

## Film series: History is not the Past

Screenings and film talks with guests, October 13-15, 2023, at Wolf Kino, Weserstraße 59, 12045 Berlin-Neuköln. Curated and moderated by author and director Oliver Hardt, based in Frankfurt am Main

*"History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history."*  
- James Baldwin

To mark the occasion of the exhibition *The Struggle of Memory – Deutsche Bank Collection*, the PalaisPopulaire is proud to present the film series "History is not the Past," curated by author and filmmaker Oliver Hardt. This series showcases films created by artists and filmmakers from Africa and the African diaspora, exploring themes of memory, loss, and restitution in diverse and thought-provoking ways. "History is not the Past" spans five screenings and features a total of thirteen short and feature-length films from nine countries, including Senegal, Nigeria, Haiti, Brazil, Germany, and France. Some of these works will be making their German debut. What unites these films is a profound awareness of how colonial history lingers and lives on in our landscapes, bodies, and objects, shaping our present realities. While some films explicitly and urgently address this colonial legacy, others do so indirectly, employing visual symbolism and coded narratives. Collectively, these films convey a shared hope: that through deep acts of remembrance, we can contribute to the healing of our wounded present.

During the screenings, Oliver Hardt will speak with authors, artists, and filmmakers. The guests include Karimah Ashadu, Dr. Mahret Ifeoma Kupka, Prof. Dr. Bénédicte Savoy, Diara Sow, and Eric Otieno Sumba.

Part two of *The Struggle of Memory* exhibition is on view at the PalaisPopulaire from October 6, 2023 to March 11, 2024. Details about the program accompanying the exhibition can be found on the website [db-palaispopulaire.com](https://db-palaispopulaire.com)

# PROGRAM

## Screening 1 – Paris, Paris, Paris! Or maybe not?

Friday, October 13, 2023, 6:30 pm, auditorium 1, Wolf Kino

### Touki Bouki - The Journey of the Hyena

Djibril Diop Mambéty

Senegal 1973, 90 min. / OV Wolof with English subtitles

"Paris, Paris, Paris!" sings Josephine Baker on the radio, her voice echoing all the way to the Senegalese capital of Dakar. In this city, Mory and his girlfriend Anta dream of escaping to the promised land of France. With unyielding determination, they resort to various schemes and hustles to scrape together the money needed for their passage on the ship. However, as they stand at the harbor, ready to embark on their journey, doubts begin to creep in. *Touki Bouki* was honored with the Film Critics' Prize at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival. Influenced by the French Nouvelle Vague, this film is hailed as a milestone in postcolonial cinematic modernism, primarily due to its unconventional narrative style.

## Screening 2 - History inscribed in bodies, spaces, and landscapes

Saturday, October 14, 2023, 2:30 pm, Studio, Wolf Kino

### 6 Friedberg Chicago

James Gregory Atkinson

D 2021, 6:16 min.

Citing the affirmative aesthetics of music videos, *6 Friedberg Chicago* depicts a group of young Black men in casual tableaux, moving in slow motion under the glow of black light. This film was shot within the premises and rooms of Ray Barracks, a former U.S. barracks located in Friedberg, Hesse. All the actors featured in the video, including the artist himself, are the sons of Black U.S. soldiers who were stationed at Ray Barracks until the 1980s. From the mere presence of these young men on screen, a nearly six-minute 'history lesson' unfolds. This historical narrative is made all the more engaging and approachable by the vocals of Ahya Simone, a queer African-American harpist. Through his research-based works, James Gregory Atkinson skillfully blends elements of autobiography with political history. He does so in response to the conspicuous gaps and omissions within official archives concerning the history of Black people in Germany.

