

## ROTIMI FANI-KAYODE

Desiree Ibekwe, Getting to Know 'Black London', The New York Times, 20 November 2024



Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Untitled, c. 1988/2020

Anyone who has explored London beyond its tourist hubs, or has at least glanced at the pages of a Zadie Smith novel, knows that multiculturalism gives the city its life. As a child, I accompanied my mother to buy ingredients for Nigerian dishes in Upton Park, an area of East London known for its South Asian community. And on neighborhood streets, Black hairdressers and barbershops are interspersed among halal butchers, traditional English cafes (called catts) and Eastern European restaurants.

In a city so diffuse with diversity, where, then, is “Black London”? The community is particularly visible in places like Brixton and Peckham in South London, Hackney in the east and Notting Hill in the west. The rich culture of these African and Caribbean communities can be experienced in restaurants, bars and cultural institutions. Below are a few of those places.

### Expression

One place where works by Black artists can be glimpsed in London is Autograph, a gallery in trendy Shoreditch in the east of the city. Currently, previously unseen works by the Nigerian-born photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode hang in a room on the second floor. The portraits are part of the exhibition “The Studio — Staging Desire” and, like much

of his work, explore Black queer self-expression: The subjects are nude, contorted, emboldened. The exhibition runs until March.

Autograph, formerly known as the Association of Black Photographers, was founded in 1988 in the South London neighborhood of Brixton. Mr. Fani-Kayode, who lived and worked in Brixton for six years until his death in 1989, was one of its founders. Today, the gallery is based at Rivington Place, a gray and black angular building designed by the Ghanaian-British architect David Adjaye. The gallery champions the exploration of identity and social justice through still and moving images, as seen in exhibitions like Mr. Fani-Kayode’s and “Abi Morocco Photos: Spirit of Lagos,” a celebration of the mood of the Nigerian city in the 1970s, on view through March.

At Tate Britain, the work of Mr. Fani-Kayode, alongside other Black photographers, including Joy Gregory and Ajamu X, is currently on display in “The 80s: Photographing Britain,” which captures the political and social change of the decade (tickets, £20). The museum also offers tours that explore the influence of people of African and Caribbean heritage on British art.

As you head from the nearby tube station to the museum’s

grounds next to the Thames, look for Iniva, or the Institute of International Visual Arts, an organization based on the campus of Chelsea College of Arts. Its small and cozy library, named for the Jamaican-born British cultural theorist Stuart Hall, is filled with books and dotted with tables. There, the organization displays exhibits amid its stacks. Its latest is “Global Resiliencies,” an exploration of zines as a tool of political resistance.