

**HOW DID THEY COME TO EUROPE?
WHY WERE THEY PORTRAYED?
WERE THEY TRULY ALL SERVANTS AND SLAVES?**



**IF THE BLACK FACES PORTRAYED IN THESE
RENAISSANCE MASTERPIECES COULD SPEAK,
WHAT WOULD THEY TELL US?**

WE WERE HERE

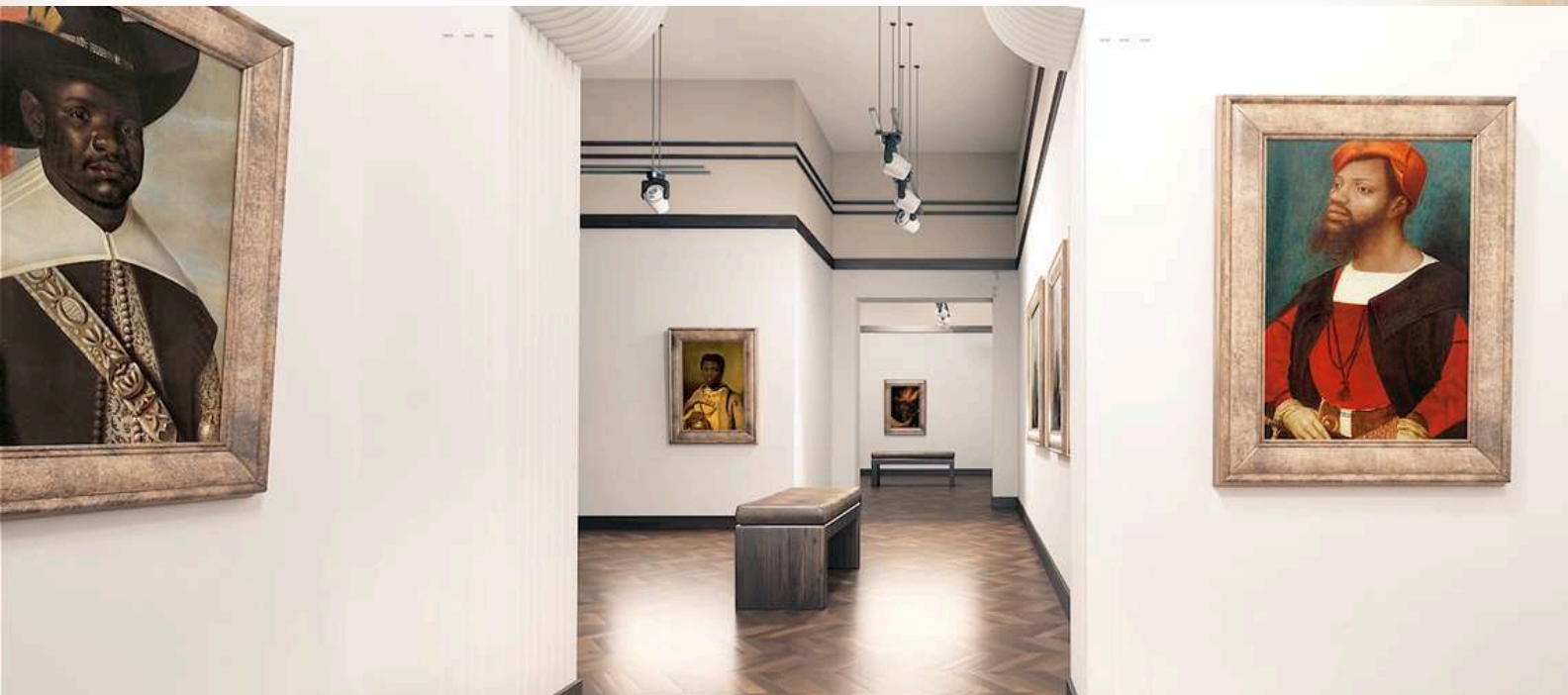
THE UNTOLD HISTORY OF BLACK
AFRICANS IN RENAISSANCE EUROPE

Official Selection -
60th International Art Exhibition, **La Biennale di Venezia**
Director: Fred Kudjo Kuwornu



