







# ***TRANSCENDING THE SIGNIFIED***

QUILLA CONSTANCE  
AKA  
JENNIFER ALLEN



The Museum of Contemporary Art London presents *Transcending The Signified*, an exhibition of bespoke large scale paintings, costumes, live cello and non-linguistic vocal performances by interdisciplinary artist Quilla Constance aka Jennifer Allen.

*Transcending The Signified* explores possibilities for performing and existing beyond learned actions, language, familiar aesthetics, and socio-cultural boundaries.

Quilla Constance's site specific paintings employ a synergy between props, architectural structures and performative surfaces. For *Transcending The Signified*, two large-scale paintings were exhibited as part of the architecture within the MOCA space. Fitted into two alcoves, the 3.5 metre high paintings, both intricate and imposing, were set up to oscillate between sculptural and painterly interventions.

Painting for Quilla Constance is a fraught and layered process, executed through performative acts, transformative states of mind, and employing varied textures and styles. The painterly surfaces have no overt focal point, but invite the viewer to scan architectural elements, decorative 'exotic' patterns, energetic brush strokes and abstract glimpses of her costumes. These paintings have been executed in oil, acrylic, acrylic ink, spray paint and collage; a combination which serves to create vibrancy, eloquent movements and an energetic tension between painterly planes.

Quilla Constance's *Celsnaker Performance* performance on June 11 delivered a surprising deviation from Edward Elgar's *Cello Concerto in E minor* (first movement). Meticulously setting up the music stand and cello, these actions mimicked the gestures of a formal classical soloist performance - and Quilla Constance began to play the piece accordingly. This was later followed by an atonal distortion of the work, with the Concerto being broken down into unrecognizable sounds, and leading into QC's non-linguistic vocal performance as she meticulously packed away her cello. Through this live work, QC employed awkward silences, movements, vocal distortions and onomatopoeia to confront the audience in a directed monologue, which at times instigated an active dialogue with the viewers, holding the audience in a tense uncertainty with regards to how the next part of the performance would take form.

Performing in front of her paintings, QC's sculptural costumes conflated with these surfaces through a merging of colours and textures. Are these paintings self-portraits or an abstraction of identities which suggest the performative nature of all identity? Is it possible for QC and indeed Jennifer Allen to transcend these (often injurious) familiar and 'exotic' surfaces? Through her frenetic interdisciplinary practice QC questions notions of cultural authenticity, challenges disciplinary boundaries, and in turn, offers a raw and fresh frame through which Allen examines the construction and negotiation of black female identities within contemporary British society and high art.

Through *Transcending The Signified* QC invites the viewer into a dialogue through which the notion of cultural authenticity and the production of meaning is audibly and visibly contested.

Roberto Ekholm  
2017





















# TRANSCENDING THE SIGNIFIED

QUILLA CONSTANCE AKA JENNIFER ALLEN

11 JUNE - 1 JULY 2017

MOCA LONDON

## FEATURED PIECES:

'Celsnakar 1', oil, acrylic, acrylic ink, enamel spray paint, collage on canvas, 2017

'Celsnakar 2', oil, acrylic, acrylic ink, on canvas, 2017

'Quilla Constance Celsnakar Performance', 2017

Photography by Simon Richardson (inside and outside cover, p.4), MOCA

BOOK DESIGN: Elliott Higgs

ISBN: 978-0-9955554-1-9

PUBLISHED: 2017

Transcending The Signified : Symposium, Wilson Road Lecture theatre, UAL  
June 23

Transcending The Signified, The Old Fire Station Gallery, Oxford  
August 3 - September 1, Tuesday - Saturday, 11am - 6pm.

Transcending The Signified, Performance and Artist Q&A at The Old Fire Station  
Thursday 24th August 7-8:30pm

Transcending The Signified  
Performance at St John's College, University of Oxford  
Saturday August 12th  
See Old Fire Station website for further details



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

MOCA  
LONDON

MOCA LONDON  
113 BELLENDEN ROAD  
LONDON, SE15 4QY  
[WWW.MOCA.LONDON](http://WWW.MOCA.LONDON)

ual:



ST JOHN'S COLLEGE  
OXFORD





