



DOING NOTHING IS NOT AN OPTION

Michael McMillan | Peckham Platform | 17 September – 22 November 2015

2015 marks twenty years since Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed, alongside eight colleagues, for crimes he did not commit. They were campaigning against Shell's exploitation and environmental destruction of the Ogoni land which twenty years on, remains unchecked. Peckham is at the heart of London's Nigerian and Ogoni diaspora so to coincide with this important anniversary, Peckham Platform has commissioned artist and writer Michael McMillan for a commemorative exhibition that will take place at the gallery from 17 September – 22 November 2015.

McMillan's *Doing Nothing is Not an Option* will be a site-responsive mixed-media installation exploring the relationship between local people in Peckham and the memory of the Nigerian writer and activist.

In June, the global *Action Saro-Wiwa* tour (organised by Platform London) brought Sokari Douglas Camp's *The Battle Bus* to Peckham Square – the living memorial created by the Nigerian artist in 2005. *The Battle Bus* is a large-scale mobile interactive steel sculpture topped by oil drums and etched with the words of one of Saro-Wiwa's final speeches. Working with Theatre Peckham, McMillan created a performance piece that used *The Battle Bus* as a site and took place on the square on Saturday 27th June. It triggered memories for Nigerians and local people in Peckham of Ken Saro-Wiwa as a symbol for ordinary people resisting oppression and fighting for freedom across Africa and the world.

For the exhibition, wallpaper made from large-scale photographs taken inside and outside *The Battle Bus* will line the gallery evoking a sense in visitors of being present in the sculpture. Kiosks will display materials from Nigerian shops and communities in Peckham including food and 'Nollywood' videos such as 70s sitcom 'Basi & Co' which was written by Ken Saro-Wiwa. Film of the performance of McMillan's work on Peckham Square and a montage of passers-by reading passages from Saro-Wiwa's final speech 'I Accuse' inside *The Battle Bus* will be projected into the gallery, creating multiple layers that reflect the impact of *The Battle Bus*' presence now it has departed on its journey to its permanent home in the Niger Delta.

Michael McMillan said:

"Buses and vehicles have a long tradition as symbols of collective solidarity, resistance and freedom through mobility in many protest movements around the world. We all remember Rosa Parks not sitting at the back and the march on Washington DC in 1963. The same year saw the Bristol Bus strike, and now we have The Battle Bus revived in 2015."

Emily Druiff, executive director of Peckham Platform said:

“We are excited about the potential of Michael McMillan's commission to reflect the challenges faced by multiple communities around issues of displacement and change. The visit of the Battle Bus was a powerful, relevant and inspiring moment locally and I hope Michael's exhibition will offer further opportunities to reflect on Saro-Wiwa's impact and the relevance of his work in Peckham in 2015.”

Born in the UK of Caribbean migrant parents, Michael McMillan's practice is interdisciplinary using mixed media as part of a creative collaborative process working with other artists and engaging with local people on a performative level. *Doing Nothing is Not an Option* commissioned by Peckham Platform takes place inside the gallery and outside in Peckham Square and includes a number of public events.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Michael McMillan was born in the UK with parents from St Vincent & the Grenadines, Caribbean. He studied Sociology at Sussex University and has an MA in Independent Film & Video from Central St Martins College of Art. Beginning as a dramatist his plays have been produced at the Royal Court Theatre and have since been published and toured nationally and internationally. His interdisciplinary practice uses mixed-media installation and curatorial work includes the critically acclaimed *The West Indian Front Room* (Geffrye Museum 2005-06). This led to international commissions: *Van Huis Uit: The Living of Migrants in the Netherlands* (Imagine IC, Amsterdam 2007-08), *A Living Room Surrounded by Salt* (IBB, Curacao 2008) as well as BBC4 documentary: *Tales from the Front Room* (2007), a book *The Front Room: Migrant Aesthetics in the Home* (Black Dog 2009) and an interactive website: www.thefrontroom.org.uk. In 2015, his recreation of the Walter Rodney Bookshop as installation will form part of *No Colour Bar: Black Art in Action 1960-1990* (Guildhall Art Gallery, July 2015-January 2016) and *Rockers, Soulheads & Lovers* will begin a national tour (New Art Exchange, Nottingham, October 2015 - January 2016). He has the first Arts Doctorate from Middlesex Univ. (2010) and is currently an Associate Lecturer in Cultural & Historical Studies at London College of Fashion, and Associate RAS Researcher (UAL).

Sokari Douglas Camp was born in Buguma, Rivers State, Nigeria. She studied fine art at Central School of Art and Design and the Royal College of Art. Sokari has represented Britain and Nigeria in National exhibitions and has had more than 40 solo shows worldwide. In venues such as National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institute 1988-89, the Museum of Mankind, London 1994/5. Her public artworks include *Battle Bus: Living Memorial for Ken Saro-Wiwa* (2006), a full-scale replica of a Nigerian steel bus, which stands as a monument to the late Niger Delta activist and writer and is travelling to Nigeria this summer as part of **Action Saro-Wiwa** – a campaign to clean up the Niger Delta. In 2003 Sokari was shortlisted for the Trafalgar Square Fourth Plinth. Her work is in permanent collections at The Smithsonian Museum, Washington, D.C., Setagaya Museum, Tokyo and the British Museum, London. In 2005 she was awarded a CBE in recognition of her services to art. In 2012 *All the World is Now Richer*, a memorial to commemorate the abolition of slavery was exhibited in The House of Commons. The sculpture was exhibited in St Paul's Cathedral, London, 2014.

Peckham Platform is a creative and educational charity based in a gallery on Peckham Square, SE15. It became independent at the start of 2014 and was awarded Arts Council national portfolio funding six months later. As an organisation it believes that communities can inform and shape their engagement with their locality by working with contemporary visual artists. Its programme of commissions creates meaningful and accessible social arts practice for Peckham and beyond, providing an expansive platform for different voices and debate and bringing contemporary social practice alive. www.peckhamplatform.com

Theatre Peckham is a learning theatre where inspirational artists meet inspirational young people. It is home to world-class creative learning and performance, with and by young people from the diverse communities of South London. Theatre Peckham aims to inspire young people from all its diverse local communities to engage with the performing arts as audiences, participants and artists. www.theatrepeckham.co.uk

Platform London combines art, activism, education and research in one organisation that creates unique projects driven by the need for social and ecological justice. Platform's current campaigns focus on the social, economic and environmental impacts of the global oil industry. Their pioneering education courses, exhibitions, art events and book projects promote radical new ideas that inspire change. www.platformlondon.org