



# We Have Met Before

Sept. 22 — Nov. 4, 2017



## We Have Met Before: New Exhibition at the National Gallery of Jamaica



Graham Fagen

The National Gallery of Jamaica in partnership with the British Council will be hosting an art exhibition from September 22-November 4, 2017. The show is entitled: **We Have Met Before** and features Graham Fagen, Joscelyn Gardner, Ingrid Pollard, and Leasho Johnson.

This exhibition revisits the challenging subject of trans-Atlantic slavery and its afterlives in the contemporary world, seen through the eyes of four contemporary artists. Each artist brings a distinctive perspective with work that was created in different locales, different media, and at different points in time.

The Scottish artist Graham Fagen is represented by a video and sound installation called *The Slave's Lament*, which was also shown at the 2015 Venice Biennale. The work is based on a 1792 song written by Scotland's national poet Robert Burns, in which an enslaved man in Virginia expresses his longing for his distant homeland of Senegal. In Fagen's interpretation, the song is performed by the reggae singer Ghetto Priest, a Rastafarian. Fagen's work also acknowledges Scottish involvement in slavery in the Americas, which may be well-known in the Caribbean, but is still part of the unacknowledged history of Scotland.

The Jamaican artist Leasho Johnson is the youngest artist in the group and presents a visually and conceptually explosive mix of history and contemporary popular culture, with strong references to the musical genre Dancehall and graffiti art. Like the other three artists, he often uses historical source material and features a repertoire of cartoon-like female and gender-ambivalent figures in various provocative poses. In some of his recent work, drowned bodies with provocatively placed palm tree extensions become sexualized tropical islands, reminiscent of the violent histories of the Caribbean archipelago. Johnson examines the politics of sexual objectification and the contradictions of gender and sexuality in contemporary Jamaican culture and not only points to the roots of these issues in the histories of colonization, slavery, exploitation and social inequality, but also acknowledges



Dr. Ingrid Pollard



Leasho T. Johnson



their revolutionary, counter-hegemonic potential in the present.

Born in Georgetown, Guyana, British artist Ingrid Pollard works mainly in analogue photographic media. *The Boy Who Watches Ships Go By* (2002) is the oldest body of work in this exhibition and consists of images of land, sea, boats and historical documents that subtly evoke the histories, visible and invisible, of Sunderland Point in northern England, which was once a thriving seaport in the Triangular Trade. The resulting narrative revolves around the story of Sambo, a young boy and servant, presumably enslaved, who travelled with the captain of the *Globe* from Kingston, Jamaica, who fell ill and died when he arrived in England. His death, it was believed, was from a disease he allegedly contracted in England to which he had no immunity; and acts as a metaphor for the fate of those who

lost their lives and freedom as a result of their contact with European slave traders. Sambo was, according to local lore, buried at Sunderland Point in 1739.

The final artist is Joscelyn Gardner, who is from Barbados and presently lives and works in Canada. She is represented by two full series of lithographs – *Plantation Poker* (2004), *Creole Portraits II* (2007) and a selection of lithographs from the *Creole Portraits III* (2009- 2011) series, which are exhibited as installations with other elements. In these prints, which conform to the conventions of natural history illustrations, intricate African braided hairstyles morph into the instruments of torture that were used during slavery. A more specific reference to sexual abuse is added in the imagery in *Plantation Poker*, where the triangular shape of the hair references female pubic hair. The lovely flowers in *Creole Portraits III* are plants that were used by enslaved women to secretly end unwanted pregnancies. While deceptively delicate and exquisitely beautiful, the prints powerfully invoke the dehumanizing cruelty of plantation slavery. Gardner's body of work is inspired by the infamous diaries of Thomas Thistlewood, a plantation overseer in Jamaica in the mid-18th century, who recorded with scientific precision his many forced sexual exploits and the cruel punishments he inflicted on the enslaved.

*We Have Met Before* revisits this complex and territory and invites the viewer into a conversation about slavery and its legacy, where various perspectives can be expressed. The resulting conversations may be difficult but we believe that we must have them, as they are central to the histories that have shaped and continue to shape the contemporary



Joscelyn Gardner

Caribbean world, and we hope that this exhibition will contribute to this necessary process.

