



beautiful souls: isaac julien's
still photographic oeuvre
art basel ovr: pioneers

vip preview march 24 – 25, 2021

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nara roesler

cover Isaac Julien
Lina Bo Bardi's Footsteps
(*Stones Against Diamonds series*) (diptych), 2016 [detail]

On the occasion of OVR:Pioneers, Nara Roesler proposes a selection of photographs by the artist that together reveal the trajectory of Julien's engagement with the medium.

British filmmaker and visual artist Isaac Julien is a pioneer in multiple-screen film installations. Having started his career as part of the Sankofa Film and Video Collective, Julien went on to produce works that have become classics such as *Looking for Langston* (1989) and *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), which won the Semaine de la Critique prize at the 1991 Cannes Film Festival. In the mid-1990s Julien started investigating new modes of cinematic practice and created his first multiple-screen installations, including the Turner Prize-nominated, two-screen installation *Vagabondia* (2000). He has been able to establish an immersive relationship between the audience and the film screen, one where the spectator is able to wander past the various screens thereby creating new mobile configurations of film spectatorship.

Since Julien started investigating those new modes of filmmaking, he has also developed a parallel body of photographic work. Instead of using film

stills from his shoots, Julien creates specific mise-en-scenes on the film set, extensively reworking the images digitally.

The comprehensive presentation includes works as early as *Three*, from 1999, until the most recent *Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement* (2019), as well as iconic series such as *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010) and *Playtime* (2013). The images presented are interwoven by their common thematic engagement with the representation of black subjectivity, migration, mythology, cinema, and architecture, representations in which female figures often appear as poetic emblems who navigate through the complexities of such matters. In each of the works presented, the audience is encouraged to listen to and learn from the female protagonists. The selection thus not only celebrates Julien's pioneering methods of creating and presenting imagery but also accentuates his perceptive, incisive and thought-provoking thematics.

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lina bo bardi – a marvellous entanglement

The multiple screen installation and photographic series *Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement* is set and filmed across a number of public architectural sites designed by Lina Bo Bardi in Brazil, such as the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (MAM-BA) and the SESC Pompeia, amongst others. It features actors Fernanda Montenegro and Fernanda Torres, who together represent the architect at different phases in her life, and read excerpts from her writings, reflecting on the legacy of the modernist architect and designer.

In this work, Julien intertwines strikingly different forms of cinematic expression. In line with the artist's earlier investigations, *Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement* addresses issues of historical reparation guided by the breadth and power of Bo Bardi's work, and a profound belief that her legacy has yet to be fully acknowledged. Recently, Bo Bardi was awarded the Special Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement (in memoriam) on the occasion of this year's Venice Architecture Biennial (2021).



Beautiful Souls, Less Beautiful Souls
(*Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement*), 2019
Endura Ultra photograph
edition of 6 + AP
180 x 240 cm | 70.9 x 94.5 in





Prehistoric Technology
(*Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous*
Entanglement), 2019
Endura Ultra photograph
facemounted
edition of 6 + AP
180 x 240 cm
70.9 x 94.5 in



Solutions invented
(*Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous*
Entanglement), 2019
Endura Ultra photograph
edition of 6 + AP
180 x 240 cm
70.9 x 94.5 in

stones against diamonds

Stones Against Diamonds was inspired by a letter written by Lina Bo Bardi, where Bo Bardi commends the beauty of semi-precious stones over precious ones, such as diamonds. The production was staged and shot over a period of five days in the remote Vatnajökull region in South East Iceland Austurland, inside glacial caves through which actress Vanessa Myrie—a spirit guide—takes the viewer from one landscape to another. Throughout the film, Julien referenced signature elements of Bo Bardi's body of work, including reproductions of the architect's iconic glass and concrete easels, and a handmade spiral staircase. Ultimately, *Stones Against Diamonds* explores how some of the most beautiful elements of nature, can also be the least precious in the conventional—and socially constructed—sense of the words.

