

Simmons & Simmons

# Steppin' Stone

An exhibition for Black History Month 2010



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Curated by  
Stuart Evans and Yinan Zhang



This year to mark black history month  
Simmons & Simmons is pleased to welcome  
you to “Steppin’ Stone”. We hope you enjoy  
this thought provoking journey through  
contemporary art.

**David Dickinson,**  
Senior Partner



# Foreword

I met Zainab Kemsley in August this year to talk about the Simmons & Simmons Collection of Contemporary Art in the context of corporate responsibility and diversity. Zainab told me about plans for the firm to recognise Black History Month in 2010 and I suggested that we could do this with an exhibition of contemporary art drawn from the firm's collection and the Lodeveans Collection which I manage with my son John.

I next talked to Yinan Zhang, the researcher for the Lodeveans Collection, who suggested that the exhibition should explore the evolution of race as a myth through language throughout history. Zainab and I thought that this sounded like an insightful approach and we asked Yinan to co-curate the show with me and to write an essay for the exhibition catalogue.

We hold great pieces by Hurvin Anderson, Steve McQueen and Chris Ofili in the Simmons & Simmons Collection. However, the Anderson is in our Frankfurt office so not readily available. I was able to access another Anderson and relevant works by Mark Boulos and David Huffman from the Lodeveans Collection.

We are grateful to Thomas Dane of Thomas Dane Gallery for lending Warm Broad Glow (reversed) by Glenn Ligon and to Paul Hedge of Hales Gallery for great pieces by Hew Locke and Tom Price. Another old friend, the artist Isaac Julien, loaned us Baltimore Series (Martin/Still Life) which we decided to use as our catalogue cover. Big thanks to Isaac.

The outcome is Steppin' Stone an exhibition for Black History Month 2010. I am delighted with the selection of works and excited with the thinking behind it. I want to express my appreciation to Yinan Zhang for all she has done.

Robert Davison, the Painting Course Leader at the University of Gloucestershire, hung the exhibition. Bob has worked with me installing pictures for Simmons & Simmons since the earliest days of the Collection and I continue to be most appreciative of his guidance and understanding.

Debbie Grayling in our Graphic Design team worked with me on the design of this catalogue, produced in house by our print department. Many thanks to Debbie and to David Blackborow and Andrew Carlettides in the print room.

The title Steppin' Stone comes from one of the two works on paper by San Francisco based David Huffman. The artists in the show challenge us to rethink some of our preconceptions and I hope that this exhibition will, for all who see it, constitute a further step in opening us to new dialogues.

**Stuart Evans**  
October 2010



# Perpetual Myth

The question of race embodies colonial histories of categorical invention originating in waves of violence, justified through series of legislation, and perpetuated by cultural production. Insight into the genealogy of racial discourse is crucial for the incisive analysis and questioning of slippages within colonial racialism and postcolonial reconsiderations of identity. While it is arguable that such an approach would seem to reify long-established stereotypes only to elaborate upon fissures of a body of knowledge, there remains a substantial stake in the re-engagement of relevant texts to further challenge evolving notions of power, especially with regard to globalization today.<sup>1</sup>

A starting point in the aforementioned genealogy lies in the relationship of travel writings produced via eighteenth-century European imperialism with modern Europe's scientific literature, as both wrest with the notion of difference. The earliest such example was "Nouvelle Division de la Terre, par les differentes Especes ou Race d'hommes qui l'habite, envoyée par un fameux Voyageur à M. l'Abbé de la Chambre..." or "A New Division of the Earth," authored by French physician and traveler François Bernier (1625-1688) and published in the *Journal des Sçavans* in 1684.<sup>2</sup> Bernier, in this text, posits the possibility of "dividing" the Earth hierarchically into "four or five Types

of Race" based on physical characteristics (with European peoples at the pinnacle), and biological specificity.<sup>3</sup> This text promulgates the conflation of geography, forces of nature, human biology and the imagination through an invention of race. It is of import to emphasize here the progressive visibility of scientific racial discourse in European intellectual thought, medical advancement and cultural dissemination.