## Programme of Activities

1. Artists Workshops: Lead by Graham Fagen, Joscelyn Gardner and Dr. Ingrid Pollard at Edna Manley College 2-4pm ,Thursday 21st September.
2. Exhibition Opening: Opening of Exhibition at the National Gallery of Jamaica on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 6:30 – 8:30 pm.
3. Panel Discussion: We Have Met Before: Conversation with the Artists, chaired by Dr. Shani Roper Saturday September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1:30 – 3:30 pm.

## About the British Council

The [British Council](#) is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

The overarching goal of the British Council's arts strategy in the Caribbean is to develop an awareness of the UK arts within the Caribbean, to connect artistic excellence of the Caribbean with the UK, and to facilitate meaningful conversations through the arts by placing the works of UK artists in dialogue with that of their Caribbean peers. This exhibition provides Caribbean artists and audiences with an opportunity to communicate with their UK counterparts so that both might consider our shared realities, through different lenses.

For more details on our work in the Caribbean, visit our website: <https://caribbean.britishcouncil.org/>, and follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BritishCouncilCaribbean/>.

## About the National Gallery of Jamaica

The National Gallery of Jamaica, which was established in 1974, is the oldest and largest public art museum in the Anglophone Caribbean.

The National Gallery of Jamaica (National Gallery) holds a comprehensive collection of early, modern and contemporary art from Jamaica along with smaller Caribbean and international holdings. A significant part of its collections is on permanent view. The National Gallery also has an active exhibition programme, which includes retrospectives of work by major Jamaican artists, thematic exhibitions, guest-curated exhibitions, touring exhibitions that originate outside of the island and, its flagship exhibition since 2014, the *Jamaica Biennial*, which has an international profile. The National Gallery offers a range of educational services, including guided tours, lectures and panel discussions,

and children's art programmes and also operates a gift shop and coffee shop.

The National Gallery is located on the Kingston Waterfront. Since July 2014, the National Gallery also operates a branch, National Gallery West, at the Montego Bay Cultural Centre. This branch offers regular exhibitions and related educational programmes.

The [National Gallery of Jamaica](#) is a division of the Institute of Jamaica, Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment, and Sport.

## Artist Biographies

**JOSCELYN GARDNER (MFA):** Moved to Canada in 2000 and now teaches at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario. She has held solo exhibitions in the USA, Canada, Spain, and various Caribbean islands; most recently, *'Staging Mary Prince'* at the Bermuda National Gallery (2016). Her work has been shown in numerous international biennials in South and Central America and Europe as well as in curated group shows in several prestigious museums. International awards include the *Grand Prize of the 7th International Printmaking Biennial* (Quebec, 2011). Her work is held in several public collections worldwide. It can be viewed at [www.joscelyngardner.com](http://www.joscelyngardner.com).

"Drawing on a family history in Barbados that dates from the 17th century, I use a postcolonial feminist methodology to probe colonial material culture found in British/ Caribbean archives in order to explore my (white) Creole identity. Specifically, I aim to articulate the intertwined historical relationship shared by black and white women in the Caribbean by recognizing that under patriarchy and colonialism the lives of all Caribbean women have been shaped by "mastership". My project also aims to address the repression and dissociation that operate in relation to the subject of slavery and white culpability."

"Working primarily with printmaking (stone lithography) and multimedia installation (video and sound), my work ruptures patriarchal or colonial versions of history by re-inserting



Hibiscus Esculentus (Sibyl) by J. Gardener



the voices / images / traces of the women omitted from this history. I attempt to "speak the unspeakable" by retrieving atrocities that lie buried in our collective memory in order to reconcile the past with the present and move toward a metaphorical healing of historical wounds. By focusing on women's lives, I identify geographical/historical/cultural/racial/class differences that have united/separated women in the wider postcolonial world."



**Boy Who Watches Ships Go By — by Ingrid Pollard**

**Dr. INGRID POLLARD:** Dr Ingrid Pollard has documented photography, documenting black people's creativity and presence in Britain. Pollard's photography questions social constructs such as Britishness and racial difference through investigations into landscape and portraiture.

An important aspect of her work is the materiality of photographic process within image-making, alternative photographic process, images on wood and slates, artist books and video. Check out more [here](#).

