

National Theatre

Press Release

25 April 2019

Ronan McKenzie: Photographs

Exhibition in the Lyttelton Lounge

Friday 3 May until September

Free during opening hours



Inspired by Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and Helen Edmundson's adaption for the National Theatre, photographer **Ronan McKenzie** has been commissioned by the National Theatre to respond to the post war journeys undertaken by Caribbean men and women between 1948 - 1971. Photographed in Leigh-on-Sea on the shores of the Thames estuary, McKenzie's documentary style images subtly connect ideas of seascapes, water, arrivals and new beginnings to Levy's *Small Island*.

Ronan McKenzie said: "For me this series represents the multiplicity and diversity in experiences of Caribbean immigrants, that begun in 1948 with the arrival of the Empire Windrush. Both being islands, The Caribbean and United Kingdom are linked by water, which inspired the artistic direction for the series. Similarly, immigration and personal journeys are sentiments that many people can relate to on a number of levels, and the clusters of people within my images aim to depict the connection between many of these stories."

Curated by **Natasha Bonnelame**, the exhibition takes water as a central theme reflected not only in terms of the location but also in the colour of the textiles and the intricate finger waves

of the hairstyles. Beautifully crafted shots of individuals are grouped with images of the collective, an important and significant detail in the development of the African Caribbean experience in the UK. The subjects in the photographs are all theatre makers living in or around London today.

Natasha Bonnelame said: “The majority of Windrush images are of young men, but women were there too. They were defiant and purposeful. We see this in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and Ronan McKenzie's considered and arresting images centre the women in the collective. This is both important and necessary.”

Related Talks and Events

[Caribbean Women's Diaspora: Calling the West Indies](#) Sat 18 May 2019, 2pm

[The Stuart Hall Project \(film screening\)](#) Mon 20 May 2019, 6.30pm

[A New Beacon: Caribbean Artists Movement](#) Thu 23 May 2019, 6.30pm

ENDS

For more information, contact Louisa Terry: lterry@nationaltheatre.org.uk

Images of some of the photographs featured in the exhibition can be downloaded [here](#).

Ronan McKenzie

Ronan McKenzie is photographer, director and curator from Walthamstow, North East London. Ronan has worked with brands including Nike, Stella McCartney and Universal Standard, and publications including i-D, Vogue US and The Travel Almanac. She recently funded and curated an exhibition titled *I'M HOME*, which featured four black British female photographers and aimed to create a truly accessible art space. Ronan is currently working on a range of projects across a number of artistic disciplines.

Natasha Bonnelame

Natasha Bonnelame holds a PhD from the Centre for Caribbean and Diaspora Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London where she has taught on Black British Literature and Caribbean Women's Writing. She is Archive Associate at the National Theatre and is currently writing a book on black British theatre to be published in 2020.

The National Theatre

The National Theatre's mission is to make world class theatre that's entertaining, challenging and inspiring – and to make it for everyone. It aims to reach the widest possible audience and to be as inclusive, diverse and national as possible with a broad range of productions that play in London, on tour around the UK, on Broadway and across the globe. The National Theatre's extensive UK-wide learning and participation programme supports young people's creative education through performance and writing programmes like Connections, New Views and Let's Play. Its major new initiative Public Acts creates extraordinary acts of theatre and community; the first Public Acts production was 2018's *Pericles*. The National Theatre extends its reach through digital programmes including NT Live, which broadcasts some of the best of British theatre to over 2,500 venues in 65 countries, and the free streaming service On Demand In Schools, used by nearly 60% of UK state secondary schools. The National Theatre invests in

the future of theatre by developing talent, creating bold new work and building audiences, partnering with a range of UK theatres and theatre companies.

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