/jo-spence-not-our-class/>, accessed 19 December 2022. See also the website for the Lambeth Women's Project, which ended in 2012: <https://savelambethwomensproject.wordpress.com/>; and 'Ain Bailey and Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski in Conversation with Rosalie Doubal', Institute of Contemporary Arts, London 2019, <https://www.ica.art/media/00757.pdf>, both accessed 19 December 2022.

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A full screen-recording of the conversation is available at <https://youtu.be/TQqsi13miBM>

This conversation forms part of the [Panchayat Research Resource](#), an online publication devoted to the Panchayat Collection at Tate.

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