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# Art | Basel

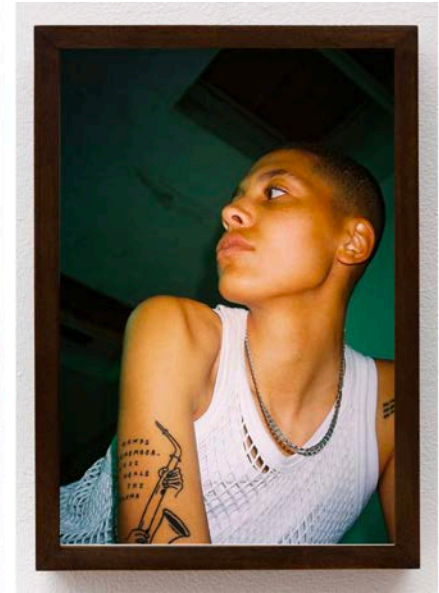
**Sofia Hallström**

## **Rene Matić: out of place, just in time**

With photographic works exploring past and present youth culture, the artist weaves a tapestry of British identity

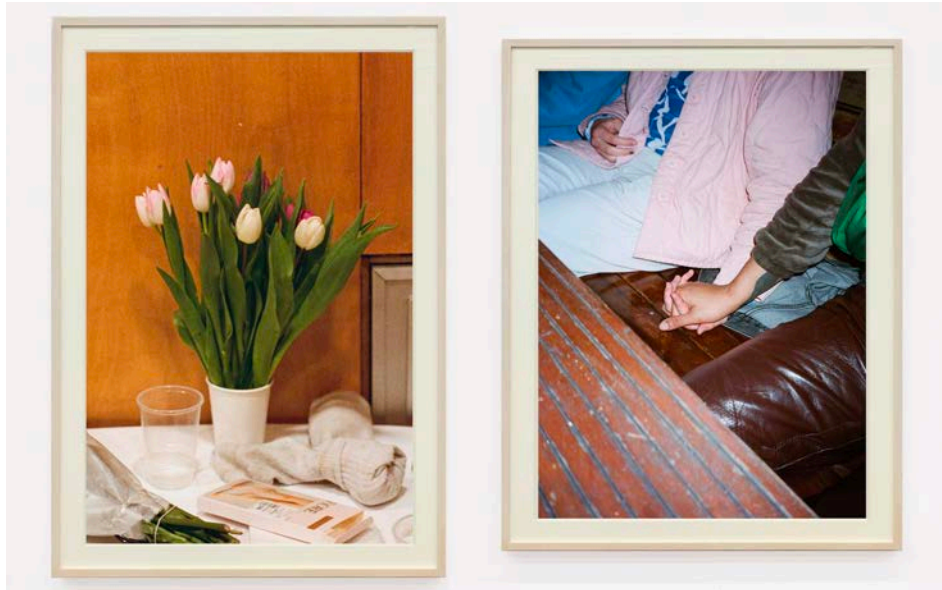
“The subversive potential of being out of place” is really what it all comes down to with my work,’ London-based artist Rene Matić tells me, quoting feminist writer Sara Ahmed, during a recent studio visit. Encompassing photography, film, text, and installation, Matić’s deeply personal practice explores themes of identity, subculture, faith, and family. In the photographic series flags for countries that don’t exist but bodies that do (2018-ongoing), on show at Arcadia Missa as part of Art Basel Miami Beach’s Nova sector, Matić asks what it means to be British by directing their camera at club nights, drag performers caught off-guard backstage, political graffiti on council estates, flowers honoring the Queen’s death, and intimate portraits of friends and family.

At the heart of Matić’s narrative is an exploration of the rude boy youth culture movement, which emerged in a newly-independent Jamaica in 1962. Originating in poverty and unemployment, this movement would be a pivotal influence on skinheads, who embraced working-class mod fashion and Jamaican music genres such as ska and reggae. Their ‘rude’-ness was a pose of political defiance, an affirmation of Black identity against the backdrop of systemic oppression and a refusal to conform to societal expectations that sought to marginalize their cultural expression.



Left: Rene Matić. Photograph by Julien Tell. Right: Rene Matić, Kai in White, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

‘My dad is a Black skinhead and I was brought up in a mixed-race household,’ Matić tells me. ‘It feels like I’m coming from a place that’s already in between.’ Born in Peterborough, Matić moved to London to study art, graduating from Central Saint Martins in 2020. There’s a complex duality in skinhead culture characterized by far-right political tendencies juxtaposed with influences drawn from the rude boy movement. Matić navigates this in-between space by incorporating intimate narratives that challenge oppressive ideologies with love rather than fear. ‘That’s why I’ve got “Born British, Die British” tattooed on my back,’ they say. The artist engages with the body as a framework to underpin humanity’s cultural, political, and familial complexities and traumas.



Photographs by Rene Matić. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London.  
Left: Southbank Centre Dressing Room II, 2023. Right: Freddie and Travis, 2023.

Every image in the series serves as a tribute to life, dance, and spaces that prove indispensable for othered communities. Yet, beneath this conviviality exists an awareness of the inherent tensions within the photographic medium and the act of looking, with Matić recognizing the potential for both harm and celebration to coexist. The artist's exploration is a quest for self within the liminal spaces, aiming to find utopia in moments that challenge the status quo.

Rene Matić is represented by [Arcadia Missa](#) (London). Their work will be on view in the Nova sector at Art Basel Miami Beach.

Sofia Hallström is a writer and artist based in London.

Published on November 30, 2023.

Caption for full-bleed images, from top to bottom: Photographs by Rene Matić. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London. 1. Kai's Birthday Party, 2022. 2. Aries dancing at HOWL, 2023.

# DAZED



Rene Matić, “Emily and Rene”, *kiss them from me* (2023) Courtesy of the artist; Arcadia Missa, London; and Chapter NY, New York

## Rene Matić’s new show is a love letter to chosen families

### Kiss Them From Me brings together intensely personal 35mm photographs from Matić’s recent archive

9 November 2023

Text [Emily Dinsdale](#)

For the last six years [Rene Matić](#) has documented the world around them in an ongoing photography series called *flags for countries that don’t exist but for bodies that do*. During this time, the London-based artist has amassed a vast archive of 35mm pictures amounting to a universe of preserved moments in time; a “heap of broken images” from which myriad tender stories emerge and recede from picture to picture.

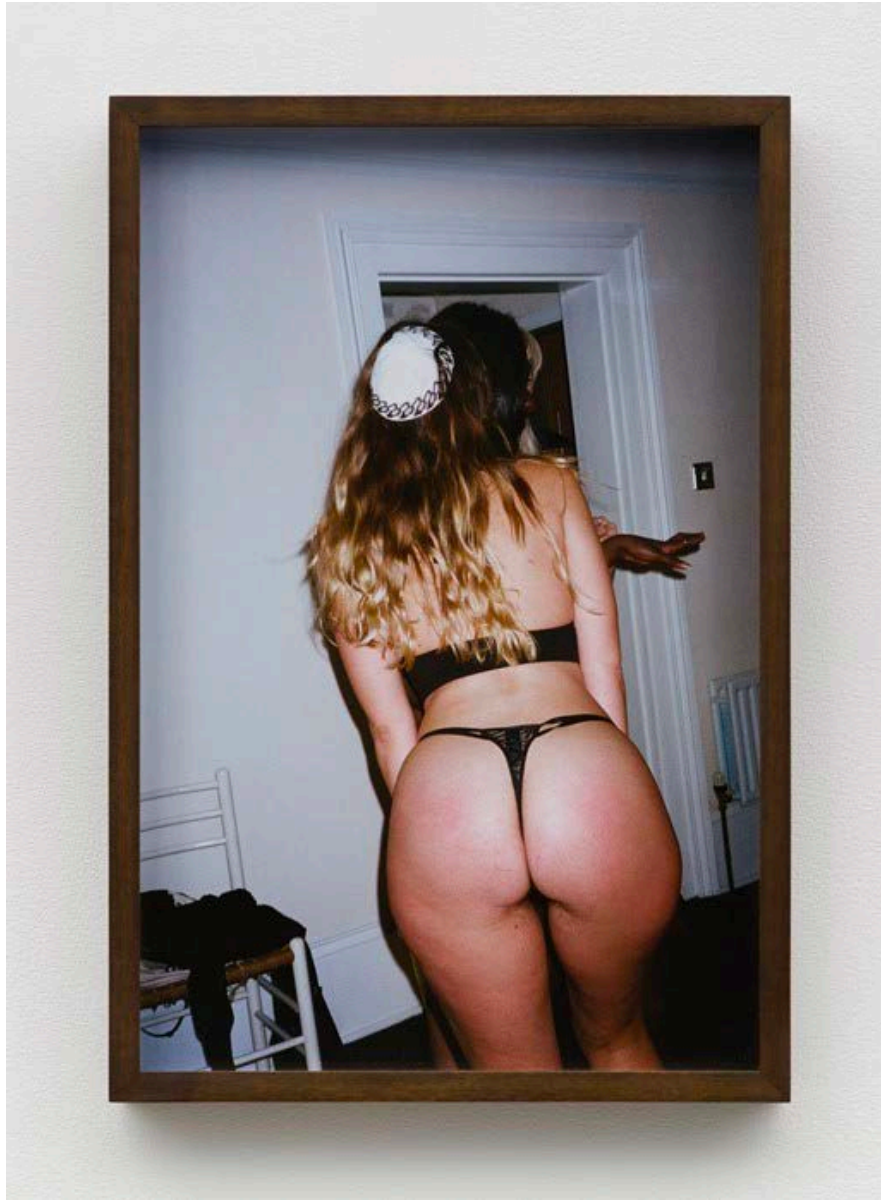
Matić’s latest exhibition at [Chapter NY](#) – their debut solo show in New York – marks the finale of this expansive series. *kiss them from me* is a constellation of images that may at first seem disparate but, as you contemplate them as a body of work, begin to take on the recognisably irregular shape and rhythm of life as it’s lived. In the artist’s own words, the show is “a love letter” to their family, “chosen and otherwise”. For Matić it’s been a year of “grappling with both love and absence”, and these qualities permeate each image, connecting them together and creating emotional contours. From a photograph of votive candles lit in mourning for Brianna Ghey’s murder to friends at Glastonbury caught in the camera flash, Matić’s wife clad in latex, and a friend suspended forever in a moment in time as they celebrate of their birthday, *kiss them from me* is an epic story told in evocative fragments.

Below, we talk to Rene Matić about *kiss them from me*, the difficulties of sharing intensely personal images in public, and the vital importance of pausing to really *look* and be present.

Please could you introduce us to *kiss them from me*?

Rene Matić: *kiss them from me* is a show that marks the end of a photography series called *flags for countries that don’t exist but for bodies that do* that I started in 2018. It’s nearly every 35mm photograph I’ve taken since picking up a camera. All the photos are taken in Britain, apart from one in this show which was taken in NYC. The series is really a love letter to my family, chosen and otherwise, as we make our way in this country that we have been burdened with. As time has moved on, we have moved along with it, and this year – after big life and relationship shifts – I decided to finish this letter and begin a new one.

**“I have been grappling with both love and absence this year. Each image manages to hold both those very big, very real, very exhausting things” – Rene Matić**

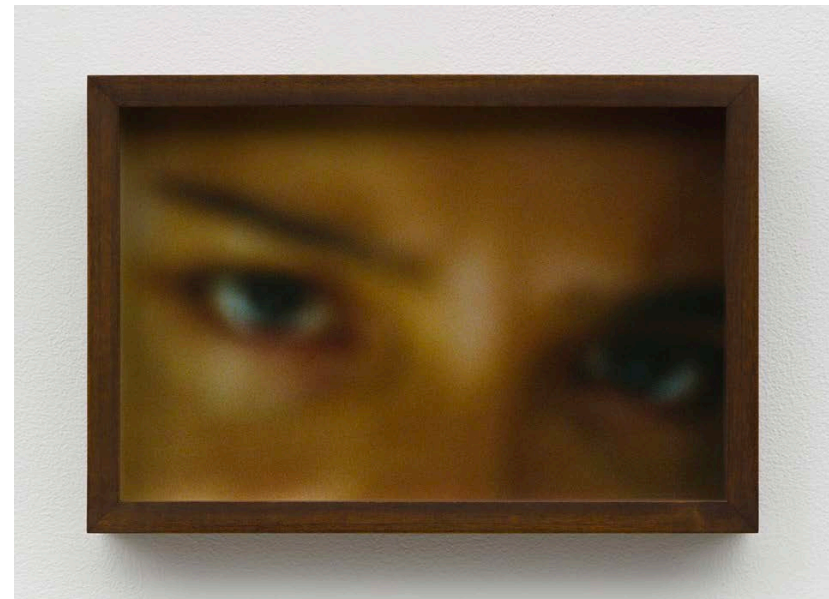


Rene Matic, "Rosie on their Birthday, London", kiss them from me (2023) Courtesy of the artist; Arcadia Missa, London; and Chapter NY, New York

For you, what are the overarching narratives and themes that emerge from this body of work?

Rene Matic: The theme is always looking – pausing. I used to think it was about place but I think it's more about time. The time in which we are living but also what photography can do with time. It gives one a chance to live forever, but it also contains that life. When I am choosing images, I start at now and work my way backwards to create and understand a timeline. This show is mostly photos taken in 2023 but there's a couple from last year and one from the year before. Each photo is almost like a consequence. Themes are given to me.

**I love the untitled self-portrait. Could you tell us about how you arranged the exhibition in the gallery space and why you chose to position this picture on an opposing wall apart from the rest?**



Rene Matic, "Untitled", kiss them from me (2023) Courtesy of the artist; Arcadia Missa, London; and Chapter NY, New York

Rene Matić: That is my first untitled work. I always say it's important to me that the audience remembered it was me looking first, like I am between them and the work. Having that piece at the opposite end of the gallery also means there's a soft anger in that photo – an unsettled in betweenness. That's how I feel.

**Your work always feels intensely personal. How does it feel to experience such private moments on display in a gallery space?**

Rene Matić: It's a real getting rid of... once things are up [on the wall]. Every work is an attempt at giving something away, to rid the self of a feeling. But it is hard. I go through an intense grieving process after shows.

**And do you ever feel a responsibility, as an artist, to make the personal public?**

Rene Matić: I have a responsibility to myself to be honest with the work – whatever that means.

**“I have a responsibility to myself to be honest with the work – whatever that means” – Rene Matić**

**What would you say is your guiding principle when it comes to making work?**

Rene Matić: Presence is key. I've struggled to be present recently and the work has suffered because of that.

**kiss them from me is such a beautiful title. Please could you tell us about where it came from/what it means to you?**

Rene Matić: Thank you! It was really hard to title this show and then I realised I was texting it a lot to friends, asking them to pass love on to a loved one. This title is a kiss hello, goodbye and everything in between. It's gentle. I am looking for gentle.

Rene Matić: I have been grappling with both love and absence this year. Each image manages to hold both those very big, very real, very exhausting things. That's why I chose them.



Rene Matić, “Flowers for Queen Elizabeth”, kiss them from me (2023) Courtesy of the artist; Arcadia Missa, London; and Chapter NY, New York

# i-D



A DOLL NAMED DAN, UK TRANS PRIDE; MAGGIE IN LATEX, LONDON, 2023.

## Photographing queer life in conservative Britain

*Rene Matić's first solo exhibition in New York, 'kiss them from me', is a reminder that not everything can last forever.*

BY EMMA RUSSELL | 30.10.23

Rene Matić has been thinking a lot about endings. They separated from their wife of seven years recently, and have since been reflecting on ideas relating to death, transition and the perishable. Moments of joy can be particularly fleeting for the queer community, where there's a reliance on spaces like gay clubs and underground music venues that are all too often temporary, says the artist, "almost as if they have to be because when things linger on too long, they get infiltrated and stopped."

Worried that the intimacy and truthfulness of their own work might be changing as they become more well known, Rene has decided that their solo show at Chapter NY will also put an end to an ongoing photography series, *flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do*, which documents these safe spaces, the people closest to them and the persistence of love in hostile places. It's intimate work, shot on a 35mm camera in living rooms and kitchens, backstage and in queues: a chronicle of queer life in Britain.



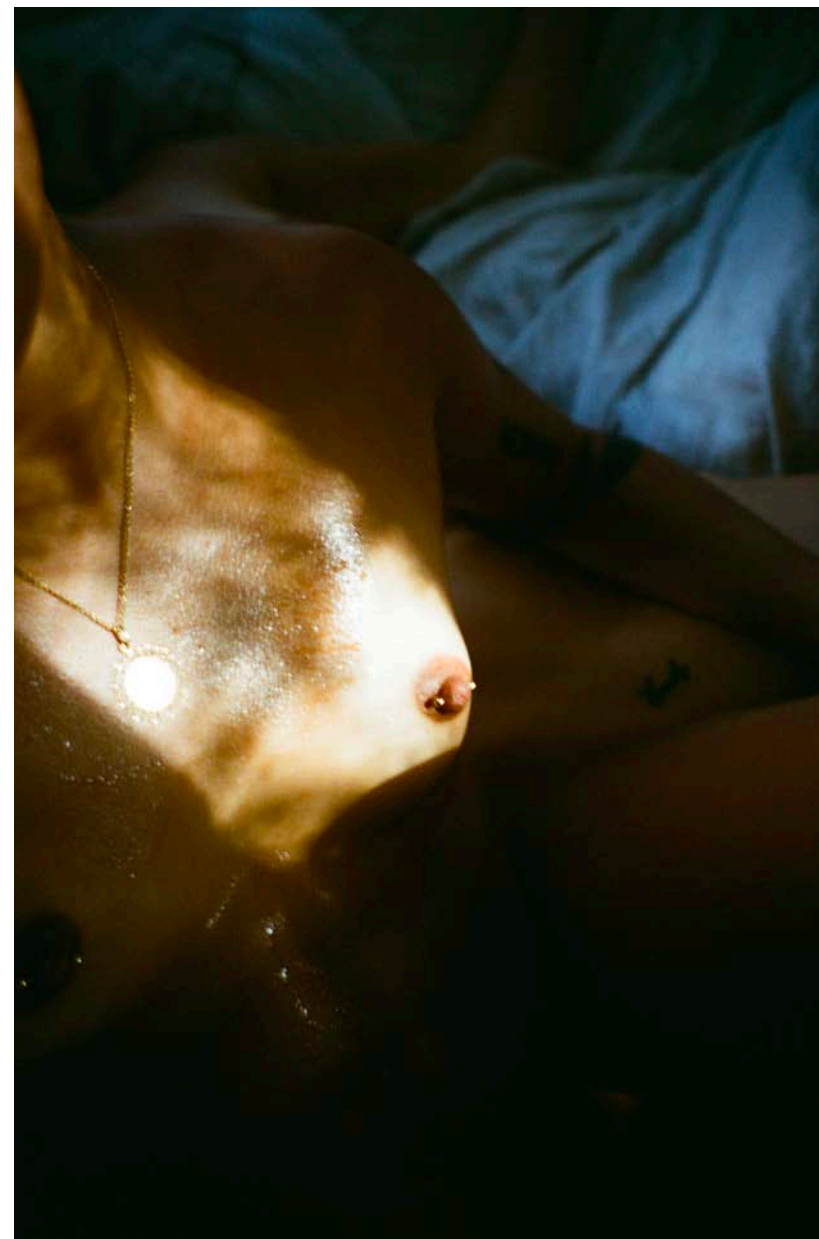
Candles for Brianna Ghey, London, 2023.

Rene thought the project would go on forever, “in the same way that I naively thought that a lot of things would last forever”, they say, but things don’t happen by accident as much anymore, there’s more awareness and the images have taken on a life of their own. “I’m questioning what it means to have a camera and to survey those spaces if I’m bringing a whole other audience into the space by having that image in a gallery,” Rene says.

Named after a text message they would send their friends whenever they’d see Rene’s wife, Maggie, *kiss them from me* alludes to an absence: “I’m not really there, but I’m still passing something on.” The photographs are taken from a body of work that has been several years in the making, and looking back — watching friends grow up and transition, physically and mentally, and shifting class as their careers take off — has been emotional for the artist. “I think there’s quite a big sadness for me about this show, it feels like a grieving of the series and also of other things — it’s like growing up.” Or, they say, “like admitting defeat.”

