

Staying Power: Photographs of Black British Experience, 1950s-1990s

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#InspiringPower

High Street Kensington, 1976,
© Al Vandenberg



This spring the V&A will present a display of over 50 recently acquired photographs that explore the experiences of black people in Britain in the latter half of the 20th century, enhanced by excerpts from oral histories gathered by Black Cultural Archives.

Over the last seven years the V&A has been working with Black Cultural Archives to acquire photographs either by black photographers or which document the lives of black people in Britain, a previously under-represented area in the V&A's photographs collection. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Museum has been able to collect 118 works by 17 artists ranging from Yinka Shonibare's large-scale series *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998), to studies of elaborate headties worn by Nigerian women, by J.D. Okhai Ojeikere, to black and white street photography of 1970s London by Al Vandenberg.

Staying Power will showcase a variety of photographic responses to black British experience. On display will be intimate portrayals of British-Caribbean life in London in the 1960s-70s by Neil Kenlock, Armet Francis, Dennis Morris and Charlie Phillips. Music, style and fashion are documented in Raphael Albert's depictions of the black beauty pageants he organised from the 1960s to the 1980s to help celebrate the growing black community in Britain and Norman 'Normski' Anderson's colourful depictions of vibrant youth culture of the 1980s and 90s.

The display also features more conceptual explorations of race and identity. Yinka Shonibare's series, *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, depicts the artist playing the role of a dandy. The work demonstrates Shonibare's identification with the dandy as an outsider or foreigner who uses his flamboyance, wit and style to penetrate the highest levels of society, which would otherwise be closed to him. Maxine Walker also draws attention to racial stereotypes by photographing herself in a variety of guises. In her *Untitled* series (1995) she presents herself with different skin tones and hairstyles as though they were instantaneous transformations made in a photo booth.

To complement the photographs, Black Cultural Archives have collected oral histories from a range of subjects including the photographers themselves, their relatives, and the people depicted in the images. To coincide with the display at the V&A, Black Cultural Archives will also present an exhibition drawn from the V&A's Staying Power collection (15 January - 30 June 2015) at their heritage centre in Brixton.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

- *Staying Power: Photographs of Black British Experience, 1950s-1990s* will be shown at the V&A in gallery 38A (Free Admission)
- *Staying Power: Photographs of Black British Experience, 1950s-1990s*, an exhibition of around 25 photographs, will be shown at Black Cultural Archives 15 January – 30 June 2015 (Free Admission)

The V&A's Photographs Collection

The V&A was the first museum to collect and exhibit photography as an art form. It now holds the UK's national collection of art photography, which is one of the largest and most important in the world. The V&A has over 500,000 photographs in its collections, ranging from works created in 1839, when the medium was first invented, to the present.

Black Cultural Archives

Founded in 1981, Black Cultural Archives' mission is to collect, preserve and celebrate the heritage and history of Black people in Britain. They opened the UK's first dedicated Black heritage centre in Brixton, London in July 2014, enabling greater access to the archive collection and providing dedicated learning spaces and an exciting programme of exhibitions and events that explore British history from a unique perspective. The archive collection offers insight into the history of people of African and Caribbean descent in Britain and includes personal papers, organisational records, rare books, ephemera, photographs, and a small collection of objects.

bcaheritage.org.uk

The Heritage Lottery Fund

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