Victoria Miro Gallery

Press Release

Isaac Julien • Paradise Omeros • Baltimore

9 September – 11 October 2003

"Few artists have cut as impressive a swathe between structural and narrative film as the British artist, Isaac Julien. His film installations effortlessly alternate between the specific and the elliptical, the documentary and disorienting visual effects, creating a dazzling crisscrossing path that seems appropriate to the theme of doubled otherness... that is central to his work."

Roberta Smith, The New York Times, July 2003

Victoria Miro Gallery is delighted to present two film installations, *Baltimore* and *Paradise Omeros*, and related photographic works by internationally renowned artist, Isaac Julien. Although very different bodies of work, *Baltimore* and *Paradise Omeros* both use the triple image format Julien has been working with since 1996 to explore the aesthetic, social and psychic aspects of space, location and social geography.

Paradise Omeros was much celebrated at last year's Documenta 11 in Kassel, Germany and has its UK premiere at the Edinburgh Festival this summer. The installation delves into the fantasies and feelings of "creoleness" - the mixed language, the hybrid mental states and the territorial transpositions that arise when one lives in multiple cultures. Using the recurrent imagery of the sea, the film sweeps the viewer into a poetic meditation on the ebb and flow of self and stranger, love and hate, war and peace, xenophobe and xenophile. *Paradise Omeros*, is set in London in the 60s and on the Caribbean island of St Lucia today and is loosely based on some of Derek Walcott's poems from *Omeros*. The Nobel prize winning poet Derek Walcott and the musician and composer Paul Gladstone Reid collaborated with Julien on the text and score for the film. Paradise Omeros is co-scripted by Isaac Julien and Grischa Duncker.

By contrast, *Baltimore,* Julien's most recent work, is rich in urban imagery, and like Julien's earlier pieces *Vagabondia* and *Three,* uses museums as a key location and theme. Inspired by blaxploitation movies while he was filming his recent acclaimed documentary *Baadasssss Cinema,* Julien appropriates the styles, gestures, language and iconography of the genre to create a work that defies easy categorization. Starring veteran black actor and director Melvin Van Peebles, *Baltimore* was designed in part as homage to Van Peebles' movies. It unites three Baltimore institutions – The Walters Art Museum, the Contemporary Museum and the Great Blacks in Wax Museum – with blaxploitation cinema, the tough talking, hard-living symbol of black empowerment that Van Peebles helped usher in with his 1971 movie "*Sweet, Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*". *Baltimore* is ironic and funky, nostalgic and futuristic, rough and fine. It is characterized by oscillation and an insistent formal play with linear perspective which also pays homage to Piero della Francesca and more particularly, a painting of unknown authorship, c.1500 known as "View of an Ideal City" which features in the collection of the Walters Art Museum.

Finally, the exhibition includes a series of large-scale photographs taken at the time of filming. They are not film stills but shot with a medium format camera and printed before the editing of the films. Some act almost like preparatory sketches in which formal ideas are worked out using the same triptych format. Others are stand alone "portraits" of the protagonists which function in a distinctly different way from the films.

Isaac Julien's work *Trussed* is showing concurrently at Sketch, The Gallery, 9 Conduit Street, London W1 from 6 September to 18 October 2003.

Biographical Details

Isaac Julien was born in 1960 in London, where he currently lives and works. Julien graduated from St Martin's School of Art in 1984, where he studied painting and fine art film. Julien's films include *The Long Road to Mazatlan* (1999), made in collaboration with Javier de Frutos and *Vagabondia* (2000), choreographed by Javier de Frutos, for which he was nominated for the 2001 Turner Prize, *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1996), the Cannes prize-winning *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) and the acclaimed

poetic documentary *Looking for Langston* (1989). He is currently visiting lecturer at Harvard University's Schools of Afro-American and Visual Environmental Studies. Julien was the recipient of the prestigious MIT Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts, 2001. Group exhibitions have included the ICA London, the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva and the Johannesburg Biennale. *The Film Art of Isaac Julien*, curated by Amada Cruz at Bard Curatorial College was shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney and toured to the Bildmuseet Umeå, Henie Onstad Museum Norway and Yerba Buena Center, San Francisco. Exhibitions in 2003 include FACT, Liverpool, the Bohen Foundation, New York and The Aspen Art Museum, Colorado and Utopia Station at the 50th Venice Biennale.

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