Tzvetan Todorov, in *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought*, traces the distortion of eighteenth-century French philosophy on human diversity through its absorption into the European Enlightenment and its utilization by nineteenth-century thinkers to perpetuate totalizing ideologies of race, nation and the exotic. In the chapter entitled "Races," Todorov navigates the "essential problem," which involves "determining just how far the realm of identity extends and where the realm of difference begins; we must try to discover just what relationship obtains between these two realms."<sup>4</sup> Todorov extends this question to racism and explicates its components and manifestations in literature by nineteenth-century French thinkers such as sociologist Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931), philosopher Ernest Renan (1823-1892), and essayist Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882).

1 One common critique of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is that by illuminating the Other and the Othering process, the dichotomy of the East and the West is further reified and thus, substantiated.

2 François Bernier, "A New Division of the Earth," trans. Janet L. Nelson, *History Workshop Journal* 51 (2001): 247-250.

3 Bernier 247.

4 Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Carol Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 90.

“Racism,” according to Todorov, is both “a matter of *behaviour*,” exhibited through contempt for individuals with physical characteristics distinct from a normative condition of physicality, and “a matter of *ideology*, a doctrine concerning human races.”<sup>5</sup> Although these two aspects of racism can be mutually exclusive, Todorov terms racism’s ideological expression “racialism,” and delineates five main racialist postulates—races exist as different species and therefore, should not be mixed; physical difference directly determines the moral standing of a race, which extends to its culture;<sup>6</sup> individual action only exists as an expression of a “racio-cultural (or ‘ethnic’) group”; there exists a “hierarchy of values” amongst races that grants the (usually) self-proclaimed superior race the authority to make universal, yet essentially ethnocentric statements that mobilize stereotypes;<sup>7</sup> the incorporation of racialist doctrine into politics—in other words, “where racialism rejoins racism.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the inherent contradictions within each of these five conditions of racialism, their deterministic tenets together comprise racialist doctrine, which without one component, is a “related but nevertheless distinct doctrine.”<sup>9</sup> From the time that Bernier published his preview of racial type classification to the emergence of modern European racialist discourse, race had become naturalized and historicized so that culture, language and national consciousness were extensions of racialized divisions of humanity.

Racialism, through three centuries of European intellectual thought, scientific advancement, as well as cultural production, embedded itself in political motivations

5 Todorov 90.

6 Todorov 91-2.

7 Todorov 93.

8 Todorov 94.

9 Todorov 94.

expressed through overseas imperialism, and had by the latter half of the nineteenth-century, attained a high level of sophistication. Race, however, is not simply an invention, or instrument in dividing and marginalizing population groups according to race, but also an evolving identity initiated through collective agency that faces limitations of the moral-racial dialectic of black and white inextricably linked to European racialist discourse and colonial histories.

Homi K. Bhabha in “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” notes that colonial discourse relies “on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness.”<sup>10</sup> Bhabha asserts that the stereotype in this case occupies a space of slippage, or “ambivalence” from what is known and “something that must be anxiously repeated” to emphasize, or perform fixity.<sup>11</sup> A crucial component of the stereotype is skin, as it is:

...the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognized as ‘common knowledge’ in a range of cultural, political and historical discourses, and plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted every day in colonial societies.<sup>12</sup>

While it certainly has been and continues to be the case that the performance of fixity based on difference asserts a corresponding and invented moral spectrum, the factor of redundancy may be undermined by its fundamental

10 Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question,” *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, ed. M. Merck (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 312-331, rpt. in *The Location of Culture*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 66.

11 Bhabha 66.

12 Bhabha 78.

precariousness. It is within this space of slippage that contemporary artists operate in order to activate/subvert the meanings and functions of and associations with race.

Ultimately, it is time that allows for an evolution of identities within the complex histories of nation-states. Etienne Balibar and Emmanuel Wallerstein in “The Construction of Peoplehood” appeal to time, specifically “pastness” as an essential element to the construction of peoplehood:

Pastness is a mode by which persons are persuaded to act in the present in ways they might not otherwise act. Pastness is a tool persons use against each other. Pastness is a central element in the socialization of individuals, in the maintenance of group solidarity, in the establishment of or challenge to social legitimation. Pastness therefore is preeminently a moral phenomenon, therefore a political phenomenon, always a contemporary phenomenon.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, a shared past presents underlying possibilities for group identity and socialization, as well as political agency that is continually accessible—in other words, without expiration.

