

Larry Achiampong

When the Sky Falls

John Hansard Gallery
25 January to 21 March 2020

#JHGAchiampong

John Hansard Gallery,
part of the University of
Southampton, is pleased
to present **When the Sky
Falls** from 25 January to
21 March 2020.

When the Sky Falls is Larry Achiampong's most ambitious and personal solo show to date, with new moving image, sound and sculptural works that bring together childhood ruminations, Akan deities and speculative future histories.

Unnamed narrators from Achiampong's most recent film, *The Expulsion*, guide visitors through a subterranean of 'invisible' workers, invoking an east London bruised from the effects of the national recession of the early 1990s. For this exhibition, John Hansard Gallery's main space has been transformed into a purgatorial space based on non-descript and deeply familiar office spaces, iconic to the West African diaspora as representing the bittersweet sting of surviving forced migration. In the installation *Attack of the Henrys*, sphinx-like anthropomorphised vacuum cleaners create a formation of nightmarish guards with rictus smiles and rhinotomies, seemingly in thrall of the gentle undulations of Achiampong's new sound work *Breath of Asase Yaa* (the Ashanti divine mother). The exhibition is also punctuated with woven heavy-duty bags, colloquially referred to as 'Ghana Must Go', for the artwork *Medase Me Adamfo*, which translates from Twi as 'Thank you, my friend'.

These new works are complemented on John Hansard Gallery's Digital Array with a special installation of *Sunday's Best*, a short film which considers how belief systems within the African diaspora are inflected by colonial histories. In this new approach to the work, the usual gallery seating has been replaced with church pews – in connection to some of the types of churches the artist attended as a child.

The exhibition also features seven-metre high versions of Achiampong's *PAN AFRICAN FLAGS FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS' ALLIANCE (MOTION)* on the gallery's exterior windows overlooking Guildhall Square. With their symbolic Pan African colour palette featuring 54 stars relating to each African country, these flags form part of Achiampong's expansive multi-disciplinary *Relic Traveller* project. *Relic Traveller* is a speculative work manifesting in performance, audio, moving image and prose that is informed by technology, agency and the body, and narratives of migration.

The exhibition, *When the Sky Falls*, is an intimate deliberation on what it is to attain apotheosis, or, at the very least, shake off the isolating signifiers of difference and poverty. Common acts of cleaning and maintenance are equal to the power of rituals and prayer. The exhibition title speaks of creation myths, folklore and the singsong refrains embedded in children's stories. Each of which are ways in which we for generations have tried to make sense of the world and what has in recent moments felt like 'the end of days'.

When the Sky Falls builds on Achiampong's concept of *Sanko-time*, a theory at the core of his recent practice. *Sanko-time* is based on the Ashanti word 'Sanfoka' – roughly translated as 'to go back for what has been left behind'. Sankofa also alludes to using the past to prepare for the future, essentially the wish of being able to go back to an immutable point to make sure that what has been lost is lost no longer. Although this is a new term, it reflects resilience from the oldest traumas of the African diasporas.

If it is the end of days, it is through hysteria, faith and connecting communally that we will unify for *When the Sky Falls*.

For more information, please contact:

Jack Lewis, John Hansard Gallery
jack@jhg.art
+44 (0)23 8059 2477

Maggie Eckel or **Harriet Clarke**,
Four Colman Getty
maggie.eckel@fourcommunications.com
+44 (0)20 3761 4475

harriet.clarke@fourcommunications.com
+44 (0)20 3967 4239

Notes to Editors

Larry Achiampong's solo and collaborative projects employ imagery, aural and visual archives, live performance and sound to explore ideas surrounding class, cross-cultural and post-digital identity. These investigations examine constructions of 'the self' by splicing the audible and visual materials of personal and interpersonal archives, offering multiple perspectives that reveal entrenched socio-political contradictions in contemporary society. From early in Achiampong's career, he has sought to activate artworks that permeate gallery walls, whether via digital transmissions, the sharing of his research in the form of sound works, through to world building with physical elements embedded in cities, woodlands or open source technologies.

Achiampong is a 2018 Jarman Award nominated artist, and a 2019 Paul Hamlyn Award recipient (for Visual Arts). He has worked with major institutions both in the UK and internationally on commissions, residencies and exhibitions with spaces including the Tate Galleries, Venice and Singapore Biennales, Somerset House and Transport for London. His work is held in public and private collections internationally, including the British Council Collection, The Government Art Collection, Arts Council England, and the Sindika Dokolo Foundation.

John Hansard Gallery

John Hansard Gallery is an internationally recognised and locally engaged contemporary art gallery in Southampton. Being part of the University of Southampton, the Gallery aims to change the world for the better through great art. To realise this the Gallery creates innovative and critically acclaimed contemporary art exhibitions, events, engagement and research projects that excite, challenge, represent and reach the widest possible public audience. From 1979 the Gallery was located on the University's Highfield Campus. In 2018 the Gallery relocated to a new purpose-built arts complex in Southampton's city centre, significantly increasing the space available for exhibitions, events and integrated programming. Learning and engagement are at the heart of the Gallery and underpin all its activities. The innovative education and public programme is accompanied by special community-focused projects, including activities for all ages and levels

of experience. John Hansard Gallery is supported using public funding as a National Portfolio Organisation by Arts Council England.

www.jhg.art

University of Southampton

The University of Southampton is one of the UK's leading teaching and research institutions, with a global reputation for research and scholarship across a wide range of subjects. The University combines academic excellence with an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to research, supporting a culture that engages and challenges students and staff in their pursuit of learning.

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Arts at University of Southampton offers a wealth of inspiring cultural experiences and opportunities, showcasing emerging talent and renowned international artists. From visual arts, music and literature, to theatre and film, there's something for everyone.

The University of Southampton has rich heritage and long-standing commitment to arts and culture as an essential part of university life. The University is proud of its unique relationship with three Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations. The Nuffield Theatre opened at its Highfield Campus in 1964 and was joined by the University's concert hall Turner Sims and John Hansard Gallery in the 1970s. The relocation of the John Hansard Gallery to its new purpose-built home in the heart of the city's Cultural Quarter increases the University of Southampton's presence in that area, close to its Mayflower Halls and administrative offices in Guildhall Square. The opening of Studio 144 symbolises an extraordinary moment for Southampton and the University will be working closely with John Hansard Gallery, City Eye and NST Nuffield Southampton Theatres to deepen public engagement, to share its research and present inspiring and accessible cultural opportunities for all.

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