***Double Pendulum*** **(**2011)

In the Summer before the 2012 Olympics artist Faisal Abdu'Allah created *Double Pendulum*, a new film about breathing and movement involving professional athletes and world-class leading scientists. Over 500 people attended the premier at the View Tube in June 2011 which was screened outdoors as part of the CREATE 11 festival as the sun set against the backdrop of the London 2012 Olympic stadium.

Despite being invisible, the air that surrounds us is the most valued element that our lives depend on. *Double Pendulum*, runs for a duration of 9' 58" and was determined according to the 100-metre sprint world record of 9.58 seconds set by Usain Bolt in 2009.

Abdu'Allah filmed the training rituals of athlete **Jeanette Kwakye**, **2007 British Champion** 100 and 200 metres; footballer **Anthony Grant** of Southend United and martial arts **2008 British Gold medalist and European Silver medalist, Ammar Duffus**.

These three very different types of sports professionals illustrate and map the journey that air takes through the human form alongside an engaging narrative from world-leading scientists from King's College London and Brunel University. 'Double Pendulum', explores how size, identity, gender, class and geography affect the way we breathe, what we breathe and how we move.

With a high prevalence of asthma in elite athletes, and official readings showing an air pollution index of 87 at Beijing's Olympic Stadium in 2008 (the World Health Organisation consider 50 to be high); air pollution and its effects on our lungs received significant media attention during the Beijing Olympics.

As part of the artist's commission which was screened from 30 June – Sunday 17 July, Abdu'Allah was in residence at the View Tube from January 2011. He devised and led a series of weekly educational workshops at the View Tube for 11-14 year olds from the local area. The young people involved produced their own short film, which dramatises their own take on air pollution and sport. They met with scientists Dr. Pascale Kippelen and Dr. Lee Romer at the Centre for Sports Medicine and Human Performance, Brunel University where they participated in lung capacity tests usually performed on professional athletes.

***Ten Degrees (Adeve)*** (2012)

In the 1993 film *Six Degrees of Separation* two salient lessons surfaced: first, that you should not believe everything that you see; and second, re-evaluate your life whenever you can. The structure of this piece echoes these two important lessons as well as its title. Abdu'Allah replaced six with ten and created a simple arrangement from two rolls of ten photographs joined together in a row and displayed in a room transformed into a giant light box. Abdu'Allah used portraits of real human beings (his students and their acquaintances), as they 'really look' and as they change as a result of experiencing certain emotions.

The piece started when Abdu'Allah witnessed a public display of mutual care between two friends, Alex Fialho and A-lan Holt. Moved by the visible closeness of their friendship and querying how many others were similarly connected to these two individuals, Abdu'Allah asked the students who they would most trust with their lives. Instead of saying the other, each referred to another person, creating a ripple effect and evidencing networks of friendships incomprehensible in their totality. Stringing together images of ten individuals connected through such networks of friendship, Abdu'Allah focused on the number 10 as representing a paradigm of friendship creation. He views the digit as containing all things and possibilities, symbolically represents the return to unity of one person and people around him. Recalling the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue (10 words) from his early experience within the Pentecostal faith, Abdu'Allah reinterpreted ten words as ten idiosyncratic portraits within a sequence of friends bound by the randomness of their friendship. Number ten in general Christianity represents the ten commitments and In Islamic tradition, 10 represents completion and the start of a new cycle.

The exercise illustrated by these ten portraits bring out a concept often seen in the history of ideas, the creation of an artist's work based on the artist's internal perception and shaping of a real, material object or experience. For Abdu'Allah, the material object is the new physical environment he created in which his subjects experienced the photographic act. This space became an active component in the creating and experiencing of images, images which come to life through the light that glows through the backlit paper.

***Dullah 69*** (2010)

Photo Etching on Paper, h16 x w15 in.

