

**ANGELS WITH DIRTY FACES**

Curated by Olivier Marboeuf

with John Akomfrah / Black Audio Film Collective, Hiwa K,  
Christian Marclay, Penny Siopis, Graeme Thomson et Silvia Maglioni,  
Till Roeskens et Marie Bouts, Samir Ramdani



Graeme Thomson & Silvia Maglioni  
*Disappear One*, Courtesy of the artists and Spectre Productions

# ANGELS WITH DIRTY FACES

## Films and videos installations by :

John Akomfrah / Black Audio Film Collective, Hiwa K, Christian Marclay, Penny Siopis, Graeme Thomson et Silvia Maglioni, Till Roeskens et Marie Bouts, Samir Ramdani

**Narration :** Octavio Framboa

Opening Tuesday February 3rd from 6pm to 9:30pm



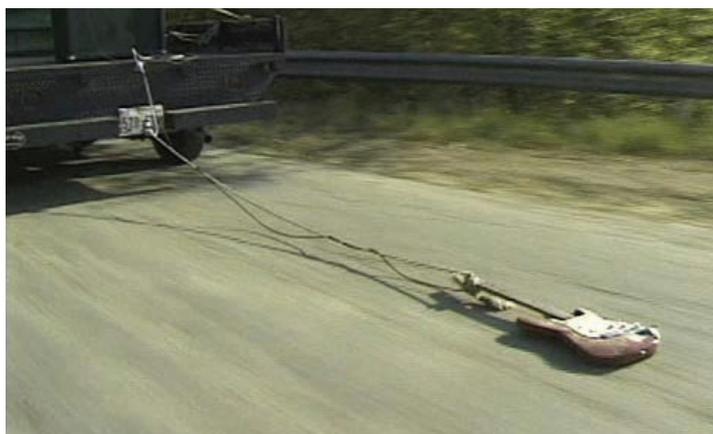
Black Audio Collective, *Handsworth songs*, 1986, 59 min  
Courtesy of the artist

*You see me as an angel, because of my voice, but an angel with a dirty face. It is due to my song that you know I am a creature, like you, a man. But the most miserable man. Because you saw me diving to the bottom, putting up no resistance. Some even heard my laughter even though they all believed I died in a hole. But it was to disappear and come back, on the summit of all ruins, to be the loud ghost that pisses on the very last lights of the West.*

Those are the narrator Octavio Framboa's words, in *Angels with Dirty Faces* (song), the first of a series of meditations dedicated to the body's struggle in a context of crisis. This narrative exhibition associates a music sheet with texts through which one can experience the vital power of a plaint. A distant echo of blues music. A musical genre whose purpose is an expanding rebellion. The sound of a *bottleneck guitar*, shrill and out of tune, the infra-bass dub of Thatcher's England, the blurred frequencies of oceanic voices. A re-enactment of history, a geography that seeps through unknown voices that take the Atlantic Ocean as one would the oldest earthly suburb.

*Travel, travel. Here, you won't find any new hands to hold your face.*

Olivier Marboeuf, a critic, curator and performer, has run Khiasma, an art center dedicated to moving images and contemporary literature since 2004. With this first exhibition at the Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, he goes on with his interest for narrative processes, considering the ways in which art can be read as a transmitter. Setting out new ways of reading contemporary history and especially colonial issues, his work (texts, performances and exhibitions) comes together in a vast speculative narration in which characters appear and links are created between scholarly or popular culture.



Christian Marclay, *Guitar Drag*, 2000, 14 mn, Courtesy of the artist

### Bodies in crisis

The exhibition *Rendez-vous : sortie de mon corps* (Meeting point: out of my body) (Khiasma, Les Lilas, 2013 and Savvy Contemporary Berlin, 2014) already developed *the story of a capitalist witchcraft*, a plot dear to Isabelle Stengers and François Pignarre (see the book published in 2007 by the Editions La Découverte). *Angels with Dirty Faces*, follows the same lines, looking for a new contemporary body, which would be the actual cradle of struggles, the territory where conflicts, patterns and stories

are imprinted and take shape. For Olivier Marboeuf, the body becomes a reading room, the area where secret knowledge and stories are told, and wait for a specific context to unveil. The exhibition becomes a ritual and magical space, in which each body and each history leads to its own arrangement.

