

Press release on the exhibition of the 2022 Kaiserring recipient Isaac Julien  
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The recipient of the Goslar Kaiserring in 2022 is the British artist, Isaac Julien. Due to his impressive films and multi-screen film installations, Isaac Julien enjoys a wide international reputation.



**Isaac Julien** - Installation view, *Lessons of the Hour*, McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco  
14 October 2020–13 March 2021, Courtesy of McEvoy Arts and Isaac Julien. Photography by Henrik Kam.

## Films and photographic art works at the Mönchehaus Museum

At the Mönchehaus, Sir Isaac Julien, RA is showing two films made thirty years apart, as well as a series of impressive photographic artworks based on these works. The 1989 film *Looking for Langston* is the first work with which Julien has gained international attention. It is dedicated to the poet Langston Hughes (1901-1967), whose poem *I, Too (Sing to America)* became the slogan of the civil rights movement, and the pivotal role that Langston Hughes played in the formation of Harlem Renaissance, a social, cultural and artistic movement of African-American artists and writers in the 1920s New York City.

An international black gay community appears in *Looking for Langston* with great elegance and beauty, using the glamorous style of old Hollywood black and white cinema. The artist repeatedly depicts a sophisticated nightclub scene during which attractive young men - both black and white - dance together until this free-spirited and idyllic togetherness is brought to a brutal end by a right-wing gang of thugs, and police which ends with an Angel laughing at the crowd.

Thirty years later, in 2019, Isaac Julien made his film *Lessons of the Hour: Frederick Douglass*, which will also be presented in Goslar. *Lessons of the Hour* is inspired by episodes in the life of freedom fighter Frederick Douglass (1818–1895). The film depicts Douglass as one of the most powerful voices and visionaries of the 19th century—from his demands to abolish chattel slavery to his aesthetic theory on photography—and demonstrates how his trenchant analyses continue to resonate.

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In *Lessons of the Hour*, the Royal Shakespeare Company Actor Ray Fearon plays a young Douglass between 1845 and 1847, a period during which he toured England, Scotland, and Ireland, delivering more than 300 lectures as he sought to affirm his struggle for equality as a global citizen and a pioneer in the history of civil rights. Filmed at sites in Edinburgh, London and Washington D.C., Julien's film excerpts three speeches Douglass delivered after returning to the U.S.: "*What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?*" (1852), "*Lecture on Pictures*" (1861), and "*Lessons of the Hour*" (1893). In his final speech *Lessons of the Hour*, he addressed lynching, suffrage and legacies of colonisation in the post-Civil War American South. Based on original archival sources, letters and writings, the film *Lessons of the Hour* reconstructs aspects of the history of abolitionism, the suffrage movement, and the invention of film itself.

Julien pays special attention to the women who were key to Douglass's life and accomplishments: Anna Murray Douglass, his wife for 44 years, until her death in 1882; Helen Pitts Douglass, a Mount Holyoke alumna whom he married following Anna's death; suffragist and friend, Susan B. Anthony; Otilie Assing, his German translator; and Ellen and Anna Richardson, British Quakers who raised the money to purchase Douglass's freedom.

*Lessons of the Hour* combines tableaux vivants which imagine Douglass with key figures from his public and private life, with montaged footage from recent times. Describing his approach as 'a staging of history seen through a contemporary lens', Julien's powerful and compelling portrait foregrounds the continued relevance and urgency of Douglass's words in the present day.

### **Isaac Julien**

Isaac Julien, KBE RA was born in London in 1960. He lives and works in London and Santa Cruz (USA), where he holds a professorship and directs the Isaac Julien Lab. In 1984, he completed a film and painting degree at the renowned St. Martin's School of Art. During this time, he became a co-founder of the Sankofa Film and Video Collective, in which Isaac Julien actively participated from 1983 to 1992. The artist film collective had been formed in response to the social unrest in Britain in the early 1980s with the aim of focusing on explorations of Black identity within an independent Black diaspora film culture, a theme that continues to preoccupy the artist, who has received many awards and honours, in his work to this day, and he was recently knighted by the late Queen Elizabeth II. He has created his film and photographic artworks in a unique and distinctive visual language that is as poetic as it is political.

\*Royal Academician

\*Knight of the British Empire und Royal Academician

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue with a laudatory speech by Wulf Herzogenrath

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