The University of Manchester
The Whitworth
Art Gallery

TRADE AND EMPIRE:
REMEMBERING SLAVERY

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FOREWORD

Maria Balshaw, Director, The Whitworth Art Gallery

The exhibition *Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery* (2007-08) was organised by the Whitworth Art Gallery to mark the 200th anniversary of the Act of Parliament that abolished the British transatlantic slave trade. *Trade and Empire* also formed part of Greater Manchester's *Revealing Histories* project that invited visitors to think again about the legacy of this history in Manchester and the North West, and to contribute their own thoughts. Four invited artists and academics: SuAndi, Kevin Dalton-Johnson, Emma Poulter and Alan Rice, worked with Whitworth curators and learning staff to create the exhibition, which was accompanied by a series of community engagement events that brought new insight into objects from our collections and from other collections around the North West and beyond, that lent works to the exhibition. I would like to thank the external curators for their contributions to the exhibition and also for the four essays that they have written for this book, which reflect on the themes of the show. An introductory text by Baroness Lola Young puts the essays in context, and the book concludes with a heartfelt Afterword by Lemn Sissay. I am grateful to them both for their excellent contributions.

I would like to thank the following lenders whose generosity made the project possible: Bolton Museum and Archive Service; The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester; The John Rylands University Library Manchester; Bristol Record Office; Merseyside Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool; The Tom S. Gardner Photographic Collection; Godfried Donkor; and Kelly O'Reilly.

During the run of *Trade and Empire*, other thematically linked exhibitions and events also formed part of our public programme. Castaways was a collaboration between the Whitworth and the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester, which was shown for the first few weeks of *Trade and Empire*. This multimedia installation featured a surround-sound ambient audioscape of the Atlantic Ocean on Anomabo Beach on the former slave coast of Ghana (The Gold Coast) by ethno-musicologist, Stephen Feld (Professor of Anthropology and Music at the University of New Mexico) and rows of collaged constructions by visual artist Virginia Ryan, who works in Ghana. Later our partnership with the British Museum led to us showing the remarkable exhibition of drawings and prints from their collection, *Mind Forg'd Manacles: Blake and Slavery*, which reminded us of William Blake's challenge to the political status quo with his passionate protest against slavery and the oppression of human freedom.

Trade and Empire and these other partnership projects helped to make 2007-08 a period of profound reflection on the troubled history and legacy of the slave trade for the Whitworth and its visitors and a timely reminder of all the work that we all still need to do today and in the future to redress the balance of history.

INTRODUCTION

Lola Young, Baroness Young of Hornsey

Facing History

On my travels around the UK, especially during the run-up to March 2007, I have encountered people who proudly told me how their city/region/country had nothing to do with the long, brutal period of African enslavement threaded through Britain's history. Others told me that abolitionists from their region were the sole connection to the 'peculiar trade'. Too many told me that the slave trade was a feature of Liverpool's and Bristol's history but nowhere else. Should anyone wish to continue to subscribe to such ideas, post-2007, they will now be doing so in the context of a year of unprecedented activity which demonstrated the simple truth: there's not a corner of the country where the impact of enslavement was not felt in one way or another. Certainly, the manufacturers who profited from the cotton industry, and those who took sugar in their hot chocolate, tea or coffee from plantations reliant on slave labour, or, on the contrary, making a deliberate choice *not* to do so, contributed to prolonging or ending this noxious traffic in human beings.

Making connections between what many see as a distant, irrelevant past and the reality of today is not an easy task. The difficulties are even more acute when the subject matter evokes pain, guilt, shame, denial and trauma. If there's any possibility of developing clarity of thought on the realities and multiple legacies of African enslavement, can that develop from a position of 'historical amnesia', that state of ignorance which has endured for so long? Clearly not. Neither can we assess and understand the significance of African enslavement without developing a better understanding of the global consequences – Britain, the USA, Africa, Brazil, Canada and most of Europe are implicated in this narrative in one way or another and a focus exclusively on the local will not enable us to develop remedies for current predicaments and problems.