### Chants

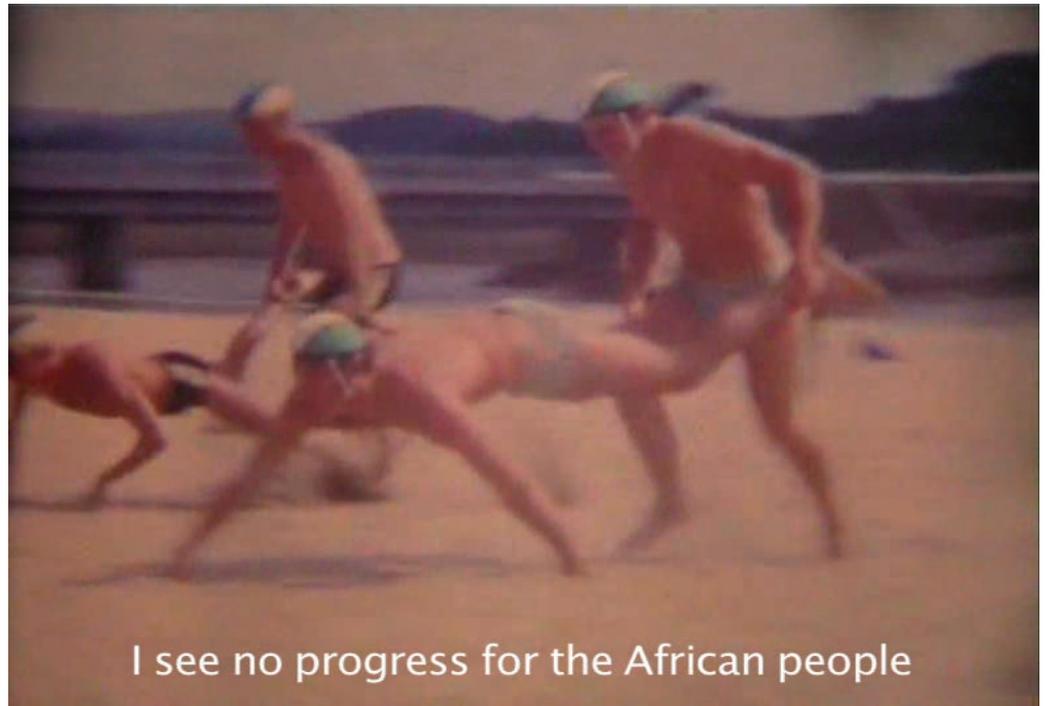
Lamentations are read as songs that accompany the collapse of a system experiencing a crisis situation. The plaint has nothing to do with renunciation, but seems to be the way to revitalize the fight, to go down in order to better come back, to change oneself, beyond despair, fear and impotence. The blues *Angels with Dirty Faces* is based on (the title refers to the British trip hop singer Tricky) doesn't refer to a specific song or music but to the spirit of survival, to struggles and auto-assertion of one's existence. Emphasizing its violent history, **Christian Marclay's** work (*Drag Guitar*) evokes a lynching, a guitar being dragged by a pick-up in a street in Texas. The plaint takes the shape of a scary dub in the **Black Audio Film Collective's** iconic masterpiece, *Handsworth songs* and turns into a vital breath when **Hiwa K** decides to play the harmonica in the middle of the crackdown of a protest in Irak. The filles du calvaire gallery exhibition is built as a musical and political music sheet that the visitor's body has to experience, as a pledge of resistance, a song of unity.

### Re-reading / Speculative narration

Olivier Marboeuf already insisted on this idea of the body as a transmitter in the text *L'Emeutier et la sorcière*<sup>1</sup> (The Rioter and the Witch). *Angels with Dirty Faces* could be its sequel. This exhibition borrows to music and songs their emotional intensity, their storytelling potential. Just like the **Obscure White Messenger** of the South African artist **Penny Siopis'** video, Olivier Marboeuf introduces us to a special narrator, a speculative character who experiences visions and orchestrates the various artworks included in this exhibition. But, as for Siopis' Dimitrios Tsafendas, the narrator being completely illegitimate, there cannot be a clear and one-sided interpretation or meaning. He simply gives voice to a song. Its poetry opens the door to new possible worlds and represents a wild answer to the crisis and the poisoned narration of the End of History.

As he wrote himself in the exhibition: *I don't have enough mouths to tell the worlds that buzz in front of my eyes.*

<sup>1</sup> *Sorcières pourchassées, assumées, puissantes, queer*, sous la direction d'Anna Colin - éditions B52



Penny Siopis, *Obscure White Messenger*, 2010, 15 mn  
Courtesy of the artist



Hiwa K, *This Lemon Tastes of Apple*, 2011, 13min  
Courtesy of the artist

## Videos and movies included in the exhibition

### ***Handsworths songs, Black Audio Collective*** (1986, 59'00'') / Video

The most emblematic work of the Black Audio Film Collective, founded by the English filmmaker John Akomfrah (amongst others), is a manifesto for the rising dub power that puts BBC reports to music, creating a luminous antidote to the racial violence of the Thatcher years.

### ***Guitar Drag, Christian Marclay*** (2000, 14'00'') / Video

An electric guitar, dragged by a pick-up, screams in an unbearable complaint. Drag Guitar is the radical work of the Swiss artist Christian Marclay (born in 1958) and replays in a dark version the lynching of an African-American killed in racist Texas.

### ***What rises from the depths cannot help but break the surface, Graeme Thomson and Silvia Maglioni*** (2015, installation of 3 screens, various length) / with the support of FNAGP

Based on the material of their upcoming movie Disappear One, this piece by the duo of artists Graeme Thomson and Silvia Maglioni tells the tale of an Atlantic crossing on a steamer boat, and turns it into a polyphonic song in which one can hear the story of Europe's crisis situation and its ghosts.

### ***Obscure White Messenger, Penny Siopis*** (2010) (15'00'') / Super 8 transferred into HD video

On the 6th of September 1966, when South Africa's Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd was about to deliver a speech in front of the Chamber, a parliamentary messenger stabbed him to death with a large kitchen knife. This messenger was Dimitrios Tsafendas. Blacklisted and known as a Communist-inclined foreigner, Tsafendas should never have been allowed on the territory. As a stateless person of mixed-race, he shouldn't have been appointed as a parliamentary messenger either, a position reserved for white South Africans. Based on Tsafendas' witness statement during trial, when he was judged insane, and on found footages gathered by the artist, *Obscure White Messenger* looks into the South African collective psyche, the denial of a political act, and into the possibility of a story told by an illegitimate narrator as history.

### ***This Lemon Tastes of Apple, Hiwa K*** (2011, 13'00'') / video

A swirl of protests started on the 17th of February in the Kurdish region of Irak. The clashes between citizens and soldiers lasted eight weeks with a record of ten deceased and four hundred wounded people. The artist Hiwa K (born in 1975 in Iraq) performed during one of those protests for greater justice and citizens' equality, for a better redistribution of wealth and political transparency. Despite police attacks and use of tear gas to disperse the protest, he went on with his harmonica interpretation of one of Ennio Morricone's song. Here, the breath's vital force contends wrestles with fear and terror.