TWENDE: AFRICAN WOMEN AND CINEMA

FILM AFRICA

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE ROYAL AFRICAN SOCIETY

23 OCT – 1 NOV 2026

BFI SOUTHBANK
SATURDAY 24TH OCTOBER

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME
13:00-17:00



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12.45-13:00	Arrival, Registration at desk in foyer of BFI Southbank
13:05	Welcome from **Stella Nse Okuzu FRSA, Director & CEO, Royal African Society**
13:10	Introduction **Keith Shiri, Curator, Film Africa**
13:15	**Session 1 – The Past** (35 mins) Salem Mekuria, Moderated Audrey Brown
13:50	**Keith Shiri** thanks the speakers and introduces the next panel
13:55	**Session 2 – The Image** (35 mins) Rama Thiaw, Moderated by: Desta Haile
14:30	**Keith Shiri** thanks the panel and announces the short break
14:35	Break – guests depart to the foyer for a break (10 mins)
14:45	Guests return to the auditorium. **Keith Shiri** introduces the next panel
14:50	**Session 3 – The Industry** (35 mins) Virginie Besson-Silla, Moderated by: Abiba Coulibaly
15:25	**Keith Shiri** thanks the panel and introduces the next session
15:30	**Session 4 – The Archive** (35 mins) Zineb Sedira, Anita Afonu. Moderated by: Esi Eshun
16:05	**Keith Shiri** thanks the panel and introduces the next panel
16:10	**Session 5- The Future** (35 Mins) Olive Nwosu, Jihan K. Moderated by: Nadia Denton
16:45	**Keith Shiri** thanks the panel and they leave the stage (5mins)
16:50	**Keith Shiri** concludes the discussion / closing remarks (10 mins)
17:00	Symposium ends guests move the drinks reception in the Blue Room
18:00	Drinks reception ends
18:15	**Screening of Cotton Queen in NFT 3**

SPEAKERS

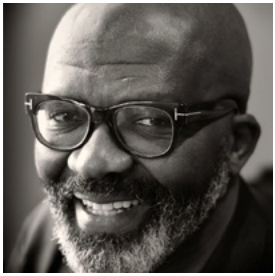


Stella Okuzu | CEO & Director, Royal African Society

Stella Okuzu is CEO & Director of the Royal African Society, which celebrates its 125th anniversary this year. She champions African voices, creativity and storytelling, connecting cultural practitioners with audiences and industry leaders.

With over 30 years' experience across finance, higher education and the not-for-profit sector, Stella has held senior roles at Standard Chartered, First Bank and FCMB Bank UK. She is passionate about connecting finance and creativity to create sustainable opportunities for Africa's creative industries.

Stella holds an MBA from IESE Business School and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Outside work, she enjoys designing and making her own clothes.



Keith Shiri

Keith Shiri is an international curator specialising in African art and cinema, with experience programming major festivals including Venice, Toronto and BFI London.

He consults for the UN International Trade Centre, supporting Caribbean film exports, and is a founding director of Africa at the Pictures, Regional Secretary (Europe) of FEPACI, and Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Westminster. A former Berlinale World Cinema Fund member and Africa Movie Academy Awards juror, he champions African cinema and expands international opportunities for filmmakers.



Anita Afonu

Anita Afonu is a Ghanaian filmmaker and archival advocate whose work explores storytelling, historical preservation and cultural heritage. Passionate about documentary filmmaking, she is committed to inspiring the next generation of Ghanaian female filmmakers. In 2025, she produced *The Eyes of Ghana*, directed by two-time Academy Award winner Ben Proudfoot and executive produced by Barack and Michelle Obama.



Virginie Besson-Silla

Virginie Besson-Silla is an internationally acclaimed film producer whose credits include *Lucy, The Lady* and *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*. Her work spans feature films, animation and documentaries, including involvement in the Oscar-winning *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. More recently, she co-produced *Timpi Tampa*, recognised at FESPACO 2025. A member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, she continues to champion international cinema.



Audrey Brown

Audrey Brown is a South African broadcast journalist and curator based in London. Growing up during apartheid, she developed a passion for film and storytelling, later studying documentary filmmaking in Paris. A renowned BBC World Service presenter, she has hosted programmes including *Focus on Africa*, *The Africa Debate* and *Network Africa*. She previously curated The Women's Jail exhibition at Constitution Hill in South Africa and serves on the board of Chimurenga, a cultural collective promoting critical thinking and creativity.



Abiba Coulibaly

Abiba Coulibaly is a London-based film programmer. Her curatorial practice examines the historic use, unfulfilled potential and inherent limitations of cinema's role in fostering solidarity and liberation between communities, continents, and diasporas. As well as programming for the Barbican, the BFI and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, she is the founder of Brixton Community Cinema and film cooperative Atlas Cinema, two ongoing experiments in what democratising access to cinema could look like.



