

Video Walkthrough | Onyeka Igwe: *THE REAL STORY IS WHAT'S IN THAT ROOM*

Onyeka Igwe gives a virtual tour of her solo exhibition, *THE REAL STORY IS WHAT'S IN THAT ROOM*. Speaking to her research into the power and politics of colonial film archives, and the architectural spaces that house them, Igwe gives us a glimpse into her commissioned film, a so-called archive (2020).

Watch the video walkthrough on Mercer Union's website:

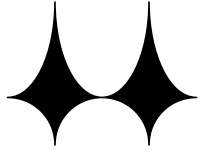
<https://www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/igwe-the-real-story-is-whats-in-that-room>

Onyeka Igwe: I was in Nigeria for like six weeks, and on one of the last days I went to this this old archive building and inside there was like no electricity and it was these rotting film cans, stopped clocks, cobwebs, nature invading the building.

My name's Onyeka Igwe, I am an artist and researcher based in London, in the UK, and we are at my exhibition *THE REAL STORY IS WHAT'S IN THAT ROOM* at Mercer Union in Toronto. I have been researching colonial film archives for the last five or six years, and I guess this film was kind of a culmination of that research in some way. The kind of inspiration for the film was this interest in architectural spaces. I was looking at colonial films, so material that is like incredibly racist. I was like, I don't want to keep on looking at this stuff because that puts the focus squarely on people who are misrepresented or don't really have a lot of agency in their representation. So how can I explore these subjects and explore the kind of power dynamics and the politics of archives, without using this material. And I thought that like archives of architecture, as structures, as places that you go was an avenue to do that exploration.

I'd spent some time at an archive in Bristol, which was from the collection of the Empire and Commonwealth Museum, which was now a now defunct museum, and the archive was held in a tobacco warehouse. Like, it used to be squatted and they used to be like raves there and at the top floor is a completely glass ceiling. But also, the second reason that I was interested in this particular space it was because of the history of the museum and how it came to be defunct. So the museum was created in 1986 which was by a guy named "Union Jack" Hayward. He was called Union Jack because he's a pretty nationalistic kind of guy. He wanted to create a museum that would cast the British Empire in the same way as the Roman Empire. But yeah, this timeline spans the life of this museum as a project from like an embryonic stage to its death in 2013. So in my research, I discovered that the Empire and Commonwealth Museum had this radio station called Commonwealth FM, and they broadcast a whole range of different programs. And I had gathered a few different bits of their archive and used that as a basis to create some more programming. There's an opportunity to listen, and there's a little QR code where you can go to a website that allows you to listen to these radio shows.

I was interested in there being a journey between the front space and the space of the film, invoking some of the horror themes that you have to kind of light your way to get to the film.



I went on a research trip to Nigeria in 2018 to look at archives there, and I had heard about this old archive building that had been kind of abandoned. The position of this archive left intact but behind a new building felt like it had some meaning for Nigeria's colonial legacy. So I guess when I encountered that building, I was like, okay, there's a way in which these two spaces speak to the colonial legacy in both places. When I was constructing it and trying to link these two buildings together, I had this narrative of something of like a tour, like a guided tour of these spaces. I was working with a sound artist called Shenece Oretha, and so we worked with some voice actors and created sound design and a score that was based on vocalizations in particular spaces. It's really like an embodied sounding out of physical spaces. The film is called a *so-called archive*, I guess I was interested in devaluing that word and making an audience kind of question a reverence for archives. I think also, a lot of my titles I want to kind of give clues to an audience of what maybe to expect, or to like, not completely trust what they're going to be seeing or hearing.