

Hostile Artist?

The row over Tate's relationship with former mega-dealer Anthony d'Offay, which first erupted as part of the MeToo-inspired 'We Are Not Surprised' movement in 2017 (see Jennifer Thatcher's 'No Surprises' in *AM414*) continues to cause bad blood despite the fact that Tate finally announced on 4 September that it had formally ended its relationship with d'Offay. To understand the most recent twists, it is important to recall preceding events.

Before he retired in 2001, blue-chip gallerist d'Offay had been arguably the most important international art dealer in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s, and in 2008 he sold (at a discount) a vast collection of work to Tate and the National Galleries of Scotland to set up the Artist Rooms programme, of which he was named ex-officio curator. As the MeToo movement gathered pace, D'Offay suddenly resigned from this curatorial position on 19 December 2017; the very next day, police opened an investigation into reports accusing him of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour from women he had worked with. Damningly, a menacing selfie of the dealer holding a 'golliwog' doll was circulated online by black British artist Jade Montserrat, who said he had sent her the photo in 2016. Within a month of the accusations coming to light, Tate and NGS suspended contact with him (*Artnotes AM413*) via a statement which declared: 'The work of Tate and NGS is underpinned by values of fairness, equality, and respect and the right to work free of sexual harassment.' Tate's newly appointed director, Maria Balshaw, however, maladroitly undermined this statement when she argued that the reason she herself had never suffered such harassment was because, she said, 'I was raised to be a confident woman' (*Artnotes AM414*), a line of reasoning that blamed the victims for their abuse. Tate's artist in residence, Liv Wynter, quit her post in disgust.

The police investigation into d'Offay rolled on quietly, but in spring 2019 newspapers reported that Tate had secretly reconnected with the disgraced dealer. Activist group Industria (then known as Girlforum) sought confirmation through a Freedom of Information request, the results of which later revealed that Tate's trustees had indeed recommended in November

2018 that the gallery's relationship with d'Offay should be 'further discussed and resolved', an instruction which quickly led to an official (but undisclosed) resumption of contact from 11 January 2019, despite there still being a live police investigation into his behaviour. In January 2020, before Tate had responded to the FOI request, Industria sent a dossier to Tate's directors demonstrating conflicts between Tate's stated ethos and its actions across a wide range of activities, from its acceptance of what Industria considered to be tainted sponsorship (from BP) and dodgy donations (from Russian oligarch Len Blavatnik) to the unresolved d'Offay situation.

In June, the police ended their investigation without further action. On 9 July, in the run up to Tate's much-trumpeted reopening after lockdown, Montserrat, dismayed by Tate's willing rehabilitation of d'Offay's public image, re-posted on Twitter d'Offay's golliwog selfie and an account of his treatment on social media and, on 23 July, Tate eventually made its first direct contact with the artist, publicly replying to her post on Twitter with a statement that concluded: 'We continue not to have any active involvement with d'Offay.' This, as the FOI request had shown, was false, a fact subsequently reconfirmed when Tate and d'Offay issued the following joint statement on 4 September: 'Tate and Anthony d'Offay have agreed to end their relationship. This involves the return of works on loan to Tate from Anthony d'Offay and Anthony d'Offay Limited and the removal of public signage at Tate. The Artist Rooms Collection, which is jointly owned by Tate and the National Galleries of Scotland, will not be affected by these changes. Neither Tate nor Anthony d'Offay will be commenting further on this matter.'

But this was not the end of the matter, especially not for Tate. On 10 September, artist Amy Sharrocks posted on Instagram a joint statement with her fellow 'A Rumour of Waves' curators - Madeleine Collie and Nando Messias - announcing the cancellation of the 12-month 'A Year of Love' programme they had put together for Tate Exchange. The programme was to feature over 50 artists, including Montserrat (initially as an artist but then as

a co-curator), but 'after six months of working together', the statement read, 'Tate staff suddenly informed the group that they were no longer allowed to work with Jade Montserrat'. Tate discussed its reasoning with the curatorial team off the record (at Tate's request), but the curators report that Tate characterised Montserrat's previous actions as 'hostile' to the institution and stated that Tate had a right to refuse to work with hostile artists. 'We strongly protest this act of institutional erasure,' the curators declared.

News of Tate's decision to block Montserrat's involvement in 'A Rumour of Waves' broke less than a week after Tate announced that it had formally cut its direct ties with d'Offay, an action which clearly suggested that the accusations against d'Offay were credible, so why was Montserrat being punished for whistleblowing rather than thanked for her bravery? In response, on 15 September, Industria published online a five-point open letter arguing that 'an institution choosing to censor and harm artists in order to prioritise its relationships with donors is unacceptable'. At the time of going to press, the letter had been backed by more than 500 signatures, including many high-profile artists and curators. The actions of Tate's senior managers, at a time when it is already under pressure over mass redundancies, have once again expertly reignited flames of protest and redirected anger away from d'Offay and onto Tate itself. He should thank them.