Nadia Denton

Nadia Denton is based in London and has worked in the film industry for two decades as a curator, public speaker and impact producer. She has been a curatorial advisor for Cinéma Africain (Austria) since 2024. She coined the term BEYOND NOLLYWOOD and has championed Nigerian cinema across various film programmes. Her publications include *Cinéma Africain: Archiving, Resistance and Freedom (2025)* and *The Nigerian Filmmaker's Guide to Success: BEYOND NOLLYWOOD (2014)*. She has worked with organisations which include the BFI London Film Festival, EFM at Berlinale, Doc Society, London Film School, Sundance Film Festival and British Council. She co-produced *Shooting it Like a Woman*, a BBC World Service radio documentary about Nigerian women in the film industry. Nadia is an official African Heritage Guide across the V&A, Tate Modern and British Museum. She has a degree in Modern History from St. Hilda's College, Oxford. Her father is the late Black British filmmaker Menelik Shabazz. www.nadiadenton.com



Esi Eshun

Esi Eshun is a London based, British-Ghanaian artist, researcher and writer who works primarily with text, poetry, sound, voice, performance, archives, and still and moving images. Her work frequently centres on contested imperial histories, and is grounded in attempts to redress perceived differences between knowledge systems inherent to the Global South and North. Her solo and collaborative work has featured at institutions including *RIBA, Tate Britain, The*

Barbican, the Dhaka Art Summit, the Sharjah Architecture Triennial, and The Berlinale. She is a lecturer in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins, and has worked on research projects involving the University of Ghana and the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. Much of her writing focuses on intersections between visual art, film, and music from anti-colonial and experimental perspectives.



Desta Haile

Desta Haile is a writer and curator with twenty years' experience across the performing arts, education and social justice organisations. As former Deputy Director of the Royal African Society, she led the tenth anniversaries of Film Africa and Africa Writes. In 2025 she programmed the calendar for the Africa Film Society, Blitz Bazawule's arts centre in Accra, and for Cinewax/Africon. On screen, she has appeared in Runyararo Mapfumo's What's in a Name and in visual artist Bolaji's What We Reach For (2025). Her roots are in participatory theatre, including an internship at Augusto Boal's Centro de Teatro do Oprimido in Rio, and she has facilitated or artistically directed more than forty international theatre festivals for young people. Desta is a board member of the Pluto Educational Trust, and her debut book, Black Beauty Model Agency, runner-up for the Global Black Women's Non-Fiction Manuscript Prize, will be published by Cassava Republic in 2027.



Jihan K

Jihan was born in exile and raised in Paris while her father, a Libyan human rights lawyer, was the peaceful opposition leader to Qaddafi's regime. After her father disappeared from Cairo, her family lived between the United States and France, while her mother, a Syrian artist, fought for justice in an international campaign. Jihan received her BA in International and Comparative Politics with a concentration in Human Rights, Philosophy, and International Law and her MA in Art Education and Storytelling. Her first feature-length documentary, *My Father and Qaddafi*, had its World Premiere at the Venice International Film Festival in 2025.



Salem Mekuria

Salem Mekuria is an independent filmmaker, writer, producer, director, videographer, and a video installation artist. She is the director of Mekuria Productions (dba), established in 1987. Her film works include five documentaries and six video installations. After teaching as a professor of Art at Wellesley College for twenty-four years, she retired in 2017. She splits her residence between Ethiopia and the United States. Her award-winning documentary films and video installations feature stories of Ethiopians and others in the African Diaspora, and have been shown internationally. Her most recent film, *Awra Amba: Village at the Beginning of a World (2026)*, is a feature documentary that tells the story of how a small village in the middle of the poorest region in Ethiopia came up with ways to solve inequality and poverty, and built a self-sustaining society grounded in education, cooperation, and mutual care.



Olive Nwosu

Olive Nwosu is a Lagos-born, London-based filmmaker exploring intimacy, power and belonging through a contemporary African lens. Her debut feature, LADY, premiered at the 2026 Sundance Film Festival, winning the Special Jury Prize for Ensemble Cast, before screening at Berlinale and the BFI London Film Festival. A Columbia University graduate and BAFTA scholarship recipient, she is currently developing projects with the BBC, House Productions and Film4.



Zineb Sedira

Zineb Sedira is an internationally acclaimed artist based between London and Paris, whose work explores cinema, identity and cultural history. She represented France at the 2022 Venice Biennale and has exhibited at leading institutions including Whitechapel Gallery and Hamburger Bahnhof. Her current installation at Tate Britain, *When Words Fall Silent, Cinema Speaks*, explores cinema and Pan-Africanism in the post-independence era.



Rama Thiaw

Rama Thiaw is a Mauritanian-Senegalese filmmaker and producer whose acclaimed documentaries include *Boul Fallé: La Voie de la Lutte (2009)* and the award-winning *The Revolution Won't Be Televised (2016)*. Founder of Dakar-based Boul Fallé Images and the Artistic Sabbar of Dakar, she champions African and Black women in the arts. She is currently completing her third feature documentary, *Zion Music*, due for release in 2027.

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