

## AUBREY WILLIAMS

### BORN

1926 Georgetown, Guyana

### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 1954 Archer Gallery, London, UK (G)
- 1958/59/60 New Vision Centre Gallery, London, UK
- 1958 Galerie Colette Allendy, Paris, France (G)
- 1959 St Catherine's College, Oxford, UK
- 1960 David Jones' Art Gallery, Melbourne, Australia (G)
- Hessenhuis, Antwerp, Belgium (G)
- Walkers Gallery, London, UK (G)
- Woodstock Gallery, London, UK (G)
- Portal Gallery, London, UK (G)
- Univision Royal Court Grill, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK (G)
- Grabowski Gallery, London, UK (G)
- 1961 Richmond Hill Gallery, Richmond, UK
- Galleria Pater, Milan, Italy
- New Vision Centre Gallery, London, UK (G)
- Galerie Walcheturm, Zürich, Switzerland (G)
- 1961/62/63/65 Commonwealth Institute Art Gallery, London, UK (G)
- 1962 National College of Art, Dublin, Ireland (G)
- 1963 Grabowski Gallery, London, UK
- Gallery 60, Colchester, UK
- Ritchie Hendricks Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
- 1964 Forum Galleries, Bristol, UK
- Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK (G)
- 1965 Arts Council, Karachi, Pakistan (G)
- Arts Centre, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK (G)
- Commonwealth Arts Festival, Royal Academy of Art, London, UK (G)
- University of Glasgow & Commonwealth Arts Festival, Glasgow, Scotland (G)
- 1966-70 Nicholas Treadwell Gallery, London, UK (G)
- 1966 The Arun Art Centre, Arundel, Sussex, UK (G)
- 1967 Van Mildert College, Durham University, Durham, UK
- Expo '67, Montreal, Canada (G)
- São Paulo Biennale (XI), Brazil (G)
- Brighton Festival of Arts, Sussex, UK (G)
- Theatre Royal, Stratford, UK (G)
- 1967/68 University of Kent, Canterbury, UK (G)
- 1968 London School of Economics, London, UK (G)
- City Art Gallery, Bristol UK (G)
- West Indian Students Centre, London UK (G)
- House of Commons, London, UK (G)
- 1969 Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, UK

- 1970 John Peartree Gallery, Kingston, Jamaica  
Guyana Museum, Georgetown, Guyana (G)
- 1971 Camden Arts Centre, London, UK
- 1971/73/74 Commonwealth Institute Art Gallery, London, UK (G)
- 1972 Illinois Centre, Chicago, USA  
Critchlow Labour College, *Carifesta '72*, Georgetown, Guyana
- 1973 Nicholas Treadwell Gallery, London, UK
- 1973/74 Little Gallery, Kingston, Jamaica
- 1974 The Warehouse, Kingston, Jamaica
- 1975/76 Olympia International Arts Centre, Jamaica (G)
- 1975-77 Gallery Barrington, Kingston, Jamaica
- 1977 'Festac'– Festival of the Arts, Lagos, Nigeria (G)  
Jamaica House, Kingston, Jamaica (G)
- 1977/81 Commonwealth Institute, London, UK
- 1982/84 Westbourne Gallery, London, UK (G)
- 1984 October Gallery, London, UK  
Paintings on the music of Dmitri Shostakovich, Royal Festival Hall, London, UK
- 1985 *The Olmec-Maya & Now*, Commonwealth Institute Art Gallery, London, UK  
Goldsmith College Gallery, London, UK  
*Cosmos*, Gallery Barrington, Kingston, Jamaica  
GLC Brixton Recreation Centre, London, UK (G)  
Contemporary Arts Centre, Kingston, Jamaica
- 1986 Camden Arts Centre, London, UK (G)  
Leicestershire Museum & Art Gallery, Northampton, UK (G)
- 1986/87/88 October Gallery, London, UK
- 1987 National Gallery (touring exhibition), Guyana  
National Gallery (touring exhibition), Guyana
- 1988 Contemporary Arts Centre, Kingston, Jamaica  
Shibuya Tokyo Plaza, Tokyo, Japan
- 1989-90 'The Other Story' – Hayward Gallery, London, UK (G)
- 1989 De Graaf Fine Art, Chicago USA  
October Gallery, London, UK
- 1990 Aubrey Williams Celebration, Commonwealth Institute, London, UK  
A Tribute to Aubrey Williams, Guyana Museum, Georgetown, Guyana  
A Tribute to Aubrey Williams, Contemporary Art Centre, Kingston, Jamaica
- 1992 *Endangered Birds*, Sotheran's Antiquarian Books, London, UK  
Belgrave Gallery, London, UK (G)
- 1995-96 *Cosmos Series*, October Gallery, London, UK
- 1995 Islington Arts Factory, London, UK (G)
- 1996 Castellani House, Georgetown, Guyana
- 1996-97 Harlem & Caribbean Cultural Center, New York, USA
- 1998 Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK
- 2002 October Gallery, London, UK
- 2004 October Gallery, London, UK

