



**PUBLISHED BY
AUTOGRAPH ABP
WITH PECKHAM PLATFORM**

© 2014 Autograph ABP

Autograph ABP
Rivington Place
London EC2A 3BA

T +44 (0)20 7729 9200

E info@autograph-abp.co.uk

www.autograph-abp.co.uk

Registered charity no 1127712

www.peckhamplatform.com

STAFF

Mark Sealy Director

Holly Tebbutt Deputy Director

Renée Mussai
Curator/Head of Archive

Lois Olmstead
Communications and Web
Co-ordinator

Adelaide Bannerman
Archive Project Co-ordinator

Lucy Keany
Outreach Co-ordinator

**THE BOARD OF
DIRECTORS**

Claire Antrobus

Peter Clack

John Dyer

Rupert Grey

Ron Henocq

Rosemary Miles

Mark Sealy

Mitra Tabrizian

Iqbal Wahhab *Chair*

Tom Wilcox

**Autograph ABP is proud
to announce the following
Honorary Patrons**

Rt Hon David Lammy MP

Professor Catherine Hall

Lola Young Baroness Young
of Hornsey OBE

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Autograph ABP is a charity that
works internationally to educate
the public in photography and
film, with a particular emphasis
on issues of cultural identity and
human rights.



Untitled, PSS 01



Untitled, PSS 04



Untitled, PSS 03



Untitled, PSS 05



Untitled, PSS 06



Untitled, PSS 07



Untitled, PSS 31

PECKHAM SQUARE STUDIO

EILEEN PERRIER

Eileen Perrier is a London born photographer of Ghanaian and Dominican descent. Her current exhibition at Peckham Platform revisits the portable studio, a recurring fascination in her practice that engages with histories of portraiture, Victorian photographic styles and techniques, social identities and senses of place. Perrier's work – in this commission as in past projects – deftly explores the intersection between historic photographic materials, technologies, formal conventions, and visual strategies.

For *Peckham Square Studio*, Perrier's sitters were curious passers-by who, over two days in July, visited her portable studio on Peckham Square at the heart of this vibrant part of South London nicknamed 'Little Lagos'. Neither selected nor pre-planned, the participants were those who approached her out of personal curiosity, coincidence or a desire to have their portrait taken. Positioned formally with a headrest, Perrier then collaborated with each subject; using different poses across more than 36 portraits of individuals, families and groups to start to portray a collective sense of place.

'With such a project like Peckham Square Studio, I do feel like there is an exchange taking place between the subject and myself. When I speak of collaboration between the subject and me what I mean by that, is there is a cooperation, which takes place for the work to be created... Those who I take pictures of have chosen to be part of the process. I am not selling them a service.' (Perrier in Mestrich, 2014)

On the front of this newspaper is a portrait of a seated black man; wearing a hoodie, bearded and with a long mane of locks draped over his shoulder. He sits at a 45-degree angle and looks on, as if in quiet contemplation. In her recent interview with Yvette Greslé, Perrier discusses how in photographing her sitter from the front and side on, she references Victorian histories of photography associated with criminology (Perrier in Greslé, 2014). The language of the side-view is inscribed in visual histories that often coded the racialised and social other as criminal types; eugenic inferiors and anthropological objects of desire and fear. These encoded stereotypes inform



Untitled, PSS 09



Untitled, PSS 10



Untitled, PSS 26



Untitled, PSS 12



Untitled, PSS 13



Untitled, PSS 15



Untitled, PSS 25

contemporary visual tropes, such as the urban street style' within which this image could be read.

Perrier's first portable studio emerged from a commission with the Whitechapel Gallery for *The Street* in 2008. For *Wentworth Street Studios*, Perrier set up on a market stall in Petticoat Lane Market and in nearby tower block Denning Point. Local residents, market traders, city workers and passers-by sat for portraits. In 2011, Perrier again recreated her portable studio for a day in Frankfurt with *Kunsthalle Schirn*.

Perrier demonstrates a social engagement in her practice that resonates with my own work as a writer and curator (creating oral histories via an ethical negotiation with my subject). Her approach also resonates strongly with Peckham Platform's mission to champion social arts practice:

'Eileen's practice excites me because it is preoccupied with the social which is integral to the vision of Peckham Platform. Her generosity and responsiveness towards the sitters and the students with whom she has worked, seems rooted in the invitation to participate on their own terms. This is an empowering and potentially transformative experience from both a cultural and personal perspective.' (Emily Druiff, executive director of Peckham Platform, 2014).

Like Daniel Meadows and his *Free Photographic Omnibus* Perrier's portraiture testifies to an interest in the everyday and 'valuing ordinary people, treating them as individuals not as types' (Meadows 2001). Within this socially discursive context there is also the unknown: 'Not knowing how people will relate to my personal ideas and the camera', yet as Perrier says, 'Portraiture allows me to encounter people I would never have the opportunity to know. This can be a brief moment in both our lives. What is great, is that I am able to document our interaction!'