### Ao Rés do Chão

Tiago Sant'Ana

BRA 2019, 5:30 min. / OV Portuguese with English subtitles

A central focus of the artistic work of Tiago Sant'Ana, a native of Bahia, Brazil, is to shed light on Afro-Brazilian history. His meticulously choreographed video *Ao Rés do Chão* points to an historical narrative: during the era of slavery, enslaved individuals were prohibited from wearing shoes. Following the abolition of slavery in Brazil, acquiring shoes became one of the initial **acts** of emancipated people. In addition to the physical presence of Black men, the choice of filming location holds particular significance in this film. *Ao Rés do Chão* (Ground Floor) was filmed at the Bahia Museum of Art, a grand colonial palace that used to be the home of one of Bahia's largest slaveholders.

## **Landscape (Western Hemisphere)**

**Lorraine O'Grady**

USA 2010-12, 18:04 min.

In the mesmerizing video artwork titled *Landscape (Western Hemisphere)*, African American artist Lorraine O'Grady masterfully morphs a close-up view of her own hair into a dynamic and abstract landscape. In this captivating transformation, the strands of hair sway in the breeze, a collage of sounds from the North American hemisphere can be heard: birds singing, insects chirping, traffic noise—a gentle yet jarring experience.

## **Plateau**

**Karimah Ashadu**

D/I/NGR 2021 - 2022, 30 min. / OV Berom with English subtitles

In her film *Plateau*, artist Karimah Ashadu offers a poignant portrayal of a community of undocumented miners laboring in a tin mine located in Nigeria's Plateau State. Through evocative and impactful imagery, Ashadu explores the profound socio-economic repercussions stemming from the region's mining history. Moreover, she underscores how this historical legacy persists, exerting a lasting influence on both the local populace and the natural environment, even in the contemporary era.

## **Chão de Estrelas**

**Tiago Sant'Ana**

BRA 2022, 8:51 min.

In his video work *Chão de Estrelas*, Brazilian artist Tiago Sant'Ana explores alternative ways of etching memories into landscapes and bodies. Shot in the imposing landscape of *Chapada Diamantina*, the short film revolves around narratives of colonial Brazilian mining and imagines paths of liberation from a system based on violence and servitude.

**Guests / in conversation:** Karimah Ashadu, artist and filmmaker, and Eric Otieno Sumba, author and political scientist

## **Screening 3 – In the presence of ghosts**

Saturday, October 14, 2023, 5 pm, Studio, Wolf Kino

## **Atlantique**

**Mati Diop**

F/B/SEN 2019, 104 min. / OV Wolof with English subtitles

In her debut film *Atlantique*, French-Senegalese filmmaker Mati Diop tells the story of Ada, a young woman in Dakar conflicted between real love and arranged marriage. And of ghosts and the sea that swallows young men who want to leave the country in the hope of a better future. *Atlantique* is an exceedingly sensual film, calmly told in beguiling images that leave room for one's own thoughts and feelings.

**Guest / in conversation:** Diara Sow, filmmaker and DoP (Director of Photography)

## Screening 4 – Living objects, collective memories

Sunday, October 15, 2023, 2:30 pm, Studio, Wolf Kino

### **Statues Also Die (Les statues meurent aussi)**

**Chris Marker / Alain Resnais / Ghislain Cloquet**

F 1953, 30 min. / OV French with English subtitles

The 1953 classic film begins its profound exploration of the subject of African looted artifacts in European museums with the words, "When men die, they enter into history. When statues die, they enter into art. This botany of death is what we call culture." Commissioned by the magazine *Présence Africaine*, which had been established a few years prior, the filmmakers explore the collection of African art held at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. As they delve deeper into this material, their astonishment grows at the sight of these artifacts being exhibited within the context of an anthropological museum rather than in the Louvre, where they believe they rightfully belong alongside classical Greek and Egyptian art. The film unexpectedly adopts a strong anti-colonial stance, leading to its censorship for nearly a decade after its initial release.