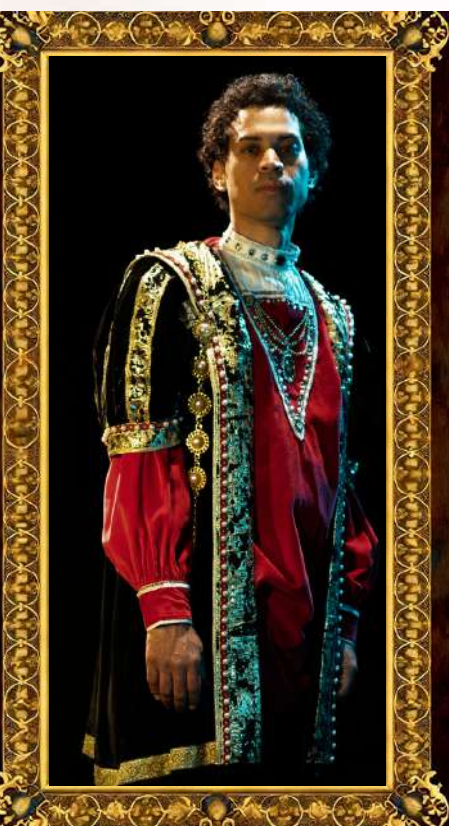
Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Fred Kudjo Kuwornu and produced by Do The Right Films, this multilingual journey spans the UK, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and France, offering a fresh perspective on European art history and cultural heritage. The documentary features interviews with prominent worldwide scholars of Art History, History, and Black Studies, as well as Black activists and Art Curators, providing a comprehensive and nuanced view of this under-explored aspect of European history.

SYNOPSIS



"We Were Here" uncovers the hidden presence of African and Black individuals in Renaissance Europe, revealing their representation in masterpieces by iconic artists of the time. How did they come to Europe? Why were they portrayed? Were they all servants and slaves? The film challenges the conventional narrative that has long overlooked their significance in the works of these celebrated Renaissance masters, telling the unknown exceptional stories of African-Europeans who were princes, ambassadors, saints, artists, professors, and knights.

FROM DUKE TO ARTIST: **BLACK EXCELLENCE** IN RENAISSANCE EUROPE



Alexander de Medici

The Duke of Florence: The first Black head of state in modern Western history, Alexander was the illegitimate son of Lorenzo II de' Medici and an African slave. He ruled Florence from 1531 to 1537.



João de Sá Panasco

A 16th-century African knight and nobleman, João de Sá Panasco served in the Portuguese court and was a member of the prestigious Order of Saint James.



Ambassador Ne Vunda

A 16th-century African diplomat who served as an ambassador from the Kingdom of Kongo to Portugal and the Vatican, playing a crucial role in diplomatic relations between Africa and Europe.

"We Were Here" highlights the erasures of history that feed nationalist politics today by recovering the presence of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe

-- **Ocula Magazine**



Saint Benedict the Moor

Born to African slaves in Sicily, he became a Franciscan friar known for his piety and miracles. He was canonized in 1807 and is considered the patron saint of African enslaved in the Americas.



Juan Latino

Born a slave in Granada, Spain, he became a renowned scholar and poet, eventually becoming a professor of Latin at the University of Granada in the 16th century.



Juan de Pareja

A Spanish painter of African descent who was initially a slave and assistant to Diego Velázquez before gaining his freedom and becoming a notable artist in his own right.

DO THE
RIGHT
FILMS

UNVEILING FORGOTTEN LIVES



"PORTRAIT OF AN AFRICAN WOMAN"
BY ANNIBALE CARRACCI (1560) PRIVATE COLLECTION



A SCENE FROM "WE WERE HERE"



"THE KITCHEN MAID" BY DIEGO VÉLAZQUEZ (1618) ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

"We Were Here" masterfully interweaves reenactment scenes inspired by the most celebrated Renaissance paintings of Velázquez, Carpaccio, Mantegna and others. These meticulously crafted reenactments serve as powerful narrative devices, enabling the long-silenced Black figures to recount their true stories.

As these subjects come alive, they reveal the complex tapestry of their identities, challenging conventional historical narratives and offering viewers a window into the authentic lives and experiences of Black individuals in Renaissance Europe



A SCENE FROM "WE WERE HERE"

DIRECTOR



Fred Kudjo Kuwornu is a multi-hyphenate socially engaged artist and scholar whose work is deeply influenced by his background as a person of African descent. Born and raised in Italy, Kuwornu is based in New York. His unique background is reflected in his triple citizenship, holding Italian, Ghanaian, and U.S. passports.

By consistently bridging *past* and *present*, *seen* and *unseen*, *hegemonic* and *subaltern*, Kuwornu's practice emerges as a vital contribution to contemporary visual culture, understanding the complex interplay between history, identity, race, and representation in our globalized world.

