

# McKenzie Heritage Picture Archive Subject Guide



*MHPA/1/2/3/2: Photograph of Anita Jeni McKenzie and Donna Henry at Business and Employment Conference, London, taken by Erol R. Bent, 11/05/1997*

## Background

This guide provides an overview of the McKenzie Heritage Picture Archive along with further information about the photographic holdings at Black Cultural Archives.

The McKenzie Heritage Picture Archive (MHPA) was a commercial photo licensing agency established by photographer Anita Jeni McKenzie in 1996. The archive provided publishers, broadcasters and other organisations with photos and images of African, Asian, and

Caribbean people, cultures, and communities. These images spanned the 18th to the 21st centuries and cover a vast range of topics. MHPA was the first of its kind in Europe, becoming the go-to outlet to source images on Black and Asian communities.

Anita Jeni McKenzie was born in the 1950s in London, England. Her parents had previously settled in the UK from Jamaica as part of the 'Windrush generation'. Anita decided to pursue photography in 1984. Initially self-taught, she then attended Goldsmiths College to study Communications, specialising in photography. Her mother Pearline had been Anita's role model, documenting the family with a Halina camera. Anita moved on to become part of the team at Monocrone Women's Photography Collective, (founded in Clapham in 1986) where she taught black and white film photography, darkroom skills and designed and created community exhibitions around South London. She also initiated (with Maxine Walker and a group of women photographers of colour), the forming of the 'Black Women and Photography Group' who produced the landmark publication 'Polareyes – a journal by and about Black Women working in photography', published in 1986. Other initiatives include partnering with fellow mother, Jenny Harrison, to design and publish an annual children's calendar, called 'Children in Focus' featuring diverse black and white photographs of children for the family and educational market. During this period Anita met the late Len Garrison (co-founder of Black Cultural Archives), whilst he was running the African Caribbean Education Resource (ACER), who became her mentor and adviser.

As a working photographer in and around London, McKenzie found that publishing and editorial clients often remarked that they did not know where to find images of the Black community for diverse representation in their publications. The formation of the 'McKenzie Heritage Picture Library and Archive' was a response to this lack in the broader media landscape. In a commercial sense McKenzie identified there was a gap in the market for the specialist supply of Black images, but the overwhelming driving and motivating force that led to the establishment of MHPA was much more community focused. McKenzie recognized that the vast multitude of historical and contemporary diasporic experiences of Black people living in Britain remained unheard or unseen. A central theme in the mission of MHPA was to allow these stories to be told through a constantly evolving library of images that would give a more detailed and accurate description of the lives of Black people in Britain than those commonly portrayed by the mainstream media.



*MHPA/1/2/20/1: Images depicting leisure activities, three people playing a board game, c1990, taken by Anita Jeni McKenzie*

The image stock in MHPA came from photographers, artists, and private family collections. Alongside this, McKenzie had been an avid deltiologist for many years, with a strong fascination for early colonial engraving images of Black and South Asian people: this is also represented within the collection. MHPA supplied images to the publishing media, television companies, local authorities and for special events. They also partnered with museums, galleries and arts, cultural and community organisations on a wide range of visual cultural projects, increasing the circulation of this unique set of images, and allowing them to help shape narratives about Black and Asian life in both in Britain and internationally.

It is important to situate the work of the McKenzie Heritage Picture Archive within a burgeoning field of Black and Asian photographic practices in the 1980s and 90s. The so called 'critical decade' of the 1980s had encompassed a multiplicity of practices and concerns that Black British photographers pursued and developed. Key issues of the time included: the meaning of Blackness; gender and sexuality and racial difference; the role of racial representation in popular culture; documentary and its relation to realism and authority and the politics of the constructed image. Anita was a contributor to this discourse through her work photographic work which was featured in critical publications such as Ten.8 and exhibited internationally. Anita also organised with other Black female photographers to bring

visibility to their practises, through initiatives such the 'Black Woman and Photography group'. The work of MHPA brought these concerns and debates into a wider public sphere by making available work by new generations of politically engaged Black and Asian photographers' to be utilised in mass media in Britain and internationally. Alongside this, the collected historic material within the archive (late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century) shed light on how colonial image making within that period constructed stereotypes and racist distortions.

