

# Institute of Contemporary Arts

PRESS RELEASE

Five Volumes for Toni Morrison  
12 – 14 March 2020



Toni Morrison. Photo: Michael Lionstar

*In a way, her strangeness, her naiveté, her craving for the other half of her equation was the consequence of an idle imagination. Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of the dance, or strings, had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like an artist with no art form, she became dangerous.*

–Toni Morrison, *Sula*

The Institute of Contemporary Arts presents a three-day convening celebrating the life and work of the novelist, essayist and Nobel laureate in literature, Toni Morrison.

The convening revisits Morrison's 1986 talk at the ICA alongside screenings, talks, performances and study groups. A testament to Morrison's influence on the arts – including literature, film, painting and music – the convening explores the continuing impact of Morrison's work on generations of cultural luminaries.

Morrison is widely celebrated for a body of work which chronicled African-American experience and identity. Over five decades, Morrison authored 11 novels which spanned the 17th century to the present day, as well as children's books and essay collections. Renowned works include *Song of Solomon*, which received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977, and *Beloved*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Morrison was the first African-American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Morrison was awarded the National Humanities Medal in 2000; the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012, which was presented to her by President Barack Obama and is the highest civilian honour in the United States; and the Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Book Critics Circle in 2015. The Toni Morrison Society, a non-profit literary organisation devoted to the study of her life and work, was founded in 1993.

Inspired by *Five Poems* (2002), a collection of poems written by Morrison with illustrations by artist Kara Walker, the convening seeks to create a space for existing and new Morrison readers to engage in a close study of her work.

Featuring academics, artists, writers and curators who all have profound personal, artistic and intellectual connections to Morrison's work, the convening includes Farah Jasmine Griffin, Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Leo Hermitt, Kareem Reid, DJ Lynnée Denise, The Black Curriculum, Lola Okolosie, Avery Gordon, Ellah P. Wakatama and more to be announced.

## PROGRAMME

### Volume I

Ethics of Care, Restorative Justice and Healing in Toni Morrison's Late Fiction

Thursday 12 March, 7pm, ICA Cinema

Farah Jasmine Griffin, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, opens the convening with a keynote lecture on the ethics of care, healing and restorative justice in Morrison's late fiction.

### Volume II

Five Poems for Toni Morrison

Friday 13 March, 7pm, ICA Theatre

In *Five Poems for Toni Morrison*, poets and writers including Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Leo Hermitt and Kareem Reid are invited to write and perform an original piece in response to Morrison's work.

### Volume III

Screening of a newly commissioned artists' film by DJ Lynnée Denise

Friday 13 March, 8.30pm, ICA Theatre

DJ scholar Lynnée Denise, a Visiting Artist at Stanford University's Institute of Diversity in the Arts, presents a newly commissioned artists' film project whose primary source material is the archival video recording of Morrison's *Guardian* talk at the ICA in 1986. This is followed by a Q&A between Lynnée Denise and ICA Curator of Learning Nydia A. Swaby.

DJ Set by DJ Lynnée Denise

Friday 13 March, 10pm, ICA Sake Bar

DJ Lynnée Denise plays a DJ set to follow the screening of her commissioned remix of Morrison's 1986 *Guardian* talk at the ICA.

Volume IV

Study groups with The Black Curriculum & Lola Okolosie

Saturday 14 March, 1pm & 3.30pm, ICA Studio

*Volume IV* comprises study groups led by writer, schoolteacher and winner of the Novel Studio scholarship from City University, Lola Okolosie, and The Black Curriculum, an organisation that seeks to address the lack of taught Black British History within schools. The Black Curriculum study group, aimed at students aged 11–16, focuses on Morrison's 1992 novel, *Jazz*, to consider the connections to music and photography in Morrison's writing. Lola Okolosie's study group offers a critical reading of Morrison's 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye*, drawing upon contemporary references.

Volume V

Screening of *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am* and Q&A with Farah Jasmine Griffin, Avery Gordon and Allah P. Wakatama

Saturday 14 March, 6pm, ICA Cinema

The convening concludes with a screening of the 2019 documentary *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am*. The film provides an intimate look at Morrison's life through interviews with Morrison's colleagues and friends, among them Oprah Winfrey, Sonia Sanchez and Farah Jasmine Griffin. A Q&A with Allah P. Wakatama, Farah Jasmine Griffin and Avery Gordon, Professor of Sociology at the University of California, follows the screening. *The Pieces I Am* features artworks by significant African-American visual artists including Mickalene Thomas (who created the collage that opens the film), Faith Ringgold, Elizabeth Catlett, Kerry James Marshall and Romare Bearden.