'We would have conversations about the area...One guy mentioned the demolition of the flats nearby. Even though the project was about the community as it is now, it becomes about more than that because you get these dialogues with people, about the history of the area...If I continue doing this work I might

consider developing a process of recording people's stories.' (Perrier in Greslé, 2014).

Taking an interest in the stories of others, as I have discovered through my own practice, often emerges from being curious about one's own story or family history. In 1995, Perrier went with her mother to Ghana and through that experience began to embrace her diasporic identity as both Ghanaian and Dominican, as well as a Londoner. She remembers the importance of photography to her mother. Portraits would be taken of the family on special occasions like birthdays and staged – at home – with the subject sitting or standing still and dressed for the event. This adherence to formal portraiture traditions is evident in early photographs of Perrier's mother as well as those of other family members taken in studios in Ghana. It endures through personal work and commissioned projects in which Perrier has photographed several members of her own family living in London and Ghana, such as in the *Red, Gold and Green* series (London 1996–1997).

There is a protocol here that Perrier enacts that is no different from the High Street studio



Untitled, PSS 17



Untitled, PSS 18



Untitled, PSS 33



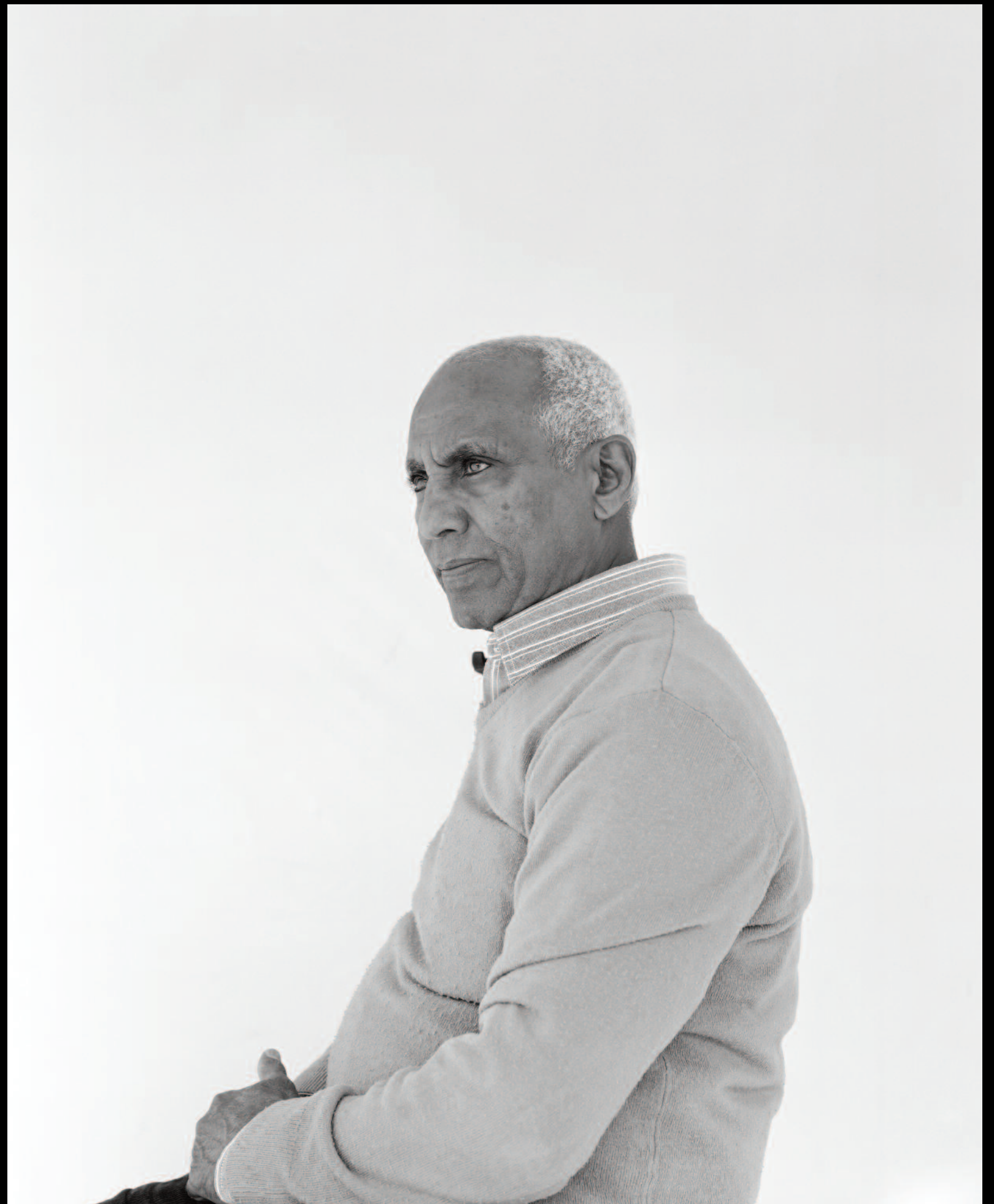
Untitled, PSS 20



Untitled, PSS 23



Untitled, PSS 34



Untitled, PSS 19

that many migrants would have had their portraits taken in to send back home or display proudly in their front rooms. The formal set up generates a level of performance from the subject that Perrier embraces. Discovering the work of the early 19th Century photographer Matthew Brady, Perrier became curious about the rigidity of the male subject, which she later discovered had been kept still by a retort stand and headrest. She also questioned the painterly set up of the portraits that included curtains with subject invariably sitting or propped next to a plinth, seat or table. Access to such a theatrically dressed studio was not usually available to black, non-white or poor white subjects, who were often portrayed in an anthropological context as objects of difference and ridicule. However, coming across the work of the early 20th century Harlem based photographer James Van Der Zee, Perrier was interested in how his work constructively portrays the black subject, in particular the work produced as part of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s.

