

22 September 2014

## Barbican Centre response to Exhibit B Change.org petition

We have considered carefully the responses to the proposed presentation of Exhibit B by the Barbican Centre. We are grateful to all those who have made their views known, and have read the comments on the change.org petition.

In responding, we acknowledge the strength of feeling on this issue. This has arisen because of a perception that the event will condone and promote racism. We state categorically that the Barbican is not neutral on the subject of racism; we are totally opposed to it and could not present a work that supported it.

Instead, Exhibit B raises, in a serious and responsible manner, issues about racism. It aims to confront the objectification of human beings and the abhorrent historical attitudes to race during the colonial era, and to question how far society has moved on. Engaging with these subjects in a work of art is always likely to be controversial and difficult, and we understand that people may be upset by the way in which the issues are portrayed in Exhibit B. That is why there is room in the event for people to leave their own testimonies and express their own feelings, in response to the presentation.

There have been issues raised around the legitimacy of the presentation as it is directed by a white South African. The Barbican has had a continuing relationship for over a decade with Brett Bailey, who is one of South Africa's most outstanding directors and has a long record of working with BAME performers. Some 150 have taken part in Exhibit B in its different presentations in 12 previous venues. They have expressed the powerful personal impact it has made on them, and their views should be respected.

While we would make no claim to be a leader in this area, we would stress to those unfamiliar with our work that we have made a continuing commitment to BAME artists at the Barbican; two of our key Barbican Associate organisations are Jazz at Lincoln Center led by Wynton Marsalis, and Boy Blue Entertainment led by Kenrick H2O Sandy and Michael J Asante, and we have presented international work from a wide range of diverse artists including Rokia Traore, Amadou & Mariam, Gilberto Gil, Salif Keita, as well the production of *The Harder They Come*. We do not suggest that these artists agree or disagree with our stance, but they are evidence of our commitment to the positive presentation of BAME work and engagement with a wide variety of diverse audiences, as is our extensive creative learning programme beyond the Barbican.

Other points have been made by protestors around issues of diversity in London today. We recognise that the Barbican Centre, in common with many arts organisations, is not represented at both management and Board level by a diversity that reflects London today. We agree that more needs to be done and this is an issue which we are addressing.

In conclusion, we accept that the presentation of Exhibit B has raised significant issues and undertake to explore these further. But we cannot accept that the views expressed, however strongly felt, should be a reason to cancel the performances. We have an undertaking to our committed performers and to our audiences who wish to explore these difficult subjects. Finally, we fully accept your right to peaceful protest if you disagree with this conclusion; in return we would ask that you fully respect our performers' right to perform and our audiences' right to attend.