

Joy Gregory

Lost Languages and other voices



An Impressions Gallery
Touring Exhibition

Curated by Anne McNeill

Lost Languages and other voices

First UK retrospective of Joy Gregory

Joy Gregory is one of the major artists to emerge from the Black British photography movement of the 80s. Coined by Ten.8 as the 'critical decade' this was a time when debates around the domain of representation were explored and challenged.

Gregory's work is influenced by a combination of race, history, gender and aesthetics. She is an important and influential artist whose work is highly intelligent, thoughtful and challenging. Whilst social and political issues are integral to her practice, the work is never overbearing or antagonistic and is rooted in the concepts of 'truth and beauty'.

This major survey show touches on cultural differences in contemporary society. The title of the exhibition refers to the works *Gomera* (2009) and *Kalahari* (2010) in which Gregory draws attention to the cultural importance of marginalised indigenous languages. Journeys also feature, with work made in global locations including South Africa, the Orkneys, Sri Lanka and the Caribbean.

Gregory is a visual story teller; *Lost Languages and other voices* brings together 16 bodies of work spanning twenty years, some seen for the very first time. This exhibition allows a greater understanding of the whole narrative of Gregory's work and includes a full range of media from video installations, animation, drawings, digital and analogue photography including Victorian print processes. Many of the works have been developed or fabricated especially for this exhibition.

This exhibition is accompanied by a new publication, *Translating Place*, with essays by Joy Gregory and Rohini Malik Okon. Full colour, 80pp, RRP £7.99.

Press Reviews

'The show deftly explores themes of identity, gender, race, post-colonial identities and stereotypes, and while the topics are intense, Gregory's tone and presentation are quite the opposite. Her use of text combined with video installation explored these concepts in a skillful, honest and playful manner.'

Aesthetica Blog

'In this first major retrospective of work by British artist Joy Gregory, her singular subversive style runs through several series of photographs.'

The Guardian

'Gregory's techniques range from hypermodern digital video installations to Victorian printing techniques, but her work is infused with a distinctive (and timeless) style which seems to yearn for something lost long ago.'

The Independent



Still from *Gomera* (2010)

Gomera

Since 2002, Gregory has been conducting research into language endangerment. Language is our main way of making sense of the world, and Gregory looks at the complex relationship between language, the environment and survival.

Central to this ten minute film is El Silbo, the whistled language used on the island of La Gomera, part of the Spain's Canary Islands, off the west coast of Africa. This work is a poetic look at the relationship between this language and the island's difficult terrain.

Carrying much further than the spoken word, this unique and indigenous language, once a source of ridicule and shame, has recently been revived and is now a marker of tradition and cultural pride. This tongue is explored in mesmeric footage that charts a journey to the island, penetrates into jungle-like natural landscapes, and captures the beauty of the whistled exchanges.

Gomera received its international premiere, May 2010, at the 17th Sydney Biennale, *Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age*.



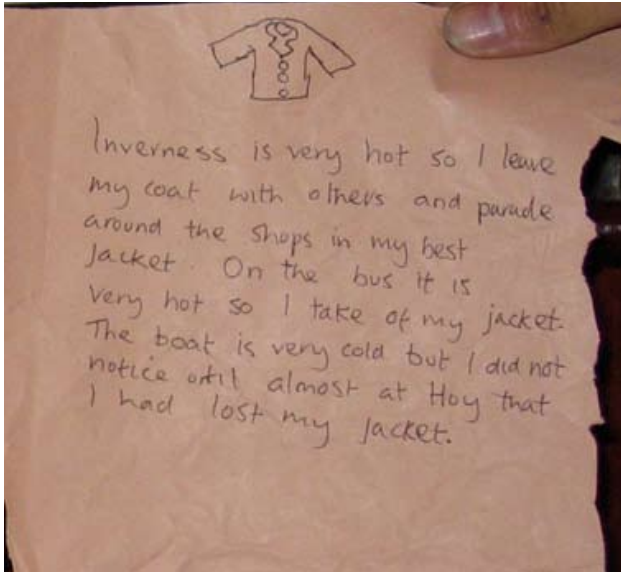
Kalahari (2010)

Kalahari

Kalahari consists of seven large colour photographs that concentrate on the relationship between the home land of the San people in the Southern Kalahari Desert and Ꞥ Nǀu. This is one of the oldest surviving human languages; known for its click consonants.

