

For immediate release: 27/06/2017  
PRESS RELEASE

**John Akomfrah: *Purple***  
The Curve, Barbican Centre  
6 October 2017 – 7 January 2018  
Media view: Thursday 5 October, 10am–1pm  
Free Admission  
#JohnAkomfrah

*Supported using public funding by Arts Council England. Projections by Christie Digital.  
The exhibition has been commissioned by the Barbican, London and co-commissioned by Bildmuseet Umeå, Sweden, TBA21-Academy, The Institute of Contemporary Art/ Boston and Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon.*

Barbican Art Gallery presents a new commission by British artist and filmmaker **John Akomfrah** for the Curve. His most ambitious project to date, ***Purple*** is an immersive, six-channel video installation which charts the incremental shifts in climate change across the planet and its effects on human communities, biodiversity and the wilderness. As the follow up to *Vertigo Sea* (2015), Akomfrah's standout work at the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, *Purple* forms the second chapter in a planned quartet of films addressing the aesthetics and politics of matter. Symphonic in scale and divided into six interwoven movements, Akomfrah has combined hundreds of hours of archival footage with newly shot film and a hypnotic sound score to produce the video installation. **John Akomfrah: *Purple* opens in the Curve on Friday 6 October 2017.**

Staged across a variety of disappearing ecological landscapes, from the hinterlands of Alaska to desolate, icy Arctic Greenland and the volcanic Marquesas Islands in the South Pacific, each location prompts the viewer to meditate on the complex relationship between humans and the planet. At a time when, according to the UN, greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are at their highest levels in history, with people experiencing the significant impacts of climate change, including shifting weather patterns, rising sea level, and more extreme weather events, Akomfrah's *Purple* brings a multitude of ideas into conversation including mammalian extinctions, the memory of ice, the plastic ocean and global warming.

**John Akomfrah** said; *"The Curve is one of the most challenging international arts spaces I know of. And I feel both blessed and honoured to be exhibiting here. The challenges ahead of us, of how we treat the planet and relate to matter and beings are daunting and hyperreal. I hope these works contribute in a small way to some of the very necessary conversations we need to have about the uncertain roads ahead."*

**Jane Alison, Head of Visual Arts, Barbican** said; *"I am especially delighted that London-based artist, John Akomfrah, is creating a new film based installation for the Curve; the second chapter in his planned quartet of films following his highly acclaimed three channel film, Vertigo Sea. This will be Akomfrah's largest art installation to date. As an artist who confronts major issues through his filmmaking, Akomfrah will address the perils of global climate change in this new work which is sure to be unmissable."*

Akomfrah's films are characterised by a rich, multi-layered visual style, which frequently combines contemporary politics with history, fiction and mythology and are typified by their investigations into subjects such as memory, identity, post-colonialism and often explore the experience of the African diaspora in Europe and the United States. His first film *Handsworth Songs* (1986) focuses on the riots in Birmingham and London through archive footage, documentary photographs and newsreel. Recent works include *Tropikos* (2016), a three-screen installation which references the work of filmmaking greats Stanley Kubrick and Theo Angelopoulos, *Auto Da Fé* (2016), a poetic period drama which presents a series of eight historical migrations over the last 400 years and *The Airport* (2016) which explores the displacement of millions of African people across the Atlantic to Britain in an experimental costume drama set in the sixteenth century. As a paen to the ocean, his three-

channel video installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015) explores a range of histories from whaling, international migration, the trans-Atlantic trade and the beginnings of globalisation.

Born in 1957, Accra, Ghana, Akomfrah lives and works in London. A founding member of the influential Black Audio Film Collective (1982–1998), his work has been shown in museums and exhibitions around the world including the Liverpool Biennial; Documenta 11, Kassel; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Serpentine Gallery, London; Tate Britain, London; Southbank Centre, London; Bildmuseet Umeå, Sweden; Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan; and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. A major retrospective of Akomfrah's gallery-based work with the Black Audio Film Collective premiered at FACT, Liverpool and Arnolfini, Bristol in 2007. His films have been included in international film festivals such as Cannes, Toronto, Sundance, amongst others. Earlier this year, John Akomfrah won the UK's leading prize for international contemporary art, Artes Mundi 7.

## Notes to Editors

### Press Information

For further information, images or to arrange interviews, please contact:

**Ann Berni, Senior Communications Manager** +44 207 382 7169, [ann.berni@barbican.org.uk](mailto:ann.berni@barbican.org.uk)

**Lily Booth, Communications Officer** +44 207 382 6162, [lily.booth@barbican.org.uk](mailto:lily.booth@barbican.org.uk)

**Breífne Ó Conbhuí, Communications Assistant**, +44 207 382 7254, [breifne.oconbhui@barbican.org.uk](mailto:breifne.oconbhui@barbican.org.uk)

**Jean Tang, Communications Assistant**, +44 0207 382 6138, [jean.tang@barbican.org.uk](mailto:jean.tang@barbican.org.uk)

### Press images available online from the Barbican Newsroom

A link to the image sheets can be found in the 'Downloads' box on the top right-hand side of the page from [www.barbican.org.uk/JohnAkomfrahNews](http://www.barbican.org.uk/JohnAkomfrahNews)

### Barbican Newsroom

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communication team's contact details are listed on our website at [www.barbican.org.uk/news](http://www.barbican.org.uk/news)

### Public Information

The Curve, Barbican, London

Public information: 0845 120 7550 / [www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery](http://www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery)

Free admission

### The Curve opening times:

Saturday – Wednesday 11am–8pm

Thursday & Friday 11am–9pm

Bank Holidays 12pm–8pm

The exhibition is closed on 24, 25 and 26 December 2017.

