

LUKE WILLIS THOMPSON

21.2.18–15.4.18

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

The Adam Art Gallery is proud to present the first large-scale solo exhibition in a New Zealand public gallery by London-based artist Luke Willis Thompson. The exhibition is a major presentation in the Adam Art Gallery's 2018 exhibition schedule and a key event in the Visual Arts Programme of this year's New Zealand Festival.

Luke Willis Thompson's installation follows a model to which we are committed that invites an individual artist to produce an exhibition for our spaces, one that fully embraces our challenging architecture to articulate their artistic project in some new way. This aspect of our programme was initiated in early 2000 with the American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth's *Guests and Foreigners, Rules and Meanings (Te Kore)*, a remarkable insertion into the multilevel Chartwell Galleries that wove selected text fragments from a variety of sources in English and Māori around the walls of those vertiginous spaces. Thompson's is a new iteration, this time transforming the entire Gallery into a dark labyrinth within which three film works are projected. Between these two projects our audiences have encountered extraordinary installations by artists such as Pauline Rhodes, Anthony McCall, Billy Apple, Jacqueline Fraser, Peter Robinson, Simon Denny, Andrew Beck, and Ruth Buchanan. These have challenged their makers, installers, and visitors. Each in their way inextricable from their context, they reinforce our belief that direct experience is an essential component of art's meaning.

This new exhibition could not have been achieved without the hard work and generosity of many people. I thank the artist for rising to this opportunity, and make special mention of Adam Art Gallery curator Stephen Cleland for assisting him at every stage. I acknowledge also the creative work of the gallery team that has helped bring this project into being. Victoria University of Wellington provides core funding for the Adam Art Gallery; its support is inspirational in allowing us creative freedom to test artists and stretch our audiences with the aim of expanding minds, creating powerful experiences, and deepening knowledge.

This project has also benefitted from generous grants from Creative New Zealand, Chartwell Trust, and Jan Warburton Charitable Trust. We are grateful to our partners: the 2018 New Zealand Festival, The Clark Collection, Wellington City Council and Park Road Post Production, all of whom we have relied upon in various ways to realise the exhibition. There are also several individuals who have helped immeasurably and deserve to be named: Alex Davidson, Errol and Jennifer Clark, Samuel Forbes, Derek Gehring, Paul Harris, Sarah Hopkinson and Danae Mossman, Sonya Lacey, Karl Noldan, Katie Taylor-Duke. Finally, I would warmly like to thank the many individuals, families and villages in Fiji who so generously assisted in the production of Thompson's new work, *How Long?*, which we are proud to premiere on this occasion.

—Christina Barton

FINDING FORM FOR POLITICAL SILENCE: NOTES ON THE INSTALLATION

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me.

—Ralph Ellison, *The Invisible Man*

In the early stages of conceptualising this focused presentation of three filmic artworks, Luke Willis Thompson proposed to not only darken the galleries but to completely seal off all sources of natural light within the building. Viewed from the outside, we now peer into the ‘back’ of the exhibition. Raw timber-framed walls and partitions barricade the numerous glass doors and windows across the exterior—including one large wall which backs onto the south-facing glass façade, irreverently shutting out a view into the building which normally functions as a large display case for passersby. As we transition into the gallery through a temporary ‘light-trap’ corridor, we are drawn to a dim glow at the edge of an adjacent gallery. Thompson’s films are to be found at the furthest reaches of the Gallery’s three-level building, and by forcing us to traverse the near pitch black spaces to reach them, the artist creates the sense that we have entered one work rather than three. This also means we are incapable of ‘leaving’ the conceptual space these films evoke until we physically exit the building.

Reflecting on how these films are physically and conceptually framed within the architecture, I am struck by the myriad ways in which Thompson has, through the stages of his career, drawn on actual sites, buildings, and objects from the world. This has led the artist to explore a plethora of means to challenge the limits of where an art experience might begin and end, including: his radical exploration of displaced readymade objects, live performances, journeys through cityscapes and interventions in gallery architecture in the vein of institutional critique. In a sense, by staging scenes to be experienced or by placing invisible frames around events, situations, and places, his work was already filmic even before he took up imaging devices such as microfilm, photography, and 16mm and 35mm celluloid film.

In this exhibition, the first to bring three film works together in one setting, Thompson tests the possibilities of his own form of expanded cinema. Using the building as a projective device and at the same time rendering it invisible, he shows how images and spaces are informed as much by what is excluded or erased as by what they hold or show. By blocking each of the building’s doors and windows Thompson alters the airflow of the building, creating a subtle emphasis on breath (or its absence). The light-lock corridor and boarded windows not only block light but also psychologically seal the building. Here, we can experience the absence of sound in heightened ways.

In these dimly illuminated spaces,
Thompson pushes our senses into an
uncertain terrain. He not only withholds
sound, but also speech, erasing the
usual gallery signage, interpretation and
advertising. The only texts are the artist's;
they contain minimal information, just
enough to place the filmed subjects
in history. Other details are closely guarded
or deferred, until later, outside the work.
All of this, to me, suggests the experience
must be understood in philosophical terms,
as a kind of phenomenological theatre; a
threshold where the skin meets the world.

