

**3 Feb – 12 Apr 2015**  
**Lower Gallery**

**ICA**

**Viviane Sassen:**  
**Pikin Slee**

**Educator's**  
**Resource Pack**



# Contents

About this pack .....	p.03
ICA Exhibitions .....	p.04
About the ICA .....	p.04
Introduction to Viviane Sassen: Pikin Slee .....	p.05
Discussion Points .....	p.06
Activities .....	p.08
ICA Learning events .....	p.11
Information .....	p.12

## About this Pack

**This resource pack has been developed to support teaching and learning both at the ICA and offsite. It offers starting points and ideas for visiting educators to use with students. It was developed with GCSE and A-Level students in mind but is well suited for work with groups of all ages.**

**Activities and discussion points are suggested and one of the key learning objectives is for students to develop their skills in aesthetic understanding and critical judgement. Students will be guided towards an analysis and exploration of how the works by Vivianne Sassen reflect the social and cultural contexts in which they were made. Suggested activities are offered for use in the gallery and offsite.**

### **Please note**

**We will tailor programmes to respond to curriculum needs whenever possible. Please contact us to make arrangements and check the website for upcoming Learning Events.**

**Contact [learning@ica.org.uk](mailto:learning@ica.org.uk) for more information or to add your contact to our learning mailing list.**

# ICA Exhibitions

**First Happenings: Adrian Henri in the '60s and '70s**  
 27 Jan 2015 – 15 Mar 2015  
 Fox Reading Room

**Viviane Sassen: Pikin Slee**  
 3 Feb 2015 – 12 Apr 2015  
 Lower Gallery

**Dor Guez: The Sick Man of Europe**  
 3 Feb – 12 Apr 2015  
 Upper Gallery

**fig-2**  
 5 Jan – 20 Dec 2015  
 ICA Studio

# About the ICA

The ICA supports radical art and culture. Through a vibrant programme of exhibitions, films, events and talks, the ICA challenges perceived notions and stimulates debate, experimentation, creativity and exchange with visitors.

Founded in 1946 by a group of artists including Roland Penrose, Peter Watson and Herbert Read, the ICA continues to support living artists in showing and exploring their work, often as it emerges and before others. The ICA has been at the forefront of cultural experimentation since its formation and has presented important debut solo shows by artists including Damien Hirst, Steve McQueen, Richard Prince and Luc Tuymans. More recently Pablo Bronstein, Lis Rhodes, Bjarne Melgaard and Juergen Teller have all staged key solo exhibitions, whilst a new generation of artists, including Luke Fowler, Lucky PDF, Hannah Sawtell and Factory Floor have taken part in exhibitions and residencies.

The ICA was one of the first venues to present The Clash and The Smiths, as well as bands such as Throbbing Gristle. The inaugural ICA / LUX Biennial of Moving Images was launched in 2012, and the ICA Cinema continues to screen rare artists' film, support independent releases and partner with leading film festivals.

## Introduction to Viviane Sassen: *Pikin Slee.*

The ICA is delighted to present a solo exhibition of recent work by Viviane Sassen, a photographer who has garnered parallel critical acclaim as a fashion photographer and in the context of contemporary visual art. The content of the exhibition focuses predominantly on a body of work that Sassen made in Pikin Slee, Suriname in 2013. Pikin Slee is the second-largest village on the Upper Suriname River, deep within the Surinamese rainforest. The exhibition consists of black and white and colour works shot digitally.

In her first visit to Pikin Slee in the summer of 2012, Sassen was intrigued by the village and its inhabitants. Her eye was caught by the overwhelming natural beauty and the Saramacca's very traditional way of living, combined with the more mundane objects which seemed to seep through daily life. The Saramacca community is isolated from the outside world, living without running water, electricity, roads or the internet. The only way to access the village is by canoe, a journey of about three hours up-river. They grow their food on small agricultural plots, producing cassava bread, pressed maripa palm oil and dried coconut.

Shot mainly in black and white and of contained format, Sassen's series of abstract compositions and elusive subjects are an exploration of the beauty of the everyday, an investigation of the sculptural qualities of the ordinary.