## EVENTS

A programme of talks and film screenings accompanies the exhibition. **Check the website for full listings:** [www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery](http://www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery)

### TALKS

**In Conversation: John Akomfrah and Anthony Downey**

**Thu 12 Oct, 7pm, Frobisher Auditorium 2**

To coincide with the installation *Purple*, John Akomfrah will be in conversation with academic, editor and writer, Anthony Downey.

**Tickets** £10

### FILM SEASON

**John Akomfrah presents...**

**From 24 Oct, Cinema 3**

To complement John Akomfrah: *Purple*, Barbican Cinema screens **a series of films chosen by the artist** that have influenced his life and work. The season includes; **Far From Vietnam** (1967) conceived and

edited by French filmmaker **Chris Marker**, bringing together contributions from six leading directors, including **Jean-Luc Godard**, **Alain Resnais**, and **Agnes Varda**, to reflect on the contributions their own films make in their opposition to US military involvement in Vietnam; one of Martin Scorsese's favourite films, **Salvatore Giuliano** (1962) by **Francesco Rosi** – a landmark in Italian and political cinema which reconstructs, docu-drama-style, key moments from notorious Sicilian bandit Giuliano's life; set in 1961, **Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment*** (1968) charts the period between the mass exodus after the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion and the missile crisis of the following year; plus ***The Night of Counting the Years (aka The Mummy)*** (1969), often considered to be the Arab world's greatest ever movie, from director **Chadi Abdel Salam**.

## BOOK

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated publication, including a newly commissioned text by Kass Banning, Associate Professor of Cinema Studies at Toronto University, as well as an interview with the artist by writer and broadcaster **Ekow Eshun**. The book is the sixth in a new publication series by Barbican Art Gallery that focuses on the Curve exhibition programme. £12.00.

## Exhibition

The exhibition has been commissioned by the Barbican, London and co-commissioned by Bildmuseet Umeå, Sweden, TBA21-Academy, The Institute of Contemporary Art/ Boston and Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon.

The exhibition will travel to Bildmuseet Umeå, Sweden, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid, Institute of Contemporary Art/ Boston and. Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon.

This installation is part of Film in Focus 2017 celebrating the power of the moving image and its influence across the arts throughout the Barbican through a series of world-class arts and learning projects, commissions and events that celebrate the medium of film. The programme explores film's huge breadth and power as a medium, with events and commissions spanning from the classic to the avant-garde. Through festivals, talks, outdoor screenings, innovative stagings, live soundtracks and commissions, *Film in Focus* explores the dialogue which exists between film and world-class artists working in every discipline.

Christie©, a global leader in visual and audio solutions, is providing leading visual technology for the exhibition, as part of a major five-year partnership with the Barbican Centre which will transform the public spaces of the Barbican, providing new platforms for its rolling programme of artistic commissions and focal points to communicate with the public in visually innovative ways.

In order to realise John Akomfrah's vision and provide the maximum image quality required for this exhibition, it was vital that the best projection technology available was used. *Purple* is projected on to six separate screens each around 3 metre-wide.

James Belso, UK Sales Manager for Christie, worked closely with the curator to select a projector that would provide the appropriate levels of brightness, colour and uniformity for visitors to examine and compare the ecological landscapes presented in *Purple*. It was also necessary the projectors' performance be identical across all six screens; throughout the duration of the exhibit. Christie is providing six high-grade projectors – Christie 3DLP projectors from the M-Series. These projectors use a yellow-notch filter to increase the range of colours that can be displayed and a feature called Comprehensive Color Adjustment (CCA™); which automatically adjusts colour and brightness to maintain the image settings of grouped projectors when used in multi-screen presentations such as *Purple*. More information about the projector spec is available from [here](#).

## Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow; the Curve is one of the few galleries in London devoted to the commissioning of new work. Through our activities we aim to inspire more people to

discover and love the arts. Entrance to the Curve is free. Through Young Barbican we offer £5 tickets to 14-25 year olds for our paid exhibitions, children under 14 are free.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. We develop engaging online content for audiences and offer special tours for schools. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

### **About the Barbican**

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](#) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over 1.1 million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas One, Two and Three, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, foyers and public spaces, a library, Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue Entertainment](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark Company](#). International Associates are [Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam](#), [New York Philharmonic](#), [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#), [Gewandhaus Orchestra Leipzig](#) and [Jazz at Lincoln Center](#).

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