Stones Against Diamonds was exhibited as part of the Rolls-Royce Arts Programme, at Palazzo Malipiero (2015), in Venice, Italy.

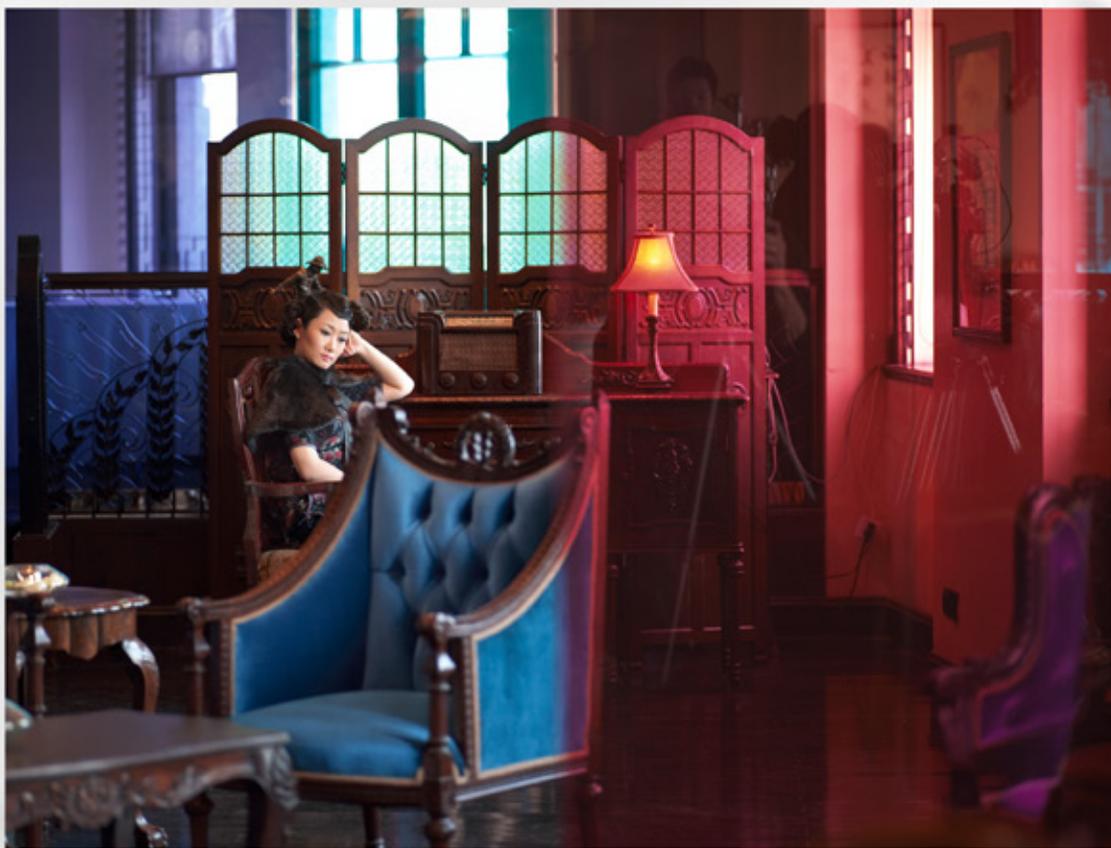


Under Opaline Blue
(*Stones Against Diamonds*), 2015
Kodak Endura Premier
photographic print
edition of 6 + AP
180 x 240 cm
70.9 x 94.5 in





Lina Bo Bardi's Footsteps
(*Stones Against Diamonds Series*
/ *A Marvellous Entanglement*), 2016
Kodak Endura Premier
edition of 6 + AP
2 pieces of 180 x 245,1 cm
70.9 x 96.5 in (each)



