

Barby Asante
Declaration of Independence
September 2023 – January 2025



'Declaration of Independence' is a project from Art on the Underground. This multi-site artwork by London-based artist Barby Asante can be found at Stratford, Bethnal Green and Notting Hill Tube stations. 'Declaration of Independence' was launched in September 2023 with a collective performance at Stratford Tube station.



Barby's 'Declaration' workshops have been engaging and diverse because you really got to reflect on yourself as an individual outside of your home and work.

Joyce Bosa

We are the ones who came together to notice, share, and write together. The lines written overleaf have arrived here on this page through reflections on everyday journeys and journeys made by those who came before us. The conversation has moved and moved us through space and time. Our noticing has travelled above and below ground, and across generations, and along map lines that connect this city with the stories of its making. This map is an intergenerational poetic; an invitation to notice; a deep weave signalling in every direction; evidence of interdependence everywhen, everywhere.

Together we have reorganised lines to form circles. Our right-angled triangles have transformed scalene ones into isosceles triangles. Greek iso (same) skelos (leg). We are the same leg. We are the same seed from which many possibilities grow.

The words presented here weave, wind, reshape and reimagine a liveable world for Black and of colour women and non-binary folk. These words connect with the words of the over one hundred others making lives in many places, who have been involved in the 'Declaration of Independence' project since 2017. We are the intersecting spirals that travel across time and space. We are unsettled and unsettling. Always arriving, trying to find place, offering our contribution. Declaring and determining ourselves, transforming the world through our interdependent presence.

Barby & Foluke



'Declaration of Independence' reflects on how declarations, policies and legislations impact our everyday lives. The ongoing project, by London-based artist Barby Asante, brings together women and non-binary people of colour and acknowledges how they are often at the forefront of struggles for equity and social justice.

For this iteration of the work, Art on the Underground invited Asante to collaborate with Transport for London (TfL) employees in a series of workshops where they produced a collective script for a new 'Declaration of Independence' performance at Stratford Tube station.

This collaborative, performative and dialogic work will be Asante's first major commission in public space and centres TfL employees through a collective process of sharing and learning. A recurrent form and key concept within the work is the circle, as drawn from West African communing traditions. Asante's circle provides space for dialogue amongst the performers and audiences, to commune, witness, share knowledge, and imagine futures that foreground equity and social justice. By telling their stories, and sharing experiences through performance, the work explores the potential to question existing dominant narratives, reflecting on how the political affects the personal.

As part of this new commission, Asante spent time in the photography archives at the London Transport Museum finding images of women of colour at work in different roles across TfL's history. These found images, including those employed by London Transport's direct recruitment in Barbados in 1956, became a part of the group's collective process, adding to individual narratives and enriching the artwork's examination of postcolonial and migration histories.

Credits:

Alexis Bailey
Baby Blue
Barby Asante
Carolyn Greene
Chiron Choir
Elizabeth Asante
Foluke Taylor
Gail Lewis
Hannah Catherine Jones
Ijeoma Fenton-Agu
InnaVisions
Jessica Richardson
Joyce Bosa
Joyce Treasure
Kathleen Adeniran
Kristel Tracey
Michelle Awosusi
Nancy Naa-Adjeley Sackey
Safia Sharif
Shirin Razavian
Tenesha Newman

