cover Detail from Waking Proud, London, 1970s Photographer Horace Ové

back cover Photograph courtesy Sheila McIntyre, c. 1964 Photographer Excel Photographics

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AUTOGRAPH ABP

Archive Issue Spring 2008

The Archive and Research Centre for CULTURALLY DIVERSE PHOTOGRAPHY

cover
Walking Proud, London, 1970s
Photographer
Horace Ové

With the support of a major grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Autograph ABP is developing the UK's first permanent public print collection and digital resource dedicated to culturally diverse photography – a long overdue project with the potential to transform the way Britain's cultural history is represented.

The project

A public archive has been an objective for Autograph ABP since 1991. The establishment of the Archive and Research Centre at Rivington Place builds on 20 years of work that has addressed a lack of representation of photographers from culturally diverse backgrounds.

With the aid of a four-year HLF grant, we will create a permanent collection of photographs and an online picture library, documenting the emergence of post-war Britain as a multicultural society.

It will enable us to engage with a wider public, reach new audiences, and work in partnership with educational and cultural institutions to create a lasting legacy of this significant era in Britain's history.

The collection

This modern collection of historical photographs will range in genre from constructed high street studio portraits and family snapshots to social documentary and fine art photography.

The archive will enhance Autograph's existing collection of artists' commissions with newly curated portfolios and vernacular photographs. Through a programme of preserving, cataloguing and digitising, they will form a learning resource featuring a range of interpretative materials.

Key works by established artists such as – **Armet Francis, Horace Ové, Ingrid Pollard, Sunil Gupta, Roshini Kempadoo, Joy Gregory, Franklyn Rodgers, Dave Lewis, Jagtar Semplay, Eileen Perrier and Anthony Lam** – will be represented alongside images by amateur photographers whose family pictures reveal another story of a complex and diverse Britain.

The archive

will open to the public from the autumn of 2010.

Benefits will include

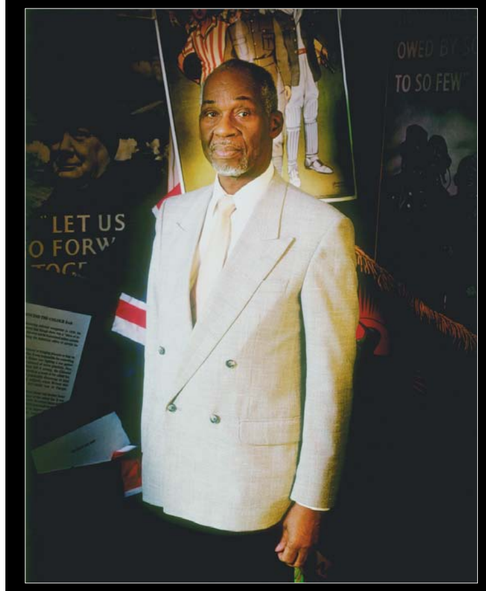
– Publicly accessible print collection and research facilities.

– Fully contextualised digital image bank featuring teaching resources to enhance the national education curriculum; artists' interviews; podcasts; audiovisual recordings and commissioned essays on thematic strands that annotate key works in the collection.

– Artists-in-schools residencies and gallery education projects.

– Public programme of talks, seminars, workshops, and study days.

Autograph ABP is a charity that works internationally to educate the public in photography, with a particular emphasis on issues of cultural identity and human rights.



World War II Veteran Allan Pinder, 1994 Photographer Dave Lewis

from Red, Gold and Green, 1996 Photographer Eileen Perrier

Couple, Poole, Dorset, early 1960s.
Photographer unknown

Reflections of the Black Experience, 1986 Photographer Sunil Gupta

Studio portrait, c. 1975 Photographer unknown

from Pastorale Interlude, 1987 Photographer Ingrid Pollard

Notting Hill Carnival 1979 Photographer Armet Francis

We will take a **photography road show** to major English cities where members of the public will make their own contribution to this historic resource. From the back of a van, images will be digitised and catalogued to transform the collection into a continuously growing, living archive.

