

## Harold Offeh: *Mmm, Gotta Try a Little Harder, It Could Be Sweet*

15 November 2025 – 1 March 2026

Press view: 14 November 2025

10.45am – 1pm



Harold Offeh, *Selfie Choreography* Workshop presented for East Side Projects, Birmingham, UK 2020. Photo, Ashley Carr.

Kettle's Yard is pleased to present *Mmm, Gotta Try a Little Harder, It Could Be Sweet*, a major survey of work by Harold Offeh (b. 1977, Ghana), running from 15 November 2025 to 1 March 2026. The artist's first institutional solo exhibition in the UK, it will explore two decades of videos, performances and projects that interrogate our acceptance of social, political and racial models in society. The exhibition will also reflect on Offeh's unique and highly collaborative methodology, inviting local communities, families, students and other artists into the galleries to participate.

Offeh often draws inspiration from mainstream music, film and cultural trends. The title, *Mmm, Gotta Try a Little Harder, It Could Be Sweet*, is taken from lyrics by the British band Portishead, whose music Offeh listened to during his formative years at art school, and will correspond to three thematic sections in the exhibition. *Mmm*, a new multi-channel sonic installation, will greet visitors with Offeh's voice repeating the sound 'mmm' – a verbal filler that can be quizzical, affirmative or used when someone is searching

for the right words. The work playfully taps into Offeh's early curiosity in art and its potential to change the way we understand the world. *Gotta Try a Little Harder* will consider how the artist uses performance as an investigative tool, while *It Could Be Sweet* will look at his more recent participatory works that touch upon themes of desire, utopianism and joy, as well as queer identity and acts of resistance. In each of these three sections, audiences will be invited to join Offeh as he playfully explores and re-performs his own archive.

*Gotta Try a Little Harder* will provide an overview of Offeh's early endeavours in art. Video works such as *Smile* (2001) place him in front of the camera, following Charlie Chaplin and Nat King Cole's instruction to 'smile through your fear and sorrow'. Displayed nearby, *Being Mammy (Mammy's Looks)* (2004) is inspired by the story of Hattie McDaniel who famously played the character Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*, becoming the first Black actress to win an Oscar for her role. Highlights from this section will also include *Hairography* (2012-2020), which considers the fetishisation

of hair in popular culture, and the artist's renowned *Covers* series (2008-2020), in which Offeh re-enacts archival album sleeves by iconic Black singers from the 1970s and 1980s.

*It Could Be Sweet* will consider Offeh's participatory and socially engaged projects, including the first UK presentation of *Stranger in the Village* (2019), originally commissioned by Art Tower Mito in Japan. The work uses James Baldwin's short essay of the same title as a framework for discussing the estrangement experienced by settled migrants and the LGBT community in Mito.

This final section will also explore *Down at the Twilight Zone* (2018), a celebration of Toronto's queer nightlife from the 1950s to today. An epic 12-hour durational performance, hosted by Offeh in Toronto, featured music, dance and interviews, and formed a new archive of Toronto's queer histories. Excerpts will be shown within a new installation informed by a number of Offeh's projects, including *Lounging* (2017-2020), an ongoing series of performance and photographic works that explore the depiction of the Black male body in popular culture, initiated during a residency at Wysing Arts Centre near Cambridge.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a lively programme of events and live performances, as well as an illustrated publication with newly commissioned texts by Sepake Angiama, David A Bailey, Lubaina Himid and Anna Khimasia.



Harold Offeh, *Covers. After Betty Davis. They Say I'm Different*, 1974, 2013, C-print. Courtesy the artist.



Harold Offeh, *Lounging. After Teddy Pendergrass, (Wysing Garden)*, 2018, Photograph. © Harold Offeh.



Harold Offeh, *Hairography 5*, 2012, Photo: Eloise Calandre. © Harold Offeh.

## Notes to Editors

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## About Harold Offeh

Based in Cambridge, Harold Offeh (b. 1977, Ghana) is an artist working in a range of media including performance, video, photography, learning and social arts practice. Offeh is interested in the space created by the inhabiting or embodying of histories, and employs humour as a means to confront the viewer with historical narratives and contemporary culture.

Offeh has exhibited widely in the UK and internationally including Tate Britain and Tate Modern, London; South London Gallery; Kettle's Yard, Cambridge; Wysing Art Centre; Studio Museum Harlem, New York; MAC VAL, France; Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Denmark; and Art Tower Mito, Japan. He studied Critical Fine Art Practice at The University of Brighton, received an MA in Fine Art Photography at the Royal College of Art, and completed a PhD by practice exploring the activation of Black Album covers through durational performance. He is currently the Head of Programme in MA Contemporary Art Practice and a visiting lecturer in MA Print at the Royal College of Art.

## About Kettle's Yard

Kettle's Yard, part of the University of Cambridge, is a leading gallery and unique house with a remarkable collection of 20th-century art. Its founders Jim and Helen Ede believed in art's ability to transform lives, a vision upheld today through critically acclaimed exhibitions, pioneering community and learning programmes, and research of the highest quality. Our aim is to offer an inspiring and enriching experience for everyone who visits. Find out more and get involved at: [www.kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk](http://www.kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk)



Harold Offeh, *Down at the Twilight Zone*, 2018, 12-hour performance and installation. Nuit Blanche, Toronto, Canada. Photo: Priam Thomas. © Harold Offeh.



Harold Offeh, *Covers: After Grace Jones, Island Life, 1985 (Graceful Arabesque)* 2008, 2008, C-print. Courtesy the artist.