



confrontation (did you get me?)



between the boundary (tread the boards)



panopticon (pasture)



confrontation (hold fast)



walk away (back talk)



scanning (camouflage)

Rhea Storr

Uncommon Observations: The Ground that Moves Us

July 2022 – June 2023

Art on the Underground presents 'Uncommon Observations: The Ground that Moves Us' a new multi-site artwork by London based artist Rhea Storr. A series of photographs presented as captioned film strips exhibited in four Underground stations across London, Stratford, Bethnal Green, Notting Hill Gate and Heathrow Terminal 4.

Rhea Storr's work questions the production and circulation of images of Black subjects. How can an image share knowledge? How might it call community together? How can an image challenge or confront its audience? Can it be a projection of joy and liberation?

This new work uses Aerochrome film, an outdated form of military surveillance photography, its use transformed into experimental openness. The photoshoot, with artist Jade Blackstock, played with who is looking at who, who is visible and who is in control of the image capture.

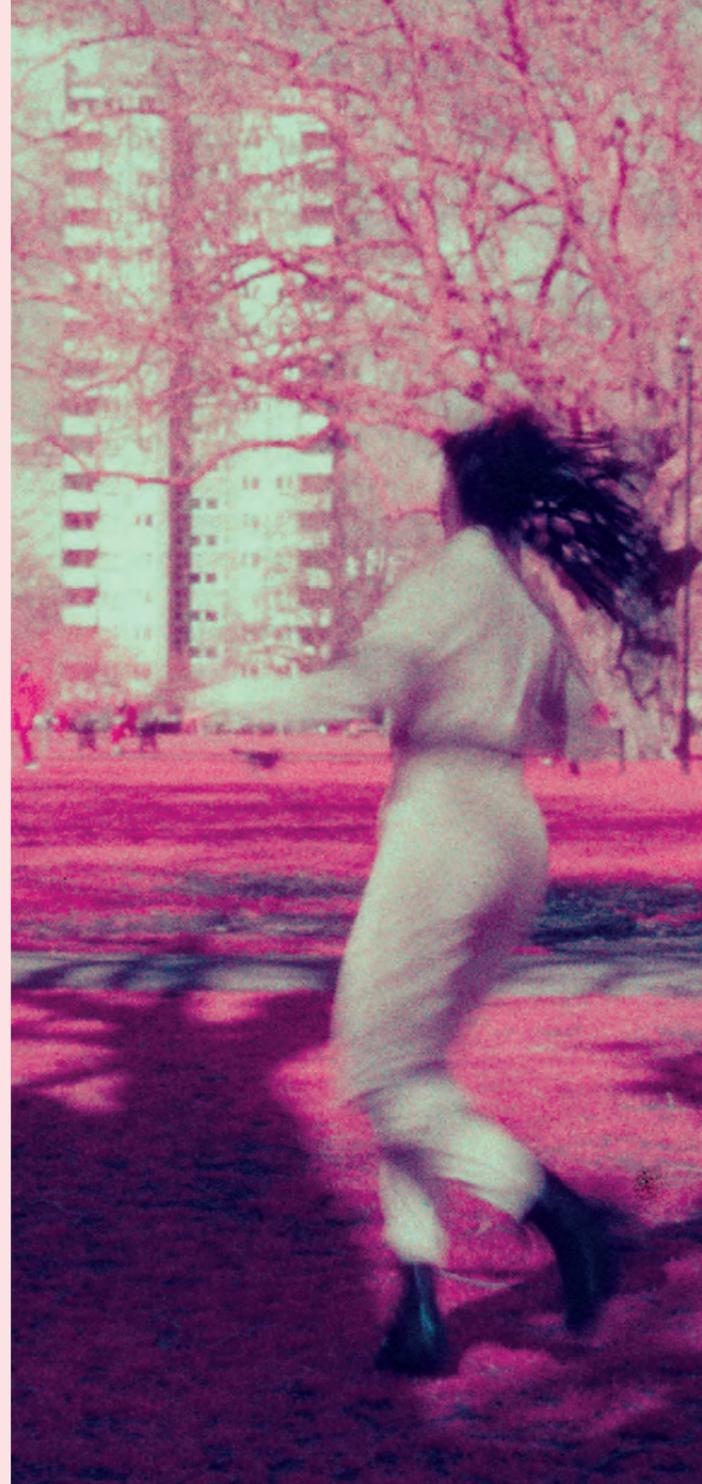
Running parallel to the photoshoot, Storr spoke with London Underground station staff asking what they notice about people. How does race, visibility or dress affect the way that they move around the Underground? These exchanges informed the image captions which read like stills from a film.

As we move past these static photographs, along passageways, escalators and through ticket halls, we experience the artworks as if in motion, never fixed or still.

A related reading list

A list of texts and references that have inspired Rhea Storr's work for Art on the Underground:

- Ian Beesley, *Grafters: Industrial Society in Image and Word*, 2016
- Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, 2015.
- Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images*, 2017.
- Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, 2013.
- Nehal El-Hadi, *On the Implications of Surveillance and Digital Reproduction*, 2022.
- Nehal El-Hadi, *Faces of Histories*, 2021.
- Patricia Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, 1990.
- bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 1992.
- Jade Montserrat, *A Reimagining of Relations*, 2021.
- Yvette Gresle, *Oversaturated: the problem with Richard Mosse's photography*, 2014.
- Film stock review: *Kodak AEROCHROME III color infrared film*, 2015.