The McKenzie Heritage Picture Archive closed as a licensing agency in 2006, however McKenzie Heritage are active in continuing to provide access to the unique collection through exhibition partnerships, events, and public appearances.

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## MHPA Collection

### **Photographers (MHPA/1/2), contributors (MHPA/1/3) and special collections (MHPA/1/3, MHPA/1/4)**

This sub-fonds contains the photographic prints, negatives, slides of over thirty photographers including the work of Leon Thompson, Neil Kenlock, Mumtaz Karimjee and others working from the 1950s-2000s. The collections of over a dozen contributors are also included, these images are mainly family collections or collected prints and ephemera from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Photographic styles in the collection include contemporary, documentary, travel, studio, portraiture, event photography and fashion. There is a strong focus on 'everyday life' within the collection, with the depiction of social gatherings, weddings, births, and leisure activities included. There are also notable individuals and events depicted throughout the library, including images of community activists such as Sybil Phoenix and Michael X, community events such as beauty pageants run by Claudia Jones in the late 1950s/60s, protests and gatherings, and images of cultural figures such as Maya Angelou, Walter Mosely and CLR James. The picture library also includes special collections from Black Cultural Archives and the initiative Children in Focus (started by Anita Jeni McKenzie and Jenny Harrison to provide high quality images of children for license).

### **Antique books, playbills, song sheets, collectables and historic images collected by Anita Jeni McKenzie (MHPA/1/1)**

The archive also contains a large collection of historic photographs and valuable ephemera collected by Anita McKenzie relating to early Black presence in Britain and the

representation of Black and Asian peoples globally (late 19<sup>th</sup> century-1970s). This includes early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial photography, postcards and other visual material and reproductions of 19<sup>th</sup> century engravings. Much of this material is rare, including an edition of Claudia Jones' West Indian Gazette and a pamphlet for a performance at the Cambridge Theatre of the acclaimed African American dancer and choreographer Katherine Dunham. This collection is foundational to MHPA and underscores the mission of the organisation to use photographic material to increase the visibility and availability of images of Black and Asian life, whilst serving an educational function by showcasing early depictions, including racist tropes and distortions. Much of this valuable material formed the basis for the MHPA publication 'Contrasts, Textures and Hues - Exploring early printed images of people of African and Asian Heritage' (2004), **(MHPA/2/7/10)** which presented the images, along with essays from a variety of contributors which helped to contextualise them.

The images in the library are organised by either the creator or the collector of the material. However, MHPA also had a subject based classification system. Using this original list, it is also possible to search the images in the collection by theme:

**Advertising**

[Advocacy](#)

**Animals**

[Art and entertainment](#)

[Artists at work](#)

[Communications](#)

[Communities](#)

[Conflict](#)

[Death](#)

**Eating and drinking**

[Education](#)

[Family](#)

[Health](#)

[Icons](#)

[Lifestyles](#)

[Men](#)

**Organisations**

[Places](#)

[Religion](#)

[Travel and transport](#)

[Women](#)

[Work and trade](#)

[Young people](#)

### **Administrative Materials (MHPA/2)**

This sub-fonds contains the administrative records of the agency, including records on governance, finance, funding, the client base of MHPA and the photographers/contributors on its books. There are also records relating to with the extensive range projects run by MHPA, including publications, web-based projects, and exhibitions. The agency offered numerous workshops and training opportunities, with a focus on upskilling younger people. This

includes the development of a training scheme aimed at young people to give them skills in photography, picture research and archival skills (MHPA/2/7/6).

### **Collected publications and ephemera (MHPA/3)**

A broad range of publications and ephemera which includes photographs sourced from the image library of MHPA. Includes publications such as Platform magazine, Soca News Magazine, Caribbean Times, Jet Magazine, Sia Information Bulletin No.28, Calabash, A Newsletter for writers of African and Asian Descent, Connections, the quarterly from the Commission for Racial Equality, Positive Times, Newslime Magazine, Community Enterprise Newspaper, The Sunday Gleaner, BBC 50th Anniversary Windrush publication, Newsletter of The Black European Community Development Federation (BECDF News), The New Advocate Magazine, The Voice of Blackliners, Magazine, The Alarm Magazine, African Women Quarterly Development Journal and Deptford Kite Magazine.

