

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA ANNOUNCES *PROJECTS: UFUOMA ESSI*, THE ARTIST'S FIRST SOLO MUSEUM EXHIBITION IN NEW YORK

NEW YORK, April 24, 2025—The Museum of Modern Art is pleased to announce ***Projects: Ufuoma Essi***, which will highlight the artist's distinctive approach to film as a medium for historical exploration and cultural memory. On view in the Museum's free, street-level Projects gallery from May 22 through October 13, 2025, the exhibition will feature two of Essi's recent works shot on Super 8mm film: *Bodies In Dissent* (2021) and *Half Memory* (2024). *Projects: Ufuoma Essi* is organized by Gee Wesley, Curatorial Associate, Department of Media and Performance.

"In my work I seek to interrogate and disrupt the silences and gaps within historical narratives," says Ufuoma Essi. "I locate power through the image and the ways in which we can reposition the image of the Black woman, and re-center those lives and experiences."

"Essi's practice examines the ways in which institutional archives shape our understanding of the past, often omitting crucial chapters of history," says Gee Wesley. "In response, she constructs films that draw on personal memory, found footage, and the work of Black feminist writers and performers, expanding the boundaries of what an archive can be."

Bodies In Dissent (2021) is an exploration of the body as a central site of remembrance. Investigating ideas of "bodily insurgency," the film considers the body as a point of return, a position of refusal, and a threshold between past, present, and future. By layering archival footage of dancer Loretta Abbott with concert audio from jazz legends Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, Essi's lens traces how performance functions as a form of historical record, preserving lived experience across time and space.

Half Memory (2024) uses Toni Morrison's essay "The Site of Memory" as a point of departure. Inspired by Morrison's notion of "rememory"—the idea that repressed experiences resurface through involuntary recollection—*Half Memory* reflects on how personal and collective histories animate our sense of place. Throughout the film, Essi weaves in audio of Morrison and other Black feminist thinkers reflecting on the role of Black women as keepers of cultural memory. The film—shot over three years in cities in which Essi has lived and worked—oscillates between years, locales, and unfolding images, examining the present as an artifact of the past.

Projects: Ufuoma Essi is part of the Elaine Dannheisser Projects Series, established at The Museum of Modern Art in 1971. The series was named the Elaine Dannheisser Projects Series in 2006 in honor of Ms. Dannheisser, a longtime collector of contemporary art who bequeathed much of her collection to MoMA upon her death in 2001. Experimental and expansive, the Elaine Dannheisser Projects Series continues to challenge and broaden ideas about art and artistic practice.

ARTIST BIO

Ufuoma Essi (b. 1995) is a video artist and filmmaker who was born and based in southeast London. Essi studied at University College London (2014–18) and the University of Pennsylvania (2016–17). Her films have been screened and exhibited at film festivals, institutions, and galleries including Gasworks, South London Gallery, Centre National d'Art Contemporain (CNAC), Julia Stoschek Foundation, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, the Chicago International Film Festival, Black Star Film Festival, and LUX.

SPONSORSHIP:

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