

Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński Respire (Liverpool)

31 January – 20 April 2024



Phileas THE AUSTRIAN OFFICE FOR
CONTEMPORARY ART

Respire (Liverpool), 2023

Our first exhibition this year presents an expansive installation by Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, which was originally shown at the 12th Liverpool Biennial in 2023. During a research trip to Vienna in May 2022 organised by Phileas, curator Khanyisile Mbongwa met Kazeem-Kamiński and invited her to participate in the Biennial, which was entitled *uMoya: The Sacred Return of Lost Things*. Over the course of the next year, the video and sound installation *Respire (Liverpool)* was produced with support from Phileas and the Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport.

Respire (Liverpool) refers to the precariousness of Black existence and cites breath as a means of individual and collective liberation. For the video, the artist filmed residents of Liverpool of different ages and

genders breathing into a red balloon. They share and control the breathing space together, creating a strong sense of collectivity. The sound moves in waves from the individual to the community and back again, creating a meditative space in which to process the legacy of traumatic pasts. Accompanied by a sound work entitled *Keep On Keepin' On (for Nile)*, developed in collaboration with artist Bassano Bonelli Bassano, the installation advocates giving Black breath space in which to unfold and defy the ongoing colonial past. Kazeem-Kamiński also presented a second video work in Liverpool, entitled *Openings (Red, Black and Green)*. The three colours are a recurring element in her work and serve as a symbol to commemorate liberation struggles on the African continent and in the African diaspora in general.



Installation view at the 12th Liverpool Biennial, 2023.
Photo: Mark McNulty

Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński

Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński (born 1980 in Vienna) is a writer, researcher and artist working in a variety of media. Rooted in Black feminist theory, she has developed a research-based practice that deals with the condition of Black life in the African diaspora. In her work she moves freely between different times and spaces, thereby resisting a clean-cut separation between documentary and speculation.

Kazeem-Kamiński has been honoured with several awards, including the Msgr. Otto Mauer Prize (2023); Art X Prize Africa/Diaspora (2023); Camera Austria Award (2021); Cathrin Pichler Prize (2018); and the Theodor Körner Prize for Art (2016). She is represented by Wonnerth Dejaco, Vienna.

Recent solo and group exhibitions include *Ire*, Art X Lagos, Lagos (2023); *Unearthing in Conversation*, FotoRio, Rio de Janeiro (2023); *Respire (Liverpool)*, Liverpool Biennial (2023); *You are awaited but never as equals*, Coalmine – Raum für Fotografie, Winterthur (2023); *Seven Scenes*, Camera Austria, Graz (2022); *If a Tree Falls in a Forest*, Les Rencontres d'Arles, Arles (2022); *Emplotment*, Ludwig Museum, Budapest (2022); *KAS*, Centrale Fies, Fies (2022); *Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2021); *This World Is White No Longer: Views of a Decentred World*, Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Salzburg (2021).



Photo: Lea Sonderegger, 2023

Public events



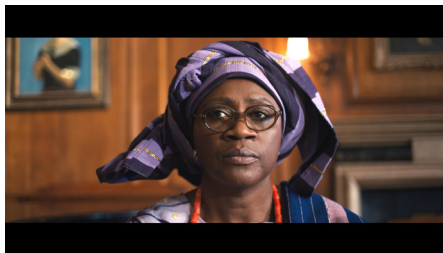
Eldis La Rosa, Photo: © MaxDoemer

A Breathing

An improvised musical performance

Tuesday 20 February at 6.30pm
Opernring 17, 1010 Vienna

Referring to texts that accompanied her in the conception of *Respire (Liverpool)* (2023) and *Openings (Red, Black, and Green)* (2023), Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński together with multi-instrumentalist and composer Eldis La Rosa invites you to a performative reading that is both improvisation and breathing rehearsal.



Onyeka Igwe, Still of *A Radical Duet*, 2023

Despite: Breathing. Constellating. Gathering.

A series of film programmes curated by Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński

Thursday 7 March at 6pm and 8.30pm
Friday 8 March at 6pm and 8.30pm
Austrian Film Museum,
Augustinerstraße 1, 1010 Vienna
(www.filmmuseum.at)

On the occasion of her exhibition at Phileas, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński has put together four programmes in collaboration with the Austrian Film Museum. The screenings are dedicated to the breath, the precariousness of Black life and the persistent demand for what the African-American academic Robin D. Kelley terms “freedom dreams”. With films by Larry Achiampong, Miryam Charles, Sylvaine Dampierre, Monica de Miranda, Ja'Tovia Gary, Onyeka Igwe, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński and Cauleen Smith.