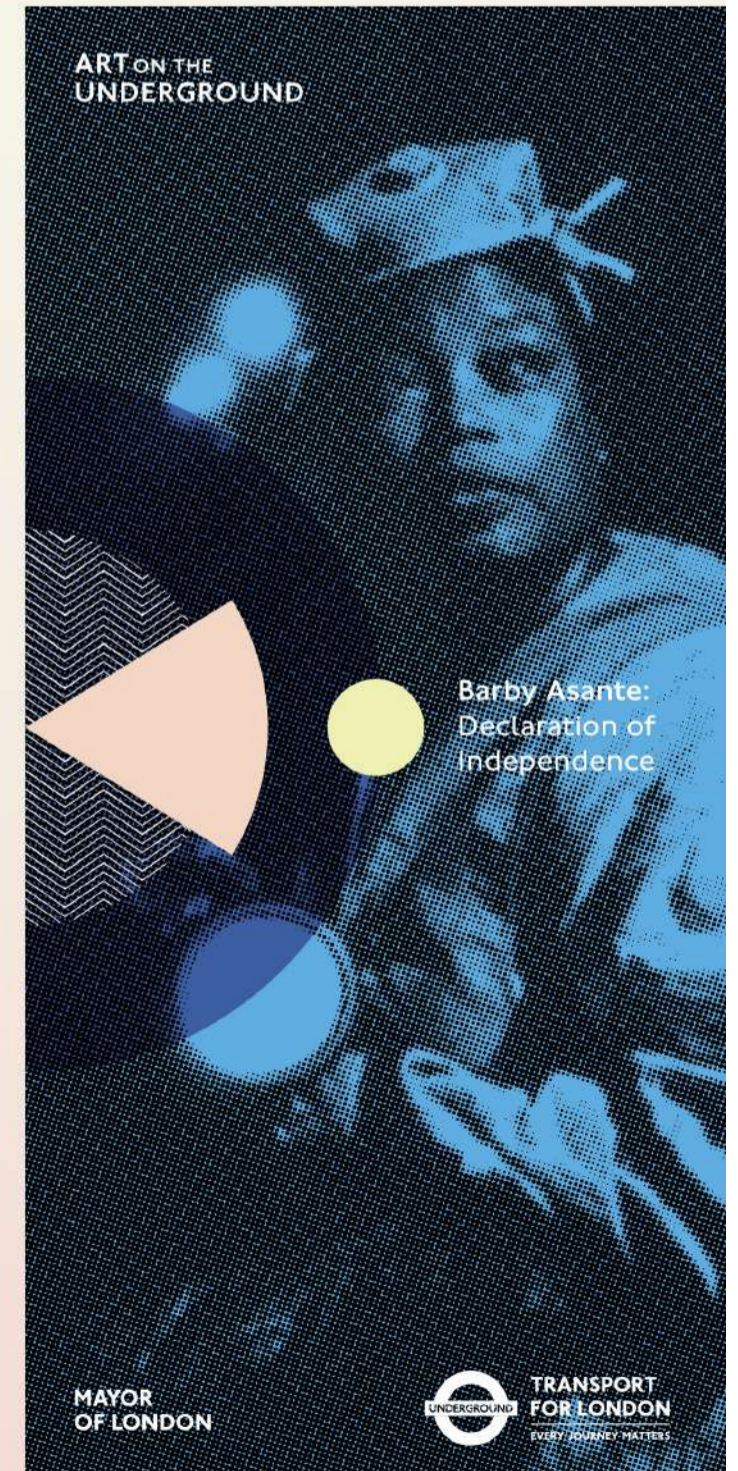
Archive images
© TfL from the London Transport Museum collection.

Artwork images
© Barby Asante and InnaVisions

The archive images can be seen in the three large-scale visual artworks installed at Stratford, Bethnal Green and Notting Hill Green Tube stations. Produced on vinyl, the archive images are set within brightly coloured interconnected shapes and lines, forming new speculative constellations and communicating ideas about histories and futures in a collective voice. Central to this artwork is the development of ways to create and occupy space; installed within touching distance alongside station escalators, and above the Stratford Tube station ticket hall, the previously personal and intimate 'Declaration' is propelled onto the public stage.

Together, the newly written and performed declaration and station artworks foreground Black diaspora narratives of non-binary people and women. The work specifically highlights the histories and divisions of labour that have impacted these narratives, capturing the scale and value of this work to London. 'Declaration' retells stories of domestic and workplace labour connecting these to wider histories of migration as a legacy of colonialism. The performance demonstrates the importance of collective thinking; by holding public space 'Declaration' gives voice to personal narratives and shapes future intentions.