“Dullah’s” are most likely to be offered in a bar in Johannesburg, South Africa. The transaction would be an illicit one, translating either literally as the trading of ‘stolen goods’ or metaphorically as a sexual dalliance between two people, one or both in an existing relationship with other people. Having a partner already between one or both parties offering a “Dullah” emphasizes the sense of a desire for an encounter that is ‘stolen’. It is both a physical exchange and a moral transgression. Whilst in South Africa during a residency at Gallery Momo in 2009, Abdu’ Allah first heard the term in local use and saw past its colloquial meaning as a casual pick-up line to a more serious truth. The term is underpinned by a denial of the rights of those from whom ‘goods’ (in either sense) are taken illegitimately. The informality of its use thinly conceals the graver implications of the exchange; not only taking what belongs to someone else and infidelity with its wider implications regarding loyalty and trust, but of an extended sense of displacement relating to negated rights also. For Abdu’Allah, the term, “Dullah’s” provoked larger questions of legal rights and moral as well as physical theft that came to the fore during his trip.

In *Dullah’s 69*, Abdu’Allah etched a series of photographed portraits of individuals he met in South Africa, some of whom told different stories of life under the Apartheid regime whilst others spoke of contemporary post-Apartheid South Africa.

This attention to precise physiognomy is naturally at odds with the recourse to anonymity and taxonomic generalizations made along legally enforced racial boundaries under Apartheid. The individuals pictured are located in both time and place, yet dislocated by memories of a fractured past.

There is an act of testimony here in these works to both individual and collective memories of trauma. Abdu'Allah ensures that their facial features constitute indelible traces of physical witness by etching his subjects. The process of photographing an image and then transferring it through the reductive exercise of etching onto a new surface through the use of corrosive acid, compounds an act of creation that attests to permanence as well as violence.

The title, *Dullah's 69* speaks to Abdu'Allah's own presence in South Africa. It is his personal take on a loaded term and a wry extension of stealing back what signifies, that which is stolen already. The sense of dislocation displayed by his sitters resonated with his own experiences of the country. His trip to Johannesburg was the first to sub-Saharan Africa and he considered the journey as an act of return to the continent from where his ancestors had been taken. Abdu' Allah refers to the trip to South Africa as completing "the geospatial circuit in his family's history, from Africa to the Caribbean to the UK and back." Abdu'Allah considers himself and his ancestors as a type of "Dullah's" or stolen goods. He was, he believes, stolen as part of his ancestral heritage and the reference in the title of the series, *Dullah's 69* is a play on the year of his birth as an arbitrary point of departure in which dates, names and places are all dislocated.

***I Wanna Kill Sam 'Cause He Ain't my Motherfucking Uncle*** (1993)

Inkjet Print on Aluminum. h78.7 x w39.3in.

*So if you see a man in red, white and blue/ getting janked by the Lench Mob Crew/ it's a man who deserves to buckle/ I wanna kill Sam cause he ain't my motherfucking uncle.*
Ice Cube, *I Wanna Kill Sam*

In its first incarnation at the Royal College of Art in London, this work was installed in a small, white room. At its center lays a glass coffin, printed upon which is the face of Lord Kitchener, the famous British Field Marshall and Secretary of State for War during the first World War. His face was immortalized in posters of the period campaigning the war effort. Five massive steel slabs hang on the walls of the room. Five men are screen printed onto the steel. Their bodies float on the surface of the cold metal, fragmented and ghostlike whilst the small black dots of the screen-print are barely coherent enough to bring them into existence. Upon entry the viewer is confronted by one of these specters pointing a gun directly at them. Those to the left and right brandish their weapons also. Simultaneously confrontational and inaccessible, these spectral soldiers consciously target the viewer in a sinister and menacing fashion.

*I Wanna Kill Sam* is a work that is provocatively direct in its immediacy. The work is inspired from Ice Cube's second solo album in 1991, *Death Certificate*. One of the album tracks, *I Wanna Kill Sam* proclaims, "The army is the only way out for young, black teenagers…[because]/ …We'll provide you with everything you need in life." However like the disingenuous promise of "forty acres and a mule" after emancipation, this vow proves untrue also,  Ice Cube charges several offences to "Uncle Sam" from breaking up black families under slavery to spreading HIV and drug use amongst them and consequently, Ice Cube ends the song by avenging to kill Sam because of this exploitation under false pretenses.

In his work of the same name, Abdu'Allah critically engages with Ice Cube's account of US army recruitment of African Americans to explicate British history. Lord Kitchener appears in the place of Uncle Sam. As War

Secretary in 1914, he is featured on posters in a massive recruitment

campaign, proclaiming, “Britons, [Lord Kitchener] wants you – join your country’s army!” One of the most enduring images of the war and beyond it, it inspired a similar iteration in the United States, in which Uncle Sam is featured in place of Lord Kitchener. In Abdu’Allah’s *I Wanna Kill Sam*, Lord Kitchener, like Uncle Sam in Ice Cube’s song, is identified as a harbinger of death. Since its first showing, the work has not been exhibited with the coffin as it necessitates an enclosed space so that the coffin is surrounded by the works on four walls.

Like Ice Cube, the men on the steel are lyricists also. Members of the British rap group, Scientists of Sound, they are personal acquaintances of Abdu’Allah, and crucially, were instrumental in his reversion to Islam. The work can be seen as representative of Abdu’Allah’s metaphoric death as Paul Duffus, his given name at birth and his rebirth as Faisal Abdu’Allah, his chosen name upon his reversion.

Criticized for perpetuating the “violent black male” stereotype, the work effectively challenges these stereotypes by its reclamation of such assumptions by the subjects themselves. Each of the men photographed had an active involvement in realizing their own image. They wore their own clothing, wielded their own props and chose the final image that would represent them.  One of the first major works in which Abdu’Allah uses the production of original photographs (as opposed to found images), there is a direct sense of ownership and mediation of these bodies by both the artist and his subjects. Moreover the work does more than refute stereotype – it erodes them. Here, there is not simply the depiction of an image but the disintegration of images also. Figures appear to dissolve into cold steel, flashing in and out of vision and thus, in and out of existence.

***Fuck Da Police*** (1991)

Etching and Inkjet Print on Aluminum h50 x w40 in.

*A feeling of great contempt and sorrow ascended into my soul for the LAPD but also for the many who were slain and maimed without the benefit of a recording that could have them absolved… I felt an overwhelming duty to make some social comment that was physical and permanent… This mindless thuggery needed a rebuttal of the same caliber to leave an indelible mark in the consciousness of all who were privy and not, to the plight of Rodney King...*
Faisal Abdu'Allah

Released in 1988, N.W.A's anthem, *Fuck tha Police* articulated the raw rage felt by so many young African American men at the widespread, and often indiscriminate racial profiling in urban centers, specifically in Los Angeles at that time. Ice Cube raps, "Fuck tha police comin straight from the underground/ A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm brown/ I'm the other color so police think/ They have the authority to kill a minority." The song is composed as a court trial in which the expected roles are reversed and the "Police Department," not the members of N.W.A (standing as the defendants), is convicted. At the end of the song, Dr Dre as the presiding Judge delivers the sentence: "The jury has found you guilty of being a redneck, white bread, chicken shit motherfucker." The convicted police responds, "But wait, that's a lie! That's a goddamn lie! I want justice! I want justice! Fuck you, you black motherfucker!"

The song, controversial upon its release, was prophetic of Ice Cube's depiction of the relationship between the police and an increasingly disenfranchised black male community. In 1991, several L.A.P.D. officers were captured on videotape brutally beating Rodney King. As shocking as the incident was however, it was not an isolated occurrence and riots ensued the following year when the police officers involved in the incident were acquitted in trial. As a permanent memorial to the nameless victims of police violence and racism, Abdu'Allah's *Fuck da Police* is a physical manifestation of, and his personal response to, the political and social consciousness that inspired N.W.A.

The work consists of an aluminum sheet featuring a solitary, hooded figure. Lit from behind by an ethereal ray of sunlight, this figure is darkly sinister and seems oppressively burdened. The viewer can sense the subject's gaze piercingly returning theirs although his face remains ominously shrouded in shadow. Two large structures stretch out on either side of him like wings and enhance his otherworldly appearance. Photographed from a lower angle, the subject looms heroically over both the structures and the viewer. The combination of the threatening stance and the supernatural aura imbue the figure with a sense of purpose. Nonetheless, the viewer is left to question provocatively whether the figure's mission is one of retribution or deliverance.

From a distance one can vaguely observe lines of text that, like the photograph, wrap around the exterior of the box. This text draws the viewer in, creating a source of curiosity that seeks to override the apprehension felt in regarding the figure. Only on close inspection can one read the text consisting of three words that repeat ceaselessly around the cube. Etched 2mm deep into the aluminum and the image laid upon it, the words "fuck da police," deface its otherwise smooth surface with its explicit message. Thus rendered, the incised aluminum evokes a connection to guns and bullets, both of which are inscribed with unique serial numbers by their makers.

Whilst the layering of text on the image that lays upon the aluminum is a powerful evocation in its own right, the most poignant component of this work is its laborious repetition of texts and forms. The surface is unified doubly, preventing any escape from its message or form. The emotional conviction and message behind the work are infinitely re-inscribed, thereby reinforcing and re-empowering the strong statement. The lines of text reverberate into the mind of the viewer, bringing metaphorically the figure upon whom they are inscribed to life as in the words of Ice Cube, "A young nigga on a warpath/ And when I'm finished, it's gonna be a bloodbath/ Of cops, dyin in L.A/ Yo Dre, I got somethin to say/ Fuck the police."

***Head of State*** (1997)

Photos print on wallpaper. h759 x w759 in,.
Coffin made out of Plexiglass, h x w in, 1997-2012.

Faisal Abdu'Allah in the late-1990's experimented with space installations that placed sculpture, objects and photographs as wallpaper to create architectural environments. He described those strategies in a conversation in 2004 as photo-environments, and often arranged his sculpture to create a narrative - in this example a coffin carefully staged in the middle of the space conjures up a morgue. The way in which Abdu'Allah understood this experience came after a long meditation about the tension between the illusion and experience of a real space, using large-scale photographs as wallpaper to trick the perception of scale and perspective and placing a life-size sculpture in the shape of a domestic funerary object.

Instead of providing graphic accounts of violence and political distrust, Abdu'Allah's photographs of violence are more direct social commentaries, a paradoxical response in which the violence produced by nature becomes a metaphor for political violence. Similarly, in this piece, he confronts the viewer with death as simply a human experience, yet one that cannot be fully understood until "you experience the passing of someone really close to you." Abdu'Allah creates this conceptual relationship with death by placing inside the space a coffin as emblematic of death and reproducing at large the real space of a morgue. This confrontation of two allusions to death evokes a form of horror – that of physical death evoked by the coffin and toughened by the space of death (morgue) reproduced on the wallpaper. Abdu'Allah describes the resultant artificial realm as a "space of no escape" and its gruesome affect is an admittance of the need for more social wakefulness. Head of State was a major work commissioned by Bisi Silva of Fourth Dial Art.

***Last Supper I*** (1996-2011)

Inkjet Print on Paper and Tapestry
h59 x w72.5 in and h120 x w144 in.

***Last Supper II*** (1996-2011)
1996-2011
Inkjet Print on Paper and Tapestry
h59 x w72.5 in and h120 x w144 in.

Compositional familiarity works to disarm the viewer in Abdu'Allah's diptych. In *The Last Supper I*, a central figure appears to assume the position of Jesus, his right hand invoking the Old Believer gesture for the sign of the cross. To his left, other men in white appear to reason with and question him whilst to his right and to his rear, veiled women look on, bereft. One woman spies a potential assassin standing to the right, his back to the viewer and his left hand displaying his weapon. Her wide-eyed stare intensifying a moment already balanced on a knife-edge. The assumption would be the assassin is Judas, yet Abdu'Allah refuses to confirm this definitively. The image invites the viewer to look closer and ask what else could be concealed in those robes, under those veils or behind those backs by anyone of these figures?

