



**ual:** university  
of the arts  
london

# The Creative Laboratory

Searching and  
Researching  
through Practice

COPYRIGHT: © Sonia Boyce. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2023



# INTRODUCTION

Professor Oriana Baddeley

It is a common misconception that research and creativity have an uneasy partnership, that artists and designers operate in different spheres to those of the traditional university scholar or laboratory research team. However, this stereotype is being increasingly questioned by the ways our changing world reveals shared concerns around social and ecological challenges, producing multidisciplinary approaches to knowledge creation and, embracing new modes of communication. Through a series of conversations and presentations around key issues this conference aims to explore the richness and diversity of the approaches used by practitioners to offer solutions to shared problems and bring new understandings to a wide public.

“

**In practice research, forms of intuitive, embodied, tacit, imaginative, affective and sensory ways of knowing can be conveyed, and its sharing presents an opportunity for the modernising and revitalising of research communication, uncovering novel dissemination routes in the digital era.**

James Bulley & Sahin Özden



# PROGRAMME

09.00	<b>Registration</b>
	<b>Welcome</b> , Deputy Vice Chancellor Research, Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise Professor David Mba
09.30	At this conference, we celebrate not only the theoretical exploration of art but also the vital concept of practice as research. We passionately believe that learning by making, by immersing oneself in the act of creation, holds immense value in shaping our understanding of the artistic process and its impact on society.
09.35	<b>Programme Introduction</b> , Professor Oriana Baddeley
	<b>PANEL 1</b>
09.45	What Would the Earth Have Us Do  Siân Sutherland (Chair), Nicholas Rochat, Dilys Williams
11.15-11.40	<b>Coffee Break</b>
	<b>PANEL 2</b>
11.40	Dialogue, Presence and The Gift  Samson Kambalu, Pratāp Rughani, Mark Sealy, Oriana Baddeley (Chair)
13.15-14.15	<b>Lunch Break</b>
	<b>Afternoon Programme Introduction</b> , Professor Oriana Baddeley
	<b>PANEL 3</b>
14.20	We're All Animals  Jennie Stephens, W.K.Lyhne, Robin Maynard, Emily Doolittle, Francine Stock (Chair)
16.00-16.20	<b>Coffee Break</b>
	<b>Panel 4</b>
16.20	Feeling Our Way  Sonia Boyce, Tanita Tikaram, Pratāp Rughani (Chair)
18.00-19.00	<b>Reception</b>

# PANEL 2

## Dialogue, Presence and The Gift

Samson Kambalu,  
Pratāp Rughani,  
Mark Sealy,  
Oriana Baddeley (Chair)

If dialogue is only carried out between those that agree can there be any true change? Is it the role of the artist or curator to impart knowledge to people ready to receive that knowledge or should it be a more challenging process of engagement with those existing outside of a shared set of social beliefs? Through a series of fascinating case studies this session explores some of ways particular historical contexts have been used to test the boundaries of shared understanding and the methods used to create constructive dialogue.

Image: Chambers of the Heart, Unknown Artist, photo credit Prātap Rughani



# Speakers Abstracts

## Samson Kambalu

Capitalism starts with the idea that we lack and we have to save up, but with the gift economies, like in southern Africa, we start with the idea that we have too much. In a gift economy, the world is the Garden of Eden, and this is a problem to solve, there are too many fish in the sea, too many crops, too many animals in the bush. What are we going to do with all this stuff? Art is primarily to take care of this excess. My problem is abundance, the abundance of life, the abundance of time.

A gift usually leads to obligation. Like at Christmas, your brother or sister buys you something, you feel obliged to buy them something. But this exchange is seen as petty in a gift economy. You can't get rid of excess through exchange.

## Pratāp Rughani

An abiding theme in my work is how to rebuild the 'connective tissue' of a culture in the aftermath of violence and atrocity. In this short presentation I will explore some new footage from a forthcoming gallery installation Chambers of the Heart (2024) working with visionary people who dare to develop dialogue in the aftermath of unspeakable loss. What might be born when victims and perpetrators seek to see what can be recovered in each other's humanity? Can such stories offer another path through polarisation to help interrupt the slide towards alienation and hatred?

## Mark Sealy

Visible – Invisible: Over time and space and through never-ending liminal ways of working, I have engaged with artists and photographic histories by visiting both the familiar and seeking out the unfamiliar in the body politic of cultural production, where words become images and images become words, where bodies become signs and signs become bodies. Images, like the written and spoken word, transmit cultural knowledge, fuel memory, and root a people's sense of being to their place of belonging. Curatorial dialogues and lines of enquiry concerning those silenced underpin the work I have supported through my role at Autograph. The aim being to destabilise hegemonic structures that underpin cultural production.



# PANEL 4

## We Feeling Our Way

Sonia Boyce,  
Tanita Tikaram,  
Pratāp Rughani (Chair)

Our "Searching and Researching Through Practice" conference culminates with a 'deep dive' into practice-as-research, inside the creative laboratory of Sonia Boyce and Tanita Tikarams' practice.

Image: Community Engagement for Newham Trainside Wall Commission for Crossrail, curated by UP projects with Atkins Shipman, 2021





# Speaker Biographies



David Mba

Professor David Mba is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research, Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise at the University of the Arts London (UAL). Prior to joining UAL, he was Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise, at De Montfort University. Whilst at DMU he also held the post of Pro Vice Chancellor/Dean for the Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Media. Other roles he has held include, Dean of Engineering at London South Bank University, and Associate Dean at Cranfield University's School of Engineering.

He is a Principal fellow of the HEA and is strongly committed to social Justice. He is a trustee of the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation, a member of Advance HE's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategic advisory group, a member of the advisory board of the Association for Black and Minority Ethnic Engineers and more recently, a board member of the Hamilton Commission - set up to increase representation of Black people in UK motorsport.

<https://researchers.arts.ac.uk/2076-david-mba>



Nicholas Rochat

Nicolas Rochat is the CEO and founder of Mover Plastic Free Sportswear, the first totally uncompromisingly plastic free unisex collection. His passion for the outdoors, lead him to becoming an uncompromising pioneer in the world of textiles. Spending all his free time in the Swiss Mountains, hiking, skiing, touring, and mountain biking, created an interest in the outdoor sportswear market, and subsequently the textile industry. Shocked by the impact of the industry on the environment, Nicolas took a strong stance against microplastic pollution, as a relentless voice to combat greenwashing around sustainability and production.

At the helm of Mover, Nicolas has progressively specialized in the use of wool and natural fibers to replace synthetics for various sports activities. Now partnering with new textiles such as Bananatex as well as traditional fabrics such as high-density woven cotton and Swiss alpaca wool. His search for better comfort through improved breathability and thermoregulation naturally laid the foundation for a new project, the world's first 100% plastic-free outdoor collection launched in October 2021.

<https://mover.eu/pages/manifesto>



Pratāp Rughani

Dr Pratāp Rughani is a documentary film-maker and Associate Dean of Research at the London College of Communication, UAL. He is Professor in Documentary Practices and Chair of UAL's Professoriate. He serves on the ELIA Executive and is Trustee of Himalayan environmental charity Pragya and Director of Lotus Films. In 2023 he joined the steering group of PRAG-UK

<https://www.lotusfilms.co.uk/category/events/>

<https://researchers.arts.ac.uk/857-pratap-rughani>