FRANK BOWLING OBE, RA

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"Is black art about colour?" wondered the abstract painter Frank Bowling at the very beginning of one of his major essays. Even nowadays, this question continues to elude any easy answers, remaining open to different interpretations, feelings and emotions. The concept of African American art is beyond doubt intriguing and delicate, and what makes this art as such is its complex history: a tangled nest of prejudice, emancipation, violence, and discrimination. Although the social relations of slavery have gone, the psychological trace still remains. Subjects such as interracial identity, skin colour and ethnicity are somehow explored by the majority of black artists throughout their own opera and style.

For anyone interested in this demanding subject, two London-based exhibitions offer an intense journey into black spirit of art, and help visitors discover how blackness and whiteness interact with one another.

2. The Map Paintings 1967-1971 (Hales Gallery, 16 October – 23 November 2013)

Frank Bowling is a Guyana born British artist whose work

as both a painter and contributing editor of the New York-based magazine Arts Magazine is of singular importance to the notion of 'black art'. The Map Paintings is the artist's third solo show with the Hales Gallery: considered as one of his most significant bodies of work, 'it brings together', as himself explains, 'ideas of geographical displacement and the diaspora experience felt as an artist of African descent born in South America and British citizen'. His cartographic outlines of South America, Guyana, Africa and Australia demonstrate much more than his masterful and powerful handling of colour. In fact, and more importantly, they are the engaging result of questioning the dialectic between black and white, art and non art, seeing and imagining, past and present around which his own identity, and his identity as artist, revolve.