

Exhibition Guide

Grace Ndiritu *The Nightingale*

This powerful new video by British artist Grace Ndiritu explores issues of racial stereotyping, identity and miscommunication.

Originally based on a story of unrequited love – the title refers to the bird famous for its beautiful, sad song – it focuses on the global separation and disconnection between the East and West.

The beginning of the video is peaceful and serene, showing Ndiritu slowly moving a cloth that covers her head and shoulders, to reveal her face, her eyes closed. The soft African music suddenly changes as the artist becomes animated, with her eyes wide open, concentrating on the viewer. She twists, wraps and folds the fabric in a sequence of simple movements to transform her appearance. Each action reveals another identity, the versatile fabric playing the role of blindfold, hajib, headscarf, burka, veil, bandanna, purdah, gag and turban; portraying an assortment of cultures. The final sequence of the video consists simply of birds in flight, literally above human politics, suggesting freedom from cultural labelling.

The Nightingale is both joyful and unsettling. It provides the viewer with a sense of triumph and celebration, despite tackling a complex and difficult subject.