

The Courtauld

Press Release

Friday 1 December 2023

THE COURTAULD ACQUIRES MAJOR NEW WORK BY CLAUDETTE JOHNSON – *BLUES DANCE*

- *Blues Dance* is currently on display as part of Claudette Johnson's solo-exhibition at The Courtauld Gallery, until 14 January 2024
- This remarkable work will be a significant addition to The Courtauld's renowned collection, which ranges from the Renaissance to the contemporary
- The acquisition has been made possible through funding from the Garcia Family Foundation and the Samuel Courtauld Trust



Claudette Johnson, *Blues Dance*, 2023, pastel, watercolour and gouache on paper, 183 x 122cm
© Claudette Johnson. Image courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London Photo: Andy Keate

Download image: <https://tinyurl.com/mvxfuyxf>

The Courtauld Gallery (Samuel Courtauld Trust) has acquired *Blues Dance*, 2023, by British artist Claudette Johnson (born 1959), one of the leading figures of the Black British Arts Movement.

Blues Dance was created especially for The Courtauld's current major exhibition, *Claudette Johnson: Presence*, on display in its Denise Coates Exhibition Galleries until 14 January 2024, presenting a selection of Johnson's larger-than-life drawings of Black women and men from across her career.

Claudette Johnson, said: "I am honoured that *Blues Dance* will be entering The Courtauld collection after being shown for the first time at the Courtauld Gallery. I'm excited about visitors going from seeing a Gauguin, a Manet or a Vanessa Bell to my work. It's good to know that there will be another story being told about women, Black women and Black people that will encourage questions about the stories that prevail within the canon of Western art history."

Blues Dance is a remarkable example of Johnson's epically scaled works on paper. A powerful but nuanced depiction of a Black woman dancing, it reflects the significance of music within the artist's practice. The figure of a woman swaying to a beat is inspired by a photograph that resonated with Johnson. *Blues Dance* is imbued with her own memories of being part of the Blue Beat reggae dance scene in the 1980s, when dances were often held in people's homes, as well as referring to the great tradition of Blues music. The title also picks up the colour of the woman's dress, painted with the aim, as Johnson has remarked, 'to make the blues move in the work.' The drawing conveys the feeling of a woman being at one with herself, fully absorbed in the music and moving to her own beat.

Ernst Vegelin, Head of The Courtauld Gallery said: "*Blues Dance* will be a major contemporary addition to The Courtauld's holdings. It resonates strongly with earlier drawings and paintings in the collection as well as being a significant part of our efforts to build the representation of contemporary art at The Courtauld."

One of the most significant figurative artists of her generation, Johnson creates drawings of Black women and men that are at once intimate and powerful. For over 30 years she has consistently pushed herself to create the most authentic renderings of her sitters, addressing both Black bodies and interior lives and lending them a profound sense of presence.

Working in a variety of media, from monochrome works in dark pastel to vast sheets brightly coloured in vibrant gouache and watercolour, combined with a dramatic use of pose, gaze, and scale, her distinctive drawings of friends, relatives, and often herself seek, as the artist puts it, "to tell a different story about our presence in this country".

Johnson came to prominence in the 1980s as an art student in Wolverhampton, starting her career as part of the newly formed BLK Art Group, and became a pioneer of Black British feminism in the visual arts.

The exhibition at The Courtauld is the first monographic show of Johnson's work at a major public gallery in London.

Blues Dance is available exclusively to purchase as a custom print and canvas from The Courtauld Shop for the duration of the exhibition. <https://shop.courtauld.ac.uk/collections/claurette-johnson-presence/products/pod1049609>

A limited edition print, *Oil Sketch*, 2019, has also been developed in partnership with Claudette Johnson, to celebrate her landmark exhibition at The Courtauld Gallery. <https://shop.courtauld.ac.uk/collections/claurette-johnson-presence/products/limited-edition-claurette-johnson-self-study>

Claudette Johnson: Presence
Until 14 Jan 2024

The Courtauld Gallery Somerset House, Strand London WC2R 0RN

Opening hours: 10.00 – 18.00 (last entry 17.15)

Temporary Exhibition tickets (including entry to our Permanent Collection) – Weekday tickets from £13; Weekend tickets from £15.

Friends and Under-18s go free. Other concessions available

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About The Courtauld

The Courtauld works to advance how we see and understand the visual arts, as an internationally-renowned centre for the teaching and research of art history and a major public gallery. Founded by collectors and philanthropists in 1932, the organisation has been at the forefront of the study of art ever since. through advanced research and conservation practice, innovative teaching, the renowned collection and inspiring exhibitions of its gallery, and engaging and accessible activities, education and events.

The Courtauld cares for one of the greatest art collections in the UK, presenting these works to the public at The Courtauld Gallery in central London, as well as through loans and partnerships. The Gallery is most famous for its iconic Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces – such as Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* and Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. It showcases these alongside an internationally renowned collection of works from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance through to the present day.

Academically, The Courtauld faculty is the largest community of art historians and conservators in the UK, teaching and carrying out research on subjects from creativity in late Antiquity to contemporary digital artforms - with an increasingly global focus. An independent college of the University of London, The Courtauld offers a range of degree programmes from BA to PhD in the History of Art, curating and the conservation of easel and wall paintings. Its alumni are leaders and innovators in the arts, culture and business worlds, helping to shape the global agenda for the arts and creative industries.

Founded on the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to engage with art, The Courtauld works to increase understanding of the role played by art throughout history, in all societies and across all geographies – as well as being a champion for the importance of art in the present day. This could be through exhibitions offering a chance to look closely at world-famous works; events bringing art history research to new audiences; accessible and expert short courses; digital engagement, innovative school, family and community programmes; or taking a formal qualification. The Courtauld's ambition is to transform access to art history education by extending the horizons of what this is and ensuring as many people as possible can benefit from the tools to better understand the visual world around us.

The Courtauld is an exempt charity and relies on generous philanthropic support to achieve its mission of advancing the understanding of the visual arts of the past and present across the world through advanced research, innovative teaching, inspiring exhibitions, programmes and collections.

The collection cared for by The Courtauld Gallery is owned by the Samuel Courtauld Trust.