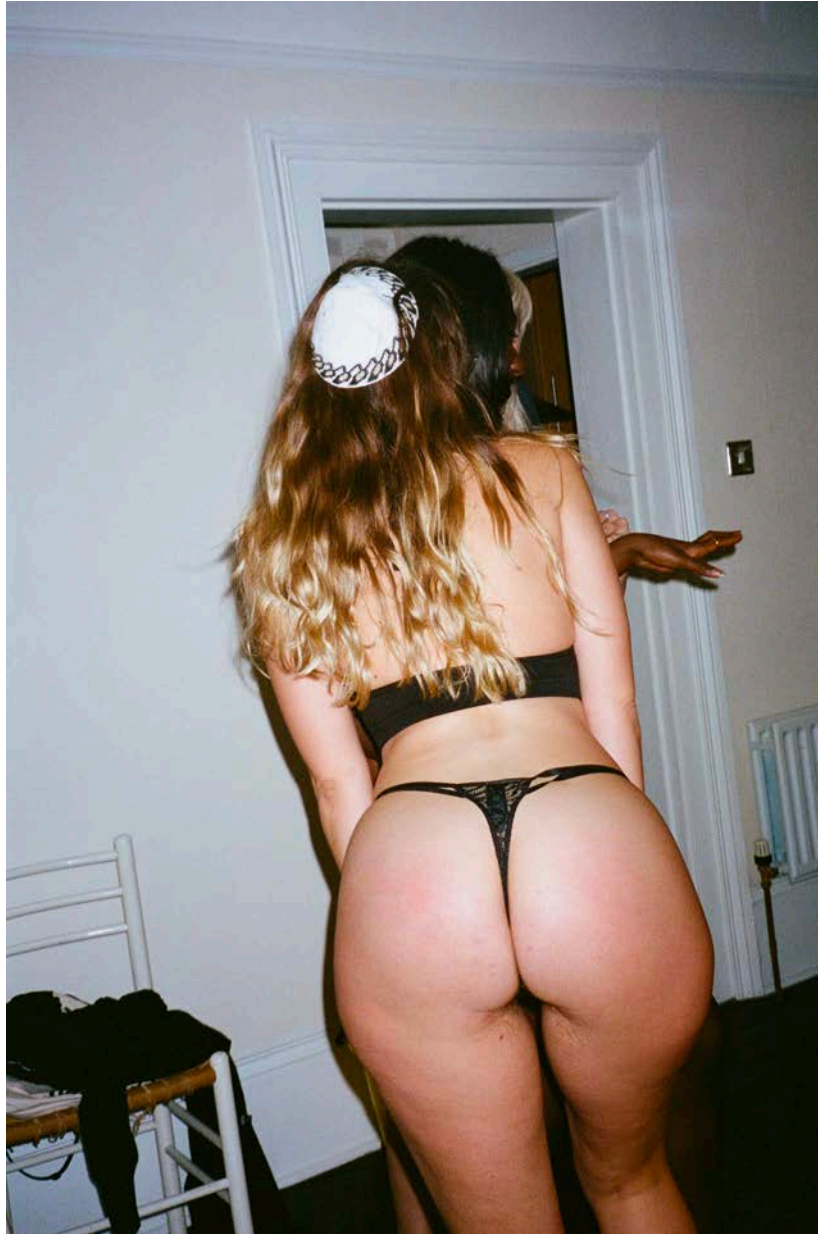
Rene met Maggie on Instagram in 2016, and was married soon after in Liverpool at the age of 19. “It’s crazy and it’s wonderful, and has definitely been the thing that has shaped me the most: the love that I’ve learned about and the care.” Initially, the artist wanted to create a show about how cross they were feeling about how hard it is to keep the world out as an interracial queer couple, and wanted to name it: “I stay alive for you.” But Rene didn’t have the strength to do that show, as the separation was too fresh and painful.

Instead, Rene has selected portraits of trans bodies in protest and celebration: a couple in red mesh at Glastonbury with a union jack hand-painted on one of the revellers’ skirts; the performer Travis backstage at the Hammersmith Apollo; a person holding a sign that says, “I am thriving in spite of this country.” “I want to show an othering of the other. Like to continue, the othering. I think it’s kind of powerful,” they say. “To not have to have these identities that people think they have a pretty clear view of. To skew that is important.”



Candles for Brianna Ghey, London, 2023.





Rosie on their Birthday, London, 2023.

Two poignant photos sit beside each other in the show: an image of the flowers to mark the Queen's death, and candles at the vigil for Brianna Ghey — the 16-year-old transgender girl that was murdered in Cheshire — that encircle the word 'human'. Both show death and grieving, on very different scales, and, like much of Rene's work, draw attention to power structures at play. Importance is placed on one life rather than the other, which feels wrong — one life and person, surely, does not mean more than the other.

Throughout the images, text plays a key role: graffiti, notes, fleeting feelings and subliminal messages. A hand-written note on white A4 is found in a window in Peckham reads 'Black Lives Mater, Save the Planet, NHS.' "It's almost like a desperation," they say. "Like desperation on desperation on desperation — me taking a photo of someone else's desperation is me being desperate and like, this kind of call to action."

Symbols of nationhood and religion are also speckled throughout the exhibit, loaded with a passive aggressiveness towards a Britain that has so much wrong with it and a government that seems unlikely to change. "Marriage to a person of the same gender was never meant for me. In the same way that the tattoo on my back, 'Born British Die British' was never meant for me," says the artist, who reclaims the far-right slogan. Hanging in their show, the emblems are subverted from their original meaning.

Rene grew up in the Brexit town of Peterborough in the East Midlands, which they describe as "beautiful and inspiring" but at the same time "deeply problematic and awful." In a place where everything goes, they say, often it does for better or worse. Last year, the artist explored their mixed-race heritage in a show at the South London Gallery called *Upon This Rock*, which included a video about their father's experience as a British Jamaican skinhead. Back then, working-class kids would unite to dance to ska and reggae before the group took a turn to the far right.

References to dance are woven throughout Rene's work: photographs taken in nightclubs and festivals, where bodies gather without needing to understand each other. It's an out-of-language moment, they say, "it's not Westernised, it's not colonised. It's a kind of utopia that can spring up anywhere." But at the same time, there's the knowledge that the dance floor won't last forever, that it's fleeting. For the queer community these spaces can be a relief and a way of survival, much like the fantasy of kink and dressing up, says Rene, who also captures Maggie in black latex, looking, Rene says, "fucking incredible."

The whole show is defiant and full of love: a reaction to an environment that's getting steadily more bleak in Britain. "The worse it gets the more numb you become, which is really sad," they say. "But at the same time, the tighter my friendship group gets, that chosen family and the love, and the ways of survival get stronger, and we get better at doing that, which is not a good thing. Obviously, we have to protect ourselves."

"I do look at love so much in my work, as a way of surviving and trying to find a way out of this kind of chaos," Rene says. "The reason why I find [the show] quite sad is because it lets go of that a little bit. It's tired. I think that really that's what I'm feeling is tiredness: looking after myself and my family and my people. I'm tired of having to care and I'm tired of having to do this much labour for us to feel at least a tiny bit comfortable."

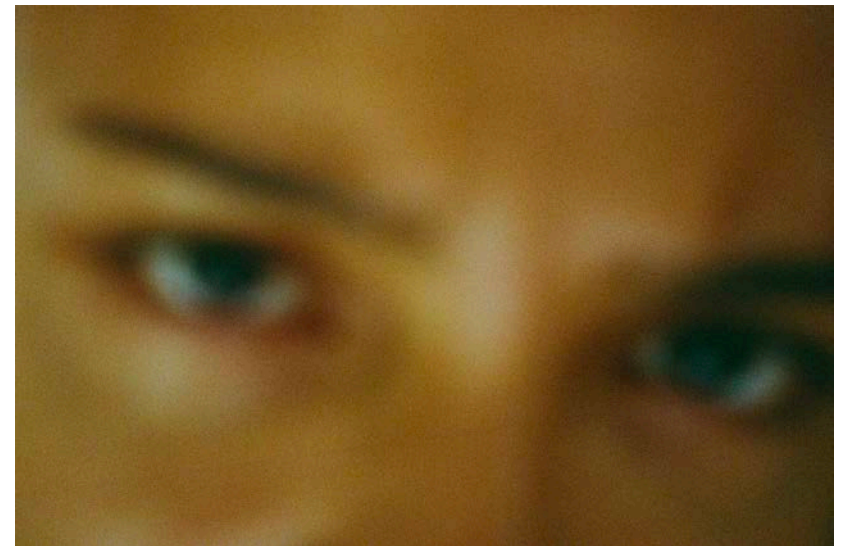
*kiss them from me is on show at Chapter NY from October 27 to December 9, 2023.*

Credits

Courtesy of the artist, Arcadia Missa, London and Chapter NY, New York.



Emily and Rene, London, 2023.



Untitled, 2023.



Love note, Peckham, 2021.



Travis Backstage at The Hammersmith Apollo, London, 2023.



Ryan and Tristen, Glastonbury, 2023



Aries dancing at HOWL, London, 2023.

# FRIEZE

## Bronwyn Katz and Rene Matić Win the Spirit Now Acquisition Prize at Frieze London 2023

IN [FRIEZE LONDON](#), [NEWS](#) | 13 OCT 23

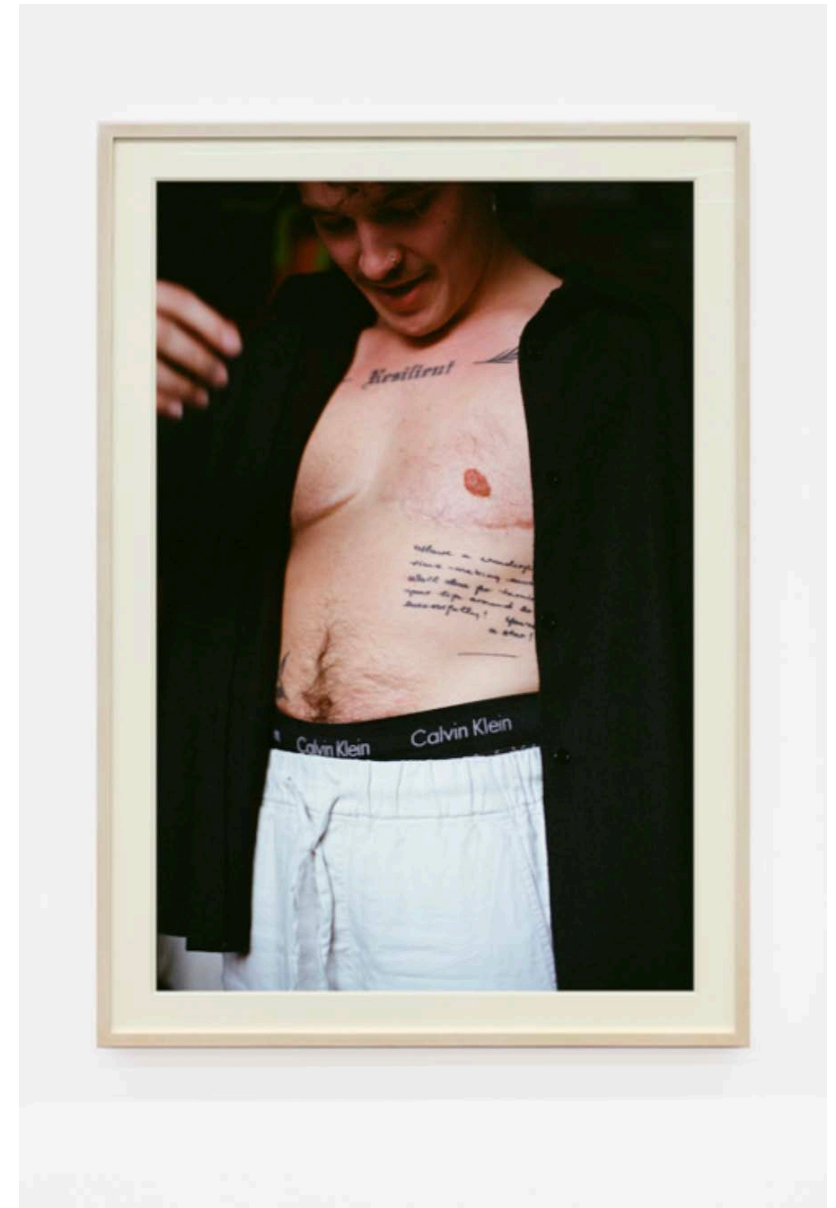
The two artists' work has been selected by the Spirit Now London committee and will join the permanent collection at The Hepworth Wakefield

Spirit Now London has announced Bronwyn Katz (b.1993, South Africa) and Rene Matić (b.1997, UK) as the winners of the second edition of the Spirit Now London Acquisition Prize in partnership with [Frieze London](#).

The selection committee was led by Marie-Laure de Clermont Tonnerre and composed of 17 members of the Spirit Now London Community and the leadership team of The Hepworth Wakefield, including Simon Wallis (Director), Olivia Colling (Deputy Director) and Laura Smith (Director of Collection & Exhibitions).

Katz's large-scale installation *Kx'orakx'ora (renew)* (2022) and Matić's two photographs *Southbank Centre Dressing Room II, London* (2023) and *Freddie Getting Dressed, London* (2023) have been acquired for The Hepworth Wakefield's permanent collection.

Spirit Now London Acquisition Prize supports decentralized high-level institutions in the UK to bring more contemporary creation and diversity into their permanent collections. In 2022, the prize acquired a work by Sylvia Snowden for the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. This year, the Prize seeks to recognize the outstanding achievements of female and non-binary artists below the age of 40 at Frieze London.



Rene Matić, *Freddie Getting Dressed, London*, 2023, archival pigment print, 137 × 95 cm (framed). Courtesy: Arcadia Missa Gallery, London



Rene Matić, *Southbank Centre Dressing Room II*, London, 2023, archival pigment print, 137 × 95 cm (framed). Courtesy: Arcadia Missa Gallery, London



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC DIARY OF TRAVIS ALABANZA'S DAY-TO-DAY

A series of intimate portraits by Rene Matić, shot primarily in Alabanza's home city of Bristol, portrays their authentic expression of self away from the spotlight.

Wednesday 09 August, 2023

Text by [Isaac Muk](#)

Photography by [Rene Matić](#)

On one dreary day last year, photographer Rene Matić was walking with performing artist and writer Travis Alabanza around the Hillfields estate in north-east Bristol. The pair had met pre-COVID on the dancefloor at [Pxssy Palace](#) – an iconic London club night focusing on queer and gender non-conforming Black, indigenous, people of colour – and having followed Travis's work online, while also sharing a Black, gender nonconforming trans identity with them, Rene felt instantly at ease.

“A first impression doesn't really exist for a lot of us anymore because there's already these preconceived ideas of a person – especially when they are a performer like Travis, or has a heavy online presence so they kind of offer themselves up to the world,” they say. “Then when we met in person, I think I kissed them on the cheek. I'm like: ‘Hey babe, how are you?’ It felt familiar already, which is interesting thinking about the access that we feel we have to people – especially trans Black people.”

Built [in 1919](#), Hillfields is the oldest council estate in the city, as well as the place Travis spent much of their childhood years. They hadn't been back to the area in over a decade, but with Rene having been commissioned to create a photographic series about Travis and Bristol, that day felt like the right time to return. As they turned into what would appear to be a nondescript alleyway, Travis stopped and said: “I've brought a skirt with me and I really want to put it on, and I really want you to take my photo in this alleyway. Because this is an alleyway where I've experienced some fuckery.”



Left to right: Travis in the alleyway, Hillfields, Bristol, 2023 © Rene Matic. Courtesy of The Artist and Arcadia Missa, London. BLM, Hillfields, Bristol, 2023 © Rene Matic. Courtesy of The Artist and Arcadia Missa, London.

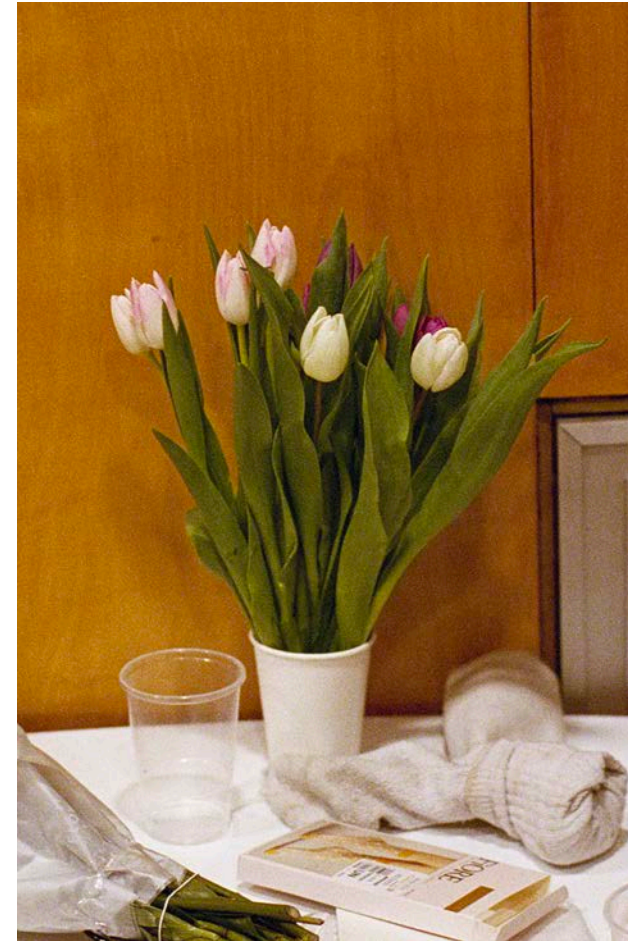
“I was like ‘let’s do it’,” Rene says, reflecting on the moment. “I think that up until that point it was my gaze, and this was like a merging of the gazes together, which was really special and I just understood. We did it and it was really beautiful.”

That picture now forms part of their new exhibition, *a girl for the living room*, which is currently running at The Martin Parr Foundation in Bristol. Alongside that photograph is a series of intimate portraits and candid shots of Travis living their daily life, made over the last 12 months. From eating a fry up with all the trimmings to cleaning up their kitchen and hanging with friends in a studio, the photographs give a peek behind the curtain into Travis’s domestic day-to-day, while simultaneously showcasing their full-throttle, authentic expression of self away from the performing stage, the online eye, and the dancefloor.

“Everyone sees this very energetic person online, and actually it just was like that,” Rene explains. “They do not turn off – their humour, their wit and how intelligent they are, it never stops. And how honest they are just blew me away.”



Left to right: Southbank Centre dressing room I, London, 2023 © Rene Matic. Courtesy of The Artist and Arcadia Missa, London. Southbank Centre Dressing Room II, London, 2023 © Rene Matic. Courtesy of The Artist and Arcadia Missa, London.



The title of the series, *a girl from the living room* is a nugget of openness and honesty in itself, derived from Travis’s confession that they’re a “homebody” at heart – a stark contrast to their very public, open persona. But the project also serves as a reminder that everyone has a private life. “They should give themselves more credit,” says Rene. “They say that they are a homebody, but I think you can still be at home and still have your mind dancing, and I think that’s what I learnt from the project.”



While the lens focuses on Travis, the photographs are also an expression of the blossoming synergetic relationship between the pair as they spent prolonged, intense periods of time working with one another. The series by design had to be collaborative – subverting the traditional photographer and subject relationship, Rene explains, simply because of who they both are – Black, trans, queer people.

“I’m quite a nervous photographer. I was very aware that I was interrupting Travis in their life and being a body in that room was a bit of an interruption and then to have this other presence of the camera... I do get shy about that,” they say. “Part of that comes down to privilege. I’m not really afforded the privilege of being able to get up in someone’s grill non-consensually.”

The collaboration has taught them a lot about their role as a photographer, but also about their personal relationships. “It’s a huge blessing and a reminder why I do the things that I do,” they continue. “And in terms of moving forward for myself and my work, this has taught me a lot about the amount of care and precision that I want to spend on the people I photograph, and don’t photograph as well. It was just a really beautiful thing.”

TRAVIS  
THIS IS DANCEFLOOR ETIQUETTE  
THIS IS GUEST LIST THIS IS KISSES  
ON BOTH SIDES OF YWR FACE  
WITHOUT GLOJ TOUCHING CHEEKS  
THIS IS LOADING THROUGH THE CROWD  
WITH A SWEATY GRIP. THIS IS UD OFF  
THE POPPER) ON THE POPPER)  
THIS IS MOVEMENT THIS IS INTENTION  
THIS IS OK OK OK FAG, AND A TAXI  
THIS IS FAGS IN A TAXI  
THIS IS ON THE WAY TO YOURS NO  
~~SO~~ SO THIS IS ON THE WAY TO  
MINE. THIS IS PARTNERING  
THIS IS FOR NOW - WHILST ~~ITS~~ ITS WAS  
THIS IS UNDERSTAND THIS THIS IS  
DONT FORGET.  
THIS IS AS A MEANS OF/  
THIS IS (THE) REST. THIS IS  
SPARKLING ~~THE~~ SPARKLING SPARKLING  
EVERYTHING ESPECIALLY WATER  
THIS IS LETS NOT (ET) GO. THIS IS  
BEFORE WE DIE. THIS IS PAY YWR  
RESPECTS (WHEN YW SET HOME)  
THIS IS FOR A SECOND  
I JUST WANTED TO KNOW WHAT YWR  
FACE LOOKED LIKE LIT BY A TABLE LAMP  
INSTEAD OF A DISCO BALL  
(it looked like mine).

Handwritten note II © Rene Matic. Courtesy of The Artist and Arcadia Missa, London.



## Rene Matic documents the interior life of a performer

*The photographer's intimate series of their friend, the writer and performer Travis Alabanza, goes on display at the Martin Parr Foundation in Bristol*

By [Megan Williams](#) 13/07/2023

“Many of the relationships that permeate the QTPOC (queer, trans, people of colour) community have been birthed in clubs and on dancefloors,” explains photographer Rene Matic.

“They are relationships that exist when the room is always too loud to converse (with words) but you show up and you show out with concern and care together – even just for the night – until the next time.”



*Top: Travis getting ready for the National Diversity Awards, London, 2023; Above: Travis and Mia having breakfast, Bristol, 2023. All images © Rene Matic*

The club laid the initial blueprint for Matic's friendship with Travis Alabanza, a Bristol-born performer and author of *None of the Above* – a book that is part memoir, part social commentary.

When Matic was commissioned by the Martin Parr Foundation in 2022 to create a series focusing on Bristol, the photographer's response was to document their friendship with Alabanza as it evolved beyond the confines of nightlife spaces, “lit by a table lamp instead of a disco ball”.

The series takes a sideways look at their relationship to examine the quiet interior life of someone in the spotlight.

Matic shows the moments associated with a public persona – book signings, makeup being applied before an awards ceremony – but also digs past to the person underneath as they hover alone in a kebab shop or at a bus stop. Some of the most intimate images are of Alabanza at home, facing away from the camera. To turn your back on someone is usually taken as a stand-offish, guarded gesture, but here, between the washing up rack and a tub of Clover, it seems like a silent indication of trust.



*Travis and Rene in Mia's studio, 2023*



*Travis at home, Bristol, 2023*



*Southbank Centre dressing room I, London, 2023*

Matić captures the moments that are rarely afforded people in the spotlight, least of all those who, as the Foundation puts it, “perform to survive both financially and politically”, and those whose very existence is subject to intense scrutiny by the mainstream.

The body of work is named after a bell hooks quote: “I’m such a girl for the living room. I really like to stay in my nest and not move. I travel in my mind, and that’s a rigorous state of journeying for me. My body isn’t that interested in moving from place to place.”