In 1974 the apartheid government declared this language extinct. In 1991, however, land claim activists used it as the main plank of evidence in a court case against the South African government and won.

These poignant and emotive images document the expanse of the Kalahari plains, whilst alluding to the associated stories of the eight remaining speakers and their ancestral land.



Tales of Loss (2008)



Still from Hoy/Hobart (2008)

In 2008, Gregory was one of 20 artists from various cultural and geographical backgrounds who came together on the remote island of Hoy in the Orkney archipelago. This creative exchange led to two new bodies of work, both of which are shown for the first time outside of the workshop setting and both make use of material beyond Gregory's usual medium of photography.

Hoy/Hobart

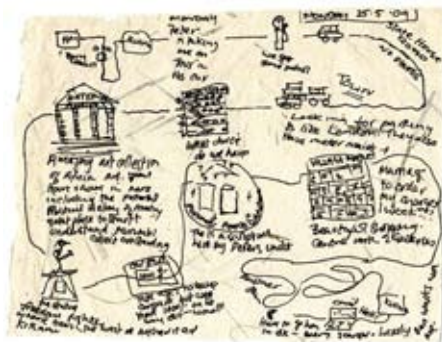
The first, *Hoy/Hobart*, is a ten minute animation inspired by the onerous journey from London to Hoy, a trip that took the same amount of time as one to the other side of the world, Hobart in Tasmania.

Tales of Loss

The second, *Tales of Loss*, is a series of small drawings that depict humorous events and various people that Gregory encountered along the way when travelling by bus, train and boat from her South London home to Hoy.



Journey to Kuona (2009)



Six Weeks (2009)

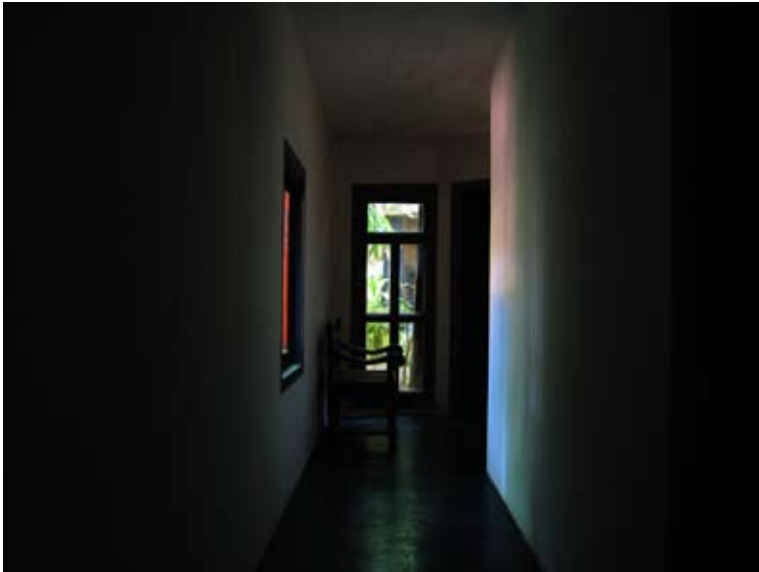
During summer 2009, Gregory was the artist-in-residence at the Kuona Trust, Nairobi, Kenya. She arrived there with few expectations and no charger for her camera. Without her digital camera and with limited film processing opportunities, Gregory decided it was an opportunity to re-think her practice.

Six Weeks

Every day for six weeks, she drew her experiences on any paper that was to hand. These drawings, almost childlike and cartoon by nature, act as a visual diary as she highlights her many misunderstandings and adventures.

Journey to Kuona Walk to 46 Matatu

With her mobile phone as her camera, Gregory documented her forty five minute journey from where she was staying to her studio at the Kuona Trust. Freed from the constraints of a cumbersome camera, she was able to record the minutia of her walk along the rough road - everything from a soft drink stall on the side of the road through to the building that houses the Iranian Cultural Centre.



From *Interiors* (2004)

Interiors

In 2004, shortly after the death of her father Gregory stayed at Lunuganga, an old rubber estate and the former country house of celebrated Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, Lunuganga was a stunning location with beautiful gardens and an air of considered serenity.