- 2006 October Gallery, London, UK
- 2007 Goodison Room, Tate Britain, London, UK
- 2008 Rotunda Space, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK
- 2010 Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK  
October Gallery, London, UK
- 2013 Hales Gallery, London, UK
- 2015 Realm of the Sun, October Gallery, London, UK
- 2016 BP Walk Through British Art, Tate Britain, London, UK  
The Disappearing Figure: Art after Catastrophe, Tate Britain, London, UK  
Armory Show, New York, NY  
Viewpoints, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
Seattle Art Fair, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Seattle, WA  
Expo Chicago, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Chicago, IL

### **SELECTED COLLECTIONS**

- Arts Council of Great Britain, UK
- Bank of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica
- Booker McConnell Plc, London, UK
- British Broadcasting Corporation, London UK
- Castellani House, National Collection of Guyana, Georgetown, Guyana
- Church House, Kingston, Jamaica
- Commonwealth Institute, London, UK
- Contemporary Arts Centre, Kingston, Jamaica
- Eliot and Rutherford Colleges, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK
- Everand Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- Guyana House of Assembly, Georgetown, Guyana
- Jamaica House, Jamaica
- National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica
- Natural History Museum, London, UK
- Marlborough House, London, UK
- Rice Marketing Board of Guyana, Georgetown, Guyana
- Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, UK
- Royal Festival Hall, London, UK
- St Catherine's College, Oxford, UK
- Tate Gallery, London, UK
- Tuesday Magazine (boardroom), Chicago, USA
- University of the West Indies, Mary Seole Hall Kingston, Jamaica
- University of Sussex, Brighton, UK
- University of Warwick, Coventry, UK
- University of York, York, UK
- Van Mildert College, Durham University, Durham, UK
- Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK
- York City Art Gallery, York, UK

### **SELECTED HONORS**

- 1970 The Golden Arrow of Achievement, Guyana
- 1980 The Cross of Merit of St. Anthony of the Desert

1986 The Cacique's Crown of Honour, Guyana

### SELECTED AWARDS AND PRIZES

1964 First Commonwealth Biennale of Abstract Art  
1964 Commonwealth Prize for Painting, London, UK  
1979 Real Aula Mallorquesa seu Esquela Miramar  
1980 Acadamia Italia delle Arti e del Lavoro, (Nomination as "Academic of Italy with Gold Medal")

### SELECTED MURALS AND COMMISSIONS

1961 *Heraldry at York*' – City of York Art Gallery (Commission)  
1970 mural - '*Timehri*', (then) Timehri Airport, Georgetown, Guyana (Commission)  
1976 mural - Olympia International Art Centre, Kingston, Jamaica (Commission)  
mural - African Methodist Episcopal Church of Christ Our Redeemer, Kingston, Jamaica  
mural - School of Hope, Kingston, Jamaica (Commission)  
mural - Guyana High Commission, Kingston, Jamaica (Commission)  
1978 mural - '*Coral Reef*' – (private house), Wiltshire, UK (Commission)  
University of Dalhousie, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada (Commission)  
1980 portrait – His Serene Excellency, Baron Bradford of Kani, London, UK (Commission)