To request further information, images and tickets, please contact:

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

**Toni Morrison** (1931–2019) was a novelist and essayist. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. She was the author of many novels, including *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Beloved* (1987), *Paradise* (1997) and *Love* (2003). She received a Pulitzer Prize for her fiction, the National Book Critics Circle's Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honour in the United States.

**Avery Gordon** is an author, writer, and Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara and Visiting Faculty Fellow at the Centre for Research Architecture, Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College, University of London. Her work focuses on radical thought in action, and, over the last few years, she has been writing about captivity, war and other forms of dispossession.

**The Black Curriculum** is an organisation rectifying the lack of taught Black British history by creating and disseminating an original curriculum encompassing history, culture and environmental science to young people around the UK, with a strong emphasis on teaching through creative forms.

**DJ Lynnée Denise** is an artist, scholar and writer whose work reflects on underground cultural movements, the 1980s, migration studies, theories of escape and electronic music of the African Diaspora. Denise's DJ Scholarship has been featured at the ICA, The Broad Museum, Tate Modern, Savvy Contemporary Gallery Berlin, Goldsmiths University of London, Iziko South African Museum, Stanford, Yale, NYU, and Princeton University. Lynnée Denise is a lecturer at UCLA Department of African American Studies and a 2020 Visiting Artist at Stanford University's Institute of Diversity in the Arts.

**Ellah P. Wakatama, OBE, (Hon) FRSL** is Editor-at-Large at Canongate Books and Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for New Writing, The University of Manchester. She is chair of the AKO Caine Prize for African Writing and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Wakatama was the Founding Publishing Director of The Indigo Press, and has also been the Deputy Editor of *Granta* magazine and Senior Editor at Jonathan Cape, Random House. She is a trustee of the Royal Literary Fund and has served as a judge for several literary prizes including the 2017 International Dublin Literary Award and the 2015 Man Booker Prize. In 2014, she served as Chair of the judging panel for the Commonwealth Writers' Short Story Prize.

**Farah Jasmine Griffin** is an author and the William B. Ransford Professor of English and Comparative Literature and the inaugural chair of the African American and African Diaspora Studies Department and Director of the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University. Professor Griffin received her B.A. from Harvard, where she majored in American History and Literature, and her PhD in American Studies from Yale. Her most recent book is *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II* (Basic Books, 2013).

**Kareem Reid** is an art writer based in South London. Reid has published critical essays for *frieze*, *Luncheon*, *Niijournal*, *Temporary Art Review* and *ARTS.BLACK*.

**Leo Hermitt** is a transdisciplinary artist, poet and performer from Manchester. They are also an MA student in Graphic Design & Art Direction at Manchester School of Art, looking at abstract publishing and collective memory.

**Lola Okolosie** is a writer and schoolteacher. She has written for the *Observer*, the *Guardian* and *Red Pepper*, among other publications. She is the winner of the Novel Studio scholarship from City University, for her novel-in-progress, *Returnees*.

**Victoria Adukwei Bulley** is a poet, writer and filmmaker. A former Barbican Young Poet, her work has appeared variously in publications including *The Poetry Review* and *Chicago Review*, in addition to featuring on BBC Radio 4 *Woman's Hour*.

Founded in 1946 by a collective of artists, poets and their supporters, the **Institute of Contemporary Arts** is an independent organisation and registered charity which supports the most pressing debates in contemporary culture. The ICA stages groundbreaking exhibitions, performances and keynote lectures by many of the world's leading thinkers. Previously home to the Independent Group, the ICA played a pivotal role in the development of pop art and charted the course of punk, performance art and independent cinema. The ICA staged the first institutional exhibitions by Francis Bacon, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Tacita Dean, Damien Hirst, Mike Kelley, Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger, Gerhard Richter, Dieter Roth, Cindy Sherman, Nancy Spero, and Cozey Fanni Tutti and early exhibitions by Bernadette Corporation, Robert Mapplethorpe, Steve McQueen and Tino Sehgal; many now historic performances including those by Laurie Anderson, Einstürzende Neubauten and Yoko Ono; legendary concerts by The Clash, Throbbing Gristle, The Smiths, David Bowie and The Beastie Boys; and critical discussions by the likes of Kathy Acker, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha. The ICA Cinema and its dedicated artist's film programme continue to showcase independent film and support pioneering filmmakers including Chantal Akerman, Kenneth Anger, Matthew Barney, Derek Jarman, Ken Loach and Laura Poitras. From its home on The Mall – the geographic heart of the UK establishment – the ICA is an organisation in which different modes of cultural production thrive on the mutual engagement with one another, and a programme that speaks to the challenges of the 21st century. [www.ica.art](http://www.ica.art)

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