Introducing 2016 Visual AIDS Curatorial Resident Ajamu

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Visual AIDS is thrilled to announce that Ajamu will be our fourth curatorial resident, co-sponsored by Visual AIDS and Residency Unlimited. He will spend the month of March 2016 conducting research in Visual AIDS's archives with access to slides, digital images, publication and other resources, as well as activating our community through dialogues, studio visits and public programs. Ajamu is from London and is one of the leading historians concerning Black LGBT history in the UK. He has worked with a cross section of community organizations within the HIV/AIDS sector in the role of Black Gay Men's Outreach worker, trainer and workshop designer for Gay Men Fighting Aids (GMFA), freelance consultant, photographic tutor and freelance photographer--creating images for safer sex campaigns, flyers and posters in relation to activism and social justice. Ajamu outlines his previous projects and goals for the residency below.

I am a London-based fine art photographer and an independent archive curator who has been involved with queer, trans, intersex, people of colour (QTIPOC) communities and wider social justice activism for over 20 years, working primarily in the UK, but connected and active nationally and internationally. The body of work that I have created includes black male portraits, self-portraits and studio based-constructed imagery.

As an independent archival curator, I am the co-founder of rukus! Federation. rukus! Federation is a nonprofit organisation known for its long-standing and successful programme of community based work with Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, artists and cultural producers. The rukus! award-winning Black LGBT Archive, launched in 2005, generates, collects, preserves and makes available to the public, historical, cultural and artistic materials relating to our lived experience in the UK.

I am in constant dialogue with activists and artists in the US as a way of refining my own understanding and academic articulation of the specifics of the Black British experience. Rarely is the Black LGBTQ experience explored through the lens of celebration and creativity, individual aspirations and achievement--essentially, the day-to-day lived experience is missing: the layers, the diversity, the individuals are not seen. What interests me is that the body of work in Visual AIDS' Artist+ Registry facilitates a different discussion for some of the reductionist ideas that circulate within this area of work within the UK, in particular for Black LGBTQ people.

Outline for the Residency

Early March: I plan to hit the ground running with an introductory curator conversation about my artistic and curatorial practice.

Mid-March: I will use my photography experience to take black and white portraits and coordinate oral history testimonies that reflect the richness and diversity of cross generational activists who are Queer, Trans, Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC) active from within the HIV/AIDS community sector in New York City. I aim to take 15 portraits while in New York City.

Late March: My final event will be a “Suitcase under the bed” ephemera gathering workshop, bringing together many of the folks I have met during my residency and encouraging activists to delve into their personal archives and share the intimate materials they keep close. I will also engage participants in the Visual AIDS Artist+ Registry content that I explore while in New York City, highlighting the participant experiences as QTIPOC activists.

I feel inspired by this residency; it will provide an opportunity to develop an international transatlantic dialogue on archival activism, HIV and AIDS activism and social justice within my arts based creative practice.

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