**LEASHO JOHNSON:** "I was born in Montego Bay, Jamaica on December 5, 1984. With my father being an artist, I was exposed to art at a tender age while spending time in his studio drawing and painting. Educated at Edna Manley School of the Visual and Performing Arts, I graduated in 2009 with a degree in Visual Communication."

"Social commentary is an integral part of my work. I believe the contradictions that I encounter; living in Jamaica speaks volumes in relation to the black experience in the western hemisphere. I often juxtapose cartoons with realistic imagery since the approachable nature of cartoons enables me to break down contentious, often disturbing issues and make them seem harmless, even comedic and in the end more palatable."

"I enjoy crossing these approaches to art creation, I like the idea that cartoons belong to

the imagination while realism is to representation, I thoroughly enjoy fusing or even blurring the tension points of these styles to pull on something that lives both in the mind and the real world. My intention is see if I can create art that can cross all social borders and create another layer to black representation in fine art.”



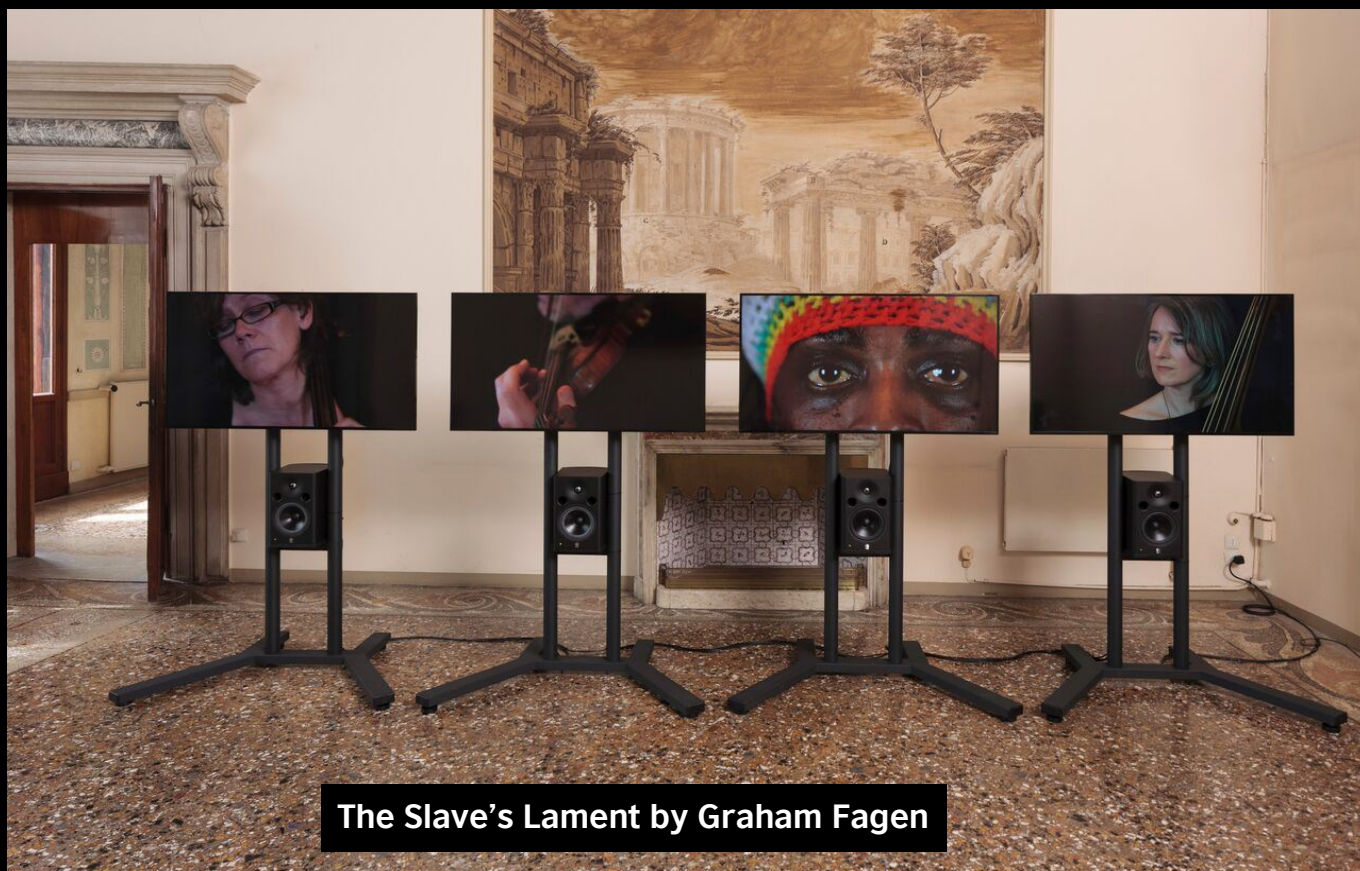
Leasho Johnson

“My works are influenced by Pop culture with a mix of various graffiti/graphic art styles. My works spans from paintings, collage, sculpture, street art and some digital medium.”



Leasho Johnson





**The Slave's Lament by Graham Fagen**

**GRAHAM FAGEN:** [Graham Fagen](#) studied at The Glasgow School of Art (1984-1988, BA Hons) and the Kent Institute of Art and Design (1989-1990, MA) and is Professor of Fine Art at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design in Dundee. He has exhibited internationally and in 2015 he was selected to represent Scotland at the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale.





## Media Links

[Save the Date: We Have Met Before](#)

[We Have Met Before: Introduction](#)

[We Have Met Before: Ingrid Pollard](#)

[We Have Met Before: Leasho Johnson](#)

[We Have Met Before: Joscelyn Gardner](#)

[We Have Met Before: Graham Fagen](#)

[We Have Met Before: Panel Discussion](#)

[We have Met Before: New Exhibition at the National Gallery of Jamaica](#)

[Jamaican in We Have Met Before Quartet](#)

[Artists' Assets](#)



You are cordially invited to the  
opening of

# We Have Met Before

Graham Fagen, Joscelyn Gardner,  
Leasho Johnson, and Ingrid Pollard