### **You Hide Me**

**Nii Kwate Owoo**

GHA 1970, 16 min. / OV English

For his essayistic short film, Ghanaian filmmaker Nii Kwate Owoo gained access to the British Museum for a day in 1970, where he filmed the valuable African artifacts stored in the basement. The questions Owoo asks himself and the European audience are as relevant today as they were fifty years ago: Under what circumstances and by what means did the looted cultural objects end up in European collections? Who possesses the expertise to judge the artistic quality of these artifacts? How can it be that the same colonial powers that for centuries dismissed Africa's historical significance now advocate for the preservation of a global cultural heritage, raising questions about access and equity?

### **One Can Only Hope and Wonder**

**The Critics Company**

NGR/D 2023. 12 min. / OV Yoruba with English/German subtitles

"But those wise men have gone to the future. They will use their tears to paint. They will run mad and create something new."

The Critics Company, a dynamic collective of young Nigerian artists, was established in Kaduna in 2015. The group comprises talented filmmakers including Godwin Gaza Josiah, Victor Josiah, Raymond Yusuff, Richard Yusuff, and Ronald Yusuff. Their latest work, *One Can Only Hope and Wonder*, was produced for their inaugural institutional exhibition at MMK Frankfurt, which debuted in March 2023. The film is a visually powerful parable about collective memories preserved in art, dying, fading, and resurrecting. In its cinematic presentation, The Critics Company combines Hollywood aesthetics with choreographed performance elements and the landscape of Kaduna in northern Nigeria.

**Guests / in conversation:** Prof. Dr. Bénédicte Savoy, art historian and author, and Dr. Mahret Ifeoma Kupka, art scholar, curator, and author

## Screening 5 – Looking for clues

Sunday, October 15, 2023, 5 pm, Studio, Wolf Kino

### Cloudscape

Lorna Simpson

USA 2004, 3:30 min.

African American artist Lorna Simpson's cinematic and photographic works explore how Black identity is formed, perceived, and experienced. *Cloudscape* is a concise yet powerful artistic statement on the fading of this identity: in an otherwise dark room, artist Terry Adkins stands whistling in a cone of light as he gradually disappears into a cloud of fog.

### The day I stopped kissing my father

James Gregory Atkinson

D/USA 2019, 3:56 min.

Whose memory counts? And whose history? In front of a monumental mural on the mobility of humanity, a black creature struts through a hall of the Detroit Public Library. Blending into the atmosphere of surveillance and one-sided historiography is the beguiling singing of harpist Ahya Simone. With the help of the creature, the sound, and the quiet camera movement, blackness and queerness are inscribed into the archive of knowledge.

### Douvan jou ka leve (The sun will rise)

Gessica Génés

F / HAI 2017, 52 min. / OV Haitian Creole with English subtitles

What is this "disease of the soul" that is slowly killing the Haitian people? With *Douvan jou ka leve* (The sun will rise), Haitian filmmaker and actress Gessica Génés attempts to understand this form of cultural bipolarity, which manifests itself primarily in the country's religious division between Vodou and Christianity. In her very personal documentary, Génés combines her own family history, marked by her mother's mental illness, with the fragile history of Haiti. The result is a moving meditation on mental illness and the unresolved inner turmoil of a nation deeply suffering from the long aftermath of European colonialism.

### Final round

Biography Oliver Hardt

Oliver Hardt is a highly acclaimed director, writer, and filmmaker known for his multi-award-winning documentaries. His work explores the cultural dynamics of the African diaspora within the realms of art, design, and architecture. Hardt's films have garnered international recognition and have been showcased at prestigious film festivals and art institutions around the world. Some of the notable venues include BlackStar Filmfest in Philadelphia, DokuArts in Berlin, the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Garage Museum in Moscow, the Haus der Kunst in Munich, the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. In addition to his role as a filmmaker, Oliver Hardt reviews exhibitions for the art magazine *Texte zu Kunst* and curates film programs for museums and art halls. In 2021, on the occasion of a Kara Walker exhibition at the Kunsthalle Schirn, he developed a film series entitled *Black Is Not A Color*, which combined themes and motifs of the African-American artist with the perspectives of Black people in Germany.