### **Anita McKenzie Personal Papers (MHPA/4)**

These papers cover a range of initiatives Anita Jeni McKenzie has been involved in during her career as a photographer. In many cases these projects predate the initiation of the McKenzie Heritage Picture Archive. Includes material relating to the Black Women Photography Group and their landmark publication 'Polareyes- A Journal by and about Black women working in photography', published in 1986. Also includes material relating to The Women's photography project in Staffordshire University, the Women Focusing project and personal correspondence of McKenzie.

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## **Complementary collections**

Alongside the records of the McKenzie Heritage Picture Archive, Black Cultural Archives also holds other photographic material within the archive which document Black lives in Britain. Alongside this, there is a range of publications and periodicals on photographic practises.

### **The Photograph Collection (Ref. PHOTOS)**

This large series of photographs reflects the presence of African and Caribbean people in Britain.

### **Staying Power Oral History project (Ref. ORAL/3)**

Oral history recordings linked to the Staying Power exhibition. Inspired by Peter Fryer's landmark text 'Staying Power, The History of Black People in Britain', the exhibition focuses on a period of time when photography served as an archival tool to capture historical moments. From documentary to portraiture to staged allegorical photographs, Staying Power documents experiences from post-World War II through to the 1990s, covering topics from mass migration to hip hop fashions of south London.

Interviews with Neil Kenlock, Judith Kenlock, Charlie Phillips, Elizabeth Chijoke, Grace Elliott and Joy Olaniyi, Dennis Morris, James Barnor, Norman Anderson, Jennie Baptiste, Pogus Caesar, Ajamu X, Barbara Gray, Maxine Walker, Ingrid Pollard, Colin Jones, Armet Francis, Yinka Shonibare and Syd Shelton.

### **Ephemera collection (Ref. EPHEMERA)**

Ephemera collected by the Black Cultural Archives across a wide range of subject matter including social political and cultural events, spanning from 1689 till the present day. [Please be aware that the collection is currently being re-catalogued. Some material may be temporarily unavailable.]

### **Periodicals on photography**

Runnymede Collection Periodicals: Ten-8 (Ref. RC/PERIODICALS/379)

Polareyes: a Journal by and about Black Women working in photography, No.1, 1987 (PERIODICALS/126)

### **Library**

769.493 MCK- Contrasts, Textures, and Hues - exploring early printed images of people of African and Asian heritage, McKenzie Heritage Picture Archive

770.92 GIL- Black Britain: A Photographic History, Paul Gilroy, preface by Stuart Hall, 2007

2.4 PRI- Notting Hill in the sixties /, photography, Charlie Phillips /, words, Mike Phillips.1991

323.73 BAI- Appropriation and Control - A photographic Exploration of Black Images, 1960

770.92 PHO- The British Black Panthers and Black power movement: an oral history and photography project, 2013

**Outside of the collections of Black Cultural Archives, the following publications are essential**

Critical Decade: Black British Photography in the 80s, David A. Bailey, Stuart Hall · 1992

Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time by Mark Sealy, 2019

Different: A Historical Context Hardcover, published by Autograph (ABP), Stuart Hall (Editor), Mark Sealy (Commentary), 2001

'Missing Photobooks: A Symptomatic Reading on the Reasons for and Impact of the Lack of Publications by Black British Photographers in the 1970s and 1980s' in: Paul Edwards, New Directions in Photobook Studies: Towards a Social History of the Photobook, Liverpool University, Taous R. Dahmani, 2021

'Polareyes: a photography journal as intersectional heterotopia', in: Sarah Crook, Charlie Jeffries (ed.), Feminist and Queer Activism in Britain and the United States in the Long 1980s, Taous R. Dahmani, 2021

Photography: Race, Rights and Representation, Mark Sealy, 2022

Shining Lights: Black Women Photographers in 1980s-'90s Britain (Paperback), Joy Gregory (editor), 2023