



# HISTORICAL

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Liz Obi - <i>Remembering Olive: Time to Pass the Memories on</i> .....	005
Kimberly Springer - <i>Stepping into the Struggle</i> .....	009
Carolyn - <i>Squatting in Brixton in the 1970s</i> .....	011
Olive Morris and Mike Colgan - <i>Anti-Nazi League</i> .....	015
Neil Kenlock - <i>Photographs</i> .....	017
Julia Morandeira - <i>A Visual Chronicle of Olive's Times</i> .....	033
Khadijah Ibrahiim - <i>Afro &amp; 'Fro Wearing Brothas &amp; Sistahs (1970s)</i> .....	035
Tanisha Ford - <i>Soul Power in Britain</i> .....	037
Paul Keleman - <i>Olive in Manchester</i> .....	040
Diane Watt Interview with Sheila Ruiz.....	042
Ajani - <i>Weeping Willow</i> .....	048
Kimberly Springer - <i>Black Radical Women &amp; Joy</i> .....	049
Stella Dadzie - <i>Ancient Roots</i> .....	052
Olive Morris - <i>A Sister's Visit to China</i> .....	055

# REMEMBRANCE/LEGACY

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Ana Laura López de la Torre - <i>Finding Olive</i> .....	062
Jon Newman - <i>The Mythical Archive</i> .....	071
Altair Roelants - <i>Remembering Olive Collective: A Research Diary</i> .....	076
Do you remember Olive Morris? - <i>Project Timeline and Images</i> .....	079
Ashley Whitfield - <i>On Strategies of Learning: Imagining Space as a Collective</i> .....	097
Deborah Withers Interview with Ana Laura López de la Torre - <i>Blogging Olive</i> .....	102
Rakhee Kewada - <i>Reflections on Remembering Olive</i> .....	106
Stella Dadzie - <i>Do you remember?</i> .....	110
Sheila Ruiz - <i>Being Part of ROC</i> .....	111
Tara Atluri - <i>Olive Would Have Told me to Shut up and do Something</i> .....	114
Linton Kwesi Johnson - <i>Jamaican Lullaby</i> .....	118
Appendixes.....	119



personal  
account



essay



original  
document



poem

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# PREFACE

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This publication brings to culmination three years of artist and community-led research inspired by the figure of Brixton-based activist Olive Morris (1952-1979). In her short life, Olive Morris co-founded the Brixton Black Women's Group and the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD), and was part of the British Black Panther Movement. She campaigned for access to education, decent living conditions for black communities and fought against state and police repression. Despite her young age, she empowered the people who lived and worked around her.

*Do you remember Olive Morris?* was initiated by the artist Ana Laura López de la Torre in 2007. The project was made possible by the invaluable input of Liz Obi, a friend and colleague of Olive Morris, and by the support of the Morris family and Mike McColgan. *Do you remember Olive Morris?* has further evolved and developed through the informed, active and generous dedication of a group of women, who since October 2008 have organised themselves under the name Remembering Olive Collective (ROC). Together, these women of all ages, backgrounds and cultures created the Olive Morris Collection, a public archive housed at Lambeth Archives since October 2009.

The Olive Morris Collection is composed of two main elements. The first is made up of documents (i.e. letters, photographs and university essays) and ephemera (i.e. pamphlets, flyers and posters) relating to both the personal and public life of Olive Morris. The second element is an oral history archive comprising thirty interviews with women and men who knew Olive, worked with her, lived with her and shared her commitment to justice and equality. This forms a unique collection of testimonies from a generation whose achievements and struggles are under-recorded. The interviews were largely captured by the younger generation, that is members of ROC who received training in oral history interviewing and transcribing as part of the project.

The texts, articles, essays and interviews included in this publication are organised in two categories: History and Remembrance/Legacy. The first part provides a context to Olive Morris' life and times, her work as an activist and that of her contemporaries. While the contributions largely focus on the British context, some draw parallels with movements and actions that took place in the 1970s in the US. The second part records the work and experiences of the many contributors to *Do you remember Olive Morris?* The publication also includes a selection of poems celebrating the spirit of Olive Morris and of her times.

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As the initiator of the project, Ana Laura López de la Torre has a practice that is largely grounded in the development of relations between people and their local environment. A Brixton resident since 1995, Ana Laura has developed a number of collaborative projects with her local community that blur the boundaries between artistic practice, activism and community work. In her text, Liz Obi confirms how Ana Laura's artistic approach and methodology hardly differ from that of a community activist. While this way of working gives her a licence to act and inspire others, Ana Laura's sensibility and experience have helped make *Do you remember Olive Morris?* relevant to its contributors and the local community. At the same time, her original way of grounding art projects in every day life has attracted the attention of academics, historians, researchers and cultural producers.

It was Ana Laura's work as an artist and her forward-thinking interest in her local community that brought together Gasworks and Lambeth Archives for this project. We would like to thank the Heritage Lottery Fund for their generous grant, without which the project would not have been possible. Our special thanks go to Ana Laura López de la Torre for her vision and indefatigable energy, Liz Obi for her ongoing support and for donating her collection of Olive Morris' documents to the Olive Morris Collection, the Morris family and Mike McColgan for their presence and support throughout the project. Thanks also to all the members of ROC for their dedication, time and intellectual input to the project and for sharing their networks to raise awareness of the project. Our thanks also go to Kimberly Springer, the publication manager and member of the editorial team, for her organisational talent and incisive editorial input, Tanisha Ford, also part of the editorial team and Inua Ellams, the publication's designer, for their engaged approach to the publication. Finally, we would like to thank everyone who has contributed time, ideas and support to *Do you remember Olive Morris?* since 2007.

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