Working within the confines of indoors; using only available light and long-exposures Gregory's visually arresting images are both luminous and moody. Gregory embarked on this project not quite a year after her father had died. These eight images are, on one level, a poignant exploration of the atmospheric interiors of the house on the estate, but on another mark her grief at that time, and lay bare the artist's unconscious state of mind.



Self Portraits (1997)

Self Portraits

Throughout the 80s and early 90s, Gregory's work focused on self-identity, mainly through photographic self-portraits. In 1997 she spent six months working throughout the Caribbean and made a conscious effort to leave that side of her work behind. Yet, somehow, and despite her best efforts, the tendency to picture herself as part of a scene, seeped out.

Over ten years later she came across a couple of 'snaps' which made her return to look at over 2,000 negatives that she had shot during this period. What she saw were pictures that were a way of passing time, self-portraits that sat at the margins of 'real work'; they were effortless and intuitive. Made at a time when the internet was in its infancy and texting from mobile phones not even imagined these images are a reminder of what it was like to travel alone while meeting new people in new places on an almost daily basis.

As Gregory says "These photographs are a window to another time to which we can never return."



Autoportrait (1989 - 1990)

Autoportrait

From the age of 13 Gregory was an avid consumer of women's magazines. Her biggest disappointment was that there was hardly a black woman to be seen. The only images of black beauty were those bad black and white photos or drawing of women in wigs in the small ads of the 'Jamaica' paper. Consisting of nine individual black and white self portraits and presented sequentially *Autoportrait* is the artist's response to the absence of image of black women in the fashion and beauty industry that surrounded her as a teenager.



Cinderella Tours Europe

In the series *Cinderella Tours Europe*, what appear to be tourist snapshots of familiar tourist landmarks are decidedly less straightforward than they suggest. On tour is a pair of golden shoes that act as both metaphor and surrogate for contemporary Caribbean people for whom the possibility of such a grand tour is difficult.

“My character of Cinderella grew out of interviews conducted around the Caribbean and the realisation that for many people Europe was as a place of unattainable dreams. I photographed sites long held in the popular imagination of Europe – such as the city of Venice and the Eiffel Tower and while I employed certain conventions of tourist photography the one thing that is missing is a tourist replaced by a pair of slippers, referencing the classic Cinderella fairytale.”

These nine visually stunning large-scale colour photographs touch on the complex relationship between Europe and the Caribbean.



Still from *The Fairest* (1998)

The Fairest

Gregory's film uncovers and probes six individuals' desire to be blonde. Asking a set of simple questions, such as *why did you choose to be Blonde?*, *what is your earliest memory of someone Blonde?*, this work uses the state of blonde as a way of describing notions of shifting identities.

Shot in 1998, a couple of years before the onset of Big Brother and the explosion of reality TV, this work presents, through simple talking heads and close up of lips, a time of innocence, whilst revealing through the interviewees unguarded moments and naked honesty our need to sometimes be someone other than ourselves.

Previously unseen, *The Fairest* has been specially edited for this exhibition.



Bottled Blonde (1998)

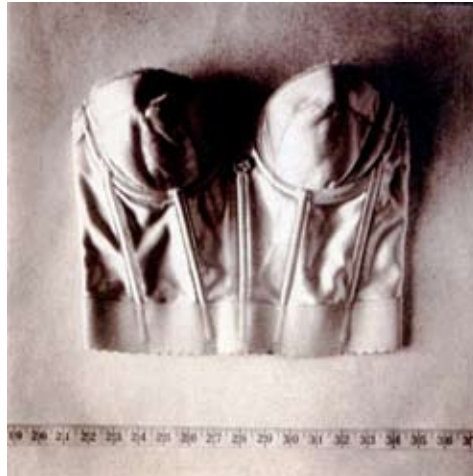
Bottled Blonde

Bottled Blonde is a sculpture based on photographic methodology. It consists of medical sample bottles filled with dyed blonde hair donated by peoples from different racial - African, Asian, European - backgrounds.

The work's sculptural qualities are connected to photography, as each individual lock of hair has been dyed and toned blonde in a laboratory setting based on the timings and methods used within a photography darkroom. Like much of Gregory's work *Bottled Blonde* looks at notions of aesthetics, beauty, gender and race.