To whom it may concern (From one Black subject to another)

'What follows are a series of counter-surveillance photographs. Or rather, a consideration of surveillance as it is intertwined with the history of Black life. As we move in a diaspora never to return, exiled, fugitive, privileged or free (perhaps), what are the means by which we can resist a gaze which seeks to hold us, to capture? How do we return the gaze as subjects and not objects of an image? Evasion from the hold requires of us constant movement. It requires us to navigate every which unexpected way through and out the other side, to walk the line between the commons and the under, to twist our tongues in a language of image making which does not fix or hold the Black body but witnesses the life of the Black subject, eye to eye. Surveillance from the ground.

To find common ground is to see from eye to eye. Historically the rights of the commoners included the ability to put animals to pasture, collect peat (for fuel), collect gravel, coal or fish. Today our concerns for common land relate more to leisure than to sustenance. I hope that you can see the generous and inquisitive spirit of play between me, behind the camera and Jade Blackstock, the performer. Many of the commons I have visited -those calm green patches of Earth often encircled by busy London roads – were used during the Second World War for military purposes. It is no accident that the film I am using, Kodak's Aerochrome, was used for the purposes of war to identify people among vast swathes of green land, by turning only the grassland a sickly pink and leaving their bodies untouched. The intentions for the use of common land and Aerochrome film intertwine; one a wartime space from which to surveil the sky and the other a film whose surface surveils soldiers on the ground. When does safety, nurture and care sour into categorisation, incarceration and control? Policing for

the purposes of care and safety often co-exists with control and incarceration. The history of surveillance too is racialised; passes, tags and the meticulous documentation of the Black body were all used to control the enslaved. To be safe and outside for Black subjects today is a basic right and yet still contested through errant policing which aims to restrain, control and harm Black life.

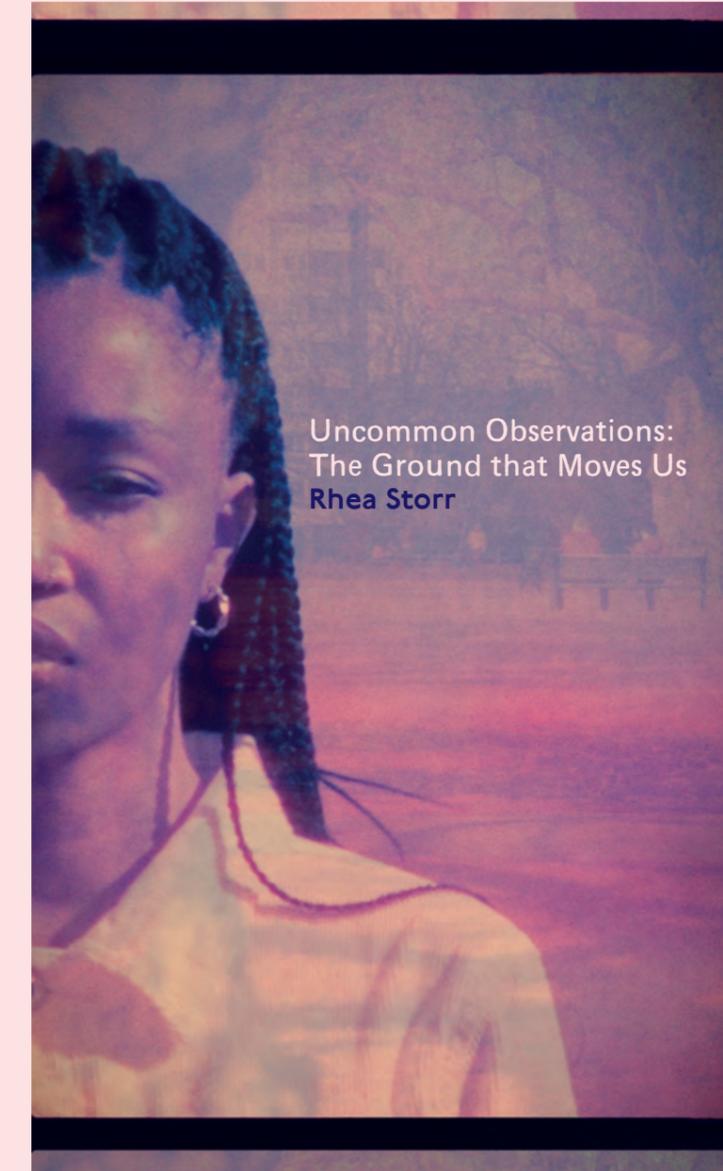
Surveillance is not without affect. It structures the way that we carry ourselves, it holds us, protects us, restricts us and gives us permission to occupy space. It deters us from certain behaviours simply through its presence. I can't help but catch feelings under these conditions. Surveillance is always and forever personal, affecting and emotional. How can we harness control, both emotionally and bodily over these flying eyes? In these photographs I have observed a subject on the ground who often moves herself faster than the film is able to surveil. By doing so she enacts a language of refusal, a strategy for counter-surveillance, a swift and deft ability to move in the face of a camera, visibility but not capture and confrontation without subordination. I want to make images where the control over image of a Black subject might be taken away from the photographer, even if it is still at the insistence of the photographer herself. I want a New Black Aesthetic movement for the watcher and the observed who are always neither one nor the other. When is looking / looked at, observing / observed, surveilling / surveilled and holding / moved free ever an even dynamic between two bodies? I am so very grateful to all of the TfL staff who took time out of their day to allow me to observe them and who shared with me their own observances. I hope that by looking you are also in some way moved.'

– Rhea Storr, 2022

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Design by HATO

ART ON THE UNDERGROUND



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The Ground that Moves Us
Rhea Storr

MAYOR
OF LONDON

TRANSPORT
FOR LONDON
EVERY JOURNEY MATTERS