# DAZED



Rene Matic, "Travis and Rene in Mia's studio" (2023) © Rene Matic

## In pictures: an intimate queer friendship between an artist and playwright

Rene Matic's latest photographic exhibition follows a friendship with performer and playwright Travis Alabanza as it blossoms from the Pxxsy Palace dancefloor and into the living room

"I met Travis in all our sweaty flesh at Pxxsy Palace around 2017 or 2018," recalls interdisciplinary artist Rene Matic, looking back on their first IRL meeting with Bristol-based playwright and performer Travis Alabanza at the London-based QTBIPOC club night. Longtime social media mutuals, following one another's lives and work from a digital remove, they would reunite sporadically over the years via the escapist, euphoric spaces of the dancefloor.

Yet for Matic, there was an undeniable sense of kinship underpinning their relationship – one which transcended the fleeting nature of their meetings. "I'm interested in these kinds of relationships that permeate the QTPOC community - the ones that exist when the room is always too loud to have a conversation," the artist tells Dazed. "The ones where the communication only continues in fire emojis and comments on Instagram but the 'so nice to see you last night, love you!' is still very real and very felt and very mutual."

So, when Matic was approached by the Martin Parr Foundation and tasked with creating a new body of work focused on Bristol in 2022, they saw the commission as an opportunity to cultivate their connection with Alabanza in new ways. "I started to think about this idea of intentional love and the love that only exists with certain people in certain places – the club, the corner shop, the pub, the church," Matic adds. "I thought about Travis, as someone who is from and lives in Bristol, as an opportunity to get to know not just the location but the person, intentionally."

But while Alabanza generously agreed to embark on this journey with Matic, they had some initial qualms. "Travis called me and was worried that I was expecting an array of partying and 'fun' to photograph," Matic explains. "They told me they were really a 'homebody' which is different to the way they are framed online." Alabanza's word choice here reminded Matic of a quote by bell hooks ("I'm such a girl for the living room. I really like to stay in my nest and not move. I travel in my mind, and that's a rigorous state of journeying for me. My body isn't that interested in moving from place to place"). This would later inspire the exhibition's title, *girl for the living room* and lead Matic to depict their subject in moments of rest and stillness which "we are rarely afforded as marginalised people".



Rene Matić, "Travis getting ready for The National Diversity awards", London (2023)  
© Rene Matić

Work on the project began in 2022 and is still ongoing, but the work displayed in the exhibition documents a series of encounters between London and Bristol. Now no longer seeing one another solely under the bright lights and carefully fashioned glamour of the nightlife or theatre space, the collaborative series takes us into the blossoming friendship between the two creatives as Matić's lens depicts Alabanza in places and scenarios where they can simply *be* - without a pressure to perform or an expectant public waiting to consume their words, experience or presence.

Often with their face out of frame, these candid 35mm photos document the performer in the kind of everyday, domestic situations usually considered too banal to find their way onto social media (except, perhaps, during the heyday of BeReal) but which are often shared between close friends and flatmates. There are images of Alabanza waiting at a bus stop, pictures of the performer with their

back to the camera while cooking in a pink-and-yellow kitchen, and snaps of fry-ups with friends against formica-top tables. We're taken into the green room, too, invited to witness the vulnerable moments which bookend Alabanza's work on stage. Here, we see dressing room tulips defiantly displayed in a makeshift, paper cup vase and makeup wipes poised perilously on ceramic sinks – backstage detritus which marks the transformation of our 'girl for the living room' into an internationally recognised performer.



Rene Matić, "Travis in the alleyway", Hillfields, Bristol (2023) © Rene Matić

And while all the pieces displayed in the exhibition document a growing connection, there are particular exchanges which will stay with the artist as defining moments of this developing friendship. One such moment occurred during an afternoon spent walking around Alabanza's former childhood estate. The day is immortalised in one of the hand-written letters included in the exhibition, as well as a portrait of Alabanza regarding the camera face-on while wearing a black dress and motorcycle jacket and reclining against an alley wall which bears the graffiti "gay". Alabanza asked for the photo to be taken – and for Matic, the image represents a mutual understanding between artist and subject. "They didn't have to explain much about why they wanted me to take that photo in that location in that outfit. It was a moment when it wasn't about getting to know because there was already a knowing (there always was)."

The body of work might document a specific relationship between a specific sitter and artist, but really it is a testament to the power of love and vulnerability – and marks out affection and intimacy as subjects which deserve more attention. "I am realising how important it is to me that I create these intimate archives. I have and will continue with Travis and lots more of the people I love," they say. "I worry that in the culture we live in, if something isn't imaged then it is absent. Narratives of love and care are so often absent in our archives, if there is an archive at all."

And while the project addresses gaps in the representation of queer people of colour, Matic sees this not as a primarily political project but, instead, a personal one. "I am aware, as Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa articulates, that representation at the level of the image should not be mistaken for political representation," they add. "That is not my hope or my duty. My hope and duty is to know love and know it *well*."

# MOUSSE

Rene Matić “upon this rock” at Kunstverein  
Gartenhaus, Vienna

08.03.2023 READING TIME 3'



Rene Matić “upon this rock” at Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna. © kunst-dokumentation.com / IG: @kunstdokumentationcom

Rene Matić’s solo exhibition “upon this rock” continues the artists long-term interrogation of ‘Britishness,’ exploring how the nation’s past manifests in its present. Presenting Matić’s work for the first time in Austria, the works investigate how family histories reverberate through different generations placing both subculture and spirituality in dialogue. While recognising the pitfalls of both, it positions subculture as religion, as saviour or guide, and vice versa. Matić notes: “it appears there is faith and soul both in the best and worst of things. There are parallels between finding the church and finding the pub. Or finding God and finding subculture. And in the end, I understand it as the search for something greater than yourself, something that won’t fail you when you are being failed.”

The new film work, *Many Rivers* (2022) takes the figure of Matić’s father, Paul, as a starting point to reflect on diaspora and the experience of growing up as a mixed-race person in Britain in the 1960s. Paul’s father Julien emigrated to the UK from St Lucia in the Caribbean in 1958. Paul’s mother, a white Irish woman called Patricia, gave birth to Paul in 1962 at the age of nineteen. Patricia—who was Catholic—feared stigma and expulsion from her religious community due to giving birth to a Black baby ‘outside of wedlock,’ and ultimately returned to Ireland leaving Paul with Julien and his new partner. This story is told from four perspectives: that of Paul; Matić’s mother Ali; their grandfather Julien; and their aunt Lulu. Matić says: “Paul doesn’t know when he was moved to Peterborough. He doesn’t know when Julien was there and when he wasn’t. He doesn’t know who’s related to him. He doesn’t know about his Blackness, and he doesn’t know about his whiteness.” Through this film’s four-way dialogue the gaps in Paul’s story are partially filled.

Two vitrines, *New Town*, (2022) contain archival images related to Matić’s life.

The artist notes: “I am always looking for where I’ve come from. There are very few photos from my Dad’s side of the family, things got lost or left behind. And so, what I have is what I am offering and is that enough? Is it enough to construct an identity, or a life, or a country? This family archive reiterates an existence—a building of a church upon a rock. . . against all odds.”

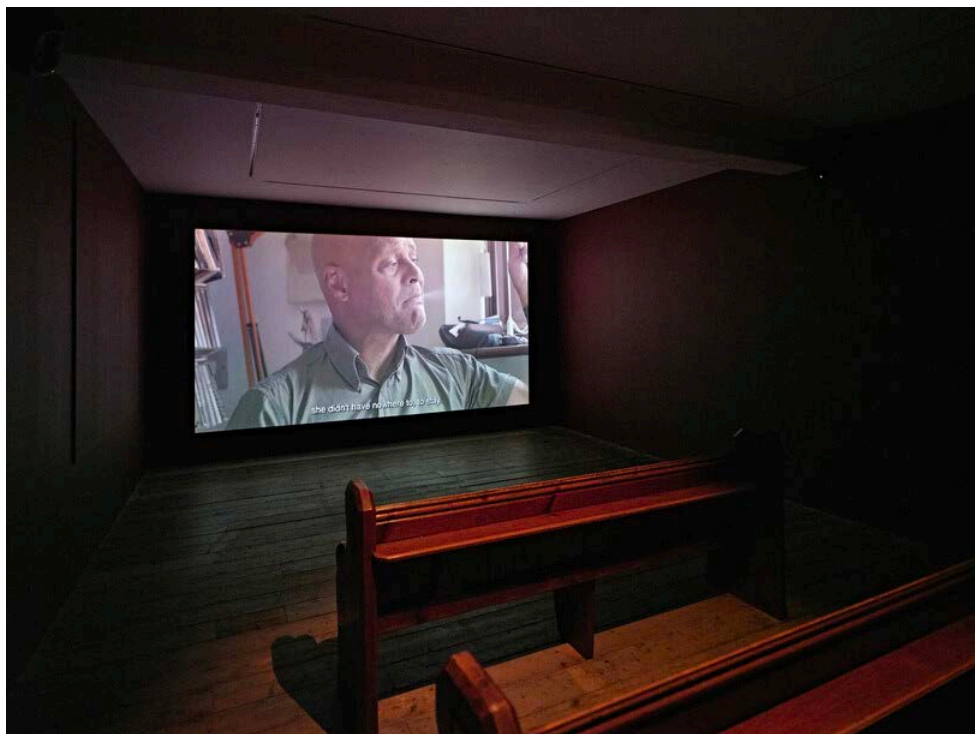
The framed photograph *Destination / Departure*, (2020) shows the artist's tattooed back. The image was taken by British photographer Derek Ridgers who documented subcultural movements including skinheads throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The tattoo itself was carried out by Lal Hardy, who tattooed many punks and Skinheads in England in the same era. By inscribing the far-right slogan '*Born British Die British*' on the mixed race, queer body Matic's irreverently derides and problematises the myth of a pure unadulterated Britishness, while simultaneously claiming the phrase as their own. The act also critiques violence enacted on Black and Brown bodies throughout British history and into the present day. By commissioning Ridgers to take the photograph, Matic inserts themselves into a specific visual history of Skinhead subculture.

Also featured are new images from the artist's ongoing photography series entitled *flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do* (2018 – ongoing). This series is a personal diary documenting Matic's community and family (chosen and otherwise), as well as being a portrait and deconstruction of contemporary Britain.

at Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna  
until March 18, 2023



# ARTFORUM



View of "upon this rock." Photo: Andy Stagg.

LONDON

## Rene Matic

SOUTH LONDON GALLERY

65 - 67 Peckham Road / 82 Peckham Road

September 23–November 27, 2022

*Many Rivers*, 2022, the video that anchors London-based multidisciplinary artist Rene Matic's largest exhibition to date, seats its viewers on a wooden church bench. We are guided to consider its intimate documentary narrative—which orbits around the experiences of the artist's father, Paul, within variously hostile environments—as one underpinned by questions of faith and of the endurance of the soul. While Matic's visual idiom utilizes imagery from markedly unexpected contexts, the artist's address, here as throughout the exhibition, is characterized by a rare memoiristic sincerity. The sharp dissonances generated make for a show as visually ambiguous as it is emotionally confrontational.

A roomful of 35-mm photographs, both hard-edged and lovely, mines poetics from signifiers of even the harshest nationalist orthodoxies. (Images of union flags and royalist memorabilia proliferate alongside portraits of lovers and friends.) Matic is invested in troubling preconceptions of what "Britishness" might mean from a distinctly mixed-race perspective, interrogating its aesthetic regimes with a striking alertness to how competing iconographies play out in public space; the legacy of Paul's immersion in skinhead culture are a dominant thread. A vitrine functions as a coda to the show, filled with ephemera relating to Matic's family history and that of Peterborough, their hometown: football memorabilia, vinyl records, birth certificates. None are reproductions. Matic commits to a no-filter ethic, a refreshingly generation-specific mode of oversharing justified by the precision of the juxtapositions.

That the exhibition is occurring in a feverish atmosphere of historical unraveling for England and the U.K.—its installation likely spanning two monarchs, three prime ministers, and numerous intersecting crises of un/livability—contributes to the vitality of Matic's presentation. (The artist directly alludes to this tension by including in the aforementioned vitrine a copy of the right-wing tabloid the *Daily Express* from the day after the Queen's death.) Everything has a life cycle. *Many Rivers* concludes with a dedication that summarizes both the exhibition's unfailingly empathetic core and its artful tangling of familial and cultural history: "For a little boy called Paul, and those who tried their best."

— *Dylan Huw*

# DAZED



## London artist Rene Matić is subverting white skinhead culture

**The artist's new exhibition, *Upon This Rock*, explores subcultures, British identity, and the stories that are buried in their family's past**

"I like to describe my work as existing in a meeting place of 'rude(ness)' - a quality of 'interrupting' or existing 'in between'," explains Rene Matić, the acclaimed London-based artist whose work brings together ideas of British identity, subculture, survival, family, and faith. Matić's latest exhibition, *Upon This Rock* (currently running at South London Gallery), excavates generational trauma through a series of installations and films which present deeply personal narratives from Matić's own background.

"*Upon This Rock* is the motto for my hometown of Peterborough," explains Matić in a conversation over email. "It references a passage from the Bible in which Christ says to his disciple, Peter, '...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' For me, it speaks to building something safe and sacred and strong on precarious, unstable and slippery terrain. It's about modes of survival." Lineage, roots, and our connection to place are threads which run throughout the work. Faced with Matić's examination of sites of memory, we can't help but think of our own home soil and the ground upon which we stand - on which our family before us have also stood - and upon which we build our lives. In this way, *Upon This Rock* conjures the uncanny sense of the past and the present existing in the same shared space. Matić says, "I'm really interested in how family histories reverberate through the generations, something I also explore in *Many Rivers*."

"I'm really interested in how family histories reverberate through the generations"

- Rene Matić

Matić's new film work, *Many Rivers* – which makes its debut in the exhibition – tells the story of the artist's father, Paul, unravelling the "ambiguity of his past" and the institutional prejudice that divided his father Julien from the white Catholic mother he never knew. "*Many Rivers* tells this story from four perspectives – Paul's; my mother, Ali; my grandfather, Julien; and my aunty Lulu. Paul doesn't know when he was moved to Peterborough. He doesn't know when Julien was there and when he wasn't. He doesn't know who's related to him. He doesn't know about his Blackness, and he doesn't know about his whiteness," Mati ć tells us. "It's also a story about the experience of existing as a mixed-race person during this period when laws protecting Black people in Britain from racial discrimination were being debated in parliament. Paul was seven when Enoch Powell made his 'Rivers of Blood' speech where he posed the threat that 'in 15 or 20 years' time, the Black hand will have the whip hand over the white man.' The crux of these stories and the thread that runs through this film is one of working-class, diasporic survival; in some cases, solidarity and in most cases triumph."

**"Skinheads represent and celebrate the relationship between white working-class British culture and West Indian Caribbean culture. I carry that in my body. It doesn't speak to me, it speaks of me and for me" – Rene Mati ć**

If the work is about the materiality of place and the stories it evokes, it's also about the body as a site of memory. Here, the body of Christ is truly omnipotent. Mati ć's new installation, *60 and 25, alive* (2022), consists of 25 bronze figures to represent every year of the artist's life and 60 found crosses for every year of their father's. "To crucify a body is to render that body un-useful – to take the life from a body whilst holding that body as a signifier for life. It is the representation of birth and death, reinvention, and liberty," Mati ć elaborates. "I have used this symbol before. It has been helpful to appropriate it from white skinhead culture and use it in opposition to the right-wing co-option as a metaphor for the exhausted Black British body, and that still stands here."

The artefacts and symbolism of faith intersect with Mati ć's interest in skinhead culture. "This work connects The crucified skinhead is a longstanding symbol used by the entire skinhead subculture – i.e. both racist and non-racist or anti-racist skinheads. Skinheads often use it to convey a sense of persecution or alienation or that society is arrayed against them," the artist says. What is it about skinheads that speak to Mati ć? "Skinheads represent and celebrate the relationship between white working-class British culture and West Indian Caribbean culture. I carry that in my body. It doesn't speak to me, it speaks of me and for me. It's where I came from," the artist tells *Dazed*. "Subcultures provide hope for marginalised folks. Subculture is a way of imagining the self out of the situation you are in and *knowing* yourself out of that situation. So much power comes from that."

Visit the gallery above for a closer look at *Upon This Rock*.

Rene Mati ć's *Upon This Rock* is running at [South London Gallery](#) until November 27 2022

# FRIEZE

## The Best Shows to See in London During Frieze

From Tai Shani's inaugural exhibition at Gathering, a new art space in Soho, to Christopher Kulendran Thomas's first institutional outing at ICA

BY ALICE BUCKNELL IN [CRITIC'S GUIDES](#), [REVIEWS](#) | 11 OCT 22

### Rene Matić and Simeon Barclay

South London Gallery

23 September – 27 November



Rene Matić, *upon this rock*, 2022, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and South London Gallery; photograph: Andy Stagg

This autumn, South London Gallery presents two solo exhibitions by British artists Rene Matić and Simeon Barclay. A gigantic fake boulder, suspended puppets and a row of locked office doors in Barclay's Main Gallery installation conjure an ominous architecture packed with cultural references and splintered symbolism. Meanwhile, Matić's 'upon this rock' unfurls across multiple spaces and media, offering a powerful collage of faith, family and life cycles that frame the artist's work. Of particular note is *60 and 25, alive* (2022), an installation by Matić that incorporates 1970s domestic interiors, skinhead subculture and a sculptural reconfiguring of the crucified body, modelled on the artist's father, to reflect on intergenerational trauma and the exhausted Black British body.

## Interview

### Artist Rene Matic: 'This story is about what, if anything, saves us'

Skylar Sherwin

Mon 26 Sep 2022 08.00 BST



Rene Matic's, *Many Rivers*, 2022. 'I have found home in my dad's skinhead roots, because once upon a time, identifying as a skinhead represented unity between

#### At the heart of this young trailblazer's solo show is a film following their father, Paul, a black skinhead – it is joyful,

Two years ago, the young artist Rene Matic had the far-right slogan "Born British Die British" tattooed on their back. The words unfurl in a delicate font across their rippling shoulders in the elegiac black-and-white portrait they then commissioned from one of their heroes: the celebrated street photographer Derek Ridgers. His early work with 1970s and 80s skinheads captured a burly tribal energy often fuelled by extremist views.

Inked on Black lesbian body, the phrase becomes a lot more than a war cry for embattled white men. "[The tattoo] was always about the in-between moments of being born British and dying British," Matic says. "That's what my story is all about."

For the artist, skinhead culture's roots, when white and British Jamaican kids danced side by side to ska and reggae, and the movement's later infamous tilt to the far right, make it "the perfect metaphor for talking about West Indian and white working-class culture – my culture". Skinhead insignia is a leitmotif throughout *Upon This Rock*, the 25-year-old's first big solo show of their film, photography and sculpture, at the South London Gallery. So, too, are crosses and flags, the major emblems of nationhood and church.

#### My whole life with my dad has been tortured by the ambiguity of his past Rene Matic

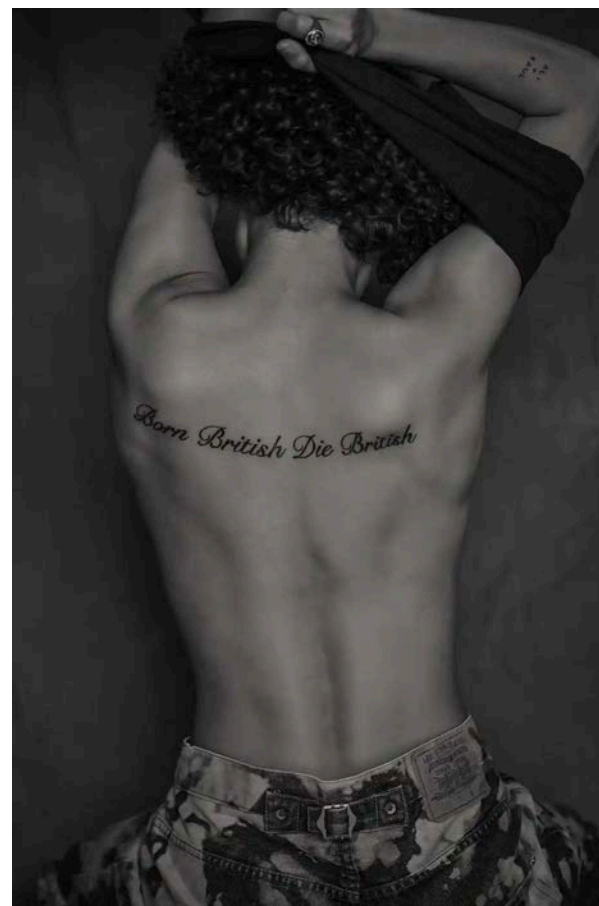
Yet it is how everyday people reach for, use and at times overturn these limited symbols that are one of the exhibition's core themes. It is an ethos summed up in the title of Matic's 35mm photography series, *Flags for Countries That Don't Exist*, an ongoing document of their life in which identity shifts constantly – from their wife Maggie's fabulous outfits to their nephew Rudi's childhood passions.

The star of the show though, is the artist's father Paul, whose raw, troubled life is handled with a gossamer touch in Matic's astonishing first film, *Many Rivers*. Paul is, improbably enough, a Black skinhead, who, inspired by an older white stepbrother, first found a sense of belonging and release with local skins in his home town of Peterborough. This, however, is far from the most extraordinary thing about Paul. His lifelong struggle with identity has knotty roots, beginning with the institutional prejudice that divided his father from the white Catholic mother he never knew. Childhood abuse, care homes, alcoholism and the pervasive shortfall of possibility in a failed "new town" have all taken their toll. "My whole life with my dad has been tortured by the ambiguity of his past," Matic says. "I set out, not necessarily to tell his story, but learn it for both of us."

Explored through family members' often painful recollections and footage of Peterborough's forgotten housing developments and broken-down churches, the film could have made grim viewing. Instead, it's as ebullient as it is moving, shot through with moments of freedom, laughter and caring: Paul dancing jubilantly in an otherwise drab backstreet and clearly loving the camera; his sister's solidarity; his sheer charm as a storyteller. As the artist points out, "the crux is a working-class diaspora's survival and triumph".

A sculptural installation riffing on the symbol of the crucified skinhead with bronze Christs inspired by Paul, affirms him as a victim with the potential for salvation and resurrection. "When Paul talks about being a skinhead in the film, his face lights up for the first time: suddenly, he has a purpose," Matić says. "This story is about the cause and effect of pain and suffering, and what, if anything, saves us in the end."

## Three more works ...



Photograph: Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa gallery

### **Destination/Departure, 2020**

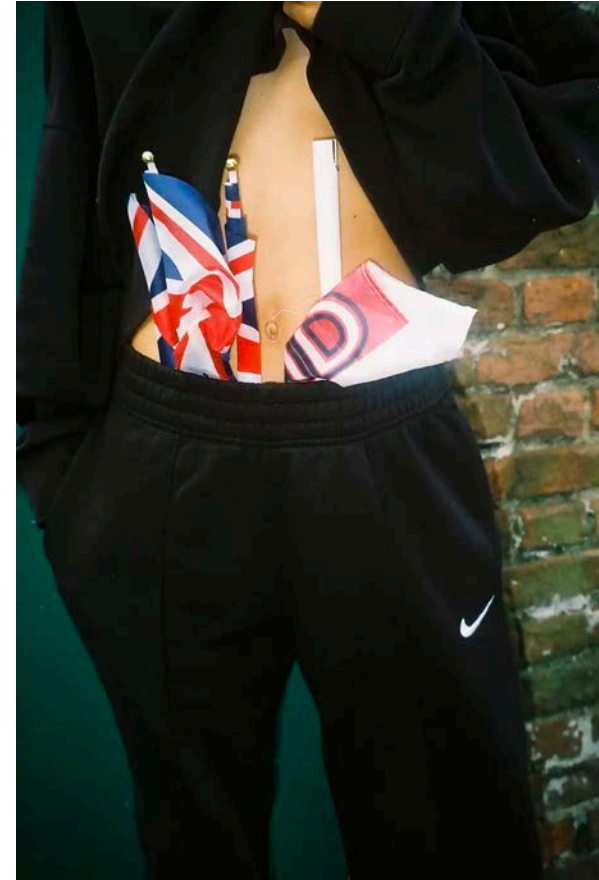
"This was partly inspired by earlier photographs of fascist tattoos Derek Ridgers had taken," says Matić. "I wanted to insert myself into that narrative. I came across Derek's photos [of skinheads] when I was younger. I think I was searching for myself, or my dad, in that scene. His work was instrumental in me understanding my culture, identity and position – and opposition."



Photograph: Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa gallery

### **Maggie in Orange, 2021**

“This is one of many photos of my wife, Maggie, and their ever-changing hair, which acts as a marker of queer time in this series. The exhibition explores how faith has presented itself to me and the people I love. Here, the way Maggie is represented is reminiscent of a kind of holy spirit. My gaze is that of pure love and belief.”



Photograph: Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa gallery

### **VE Day Skegness III, 2020**

“This was taken during the 2020 lockdown when Skeggy came out in full patriotic force. I had been isolating there with my wife and hadn’t seen another person of colour for three months and was feeling the weight of it. It felt like a dystopia, like some Get Out shit. One day, I’d been accused of stealing a parcel I was carrying. I stole some flags – which were everywhere – instead. This is me, understanding that gaze.”

*Rene Matić: Upon This Rock is at South London Gallery until 27 November.*

# Wallpaper\*

## Two South London Gallery shows explore selfhood and subcultures

Running concurrently at South London Gallery, exhibitions by Simeon Barclay and Rene Matic explore the complexities of cultural identity utilising film, photography and construction



Rene Matic, flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do, 2018 - ongoing at South London Gallery. (Image credit: Andy Stagg)

South London Gallery established its main building in 1891, but has expanded in recent years to include additional spaces. Each holds its own rich history, and provides an apt stage to consider ideas around legacy, identity and British culture. In their respective solo shows, Simeon Barclay uses sculpture to prompt conversations about space, while Rene Matic considers notions of 'Britishness' through film, photography and memorabilia.

### Rene Matic: 'Upon this Rock'

The two London art exhibitions run concurrently, yet explore two very different perspectives. Matic's artwork, on view in the gallery's Fire Station space, uses images of graffiti and masculine tropes to offer insights into British culture. The flags in the show are used as emblems of identity; an image of the St George cross is stamped across the front of a block of flats, a tentative link to 'skinhead subculture'. Alongside it is an image of Union Jack bunting hanging across the front of a terraced house. In Matic's ongoing series *flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do*, a cluster of Union Jack darts sit next to a 'Black power' afro comb; both are inside a mug that says 'your country needs you', and sit on books by African-American artist Glenn Ligon. Elsewhere is an image of flags shoved down the front of tracksuits, and another of a police car crashed into traffic lights, setting a tone of structures in flux and asking 'whose authority?'

BY MARTHA ELLIOTT  
PUBLISHED OCTOBER 01, 2022

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM  
ANDY STAGG - PHOTOGRAPHY

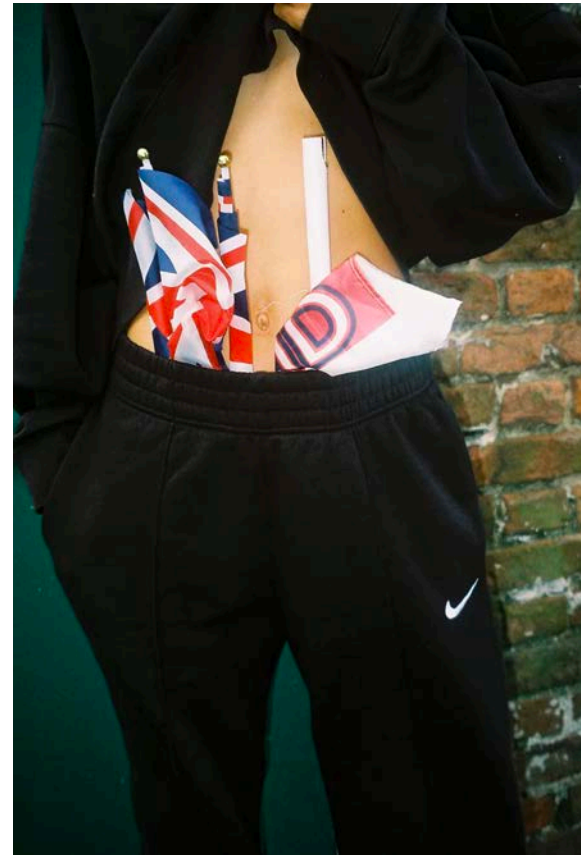




Rene Matic, *65 and 25, alive*, 2022 at South London Gallery.  
(Image credit: Andy Stagg)

Matic looks at resetting the meaning of flags, their piece *upon this rock, I will build my church*, 2022, takes an extract from the Bible. A flag, hand-stitched with the work's title hangs over the entrance to the building. Inside, spirituality draws the show together. A dimly lit room, with one wall covered in crucifixes, feels like a shrine. On closer inspection, each cross holds the figure of a skinhead – the crucified body used as a mark of perceived alienation. Emblems of organised religion cross over into subcultural references; a 30-minute video, *Many Rivers*, 2022 is watched from two church pews. The video documents childhood anecdotes from Matic's father's childhood. Recalling racism, school and the social care system, the video retraces the artist's early years through the eyes of their father, mother, grandfather and aunt.

In the show, Matic displays an array of competing symbolism, using religion as a lens through which to understand specific cultures. 'There are parallels between finding the church and finding the pub,' the artist explains. 'Or finding god and finding subculture.' By pinpointing moments of platonic intimacy and visiting familial history, Matic reflects on the routes we all take to finding our own subcultures, and in turn our own 'flag' – literally or spiritually.



Rene Matic, *VE Day, Skegness III*, 2020, part of *flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do*, 2018 – ongoing.  
(Image credit: courtesy the artist)

# Rene Matic



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## CURA.

**Rene Matic**  
in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist

CURA. 38  
The Generational Issue  
SS2022

Studio visit

**HUO:** What are you working on right now?\*

**RM:** The artwork I am working on right now is a new commission from Somerset House Studios called *Follow the Light of the Suns*. It consists of old vitrines filled with badges that the audience can performatively take away with them. I haven't used badges in my work before, but I am definitely interested in collecting them. Different people can wear the same one and yet it can mean different things: I'm obsessed with any kind of subcultural object that can be used and acquire different meanings. The other project I am working on is for the exhibition *Beano: The Art of Breaking The Rules*. Somerset House is organizing a show, curated by Andy Holden, celebrating 80 years of Beano, a very British comic which was very popular in the postwar period. I didn't read it myself, but my parents and my granddad did. The characters all wear black and red clothes because they were the only colors they could print back in those days. I was really interested in the most well known character in the comic, Dennis the Menace, because the black and red striped clothes he wears are really similar to the Pan-African flag, which also has green in it. In the Pan-African flag red represents blood, black represents the skin and green represents the land. I was really interested in the idea that Dennis could wear this blood-redness and the color of the skin without landlords, as an example of what black Britishness is. You have this skin and this violence, but there is nowhere to put it. For the same commission, I've also created a character called Moonstomp, who takes his name from the song *Skinhead Moonstomp* by Symrip.

HUO: So that's a new character you are bringing in?

RM: Yes. I am going to show his outfit.

HUO: And that's going to be in the exhibition about Beano?

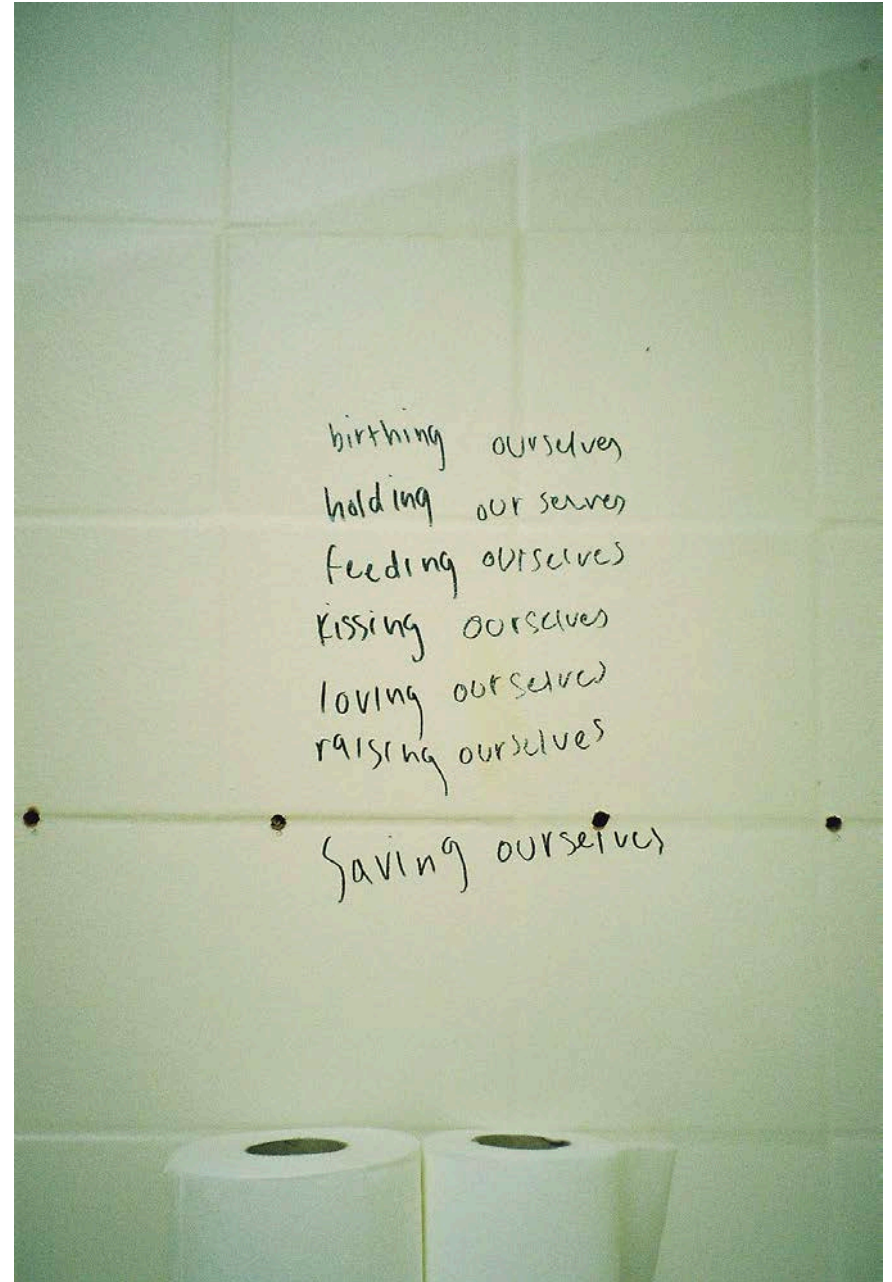
RM: Yes. I am very excited about that because I often use clothes, but this is the first time I've used them as a way to really build up a character. I can show you the sketches for Moonstomp, this little skinhead. The song *Skinhead Moonstomp* is about putting on an outfit to dance to the moon. It is about black and white, working-class Brits coming together, dressing up and finding their space. Moonstomp is the guy who's going to be dancing, but all that is shown of him is his outfit. The work will be finalized this week. There's just been a lot going on. I recently won a grant to make a film.[1] I've been wanting to make a film about my dad for a long time.

HUO: In the Arcadia Missa exhibition[2] you present photography and a sound piece. I loved the show!

RM: Thank you. In that exhibition, there are these characters which come up throughout, and my dad is one of them. I've always wanted to make this film or explore my dad's experience. He was born in 1962, to my granddad who came to St. Lucia in 1958. His mother was a 19-year old Irish Catholic white woman called Patricia. She gave birth to him out of wedlock, so therefore had to leave and go back to Ireland. My dad is a very poorly man, he suffers from alcoholism.

HUO: So that's all a real story?

RM: Yes. Patricia, my dad's mum, had him here in England. And then she went back to Ireland, where my granddad couldn't marry her because he was black and the priest was racist. These are things that I'm just learning about. I wanted to make a film about my dad and his parents. I interviewed my granddad and my auntie, my dad and my mom.



Saving Ourselves, 2019



Rudi at Christmas, 2019



Maggie in Pink, 2019

HUO: As I can see in the book for the Arcadia Missa exhibition, you also do a lot of handwriting.

RM: Yes, I do a lot of writing, always handwriting.

HUO: So you're basically writing poems?

RM: Yes. Always.

HUO: And what inspires your poetry?

RM: I love bell hooks. I love any kind of academic who writes from an emotional starting point. I've always struggled with academia, and I find that being emotional in my understanding of theory is helpful.

HUO: And you've clearly read *Glitch Feminism. A Manifesto* by Legacy Russel.

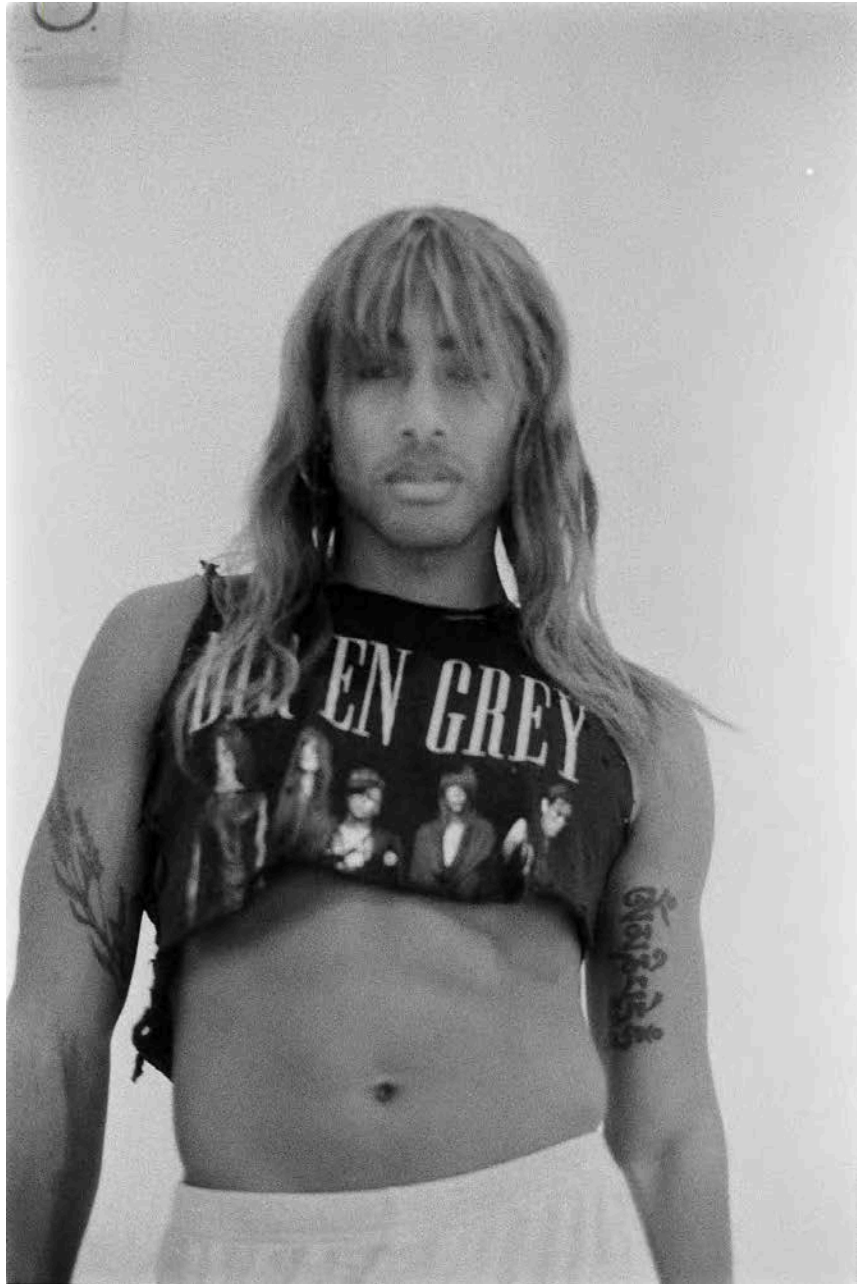
RM: Sure. I always say that the overarching theme of my work is this idea of rudeness, the 'rude boy.' And it's similar to glitch, because it's about this interrupting and existing in between, and evoking some kind of reaction to your existence. The show at Arcadia Missa was kind of scary, because I had never shown my 35-millimeter pictures before. And it wasn't even my decision to make the book. They said: "We have seen that you have these pictures. Can we make a book?" And then, when we were doing the book, we decided to do a show.

HUO: So did the book come first?

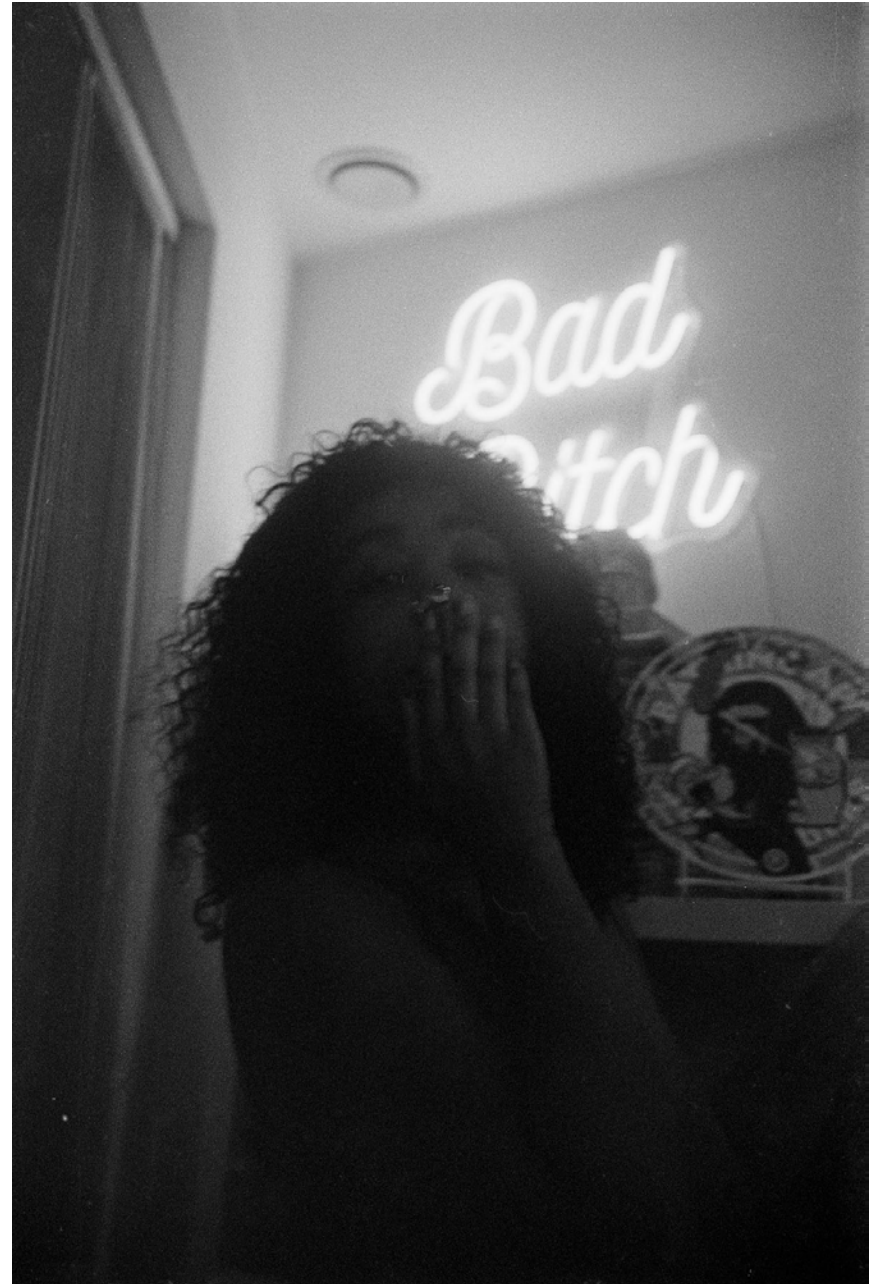
RM: Yes, it came first. It was a really interesting experience, because all of the pictures were taken at a time when I haven't been thinking about controlling my practice, it was never about them being shown. I'm trying to carry some of that energy on in my new work, because they were quite well received.