The links between the past and the present, and the local and the global, are implicit in the approach taken by the curators and artists who have worked on *Trade and Empire*. The exhibits and narrative relating to Ogoniland and the palm oil trade, for example, clearly resonate with the current struggles of the Ogoni people with multi-national oil companies, which have decimated the Niger Delta region through their polluting processes. For protesting against these powerful organisations, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni colleagues were executed by the Nigerian government in 1995. The history contextualises that recent past and the present for us, and should lead us to understand better the ways in which power manifests itself and how those who wield it irresponsibly may be defeated.

Once you begin to look in the right places, with the appropriate lenses, you will see Britain's colonial history inscribed on our landscapes, our cityscapes and in our institutions. That there were several Manchester families with direct connections to the trans-Atlantic slave trade is a strand running through the exhibition, which again highlights the extent to which slavery was not a marginal activity sustained by a few from one or two cities. It also demonstrates the extent to which Britain's current cultural wealth has its foundations in enslavement and colonial conquest. The Benin bronzes referenced by Tony Phillips are an obvious example but there are plenty of others scattered around the country. The general public has little sense of how these works fit into our political, colonial and social history.

Another point, well-made by the juxtaposition of the work of William Hogarth and Godfried Donkor, is that once the several thousand Black people who lived in the country in the middle of the 18th century were settled here, they were no longer enslaved but 'free men'. Of course they still had to endure the hardship of poverty and racism but Hogarth's symbolic deployment of Black people along with the stories of such notable people as Henry 'Box' Brown suggest a far richer variety of roles and status than might be imagined.

The enslaved Africans who fought against their captivity used a variety of strategies to challenge their oppression. Naming them is important, as their role in eventually dismantling the institution of slavery has been under-acknowledged in the past. The act of memorialising those who have been stripped of their names, cultures and languages brings them to our consciousness, filling in gaps in history and the collective psyche. The commitment to

bringing these narratives to the fore is evidenced in SuAndi's curatorial and creative practice.

Alongside those who were quite happy for the trade to continue and who made profits from slavery, there were vociferous, radical abolitionists fighting against enslavement. This aspect of the history is really important because it demonstrates the potential of alliances across barriers of 'race', class and gender. At the Houses of Parliament exhibition held from May to September 2007, the Manchester petition signed by thousands of ordinary people and calling on Parliament to abolish the slave trade was one of the objects on display that attracted much attention. But if 2007 had been merely an opportunity to boast about Britain's abolitionist credentials, it would have presented us with a distorted view of the subject. It's necessary to remember that this trade in human beings lasted for about three centuries. And of course 1807 did not see legislation for the abolition of slavery itself: that didn't happen until 1833.

At least part of the point of commemorating the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade on British ships – to give 2007 its full, inglorious title – was to make a clear statement to the British public. What happened in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with regard to enslavement, colonialism and scientific theories of 'race', continues to haunt the ways in which we think about and interact with each other. This applies not only to us here in Britain: it also concerns how we think of people in African and other developing countries. Emma Poulter asks what the cost of Manchester's industrial ascendancy was: we might well ask today, what is the true cost of the 'cheap' consumer goods we keep buying?

Alan Rice speculates in his essay that SuAndi's installation might have made good use of a portrait of Ottabah Cuoguano that was eventually omitted from the exhibition. But we know that it's not possible for an exhibition to treat a subject with the longevity and complexity of the slave trade comprehensively. The best we can do is offer clues to be followed up by someone whose curiosity has been stimulated to find out more. That's how history develops and the field of our knowledge – and our recognition of our ignorance – is expanded. If the commemorative year continues to contribute to the sum of knowledge on this subject, it will have given some return on the intellectual, emotional and financial resources that some of us invested in it.

THE MAKING OF *TRADE AND EMPIRE: REMEMBERING SLAVERY*

David Morris and Andrew Vaughan

This exhibition explored the themes of trade and empire, commerce and collecting, and the impact and resonance of the experience of slavery and its legacy, within the context of the bicentenary of the parliamentary abolition of the British slave trade in 2007. It focused on the impact of the Atlantic slave trade on Manchester and the North West, as reflected in selections from the Whitworth's collections, integrated with other contemporary works by Black artists and objects borrowed from The Manchester Museum, The John Rylands University Library Manchester, Bolton Museums and Archives Service and private collections around the North West.

Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery (16 June 2007 – 27 April 2008) was the Whitworth's main contribution in 2007-08 towards *Revealing Histories*, an ambitious long-term project joining together eight museums and galleries across Greater Manchester. In 2007-08 *Revealing Histories* aimed to collaborate with communities to explore the impact of empire and the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade in the collections and histories of the region's cultural institutions and communities.[1]

The bicentenary was seen in some quarters, notably in the feature film *Amazing Grace* (2007), as an opportunity to tell the story of the abolition of the British slave trade in a celebratory tone and, as Dr Alan Rice has pointed out in his essay below, in terms of white philanthropy and black subservience. In the spirit of the Revealing Histories project however, we wanted to re-interrogate the stories that could be told using the Whitworth collections – not to celebrate the triumph of British liberal values as embodied solely in the persons of William Wilberforce and his fellow white abolitionists, but to tell a wider range of meaningful stories of the Atlantic slave trade and its legacies in Manchester and the North West of England. To do this we needed an exhibition that represented a range of different voices both Black and white.

In keeping with the *In my View* strand of the *Revealing Histories* programme, we decided to invite four guest curators to co-produce the exhibition with us, working in partnership with the curatorial, and learning and interpretation staff of the Whitworth. SuAndi, Kevin Dalton-Johnson, Emma Poulter and Dr. Alan Rice, are community engaged artists and/or academic researchers working on the history of slavery, trade, empire and its legacy in Manchester and the North West. Their cultural identities and own ethnic backgrounds are variously from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and Britain. In their selection of works, debates on the meanings of objects, and views on how the works should be displayed, the four guest curators brought a stimulating array of new voices into the Whitworth and, through their specialist knowledge and experience, helped to unearth many previously hidden stories about the images and objects in our care. Specialist curatorial knowledge from Whitworth staff also often informed the broader historical perspective or narrative provided by the guest curators and this collaboration worked well for the overall scheme of the show.

Within the Whitworth, preparing the *Trade and Empire* exhibition marked a strengthening of the working relationship between collection curators and our learning and interpretation team. Strong internal and external collaborations were crucial in delivering a show that generated new stories about the collections and that addressed a wide variety of learning styles – visual/spatial – verbal/written – experiential/tactile – musical/aural – emotional/intrapersonal and ludic. New modes of interpretation were piloted, including multiple perspectives on one object, and using the *Revealing Histories* website to create a virtual space for debate amongst wider communities of interest. New knowledge generated by research for the exhibition was captured on the Gallery's collections database for future reference.

The idea of co-producing the exhibition with guest curators was predicated upon the notion that the Whitworth functions best when it works as a laboratory for researching, producing and developing ideas. We wish the Gallery to be a space for dialogue where notions of difference and

sometimes dissent can be voiced and debated, where new stories can be generated about our collections and exhibitions, and where strong connections to lived experience can be explored.

This notion of the Gallery as a space for fostering dialogue and debate relates directly to the Whitworth's role as a university gallery, a public arena where the worlds of the city and the academy intersect and new ideas can be generated and debated. It also grows out of a desire to allow interpretative authority relating to the Whitworth's collections to flow from a variety of informed sources, rather than depending solely on the knowledge of Whitworth curators, however deep or extensive this might be in particular areas. As an integral part of what we do as curators at the Whitworth, we wish to open up our collections to other investigators and encourage them to re-interrogate the images and objects here, connect them together in new ways and re-contextualise them in the light of evolving contemporary concerns.

The selection process for the exhibition began with Whitworth collection curators bringing together all the works in their collections that related to the themes of the exhibition. The four guest curators were then invited to decide on their thematic approach and to select the show accordingly. They were also encouraged to go beyond the curatorial selection if they wished to and extend the scope of the selection, both from within the Whitworth's collections and beyond.

A collage of recollections from the exhibition-making process and comments from visitors to the exhibition

The totality of any exhibition experience must include a representation of the process of making the exhibition and also of the responses of visitors to the show, as without the latter the exhibition-making process itself would be futile. Visitor statements are in italics and are taken from the Comments Book in the exhibition gallery between June – November 2007.