Sassen was born in 1972 in Amsterdam, where she now lives. She first studied fashion design, followed by photography at the Utrecht School of the Arts (HKU) and Fine Art at Ateliers Arnhem. Her work was first published in avant-garde fashion magazines and is regularly commissioned by prominent designers. Sassen was included in the main exhibition of the 55th Venice Biennale, The Encyclopedic Palace, in 2013. A retrospective of 17 years of her fashion work, In and Out of Fashion, opened at Huis Marseille Museum for Photography, Amsterdam, in 2012, accompanied by a book published by Prestel (Munich).

Recent group shows include No Fashion, Please! Photography between gender and lifestyle at the Vienna Kunsthalle (2011); Figure and Ground: Dynamic Landscape at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in Toronto as part of the Contact Photography Festival (2011); and Modern Times: Rijsmuseum, Amsterdam (2015), New Photography, MOMA, New York.

Programme Supporter: *Maryam and Edward Eisler*

Additional support from the Viviane Sassen Exhibition Supporters Group including The Stanley Foundation



Do'éki, C-Print Photograph © Viviane Sassen  
Courtesy the artist and Stevenson Galler

# Discussion Points

**1** → Pikin Slee is the second-largest village of the Upper Suriname River, deep within the Surinamese rainforest. Sassen was intrigued by the village and the 4,000 inhabitants of the Saramacca tribe that live there. What do you think life in Pikin Slee might be like, based on the artefacts you can identify in the photographs? What customs and traditions are alluded to?

**2** → Born in Amsterdam, Sassen spent much of her childhood in Kenya, which she associates with vivid colours and strong contrasts of light and shade. To what extent have these associations and her experience of growing up in Africa informed the use of formal elements such as colour, line, texture and volume in her work? Is this visible in her fashion photography?

**3** → Sassen has discussed the use of shadows as a technique to withdraw the subject from our gaze while remaining the object of the photograph. As well as shadows, Sassen uses sunlight, mirrors and reflection in her work. What effects do these elements have on the way the viewer looks at the photographs? How do these elements lead the viewer's gaze in and around the images?

**4** → What do Sassen's works avoid, that we might expect of a project that documents a village deep within the Surinamese rainforest? Many of the works are very contained and close-up. There is a quality of secrecy, a feeling that the viewer is not allowed full access into the place. What is revealed and what is concealed about the location? Why do you think the artist avoids giving the viewer a wider impression of the village?

**5** → As well as Pikin Slee, Sassen has completed similar projects visiting locales in Africa such as *Flamboya* (2010) and *Parasomnia* (2011). What do you think are the effects of her working method on the communities she visits?

**6** → Sassen is famed for her fashion photography within publications such as *Purple*, *Dazed & Confused* and *Acne Paper* and for her successful advertising campaigns for fashion brands such as Stella McCartney / Adidas, Missoni, Miu Miu and Carven. Compare her fashion photography to her images of Pikin Slee. Can you identify similarities and differences? Do you think her initial success as a fashion photographer has influenced the way she captures her subjects?

**7** → In Sassen's portraits she tries to avoid a mere description of an individual. How might the photographs that include people be seen to capture something beyond the individual? What do the titles of the photographs of Sassen's portraits, such as *Rorschach* tell us about the artist's working method?



# Activities

## Photography

Viviane Sassen writes of her photographs of Pikin Slee that “the project is an exploration of the beauty of the everyday, an investigation of the sculptural qualities of the ordinary...” Beauty is subjective and can be found in unusual or everyday objects, it does not need to abide by the traditional canon set in art history. Taking inspiration from Sassen’s images of everyday life in the village in Surinam, create a series of photographs that express the beauty of the everyday, for example within your academic or local community. Experiment with the formal properties of the photograph such as composition, colour, line and texture as well as reflections and shadows

## Gaze

Sassen has stated that her work is more about the gaze of the viewer than the subject photographed. Analyse a photograph in the exhibition and identify how Sassen engages and challenges your gaze. How are you guided to look at the work? Investigate the theory of the gaze to support your understanding of Sassen’s photography. Read Rudolf Arnheim’s *Art and Visual Perception* (1954) and John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (1972).



## Research

Sassen is influenced by “people who make intimate documentary work about their own life on small cameras with great energy.” She cites photographers such as Nan Goldin and Larry Clark as early influences. In her fashion photography, she is influenced by the Modernist painters, Surrealists such as Man Ray and Magritte in formal aspects like colour, shape, structure. Put together a slide show or mood board of images by these artists which link to Sassen’s photographs of Pikiin Slee. Add images by other photographers and artists of your choice, that you believe link to her work. You may wish to compile the images by hand or use an online platform such as Instagram.

