

MESSUMS

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Press Release



Tales of Africa and their contemporary response

Karen Blixen's life in Kenya

Photographs taken a hundred years ago by Thomas Dinesen

With Ingrid Pollard and Michelle K. Angwenyi

12 May – 11 June

Messums London

Messums London is pleased to present *Tales of Africa*, an exhibition of 15 photographs of renowned author Karen Blixen's life in Kenya and a commentary on the objects as markers of colonial history. Captured a hundred years ago, the majority of the pictures were taken by Thomas Dinesen, the younger brother of Karen Blixen. The images serve as a visual insight into Blixen's world-famous memoir of her years in Kenya, *Out of Africa* (1937), which provided for a mystical vision of Kenya with continuing effects today. Visual artist Ingrid Pollard and writer Michelle K. Angwenyi have been commissioned by Messums to respond to the collection and explore Karen Blixen's legacy through their practice. They will produce works inviting us to think about photography and literature as storytelling and evolving forms of knowledge. Online talks with Pollard and Angwenyi will accompany this exhibition to expand on what can be learned from the Karen Blixen collection in today's time.

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Karen Blixen was born in the northern region of Copenhagen in 1885 and grew up in an aristocratic family. She married her cousin Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke and in 1914, emigrated to Kenya with him to buy land with their family's capital and start a coffee plantation. The farm, named 'the Karen Coffee Company', was amongst the largest plantations in Kenya. For 17 years, Blixen remained in the Ngong Hills, managing the farm alone for ten years after her separation from Blixen-Finecke in 1921. She wrote *Out of Africa* a few years after the farm's financial bankruptcy and her return to Denmark.

Thomas Dinesen spent several months with Blixen in 1921-1923 and 1924-1925. Stored in albums or sent to their family members in Denmark, Dinesen's pictures were intended to illustrate their everyday activities. Exhibited in London for the first time, this ambiguous photographic collection offers intimate depictions of Karen Blixen's daily life in Kenya through her brother's eyes; at times bucolic, romantic and free spirited, yet undoubtedly shaped by colonial power structures. As such, the photographs exist concomitantly as both artworks and anthropological documents, memento mori of an imperialist era. Viewers are encouraged to confront Thomas Dinesen's photographs as time and place-specific artefacts in order to appreciate their sociological pertinence, pictorial tropes and orchestration.

Ingrid Pollard (Dr) is a photographer, media artist and researcher. She is a graduate of the London College of Printing and Derby University. Ingrid has developed a social practice concerned with representation, history and landscape with reference to race, difference and the materiality of lens-based media. Her work is included in numerous collections including the UK Arts Council and the Victoria & Albert Museum. She lives and works in London UK.

Michelle K. Angwenyi is a writer from Nairobi, Kenya, whose writing attempts to explore time and memory. She was shortlisted for the 2018 Brunel Africa International Poetry Prize, and for the 2017 Short Story Day Africa Prize. She is the author of *Gray Latitudes*, selected for the New Generation African Poets Chapbook series (Akashic Books, 2020). Michelle is a Centre for Arts, Design and Social Research Fellow.

For further information or images please email: press@messumswiltshire.com

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Tales of Africa
12 May – 11 June 2021
Messums London & Online

ONLINE TALKS

‘Working against the grain: a response to Karen Blixen’s photographic archive’
A conversation with Dr Ingrid Pollard
19 May 2021
5 pm

‘Photography, literature and memory: Karen Blixen’s legacy in Kenya’
A conversation with Michelle K. Angwenyi
2 June 2021
10 am

This exhibition marks the inauguration of **Messums Photographic Department**, to be officially launched on **12 May 2021**. A programme of talks and exhibitions featuring international, renowned and emerging artists and photographers, encouraging dialogue between practitioners will be announced soon.

*For further information about The Photographic Department please email:
photography@messumswiltshire.com*

Notes to editors:

MESSUMS WILTSHIRE is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre set inside a restored thirteenth-century tithe barn and surrounding buildings with exhibition space, sculpture garden and restaurant.

MESSUMS LONDON is a modernist gallery space on Cork Street, a historic centre of the London art world since the 1930s. Messums has had a presence here since 1992.

MESSUMS YORKSHIRE opened in early July 2020. The third Messums gallery to open in England, it hosts a rolling programme of exhibitions with a focus on clients and artists in the North of England.

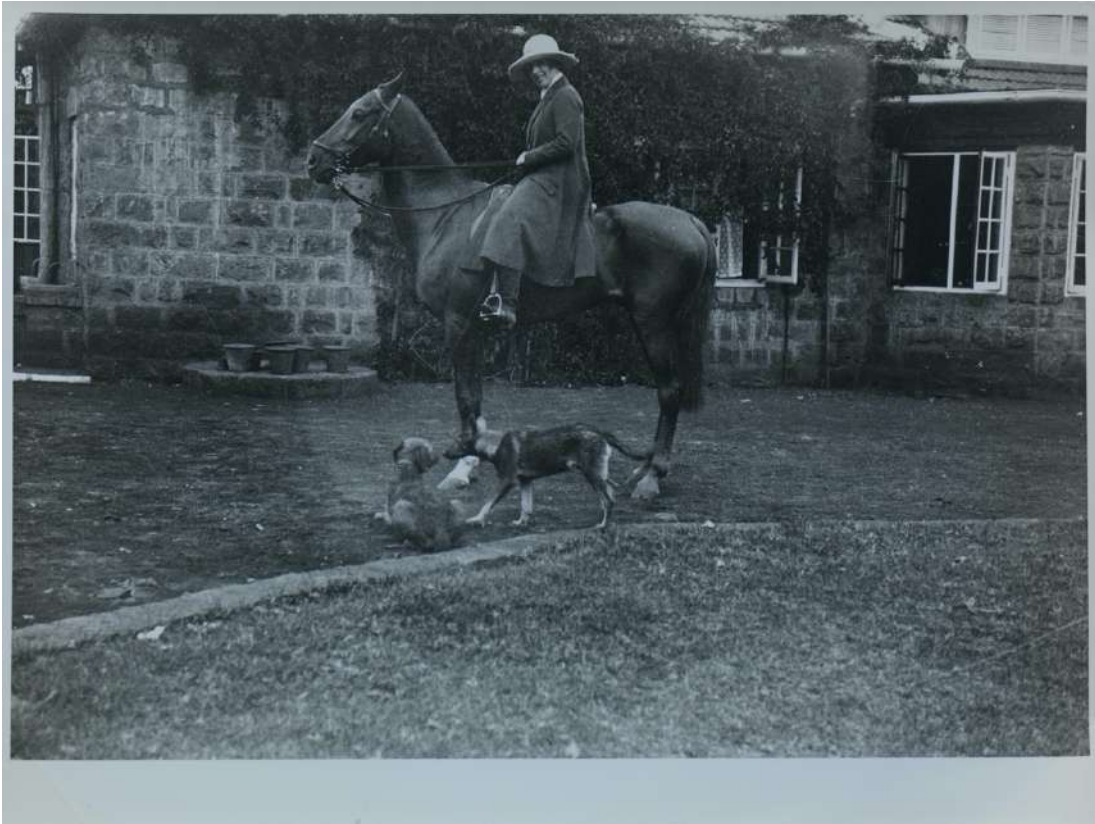
A comprehensive list of past and future exhibitions can be found on our websites.

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