

ARTnews

"Pioneering Filmmaker and Artist Isaac Julien Knighted By Queen of England"

By Alex Greenberger

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Tilda Swinton and Isaac Julien. PHOTO JOERG CARSTENSEN/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP IMAGES

[Isaac Julien](#), a filmmaker whose work has explored intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class across the years, has become one of the few Black artists to be knighted by the Queen of England.

On Thursday, the Queen revealed her 2022 Birthday Honours List, which includes news of members of all sectors of British society who have received special honors. Julien was knighted alongside the crime writer Ian Rankin, and Arlene Foster, the first minister of North Ireland, was made a dame.

Among the other art-related figures to be knighted was Nicholas Coleridge, who is currently chairman of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Meanwhile, [Cornelia Parker](#), a sculptor with a

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retrospective that just opened at Tate Britain, was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire, and [Nadia Samdani](#), a Bangladeshi collector who ranks on the ARTnews Top 200 Collectors list, was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire.

Julien is among just a [handful of Black British artists who have been knighted](#). The status has been fraught among some members of their community, with the poet Benjamin Zephaniah rejecting the award in 2003 because of the word "empire" in the title, which he said he associated with "years of brutality."

Since then, however, filmmaker Steve McQueen and painter Frank Bowling have both received the award. Both have explained that they considered it a major achievement because they consider being British to be a core component of their respective identities.

Over the years, Julien has become widely known across the world for his technically complex multiscreen installations that have drawn heavily on the theories of Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, and others. Early on, he gained recognition for his films and videos about his identity as a Black gay man from London. Since then, he has turned his focus global, training his camera on recreations of Frederick Douglass's life and a vision intended to evoke a 2004 flood that killed 20 Chinese cockle pickers in England.

Seemingly in recognition of the intersectional qualities of Julien's work, the Queen's Birthday Honours List noted that Julien had received his knighthood for "Diversity and Inclusion in Art."

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