

## PRESS RELEASE

**Keith Piper**  
***Jet Black Futures I***

20 September – 29 October 2017  
Wednesday–Sunday, 11am–5pm

**Preview Thursday, 21 September, 6.30-8.30pm**

Exhibition Tour (Frieze Week) Friday 6 October at 3pm

Keith Piper in conversation with Professor Paul Goodwin as part of a performative symposium on Saturday, 21 October

'I was drawn to the inherent ambiguities of the term 'jet-black'. On one level it evokes an absolute blackness...the total absence of light. In a sense it differs from the term 'pitch-black' in that 'pitch' carries connotations from the old technology of bitumen and other tar-like substances. Jet-black on the other hand seems replete with notions of 'high-tech' modernity, whilst at the same time carrying our contemporary sense of ambivalence towards technologies whose initial utopian promise has been eclipsed by our sense of their environmental cost and non-sustainability.' Keith Piper (2017)

Keith Piper is a Black British artist of international significance and Beaconsfield is proud to have commissioned *Mic Drop*, the latest digital work in the artist's oeuvre for BGV's cavernous Arch Gallery.

The new single-screen digital work takes as its focus the 'mic drop': a confrontational performative gesture dating back to 1980s Rap, globalised by Barack Obama in 2016 and signalling the definitive end of a statement.<sup>i</sup> Given the allusions contained within Piper's exhibition title – 'the terror of looming 'black futures', the 'tech noir' of science fiction and the void of global annihilation' – the mic drop takes on a dangerous edge.

Working with the frisson and anxiety associated with futurological speculation, *Jet Black Futures* brings Piper's recent research and experience as an early pioneer of digital art to bear on current preoccupations of the information age. The new work is contextualised by the first London screening of *Unearthing The Banker's Bones* (2016), an Arts Council Collection 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commission.<sup>ii</sup> Depicting a narrative of social and economic collapse, this synchronised three screen video installation uses the devices of science fiction to look back from the future at our contemporary condition.

A founder member of the British BLK Art Group (active 1979-1984), Piper is a key British artist and academic figure who pioneered multi-media installation on a digital platform in the UK from the mid 1980s. More recently, Piper's research has contributed to the discourses of what has come to be described as 'Afrofuturism'.<sup>iii</sup> Key Afrofuturist concepts of 'space', as in the evocation of the 'astral', and 'geography' as associated with concepts of mapping, distance and terrain, form starting points for the current body of work. The conversation, in progress between Beaconsfield and Piper since 2005, will continue in public through a performative symposium on 21 October that welcomes Professor Paul Goodwin (Chelsea UAL) and Middlesex University Art & Design Research Institute Science Fiction Cluster.<sup>iv</sup>



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## **Editors notes:**

Keith Piper is a British based artist and academic.

His creative practice responds to specific social and political issues, historical relationships and geographical sites. Adopting a research driven approach, and using a variety of media, his work over the past 30 years has ranged from painting, through photography and installation to a use of digital media, video and computer based interactivity.

<http://www.keithpiper.info>

*Mic Drop is a Beaconsfield Commission supported by ACE Grants for the Arts.*

*Unearthing the Bankers Bones is a 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commission for the Arts Council Collection with Bluecoat and Iniva.*

*The Arts Council Collection is managed by Southbank Centre, London on behalf of Arts Council England.*

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/shortcuts/2016/may/02/obama-out-mic-drop-white-house->

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.artscouncilcollection.org.uk>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.alondranelson.com/books/afrofuturism>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://adri.mdx.ac.uk/science-fiction>