Early in the process Emma Poulter, one of the guest curators, decided that she wished to superimpose two landscape watercolours by J. M. W. Turner from the Whitworth's collection onto a large-scale photograph of Black men, women and children working as cotton pickers in the state of Georgia in the southern USA (Fig. 1). This was a radical initiative within the context of established Whitworth display practices for the watercolour collection – but this display innovation conveyed concretely the strong links between wealth made, at least in part through slave-grown cotton, and cultural accumulation in the private sphere, which was then transferred to the public sphere through philanthropic donations and bequests to public art collections.

Emma brought a distinctive approach to the exhibition-making process and always had a clear vision of how she wanted to display the *Commerce and Collecting* section. At an early team meeting she presented a hand-drawn sketch of how she visualised the display. The drawing included the superimposed Turner watercolours over a large image of cotton pickers as mentioned above, other artworks, maps, large quotations, audio listening posts and several object cases full of textiles, cotton samples and West African artefacts.

Emma's museum background ensured that this part of the exhibition would look very different to a traditional Whitworth historical display. Rather than placing emphasis on individual artworks, Emma wanted the full gallery wall and adjacent floor area to act almost like a giant museum case, in which the viewer could choose to look at individual exhibits, but also stand back and contemplate a larger assemblage of thematically connected objects.

Fig. 1 Installation shot of *Commerce and Collecting* section of the *Trade and Empire* exhibition (2007-08)

Extract from the Exhibition Comments Book:

Just wonderful!

Objects are not any more objects, and History is not a far distant story; it communicates with something inside us, maybe humanity?

In this exhibition even the sentences became an object to watch!

Thanks a lot!

Kevin Dalton-Johnson came into the Whitworth's Prints and Drawings Study Room to look at a series of etchings by Tony Phillips, *A History of the Benin Bronzes*, made in 1984, that he had chosen to focus on for the exhibition. After about twenty minutes of careful looking, Kevin revealed a remarkable insight that transformed our understanding of the series. He read the series as a process of recovering a lost Black history through the etching process and the serial possibilities of prints. Phillips had reused the same plates several times for different images in the series and gradually etched in the complexity and richness of the original Benin social and religious contexts that were effaced in the later images of the series, which show the Bronzes in the West, whether in the auction house, the museum or the private house. Kevin interpreted the series as being about, and also physically embodying, ideas of Black cultural displacement and dislocation. Through Kevin's interpretation we can see that *A History of the Benin Bronzes* functions as a conceptual artwork as well as a narrative print series. His reading emerged directly from his position as a Black artist from a Caribbean background, wrestling with questions of Black male identity. He made an accompanying interactive work, *The Benin Bronzes Revealing Histories Table*, which invited visitors to explore ideas of cultural displacement and identity (see Fig. 47).

Extract from the Exhibition Comments Book:

Today my fiancé came and you opened his eyes to culture and I thank you for that. What a difference. The Slave Trade still goes on let's wake up.

Had a go at the history table today with my girlfriend and had a great feeling. Thanks for giving us the opportunity. What a difference the day makes.

A private collection of photographs depicting Benin and West African subjects from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offered an important visual context for the objects from West Africa and for the Tony Phillips print series on the Benin Bronzes. The photographs were lent by the family of Tom Singleton Gardner, who collected them when based in southern Nigeria from around 1890 to 1917. Many are attributed to the Black African artist photographer J. A. Green, who has become the focus of current American research that argues his importance within the field of photographic history.

The Tom Singleton Gardner collection contains around one hundred photographs that include many unpublished images by Green. They offer a unique view into West African life under late nineteenth century colonial rule and were the topic of much discussion within the curatorial team. One photograph by Green that we remember sparking much debate was of a young African baby dressed in ceremonial clothing (Fig. 2). The image itself offers a snapshot in time, but it was a hand-written comment on the back, perhaps by Gardner himself, which furthered the discussion. It reads:

"The advance of civilisation! Poor little divel. (sic) It would be far happier stripped."

The comment, together with the baby's image, moved us to reflect on the colonial gaze and the problem of difference. It was as if the photograph and text together had the

Fig. 2 *West African baby dressed in ceremonial clothing* (c.1894-1904)
Photograph by Ibani Ijo photographer, J. A. Green
Courtesy of The Tom S. Gardner Photographic Collection

power to reveal a voice from the past, providing an uncomfortable insight into the colonial mindset in operation in West Africa at this time.