—Stephen Cleland

LEVEL 3

How Long? 2018

16mm, colour, silent

11 minutes, 26 seconds @ 24 fps

Kodak Vision 3 250d colour negative film
transferred to digital video

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Mhairi-Clare Fitzpatrick

Commissioned by Adam Art Gallery
Te Pātaka Toi, Wellington. Produced with
support from Creative New Zealand,
Chartwell Trust and the Jan Warburton
Charitable Trust. Filmed on location in
Lautoka, Suva, and Nausori, and with the
permission of the villages of Namoli and
Munua, December 2017.

How Long? is a new commission Luke
Willis Thompson has developed for the Adam
Art Gallery. Filmed in portrait orientation,
this film scales the distinctive vertically
proportioned space of the Gallery's Athfield-
designed complex.

The premise of *How Long?* refers to a
tradition of naming which is specific to
indigenous Pacific cultures. Thompson has
stated: 'Fijian names do not always follow
either maternal or paternal lines, nor do they
necessarily require antecedents.

New names can be given either as first or
surnames providing the event or the
relation that grants the name is significant
enough.' In the context of men and women
serving offshore, Thompson continues,
'a child born while their parent is serving or
killed could end up being named after
that war zone.'

Filmed in Fiji in December 2017, Thompson's
new artwork presents four individuals from
different families, who each carry the name of
a nation or contested territory. Arranging
the subjects from oldest to youngest and
making their names available in their
anglicised form, the portraits collectively
construct an embodied timeline which
maps the global deployment of Fijian soldiers
and security forces over the past four
decades: Jone Lebanon (born 1979), Rosi
Lebanon (born 1984), Rupeni Iraq (born
2011) and Inia Sinai (born 2017).

LEVEL 2

Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries 2016

16mm, b&w, silent

9 minutes, 10 seconds @16 fps

Kodak Tri-X 16mm b&w reversal stock

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Simona Susnea

Commissioned by the Institute of Modern Art (IMA), Brisbane. Produced in association with Chisenhale Gallery and Create, London. Filmed in London, 2016.

Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries mimics the format of Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*. Produced between 1964 and 1966, Warhol's films capture a line-up of individuals who passed through his famed Factory, each being invited to pose for the duration of a single unedited 100ft roll of film.

Thompson appropriates Warhol's medium and method, deploying the same Kodak Tri-X 16mm film stock, composition and lighting effects, to film two young Black Londoners. Both are descendants of victims of police brutality exacted upon their maternal forebears. Brandon is the grandson of Dorothy 'Cherry' Groce, who was shot by police in her home in Brixton in 1985 (an event that helped spark the Brixton Riots); and Graeme is the son of Joy Gardner who was similarly the victim of a botched police raid on her home in Crouch End, London, when she was seized for deportation in 1993.

In the Galerie Nagel Draxler presentation of *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries* (September 2016), the artist made the following changes to their Berlin gallery. The exhibition and office spaces were partitioned with a floor to ceiling wall; the street facing windows were applied with black film; the projector was encased in a locked box; and any functioning video cameras were removed. The result was a solitary viewing experience, where one could watch the film completely unobserved by others.

LEVEL 1

autoportrait 2017

35mm, b&w, silent

8 minutes, 50 seconds @ 24 fps

35mm Kodak Eastman Double-X BW

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Mhairi-Clare Fitzpatrick

FILM AND LIGHTING TECHNICIAN

Miranda Langevin

PROJECT LIAISON

Sara Cluggish

Commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery,
London. Filmed in Minneapolis, 2017.

In July 2016, Diamond Reynolds's partner, Philando Castile, was shot and killed by a police officer following a traffic stop in St Paul, Minnesota, USA, while Reynolds and her four-year-old daughter were passengers in the car. During the seconds immediately after seven shots were fired, and during Castile's final moments, Reynolds broadcast, via Facebook Live, the exchange between herself, the officer, and Castile. On the strength of her evidence, the policeman was charged with the unreasonable use of force, the first such case to be brought against the police in over 200 incidents in the state over three decades. The special prosecutor appointed to the case credited Reynolds' bravery for this result. Yet, in June 2017, despite Reynolds' video being played to the jury as evidence alongside an abundance of other forms of state surveillance and police-recorded footage, the officer who shot Castile was acquitted of all charges.

During the period of indeterminacy between charges being laid and the subsequent trial, Luke Willis Thompson produced a portrait of Diamond Reynolds, working in close conversation with her and her lawyer for his commission and exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery, London. His film, *autoportrait*, is slow-paced and silent, in formal contrast to Reynolds's own digital footage. Being singular and analogue, the work could only be experienced in the space in which it was shown. Thompson drew on the auratic quality of 35mm black-and-white film to grant Reynolds a direct and almost physical presence. Yet *autoportrait* is more than a mere counter-image. It offers the potential for a different kind of empathic connection, requiring us to attend to a new set of actions in order to understand Reynolds' original networked video, which moved with uncontrollable speed across class, racial, and geographical borders, reaching individuals across the world on a bodily level.

autoportrait therefore operates within a larger technological frame, attending to the ways in which vision, perception, and belief are structured through media. By allowing Reynolds to compose herself for the camera, Thompson compensates for the fact that the motivations behind the split-second decision to shoot cannot be captured on film. He requires the viewer to imagine the fear and racist visual logic that coalesced to produce that catastrophic event, asking us to consider the ways in which thought itself is conditioned by mediated representations, and how, in turn, these influence justice.