## Bibliography

Balibar, Etienne and Emmanuel Wallerstein. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London and New York: Verso, 1991.

Bernier, François. “A New Division of the Earth,” trans. Janet L. Nelson. *History Workshop Journal* 51 (2001): 247-250.

Bhabha, Homi K. “The Other Question.” *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, ed. M. Merck. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. Rpt. in *The Location of Culture*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Carol Porter. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

## Yinan Zhang

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13 Etienne Balibar and Emmanuel Wallerstein, “The Construction of Peoplehood,” *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991) 78.



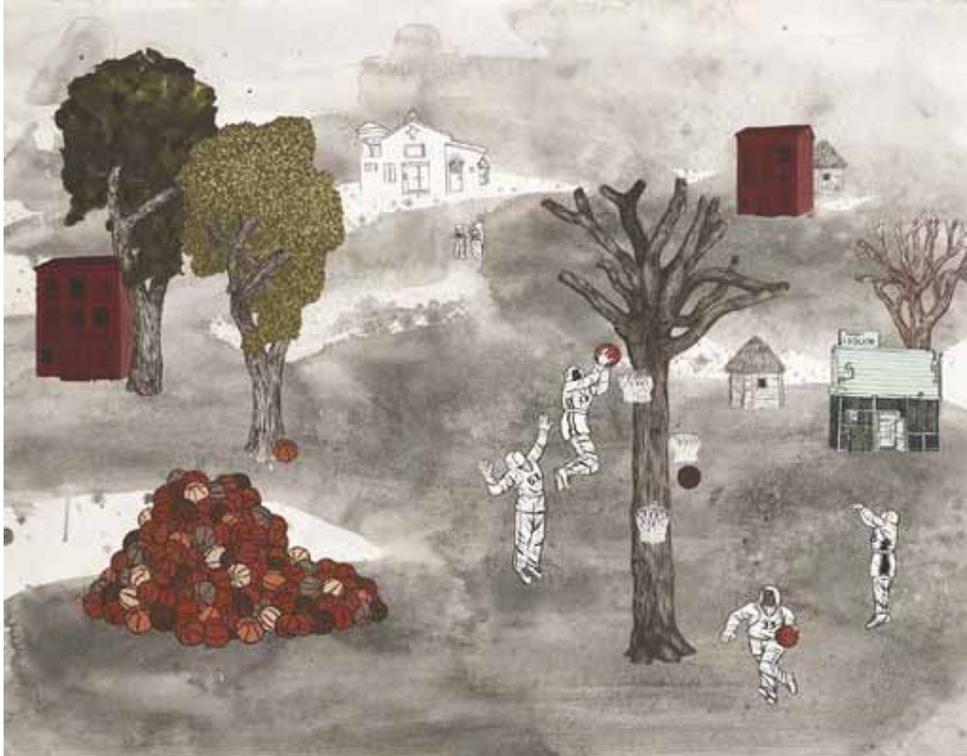


**Hurvin Anderson**  
'Untitled', 2009

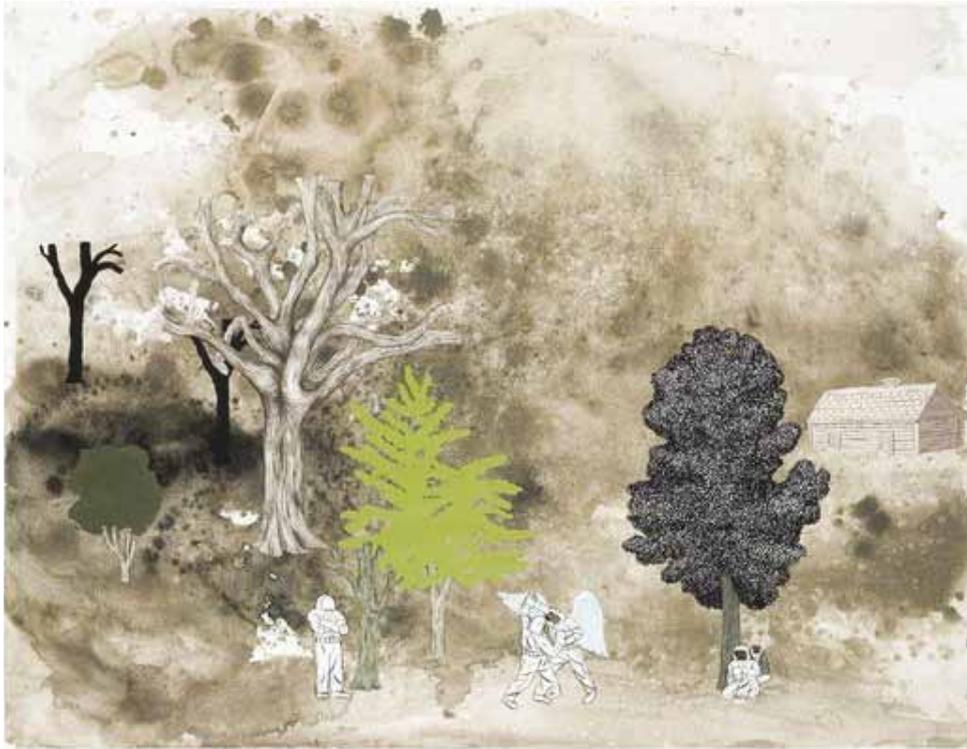




**Mark Boulos**  
Jerusalem, 2004



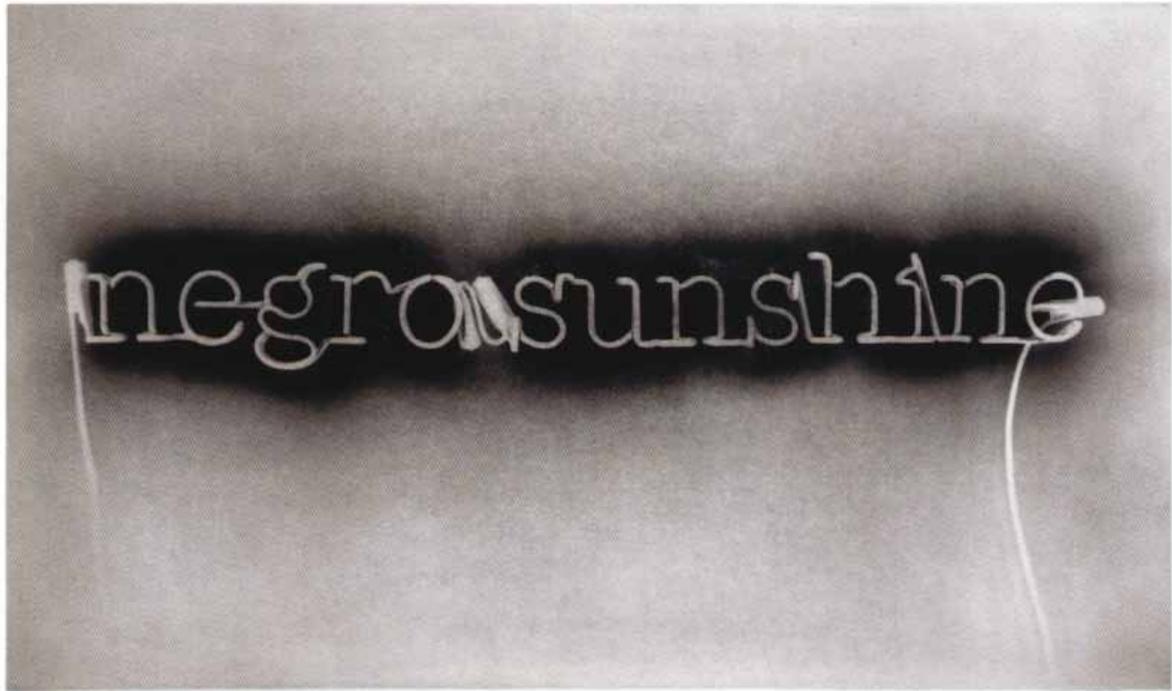
**David Huffman**  
Steppin' Stone, 2006



**David Huffman**

David Wrestling an Angel, 2006





**Glenn Ligon**

Warm Broad Glow (reversed), 2007





**Hew Locke**  
Demeter, 2010





**Isaac Julien**

Baltimore Series (Martin/Still Life), 2003



**Steve McQueen**

More, 2001







**Chris Ofili**  
Untitled, 1998





**Tom Price**  
Orpheus Street Figure 1, 2008

# The artists

Hurvin Anderson (b. 1965, Birmingham, UK) presents abstracted interiors and landscapes that draw from his Jamaican heritage and British background. The artist was featured in Tate Britain's *Art Now* in 2009.

Mark Boulos (b. 1975, Boston) is an American filmmaker who is based in London. He works within the documentary genre to make films touching on the relationship between ideology and reality.

David Huffman (b. 1963, Berkeley, California) incorporates desolate terrain, the stereotypical association of basketball with African-American youth culture, religious iconography, and the space age in his works on paper that challenge preconceived notions of history painting and race.

Isaac Julien (b. 1960, London) revisits the controversial Blaxploitation 1970s film genre in his new-media project *Baltimore* (2003), which chronicles the iconic Blaxploitation auteur Melvin van Peebles's visits through European paintings collections of Baltimore museums and the Great Blacks in Wax Museum, bringing into focus the contradictions and tensions of high culture and kitsch.

Glenn Ligon (b. 1960, New York) is a conceptual artist whose works incorporate text and various media including painting, neon, video and photography. Informed by his own experience as an African American gay man living in the United States, Ligon's artistic practice deals with the ambiguities of racial designation.

Hew Locke (b. 1959, Edinburgh, UK) explores issues of Britishness and identity formation through sculptural collage.

Chris Ofili (b. 1968, Manchester, UK) is a Turner Prize winner and represented the British Pavilion in 2003. Ofili's works often reference aspects of his Nigerian heritage, and his paintings allow for reconsiderations of racial and sexual stereotypes.

Steve McQueen (b. 1969, London) represented the British pavilion in the 2009 Venice Biennale, and has won the Turner Prize, BAFTA and the Golden Camera at the Cannes Film Festival.

Tom Price (b. 1981, London) works with video, particularly stop-motion animation, and is interested in the gesture as revealing of character. Price's sculptures are based on this idea of the scrutiny of the gesture, and include physical attributes appropriated from the imagined and real world.

# List of works

## **Hurvin Anderson**

'Untitled', 2009  
woodblock and woodcut print  
83.8 x 66 cm.  
Edition 3/40  
Lodeveans Collection

## **Mark Boulos**

Jerusalem, 2004  
Digi-Beta, 16:9, English and Arabic with English subtitles  
3 mins  
Lodeveans Collection

## **David Huffman**

Steppin' Stone, 2006  
Mixed media on paper  
38 x 50 inches  
Lodeveans Collection

## **David Huffman**

David Wrestling an Angel, 2006  
Mixed media on paper  
38 x 50 inches  
Lodeveans Collection

## **Glenn Ligon**

Warm Broad Glow (reversed), 2007  
photogravure etching  
60.9 x 91.4 cm / 24 x 36 in.  
Edition 13/35  
Loan from Thomas Dane Gallery

## **Hew Locke**

Demeter, 2010  
Mixed media  
232 x 100 x 42 cm  
Loan from Hales Gallery

## **Isaac Julien**

Baltimore Series (Martin/Still Life), 2003  
Digital print on Hahnemule Photomag 308gms paper  
135 x 111.5cm  
Loan from the artist

## **Steve McQueen**

More, 2001  
2 colour photographs, diptych  
34 1/4 x 51 inches  
edition of 4 plus 1 AP, 2/4  
Collection of Simmons & Simmons

## **Chris Ofili**

Untitled, 1998  
six watercolours on paper  
each 24 x 15.5 cm  
Collection of Simmons & Simmons

## **Tom Price**

Orpheus Street Figure 1, 2008  
Bronze sculpture  
64.5x20x13.5cm  
Loan from Hales Gallery

The Simmons & Simmons Collection of Contemporary Art can be viewed online at [www.simmonscontemporary.com](http://www.simmonscontemporary.com)

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Cover Isaac Julien

Baltimore Series (Martin/Still Life), 2003 detail