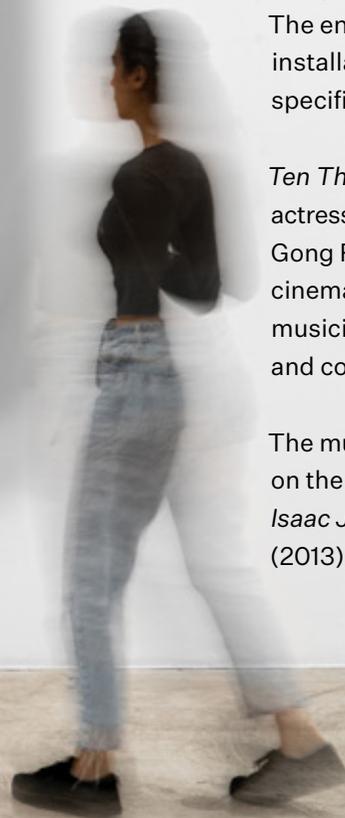
ten thousand waves

Ten Thousand Waves engages with the movement, or displacement of people across the world, whether countries or continents, offering a reflection on their many unfinished journeys. The work was shot in China, intertwining contemporary cultural references together with ancient myths, which include the fable of the goddess Mazu, the Tale of Yishan Island, and the reenactment of the iconic 1930s Chinese film *The Goddess*. *Ten Thousand Waves* was staged and shot in the streets of both old and modern Shanghai, accompanied by music that juxtaposes Eastern and Western traditions. The entire process gave rise to a multi-screen installation, and to photographic images specifically set during the time of production.

Ten Thousand Waves included the collaboration of actresses Maggie Cheung, and Zhao Tao, calligrapher Gong Fagen, the film and video artist Yang Fudong, cinematographer Zhao Xiaoshi, poet Wang Ping, musician Jah Wobble, the Chinese Dub Orchestra, and composer Maria de Alvear, amongst others.

The multi-screen installation was notably exhibited on the occasion of the artist's solo presentation *Isaac Julien: Ten Thousand Waves*, at MoMA (2013), in New York, NY, USA.

Glass House
(*Ten Thousand Waves*), 2010
Endura Ultra Photograph
edition of 6 + AP
180 x 239,8 cm
70.9 x 94.4 in





three

Three engages with the idea of desire, which the artist explores through particular dance movements and symbolically charged imagery. In creating a work that relies on elements of film, dance, photography, music, theatre, painting, and sculpture, and weaving them together to construct a poetic proposition, Julien seeks to transcend the barriers between artistic domains, allowing them to expand through collaborative dialogue and exchange.

Three was created in collaboration with and featuring British actress Cleo Sylvestre, as well as choreographers Bebe Miller and Ralph Lemon. Lemon has been the recipient of numerous accolades, and in 2020 was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship.

Three's photographic works were exhibited on the occasion of the exhibition *Groundings*, at MCA Chicago (2018), Chicago, IL, USA.





playtime

Playtime presents the story of six different characters, with separate yet interconnecting stories and experiences of the financial crisis forming a critique of the influence of capital in the art world. The protagonists include an artist, a hedge fund manager, an auctioneer, a house worker, an art dealer, and a reporter, living across three different cities—London, a city transformed by the deregulation of the banks; Reykjavik, where the 2008 global financial crisis began; and Dubai, a center for financial markets.

The production stars James Franco, Maggie Cheung, Colin Salmon, and auctioneer Simon de Pury, among others. The seemingly separate narratives examine the different ways and levels in which the flow of capital affects the production, dealing, and collecting of contemporary art, and how lives are affected by the market. Julien notably begins the film by asking *The Enigma of Capital* author David Harvey why capital is so difficult to depict, receiving the response that: ‘in the same way you can only really intuit gravity exists by its effects, you can really only intuit that capital exists by its effects.’

Playtime was presented on the occasion of the exhibition *Playtime*, at Platform-L Contemporary Art Center (2017), in Seoul, South Korea.





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