Kuwornu's curatorial vision can be understood as a form of *historical remixing* in which he reconfigures archival materials and contemporary narratives to enlighten a rethinking of perspectives

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



I was born and raised in Europe, yet throughout my school years, I never saw myself reflected in our history lessons. The only mention of Black people came in the context of the slave trade, and when we studied the Renaissance, there were no stories or images of African descent in our textbooks. Discussions about Black people in the 15th and 16th centuries typically focus solely on their condition as enslaved individuals, overlooking the remarkable figures who lived in Europe during that time. This film aims to empower the Black diaspora by highlighting their presence as an integral part of Renaissance Europe's societal fabric. It seeks to address the gaps in our historical education and challenge the narrow narrative that has long shaped our understanding of this period

---Fred Kudjo Kuwornu.

PRODUCTION DETAILS

Year: 2024

Shooting Format: Red Komodo 6K

Aspect Ratio: 2.35:1

Film Color: Color

Audio: Stereo

Languages: French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Dutch with English subtitles

Shooting Locations: Rome, Venice, Florence, Palermo, Paris, London,
Amsterdam, Seville, Granada, Madrid, Lisbon, Lagos, Rio de Janeiro

Produced by Do The Right Films

DOP: Luigi Benvisto (AIC)

Edited by: Fred Kuwornu and Luigi Benvisto

Producer: Fred Kudjo Kuwornu, Lorenzo Fabbri, Peter Boateng Manu

with the support of:

Africa No Filter, OSF, University of Minnesota

and the collaboration of Cantieri Meticci



SCREENINGS DISTRIBUTION

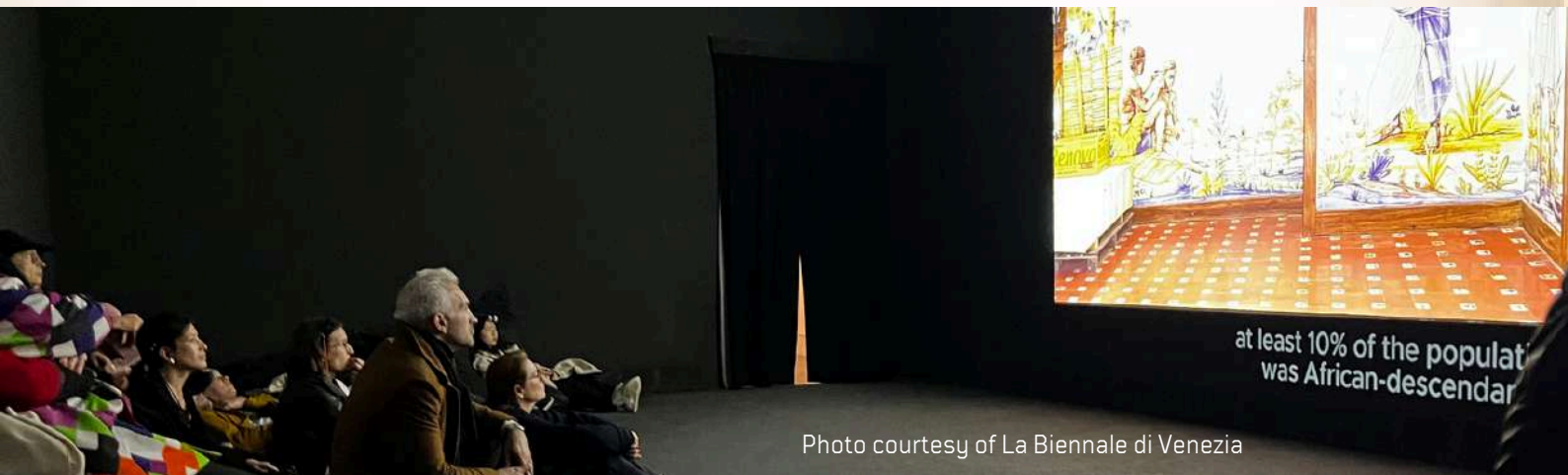


Photo courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia

"We Were Here" is currently showcasing at the 60th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia in the Central Pavilion, curated by Adriano Pedrosa, until November 24th, 2024. The film, after its exclusive premiere at the Venice Art Biennale, is set for a 2025 global release. Its hybrid distribution plan includes a worldwide tour of exhibitions. Museums, cultural hubs, and film festivals across the globe will host these showcase.

[Link La Biennale Venezia](#)

UNTOLD STORIES

DO THE RIGHT FILMS

Do The Right Films, founded in New York in 2013, produces award-winning documentaries, film showcases and exhibitions that expose injustice, illuminate the power of community and tell a history seldom told. Kuwornu named his production company Do The Right Films as a nod to Lee's influential 1989 film *Do the Right Thing*. This suggests a shared commitment to using visual story-telling as a tool for social change and challenging injustice.

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