



**Rohini Malik Okon, *Cyclical Notations:
A Little or No Breeze***

Rohini Malik Okon is a curator, producer and writer based in London. Over the past 25 years she has conceived, commissioned and produced numerous projects and events engaging with a diverse range of artists, participants and audiences, and is committed to exploring the potential of art to open up opportunities for learning and participation. Her work often explores transcultural and interdisciplinary exchanges, performative and collaborative practices and the relationships between art, public space and civic dialogue. Previous positions include Participation Producer (Visual Arts) at Southbank Centre and co-ordinator of the AHRC funded research project 'Translating the Image - Cross Cultural Contemporary Arts' at Goldsmiths College, and she is currently Curatorial Project Manager of Future Collect at iniva. Published research and writing include Understanding Slavery Initiative, a learning resource produced by the National Maritime Museum, and texts on the work of artist Joy Gregory including *Sites of Africa* (published in *Critical Cities Volume 2*, 2010) and *Narratives of Place* (published by Impressions Gallery, Bradford, 2010).

Alluding both to a sense of discomfort and to a disrupted stillness, the title of this multilayered immersive installation, *A Little or No Breeze*, suggests an atmosphere that can potentially be stifling but also perhaps soothing if a little breeze blows. Taken from a text in Hans Sloane's *A Voyage to Jamaica* (1688) in which he charts the weather in Jamaica daily, these words along with other meteorological observations form the textual element of one of the moving image works presented by Joy Gregory. The visual element of this piece evokes the figure of Rose, who is present in another of Sloane's journal entries. Rose was an enslaved woman suffering with depression who lived at the house where Sloane stayed and, while there, recorded his brutal and non-consensual medical treatment of her. Shot with the feel of super eight in a monotone palette, the artist herself inhabits Rose, still and solitary and with a sense of empathy and dignity in contrast to Sloane's objective observations.

Hans Sloane was a seventeenth century physician, collector and botanist whose vast collection made up the origins of both The British Museum and The Natural History Museum, yet much of the wealth Sloane used to purchase his collection was derived from slavery. He travelled to Jamaica in 1687 where, during his stay on the island, he recorded and collected hundreds of specimens of plants, many of which were transported to the island from Africa while others were indigenous to Jamaica. By juxtaposing Sloane's musings on the weather in Jamaica with Rose's experience, Gregory disrupts any sense of a linear narrative and invites us to consider multiple perspectives simultaneously. Shifting from interior to exterior, her second moving image work is a collage of stills of seascapes and landscapes, luminous and presented in rich colour. The work moves between the Palm House at Kew Gardens, across the sea to the fecund abundance of rural Jamaica, to town gardens and the Botanical Gardens in Kingston, then back across the sea to London. Here the textual element features Sloane's observations of Rose and we are again disorientated and invited to reconsider our preconceptions.

Adding to this sense of slippage and overlapping narratives is the soundscape created by composer Philip Miller. Weaving together conversation, song, historical exploration and sampled sounds including the ring of a mobile phone and the blow of a conch shell, Miller creates a palpable sense of movement in acoustic space. The starting point for his composition is the transcription made of a traditional Angolan song by a local musician during Hans Sloane's stay in Jamaica. Written in western musical notation, the transcript is held in the Montague Music Collection at Boughton House in Northamptonshire, England. In reimagining the song with a contemporary singer, Miller also considers the context in which an Angolan slave song came to be sung in Jamaica, how it was originally transcribed by freed slave and Jamaican musician Mr Baptiste and what it means to archive music in this way. Emanating throughout the gallery, this immersive soundscape is of a different length to the two moving image works and is not directly linked to either as a soundtrack. Meanings and associations shift as the visual and audio pieces are experienced simultaneously and the juxtapositions will be different each time.

Included in the soundscape are fragments of recorded phone call conversations between Gregory and a range of people who emigrated from Jamaica, recalling their early imaginings of Britain, their encounters with the British weather and noting details of their current environment and day to day lives. Through small incidental details we hear recollections of loneliness, darkness and the cold, of first coats and boots and paraffin heaters and a bodily longing to return 'home'. Jamaica is remembered as vibrant and lushly green and warm. Taking her cue from Hans Sloane, Gregory asks 'What is the weather like today?', and the inclusion of these conversations in the soundscape hints at a sense of cumulative personal local knowledge where everyday narratives become amplified by being shared.

From the transplanting of seedlings to the transcription of words, both spoken and sung, the cyclical notations emerging from *A Little or No*

Breeze suggest an evolving project of research and recollection. Reflecting on historical and contemporary experience to disrupt any sense of linear narrative, the work aims to reanimate and transform archival collections and documented anecdotes to explore new ways of considering personal memories and shared histories of movement and migration.



Joy Gregory *The Drawing Room (Little or no breeze)* 2021
archival digital print on fine art paper 59.4 x 84.1 cm



Joy Gregory *The Staircase (Little or no breeze)* 2021
archival digital print on fine art paper 59.4 x 84.1 cm

Cover: Joy Gregory *Little or no sea breeze* 2020
inkjet print on paper 33.6 x 50.8 cm

Back: Joy Gregory *What Cotton Tree, Hope Botanical Gardens, Saint Andrews, Jamaica* 2021
digital image dimensions variable



Joy Gregory and Philip Miller
SEEDS OF EMPIRE: A Little or No Breeze
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