Girl Thing (2002 - 2004)



Objects of Beauty (1992 - 1995)

Objects of Beauty

This set of eight images uses the Victorian printing process of kallitypes to present beguiling images of objects often associated with the western fashion industry.

Some appear alongside tape measures which suggest questions about ideal proportions and allude to anthropological recording. Others have been chosen for the way they can change a body shape, or even the way a woman walks. The apparent simplicity of the work belies its complex message and lets us question the meanings we attach to these objects.

Girl Thing

Similarly, *Girl Thing* (2002 - 2004), presented as eight cyanotypes, is an exploration of gender construction through stereotypical feminine clothing like silk bras and corsets and accessories, such as a delicate handkerchief. The instant recognition of the isolated objects and their wider meanings to a broad audience indicates that, despite claims of radical social change over the last forty years, the essence of gender expectation remains the same.

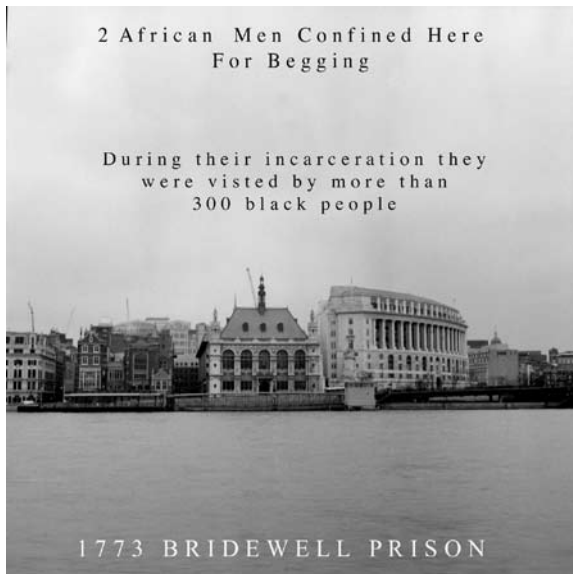


The Handbag Project (1998)

The Handbag Project

During a residency in Johannesburg, Gregory became fascinated by objects of luxury bought and treasured by those with positions of power and privilege during the period of apartheid. She was particularly attracted to handbags for their potency symbols of white woman advantage and general femininity. They describe a time in history where idleness, as well as the objectification of women, was ingrained in society, and contrasted with the lives of the other women who shared the same physical space but were socially and politically separated.

Presented like religious relics, this work is a collection of eight one-off large salt printed photograms that, in common with our desire to underplay the most distasteful elements of our past, record only a trace of the original object.



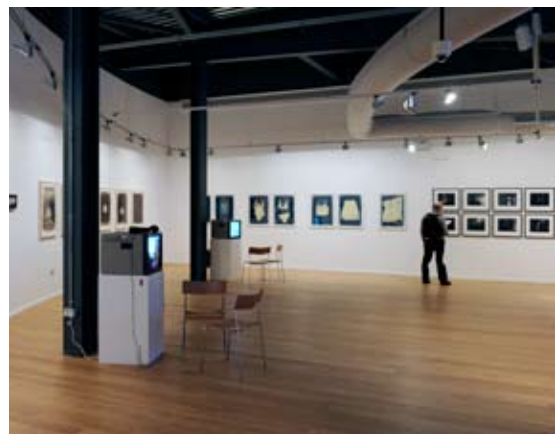
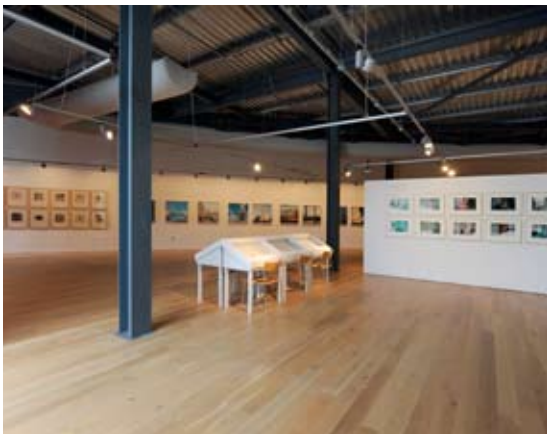
Sites of Africa (2001)

Sites of Africa

Sites of Africa is a series of work using photography and text to document absent histories. Originally shown as outdoor billboards, this project has been re-worked for the gallery space.

