

**INDEPENDENT**

Forgotten history of black artists to be uncovered in £700,000 curation project

Hundreds of works to be catalogued in attempt to uncover hidden story of their powerful influence on 20th-century art

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Frank Bowling is one of Britain's most distinguished post-war artists (*David Sandison*)

Hundreds of works by black artists held in British public collections are to be catalogued for the first time in an attempt to uncover the hidden story of their powerful influence on 20th-Century art.

A team of artists and researchers will spend the next three years trawling museums and galleries for work by artists of African or Asian descent to piece together the forgotten history of how they worked alongside - and inspired - household names from Marcel Duchamp to Barbara Hepworth.

The £700,000 project, to be launched this week and led by the University of the Arts London, will take investigators to art held in national museums but also locations such as hospitals and municipal galleries to produce an online database of at least 300 works by artists who helped shape the modernism movements of the last century.

The scheme, led by British artist and academic Sonia Boyce, will also seek to break a cycle whereby the focus on black art has tended to emphasise the ethnicity of the artist rather than the significance of the work itself in the broader context of artistic endeavour.



Althea McNish is Britain's first black textile designer of international standing (*Rex*)

Professor Boyce told *The Independent*: “Many artists don’t want to be framed within a discussion about race. If we look back, these are black artists who went to art school and rubbed shoulders with their contemporaries and played their role in shaping the movements of their day. Without black artists there would be no modernism.

“The paradox here is that we have to identify these artists according to their ethnicity but if we don’t start this process a silence will remain about their work. We want to build a base of knowledge about this art to show its role within the broader story of 20th century art.”

The project, entitled Black Artists and Modernism and backed by the Tate as well as leading regional galleries, will also include exhibitions and a possible television documentary as the researchers piece together the history of the works, many of which currently lack detailed descriptions of their genesis and significance.

THREE BLACK ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Ronald Moody

The Jamaican-born artist spent some of his formative years in Britain after travelling to London in the 1920s to study dentistry and change tack to become a leading sculptor. He was a contemporary of Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore.

Frank Bowling

The son of policeman and a seamstress from Guyana, Bowling is one of Britain’s most distinguished post-war artists. He attended the Royal College of Art with, among others, David Hockney. At graduation in 1962, Hockney pipped Bowling to the annual gold medal.

Althea McNish

Britain’s first black textile designer of international standing, McNish came to Britain in the 1950s from her native Trinidad and Tobago. She is renowned for her bold, tropical-inspired designs and has worked for companies including Liberty and Heals.

Prof Boyce said she and her colleagues expect to catalogue at least 30 black artists, many of them born in Britain and others who passed through during the last 100 years from locations such as South Africa and the Philippines.

Prominent contemporary artists such as Chris Ofili and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye will feature but much of the work will be about reappraising others whose contribution remains under-recognised.



Professor Sonia Boyce is the joint chair of black art and design at the University of the Arts London (*Paul Cochrane*)

Among them will be Ronald Moody, a Jamaican-born sculptor who came to London in the 1920s to study dentistry but was inspired to become an artist by the British Museum's collections of ethnographic art. He became close friends with key British sculptors including Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore.