

# Welcome

**Name:** Ian Sergeant

**PhD:** Art Design and Media

**Thesis Title:** *Visual Representations and Cultural (Re)Constructions of Black British Masculinity in 21st Century Birmingham*

## Thesis Description:

This practice-led study places Birmingham as a site of cultural significance in the context of black British migration[1] and the emergence of the Blk Art Group (BAG) in the early 80s[2]. BAG challenged socio-political narratives of race and identity, influencing future generations of black visual artists. Through a written thesis, socially engaged arts practice and eventual curation of an exhibition of works portraying the black male, it will explore black male identities, asking, "to what extent is place (Birmingham) a signifier in the making of these identities?" Ward et al's study of post-industrial inner-city and rural locations of Britain suggests "place is often implicitly implicated, but rarely considered for its role in shaping young men's practices, trajectories and aspirations"[3].

The aim of this study is to contribute to literature and visual arts practice in relation to black masculinity, identities and representations, and in a major city outside London. Utilising an approach of mixed methods of auto-ethnography, fieldwork and textual analysis, the objective is to address and or answer the following related key questions:

1. To what extent is the BAG's art of the 80s useful in framing constructs of contemporary black male identities?
2. What do young black men understand by the term masculinity?
3. What influences young black males in creating their masculine identities?
4. How are these masculine identities negotiated in their communities and through their use of popular culture?

The PhD's potential application will be to community, academic and artistic discourses of black male identities in Birmingham. Its impact lies in the curation of an exhibition and socially engaged activities within the community. Additionally, by working in the community and with organisations who engage with young black men, the aim is to encourage their attendance and participation, along with artists, scholars and the wider public. The written study will also critically reflect on this practice-led approach.

[1] Morris, Lynda; Chambers, Eddie. *Vanley Burke: By the Rivers of Birminam. MAC Birmingham*. 2012. Pg. 11 - Vanley Burke is a celebrated documentary photographer, who for the past 40 years has documented the lives of the black communities of Birmingham, from early migration to the present day.

[2] Bailey, David A; Baucom, Ian; Boyce, Sonia. *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*. Duke University Press. 2005

[3] Ward, Michael R. M; Tarrant, Anna; Terry, Gareth; Featherstone, Brid; Robb, Martin; Ruxton, Sandy. *Doing Gender Locally: The Importance of 'Place' in Understanding Marginalised Masculinities and Young Men's Transitions to 'Safe' and Successful Futures*. *The Sociological Review*, 11/2017, Vol 65, Issue 4.

## Supervisors and Institution(s):

Professor Rajinder Dudrah (Birmingham School of Media, Birmingham City University)

Dr Kirsten Forkert (Birmingham School of Media, Birmingham City University)

Dr Karen Wilkes (School of Social Sciences, Birmingham City University)

## Publications (please include full details with page nos. or web links):

## Scholarly / Public Engagement Activities:

Year: 2016/17

- MA Contemporary Curatorial Practice

## Other Research Interests:

In 2017 with funding from Arts Council's International Development Fund, I undertook a residency with the [Rebuild Foundation](#) Chicago, researching arts organisations and institutions relationship



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with communities. In terms of curatorial projects the most recent shows include:

- Researched and curated an exhibition exploring the digital embodiment of the late artist Donald Rodney *Reimaging Donald Rodney* at <http://www.vividprojects.org.uk/>
- One Love exhibition celebrating the life Bob Marley and reggae music at The Birmingham Rep <https://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/news/one-love-celebrating-the-life-of-bob-marley.html>