VE Day, Skegness III, 2020



Malik at Somerset House II, 2020



Chidera on Her Birthday II, 2020

HUO: Who are the photographers who inspire you?

RM: This picture<sup>[3]</sup> here is from a show that I did at VITRINE gallery, *Born British, Die British*.<sup>[4]</sup> The guy who took it is Derek Ridgers, a photographer who has always been interested in subcultural movements. He was never a skinhead, but he was just there. I've become obsessed with his photographic work: he and Gavin Watson are largely responsible for showing the skinheads in all their multiplicity.

HUO: So he was not a skinhead but a friend of the skinheads?

RM: He was of a similar age, and just found them interesting as a photographer at the time. I asked him to take that picture of me so I could insert myself into this narrative because there's some gorgeous pictures of tattoos of racist skins that he's taken. To have him taking this photograph of me, for me meant like, "Fuck you!"

HUO: So, he would be a photography inspiration?

RM: Yes, and Gavin Watson, obviously. A lot of the pictures that anyone knows or sees of skinheads were taken by Derek Ridgers and Gavin Watson. I also looked a lot at Nan Goldin. And inspiration-wise, it's mostly just any image from Postwar Britain to early '80s Britain. I am very interested in that era.

HUO: And for your writing?

RM: Well, as I said bell hooks, but also Patti Smith is a huge inspiration. And actually a lot of music. Maybe more reggae and ska music than poetry. Music is an important reference to most of my practice.

HUO: Please, tell me more about the film you are making.

RM: I was like, "I don't want to make this film. I want to, but I don't want to." I suppose it is because of the anxiety of sitting down with my family, it's a difficult story to tell. There are so many things that needed to be unearthed, that would happen during the process of making the film.

HUO: What's the first film you made?

RM: I think the main film that people know me for is *Brown Girl in the Art World III*, which is the film of me dancing in front of a pub.

HUO: Can you tell us about the genesis of that work?

RM: I was in my second year at university when I made that. I was really stuck on this film called *This All Belongs to You*, in which I was dancing in a skinhead attire. And I became really obsessed with Arthur Jafa's idea of 'glamouring,' you know, with people kind of moonwalking their way out of submission. I made this previous film and I thought: "Am I just babysitting the white gaze? Am I doing anything with this?" My whole year was just taken up with understanding what was going on. In the end I made *Brown Girl in the Art World III*, which was inspired by the whole discussion about what goes on when imaging the black female queer body and also, I suppose, the labor that goes into the understanding of imaging it. The dancing films came about because I'm obsessed with the film *This is England*: every time there's a fight scene, they slow it down. And you get to see how clear all of the movements are but also how big they can be and what they actually mean. So that's where dancing came in. I always say that it feels like my blackness and my whiteness are in a war with one another. And the only way that I feel like I can show that war is by dancing. My dance moves are always slowed down in order for me to understand what is going on with those movements, because they're not rehearsed.



Kai Taking Their Braids Out II, 2020

**HUO:** The book has a great title, *Flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do*.

**RM:** I love flags, and I use them a lot in my work. They are always supposed to represent more than one thing. I think the reason why I am obsessed with flags is that they have two sides, so there's always this obsession with two sides of things. And it means that I can say two different things but have this meeting point in the middle, which I think is what being mixed is like. I installed a flag on top of a building on the occasion of the group show *Arcadia* in the frame of the yearly program of commissions *Bold Tendencies*. One side of it said "Dance with me" and the other side said "Let me lead." The work's title is *no more quick, quick, slow*, which is a quote from the book *Britain's 'Brown Babies'*, which was about how the black GIs came over from America and danced with white women. And the white women were like, "Finally, someone can move," because they were so sick of the dance moves that their husbands had been doing with them. When whiteness and blackness come together, whiteness feels very much alive, but blackness perhaps does not. This flag I am showing you is the original flag that we hung for the whole summer, and when they decided it should be a permanent installation I produced another exemplar.

**HUO:** Hannah Black talks about the "anti-symbolic". So, it is an anti-symbolic flag, an ambiguous flag...

**RM:** Absolutely. It's interesting, because all of my work is a recycling of symbols that are not meant for me, but I take them up and turn them on their heads.

**HUO:** Let's get back to your dad's story and the film you are making. When your dad was a skinhead, that was prior to the skinhead idea being appropriated by the extreme right. When did that happen historically?

**RM:** It was pretty confusing. It was probably around mid '70s.



HUO: Do we know what happened?

RM: All I can understand is that because there wasn't, up until then, much evidence of the war, by the mid '70s films started being released glorifying Hitler and Nazis and making them look very glamorous, like something that could be taken up and used in order to get rid of the shit that was going on in England. So that's why it happened around the mid '70s, because of television, and because the dissemination of information was easier and more accessible. It was a moment of crisis for the British Empire, from the economical, political and social point of view, with massive unemployment. All of this information about the war and fighting became very alluring. I would say that's what happened. It's just so hard to grasp, it was so gradual. Even my dad being in it, it was hard for him to understand when it happened. Just one day it was really unsafe for him to be part of that.

HUO: So he left the community?

RM: Yeah, I guess so. I mean, he enjoyed it. He loved that as a black guy he could be untouchable by hanging around with these racist white guys. The skinhead is just this very apt metaphor for everything that goes on.

HUO: Do you have any unrealized projects, like dreams, utopias, things that would be too expensive to be realized?

RM: Yes, this fucking film! The grant basically bought me the iMac to make it, but I'm very overwhelmed because in my head it was a film and now I'm realizing that it's a show, that each interview should be by itself and not in the order I previously imagined. So this is the project that I feel overwhelmed by, and I need someone to come in and help me understand that, someone who is separate from my family. I'm very anxious to get back to working on it. The whole process is a research process.



Portrait by Owen Harvey

HUO: Did you ever work in performance? Are you interested in performance?

RM: I've never done one. Although I understood the experience of getting a tattoo as a performance.

HUO: Tattoos seem to have a lot to do with writing, which is interesting.

RM: I like that it reflects the way that I write, which is in quite short, small moments. Tattoos do the same thing, I suppose.

HUO: So these are like haikus. Tattoo haikus.

RM: Exactly! I overexaggerated it as a performance in the sense that I've got it tattooed, and my body will continue to change with that tattoo, in the same way that the political climate does. And that meaning will change throughout my life. But in terms of audience and performance, I've never done that. I think I'm very interested in the thing in between the performance and the audience, which is the camera or the screen. I can imagine I could be performing. Right now if I got approached to do a performance, then I would definitely figure one out. I mean, there's always room for more.

HUO: Often something can start as performance and then can become a work or vice versa.

RM: The dancing videos are interesting because I'm not showing a real version of what's going on, they're slowed down. I'm only dancing for three minutes. But in order to show the drama, or the violence of movement, I go crazy for three minutes, and it's really hard work. And no one understands that kind of weird moment that's going on. They just see this kind of seamless movement.

HUO: Would you say that the photographs are performance? I feel that some are like performances. There are lots of performative moments in them.

RM: I assume you can't deny it. As soon as a camera is put on a body, then it suggests that that body is performing in some kind of way. So yes, I would say so.

HUO: Last night I was reading Paul Gilroy's *After Empire. Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* I think it's a book one has to read and reread.

RM: Yes, absolutely. It's a book that keeps on giving. I think with identity, my identity, I'm just constantly trying to recognize moments where myself or my community are disrupting by accident, just by existing we are spitting in the emperor's face. It's not supposed to be violent disruption, it's supposed to be like we're doing it by accident, just by being born. I'm very interested in re-imagining the violence of the skinhead culture, of any subculture, as something that's happening by accident. In my work I use dance as a way to talk about violence.

HUO: When you photograph do you do it like a daily practice or a weekly practice? Or are there moments in which you do a lot of pictures and then not? I was wondering that in the exhibition, if it's a project or if it's just something you always do.

RM: I am always taking pictures, but I definitely have moments where I pick up the camera more times than not. I mean, the book contains photos taken from the moment that I literally started using a camera.

HUO: And you don't use a phone, you use a camera?

RM: Yeah. This one and another one.

HUO: But is there a physical film inside or is it a digital camera?

RM: Yes, a physical film.

**HUO:** Well, I haven't seen a physical camera in ages. It is such a strange experience to see it and hear the sound. The other day I did an interview with Richard Long. And he said, "This is a bad line. You have to call back." I rang him back and he said: "No, I'm not comfortable. We need a better line. This is not a landline." And I said "Richard, I didn't have a landline in ten years." That's the story of extinct technology. The sound of this camera, I haven't heard it in a long time. Do you remember, I don't know when it was (it must be in the '90s), when one would go on the internet, the modem would make that sound.

**RM:** I remember getting a computer for the first time at home. And I think we didn't even have internet at the time. And I was like, what is the point of this computer?

**HUO:** There's a great sentence, I think it's Hannah Black's. It says: "The dreamlessness of the surroundings intensifies the inner dream." I was thinking that about your show: the dreamlessness of your show provokes people to dream.

**RM:** I honestly had no idea what this show or this book were until Hannah wrote the text. And all she had was the pictures, she was one of the first people to see them.

**HUO:** Have you known each other for a while?

**RM:** No, I don't know her. I only met her through doing this. She works with Arcadia Missa, she's black and British and her work has this lovely academic side. The reason why we go to academia or theory, most of the time, is from an emotion and I think that Hannah gets that perfectly.

**HUO:** Thank you so much. It was a great studio visit. I've told everyone to go and see your show. I was so excited. \* The conversation took place in 2021.

**RM:** I was sad when it was over. But it was one of those lovely things of having the book—that it continues.

1 BEYOND #2 from Film and Video Umbrella, <https://www.fvu.co.uk/projects/beyond-1>.

2 *Flags for countries that don't exist but for bodies that do*, Arcadia Missa Gallery, London, 22 July – 4 September 2021.

3 Rene Matić, *Destination/Departure*, 2020, blueback photographic print mounted on MDF. Photographed by Derek Ridgers, 152 × 101 × 1 cm.

4 *Born British, Die British*, VITRINE gallery, London, 11 October 2020 – 17 January 2021.

**Rene Matić  
in conversation with  
Hans Ulrich Obrist**

**All images:**

**Courtesy: the artist and Arcadia Missa, London**

**Portrait by Owen Harvey**

**CURA. 38**

**The Generational Issue**

**SS2022**

**RENE MATIĆ (b. 1997, Peterborough, UK) lives and works in London. Their work brings together themes of post-blackness, glitch feminism and subcultural theory in a meeting place they describe as rude(ness) – to interrupt and exist in/ between. @rene.matic**

**HANS ULRICH OBRIST (b. 1968, Zurich) is Artistic Director of the Serpentine Galleries, London. Prior to this, he was the Curator of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Since his first show World Soup (The Kitchen Show) in 1991, he has curated more than three hundred shows. @hansulrichobrist**

# TRIBUNE

20.04.2022

## The Enemies Within

By  
[Ravi Ghosh](#)

Young artists Corbin Shaw and Rene Matić are challenging the slogans, images, and ideas of Britishness by drawing on personal experience and class politics.



Corbin Shaw, Comfort Blanket, 2021. Photo Credit: Rob Harris

In 2013, Jeremy Deller represented the United Kingdom at the 55th Venice Biennale, the pinnacle of the art world calendar. His exhibition, *English Magic*, combined English folk with a fairly merciful (but of its time) anti-establishment sentiment, speaking in juxtaposition and conceptual ingenuity rather than outright iconoclasm. Deller's patchwork of paintings, photographs, textile, sculpture, and video—all conceived by him, but often executed by guest artists—contained a multitude of historical and pop culture references, in what the Turner Prize winner called a 'wistfully aggressive' portrait of nation.

One mural portrayed an imagined torching of Jersey by an anti-tax evasion mob. Another showed a giant hen harrier clasping a Range Rover, a reference to the 2007 shooting of endangered birds over the Sandringham estate (allegedly by Prince Harry). Sketches of Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell by incarcerated ex-servicemen lined the walls of an Iraq War-themed room, while 250,000-year-old palaeolithic hand axes lived next door. Two textile banners flanked the pavilion entrance, each bearing lyrics from David Bowie's 'The Man Who Sold the World'. On the left, 'I searched for form and land', and on the right, 'For years and years I roamed'.

I was reminded of Deller's work visiting *Nowt as Queer as Folk*, a recent solo exhibition by Corbin Shaw at London's Guts Gallery. The pair share a semantic language in which subversion and intertextuality reformulate the motifs and idioms of deep Englishness. Both use football, rave culture, and folk rituals to scrutinise national identity. (Shaw's current exhibition at the football-themed *OOO Gallery*, London, runs alongside photographs by Martin Parr until 8 May).

Shaw's banners evoke the complex nostalgia of growing up in working-class northern villages, where post-industrial alienation hangs over generations of men. Among his stitched all-caps slogans are: 'Village Idiot Turned Village Celeb'; 'Local Jobs For Local People'; and 'Sad Lads In The Sticks'. He takes the same approach using England flags, capturing football fandom's distinct melancholia while probing masculinity caught between repressed brotherhood and enlightened outcast.

There are historic connections too. The Battle of Orgreave is the subject of Deller's most acclaimed 2001 re-enactment, which featured 200 miners from the original police clashes in 1984. Harthill, where Shaw was raised—and where memories of the Miners' Strike loom large—is less than ten miles from the Orgreave coking plant where the violence occurred. Ed Hall, the textile-maker who creates Deller's banners, has a long relationship with British labour movements, including crafting a piece for the South Yorkshire branch of Unite which references Orgreave, and to which Shaw's badge-clad *Pride of Sheff* banner bears a tonal resemblance. Hall's inclusion of the phrase 'Still the Enemy Within,' a play on Margaret Thatcher's union-bashing speech a month after the Battle, feels like a precursor to Shaw's playful appropriation of dissenting voices.

These overlaps speak to the influence of Deller's 'Social Surrealism' on British conceptual art. The gap between the artists (at the time of Shaw's birth in 1997, Deller was convincing brass bands to play acid house tunes for his *Acid Brass* project) makes a successor narrative compelling, while also reflecting the increased visibility of working-class, non-London-born artists. But while Deller uses mass spectacle to probe the country's prejudices, affections, and eccentricities (his 2016 Battle of the Somme commemoration *we're here because we're here* being the best recent example), Shaw's examination of identity relies on the slippages revealed by intergenerational closeness and community friction. Unlike Deller, he is an essential component of his own art—social commentary via social experience.

He is not the only one shaking up the aesthetics of Britishness. Peterborough-born Rene Matic creates work channelling 'rude(ness)', a concept adapted from Glitch Feminism which complicates the relationship between segregated notions of Britishness, mainly across racial and gender lines. As with Shaw, football, 'casuals' sportswear, slogan-clad flags, and dance feature prominently in Matic's work, and text is used to disrupt entrenched codes of national expression.

*Born British, Die British*, the centrepiece of Matic's 2020 solo exhibition at VITRINE gallery, London, is a video of the artist being tattooed with the eponymous slogan by Lal Hardy, who has been inking punks and skinheads since 1979. The film is accompanied by a photograph of the tattooed Matic by subculture chronicler Derek Ridgers. Elsewhere in the show, a Fred Perry polo shirt lies crumpled on the floor, an English casuals staple both treasured and discarded. (Matic's father was a skinhead, and they often reference the movement's anti-fascist history and connection with Jamaican Rude Boy aesthetics.)

[ACTIVISM & PROTEST, RACE & REPRESENTATION](#)  
25 NOVEMBER 2021

## Rene Matic: “This book is where I’ve come from”

by [JAMILA PROWSE](#)



© Rene Matic.

*This article is printed in the latest issue of British Journal of Photography magazine, Activism & Protest, delivered direct to you with an [1854 Subscription](#).*

Far removed from the patriotic flag-waving that lays claim to the country, Rene Matic’s love letter to their Black, Brown and queer community offers an alternative vision of Britishness. Defiant and sincere, its very existence makes it an incidental voice of protest

In early 2018, Rene Matic picked up an old point-and-shoot camera that had been lying around the house for years. “I didn’t even know if it worked,” says the visual artist over Zoom on a sunny morning in mid-September. Matic’s artistic practice has predominantly existed within the realms of sculpture, installation and moving-image, and they describe their endeavour into photography as an “accident” – an experiment without foresight of where it would lead. Three years later, a book, titled *Flags for Countries That Don’t Exist but Bodies That Do*, brings the series of images together. From the first time Matic tested the camera, up until the present day, a cohesive narrative has formed out of the messiness of life.

“As someone who’s always looking for where I’ve come from, it was like, OK, so that’s not possible... [This book] is where I’ve come from. And when we’re older, we’ll look back and be like, ‘That’s where we came from.’”



© Rene Matic.

Through the three-year period, we bear witness to a testimony of a life lived. Matic takes us into intimate moments of private exchanges shared between family (both chosen and blood). In *Chiddy Doing Rene's Hair* (2019), Matic's good friend Chidera - who is a regular feature - carefully holds the root of Matic's curls as she braids their hair, an indicator of the unspoken trust that lies between them. Matic appears with their dad several times, revealing a resemblance in the way they hold their faces; a recognition of the impulse to self-archive, which exists in second and third generation migrants whose family ephemera may have been lost in transit.

"My dad doesn't have any pictures of himself when he was younger, and the Black side of my family has no pictures because they moved around so much in England, when they couldn't get a permanent place to stay. So my granddad was constantly packing up, and things got left behind," Matic explains. "As someone who's always looking for where I've come from, it was like, OK, so that's not possible... [This book] is where I've come from. And when we're older, we'll look back and be like, 'That's where we came from.'"



© Rene Matic.

In the book, there are many images of Matić's partner, Maggie. Maggie in bed, looking up at Matić and smiling, the word 'GAY' emboldened across their chest. Maggie and Matić, mid-caress in the kitchen, with Maggie holding the camera. Maggie at home, black hair fashioned in a flick with red lipstick on, reminiscent of old Hollywood glamour. Maggie dressed to the nines, whether as a vampire on Halloween, in a white corset and a flamingo-esque cardigan, or a pink silk kimono dress, matching eye make-up and a beaded handbag.

Noted by Hannah Black in the book's introduction, the key signifier of the passage of time is Maggie's ever-changing hair colour: "From platinum with dark roots to glossy black to orange." A whole marriage unfurls in front of our eyes and as a viewer, we are invited into relatively unseen quotidian rituals of love. "Maggie is just this continuous, evolving thing in my life that I get to watch at all times," says Matić. "It is strange that sometimes I would want to put a full stop to some of those looks or some of those hairdos. Maybe it's this moment of feeling overwhelmed by what I'm experiencing. You definitely know that you took a second to recognise that what you were looking at was worth something."

Simultaneously, the chaos of the world reverberates behind the scenes. A shift occurs in 2020, with signs thanking key workers and a self-portrait of Matić jumping around, banging a pan with a wooden spoon. Crowded images of people with handmade signs, fists raised, indicate last summer's Black Lives Matter uprisings. "In this world - or the world of the book, let's say - there are moments that can't be ignored," they say. Matić clearly felt an impulse to represent the momentous times we've been living through, but their protest images are distinct from others in the series.



© Rene Matić.

Elsewhere, Matić tends to hone in on purposeful faces in close proximity. With the protest images, they "tried to use ones that were the least incriminating or had the least amount of recognisable faces": an acknowledgement of how police use protest photographs to identify and convict people. Still, there is a symbiosis in how Matić's love letter to their Black, Brown and queer community holds the internal language of protest. Here, they are defiantly living life fully in a country that attempts to incriminate their daily choices. "We go to protests to be among people who are like for like, and I think that that is what is similar about the other pictures where you're in a living room, or you're at a party. They're all the same because you're just there to be around and to create a world or a space or a country in a room that you can exist in, not even necessarily safely, but just proudly, maybe."



## Love, intimacy and community

Matić's series is unified by a preoccupation with anti-symbolism. Their communal space does not recognise boundaries, borders and countries. Still, patriotic references sneak in. On a trip to Skegness, Lincolnshire, on VE Day, Union Jacks and St George flags permeate the photographs. Reflecting on that day, Matić muses that while we have come to identify flags with performing a reclamation of Empire, they are still just that: performances. "Maggie and I were walking around Skeggy, because it was lockdown and we had nothing to do, and there was this weird hyper display of trying to claim back Britishness. And yet here was this lesbian couple walking through this scene. It felt like we were in a film," they say. "It just goes to show that the display of Britishness is not real; it's theatrics. And actually what was real was Maggie and I walking through it." The most vivid portrayal, in the world of Matić's books, is what they describe as "this overwhelming sense of love, intimacy and community". When held up against the veracity of tenderness, all the oppressive forces begin to lose definition. "The big moments, like BLM or Covid-19, felt so crazy and emotional, but actually if you look at them in the book, they fall away. The presence of people and love comes forward. I think it's a nice reminder that this will continue to be stronger, whatever we go through."

Something I recognise intimately as a mixed race person is what Matić resists throughout the series: the ways in which Britain attempts to deny our existence, and flatten the multiplicity of our lives with jarring reminders that we don't really belong here. So, when we talk of protest images, there is meaning to a photograph of discarded Union Jack and St George flags, stuffed down the front of Nike track-pants, against an exposed brown tummy. And there is defiance, too, in the image of Maggie, dressed all in pink in a decided act of pleasure, purposefully holding out a bag which reads, 'I DIDN'T ASK YOUR OPINION'.



© Rene Matić.