Firearms remain prominent in *The Last Supper II* where white robes and religious garb are replaced by contemporary clothes in which the actors, almost unanimously, turn away from the internal interaction and return the gaze of the viewer. This sacred scene, so often scrutinized, looks back at us in Abdu'Allah's depiction of it. The heavy table on which the holy feast would be laid provides a barrier between their space and ours. This table bisects the composition, separating upper and lower bodies between the spaces of display and of concealment, of weapons seen and unseen and of loyalty and disloyalty.
In *The Last Supper*, Abdu'Allah plays with our assumptions. After all, we know what happens next, but is this the case? We assume that as in the biblical narrative Christ is betrayed. Yet Abdu'Allah's shoot is staged with live actors who have real lives. The stage lights that were used as the set of the photo shoot are switched off and the actors in these compositions go home. Yet these are not actors. The men and women depicted here are Abdu'Allah's friends. They wear their own clothes and the white robes

are those that they wear regularly to Mosque.  The weapons, too, significantly in Abdu'Allah's portrayal are their own.
Working with Kofi Allen, Abdu'Allah presents the final works simply as large photographs. With no use of print techniques or transfer onto metal, these images exude an air of documentary that are neither fact nor fiction. Here in Abdu'Allah's rearticulation are presented twelve young Muslim men and women re-enacting Christ's iconic final feast.  The blonde haired, blue-eyed protagonist is replaced as is the privileged state of detached omniscience afforded the viewer by previous artists of this iconic scene. Our presence is sutured into a lingering moment. The insertion of firearms upsets the well-known narrative without knowing whether they indicate an offensive or defensive act. This simultaneous sense of both confrontation and yet protection ensues in which the viewer is implicated.

***Revelations*** (1996)

Inkjet Print on Paper h60 x  w40 in.

The *Revelations* series was a continuation of the creative partnership between Abdu'Allah and Kofi Allen that had begun with *The Last Supper*. Shot from close, oblique angles, *Revelations* foreground those final moments of Christ's ultimate suffering during the Crucifixion using high definition, monochrome photography to capture the intricate texture of skin, the viscosity of bodily fluid and the radiance of divine light. In one image, a crown of thorns pierces the forehead, in another the stigmata in the palm of a creased hand oozes a trickle of blood and another features an Egyptian ankh, the sacred symbol of life that pre-dates the crucifix, which reinforces Abdu'Allah's spiritual connection to Nubian civilization.

The series manifests an interest in the power of ritual gestures: the specific position of hands and arms to protect the body, to confess the faith and invoke divine presence. The deployment of the camera in *Revelations* reflects Abdu'Allah's wider interest in the physical relationship of the viewer's gaze to his work.
As with *The Last Supper*, Abdu'Allah plays with the accepted iconography of Western Christianity and the canon of religious art, but contests the authority of a solely blonde haired blue-eyed Christ. For Abdu'Allah, divinity can transcend skin or hair color, and thereby, preconceived notions of being authorized by one race only. Any attempt at eye contact or front-on scrutiny is frustrated within this work. We are restricted to a human viewpoint, powerlessly gazing up at a man depicted as Jesus Christ, savior, prophet and icon.

***Goldfinger*** **(**2007)

Eleven photo-screen prints on gold plated bronze 24 carats.
60 x 40 inches, 2007.
Gold-plated Beretta, h5.5 x 1.2 w9
Knuckle Duster, h2.7 x 0.2 w5.1 in

Comprised of eleven portraits, a gold-plated knuckle duster and beretta, the Goldfinger series depicts a set of men who, through their infamy, could be considered legendary. These eleven men were (some still are) key players in The Firm, a multi-generational family business at the forefront of London's organized crime scene. The organization's roots lead back to East London in the fifties and sixties, when The Firm's architects, twins Reggie and Ronnie Kray, laid its foundations. Goldfinger features several men who worked closely with the Krays to make The Firm the leader of London's organized crime. The cost of this rise to prominence, which includes charges as serious as torture and murder, blights their reputations to this day. Past deeds now seem ineradicable and inescapable, and no road to redemption remains.

Abdu'Allah uses gold-plated bronze and creates close-up, blown-up portraits. Each pore, hair and wrinkle is visible in the myriad of miniscule dots that comprise the halftones of the screenprint. However, the power of these portraits does not only lie within the sitters themselves, but rather Abdu'Allah's ability to disarm them. He captures their faces in stolen moments that reveal vulnerability. Regardless of their past misdeeds these are no longer notorious gangsters, but are men nearing the end of their lives, their mortality pressing in ever closer.

The Goldfinger series is a powerful example of Abdu'Allah's interest in the transformation of materials. Working with gold, that most coveted of metals, Abdu'Allah likened the work's realization to an act of alchemy in which something base becomes most precious. The material of gold not only resonated with the economy of gangster culture, but with more ancient associations of gold as wisdom provider and redeemer.

The transformative and immaterial qualities of gold are those that speak most strongly to the moral transfigurations enacted here. In the act of

creating these works, Abdu'Allah labors to grant some degree of redemption to the men pictured. Through the neutral manner in which they are photographed to the close cropping of their portraits, the viewer feels, not only that they are deeply acquainted with the sitters, but also that these men possess a vulnerability that renders them completely human. When these features are encased in gold, Abdu'Allah's Midas touch performs its ultimate act of conversion – seen through and on gold each man exists alone, immortalized and elevated by the very material that composes their image.

***Garden of Eden*** (2003)

Sketch and Architectural Plan by David Adjaye, 2003.
Interior glass box, 2.6m, x 4m x 4m high.

Exterior felt enclosure
9.4m x 9.2m, 2.6 m high

*The Garden is everywhere, it is all around us… It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth. What truth you may ask? That you're a slave… Unfortunately no one can be told what the true significance of the Garden is, you have to see it for yourself.*
Faisal Abdu'Allah requoting The Matrix

Ask Faisal Abdu'Allah about the genesis of the *Garden of Eden* and you will hear the story of a fateful train journey from Vienna to Linz. Spanning several hours, the artist tells of an increased awareness of being watched while the train progressed from one station to the next. As the sun set and darkness fell, the lit carriage became reflective to those inside and transparent to those outside. By the time he disembarked at his destination, he was weary from the long journey and ill-prepared for what greeted him on the platform – eight men, likely Neo-Nazis, assembled in formation to surround the artist, yelling "Ku Klux Klan!" He describes the incident as the first time in his life that he truly experienced a sense of difference, alienation and fragility.

Abdu'Allah collaborated with the architect David Adjaye to produce a structure called the *Garden of Eden* that consisted of two distinct but interwoven spaces that consisted of an inner and outer garden. While the outer garden is a dark tunnel mitigated by the soft texture of black, felt-covered walls, ceiling and floor, the inner garden is a haven of warmth; its reflective walls bathing those inside with a glowing, red light. Abdu'Allah has likened the inner garden to a childhood experience of looking directly at the sun with his eyes closed, feeling safe through its warmth though only a fracture away from being blinded by its harsh light.

Upon entering viewers are requested by staff to separate according to eye color again. Those with blue eyes are led into the inner garden, where basking in luminescent reflectivity, they can enjoy a privileged access to an idyllic space.

Surrounded by mirrors and consumed by themselves and their own experience, they cannot realize that they are in fact, the subjects of the work. They cannot see that those with brown eyes are watching them from just outside the walls of the inner sanctum. In the soft tunnel space of the outer garden, those with brown eyes are granted only visual access to the inner garden; they can see in but do not have access to enter.

Feelings of difference are evoked, not only in the preliminary separation by eye color, but throughout the entire process of traversing within the installation. Upon exiting the inner garden those with blue eyes who initially feel themselves part of an exclusive group, realize that they have co-opted to be part of a game of those that can look but cannot enter and those that can enter but cannot look. There is inevitably a sense of violation that coincides with being the subject of a voyeuristic gaze. The spatial experience is manipulated to evoke a reaction in the viewer that goes beyond aesthetic appreciation and reconfigures the mode of perceiving difference and alienation via the experience of Abdu'Allah's collaborative installation.

**New Orleans series**

“Humanity”
Photo on paper, h60 x w60 in, New Orleans 2008
Printed by Magnolia Edition, Oakland California, USA, 2011.

“I am Still Waiting”
Photo on paper, h60 x w160 in, New Orleans 2008
Printed by Magnolia Editions, Oakland California, USA, 2011.