Emma Poulter chose a selection of photographs from the Gardner archive to illustrate the 'legitimate' trade with West Africa that supplanted the trade in slaves. This refers to the production and trade in palm oil that grew up, after the abolition of the slave trade, around settlements originally established as West African slave ports (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 *Photograph taken in British Palm Oil Protectorates in West Africa* (c.1894-1904)
Photograph by Ibani Ijo photographer, J. A. Green
Courtesy of The Tom S. Gardner Photographic Collection

Imported European goods acted as touchstones to memory, recalling valued trading relationships. The engraving on the chair in this photograph reads: 'This chair presented by Sir John Tobin to his friend Duke Ephraim King of Old Calabar, Liverpool 10 Sep 1826'. This photograph was taken some seventy years after the chair was presented. Although we do not know who the woman is, she is likely to be related to Duke Ephraim.

John Tobin and his brother Thomas were slave traders on the West African coast. After the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 John Tobin forged links with Duke Ephraim to enable him to make the transition from trading in slaves to trading in palm oil. The goods the brothers exchanged remained the same as when they had traded for slaves; predominantly textiles, rum and guns. John Tobin was made Mayor of Liverpool in 1819 and was knighted two years later.

The photograph of the captured Oba of Benin on his way to exile in Calabar after the British punitive raids of 1897, which linked the section on Tony Phillips's print series about the Benin Bronzes to that dealing with the palm oil trade in West Africa, was not, at first, selected. Internally the Gallery team felt that a case should be made for the photograph's inclusion, to support and enrich visually the Benin story and

Fig. 4 *Ovonramwen, Oba of Benin, with guards on board the Niger Coast Protectorate Yacht, S. Y. Ivy, on his way to exile in Calabar in 1897* (1897)
Photograph by Ibani Ijo photographer, J. A. Green
Courtesy of The Tom S. Gardner Photographic Collection

to act as a link between these two sections of the show (Fig. 4). Without this photograph, and others that accompanied it, the two sections might have seemed unconnected to a visitor unfamiliar with the history of West Africa. The proposal to include the photograph of the Oba of Benin was put forward for discussion at a team meeting and it was agreed that to omit the image would be an opportunity missed.

The role of Whitworth curators and learning staff in the exhibition-making process was editorial and advisory: to help the narratives of the exhibition, as devised by the guest curators, speak as clearly as possible to our diverse visitors.

Extract from the Exhibition Comments Book:

The telling portrait of the Oba of Benin aboard the Protectorate Yacht puts everything about this wonderful exhibition in context for me. Yes, I can relate to the presence contained with the looted bronzes, but it's the 'look' in the eyes of the Oba that for me – says it all.

Alan Rice wished to make sure that the exhibition contained examples of Black agency in the struggle against slavery and that contemporary Black artists were well represented. He was particularly pleased then to locate a copy of the rare and classic second edition of Henry Box Brown's *Narrative*, describing Brown's extraordinary escape from slavery in America, in the Reserve collection of the John Rylands University Library. The book was published in Salford in 1851 and demonstrated perfectly the important links that Brown developed with Manchester, eventually leading to him residing in the city in the 1870s (see Fig. 11).

Alan was also delighted to find examples of textiles by Althea McNish in the Whitworth's collections. She is a pioneering Black woman textile designer whom he knows well and admires for her bold, colourful designs, inspired by her childhood in Trinidad (see Fig. 23). He suggested displaying her textiles in a triangular form to reflect the diasporic facts of her family history and to speak to Africa, Europe and the Caribbean, echoing the triangular trade in the eighteenth century.

William Hogarth's respect for London's Black population in the mid-eighteenth century and his use of Black figures as emblems of rational vitality to satirise the corruption of the English upper class elites meant that his prints were very likely to be part of the show. But it was Alan Rice's inspired juxtaposition of Hogarth's satires with those of a Ghanaian-born Black artist currently working in Brixton – Godfried Donkor – that gave a contemporary edge to his selection. Godfried Donkor visited the Whitworth during preparation for the show and he and Alan Rice together determined which Hogarth and Donkor works would be shown alongside each other (see Figs. 18-22).