BIOGRAPHY

Born and educated in Auckland, New Zealand, Luke Willis Thompson left in 2013, after completing a MFA at Elam School of Fine Arts, The University of Auckland, to undertake post-graduate studies at the Städelschule, Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. He then moved to London where he was the 2016–17 Chisenhale Gallery Residency artist. Since his first solo exhibition (*inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, Hopkinson Mossman, Auckland 2012)—which radically rethought the exhibition experience by emptying the gallery and inviting visitors to take a journey by taxi to an undisclosed destination (his family home in Epsom)—Thompson has produced a deeply thoughtful body of work that uses objects, people, spaces, and images as vehicles to unlock traumatic histories whether these are of racial inequality, institutional violence, colonialism, or the cruel effects of global warfare and forced migration.

Since winning the prestigious Walters Prize in 2014, the artist has received considerable critical attention. His works have been included in: *Field Guide* (Remai Modern, Saskatoon, 2017); La Biennale de Montreal (2016), São Paulo Bienal (2016), Asia Pacific Triennial (Brisbane, 2015), the New Museum Triennial (New York, 2015), The Fifth Auckland Triennial (2013), and he presented *Misadventure*, a solo exhibition at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane in 2016.

Thompson's *autoportrait*, the film he made for his solo show at Chisenhale Gallery in 2017, has been selected for the 2018 Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize and June 2018, he will present a solo project at Kunsthalle Basel.

Luke Willis Thompson is represented by Hopkinson Mossman, Auckland/Wellington, and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne.

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

All events are at the Adam Art Gallery.

24 FEBRUARY, SATURDAY, 2PM

Luke Willis Thompson in conversation with Christina Barton & Stephen Cleland.

3 MARCH, SATURDAY, 2PM

In the wake of performance – a discussion with Amelia Jones moderated by Geoffrey Batchen

Renowned art historian and performance theorist, Amelia Jones, will address questions about performance, temporality, liveness and representation, with artist Luke Willis Thompson, curator Stephen Cleland, and moderator Geoffrey Batchen.

10 MARCH, SATURDAY, 2PM

Liner notes: a critic and a curator – Laura Preston & Wystan Curnow in conversation

Over the course of 2017 while based in Athens for documenta 14, curator and editor Laura Preston exchanged a series of emails with Auckland-based writer and curator, Wystan Curnow, in which they discussed their relationship to art and place. In Wellington, they continue this conversation face-to-face, situating Luke Willis Thompson's exhibition as an encounter in their deep engagement with contemporary art.

24 MARCH, SATURDAY 2–4PM

Fiji now – a panel discussion

This panel will explore Fiji's complex history and its consequences for its people and their entanglement with global politics.

15 MARCH, THURSDAY, 5.30PM

Screening – Portrait of Jason, Dir. Shirley Clarke, 1967

Selected by Luke Willis Thompson & supplied by Mubi Films, London.

22 MARCH, THURSDAY, 5.30PM

Screening – Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien (No Regret), Dir. Marlon Riggs, 1992

Selected by Luke Willis Thompson, supplied by Video Data Bank, Chicago.

7 APRIL, SATURDAY, 2PM

The Philando Castile story – a panel discussion

Drawing on the events in the aftermath of the shooting of Diamond Reynolds' partner, Philando Castile, in a traffic stop by Minnesota police, commentators will consider the role images play in resisting and perpetuating institutional violence.

14 APRIL, SATURDAY, 2PM

Peter Shand, art historian and Head of Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland, reflects on the work of Luke Willis Thompson.

COLOPHON

Published by the Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi at Victoria University of Wellington, to accompany this exhibition, 21 February – 15 April 2018

Exhibition curator Stephen Cleland
Editor Christina Barton
Design Samuel Forbes

First printed in February 2018

© 2018 Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi

All rights reserved. Except for reasonable purposes of fair review, no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means without the prior written consent of the publishers.

All works reproduced with kind permission of the artists, owners or their representatives.

The Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi is the university art gallery of Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.

Director Christina Barton
Curator Stephen Cleland
Exhibition Officer Andy Cummins
Collection Officer Sophie Thorn
Gallery Administrator Ann Gale

Adam Art Gallery
Gate 3, Kelburn Parade
Victoria University of Wellington
PO Box 600
Wellington 6140
New Zealand
+ 64 4 463 6835
adamartgallery@vuw.ac.nz
www.adamartgallery.org.nz

The exhibition is generously supported by Victoria University of Wellington, Creative New Zealand, Chartwell Trust, Jan Warburton Charitable Trust, Wellington City Council, The Clark Collection and Park Road Post Production.

Te **Adam**
Pātaka **Art**
Toi **Gallery**