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BEING MAMMY,
(MAMMY'S LOOKS)


Harold Offeh
2004

17 mins Colour Sound
Video installation




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Being Mammy (Extract)

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Harold Offeh

'Why should I complain about making \$700 a week playing a maid? If I didn't I'd be making \$7 a week actually being one.' (Hattie McDaniel).

Being Mammy is an attempt explore the world of the Mammy caricature and evoke the tragedy of the type cast actor doomed to recreate and replay the same role.

This exhibition at Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth, was the culmination of a research project commissioned by Picture This, Bristol, as part of *Ghosting*, a series of research-based commissions on the themes of archive, memory and ethnography. Offeh worked with resources from the Bill Douglas Centre, based at the University of Exeter, where he examined the life and career of actress Hattie McDaniel, who famously played and won an Oscar for her role as 'Mammy' in *Gone with the Wind*.

Late in her career McDaniel was singled out by Civil rights activists for perpetuating negative stereotypes; her response was the aforementioned quote, which Offeh sees as central to the construction of 'Being Mammy': it is filled with the heavy pathos of a woman trapped by a stereotype.

The exhibition attempted to examine the relationships between role-play, stereotyping and identity through a multi-media installation combining several performance video works contextualised by a series of objects, including replica pre-cinema artefacts, posters and other ephemera.

Reference: Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth 2004

Commissioned by Picture This as part of the Ghosting series funded by Arts Council England National Touring Programme.

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