“Madame Levauh”
Photo on paper, h60 x w120 in, New Orleans 2008
Printed by Magnolia Editions, Oakland California, USA, 2011.

“Second Line”
Photo on paper, h60 x w160 in, New Orleans 2008
Printed by Magnolia Editions, Oakland California, USA, 2011.

This wall presents four photographs produced during Abdu’Allah’s artist in residency at Row House art residency project in 2006 in Texas Houston, a year after the Hurricane Katrina tragedy that unfurled in New Orleans in 2005. A selection of Faisal’s photographs printed on paper shows Faisal commitment to social issues, political consciousness and street photography, three key elements in his conceptual photographic experience. This work also shows a clear connection to the artist’s early work as well as the evolution of his subject matter.

In the early middle of first decade of this millennia Abdu’Allah found himself photographing visual residue and what he calls “deception images”. These images, not readily identifiable as belonging to any environment experienced before by the artist instead gave him license to explore the manner in which memories could be used to create images that evoke a sense of distrust similar to that experienced in London during the period of racial unrest and the uprising of Afro-British population in the 1980’s.

These photographs rely in specific type of images and strategy produced analogically. Taking the images surreptitiously walking through the city with a medium format camera allow Abdu'Allah to record his subjects, the un-posed faces of the city's inhabitants, the unbearable mark of nature as metaphor for political ineptitude and human resilience. A similar tradition started with Walker Evans's *Subway Passengers* made on New York City underground trains in the 1930's, although instead of using small hidden cameras, Abdu'Allah approached his subjects with the subjects' knowledge, allowing his self expression to align with a subject's right to chose their own images.

They are a clear example of the manner in which Abdu'Allah defines photography as not just a means of 'making images of things we see with our eyes' as Socrates used to describe painting. Like Socrates, the main question Abdu'Allah raises transcends the realm of the visible, however, Abdu'Allah explores this in an opposite direction from Socrates whose main concern was the disposition of the soul a means to express emotions and represent human passion. Abdu'Allah instead assumes direct contact between such disposition and the photographic form and uses this connection to excite certain social awareness and engender political engagement.

***The Browning of Britannia*** (2008)

The focal point of Abdu'Allah's immersive installation is the central column showing a looped film of Ago Piero Ajano on four small screens, the front, side and rear view shots creating a full 360 degree portrait. Seated against a white background, he is motionless apart from one moment when he wipes his face with a red handkerchief.  He sits andseemingly waits to be filmed and by the work's existence. to be heard and perhaps,vindicated also. The surrounding screens that feature the testimony of other individualswho have met Ajano and their understanding of his case signifies both Ajano's hidden personal history and his public situation; he is used to others speaking for and about him. Abdu'Allah's configuration of the installation
suggests that Ajano's twitching bodyseems on occasion, a response to the account of his surrounding speakers even though each film was produced as a discrete entity, lending to the pathos of the narrative.

The pedigree of any royal family is subject to close scrutiny and the British royal family is no exception. From marriage with an American divorcee to dubious links with German fascists, much care has been taken to ensure that the nobility of the royal line is not tarnished by unsuitable affairs or unsavory politics. In a commission made for the BFI in 2008, Abdu'Allah presents a multi-screen video installation on Ago Piero Ajano, a seemingly unlikely claimant to the title of HRH (His Royal Highness). Prince Ajano is purportedly the direct descendent (son) of King Edward VIII, King George VI or Lord Louis Mountbatten. Ajano asserts that the British monarchy subsidized his living costs for many years until the 1990s when his income was curtailed. At time of Abdu'Allah's film, Ajano lives a relatively penniless existence in state-funded housing and his claim toany royal connection seemingly obscured.

Browning of Britannia refuses to confirm or refute the royal identity of Ajano and the viewer is cast is a disorientating position
between Ajano sitting peacefully, though a little anxiously as the handkerchief used by him suggests, and the assumed "true testimony"of witnesses to Ajano's situation. Ajano remains suspended in a liminal space between fact and fiction; he sits, helplessly, dependent upon some higher authority to accept or reject his "real" identity. The sense of disorientation and incompletion is increased by mock television-style interviews featuring individuals whose identity is confirmed by

accompanying captions – Ajano's significantly is not. The editing using images and sounds that occasionally stagger and jump cut emphasize the fragmented evidence upon which the viewer must base their judgment of a real or an assumed identity of a frail, elderly man.