In this new manifestation we are presented with six very large images of well known London sites - such as Greenwich Observatory and the Bank of England - which once represented a burgeoning African presence, now disappeared and unknown.

Installation Images



List of works

Gomera (2010)

1 x DVD, 10 min film

Kalahari

4 x Framed photographs 20 x 24"

3 x Framed photographs 20 x 16"

Hoy/Hobart (2008)

1 x DVD, 10 min animation film

Tales of Loss (2008)

7 x framed drawings 13.4 x 11.2" (34cm x 28.5cm)

6 weeks (2009)

42 x hand drawn illustrations displayed in six bespoke vitrines

Journey to Kuona (2009)

1 x linear landscape photograph collage 3.5 x 295" (9 x 750cm)

Walk to 46 Matatu (2009)

1 x linear landscape photograph collage 3.5 x 75' (9 x 190cm)

Interiors (2004)

8 x framed photographs 20 x 24"

Self Portraits (1997)

10 x framed photographs 16 x 12"

Autoportrait (1989 - 1990)

1 x framed collage 8 x 44" (20cm x 111.5cm)

Cinderella Tours Europe (1997 - 2001)

9 x full framed photographs 34 x 34.5"

The Fairest (1998)

1 x DVD, 7 minute film

Bottled Blond (1998)

1 x framed sculptural piece 30 x 24" (65 x 80 x 10cm), comprising glass shelves, small glass bottles with hair samples, glass front and back, framed in wood

List of works, continued

Objects of Beauty (1992 - 1995)

12 x framed kallitype photographic prints 26.5 x 21.5" (67 x 54cm)

Girl Thing (2002 - 2004)

7 x framed Cyanotype photographic prints 34 x 26" (66 x 80cm)

The Handbag Project (1998)

6 x framed salt print photographs 34 x 26" (66 x 80cm)

Sites of Africa (2001)

6 x laminated images - poster style with text - various sizes, approx 1 x 1.4m

Equipment

Venue will need to provide monitors with built-in sound and DVD players (Impressions may be able to supply these, please ask). Venue to provide their own technician. Technical advice and touring handbook supplied.

Interpretation and Education

Text supplied for venue to produce information sheet.

Artist information folder.

Suggested selection of books for visitors to read (venue to arrange with own library).

Text for introduction panel and captions (venue to produce own vinyl lettering).

Support from Impressions' Education & Learning Manager to help plan related activities.

Space required

Approximately 60 - 80 linear metres. Impressions can provide advice on editing and installing the exhibition to suit your space. Support from Impressions' Curator available on request.

Publication

Translating Place, a full colour 80pp publication, published by Impressions Gallery, edited by Anne McNeill, with essay by Rohini Malik Okon, examining the cross-cultural experiences of an artist-in-residency project. RRP £7.99

Transport

Hiring venues are responsible for onward transport if the exhibition is on consecutive tour, otherwise two-way transport is payable.

Insurance

Venues are responsible for insurance in transit and in situ; replacement value £80,000.

Fees

Hire fee for mainland UK venues £3,000+vat. For overseas venues, please enquire directly.

Joy Gregory

Gregory was born in England, 1959, to parents of Jamaican origin. She is a graduate of Manchester Polytechnic and the Royal College of Art.

She has exhibited all over the world for almost 20 years and shown in many biennials and festivals, as well as the recipient of numerous awards, including the prestigious NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) Fellowship 2002. Her work is included in many collections including the UK Arts Council Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia, and Yale British Art Collection. Gregory is a frequent and popular speaker on her work in photography.

Anne McNeill

Anne McNeill is Director of Impressions Gallery. She has curated numerous exhibitions, most recently *Cockroach Diary & Other Stories*, a major retrospective of work by Anna Fox, which was shortlisted for the Deutsche Börse Award 2010.

Impressions Gallery

Established in 1972 in York, Impressions was one of the first specialist photography galleries in Europe. Now based in Bradford, we are widely considered a leading international exhibition space for photography. We support and promote innovative and creative work that extends the boundaries of photographic practice.

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