As a digital image bank and research resource, the archive will highlight

a missing chapter

in the UK's cultural history.

from Notes From the Street, 1995
Photographer Anthony Lam

Brownie, Shifnal, Shropshire, c. 1968
Photographer unknown

Hand-tinted portrait, Hackney, London, c. 1964
Photographer
Excel Photographics

Polling Day, Stepney, 1992
Photographer
Jagtar Semplay

When I grew up in the United States in the city of Philadelphia in the 1950s and 60s, the camera was a central element in our lives.

Philadelphia is about a 90-minute drive from New York City's Harlem and, in the early 20th century, a major city for a number of blacks who migrated from the Caribbean and southern U.S. states to northern cities such as New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. My family treasured their past – as evidenced in their ability to tell stories and preserve objects, recordings, clothing, and photographs. Studying photographs as a curator has inspired me to reflect on my own family pictures, and to place them in a wider historical context. In my own photographic practice, I use family photographs and archival references to incorporate stories and social politics, hoping to invite a larger public to imagine these experiences – both collective and individual – of aspects of the African diaspora in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

After my father's death in 1990, I revisited photographs of family members, as well as photographs from other family albums. I found myself searching through his trunk of photographs and negatives in an attempt to preserve his memory. I was always struck by the range of photographs he produced and tucked away and wondered why! I looked closely at the photographs of the men, women and children – dancing, working, playing, and posing. As I explored his world through the archive he created, I thought about the experiences I had had as a child in a semi-segregated society, ones he had during segregation that were so different, and finally my work as a photography curator at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in the 1980s.

According to Paul Gilroy, 'Blacks [in Britain] have seldom been seen in advertisements or on television (in the 60s and 70s). The pictorial symbols inherent in the political agitation of their communities, in independently published magazines or the minority markets in specialised items like cosmetics that have displayed the cultural assets and distinctiveness of the "racial" group are limited and meagre visual resources by comparison with the mainstream media. The cultural significance of record covers as a form of folk art is therefore enhanced simply because they offer one of very few opportunities to see and enjoy images of black people outside of the stereotyped guises in which the dominant culture normally sanctions their presence.'[1] Gilroy's thoughtful articulation of the absence of images of blacks in Britain during this period allows us to appreciate the need for an archive of images in various formats.

I have written about African-American photography for a number of years and have had the opportunity to research, examine and exhibit photographs contained in Autograph's archive. As an artist who writes about black photographic imagery, I have consistently focused my research on body politics, race, gender, and the politics of visual culture – the central questions of visual theory. Today it is difficult to find a single meaning in a photograph – the photographic archive is often used as a stimulus for artists to create work about family, society, and politics. Without the archive, 'do we dare imagine how many pioneering black photographers there might have been, had more favorable socio-economic circumstances prevailed?'[2] – a question activist Angela Davis posed in 1983.

In my view, archives function as an evolving memory space to uncover and recover materials and as a resource for both the photographer and the community. Allan Sekula refines the notion of the archive by defining it as a 'shadow archive'.[3] Autograph ABP has taken on the responsibility of preserving the visual memory embedded in the concept of the shadow archive, and much more of Black Britain and the black diaspora.

For some time I have assembled materials focusing on challenging images in an effort to encourage my students and other photographers to make informed choices in creating works of art. In teaching visual culture, I often examine images of 'uplift', stereotypes, beauty, and politicized images in art and popular culture. In asking a viewing public to critique photographs in the media, picture books, public photographic repositories and private family albums, I hope to encourage them to embrace a more diverse way of reading photographs. The archive as a traditional space for preserving has evolved from document to virtual spaces. Autograph is embracing new ways of disseminating and accessing ideas about the archive – by organizing road shows and public lectures, Autograph will attract a larger audience as they expand the very notion of an archive.

Some of the artists whose works are in the Autograph archive are considering how photographic imagery is viewed within and outside of an art context, and specifically the ways one looks at and interprets photographs. They are also thinking about how identity and representation are constructed in photographs of the racialized and gendered body. As a lifelong student of photography, I have always had a strong interest in questioning and/or reading images. In its current state, Autograph's collection has helped me to explore and decode the photographic references produced by many of the photographers, which reflect the political, ideological and aesthetic interests of the photographer and subject and therefore bring attention to parallels in visual and written discourse. Many of the artists represented in Autograph's archive have taken critical steps to construct ways in which to comment and view their role in contemporary photographic practices. By looking at the diverse visual stories beyond the stereotypes, Autograph is inviting a global reading of the images in their collection.

> Stuart Hall:
> 'Within racialised forms of "looking", profound differences of history, culture and experience have often been reduced to a handful of stereotypical features, which are "read" as if they represent a truth of nature, somehow indelibly inscribed on the body. They are assumed to be "real" because they can be seen – difference, visible to the naked eye.'[4]

Hall's remarkable reading of the different ways of looking is helpful in shaping discussions about visual images. Scholars and artists alike are reappropriating, historizising, and creating new works from the archive. The archive is becoming more and more interactive, not only in the virtual world but also with local communities; in other words, people are engaging with the photograph and the photographer. It is fitting to link the mission of Autograph to the aspirations of the founding members of the Schomburg Center. For the last two decades, Autograph has brought together a cross-section of photographers from all over the world to exhibit, lecture and write about their photographic experiences. I was invited in 1989, and again in 2005, to discuss the images of Autograph's photographers in publications focusing on themes that ranged from family photographs to documentary photographs of migration from Africa and the Caribbean to conceptual work of today.

Like many archives working today, Autograph's mission is to respond to the social and aesthetic issues beyond the sometimes insular photographic community. Autograph's archive has the capability of offering researchers, photographers, and the general public ways in which to view and comment on the body, landscapes, politics, culture, and history. The themes that emerge from the photographers' portfolios are often shared concerns which include global issues about war imagery, abuse, racial profiling, poverty, beauty, migration, protests, identity, community, spirituality, and sexuality. Amiri Baraka provocatively asserts that 'we want our new black selves as absolute masters of our own space. Can you dig it, space…Space is what we are fighting for. Institutional space, living i.e. human space, thinking space…'[5] This was stated some forty years ago in the USA regarding the philosophical framework of the Black Arts Movement. Autograph ABP is providing the institutional and thinking space for artists, historians, and collectors.

Deborah Willis

is an exhibiting photographer, professor of Photography and Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University and the author of *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present*.

above and opposite 'Family photos by my dad Thomas Willis, with my sister Yvonne, Christmas, 1955 and in the kitchen with my mother Ruth Willis, my sister and our baby sitter'.

[1] Paul Gilroy, 'Wearing Your Art on Your Sleeve: Notes Towards a Diaspora History of Black Ephemera', *Ten*-8, Vol. 2. No. 3 (1992).

[2] Angela Davis, 'Photography and Afro-American History', *Ten*-8, No. 24 (n.d.).

[3] Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. by Richard Bolton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

[4] Stuart Hall, *Different*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Mark Sealy (New York: Phaidon, 2001).

[5] Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), 'A Black Value System' in *Black Poets: The Theory, Practice & Aesthetics of the Pan-Africanist Revolution*, ed. by Woodie King and Earl Anthony (New York: Mentor Books, 1972).

The idea of the AUTOGRAPH ARCHIVE

Michael X and members of the Black Power movement at Paddington Station, London, 1968.

HORACE OVÉ

SANTU MOFOKENG
The Black Photo Album
A Look at me 1890–1950

As far as I can recall, there are no photographs of me as a baby.

My first encounter with the camera happened in the early 1960s when I was seven or eight years old. The person behind the camera was an itinerant, journeyman photographer who plied his trade on a Lambretta motor-scooter. He came to our house in Soweto at the behest of my mother, to photograph me and my younger brother one cold morning. She wanted to memorialise the jackets she had sewn for us with bits of leftover material from the garment factory where she worked. She was proud of her handiwork, and we were happy for the warmth we got from these coats of many colours, though we regretted they did not carry any store labels.

The first camera I ever owned had probably fallen off a truck.

I was 17-years old and in high school. The camera was in a dismal state of disrepair, so I couldn't do anything to make it worse. I paid for it to be repaired with my own money, which I'd earned from a commission on a sale of a complete set of Collins encyclopedias during school vacation of 1973. I only had this camera for two years before my neighbour came to borrow it (in my absence) from my sister. I never saw it again.

Later, I began to learn the trade as street photographer.

As a roving portrait or street photographer you charged a deposit for each and every exposure you made for a client – you had to sell all the exposures you made, including the duds. You could make enemies for life if you didn't return all the exposed prints you'd made of the subject. Tardiness in returning photographs could cost you your reputation and business, perhaps even a beating. Most township people felt vulnerable and exposed when they gave you permission to take (or make) an image of them. Many felt that their 'shade' (the new anthropology term), 'seriti/isithunzi' (in the vernacular), or 'soul' (the older missionary term) was implicated in the process. They feared that their essence could be stolen or their destiny altered by interfering with the resulting image or images: 'Cameraman, why are you taking so many photos of me. What are you going to do with the rest of them?'

It was not until I had my first solo exhibition that I really began to ponder my role as photographer.

I began to understand that the messages I was trying to send, however different from others that came before, would always be overshadowed by the perceptions and assumptions about South Africa that viewers bring with them. I had not thought about my own responsibility in the continuing, contentious struggle over the representation of my country's history.

I began to enlist the participation of the communities where I worked.

This is how I began to explore the politics of representation. And it was only then that I became aware of urban family portraits that were made at the beginning of this century.

The images in *The Black Photo Album* are portraits that urban black working and middle-class families had commissioned, requested or tacitly sanctioned. They have been left behind by dead relatives, where they sometimes hang on obscure parlour walls in the townships. In some families they are coveted as treasures, displacing totems in discursive narratives about identity, lineage and personality. And because, to some people, photographs contain the 'shadow' of the subject, they are carefully guarded from the ill-will of witches and enemies. In other families they are being destroyed as rubbish during spring-cleans because of interruptions in continuity or disaffection with the encapsulated meanings and the history of the images.

They belong and circulate in the private domain. Their significance lies outside of the framed image – they were made in a period when the South African state was being entrenched and policies toward people the government designated 'natives' were being articulated. It was an era mesmerised by the newly discovered life sciences such as anthropology, informed by social Darwinism.

Most of these images are slowly disintegrating in plastic bags, tin boxes, under beds, on top of cupboards and kists in the townships. And because they lie outside the education system, including the museums, galleries and libraries in this country, I found them enigmatic. These solemn images of middle- and working-class black families, crafted according to the styles (in gesture, props and clothing) of Georgian and Victorian portrait painting, portray a class of people who, according to my history lessons, did not exist at the time they were made. My quest for an explanation for this omission made me appreciate the crime of apartheid; 'The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting' (Kundera).

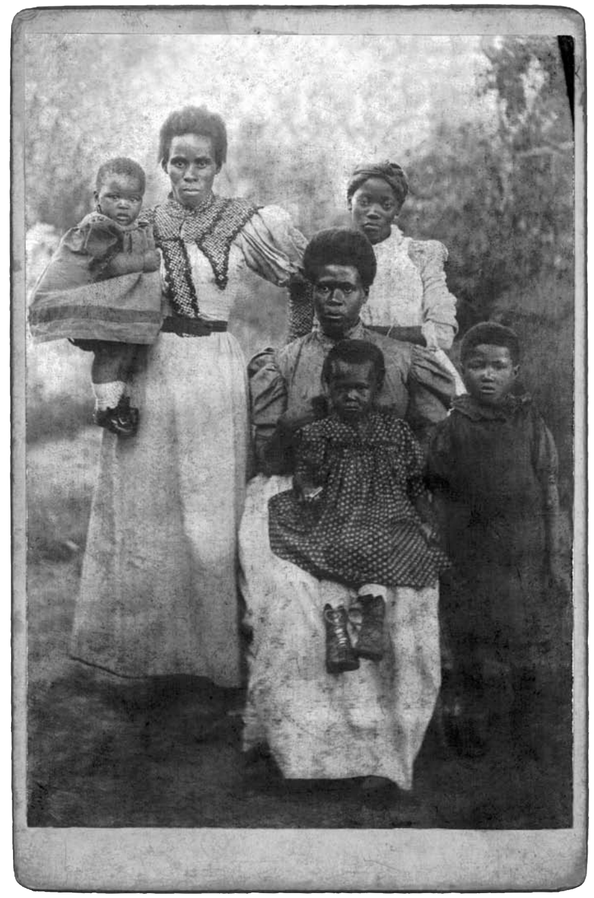
And as I examine old family albums, I feel I have come full circle.

