

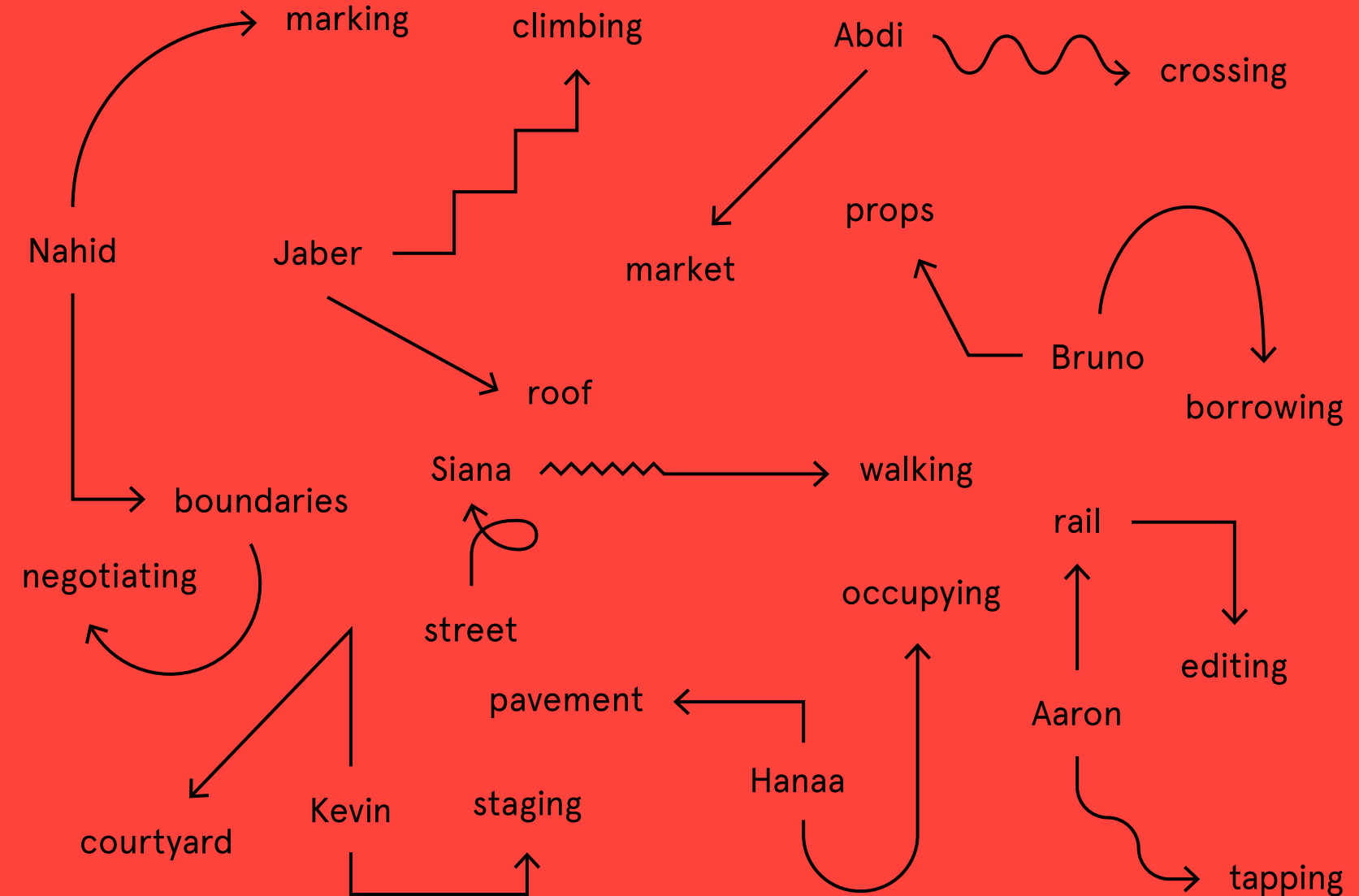
ACTION OF STREET

A Directory of Public Actions



A collaboration between Febrik and
students from Westminster Academy

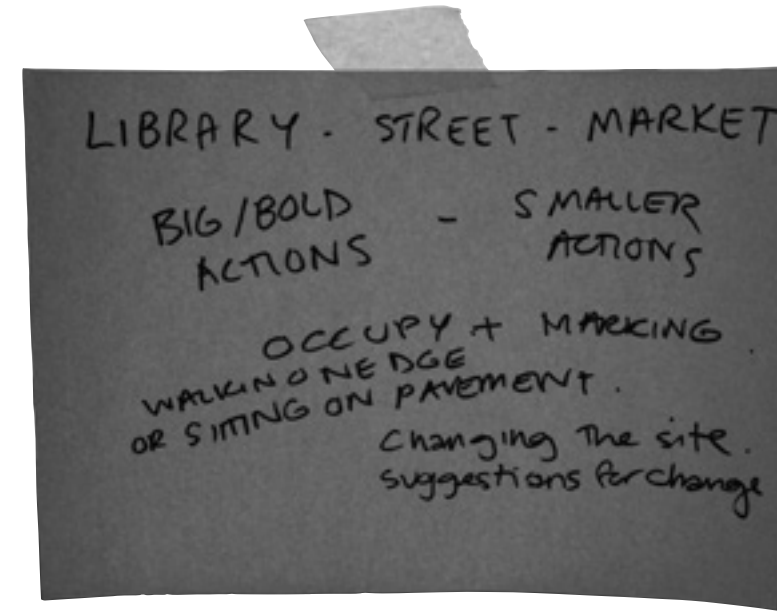
ACTION OF ROOM



Action



Critical
Action



Action of Street / Action of Room

During the 1970s, film director Alejandro Jodorowsky assembled a team of people to help him realise his vision to translate the cult science-fiction novel *Dune* into a feature film. The project was eventually pulled by the producers and was famously left incomplete. What remains are the sketches, screenplay, notes and ideas the director collected together in a book he calls his production 'bible'.

Although markedly smaller in ambition and scale to the great filmmaker's project, this directory has echoes of Jodorowsky's draft; it can be read as a collection of sketches from the cutting-room floor, as a working document and a tribute to the collaborative creative process.

Throughout the winter of 2015, young people from Westminster Academy, artist collective Febrik and the Serpentine Galleries Education Team worked together to investigate the use and regulation of public space on and around Church Street, North London. The directory charts the project – from filming experimental actions in the street, to reflections on their meaning in the studio and the ultimately unsuccessful attempts to bring the footage together into a final film.

Since 2002, the Serpentine Galleries have developed projects with artists in collaboration with organisations and people living and working in the neighbourhood that explore the impact of and responses to political and cultural issues within the local community. Church Street is undergoing extreme change, with three major regeneration projects in the area. This creates both an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety, as well as an opportunity for young people to be involved in responding to and shaping provisions for others in the area.

Working together as Febrik, artists Reem Charif and Mohamad Hafeda are interested in the practices of public spaces in relation to social and urban change. Their research has taken place through a series of projects primarily in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan and more recently in Sceaux Gardens estate in South London. For Febrik, this commission presented an opportunity to extend their practice of using actions and propositional thinking to support people to negotiate their right to spaces.

For the young people – eight students aged 14 and 15 years-old from Westminster Academy – the project provided a space to think about their future beyond school and to critically consider their roles and responsibilities in relationship to their community and the wider world.

The group used physical interventions and film as tools to research, test and record their experiences. They revealed the lack of public space by occupying and activating pockets of left-over areas; the places that exist between the public and private, the back and the front, from the stairwells of libraries to the backs of market stalls.

Through the project, the young people also proposed a series of speculative changes by imagining alternative futures for Church Street. They suggested that the market should be pedestrianised in order to protect spaces for strolling and conversing; proposed a yearly food fight to bring the buyers and sellers of the market together and a dance off to address the divisions between the two markets at each end of Church Street. These propositions existed only in the speculative realm and served as triggers for conversations as to why such interventions are not possible in public space.

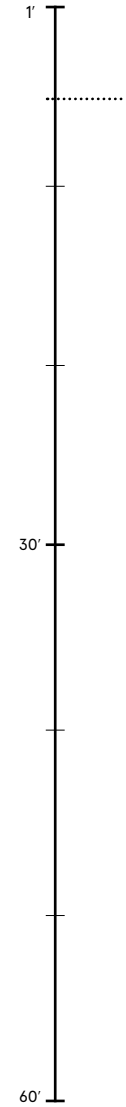
This project is part of the Serpentine Galleries Youth Forum; a work-experience programme where young people work with artists and curators to identify and discuss issues in the social realm and create platforms for change. The programme adopts a critical pedagogy approach in order to reveal and address power structures and to disrupt hierarchies between adults and young people, teachers and students.

Unlike Jodorowsky's *Dune*, which never materialised, this publication maps a dynamic process as it unfolds through explorative public actions in the street and reflective exchanges in the studio. Each chapter moves between the street and the studio, mirroring the non-linear path the project took, while the text is drawn from conversations between the young people, Febrik and the Serpentine Galleries Education Team. What follows is the record of an experimental collaboration and unfinished film.

EDITING THE SITE

Spend some time in a place you like or you are curious about.

What places on the site inspire you
to re-think how to use public space?



Action
of
Street

Walking in the middle of the market



The camera pans from the ground to the sky revealing the horizon
in the middle of the market street as Siana walks the line.



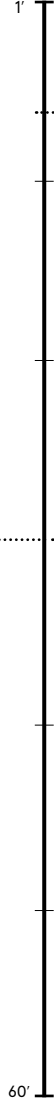


Critical Action

I think in-between the market stalls, it's a bit free. There's a bit of freedom, because everyone can talk to each other — Aaron

Where can you freely walk in the middle of the street?
Can a space for walking support social interaction?

The middle space is where conversations happen, where produce is stacked, where traders take a break and make a mess.



Action of Street



The camera follows our bodies as they mark the boundaries of spaces. Our gestures respond to the nature of each space – Siana touches the books quietly, while Aaron taps the rails noisily.

Our bodies mark and activate the boundaries of spaces



Critical Action

The films show how places can be used in different ways — Hanaa

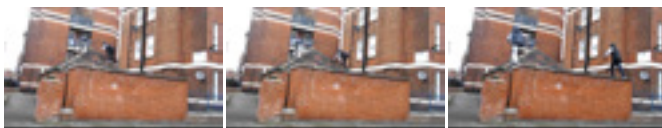
What places are accessible to us?

We identified a poverty of public spaces available on the street. Within the public spaces that were open to us, such as the library and the park, there was much more scope for creative actions.

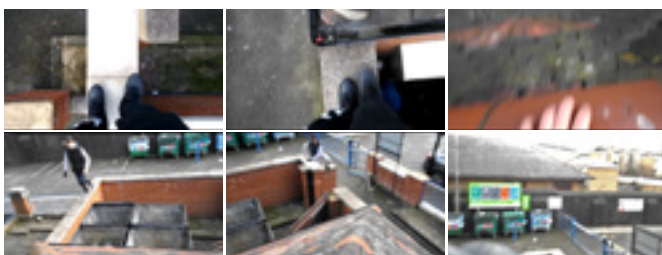
1'
30'
60'

Action
of
Street

Climbing up the roof of the bin
store at the back of Belvedere
Heights housing estate



The camera switches vantage point between first and third person, collapsing the spatial divisions between the edge and centre, front and back, inside and outside.



Critical
Action

I like the part when I'm doing a
first person shot when I'm climbing
up the roof. That was one of my
favourite bits for the film — Jaber

This shows that we control the
area — Aaron

What is 'public space'? Where
does it start and who is it for?

Here the site operates as a
playground. Public areas
became spaces for exploration
and investigation, places to
play with different actions
and their meanings.

Action
of
Room

Selecting particular spaces in
the public realm to occupy

In the studio the group reflected
on the types of public spaces
accessible to them and the types
of social and spatial limits that
govern these spaces. They
observed that:

- Certain limits influence the
nature of the public actions they
feel comfortable in performing.
- The limits they encountered
were affected by social and legal
expectations on how to use and
behave in these spaces.
- The limits relate to physical
accessibility, degrees of visibility
and individual's confidence in
using these spaces.

What spaces do you
like or would like to
spend time in?

CROS
from inside to
Two
SIDE
Different
things it



Critical Action

It feels like you're free to do what you want. You get motivated inside through it — Aaron

What public spaces are available to us and how can we use them?

- Identified public spaces
- Park and park-railings
- Library
- Pavement
- Middle of market street
- Back of market stall
- Edge of private and public property
- Back of housing estate
- Top of bin storage area
- Pedestrian passages
- Leftover spaces between buildings

- Limits
- Private/public
- Inside/outside
- Back/front
- Edge/centre
- Social hierarchies

PUSHING THE LIMIT

Use your body in a new
way in a public space.

Can we physically test what
is possible in public spaces?

1'

Action
of
Street

Walking along the wall of a terraced housing block

30'



The camera moves along the wall, following Jaber's footsteps as he negotiates the boundary between public and private.

60'



Critical Action

Through this project, in various ways, we have tried to challenge not only our imagination but also the monotonous stereotypes about young people that are rather common nowadays. As shown in both the library and outside on the street, we have attempted to rearrange the chairs in numerous ways to suggest our creativity — **Siana**

How can we occupy the boundary between public and private? Do physical edges such as the wall demarcate areas that are off-limits or can they be in-between spaces to occupy?

Stepping on the boundary wall of a terraced house expanded the discussion of what constitutes public space. The action politicised the discussion by physically exposing the fine line separating public from private and by asking whether we are inside or outside someone's property — or simply on the edge.

60'

30'

Action of Street



Reappearance of site-specific props from one site (library) into another (street)

The camera captures a series of shots of a green chair occupying different spaces on the site. The chair sits amongst its peers in the library, then reappears in the middle of unused market stall frames, in the middle of the market corridor and finally, barricades the street entrance.



Critical Action

Sitting down on a chair on a quiet road to give an effect of peace — **Hanaa**

Are there public spaces dedicated to us? What would make a good place for us to hang out?

Speculating on the limits of public space and its relation to age. Identifying what is allowed or expected from different age groups, especially through the transition to adulthood.

Action
of
Street

Staging and rehearsing alternative uses for the library courtyard



The small areas that people don't use much, we can use it, bring more activities. Creating, experimenting with areas full of people — **Kevin**

We made two types of footage – one is disruptive and the other is peaceful — Aaron

Do places that have no clear function provide opportunities to act out alternative uses of space?

Moving from inside the library to the courtyard outside, the interior of the library works as a backstage for a theatrical use of the courtyard.

Action
of
Room

Naming the film

Through the action of selecting and arranging words to name the film, discussions about the wider context of the project began to emerge:

- How important is public perception when making a public action and a public film?
- What is the role of a title in communicating the aims of the film?
- What are our rights in public spaces and what are our responsibilities towards others using the same space?
- What are the ways we can make our film public?

What do our public actions in the film mean? What limits are we and the film pushing?





Critical
Action

And then sometimes people might come through and then we have to stop the video, let them come and then wait for it. And then start again. I think that's what happens when you're doing something in public and outside, you just respect other people — **Bruno**

Who are the public? What message do we want to communicate to them?

Titles set expectations and convey the message of the public event (film). Our title aims to:

- Challenge stereotypes about young people by proving their independence with positive and creative actions.
- Push public limits in different ways from gentle to assertive.
- Encourage more freedom in the rules of street behaviour.
- Make people think differently about public space and encourage young people to use public space in unexpected ways.
- Show that young people can be free, fun and energetic without causing harm.

CROSSING BETWEEN

Use props at the site in a new way. Make a friend at the site.

Can we change spatial and social hierarchies and arrangements?

1'
30'
60'

Action
of
Street

Sitting on the pavement

The camera moves slowly, comfortably recording the pavement sit-in, revealing the framework of the market corridor as a backdrop.



Critical
Action

I learned that there's two types of teenagers – well, there's probably more but in the video we've only shown two – one of more movement and one of less movement. And it just shows how we used public spaces to our own advantage — Hanaa

How powerful is gentle resistance of a public limit?

There are many ways to ask questions through public action: by gently being present, by boldly and actively occupying spaces or through initiating conversations with residents.

1'
30'
60'

Action
of
Street

Using a traffic cone to cross a visual and physical limit



The camera as a distant observer or invisible witness. The confidence of the action – peeking over into a public space to see what is happening – conveys curiosity rather than an invasion of privacy.



Critical Action

I think the film's about young people trying not to break the limits by doing something bad but break the limits by doing something positive. So they don't want to feel like they can't do stuff, because of the law or something like that. It's in the title, Urban Takeover — Jaber

Can we break the limit by doing something positive?

When young people cross limits in public, their actions can be interpreted by adults as transgressive. These readings expose an underlying distrust of young people and their intentions. Through the project we collectively sought to challenge these prejudices and reveal the creative capabilities of the group.

60'

30'

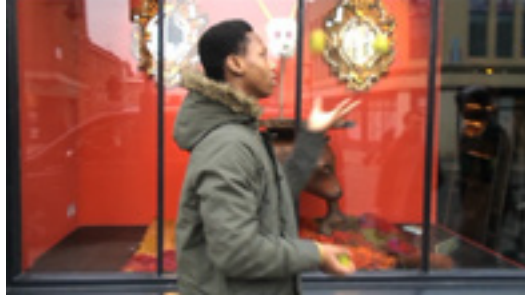
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Action
of
Street

The camera records a continuous shot as Kevin crosses between two sides of the street. The image, like a panoramic landscape, is a connector between the two different market types. As Kevin moves, the juggling is juxtaposed against the changing language of the facades of the street. The fruit was borrowed from a stall vendor.

Juggling as we cross between the two markets at each end of Church Street



Critical Action

In Church Street, there are people with different cultures and just young people, old people. There's a poor side and a more posh side — Abdi

What and who are at each side?
What do both sides have in common?

The division between Church Street market at one end and the antique market at the other is clearly marked by the clients, the cars, the facades of the buildings and the exclusivity of access to some of the shops.

Action
of
Room

Editing as a process of constructing narrative and negotiating collective meaning

Film was used as a medium to support and document a series of explorative public actions as opposed to realising a planned narrative.

- How does this experimental footage fall into a narrative with a clear line of thought and meaning?
- What is the nature of the narrative produced?
- Is it linear, fragmented or suggestive?
- Does it need to be conclusive?

The process of turning footage of public actions into a collective film also generates speculations about each young persons ownership of the film’s narrative. In the end, three films were produced.

Can film be used as a research tool?

Urban Takeover



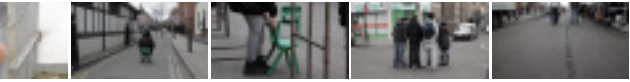
[Alan Walker *Spectre*



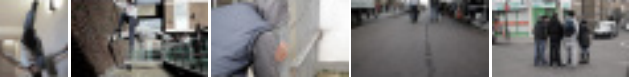
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[K'Trill *Razorblade Romance*



]



]



Critical
Action

I would create a story, like a film
with an introduction, beginning,
middle and end — Kevin

Experimenting with ideas and
brainstorming — Hanaa

Does a film need to have
a coherent narrative if the
process of making it was
not linear?

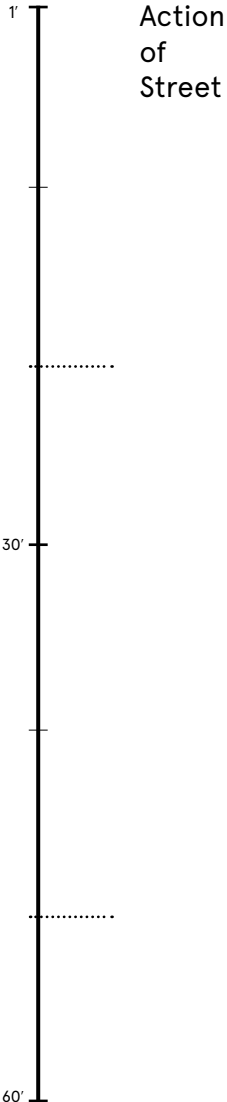
Filming as research
Filming as reflecting
Filming as crossing
Filming as pushing
Filming as speculating
Filming as proposing
Filming as playing

Editing as objecting
Editing as agreeing
Editing as debating
Editing as narrative

SPECULATING ON CHANGE

Suggest a fictional or imagined scenario to change the site.

What would you like to change on Church Street?



Interviewing local people on Church Street

What do you think if the market had a food fight once a year?



The camera gives Jaber confidence in pursuing his interviews. The questions are suggestive and provoke strong responses from the interviewees about the future of their local area.

What do you think if Church Street market closed down?



Critical Action

Well I'll go with Jaber's idea for a food fight — Nahid


Could fictional scenarios provoke relevant discussions about the future of Church Street?

Jaber's playful ideas and proposals suggest new ways of making things happen within existing bureaucratic procedures.

1'


Action of Street

Building relationships by 'borrowing' props for shooting



30'

The footage of our interviews reveals how the presence of the camera can create distance between people. The films show how the camera gets the attention of the interviewee, but it also captures awkward angles, gets in the way of communication and makes some people uneasy by creating a formal setting.



60'

Critical Action

Many people have contributed to our common footage. Not only the editors, the people who support us, but also the ones who work in the street, in Church Street. Once

one of the people allowed us to take their trolley in order to fulfil our project. He trusted us and that helped a lot and made our work easier — Siana

How can we make friends on the site? How can we cross the social limit?

It wasn't always easy to start conversations and build relationships with people who live and work on the street. We tried to engage people by:

— Asking people their opinions about our proposals for Church Street.

— Finding a common language or interest.

— Asking people to help us by lending props or materials for our actions.

— Inviting people to become participants in and audience members for our actions.

Action of Room

Debate as a mechanism for political engagement and citizenship

Conversations about public space simultaneously explored the mechanisms through which group decisions can be made. Differences of opinion began to emerge and objections became a powerful way of asking pertinent questions about power and representation.

How do we make collective decisions? What is democratic representation?





Critical Action

I think we can do the same
movie, but two different scenes
maybe, because this shows the
freedom and this shows... what
they did — **Aaron**

I can't say that I don't like any.
I like everything of that film
because it represents us in many
different ways — **Siana**

Do differences of opinion
amongst a group create a
rich dialogue and a better
understanding of a topic?

— Sometimes we cannot
reach a shared outcome
or a singular decision.

— Disagreeing is important
for the development of
discussions and for the
emergence of new ideas
and understandings.

— Needing to agree may
force groups or individuals
into making decisions that
do not represent them.

— Differing opinions and the
opportunity to raise them
are necessary for a fairer
democratic representation.

Edge ↔ Centre

Inside ↔ Outside

Back ↔ Front

Public ↔ Private



Critical
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Commissioned by The Serpentine Galleries
Education Team

With thanks to Aaron, Abdi, Alex, Amal, Ben,
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