When Matić picked up a camera at the start of 2018, it was with no specific purpose or direction. Whereas their usual creative process involves a questioning of 'what am I saying?' or 'what is this countering?', this series is simply a glimpse behind the closed doors of Matić's world. "That's the best part about it, we're not doing anything other than just continuing amongst this chaos," they say. "And actually, it's not a sad story at all, most of the time, because... well, look at us."

[renematic.com](http://renematic.com)

DETAILS, DETAILS

*Two new responses to artworks in Tate's collection – Rebecca Birrell on Ethel Sands's Tea with Sickert and Rene Matic on Agostino Brunias's Dancing Scene in the West Indies*

THE HERE AND  
THE THERE OF IT

i was going to write about  
how i always feel so very far away from  
dancing in the west indies  
and that even here  
i am not partaking.  
a little dissatisfied  
a little impatient  
i am waiting  
i know what dancing is and does and did  
and does and does  
and how it can mesmerise  
how it will arrest you  
disarm you  
but of course  
i have weapons in every pocket  
and two hands free to use them  
i have a job to do *there*

because  
the thing about blackness is  
(for the ones looking)  
...it's the here  
as in  
the near

anyway the point was the painting  
the painting is the point  
and the here and the there of it

because the thing about blackness is  
(for the ones being)  
it's the there  
as in  
the beyond

i am far away from the here,  
here  
i'm beyond  
between the house and the tree  
setting it on fire

the here is a sunset but the there  
it's flames  
i'm telling you  
it's flames  
you didn't realise  
but it's flames

they're dancing to its scorch  
kicking its ashes in your eyes  
as you clap along  
off beat



**Agostino Brunias**  
*Dancing Scene in the West Indies* 1764-96  
Oil paint on canvas  
50.8 x 66 cm

they'll join us later  
crossing over from here to there  
vast and boundless  
where we will rest on the rubble  
of the big house  
in the middle

what a scene

*Dancing Scene in the West Indies* was purchased with assistance from Tate Patrons and Tate Members in 2013.

Rene Matic is an artist who lives and works in London. A group of 15 photographs from their series *flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do* 2018-21 has been acquired thanks to the Frieze Tate Fund 2021 supported by Endeavor.

# It's Nice That



RENE MATIĆ  
ART

SUPPORTED BY Pinterest  
THE GRADUATES 2020

Words [Ruby Boddington](#)

17 August 2020

Rene Matić explores “dimensions of Blackness through the lens of their own personal experiences as a queer, Black womxn”

Recently, Rene has been investigating the Skinhead movement and its origins as a multicultural marriage between West Indian and white working class culture.

Born in Peterborough and now based in London, having just completed a BA in fine art at Central Saint Martins, Rene Matić’s portfolio is one well beyond the years of a recent grad. Complex, questioning and spanning an array of media, Rene has already made a name for themselves in the art world, exhibiting in myriad shows in the UK and internationally, as well as being selected as one of this year’s Bloomberg New Contemporaries.

Their contribution to New Contemporaries – an exhibition which has long marked a genuine stamp of approval for any emerging artist – is titled *There’s been some times on stage when I really felt free*. Less of “a work” and just a “documentation of my guy” it comprises clips Rene filmed one evening at their father’s house in Peterborough. Riffing off what Arthur Jafa calls “glamorising” – the idea that Black folk have learnt to perform or “moonwalk” their way out of submission – it speaks to Rene’s father’s ability to do exactly that. The film was created before Rene’s father attempted suicide, after his successful cancer treatment, during his “on-going love affair” with alcohol and in the same week Rene started taking antidepressants. “Black men don’t catch breaks and neither do their brown babies,” Rene writes on the [New Contemporaries blog](#), describing how the film is about “what survival looks like”.

Gallery Rene Matić





“Skinhead is a badge I can wear but it’s an uncomfortable one. We can’t address it without all its stickiness and turmoil. That is what being Black and British feels like – it is the perfect metaphor.”

Rene Matić

Rene’s portfolio at large explores “the immeasurable dimensions of Blackness through the lens of their own personal experiences as a queer, Black woman living in the diaspora.” It’s through this that they “combat and question the power relations that pervade the art world and society more widely.” In recent times, that has manifested in an exploration of the Skinhead movement and its beginnings as a “multicultural marriage” between West Indian and white working class culture, and its subsequent co-option by far right white supremacists.

Later this year, at Vitrine in London, Rene will be hosting their first solo exhibition titled *Born British, Die British* which will debut a new film of the same name. It documents Rene being permanently marked with the words “Born British, Die British,” a tattoo more often associated with and seen on the bodies of far-right, white skinheads. In turn, Rene claims a facet of Britishness which is often denied to them; “the myth of a ‘pure’ and ‘unadulterated’ Britishness.”

In turn, works such as this, as well as deeply personal documentations like *There’s been some times on stage when I really felt free* form a metaphor examining their own experience of living in the Black British diaspora. They also, the artist writes “excavate white jealousy, the continued legacy of colonialism and the fear of a Black planet” – topics which coalesce within their mixed race identity.



Above Rene Matić: This all Belongs to You, 2018

It's Nice That: What's the most valuable lesson you learned during your time at university?

Rene Matić: I learnt about a process. I get cross, I get lost, I read, I find, I breathe all that into something and then the cycle begins again... and I learnt how to pay attention to all of it.

INT: Your current work is concerned with the Skinhead movement, when and why did you begin exploring this and how has it manifested in your work?

RM: I started to work with the Skinhead subculture at the same time I started to understand it as a huge part of my culture and my identity. My Dad was/is a Black Skinhead and I wanted to unfurl all of that and what it means; what it looks like, what it feels like. The work is a documentation of that journey.

INT: It's a subculture with a fascinating but tumultuous history, how have you used this lens to examine your own experience of living in the Black British diaspora?

RM: A lot of mixed kids like myself grow up with little to no knowledge about their Black ancestry. It has been difficult for me to grab hold of something and feel comfortable enough to call it mine. Skinhead is a badge I can wear but it's an uncomfortable one. We can't address it without all its stickiness and turmoil. That is what being Black and British feels like – it is the perfect metaphor. The Skinhead was birthed from the cross pollination of Caribbean culture and white working class British culture, and so was I. That's my flag.

INT: You've worked with painting, sculpture, film, photography and textile – what interests you about this multimedia approach?

RM: The ability to explore and meditate on something with everything I have in my tool box is an agency one is rarely afforded. One of the most rewarding and challenging parts of the processes is finding a medium that holds the conversation in the most appropriate way.



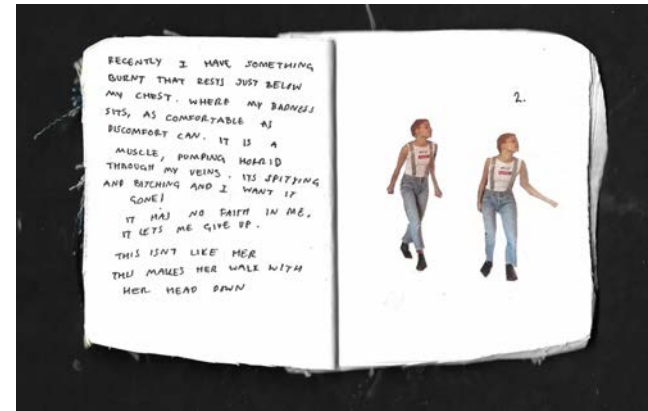
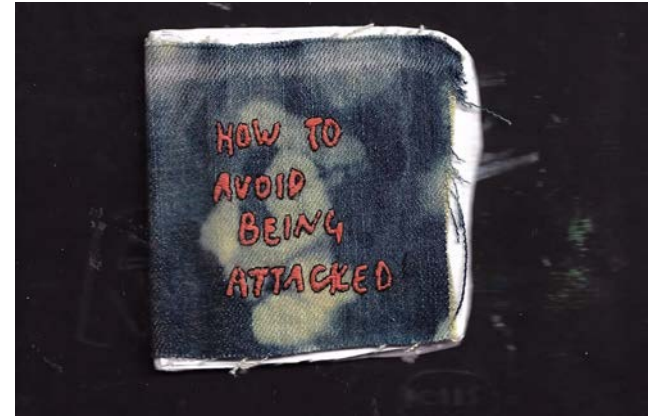
Above  
Rene Matić: There's been some times on stage when I really felt free



Above  
Rene Matić: There's been some times on stage when I really felt free



Above Rene Matić: We give a lead to Britain, 2020



Rene Matić: How to Avoid Being Attacked, Zine, 2019

# HUNGER



ART + CULTURE  
15 January 2020

## Disrupting the white gaze with Rene Matić

The multidisciplinary artist discusses their 'Brown Girl in the Art World' series, asking; "what's the cost of attempting to take up space in spaces that don't want us?"

Peterborough-born artist Rene Matić's work probes the invisibilised structures of oppression that underpin society, troubling the easy narratives sustained by today's cultural norms. Currently studying at Central St Martins, London, their multifaceted practice spans everything from painting, design collaborations, film and dance to projects like *Do You Remember Olive Morris?*, a sculptural work created in homage to community organiser, British Black Panther and feminist *Olive Morris*, commissioned by Tate and the Mayor of London for the Black Cultural Archives.

In anticipation of the screening of their 2019 film *Brown Girl in the Art World III* at [London Short Film Festival](#), they sit down to talk to HUNGER about their practice, the crooked room and why they're done babysitting the white gaze.

For our readers who are not familiar with your work, would you be able to describe some of the central interests within your practice?

I'm currently studying and working in London. My work explores the immeasurable dimensions of Blackness through the lens of my own personal experiences as a queer, Black womxn living in the diaspora. In doing so, I aim to expose, combat and question the power relations that pervade the art world and society more widely. I'd say this particular series, *Brown Girl in the Art World*, really embodies this project and typifies my wider practice.

My current work predominantly explores the Skinhead movement, its founding as a multicultural marriage between West Indian and white working class culture and its subsequent co-option by far-right white supremacists. I use this as a metaphor to examine my own experience of living in the Black British diaspora and also to excavate white jealousy, the continued legacy of colonialism and the fear of a Black planet – all things which find convergence within and upon my mixed race identity.

I work across painting, sculpture, film photography and textile attempting to bring to light (or dark) the fated conflicts and contradictions that one encounters while navigating the world in a body like my own.

What prompted you to begin work on the *Brown Girl in the Art World* series?

I think *Brown Girl in the Art World I and II* were the first intentionally reactionary works I ever made. All through my life and my practice, I have these moments where I come up against the ugly, brutal force of white supremacist heteropatriarchy. These forces which come to limit, restrict and oppress me and people with bodies and identities like mine. This series is a collection of those moments. Moments that I want to be loud about I suppose, or spend a little bit longer dissecting even though there are never conclusions. *Brown Girl in the Art World III* was, for me, a handing over of stuff, like; “here is all this stuff I can’t hold anymore so I’m putting it here.”

**"Brown Girl in the Art World III was, for me, a handing over of stuff, like; 'here is all this stuff I can't hold anymore so I'm putting it here.'"**

There’s an interest in corporeality in the *Brown Girl in the Art World* series – in parts II and III but also the imagery of part I (“A link in a chain. Hand in hand, always.”). It seems like one of the concerns of the series is the potential of a “return to the body” moment. Is this an accurate reading? Would you be able to elaborate on the role that corporeality plays in the series and your work more broadly?

I think that *BGITAW II*, which is a photograph of me doing a naked handstand in a white boy’s gallery, is the corporeal manifestation of the essay *BGITAW I* and then the *BGITAW III* video piece brings those two excavations together. The way my body and bodies like mine are identified, othered and oppressed is at the heart of the conversations. But I would say at the moment I am more interested in pointing out the wider societal conflicts and obsessions with the body and how it is positioned and constructed as a problem. This recalcitrant body that is obliged to react or respond to reactions and responses. It’s a mother fuckin’ war zone. Like, you can look at me but I can look right fuckin’ back.

*Brown Girl in the Art World II* seems to marry this concern with the theme of space — taking up space, making space and inhospitable spaces. Would you be able to talk more about the work and its relation to space please?

*Brown Girl in the Art World II* was a huge turning point in my practice. It signals the moment where I started to think about weaponising my body in space. Since then, I feel that the conversation about taking up space as a radical act has reached a bit of a crescendo. I think more widely the conversation has now shifted focus to the emotional labour, the pain and the exhaustion that comes with having to forcefully take up space. This is what *Brown Girl in the Art World III* examines.... I think. It asks; “what is the cost of attempting to take up space in spaces that don’t want us?”

*Brown Girl in the Art World I* makes reference to Melissa Harris-Perry and the concept of the “crooked room” which makes more explicit the challenges of existing within a world dominated by whiteness and other oppressive paradigms. Is there ever a way of re-adjusting the slope of the room?

Ain’t that the question on everyone’s lips aahhh... I think that by confronting and exposing the crooked room we hand the problem and the embarrassment to the oppressor. It isn’t our job to re-adjust it. We shouldn’t really have to clean up this mess. Like [James] Baldwin says; “Well he’s unnecessary to me, so he must be necessary to you. So I give you your problem back. You’re the nigger baby, it isn’t me.”

By dubbing the video footage with meta-textual discussion of the intellectual processes behind the work, *Brown Girl in the Art World III* makes more tangible the additional labour that artists of colour undertake in comparison to their white peers. Do you think that this labour should be recognised and recompensed accordingly?



I think the most important thing is that we recognise this. In ourselves, our communities and our (chosen) families, we must recognise the power, value and significance of this labour. We shouldn't always be looking for external validation, it waters us down and makes us lose sight of what we are worth. bell hooks talks about this when she says that we colonise ourselves when we look to the coloniser for approval. We subconsciously survey ourselves when working and living so that we fit, so that we are tolerated. *BGITAW III* is me trying to challenge that process, unpack it and undo it.

**"The conversation about taking up space as a radical act has reached a bit of a crescendo. More widely, the conversation has shifted focus to the emotional labour, pain and exhaustion that comes with having to forcefully take up space."**

*Brown Girl in the Art World III* is in dialogue with (or is a response to?) another of your works, *This all belongs to you*. Would you be able to discuss the relationship between the two works?

Well everyone told me that *This all belongs to you* was gorgeous and stunning and I felt like I didn't want my work to be read and watched that easily. I felt like I was lying. So I had a year of ruminating on that piece because I was so conflicted about its potential sugar-coating and the way I felt it had come to babysit the white gaze. *BGITAW III* came about as a result of this laborious process. In the piece, I try and unpack and explore what it would mean to try make the gaze uncomfortable. I don't think the work successfully achieves that (and I didn't expect it to), but it begins to think about how we could.

Would you be able to discuss the choice of location for *Brown Girl in the Art World III*?

I'm so glad you asked me this because because because, in the video I say that it was filmed in Cornwall which is so random of me because it was actually filmed in Skegness (I had been travelling a lot, don't ask). But the voice recording is taken from a presentation I was doing at uni so I didn't want to re-record it. I felt it was more important for me to keep the original audio.

I chose the pub in Skegness, which is a predominantly working-class seaside town where I was on holiday, because it asked me to. The sign on the front said "lease this pub" with a huge car park in front of it, like a stage. I first noticed it because it was draped in the Cross of Saint George which made the location, as an image, already so loaded. That kind of environment means different things to me for different reasons but, more than anything, it was a just stage I had to dance on.

Do you plan to add to the *Brown Girl in the Art World* series? If so, where might it lead next?

I think that for as long as I am a brown person working in the art world I will continue to reflect on what that means and what that looks like. At the moment, I'm more concerned with how gendered the title is, because I don't feel like a girl today and it's annoying that it says that. Having said that, it's nice to map my growth through this series of works. Growth and strength and knowledge and ability.

Image Still taken from 'Brown Girl in the Art World III' by Rene Matic, courtesy of the artist

# DAZED

## Meet the young, queer, woman of colour creating art from her experiences

Central Saint Martins fine art student **Rene Matic's** work is challenging, provocative, and beautiful

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GUCCI AW18

11 October 2018

Text [TJ Sidhu](#)



Director Joe Hideout, styling Ben Schofield, grooming Roku Ruppongi

*To celebrate its AW18 collection, Dazed has teamed up with Gucci to spotlight three young British artists using their art to spark conversations around identity, freedom, and self-expression.*

Using art as a form of self-expression from an early age, 20-year-old [Rene Matic's](#) creative juices spark the conversations surrounding her lived experiences, as she describes it, a “queer, working-class womxn (a term allowing for the inclusion of genderfluid, gender queer, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and trans identities) of colour.”

Working across a range of mediums, some of Matic's work include a framed [Supreme](#) shopping bag with ‘Supremacy’ written across the distinguished red box logo, politically-charged films, as well as thickly layered acrylic self-portraits which all draw back to her personal experiences of racism and homophobia. With influences such as [Nina Simone](#) and James Baldwin, Matic constantly draws back to the importance of political awareness in a time where we need it now more than ever.

Currently studying BA Fine Art at Central Saint Martins, the artist's work taps into her lived experiences as a queer womxn of colour. Challenging, provoking, and exposing the power structure within society is Matic's way of combating the oppression she has faced and hopefully resonating for those with similar experiences. Don't be fooled into thinking Matic is forcing any message down your throat though – she's here to tell *her* story and whether you get it or not, is up to you. “One of the things I've learnt recently is that whatever my work is about, it really doesn't have anything to do with how the viewer sees it at all,” she explains.

Here, we speak to Matic about her identity, how it informs her art, and whether freedom really exists.

### **What inspires your work?**

**Rene Matic:** It's my identity and whatever comes with that. In terms of people that I'm inspired by, it would be Nina Simone or James Baldwin – people who have really found a way to get their point across through platforms like art.

### **How does being a queer womxn of colour inform your art?**

**Rene Matic:** The whole of my practice is based around being a queer womxn of colour because it is my literal experience. It informs it in all directions because my work is always about living my experiences and all of the different things that go with that, whether it be positive or negative. Whatever happens it will definitely be in my artwork somewhere. It's all that I can really report on because it's my story, but I also think it counts for a lot of other people's stories as well.

### **How effective do you think art is in getting political messages across?**

**Rene Matic:** I think (using art) is actually the easiest way to get messages across because visuals and imagery are extremely accessible, especially in the digital, image-based culture that we live in. We just need to do more of what we're doing and really push for it. Schools need to spark kids creativity as opposed to forcing academia down their throats. I think giving people the freedom and agency to do what they want would lead to more people expressing themselves through art, actually.

**“One of the things I've learnt recently is that whatever my work is about, it really doesn't have anything to do with how the viewer sees it at all” – Rene Matic**

### **What is your favourite medium to work with?**

**Rene Matic:** I think film. The films I have made have got a wider response – my mum and people from the older generations are quite shocked by how they feel about the messages, whereas a painting is quite two-dimensional. It can be seen as just a pretty picture, or if people want to go further with it then that's always an option. But, with video, the politics is very much at the forefront without people having to dive into it – you don't have to try and force yourself to understand it because hopefully it already speaks for itself in some ways!

### **Do you feel emotion is an important factor to making good art?**

**Rene Matic:** Yeah, but I don't think you can demand emotion from people, it's just something that comes naturally. One of the things I've learnt recently is that whatever my work is about, it really doesn't have anything to do with how the viewer sees it at all. My work could be about being black and being queer but if someone thinks it's about dogs, then it's about dogs – it really doesn't matter.

### **How would you describe freedom in this day and age and do you think it can exist?**

**Rene Matic:** Honestly, I don't think it can exist. I always go back to what Nina Simone said – “freedom means to have no fear” and, to be honest, I really can't imagine a time of not being scared about something. I can't imagine what freedom is actually like because we live under capitalism. But so long as you're aware of that and you're not looking past it.

### **What do you think fashion brands can do to further improve on the issues you raise in your work?**

**Rene Matić:** Don't just wheel artists or creatives or people of marginalised identities as just a face. Hire more people of colour, hire more queer people, more trans people and let them speak for themselves as opposed to big corporations speaking for them and telling their stories – they should be telling their own stories. And they should put their money into charities and artist-lead spaces because that is important.

*Gucci's AW18 collection is available now, you can shop Rene's [look](#) and [bag](#).*



**Director Joe Hideout, styling Ben Schofield, grooming Roku Ruppongi**

*Director: Joe Ridout  
Camera Assistant: Rory Mclean  
Stylist: Ben Schofield  
Grooming: Roku Roppngi  
Producer: Lauren Ford*



## OF SKINHEADS AND SKIN: THE ARTWORK OF RENE MATIĆ

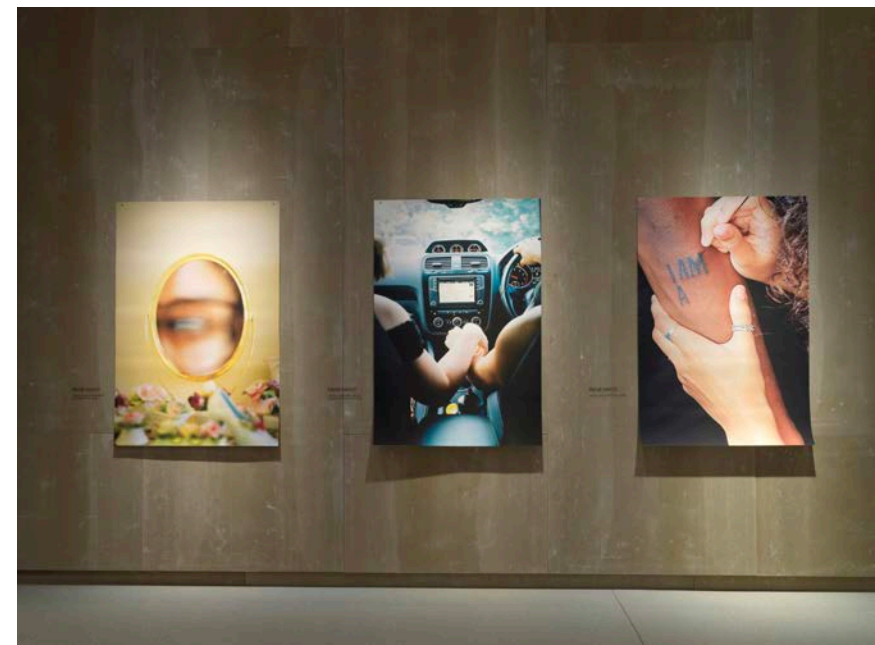
February 2, 2021



Rene Matic's first solo show may have recently closed at Bermondsey's Vitrine Gallery, but the Peterborough-born artist has made their ephemeral exhibition permanent; its title 'Born British, Die British' is indelibly etched on Matic's skin, reclaiming a phrase to fit their own experience of the Black British diaspora. Investigating Skinhead culture as a means to probe identity, for Rene Matic, the body is a battleground, dance is a combative rapture and clothing is an emblem of convoluted history. With a self-analytical wisdom beyond their 23 years and an immense artistic output – spanning film, sculpture, photography textiles and painting – Matic is a compelling force of subversive creativity.

### How would you describe your artistic practice?

I like describing my practice as RUDE. It means what it means... to interrupt, to be impolite, abrupt and offensive. As a queer, black gender non-conforming person in Britain – to be a glitch – is to be all of these things by accident. With my work I am trying lean in to all this accident.



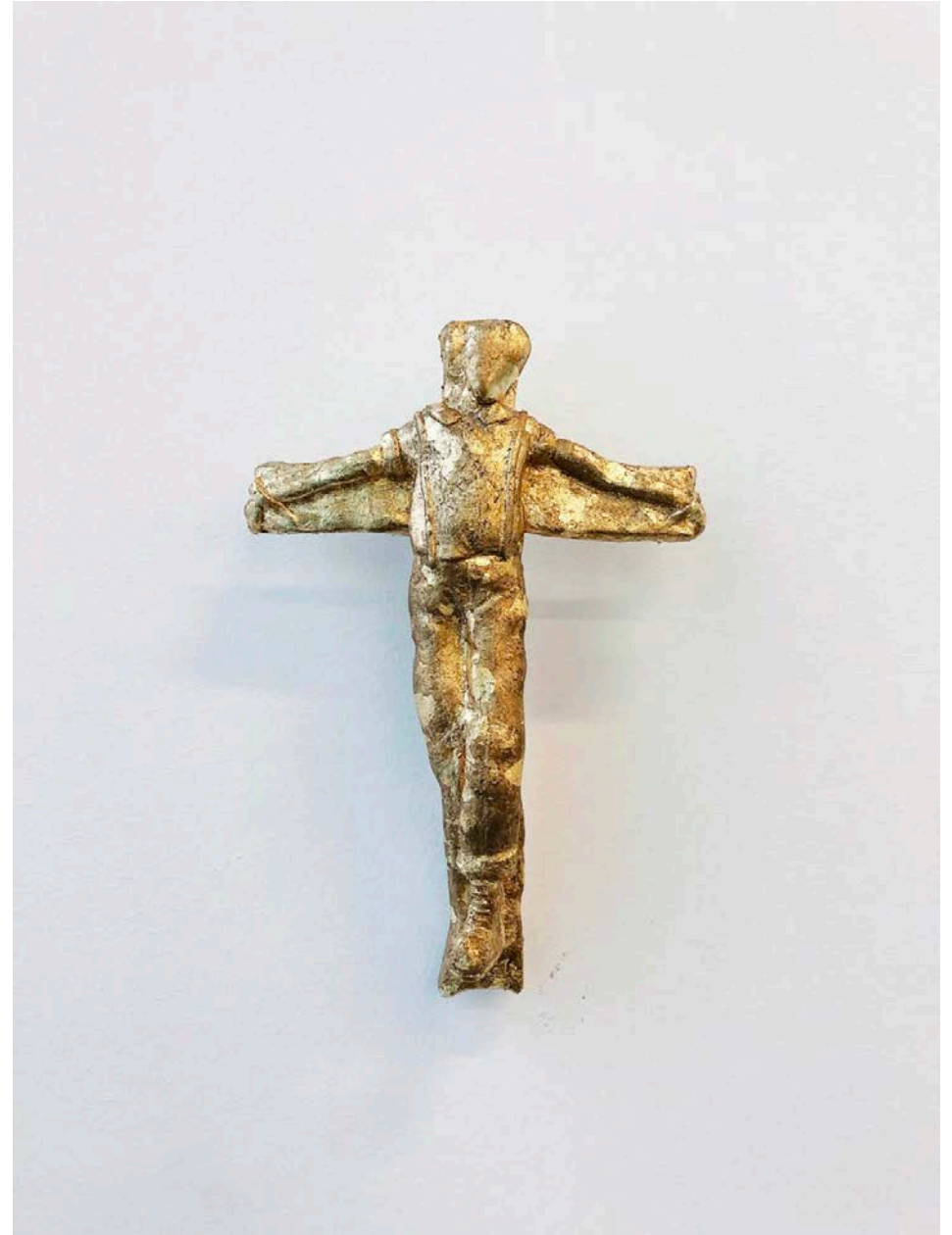
**Is the RUDE nature of your practice one of the reasons why you are fascinated by Skinhead culture, which of course partly stemmed from Rudeboys? I know that your Dad was a skinhead, but why do has that subcultural influence has perpetuated in your work?**

ABSOLUTELY! I believe in the Skinhead as a concept and as a metaphor. Subcultures are so powerful because of their rudeness. Rudeness is a 'display of disrespect by not complying with social norms. It is in the disrespecting that I find myself so encouraged and fired up. Disrespecting makes room for change and growth; it not only says to hell with subordination but also to hegemony. The Skinhead is by far the most radical, anti-establishment, anti-fascist subculture... that's why it posed/poses such a threat to white supremacist systems – because it disrespected it. THAT is why it has been co-opted, coerced and derailed.

Blackness and black Britishness is a subculture in and of itself. It is to be outside of society... it is to be a skinhead or a punk without the creepers or the polo shirt. I like the 'opting in' of subcultures. There is a rare agency there... one that PoC rarely get access to.

**Your first solo exhibition included a work called Muddy Puddle which showed archetypal Skinhead clothing strewn on the floor. Dick Hebdige viewed style as "intentional communication," what does clothing represent to you?**

Dick Hebdige also talks of the idea that whoever we are – if we exist in the same society – we will inevitably share some of the same materials, historical conditions and to a certain extent, cultures... even if we use those same things to stand in opposition to one another. I use clothes as a metaphor for this.



**You had the exhibition title, 'Born British, Die British', tattooed across your back, a film documenting this process was the focal point of the show. Could you elaborate on that incredibly intimate process?**

As a 'tattooed person' I don't think one ever truly understands the permanency of being inked; how can we rationally attest for our future bodies?

It was a ceremonial betrothing of Britishness upon my mixed-race skin speaking not only to the unique reality of hailing from the Black British diaspora, but also connoting the historical violence enacted on Black and Brown bodies in the name of 'Great' Britain, both historically and today.

The tattoo took about 40 minutes and of course, I was in the expert hands of Lal Hardy. Most of the time I was focusing on the music he had on – a compilation of Ska, reggae and 2-Tone. OUR MUSIC. The pain rendered me mute for the duration of the tattoo, which I wasn't expecting as I had hoped to wax lyrical with Lal... but I relaxed into the fact that we were connecting silently, without words, just energy.

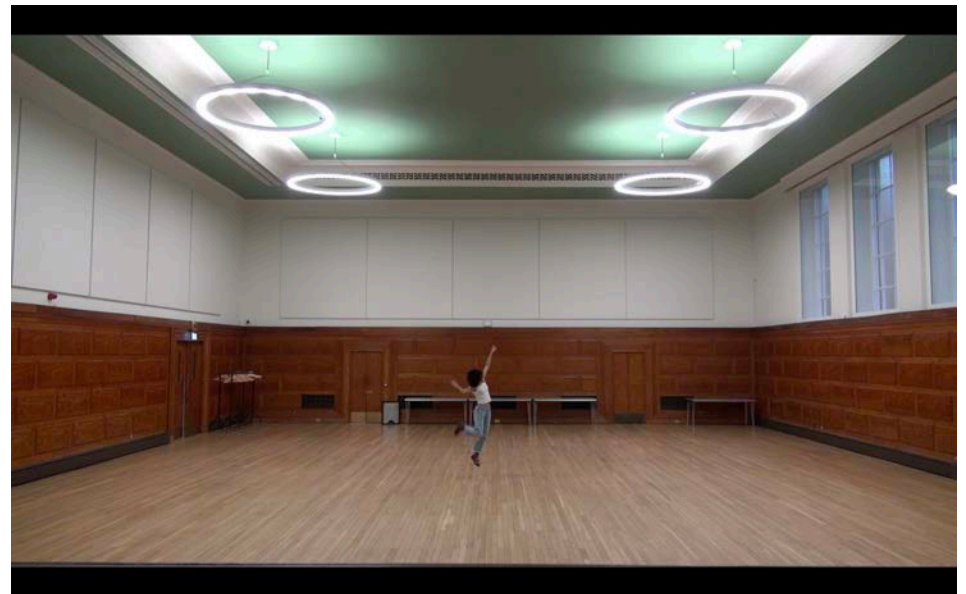
**You were then photographed by Derek Ridgers, who is renowned for documenting British subculture. What is the significance of Ridgers being the one to capture your British bestowal?**

Aside from being a huge fan of Derek's work – Derek is partly responsible for imaging subcultures that, without the visible evidence of their existence, would have faded away without a fight. Derek's work reminds us of the phenomena of British subculture. By having my portrait taken by him, I felt like I was inserting myself into that narrative and that legacy.

**Your work is highly autobiographical, is it daunting being so personal? Do you think the artwork can be, or should be, separate from the artist?**

All I can do is be autobiographical. I once had a conversation with artist Jesse Darling about how, as artists, we each have our own tool box. The tools are our stories and our experiences and that is what we use to build with and to build on. We do not choose the tools; the tools choose us.

If I am daunted by a thing then it means I do not know it. Joan Didion says something along the lines of 'I write to find out what I am thinking' and I make art to find out what I am feeling. The intimacy is a blessing. I don't think art can ever be separate from the artist, when the tools that have been used are so nuanced.



**You often revisit work with thoughtful transparency, probing and peeling back the layers. Where does this self-awareness stem from?**

HA yes, I find it so helpful to revisit and reflect on past works because sometimes it is the first time you can really see and understand it... after you part ways. Being transparent allows for mistakes and messiness. Brown Girl in the Art World III voices the messiness and, in turn, helps clean it up a bit.

I think a lot of it also comes from imposter syndrome which is a symptom of the weight of being a black, queer artist. I am never really sure about anything, so why pretend that I am?

**I've read that Patti Smith's Just Kids has been a big influence on you. You recently responded to Smith's New Year's billboard for CIRCA, how was that?**

Responding to Patti's work with CIRCA was one of the easiest things I have ever done. I suppose because I have been responding to her work since I was 15, as has my collaborator Kai-Isiah Jamal. It was so special to debut our first collaboration alongside Patti. Kai and I both live in our own fantasy world's most of the time and so it was beautiful to merge those two worlds together in the name of punk and freedom.

**What are your current inspirations?**

Family, both chosen and blood; the love and care that is circulating and keeping us alive. I have been reading bell hooks' 'All About Love: New Visions' and I am inspired by a devotion to loving and being loved healthily and happily.

**What next?**

I am working on a photography book with Arcadia Missa and I am just about to start working towards a solo show with a wonderful gallery and organization but all that is TBC.

**Our ongoing series of reports on emerging and established artists with close-up Q&As, gallery reports and exhibition reviews, with a special emphasis on supporting diversity in art, women in art and the independent art scene.**

**Brought to you by Underground – the brand of the Original Allgender Creeper shoe and other British Subculture styles.**



# HUNGER



ART + CULTURE FASHION  
15 November 2018

## **The Muse: Meet CSM student and creative activist Rene Matić**

"A fucking hot mess but a determined one," is how Rene Matić best describes her art practice. The 21-year-old creative activist, currently studying at Central Saint Martins, explores the intersections her own experience as a queer womxn of colour - aiming to expose, combat and question power relations and structures within the art world and society more widely. To celebrate her debut collection with fashion collective/brand Collusion, we caught up with the one-to-watch to find out more.

### **Hi Rene! What is one of your first artistic memories?**

When I was a kid all I would do is draw and make things and one day in primary school I sat back and looked at this one picture and thought shit, I've really got something going here and the boy next to me was saying that he hated it and he started getting all red faced and vexed like I had ruined his life. I remember thinking oh, ok so this is jealousy (and fragile masculinity) and that I had something that could be powerful and that no one could take away from me. I think that's when I learnt to nurture this gorgeous thing that is creativity and imagination.

### **Talk me through your recent collection for COLLUSION? What themes did you explore?**

The works that I produced for this collaboration embody themes of solidarity, diaspora and belonging, making subtle reference to the work of Audre Lorde and James Baldwin, two integral figures in my practice.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bp1UQ8QB2Za/>

### **When did you first realize you wanted to be an artist? Did you ever have a 'Plan B' career choice?**

I studied fashion design at college and a year of fashion BA at Ravensbourne Uni before dropping out to pursue fine art after the first year. I always wanted to be an artist but I didn't think people like me could make it in the 'art world.' I wasn't in love with fashion like I was art. You need true love and respect for your subject if you are going to succeed.

### **What are some of your biggest inspirations?**

My Wife and everyone else who always knew who they fucking were and where they deserved to be.

[https://www.instagram.com/p/BqFof\\_eBSZL/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BqFof_eBSZL/)

### **What's been a career highlight for you so far?**

I was recently commissioned by Tate and the Mayor of London to install some work at the Black Cultural Archives. I made four black power fists to honour British black panther, Community leader and Activist, Olive Morris who died at the age of 27 in 1979, the fists are 5ft 2, the same height as Olive and myself. Doing that project meant I had the honour of meeting some of Olives closest friends and family, that was a real moment. I will remember it forever, those people are royalty. Making work for people like that, that's the honey.

### **The film that's shaped you the most and why?**

Soon to be a film, Patti Smith's book 'Just Kids' is what shaped me the most. I finished reading it four days before my 16th birthday. I think it offered me a freedom that felt so far away previously. It stresses the importance of the self and love and poetry as philosophy. its a fairytale really but it brought me up and I thank Patti everyday for that.

### **Your ultimate style icon?**

Most things that came out of the 70s... The Black Panthers, Skinheads, Punks... the aesthetics of resistance is sexy as hell.

### **Who are your top five creatives to follow on Instagram?**

@Kai\_isaiah\_jamal @Charlie\_craggs @joymiessi @dominiquehwhite @thewhitepube.

### **The one quote you live your life by?**

GO FOR BROKE – James Baldwin.

### **The number one advice you'd give to young artists starting out?**

Know when/if it's your turn, be precious with your tools. Don't make compromises.



### **What's up next for you, any upcoming projects you can share?**

I am going to be taking some time to read all the books I have been neglecting. To reevaluate my priorities, my commitments and my worth.

### **The future of art – in one word...**

BLACK.

### **Finally, your dream creative goal?**

To be able to sustain a political practice without compromise and co-option.

*Follow Rene on Instagram [@bad.gal.rene](https://www.instagram.com/bad.gal.rene).*

Image Courtesy of Collusion  
Interview Emma Firth

## Rene Matić. Born British, Die British

11 October 2020 - 17 January 2021 at Vitrine in London, United Kingdom

21 August 2020



Rene Matić, we give a lead to britain, 2020. HD video with sound. 00:12:02. Courtesy of the artist.

“We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition”  
-Shakespeare, Henry V, St Crispin's Day Speech.

'Born British, Die British' is British artist Rene Matić's first solo show in London, UK. The exhibition debuts their new film which documents Matić being permanently marked with the words 'Born British, Die British,' a tattoo traditionally donned by far-right, white skinheads.

Working across painting, sculpture, film, photography and textile, Matić's practice explores the immeasurable dimensions of Blackness through the lens of their own personal experiences as a queer, Black womxn living in the diaspora. Their current work explores the Skinhead movement and its founding as a multicultural marriage between West Indian and white working class culture. In doing so, Matić aims to expose, combat and question, the power relations that pervade the art world and society more widely.

'Born British, Die British' emulates and adopts this right-wing statement and aesthetic signifier, staking a claim in a Britishness that is often denied of them. The myth of a 'pure' and 'unadulterated' Britishness.

Lal Hardy, the tattoo artist who endows Matić with this marking, has been tattooing punks and skinheads since 1979 – a politically turbulent period for Britain, and the year Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. The image of a middle-aged white man inscribing Britishness on the body of a 23-year-old, mixed-race, non-binary femme reads like an inauguration or an initiation. By reclaiming this body marking as their own, Matić signals and celebrates their skin as a subversive surface that undermines what it means to be born British and to die British in modern-day, multi-cultural Britain.

This ceremonial betrothing of Britishness upon Matić's mixed-race skin speaks not only to the unique reality of hailing from the Black British diaspora, but also connotes the historical violence enacted on Black and Brown bodies in the name of 'Great' Britain, both historically and today. By committing to bearing this patriotic, nationalistic statement that is usually reserved for white Britons, Matić at once recognises and reconciles the discomfort surrounding their own Britishness, inserting themselves into an extremist, right-wing (sub)culture which seeks to eradicate their very existence.

The video is accompanied by a portrait of Matić, taken by legendary British photographer Derek Ridgers who is best known for his photography of music, film and street culture.



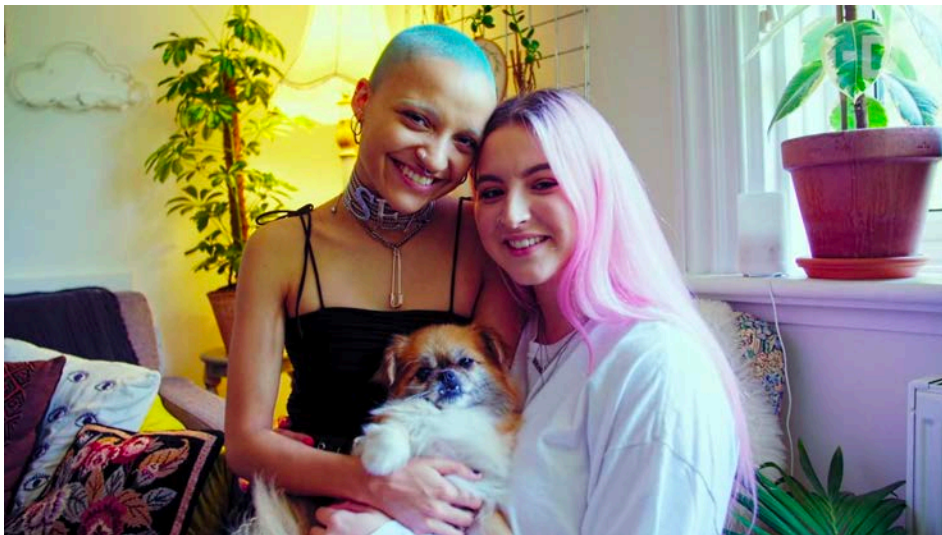


LOVE WEEK

## young, femme and hitched: meet the couple trailblazing a more modern marriage

*We vowed never to use the phrase ‘couple goals’ in a sentence, but, well, they are.*

BY STAFF I-D 31.5.18



In our new series, Love Week, i-D are exploring what really matters when it comes to dating and relationships in 2018. Today, we hear from madly in love femmes Rene and Maggie, who met on Instagram and got hitched in 2016. These two are a beautiful example of a generation set to redefine what love looks like. Queer, interracial, young but wise beyond their years, they decided to get married firstly because they are head over heels for each other, but also to make a statement -- their love is not a phase. Rene and Maggie are the real deal.

The pair first met in person at the Saatchi Gallery over the pinnacle of romantic foodstuffs: shared carbohydrates. “You just were like, have half of this sandwich, and I was like, no, and you just looked at me and were like no. You’re having. the sandwich,” Rene says. “And it’s been like that ever since.”

Not long after that and they’re getting married in oversized white hoodies. “Standing up in front of a group of people saying this is who I am, this is the person I love, is quite a powerful act of visibility.” The pair what it means to be young and in love in 2018 -- kind, open and completely besotted. And they look damn good doing it. Watch the film, feel emotional, and then read on to find out about Rene and Maggie’s best and worst habits, their advice to their younger selves about love, and what they want for their shared future.

### **Please introduce yourselves!**

Maggie: I’m a 25-year-old researcher and curator originally from Liverpool but living and working in London.

Rene: I’m 20 and I’m a conceptual artist and visual archivist currently studying at Central St Martins. I grew up in Peterborough and now I live and work in London.

### **Describe each other in 3 words.**

Maggie: Rene is hilarious, breathtaking and visionary.

Rene: Maggie is ingenious, passionate and dreamy.

### **What's the best date you've taken each other on?**

Maggie: Our first date, without a doubt. It wasn't supposed to be a date -- it was the first time we had ever met offline and we spent the day visiting galleries and obsessively asking each other questions, exchanging stories and absorbing as much of each other as we could. When I had to leave it felt like I was tearing myself in two and we have been inseparable ever since that day.

Rene: Definitely our first date! But every date since then has been just as magical.

### **What is Rene's best habit? And her most annoying one...**

Maggie: her dedication to her work. She is always making something, writing something or painting something. I love the passion she has for her art. Her worst habit is falling asleep on the couch in the evening and being completely impossible to wake up.

### **And how about Maggie?**

Rene: Mags's best habit is her ability to get shit done. I have never met someone so in charge of what they're doing -- it's incredibly inspiring. Her most annoying habit is not giving herself enough credit for everything that she has done and is doing. She is my hero.

### **What would you tell your 16-year-old self about dating?**

Maggie: I would tell myself to go a little easier on my partners. Nobody is perfect. Your partner can love you, support you and bring out the best in you, but they cannot fix you or complete you... only you can do that work.

Rene: You are lucky to have this much passion inside you, don't waste it on someone who doesn't nurture it.