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#### BOOKS AND ARTICLES

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POWELL, R.J. (1997) *Black Art and Culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Thames and Hudson. London

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ARAEEN, R. (1987/88) 'Conversation with Aubrey Williams'. *Third Text*. (2) pp. 25-52.

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## EXHIBITION CATALOGS AND REVIEWS

### 1959

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### 1960

NEW VISION CENTRE GALLERY. (1960) *Aubrey Williams: Paintings*. [exhibition catalogue 7-26 November] London.

GRABOWSKI GALLERY. (1960) *Continuum*. [exhibition catalogue 18 October – 12 November] London.

### 1961

GALLERIA PATER MILAN (1961) *Aubrey Williams* [exhibition catalogue 26 October] Milan.

### 1962

COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE ART GALLERY (1962) *Commonwealth Art Today*. [exhibition catalogue 7 November 1962 – 13 January 1963] London.

### 1963

COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE ART GALLERY (1963) *First Commonwealth Biennale of Abstract Art*. [exhibition catalogue 19 September – 13 October] London

### 1964

WHITWORTH ART GALLERY [1964] *Cosmopolis: Artist of the School of London*. [Exhibition catalogue] Manchester.

FORUM GALLERIES (1964) *Aubrey Williams, Max Chapman: Recent Paintings*. [exhibition catalogue 14 May – 16 June] Bristol.

### 1965

COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE ART GALLERY (1965) *Aubrey Williams (British Guiana)*. [exhibition catalogue 3 – 27 June] London.

COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE ART GALLERY (1965) *Second Commonwealth Biennial of Abstract Art*. [exhibition catalogue 4 – 28 November] London.

### 1969

ROYAL ALBERT MEMORIAL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY (1969) *Aubrey Williams: Paintings*. [exhibition catalogue 11 – 31 December] Exeter.

### 1971

CHAPMAN, M. (1971) 'Review of Aubrey Williams: Exhibitions of Recent Paintings at Camden Arts Centre'. *What's on In London*. 29 January 1971

### 1973

LITTLE GALLERY (1973) *Karl Parboosingh and Aubrey Williams*. [exhibition catalogue 18 December 1973 – 1 January 1974] Kingston, Jamaica.

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### 1977

COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE ART GALLERY (1977) *Commonwealth Artists of Fame 1952 – 1977*. [exhibition catalogue 1 June – 3 July] London.

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**1981**

COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE ART GALLERY (1981) *Shostakovich: An Exhibition of New Paintings by Aubrey Williams*. [exhibition catalogue 20 October – 15 November] London.

**1985**

COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE ART GALLERY (1985) *The Olmec-Maya and Now: New Work by Aubrey Williams*. [exhibition catalogue 6 June – 7 July] London.

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LLOYD, E. (1985) 'The Olmec-Maya and Now'. *Race Today*. Vol 16 (No 5) p. 26.

**1986**

1986 CAMDEN ARTS CENTRE (1986) *Hampstead Artists 1946-1986*. [exhibition catalogue 20 April – 29 May] London.

**1987**

1987 LEE, D. (1987) 'Aubrey Williams – October Gallery'. *Arts Review*. Vol 39 (No 11) 5 June 1987. pp. 381-382.

**1988**

SHIBUYA TOKYU PLAZA (1988) *Aubrey Williams*. [exhibition catalogue 9-15 May] Tokyo, Japan.

**1989**

HAYWARD GALLERY  
(1989) *The Other Story. Afro-Asian Artists in post-war Britain*. [exhibition catalogue 29 November – 4 February] London.

