

News Release

Monday 26 June 2017

SAMUEL FOSSO'S 666 POLAROID SELF-PORTRAITS CAPTURE 666 DIFFERENT EMOTIONS

Samuel Fosso's first UK solo display is supported by the William Brake Charitable Trust



Samuel Fosso with four self-portraits from his *SIXSIXSIX* series at National Portrait Gallery Photo: © Jorge Herrera

Striking photographs from a series of 666 self-portraits by the artist Samuel Fosso (b.1962) can be seen for the first time in a new display ***Samuel Fosso: Self-portraits*** which has just opened at the National Portrait Gallery.

This ambitious self-portrait series of large format Polaroids called ***SIXSIXSIX***, was created by the Cameroonian-born artist in 2015. Each shot was taken against the same red backdrop with Samuel Fosso adopting an identical head and shoulders pose. Photographed every day in October and November 2015, each work is intended to reflect Fosso's particular mood at that moment.



SIXSIXSIX Series, Unique Instant Print from a Set of 666 (details) by Samuel Fosso 2015 © Samuel Fosso, Courtesy JM Patras/ Paris

As part of his first solo display in the United Kingdom, Samuel Fosso's new works are displayed alongside some of the earliest self-portraits that he made as a teenager in the 1970s working in Bangui, Central African Republic. In these works Fosso adopted personas to reflect popular West African culture, from musicians and the latest youth fashions to political advertising. He used special cloth backgrounds, in front of which he dressed up in a range of outfits from authentic European costumes and African folk costumes to navy uniforms, karate keikogis and boxer shorts.



Samuel Fosso 70s series, by Samuel Fosso, c. 1976/1977 © Samuel Fosso 2016 Courtesy JM Patras/ Paris

Fosso experimented with self-portraiture alongside his commercial work taking passport, portrait and wedding photographs in his studio, the Studio Photo Nationale, which had as its motto: 'With Studio National, you will be beautiful, stylish, dainty and easy to recognise.'

'To succeed, I immerse myself in the necessary physical and mental state. It's a way to escape myself. It is a solitary path. I am a solitary man,' says Fosso. 'In all my works, I am both character and director. I don't put myself in the photographs. My work is based on specific situations and people I am familiar with, things that I desire and things that I draw up in my imagination and which, then, I interpret. I borrow an identity.'

Born 1962, Samuel Fosso lived in Cameroon and then Nigeria as a child before moving to Bangui, Central African Republic, at the end of the Biafran war in 1972. In 1975, aged thirteen, Fosso opened a commercial photography studio there. The idea of the self-portrait came to him, he says, very early on when he began posing before his camera at night to use up spare film 'simply for pleasure'.

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London, says: 'The National Portrait Gallery is honoured to be showing the first display of Samuel Fosso's work in the UK. With a selection from this extraordinary new body of self-portraits alongside some of Fosso's most celebrated early photographs this display is a long overdue introduction to this important artist.'

Sarah Howgate, Senior Curator of Contemporary Collections, co-curator of ***Samuel Fosso: Self-portraits***, National Portrait Gallery, London says: 'We're delighted to be showing Samuel Fosso's extraordinary self-portraits, which chart his journey from the performative bravado of his youth to the quieter, more subtle introspection of his middle years.'

Lucy Wood, Assistant Curator (1910 - Contemporary), and co-curator of ***Samuel Fosso: Self-portraits***, at the National Portrait Gallery, London says: 'The understated and stripped-back composition of the new self-portraits represents a departure from Fosso's earlier approach to the self-portrait.'

This is the third in a series of five annual contemporary portrait displays funded by the William Brake Charitable Trust following *Thomas J Price: Now You See Me* (2016) and *Friendship Portraits: Chantal Joffe and Ishbel Myerscough* (2015).

DISPLAY

Samuel Fosso: Self-Portraits

24 June - 24 September 2017, Room 41 and 41a, Lerner Ground floor Contemporary Galleries
National Portrait Gallery, Admission Free

For further Press information and image requests please contact: Neil Evans, Press Office, National Portrait Gallery

Tel: 020 7312 2452 (not for publication) Email: nevans@npg.org.uk

To download Press images visit: www.npg.org.uk/press

National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place WC2H 0HE, opening hours Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday: 10am – 6pm (Gallery closure commences at 5.50pm) **Late Opening:** Thursday, Friday: 10am – 9pm (Gallery closure commences at 8.50pm) **Nearest Underground:** Leicester Square/Charing Cross **General information:** 0207 306 0055 **Recorded information:** 020 7312 2463 **Website/Tickets:** www.npg.org.uk