**Live Salon**

Abdu'Allah's barber shop seems no different from any other in London. Men, both young and old wander in, chat about Premier League football, offload their troubles about love and life, flick through newspaper tabloids and challenge each other to games on PlayStation. Glancing in the mirror, they shake hands and leave with hair slick, sharp and shorn. The shelves are stocked with hair gel and the walls advertise local boxing matches. Abdu'Allah's studio is located below the barber shop floor and when he is not cutting hair with his fellow barbers, he works downstairs with the babble of the high street trickling down. That his art studio sits so close to his secondary trade as a barber is fitting for Abdu'Allah is an artist whose practice is engaged not just with the creation of artworks, but with the fostering and critique of community. Spend just two minutes in the shop and you'll see boys asking for the latest styles, locals debating neighborhood politics and the familiar banter of both strangers and friends. Beyond any cliché about brotherhood and belonging, community with all of its contradictions surrounds you.

Abdu'Allah's performance piece, Live Salon first performed at the Hayward Gallery, as part of the British Art Show in 2006 and more recently at Tate Britain in 2010, cannot be understood without recourse to understanding the barber's traditional terrain. By setting up his barber chair in the midst of an art gallery and inviting people have their hair cut, Abdu'Allah disarms the typical stance of an exhibition visitor. A male visitor takes his seat in the chair, and Abdu'Allah begins, asking how his day has been, what he's doing later and whether he or anyone watching has any questions. The World Cup surfaces as does the British weather inevitably, and questions about Abdu'Allah's art practice crop up alongside those probing his thoughts on love. To the latter Abdu'Allah laughs, wielding his clippers, and saying, 'Well, my wife will be here soon so we'll just have to wait for her!' He jokes about the occasional less successful haircut he's performed and what it means to be a young, British artist of Jamaican origin.

There are a predictable slew of questions about race, about Abdu'Allah's relationship to Black art and his own experiences with the art establishment. When it comes to the cutting and cultivation of hair, questions of race are perhaps to be expected since, as Kobena Mercer wrote in 1987, the stylization of black hair became a particularly politicized act over the course of the twentieth century. Mercer's article is important in this context less for its explication of racial politics and more for its exploration of hair as a socialized, artistic medium. As Mercer highlights, the cultivation of hair is a means offoregrounding difference and the individual as well as collectivity and belonging. Naturally by extension, the salon is a critical space in which hair is 'shaped and reshaped by [both] social convention and symbolic intervention.'

As with all of Abdu'Allah's works, to focus on questions of racialized identity is far too restrictive. The politics of Live Salon are more complexly involved with class, gender and commerce as much as race and with craftsmanship as much as aesthetics. With Live Salon Abdu'Allah transports a barber shop that is rooted in the West Indian community of Harlesden into the white cube of an art gallery. In doing so he collapses the elitism of the art world conversation with everyday gossip of a North London salon, subverting a space that otherwise exists in separation from everyday public life, contrasting the norms of everyday life with those within a gallery space. Screens showing examples of Abdu'Allah's works flank the barber chair and a laptop hooked up to speakers emit a playlist of his favorite music. We are spectators and participants, challenged to question, to confront the artist at work and to even provide the physical medium for his practice.

Live Salon also compromises the intimate relationship between customer and barber, the close conversation between two men that is inherent in the unquestionably masculine zone of interaction on the barbershop floor. As Abdu'Allah has stated, the emotional baggage that he acquires in a day of haircutting far outweighs the sweat of cutting hair. In the gallery space such emotional baggage is suppressed yet the familiarity of the barber chair, Abdu'Allah's deliberately casual conversation, his easy manner and the democracy of the participatory performance enables people to liberate themselves from the behavioral norms of an art gallery. Chat and laughter are encouraged as are provocative questions about why and how such a performance can be art.

‘Live Salon’ is exactly as its title states, live, present and productive, an unscripted salon of cutting and critique.