**1992**

THE BELGRAVE GALLERY (1992) *British Abstract Art of the 50s and 60s*. [exhibition catalogue 5-27 March] London.

**1995**

OCTOBER GALLERY (1995) *Aubrey Williams: Cosmos Series* [exhibition catalogue 14 December 1995 – 27 January 1996] London.

**1996**

CASTELLANI HOUSE (1996) *An exhibition of the Works of Aubrey Williams* [exhibition catalogue 26 March – 30 April] Georgetown, Guyana.

**1997**

FRANKLIN H. WILLIAMS CARIBBEAN CULTURAL CENTER / AFRICAN DIASPORA INSTITUTE (1997) *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian and Caribbean Artists in Britain 1966-1996*. [exhibition catalogue 14 October 1997 0 15 March 1998. the Studio Museum in Harlem: 15 October 1997- 15 March 1998, the Bronx Museum of Arts: 16 October 1997 – 15 March 1998, the Caribbean Cultural Center] New York.

**1998**

THE WHITECHAPEL GALLERY in association with InIVA (1998) *Aubrey Williams*. [exhibition catalogue 12 June – 16 August] InIVA Institute of International Visual Arts. London.

**2005**

THE WHITECHAPEL GALLERY (2005) *Back to Black: Art, Cinema and the Racial Imaginary* [exhibition catalogue 7 June – 4 September] London.



**Biography:**

Aubrey Williams, 1926 – 1990

Aubrey Williams was born in Georgetown, Guyana in 1926, and began painting and drawing from the age of five. He joined the Working People's Art Class whilst still at school, studying under E. R. Burrowes, a man he credited as 'opening the Guyanese eyes to art'. A trained agronomist, his work took him to the north-west rainforest of Guyana, where he lived for two years amongst the indigenous Warrau people, a period which proved one of the most formative of his life and where, he said, "*I started to understand what art really is*".

By 1952, when he returned to Georgetown at the age of twenty-six, Guyana was nearing the end of its time as a British colony and Williams sailed to London, initially on six months paid leave, to become a painter and began life drawing at St Martins School of Art. As a painter with detailed knowledge of flora and fauna, with personal experience of momentous political change, and with a growing interest in pre-Columbian cultures, he arrived in London with a unique visual and intellectual vocabulary. Over the following years he took the opportunity to travel extensively around Europe, returning to London and to opportunities to exhibit his work. He was also part of the spectacular explosion of creativity, optimism and productivity generated by the influx of Caribbean writers, artists and intellectuals to London at the time. This cultural foment was exemplified in the Caribbean Artists Movement, founded in 1966 by Kamau Brathwaite, poet and historian, John La Rose, poet and activist, and Andrew Salkey, novelist and journalist. Aubrey Williams was a founder member and participated fully in CAM's activities, as did Ronald Moody, sculptor. Within this mutually supportive network, Williams found, and contributed to, an enriching framework of ideas and discussion, including debates on visual sources, strategies for change, and the stifling effects of being categorised as either a quintessentially Caribbean or British artist.

From the early 1960s, Williams exhibited widely, winning awards and garnering high acclaim from a London art circuit enchanted by what Guy Brett calls "the heady interface between artistic innovation and trans-nationalism." When he had arrived, London was a city with few apparent signs of black presence, and as such, the visibility of Williams' work represented one of the first challenges to the white dominance in the British art establishment. Over the years that followed however, Williams found himself increasingly confronted by 'institutional indifference', his work framed and discussed solely in terms of 'otherness'.

Williams' paintings have always resisted classification, evolving through many distinct phases over the course of his career. From immaculately accomplished depictions of birds, to figurations, to explosive, vibrant abstracts, Williams drew influence from abstract expressionism, from Olmec, Maya, and Warrau imagery, from science fiction, from the symphonies and quartets of Russian composer Dimitri Shostakovich, and from artists such as Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, Diego Rivera, Yves Klein and Rufino Tamayo.