

the **Whitworth**

PRESS RELEASE

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Michaela Yearwood-Dan The Practice of Liberation

17 April 2026 – 18 October 2026



The Whitworth announces *The Practice of Liberation*, a new exhibition by acclaimed contemporary artist Michaela Yearwood-Dan (born 1994). For her first UK institutional museum exhibition, the artist presents a major new commission that transforms the gallery into a layered installation shaped by painting, ceramics and sound. The exhibition is organised in collaboration with Towner Eastbourne and Arnolfini in Bristol, who will present the exhibition following its premiere at the Whitworth.

The exhibition, formed entirely of new work, centres on a series of 14 paintings and six ceramic vessels presented within a multidimensional installation designed by the artist and accompanied by a bespoke musical score by composer Alex Gruz.

Drawing on the aesthetics and symbolism of the Catholic church, Yearwood-Dan creates a powerfully resonant space to examine the intersection of the histories of colonialism and institutional religion through the lens of her own memory and experience - reflecting on the ongoing process of personal and collective liberation.

Using the language of abstraction, Yearwood-Dan's paintings incorporate fragments of her own diaristic writing alongside adapted and borrowed texts and lyrics. These words move between intimate and political, appearing at varying scales across the canvases. References to writers such

the Whitworth

as civil rights activist James Baldwin sit alongside the artist's own reflections, inviting the viewer to consider how the personal and the political intersect in new ways.

The exhibition's title references the writings of bell hooks, whose work explores how education, culture, love, and art can become tools for social and personal freedom.

Visual and symbolic references to Catholicism appear both directly and indirectly, alongside the artist's reflections on love, colonialism, patriarchal structures and class systems that have shaped her experience. Rather than presenting liberation as a fixed state, *The Practice of Liberation* explores it as ongoing – grounded in care, introspection and new ways of communing.

At the heart of the exhibition, the 14 paintings echo the motif of the Stations of the Cross - a sequence of devotional images central to Catholicism. Yearwood-Dan adopts this structure as a compositional reference point, with visual motifs throughout the works echoing the religious architecture and symbolism, including fallen crosses and diptych compositions reminiscent of stained-glass windows. The six ceramic vessels reference both Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, and the malleable shapes of Ghanaian *bolga* baskets, evoking domestic comfort and ritual.

The titles of Yearwood-Dan's work convey additional layers of meaning. Within this body of work, the painting *Passio* takes its title from the Latin term meaning suffering and endurance - a spiritual concept historically embedded within Catholic narratives of devotion.

Known for her vibrant and expansive canvases, in this body of work Yearwood-Dan introduces a palette that moves between bold colours and softer, subdued tones. Evoking both faded colours of historic religious paintings, and sun-bleached hues of the Caribbean, the surfaces of her paintings reflect the personal and cultural histories that underpin her practice.

The exhibition embodies the Whitworth's mission to create an open, inspiring and safe space for all, foregrounding community, inclusion and shared experience.

Michaela Yearwood-Dan has rapidly gained international recognition and is widely regarded as a defining voice in contemporary painting. *The Practice of Liberation* marks a pivotal moment in her career, premiering at the Whitworth before touring to Towner in Eastbourne, and Arnolfini in Bristol.

Michaela Yearwood-Dan, artist, said: "This body of work feels like a collation of years of creative and personal exploration; where various facets of my artistic practice have been able to come together to illustrate and actualise an idea of self-liberation. Whilst *The Practice of Liberation* is a concept that encourages a dismantling of oppression, and conscious movement towards freedom and self-transformation, at its core it remains a practice. It's an ongoing dedication to a belief, an idea or goal. It's an invitation to allow oneself to dare to imagine the world differently. My hope for this show is to offer audiences a compassionate space to reflect, ponder and be held. Through my own diaristic offerings, and abstracted lenses of world-blending compositions, I can only hope that visitors to the Whitworth, Towner and Arnolfini are - and if only in the smallest of ways - emboldened to uptake their own Liberation practice and take a moment to pause."

the Whitworth

Olivia Heron, Curator, the Whitworth, said: "We're thrilled to have co-commissioned all new work for Michaela Yearwood-Dan's first institutional show in the UK. Michaela's richly layered practice brings together a wealth of references, inviting us to connect with her work on so many levels. Through her multi-dimensional new body of work, *The Practice of Liberation*, Michaela creates a resonant space devoted to the vital, ongoing processes of memory, reflection, liberation, growth, and healing. I can't wait for our audiences to experience her powerful work at the Whitworth."

Sook-Kyung Lee, Director the Whitworth, said: "Michaela's work reminds us why spaces for reflection, care, and collective joy matter so deeply at the current time. In *The Practice of Liberation*, she reimagines the gallery as a place where people can pause, feel grounded, and consider different ways of being together. This project reflects the Whitworth's commitment to art that is both ambitious and profoundly connected to lived experience, and to working with artists whose voices resonate meaningfully with our communities. We're delighted that the exhibition will continue its journey to Eastbourne and Bristol, reaching new audiences along the way."

Noelle Collins, Exhibitions Curator, Towner Eastbourne, said: "Michaela sets down layers of luscious colour in fluid, almost calligraphic gestures, working freely across immense canvases. There's an immediate sense of vitality that permeates her work, but there's vulnerability too. *The Practice of Liberation* is a deeply personal reflection on Michaela's memories and experiences, not as concise or finite as a reckoning, but an ongoing process of liberation and release from systems of burden. We're proud to bring this powerful new work to Towner audiences."

Gemma Brace, Head of Exhibitions, Arnolfini, said: "We are excited to be sharing Michaela Yearwood-Dan's powerful and meditative work with Arnolfini's audiences. Resonating strongly with our own ethos as an Arts Centre of Sanctuary to create spaces for community, care and belonging, we look forward to embracing Yearwood-Dan's lived experience of self-liberation and to be honouring her invitation to reimagine the world differently."

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

For all press information, images and interview requests please contact: Melissa McFarlane, Communications Manager at whitworthpress@manchester.ac.uk and Emily Gates, Rees & Co Emily.gates@reesandco.com

Credits

The commission and exhibition are co-produced by the Whitworth, The University of Manchester, Towner Eastbourne and Arnolfini in Bristol, where the exhibition will tour in 2026-27. The Whitworth exhibition is curated by Olivia Heron (Curator, the Whitworth), with Vaishna Surjid (Curatorial Assistant, the Whitworth).

Image credit

Michaela Yearwood-Dan, *Passio* (2026) © Michaela Yearwood-Dan Courtesy the artist, Hauser & Wirth and Marianne Boesky Gallery Photographer: Deniz Guzel.

the Whitworth

Listings information

Michaela Yearwood-Dan: The Practice of Liberation

17 April – 18 October 2026

The Whitworth, Oxford Road, Manchester, M15 6ER Open Tue-Sun 10-5pm (till 9pm on Thursday)

Free entry

Spring Seasonal Launch

Thursday 16 April, 6pm-8pm

Join us for a first look at *The Practice of Liberation* and celebrate the Whitworth's Spring 2026 exhibitions. Visit our website for more details soon.

Public Programme highlights

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of Thursday Lates and creative workshops for adults, young people and families exploring key themes in Yearwood-Dan's practice. Please visit our website, further details will be announced in April 2026.

Related publication

A fully illustrated publication will be released in June 2026, with contributions from Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Indie A. Choudhury, Ekow Eshun, Michaela Yearwood-Dan, and the commissioning curators. The artist's first monograph, the publication is jointly edited and published by the Whitworth, Towner Eastbourne and Arnolfini.

Limited edition

Michaela Yearwood-Dan will produce a new signed limited edition print to accompany the exhibition. This will launch alongside the publication in June 2026, available to purchase in the Whitworth shop instore and online.

Exhibition touring dates

Michaela Yearwood-Dan: The Practice of Liberation

Towner Eastbourne: 21 November 2026 – 14 February 2027

Arnolfini, Bristol: 27 February – 23 May 2027

About the artist

Michaela Yearwood-Dan (b 1994 London) endeavours to build spaces of community, abundance, and joy, through a multifaceted practice encompassing large scale paintings, works on paper, ceramics, and site-specific mural and sound installations.

Yearwood-Dan's unique visual language draws on a diverse range of influences, including Blackness, queerness, femininity, and healing rituals, often combining art historical references with pop culture. Within her paintings and ceramics, she inscribes lines of text pulled from song lyrics, poetry, or her own diaristic writings. These meditations, appearing at various scales and degrees of legibility, are insightful and funny, confident and questioning. Her words beckon the viewer into a vivid, welcoming world of paradox, play, and contemplation formed within an atmosphere of swirling forms and brilliant chromaticity.

the Whitworth

Yearwood-Dan's work has been shown at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; York Art Gallery (UK); and in the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Arizona; the Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas (USA); Palazzo Monti, Brescia (Italy); and the Museum of Contemporary African Art, Marrakesh (Morocco), among others. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Government Art Collection (UK), and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; the Crocker Art Museum; the Jorge M. Perez Collection; and the Columbus Museum of Art and the Pizzuti Collection (USA). She lives and works in London.

About the Whitworth

The Whitworth is proudly part of The University of Manchester, operating as a convening space between the University and the people of the city. Founded in 1889 for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester" it continues this mission today in new contexts. The gallery, its park and gardens are home to the collection of over 60,000 works of art, textiles, sculptures and wallpapers and provides a platform for artists from around the world. The Whitworth is driven by a vision to actively seek and manifest connections between art, creativity, and their role in developing a more resilient and caring society through its exhibitions and award-winning civic engagement programme.

Gallery opening times: Tuesday to Sunday 10am-5pm, Thursday late opening until 9pm

www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth