

HEW LOCKE

Kadish Morris, Exhibition Diary, The World of Interiors, June 2022

EXHIBITION **diary**

Cosmologies of colour, hidden Brazil, collectivism at Kassel, serious fun, plus Jennifer Higgie's listings



Left: Sedrick Chisom, *Medusa Wandered the Wetlands of the Capital Citadel Undisturbed by Two Confederate Drifters Preoccupied by Poisonous Vapors that Stirred in the Night Air*, 2021, mixed media.
 Opposite: Lina Iris Viktor, *Eleventh*, 2018, mixed media

In the Black Fantastic **HAYWARD GALLERY** Southbank Centre, Belvedere Rd, London SE1

In her 2013 book *Afrofuturism: the World of Black Sci-Fi Fantasy and Fantasy Culture*, film-maker and author Ytasha L. Womack writes that 'a cosmic foot has to be put down' in terms of reimagining the role and visibility of people of non-European descent. A mainstream example is that of the 2018 sci-fi superhero film *Black Panther*, which imagined an African country that was untouched by European colonialism.

It's not an isolated example. There's a long tradition of 'looking forward' in the work of artists, writers, architects, musicians and filmmakers of African descent. The author Octavia E. Butler, the musician George Clinton and the artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, for instance, all explored African diaspora protagonists and communities in various manifestations of speculative, fantastical and alternative realities.

British curator Ekow Eshun seeks to build upon these existing legacies with this new exhibition, *In the Black Fantastic*, which will focus on the creation of new worlds while also contemplating the issues of racism and social injustice, African mythology and spiritual traditions.

The show will include painting, photography, sculpture, installations and mixed-media works by 11 international artists – Nick Cave, Sedrick Chisom, Ellen Gallagher, Hew Locke, Wan gechi Mutu, Rashaad Newsome, Chris Ofili, Tabita Rezaire, Cauleen Smith, Lina Iris Viktor and Kara Walker. Together, they will explore Ekow's ambitious vision of creating an immersive environment. No two narratives will be alike, but none of these artists is a stranger to the concept of the fantastical. American sculptor Cave creates whimsical 'soundsuits' that critique racial injustice while Franco/Guyano/Danish Rezaire's video-heavy practice marries African philosophy and cosmology

to technology and science. British sculptor Locke's dramatic installations recontextualise and also embellish archaic aristocratic figures, while Netherlands-based painter Ellen Gallagher's tender watercolours employ mythology to envisage a different ending for the slave trade's Middle Passage. Each artist has, in their own way, played with time, physics and the unknown in order to unearth new knowledge, truths and identities. Their heritages, practices and aesthetics differ, but they come together with the joint goal of Black liberation.

The show's arrival is timely. This year's US Black History month witnessed new conversations about the need to focus on the making of history, rather than simply observing it. Artistic expression appears to be at the centre of this change – especially with organisers from the Black Lives Matter movement seeking to establish a 'Black Futures Month', which would entail 29 days spent creatively envisaging both individual and collective evolution. This, too, appears to be the goal of *In the Black Fantastic*, to provide fertile ground upon which new ways of visualising change will grow and flourish.

Another principle underpinning the exhibition is the idea that Black people's historical erasure shouldn't mean that they have to humble themselves – they have the right to play god as much as anyone else.

Eshun expressed it best in an interview about the pictures he archives on an Instagram account that is dedicated to Afrofuturism. 'They reveal a desire to make the world over, to create imagery more fantastic, music more resonant, buildings more audacious, than ever previously witnessed.' **IN THE BLACK FANTASTIC** runs 29 June-18 Sept, Wed-Sat 11-7, Sun 10-6 ■ **KADISH MORRIS** is an arts journalist and critic based in Leeds and London