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 22, 2017 @6:30 PM

@THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF JAMAICA





# We Have Met Before:

Graham Fagen, Joscelyn Gardner,  
Leasho Johnson, and Ingrid Pollard

OPENS AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF JAMAICA  
FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 22, 2017 @6:30 PM





# We Have Met Before

3 ARTISTS, 3 WORKSHOPS, 3 LOCATIONS

2:00pm - 4:00pm

THURSDAY 21st SEPTEMBER 2017

We Have Met Before, which opens on September 22 at the National Gallery of Jamaica, is staged in partnership with the British Council. The works selected for the exhibition represent a conversation on the histories of Slavery, the Transatlantic trade, and its present-day implications.

The School of Visual Art is honored to host these workshops with 3 of the 4 artists from the exhibition. Please do join us in conversation.



**JOSCELYN GARDNER**  
PRINTMAKER  
PRINTMAKING DEPARTMENT

Drawing on a family history in Barbados that dates from the 17th century, Gardner uses a postcolonial feminist methodology to probe colonial material culture found in British / Caribbean archives in order to explore her (white) Creole identity. Her project also aims to address the repression and dissociation that operate in relation to the subject of slavery and white culpability.



**GRAHAM FAGEN**  
DRAWING  
EUGENE HYDE DRAWING STUDIO

Graham Fagen (Scotland) is represented with a video and sound installation, *The Slave's Lament* (2015), which reinterprets the 1792 abolitionist song written by the Scottish poet Robert Burns, who was once contracted to work as a bookkeeper on a Jamaican plantation but never made the passage. The song is performed by the reggae singer Ghetto Priest and this interpretation resonates uncannily with the lyrics of exile in classic reggae.



**INGRID POLLARD**  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
PHOTOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT

Ingrid Pollard's (Guyana/England) analogue photographic series *The Boy Who Watches Ships Go By* (2002) consists of images of land, sea, boats and historical documents that evoke the histories, visible and invisible, of Sunderland Point in northern England. The narrative revolves around the story of Sambo, a young boy, presumably enslaved, who travelled with the captain of the *Globe* from Kingston, Jamaica, and who fell ill and died when he arrived at Sunderland Point in 1739, where it is believed he was buried.