Unidentified, 1880s.
Photographer A. Napier, Johannesburg

Unidentified, 1880s. Photographer unknown

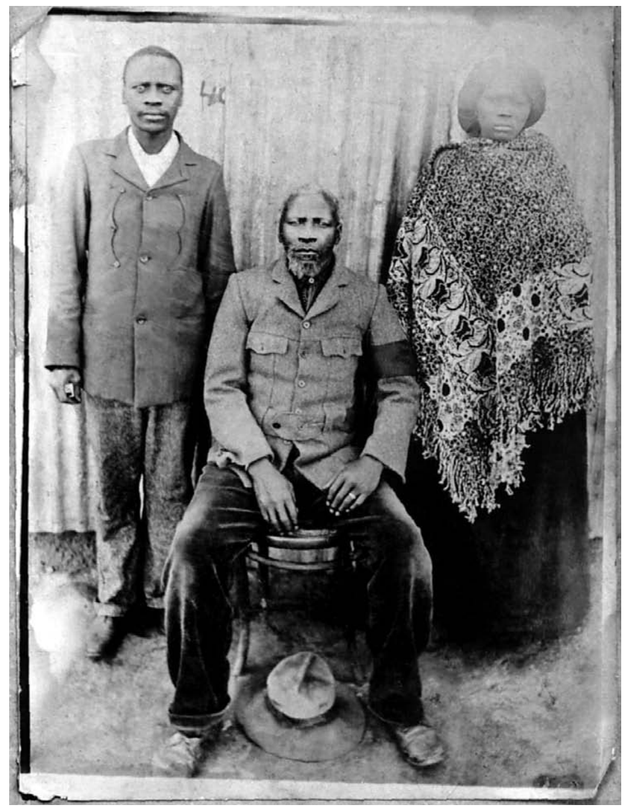
Bishop Jacobus G. Xaba and his family, 1890s.
Photographer Deale, Bloemfontein, Orange River Colony.

Ouma Maria Letsipa and her daughter, Minkie Letsipa, c. 1900.
Photographer Scholtz Studio, Linley. Orange River Colony.



Unidentified portrait, c. 1900. Photographer unknown

Lentjeka Nkole (centre), his wife and an unknown man, 1920s.
Photographer unknown, Roman Catholic Church, Rosettenville.



Santu Mofokeng is one of South Africa's leading photographers. This is an edited extract from his essay in Granta's *The View from Africa* (Winter 2005) and the artist statement accompanying *The Black Photo Album*.

Autograph ABP will present a retrospective of Santu Mofokeng's work at Rivington Place in 2009, produced in partnership with Iziko SA National Gallery, Cape Town and Gallery Momo, Johannesburg.

With special thanks to Gallery Momo

Dance. Midnapore, India. 1926.
© Golam Kashem Daddy / Drik / Majority World

‘I don't want to be our icon of poverty, or a sponge for your guilt. My identity is for me to build, in my own image. You are welcome to walk beside me, but don't stand in front to give me a helping hand. You are blocking the sun.’

Shahidul Alam, 2008.
www.drik.net

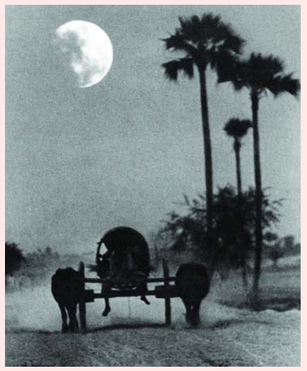
The vast majority of published images of the developing world are taken by white, European and North American photographers. Even with the advent of the internet and digital photography, photographers from the developing world (or majority world as it is increasingly being called) are still not presenting their own reality in the global media. One answer for this is that old prejudices die hard. Shahidul Alam, director of Dhaka-based Drik photographic agency, upon confronting a London development exhibition organiser with this very lack of exposure of majority world photographers, was informed that the curator (a director of a western photographic agency) believed ‘they don’t have the eye.’