For more information visit: art.tfl.gov.uk



Design by HATO

Alexis
I am just me
Please do not speak to me like that,
I am here to assist you
I am just me
Apologies that you were given the wrong directions
I am just me

Carolyn
Let's know and find out more
Of what lies beyond this map
The stories, the tears, the fears
Struggles, fight, history.

Ijeoma
Emerged from the underground,
I'm now those I once observed.
Above ground I'm overshadowed by snowy peaks.
The efforts for better representation - We've heard.
Does this place reflect the city we serve?

Joyce
I have developed a creative way of thinking
when expressing myself through writing.

Kristel
A likkle bit of this and a likkle bit of that.
I try to write down the steps but she refuses to be bound
by written recipes and the imperial measurement system.

Kathleen
He visited me in a vision
And drew me a map

Carolyn
Is White City really white?
Wood Lane made of wood?

Nancy
We come together to understand
and notice our surroundings.
To form complex bonds as we navigate
and vividly paint our new journeys.

Tenesha
OMG I'm resisting the urge to pat my head to itch
my ROOTS, and get distracted by seeing a familiar
face smiling on the platform while on ROUTE.

Safia
Trying to find a spot to stand that's not so tight
Headphones in my ear, but still aware
Children and adults that love to stare

Tenesha
The train makes a harsh BRAKE
I stumble but don't drop
I just about manage to prevent any of
my beloved acrylic nails from BREAK-ing.

Michelle
Listen to the rhythm of the chaos,
let it find you.
My mind migrates to the ignorant bliss of customers
before us and the staff in front of them.
I ask myself where are you really from,
where are you really going?

Shirin
Something leads me east

Ijeoma
In all, I am still my ancestors dream.

Kristel
My grandmother,
My umbilical connection
to the land of wood and water.
Who will keep me rooted
when you're gone?
Cast adrift in Babylon.

Shirin
I am not just a woman, mother,
sister or daughter
I am the love and hard work that
keeps everything going

Safia
I want to be ahead of you, not so you
can walk the path I make for you,
but to be able to see the dangers ahead
so that you don't have to experience
any pain or downfalls.

Shirin
I am the sweat on the brow
that puts bread on the table
I am a ray of sunshine and a rain cloud
that keeps the crops growing
I am not the lines on my face or
the silver strands in my hair

Alexis
I am just me
Safia
I want to be able to love like
I've never been hurt before.

Michelle
Interrupted by the sweet whistle of the birds -
Can you hear them too?

Shirin
My skull blossoms in violet, purple, blue.

Kathleen
A taste of rest
Ijeoma

Not everyone gets to choose the life they live
As the West Indians were brought over

Nancy
Crossing over the seas and imaginary limits
Carolyn

What we see to what we don't
From train buffers to night fluffers
There's more than meets the eye
Than just a stop on a line.

Ijeoma
Us African and Caribbeans are
ploughing through

Kristel
They called it the Commonwealth
But there was nothing common
about that wealth.

Alexis
Where am I going wrong,
what did I do to upset people today?

Elizabeth
Well, if the trains are late
They pour it on us.

Tenesha
My nostrils fill with everything
EXCEPT my expensive floral perfume
The overwhelming smell of B.O
I just can't ACCEPT.

Annoyingly, beads of sweat turn
my smooth baby hairs COARSE
As the train runs its repetitive COURSE.

Kathleen
The weight on my shoulders
The wait.....

Michelle
Finding comfort in the stillness,
The whistle of the waves
closing in on the shore

Safia
I made it, a sigh of relief
Relaxed shoulders and unclenched teeth
Tomorrow I'll wake up earlier, is all I can say
Even though it will probably be the same as today

Safia
I want to protect and be protected,
to feel safe and secure.
I want to start our journey and
create our own happy ever after.

Shirin
I bathe in its vibrant colours

Kathleen
New names, new beginnings
New stories, new singings

Alexis
Apologies that you were given
the wrong directions

Ijeoma
I know the power my choice
wields and that alone is a
Declaration of Independence.