### **And about love?**

Maggie: I would tell myself that the love you receive is not linked to your self-worth, and that you shouldn't rely solely on the love and affection of others to make you feel good about yourself. Your lover can help you see your inner magic, but only *you* can make you truly happy with who you are. True and lasting love meets you where you're at, it grows with you and appreciates you just the way you are.

Rene: Your body is the only one that you will ever get, don't forget to put some love there too.

### **What do you think your life will look like in five years from now?**

Maggie: I hope that Rene and I will be applying our creativity, passion and politics to our careers, thinking about expanding our family, but also still making each other smile every day and acting like little kids on the sly.

Rene: I hope that we will be pursuing our artistic dreams, maybe in a different country, maybe with a baby on the way, definitely still obsessed with each other.

### **What does it feel like to be loved?**

Maggie: It feels like home.

Rene: It feels like I am exactly where I always needed to be.

# Floor



**“I started using dance in my work because I wanted to image the conflict between my blackness and my whiteness. Dancing alone looks and feels like a fight with the self; the body becomes in discussion with itself and the space that it’s in.”**

*Interview by Charlie Mills  
All images are courtesy of the artist  
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**Could you tell us a bit about yourselves and your background?  
Where did you study?**

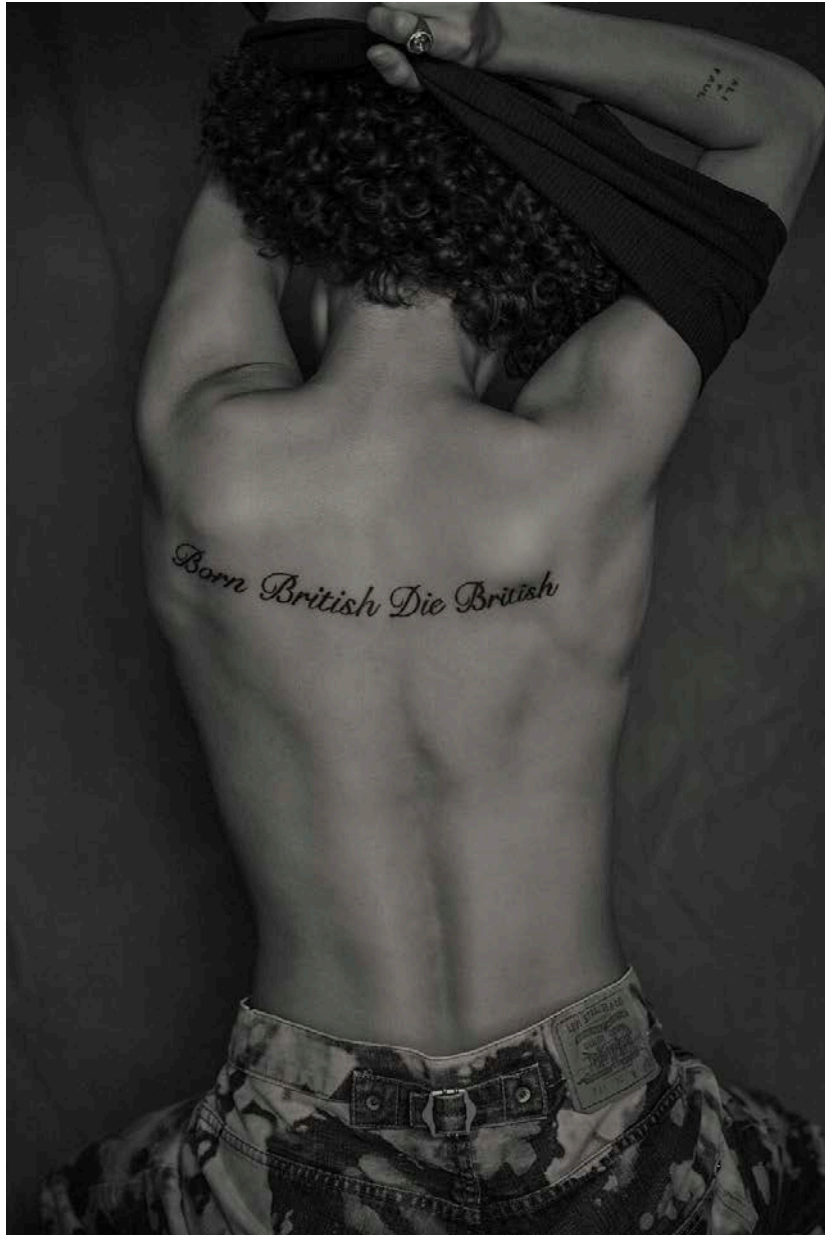
My name is Rene and I’m 23. I grew up in the funny little city of Peterborough. I moved to London when I was 18 to study fashion design but quickly realised I preferred fine art so, I dropped out after my first year. I moved in with my then fiancé (now wife) in Liverpool where I had a studio at The Royal Standard. I lived and worked there for a year to get a portfolio together and then we moved back to London so I could study Fine Art at Central St Martins. I graduated in June 2020 during lockdown and have been making and showing work ever since.

**You cite the American singer and civil rights activist Nina Simone as a major influence in your work – what is it about them and their work you find so galvanising?**

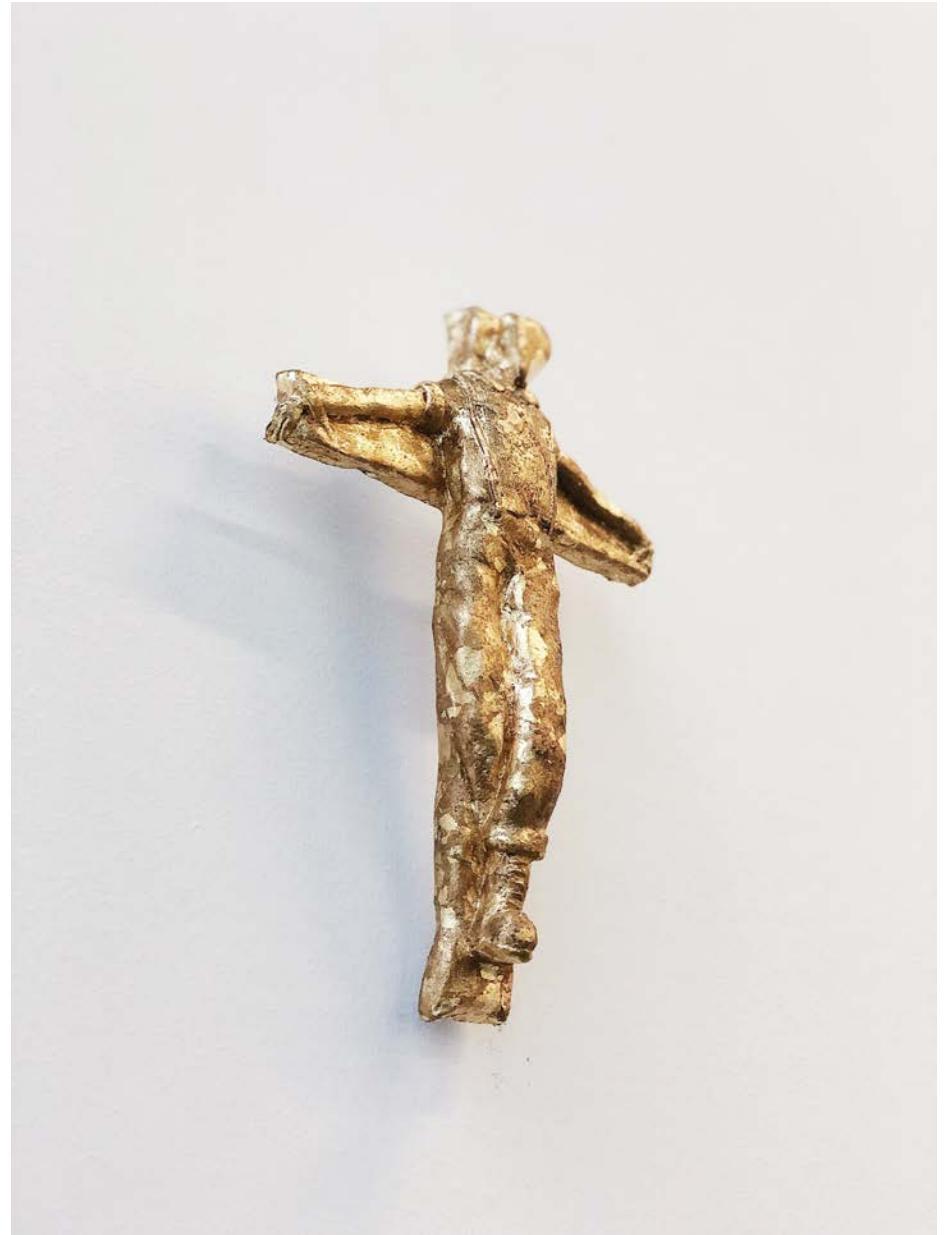
My parents were both huge Nina Simone fans and I had a teacher in primary school who would play her on repeat whilst we were working. For so long, all I knew was this genderless, beautiful creamy voice. Then when I was about 15 I started to discover Nina as the activist, the icon and the pianist. Sadly, this was after she passed away and I couldn’t and still can’t wrap my head around this person existing in this world. This world, even now, isn’t ready for a Nina Simone.

A lot of my work focuses on the consequences of living in this society as marginalised people. In my opinion, Nina was a victim and a target in the same way that Martin Luther King was. Lucky enough for us, she left bread crumbs, and it would be criminal to not to follow them.

**Your three works, *This All Belongs to You*, *Brown Girl in the Art World III* and *we give a lead to Britain*, include videos of you dancing in particular locations – outside a South East London garage, outside a pub in Skegness and inside the Lambeth Town Hall in Brixton. What is it about dancing that you find interesting as a medium, formally and as a means of storytelling?**



*Born British, Die British, 2020*



*Born British, Die British, 2020*



I started using dance in my work because I wanted to image the conflict between my blackness and my whiteness. Dancing alone looks and feels like a fight with the self; the body becomes in discussion with itself and the space that it's in.

The first time I filmed myself dancing I noticed I would fluctuate between different genres and eras of dance from Northern Soul to Voguing to moshing. These eras of dance have grown from violent and oppressing political climates. Each dance move is a way to communicate outside of the language of the oppressor. Dance allows for opacity and when filmed in slow motion it captures the body in all of its clarity and all of its abstraction.

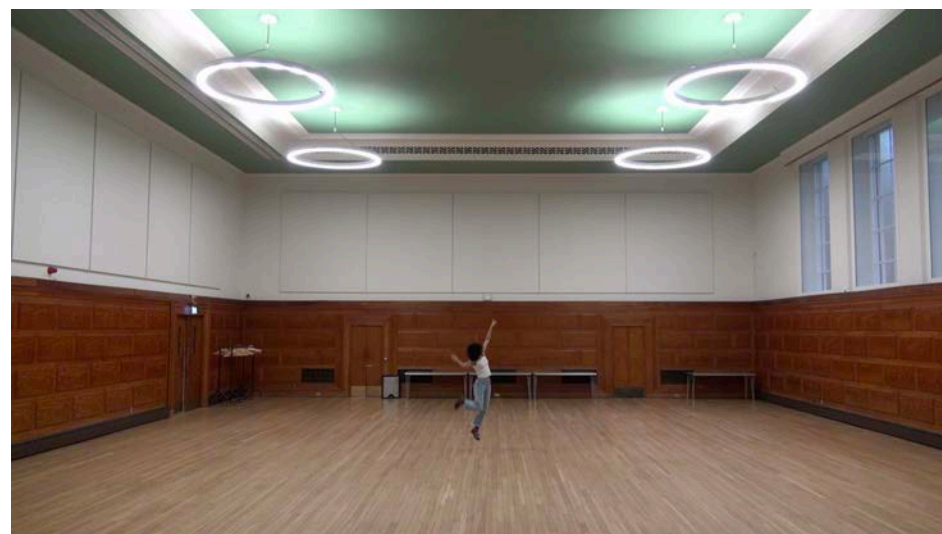
**Your recent solo show at VITRINE Gallery, London, was called *Born British, Die British*. For the exhibition you received the eponymous tattoo across your back from Lal Hardy, a well-known figure from the punk and skinhead scene since 1979. This single gesture unfurls a complex history and set of myths concerning not only the skinhead movement and its shifting relationship to race but of 'Britishness' in general. What did you hope to discover or reveal through this process?**

For me, this work is not about discovery or revelation. It speaks of the reality of hailing from the Black British diaspora, connoting the historical violence enacted on Black and Brown bodies in the name of 'Great' Britain, both historically and today.

The image of a middle-aged white man inscribing Britishness on the body of a 23-year-old, mixed-race, non-binary femme reads like an inauguration or an initiation. By reclaiming this body marking as my own, I signal and celebrate my skin as a subversive surface that undermines what it means to be born British and to die British in modern-day, multi-cultural Britain. I exist as a glitch and this work mocks those who refuse to embrace the error. It throws shade, it's sarcastic, it's ironic, it's rude... but its right.



*Brown Girl in the Art World, 2019*



*We Give a Lead to Britain, 2020*

**You speak frequently about ‘irreducibility’ in your work, whether that is between acts of celebration and violence, recognition and disavowal, or your own lived experience as a queer mixed-race artist. Is it important that your works remain open ended – that a level of discomfort or cognitive dissonance remains in their reception?**

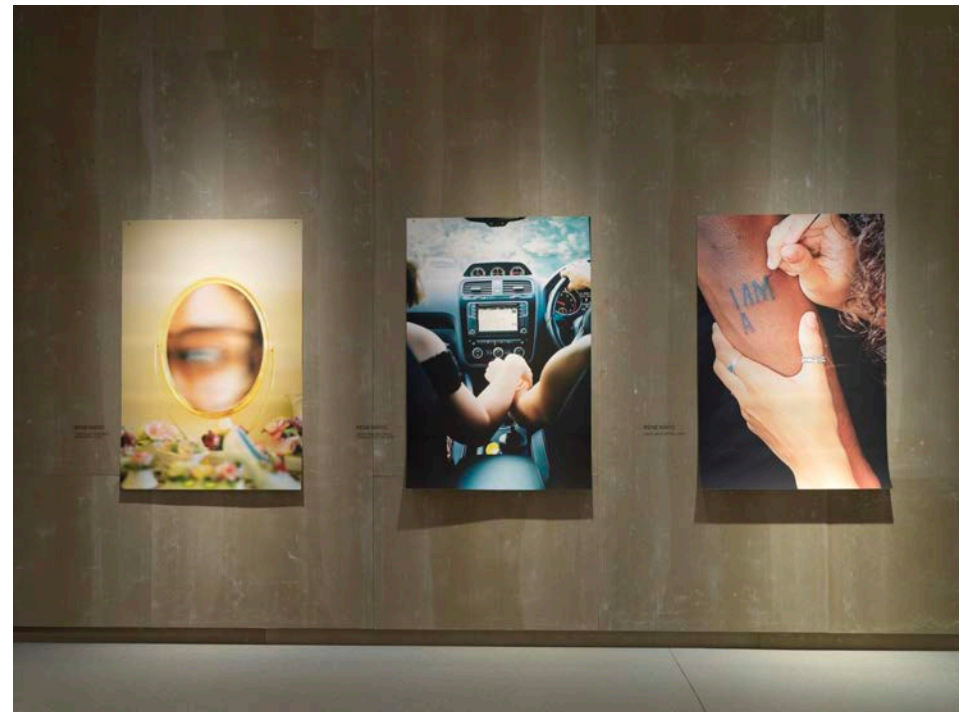
Who am I to attempt to define any kind of truth other than my own in this world? To leave room is so integral to my survival and in turn my practice. The cognitive dissonance is not a choice, it is – again – reality. Why would I attempt to straighten anything out when there isn’t anything straight about me lmao.

I’m not talking about letting things be, because of course I am here as an explorer. But if I was to conclude my explorations then it would be to assume my journey has an end. I am terrible at articulating this through words because the whole thing really is just all poetry and using the abstraction of poetry to convey the abstraction of one’s experiences. As Audrey Lorde writes in ‘Poetry Is Not a Luxury’ (1985): “We can train ourselves to respect our feelings, and to discipline (transpose) them into a language that matches those feelings so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream or vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives”.

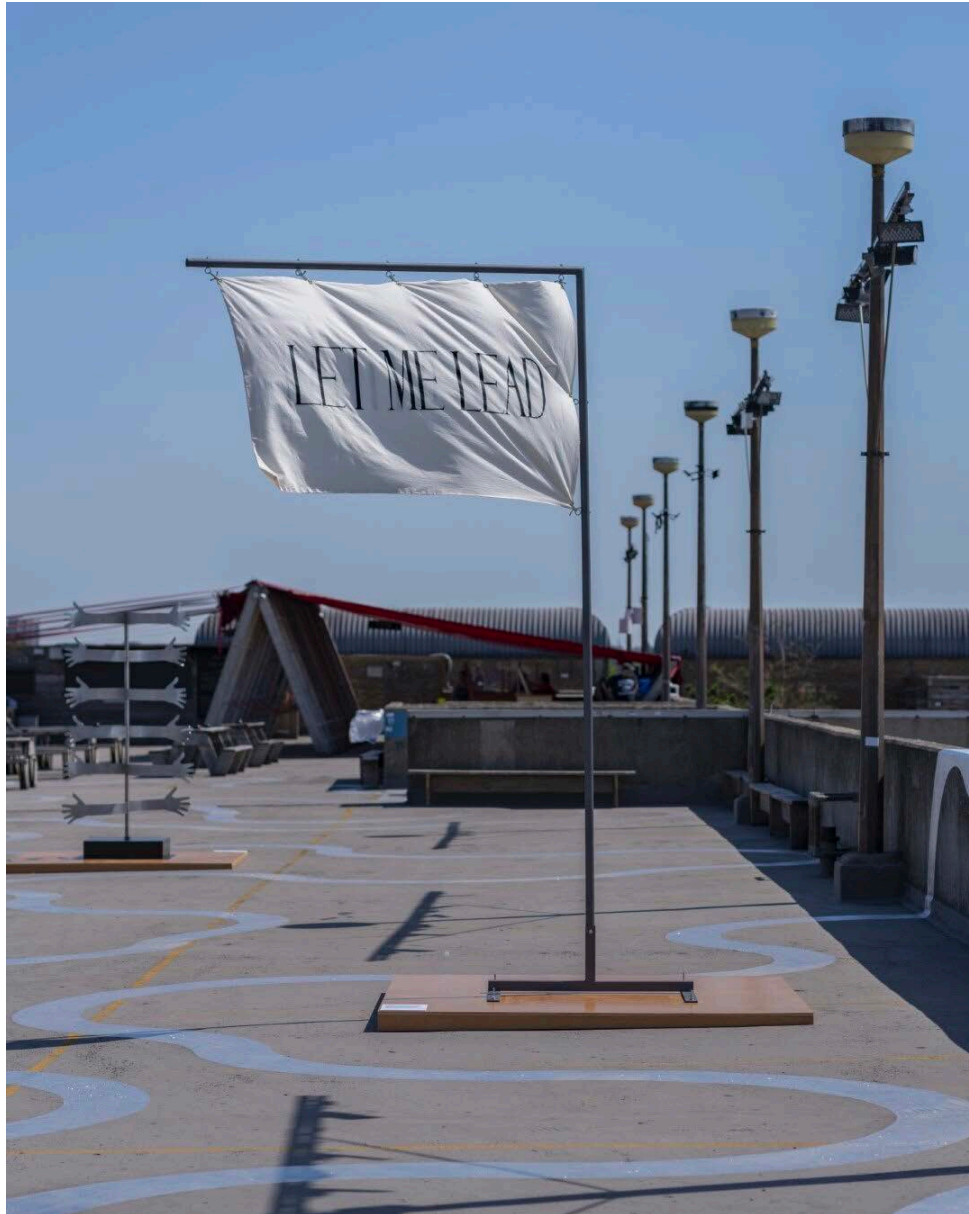
I suppose my answer is that the works remain open because I do. Of course I do - I’m 23.

**Discord, conflict and tragedy are subjects never far away in your practice. Yet it is love, joy and happiness that shine through. How has love been an inspiration to you, and do you see it as a recurring expression in your work?**

I suppose really, when I talk about ‘leaving room’ that is where the love lives. When I first started as a practicing artist I thought I was ok that the work would make me ill. Until I realised that the work could be the respite. I was so angry at my parents for bringing brown babies into this world until I realised that I was a product of love and a love that as Kathleen Collins writes about in ‘whatever happened to interracial love?’ was “the love of two human beings who mate in spite of or because of or instead of or after the fact of.” It opened up my world to trying to understand evil but without giving it power. Looking for the child in evil. Tony Morrison says that “evil is compelling, goodness lurks backstage... Evil has vivid speech, goodness bites it’s tongue.” We have to pay attention to what we are foregrounding and perpetuation. Goodness is the goal.



coalition, 2019. Friends and Friends of Friends, Schlossmuseum, Linz, 2020



*No More Quick, Quick, Slow, 2020. Photography by Damian Griffiths. Courtesy of Bold Tendencies*

**In May this year, you will have a new permanent commission unveiled at Bold Tendencies in Peckham, London. It is called *no more quick, quick, slow*. Can you tell us about the new work and what are the ideas that inspired it?**

*no more quick, quick, slow* is inspired by a quote in Lucy Bland's book *'Britain's 'Brown Babies'* (2019) that reads, "We English girls took to it like ducks to water. No more quick, quick, slow for us. This was living." The quote references meeting, loving and dancing with black men (specifically black G.I.s). The work is about this messy dance of de-colonisation and how dancing alone cannot always protect me. Really, it is a call to action –to do/dance better and to remember who we should dancing with and who we should let lead. The flag was on display last year but BT asked to have it as a permanent part of their display so we decided to give her a little bit of a make-over for her new home.

**Is there anything new and exciting in the pipeline you would like to tell us about?**

I am currently working on a book of photographs with Arcadia Missa Gallery called 'flags for countries that don't exist but for bodies that do.' The launch of the book will also involve a show which I am really excited about. I have a few lovely group shows in the works which I am in the studio preparing for. And of course, the reveal of the new flag with Bold Tendencies.

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