Yet prejudice accounts for just one of the many reasons why majority world photographers face such difficulties; other factors include lack of training, modern photographic equipment and access to global image markets. But change, thankfully, is afoot. Powerful voices are speaking out against the current imbalance and more visibility is at last being given to the wealth of real photographic talent in the majority world. Drik, South Asia’s leading picture library, has pioneered this revolution since its inception almost twenty years ago. Set up with just one filing cabinet, an XT computer without hard drive and a converted toilet as a darkroom, Drik competes with the best of the developed world photo agencies. In Sanskrit, the word Drik means ‘vision’ and for the many media professionals involved, campaigning for majority world citizens to be represented as a vibrant source of human energy and to have a say in how they are represented, has remained integral to this vision.

In 2004, Alam came into contact with western professionals who had been trying to highlight the dilemmas of majority world photographers. A new global initiative, Majority World, evolved through collaboration between Drik and Kijijivision World Photography in the UK, and was set up in 2006 to invoke ethical standards in the trading of images. Software was developed in Dhaka to provide an online solution, www.majorityworld.com, that would serve all majority-world photographers. The aim of the organisation is twofold: to provide a platform for indigenous photographers, photographic agencies and image collections from the majority world to gain fair access to global image markets and to make it easier for image buyers to find the wealth of fresh photographic talent emerging from the majority world.

More pressure must be exerted on those who purchase and use such images, such as non-governmental, fair trade and development education organisations, the media, the travel industry and businesses trading in the majority world. In doing so, not only will a fairer world market in photography be created, but also the livelihoods of countless photographers the world over will be improved. And simultaneously the general public will benefit by getting greater exposure to the beauty, the resilience, the excitement and the pride that is all too often overlooked in the majority world.

Rebecca Narracott, 2008.
www.majorityworld.com

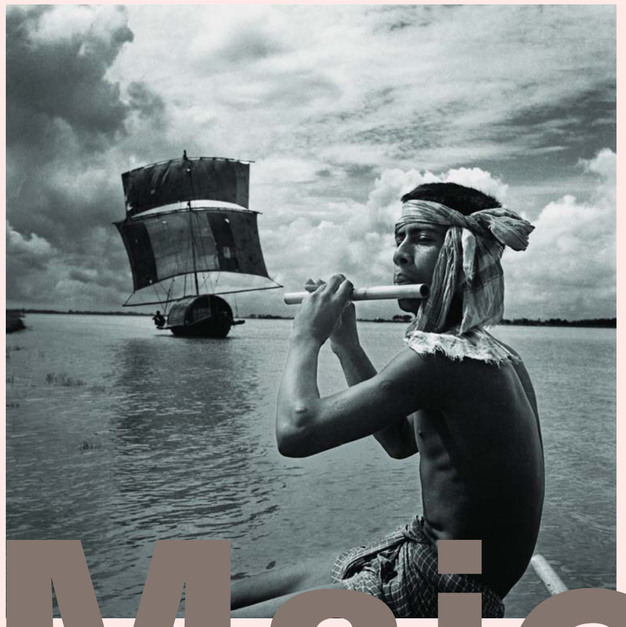


Bullock cart moonscape. Nachole, Rajshahi, Bangladesh. 1976.
© Manzoor Alam Beg / Drik / Majority World

House wife. Midnapore, India. 1927.
© Golam Kashem Daddy / Drik / Majority World

Railway engine. Dhaka, Bangladesh. 1939.
© Golam Kashem Daddy / Drik / Majority World

Boatman playing flute at Brahmaputra river. Mymensingh, Bangladesh. 1960.
© Naib Uddin Ahmed / Drik / Majority World



Students on the streets during the non-cooperation movement of 1970. Bangladesh.
© Jalaluddin Haider / Drik / Majority World

Two Sisters. Midnapore, India. 1926.
© Golam Kashem Daddy / Drik / Majority World