Production credits

Respire (Liverpool), 2023, video, 16 min

Keep On Keepin' On (for Nile), 2023, soundscape, looped, 16 min

Openings (Red, Black and Green), 2023, video, looped, 16 min

All works commissioned by the 12th Liverpool Biennial 2023 and co-produced by Phileas – The Austrian Office for Contemporary Art and the Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport.

Community of the breathing: Brayden, Christina Adamu, Ngunan Adamu, Perri Alleyne-Hughes, Elliss Eyo-Thompson, Bea Freeman, Nina Lipman, David Loy, Pascale, Michelle Peterkin-Walker, Hellen Songa, Heather Joy Tomlinson

Director of photography & camera: Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński

Light & technical support: Carl Davies

Dramaturgy & editing: Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński

Editing assistance: Nick Prokesch

Sound recording, composition & mixing: Bassano Bonelli Bassano

Color grading: Sunanda Mesquita & Nick Prokesch

Make up: Nathalie Crawford

Line producer: Aimee Harrison & Rudi Hart

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The artist thanks: Martina Berger, Victoria Dejaco, Michael Krupica, Jennifer John, Khanyisile Mbongwa, Mark Murphy, Thomas Sandri and Michael Wonnerth-Magnusson

Aspiring to Conspiring

I reflected on the politics of naming, on the possibility to hold space for others and oneself, on the volume occupied by air, and more broadly on the space afforded to (Black, Brown, Riotous, Poor, Trans, Irreverent) bodies to be...

I successively deleted and added parentheses and brackets, nodding to the idea that “the ambiguity between the upper- and the lowercase of blackness is one that is further complicated and amplified in the space of breathing, by the parenthesis. [...] Placing Blackness in brackets attends to the violence of suppressing Black breathing, an erasure that continues to be a condition of the present.” (Cox & Jean-François, p. 1) One that George Floyd’s murder has eternally burnt in our collective psyche.

Standing on the shoulders of many, I went back to the text Achille Mbembe wrote in the early hours of the pandemic, which he titled ‘*The Universal Right to Breathe*’. “We must answer here and now for our life on Earth *with others* (including viruses) and our shared fate. Such is the injunction this pathogenic period addresses to humankind [...] with the decomposition of bodies, the sorting and expulsion of all sorts of human waste – the ‘great separation’.”

In complete opposition to this ‘great separation’, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński’s *Respire (Liverpool)* gave me the feeling of a greater unison; a possible harmony

or choir of breaths; a constructed space of communion, built through letting molecules in and out of our lungs in a syncopal rhythm. I drifted along the terms at play: *RESPIRE* (the work’s title), *ASPIRE* (both the hope to achieve something, possibly together, and the removal from our bodies of a liquid or gas using suction), *EXPIRE* (the coming to an end, the multiple deaths of brothers, sisters, mothers, daughters or the expulsion of air out of rib cages), and landed on the shores of *CONSPIRE*... The act of planning and plotting secretly with others. The making happen of something that is difficult to do.

[...]

In her analysis of the artist’s practice published under the title *Ana Mendieta and the Black Atlantic*, Genevieve Hyacinthe refers back to one of Bob Marley’s songs, *Small Axe* (1970), which recently gave its name to a British anthology film series directed by Steve McQueen (2020). The central line of the song states, “If you are the big tree, we are the small axe sharpened to cut you down.” Hyacinthe compares Mendieta’s performances to the hatchet, highlighting “her diminutive, yet impactful and enduring processes”. Like Kazeem-Kamiński, Mendieta pondered on the spacious/limited capacity of (Black, or in her case Brown) bodies to breathe freely. In *Burial Pyramid* (1974), a live-action film and series of photographs made in Mexico, she, with the help of

students, covered herself with boulders and stones. Describing this gesture, Hyacinthe states: “The rocks blanketing her body were displaced by her drive, the rise and fall of her frontal body, as she modulated her pranayama breath. This breath fortified her resolve to endure.” (Hyacinthe, p. 183) *What resolve and strength must it have required to endure the weight of rocks crashing her rib cage...*

[...]

Every time the sign appears, breathe in, and hold for... 1. 2. 3. 4. And release.

To prepare for this text, I did something I often do when a term sits at the middle of a tightly woven web of ideas I’ve been knitting for years. I typed ‘breathe’ in the search bar of my desktop. A cluster of admired ones popped up: Juliana Spahr; Khadija Saye; Renée Mussai; Christina Sharpe; Raqs Media Collective; Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum; Ayesha Hameed... Alongside those, a disproportionate number of the files were from my Kundalini yoga training; a series of pranayamas and meditations I practice daily since becoming an instructor.

- Breathing provides waste removal and oxygen for cells throughout the body.



Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, *Openings (Red, Black and Green)*, 2023

- The lungs cradle and cushion the heart.
- Breathing creates a rhythmic movement of the spine and pumps the cerebrospinal fluid.
- Controlling the breath can alter the heart rate.
- Brain waves can also be altered.
- Rapid and erratic breath is associated with sickness.
- Movement of the diaphragm helps pump the lymphatic fluid and massages the abdominal organs.

I opened another file, and fell on words I wrote during the training: “in these pandemic times, I’m reading a collection by the American author Juliana Spahr. She evokes the sometimes-imperceptible link that exists between living people: the air they breathe. After a year spent locked up, lungs flattened by a disease whose effects were not yet well known, her text feels essential.”

How lovely and how doomed this connection of everyone with lungs.
(Spahr, p. 1)

[...]

In 2009, Motswana artist Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum completed *in spite of everything that breathes and moves (black cave)*, a collage-based work. I was reminded of the shape of her cave when stepping into Kazeem-Kamiński’s room at FACT in

Liverpool. I sat down in the dark, and was engulfed into *Respire (Liverpool)*, a space dedicated to the expansion of breath.

I remember listening to Khanyisile Mbongwa, the curator of *uMoya*, the 2023 Liverpool Biennial, describing in minute detail the swaths of wind that rush through the streets of the British coastal city. Only then did I understand how literally she had meant for the element of air to determine the making and thinking of the Biennial. With Mbongwa, Kazeem-Kamiński and (Black) author Christina Sharpe, I wondered whether the seas could act as archives of breathlessness. I remember thinking, is the *‘wind rushing’ differently in the UK? Can atmospheric pressure differ in places that have not compressed/ depressed/ oppressed/ pressed people’s spaces, and lungs, to the point of exhaustion?*

Weirdly, the standard unit for measuring barometric pressure is called an atmosphere (atm). One atmosphere equals 29.9213 inches of mercury. The type of weather we commonly experience in the British Isles is low pressure. On Earth, pressure becomes lower with increasing altitude, and in the midst of certain storms. Climatologists call these low-pressure systems depressions...

[...]



Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, Stills of *Respire* (Liverpool), 2023

linear understandings of space and time. If so, it may be the exact place in which *Respire* operates: the space occupied by air in-between the you and the I.

Valentine Umansky

Curator, author and critic Valentine Umansky has worked for various institutions dedicated to visual arts and is currently Curator, International Art at Tate Modern, London.

The Conspirers' Choir

Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017)

Huiwai Chu, Meagan Down, Nkule Mabaso, Pablo Martínez and Corina Oprea (eds.), *Climate: Our Right to Breathe* (L'Internationale & K. Verlag, 2022)

Jessie Cox & Isaac Jean-François, 'Aesthetics of (Black) Breathing', *Ilquid blackness*, April 2022, vol. 6, no. 1

Frantz Fanon, *Oeuvres* (La Découverte, 2011)

bell hooks, 'Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,' in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (South End, 1992)

Genevieve Hyacinthe, *Radical Virtuosity: Ana Mendieta and the Black Atlantic* (MIT Press, 2019)

Omotayo T. Jolaosho, 'The Enduring Urgency of Black Breath', *Anthropology News*, 16 April 2021

Marielle Macé, *Respire* (Verdier, 2023)

Achille Mbembe, 'The Universal Right to Breathe', *Critical Inquiry*, January 2021, vol. 47, no. S2

Rutendo Lerato Ngara, 'Dancing Into the He'Art-H of the Womb', in *Tabita Rezaire: Womb Consciousness* (Presses du réel, 2022)

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016)

Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes* (Daunt Books, 2023)

Cindy Sissokho, 'Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński. Seven Scenes', press release, *Camera Austria*, 2022

Juliana Spahr, *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (University of California Press, 2005)

Phileas – The Austrian Office for Contemporary Art supports artists, curators, galleries and institutions in Austria and works to strengthen their presence on the international landscape of contemporary art. Through long-term partnerships with museums, biennials and art institutions around the world, we enable the production and exhibition of new artworks and their donation to public collections.

Our exhibition space and office in Vienna provides a window into our international activities and a meeting place for public talks, screenings and performances. We publish an annual series of artist monographs and maintain an Artist Library of exhibition catalogues and portfolios available for research and consultation. We support the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale through a combination of fundraising, publishing and historical research, and are commissioners of the first Austrian Pavilion at the Gwangju Biennale, South Korea, in 2024. To complement these activities, we run an active Visitor Programme that invites international curators and critics to Austria throughout the year to visit artists' studios, galleries, museums and artist-run spaces.

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Cover: Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, Still of *Openings (Red, Black and Green)*, 2023.
Courtesy of the artist and Wonnerth-Dejaco.

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