## Snapshot

Photographer Viviane Sassen was influenced by the ‘snapshot’ aesthetic of photography within independent magazines such as *Dazed and Confused* and *Purple*. Create a series of images of a location of your choice, experimenting with the ‘snapshot’ technique. Focus on expressing the spontaneity and off-guard quality of the ‘snapshot’ aesthetic as well as the sculptural quality of the elements you photograph.



Latum, 2013. C-Print Photograph  
© Viviane Sassen Courtesy the artist and Stevenson Gallery

# ICA Learning

Our dynamic learning programme provides opportunities for creative exchange, investigation and discussion between practitioners and audiences. The ICA strives to build sustainable relationships with universities, students, schools and our wider audiences, nurturing interest and appreciation of the creative process, and broadening engagement with contemporary arts.

ICA Learning provides different opportunities to engage with the ICA programme through gallery tours, guided visits to our exhibitions, Friday Salons, online educational platforms and the ICA Student Forum, a dedicated student body that curates events and projects for the Public Programme.

Our University Partnerships exist to encourage the development of joint projects and research. In addition, ICA Academy provides career paths to Further Education, Higher Education and employment.

For further information or to make a booking, please email [learning@ica.org.uk](mailto:learning@ica.org.uk)

ICA Learning is generously supported by The Ernest Cook Trust

# ICA Learning Events

**Artists Talk: Viviane Sassen**

Wed 4 Mar, 6.30pm.

£8/£7 ICA Members

Led by ICA curators Matt Williams and Juliette Desorgues.

**Educator's Tour of Guez and Sassen**

Wed 4 Feb, 5pm.

Free, booking required.

Led by ICA curators Matt Williams and Juliette Desorgues.

**Creative Workshop on Photography**

Sat 21 Mar, 10am.

Free, booking required

Join artist Phoebe Davies for a creative session on photography, using Viviane Sassen's work as inspiration.

**ICA Learning**

[ica.org.uk/learning](http://ica.org.uk/learning)  
[learning@ica.org.uk](mailto:learning@ica.org.uk)

**Educators' Previews**

Join our teacher's previews for all of our exhibitions

**Educator Resource Packs**

Educator resource packs are available at the ICA Box Office, or by emailing [learning@ica.org.uk](mailto:learning@ica.org.uk)

**Art Rules**

Art Rules is an online space to discuss the rules of art today. Engage your students by visiting: [artrules.ica.org.uk](http://artrules.ica.org.uk)

**MA in the Contemporary**

Find out more about our unique, interdisciplinary MA programme, in partnership with University of Kent.  
[ica.org.uk/ma-contemporary](http://ica.org.uk/ma-contemporary)

**Cinema Matinee Screenings**

Cinema group matinees are available for schools, colleges and universities.

[ica.org.uk/learning/school-and-groupscreenings](http://ica.org.uk/learning/school-and-groupscreenings)

**ICA Student Forum**

Join the ICA Student Forum to shape and develop a public programme of events in response to the ICA programme.

[ica.org.uk/student-forum](http://ica.org.uk/student-forum)

**University Partnerships**

Through our University partnerships we engage and promote greater collaborative opportunities between university students, teaching staff and the ICA's public programme.

[ica.org.uk/university-partnerships](http://ica.org.uk/university-partnerships)

**Opening Hours**

Tuesday—Sunday, 11am—11pm

**Day Membership £1**

Wednesday—Sunday, 11am–6pm  
 Until 9pm on Thursdays

**Exhibitions**

Tuesday—Sunday, 11am—6pm  
 Open late every Thursday until 9pm

**ICA Box Office & Bookshop**

Tuesday—Sunday, 11am—9pm

**ICA Café Bar**

Food served from 11.30—3.30pm / 5.30—9pm

**Tuesday Cinema**

All films, all day: £3 for ICA Members / £6 non-Members

**Sign Up to our Newsletters**

[ica.org.uk/signup](http://ica.org.uk/signup)

**Follow us****Cover image:**

Cover image: Manja, 2013. C-Print Photograph © Viviane Sassen Courtesy the artist and Stevenson Gallery

Resource pack developed by Rita Cottone and Alice Holliday