

THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY

celebrating and recording women's lives



Out of the Archives

Opening: 12 May, 6.30-8.30pm – through 2 October 2010

The Women's Library presents **Out of the Archives**, an exhibition marking the culmination of a series of commissions inspired by items in The Women's Library collections.

Working across a range of media and connected by their interest in historiography, Helen Cammock, Marysia Lewandowska, Olivia Plender and Hester Reeve, Eileen Simpson and Ben White (Open Music Archive) started research in the Library's archives in January 2010. They have focused on specific cultural, social and political events including women's migration to South Africa from the 1860s to the 1880s; militant suffragettes' radical relationship to art and representation; post-World War Two folk revival; and the 1980s Greenham Common Women's Peace Campaign.

Drawing from letters related to British women emigration to South Africa in the late 19th century, **Helen Cammock's** film is built around three fictional characters: a white governess, a white servant and a black servant. Their experiences of working on a South African farm – including their possible relation to one another – are conveyed to the camera through the dispassionate voices of three women sitting in contemporary settings. Suggesting connections between historical and present-time societal structures, the film further addresses the cultural circumstances under which historical records are created; more particularly how middle class and European perspectives prevail.

Inspired by the figure of the suffragette as militant artist, **Olivia Plender** and **Hester Reeve** have realised three works which reference and expose the strategies used by the suffragettes to publicly denounce women's subjugation. In an exploration of the militant attacks waged on famous art works by suffragettes and artists such as Mary Richardson, Plender and Reeve address the suffragettes' skilful means of attracting media attention and rally public opinion, calling in to question the traditional separation between art and politics. In a further photographic series and video, they revisit other emblematic moments of the suffragettes' revolt, as well as their relationship to violence.

Eileen Simpson and **Ben White's** commission takes as a starting point *The Brilliant and the Dark*, a cantata for women's voices first performed by 1,000 women volunteers in 1969. Simpson and White have invited the all-women choir Gaggle to remix the music and lyrics of the original composition for a music video. Filmed on location at The Women's Library, the video re-animates the 1969 performance through restaging situations – from the backstage preparations, to choreographed moments in the live event – which are documented in photographs held in the Library's collection. The project will culminate in a live performance and the distribution of a new copyleft score.

Marysia Lewandowska's project *OPEN HEARING* revisits the creative politics of the Greenham Common women peace campaigners to force a public debate and the legal responses to this unprecedented act of so-called civil disobedience. Amongst other works, at the centre of *OPEN HEARING* is a pod-like structure referencing the makeshift shelters of the campaigners and acting here as a cinema and listening booth in which Tim Knock's film *And the Fence Came Tumbling Down* (2001) alternates with a soundtrack engaging some aspects of the court cases of the Greenham Common Women.

More than an exhibition, **Out of the Archives** is a knowledge-sharing project which provides artists with the tools to access rare material and to present their work in the scholarly context of the Library. In turn, through working with artists, The Women's Library supports alternative readings of its collections, valuing the speculative potential brought about by the artist's work.

OUT OF THE ARCHIVES EVENTS:

Thursday 17 June, 7pm: Tour of the exhibition led by Anna Colin, curator of **Out of the Archives**.

Saturday 11 September, 12-3.30pm: A seminar bringing together the artists commissioned for the *Out of the Archives* project and guest speakers to present and discuss their responses to the archive. Check the website for further details.

Thursday 23 September, 7pm: Live performance orchestrated by artists Eileen Simpson and Ben White (Open Music Archive), presenting re-interpretations of *The Brilliant and the Dark* in collaboration with the all-women choir Gaggle and vocalist Ellen Southern.

Other events will be announced soon, please check the website for updates.

The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT
www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk | Nearest Tube: Aldgate/ Aldgate East

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- **The Women's Library** is the oldest and largest collection of women's history in the UK. It was founded in 1926 as the Library of the London Society for Women's Service, a non-militant organisation run by leading suffragist Millicent Fawcett. It is now held by the London Metropolitan University and is an internationally acclaimed specialist library, archive and museum collection.
- **Helen Cammock's** video and photographic work explores issues of identity and of the construction of narrative. Often working from an autobiographical point of view, and in collaboration with others, Cammock is interested in uncovering and emphasising messages embedded in both visual and written language. She is Co-director of Brighton Photo Fringe and is currently taking an MA in Photography at the Royal College of Art, London. Recent exhibitions include *Black History* (2009) and *Affinity* (2008) in Brighton.
- **Marysia Lewandowska** is a Polish born, London based artist who has collaborated with Neil Cummings between 1995–2008. She is a co-author of many projects such as *The Value of Things* (Birkhauser, 2000), *Give & Take* (Victoria & Albert Museum, 2001), *Capital* (Tate Modern, 2001), *Enthusiasm* (CCS Zamek Ujazdowski Warsaw, Whitechapel Gallery London, KW Berlin, Tapies Foundation Barcelona, 2004/06), *Museum Futures: Distributed* (Moderna Museet, Stockholm 2008). See: www.marysialewandowska.com Marysia Lewandowska's long-term project *Womens' Audio Archive* supported by CCS Bard College, NY and presented at The Women's Library in 2009 has recently been launched as www.womensaudioarchive.org.
- **Olivia Plender** is based in Berlin. Her research-oriented practice has addressed subjects ranging from the BBC's early history to social and religious movements such as Modern Spiritualism. She has shown her work internationally, in exhibitions including *Aadieu, Adieu Apa (Goodbye Goodbye Father)*, Gasworks, London; *Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009*, Tate Britain; *The Greenroom*, Hessel Museum of Art, CCS Bard, New York, (2008); *The Great Transformation*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt (2008).
- **Hester Reeve** lives and works in Sheffield. She navigates her complex relationship as an artist with the world through her conceptual persona HRH.the. Her practice combines live art, drawing, writing, lens based media and philosophical dialogue. Public showings include *The Met Theatre*, Bury (2009); *Site Gallery*, Sheffield (2006); and *LIVE Biennale*, Vancouver (2003).
- **Eileen Simpson** and **Ben White** work at the intersection of art, music and information networks, and seek to challenge conventional mechanisms for the authorship, ownership and distribution of culture. Their ongoing project *Open Music Archive* is an initiative to source, digitise and distribute out-of-copyright sound recordings and is a vehicle for collaborative projects exploring the material's potential for reuse. See: www.openmusicarchive.org. They have exhibited in places including the 17th Sydney Biennale, Gasworks and Mexico's *Ambulante Documentary film festival* (2010); *ICA London* (2008) and *Cornerhouse Manchester* (2007).