Perrier has photographed sitters linked in other ways. She explored the politics of black hair in

her *Afro Hair and Beauty Show* series (1998), inspired by Kobena Mercer's writing. Later, drawing on memories of school portraits in which she would rarely smile to avoid showing a gap tooth, Perrier created a series, (which also includes a self portrait) with subjects revealing their own gap teeth (*Grace*, 2000). Perrier's honest unpacking of her childhood sensitivities enabled her to reclaim the beauty of this genetic trait, inherited from her mother. In foregrounding this in the last portrait Perrier took of her, it stands and evokes her in death she named the series after her mother as a memento to her passing.

The work with Year 10 students at *Harris Academy Peckham* was intrinsic to the socially democratic sensibility that Perrier was able to bring to *Peckham Square Studio*. Students participated in five workshops with Perrier. They were asked to bring in family photographs and personal photo albums from home, and to compare and contrast their family images, as well as looking at the work by various artists working with portraiture, family and the studio, including Seydou Keita, Dinu Li, Daniel Meadows and Marjolaine Ryley. A whole

session was spent taking images in the playground and the majority of students also took portraits of each other, using the same headrest device that Perrier used for *Peckham Square Studio*.

The contemporary revival of the portable photographic studio recreates the 19th century moment when the first photographers invited curious members of the public to take part in a demonstration of what was then a revolutionary new technology. Perrier's intervention in Peckham in 2014, it could be argued, brings this full circle. The setting and technology are unfamiliar – the analogue camera, headrest, studio, stillness and formality. But through her studio and the process of her shoot a co-operative relationship develops between Perrier and her sitter who, at its conclusion, is presented with an authenticated copy of their portrait as a thank you for their collaboration. The portable studio, camera and headrest continue to live and the magic that takes place inside this space still has an appeal for people going about their everyday lives.

Michael McMillan – August 2014



Untitled, PSS 27



Untitled, PSS 28



Untitled, PSS 29



Untitled, PSS 30



Untitled, PSS 16



Untitled, PSS 24a



Untitled, PSS 32

TEXT REFERENCES

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.

Greslé, Yvette. 'Eileen Perrier/Peckham Square Studio' <http://www.photomonitor.co.uk/2014/10/peckham-square-studio-2/>

Hall, Stuart. 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', In Williams, P. and Williams, L. (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

Keita, Seydou. *Seydou Keita*, Photo Poche, 1995.

Li, Dinu. *Mother of all Journeys*, Common, 2007.

Meadows, Daniel. *The Bus: The Free Photographic Omnibus, 1973-2001*, Harvill Press, 2001.

McMillan, Michael. Expert-Intuitive Operations in the Creative Decision-Making of "The Front Room" installations/exhibitions: a Portfolio. Arts Doctorate, London: Middlesex University, 2010.

Mestrich, Qiana. 'Photographer Interview: Eileen Perrier' <http://dodgeburn.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/photographer-interview-eileen-perrier.html>

Ryley, Marjolaine. Riley, Brigitte & Brown, Camille *Villa Mona: A Proper Kind of House*, TRACE editions, 2006.

Williams, Val & Fox, Anna. (eds) *Street Dreams: Indian Vernacular Studio Photographs*, Booth-Clibborn Editions, 1997.

Williams, Val & Bright, Susan. *How We Are Photographing Britain: From the 1840s to the present*, London: Tate, 2007.

ARTIST'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- | | |
|--|---|
| Peckham Platform
Emily Druiff, Director
Kiki Claxton , Gallery Officer
Peter Rhodes, Learning Officer
Hannah Clayden, Learning Assistant
Angelica Bollettinari
Margherita Elliot
Mario D'Agostino
James Randell | Michael Dyer Associates
University of Westminster
Andy Golding
Dave Freeman
Darrin Cobb
Moacir Lopes
Chris Wilding
Andre Pinkowski
Nick Braithwaite |
| Autograph ABP
Mark Sealy MBE, Director
Renée Mussai, Curator/
Head of Archive | University of East London
Ralph Hall
David Knights
Stephen Marlow |
| My son
Lewis Dunkley | All the sitters who took part in this project
Lastly, all those whom I have not mentioned, but who helped, listened and assisted me, on my journey to completing this project. |
| Retoucher
Peter Hart | Thank you all. |
| Text Editor
Benjamin Ward | |
| Harris Academy
Craig Christmas
Year 10 students (2013/14) | |