Extract from the Exhibition Comments Book:

I am French, with African origins. I really appreciate what you are doing to remember that Africans had suffered during the slave trade. We don't have this kind of exhibition in France. A pity! They just prefer to talk about the benefits of colonisation, like as if Europe had saved Africa!

Thanks

SuAndi had a deeply felt conviction at the heart of her contribution to the exhibition: that it was important to humanise a gallery show about slavery and its legacies that she felt could otherwise have been too academic or curatorial in its tone. We remember her searching questions in our discussions: "Where is the heart? Where are the people?"

Her introductory text for the exhibition was written in a provocative voice of Black experience of slavery's legacy – and it was crucial that this voice was heard. Her installation *The Door of No Return* and her large scale text: *Remember . . . we were People before we were slaves*, introduced an experiential and performative element into the show that was greatly valued by visitors as an emotional release. She reminds us that experiencing through the arts can put us in touch with the qualities that emphasise our common humanity. Visitors were encouraged to tie a knot of remembrance for someone who was lost to them, and by so doing feel a human kinship with those left behind in Africa when the slave ships sailed West with their loved ones aboard. By the beginning of December 2007, 750 people had tied knots of remembrance. The knots hung in the gallery until the exhibition closed; they were then blessed and cremated.

Fig. 5 Knots of Remembrance tied by visitors within SuAndi's *The Door of No Return* installation in the *Trade and Empire* exhibition (2007-08)

SuAndi also posed the searching question: "What will this exhibition mean to a Black youth growing up in Manchester today?" And there were a few raised eyebrows from staff within the gallery when they realised that SuAndi had quoted and cited Wikipedia in her storyboard text. This was certainly not the normal practice of a Whitworth curator. SuAndi thought that to engage local young audiences in a meaningful dialogue the exhibition interpretation needed to be speaking a language of now and one that this target audience would identify with. Even though this is only a small part of the interpretation, her distinctive voice has enabled Wikipedia to sit comfortably alongside other more conventionally academic citations within the exhibition.

Extract from the Exhibition Comments Book:

Still they write us down in history with their bitter twisted lies – still trodden in the very dirt. Yet we shall forever rise!!!

Long before there was a British Empire or corrupt Western Governments forever seeking to exploit those ancient nations whom are now deemed to be backward, we were HERE. Long before colonialism of the nature of a wretched man who has sought to destroy in one day that which has taken millennia to build, we were here.

We are the People of the Sun. We are the People of the Earth. The red dirt of my home continues to course through my veins; it is forever a part of me and I am forever a part of it. We shall continue until heaven and earth pass away. Do not trivialise the experience of the mother who squatted and birthed so many. The Western world will be forever indebted. It owes us its allegiance. People should never forget that the comfortable, sedated lives we lead and seek to protect – even wage wars to protect – only exist because WE EXIST.

The first two lines of this extract are the opening lines of Maya Angelou's poem *Still I Rise*.

During the exhibition selection process the four guest curators looked upon the collections with fresh eyes offering informed, but personal viewpoints for the interpretation of each object, teasing out new stories and narratives that referred to the slavery debate. A curatorial conversation was created that included differences of opinion, but the process permitted all views and ideas to be aired and critiqued.

A moment that revealed these differences and that particularly stands out for us was when the guest curators were first shown the slave models from Brazil (see Figs. 13-16). The discussion that followed split the curatorial team on how these should be interpreted and what was instantly evident was that Kevin Dalton-Johnson and SuAndi were particularly affected by these images.

Before this discussion the four slave models had certainly touched us with their history, and for us they represented a deeply troubling but fascinating story. What Kevin Dalton-Johnson and SuAndi appeared to show in their responses to the objects was a mixture of intellectual disdain and gut revulsion – responses that came from their own dealings with the portrayal of Black people throughout history. They did not deny the importance of the arguments put forward by Alan Rice for wanting to include the models in the exhibition, but felt that they did not want to interpret the objects.

The discussion was intense and demonstrated how real and live the many complex issues that surround the legacy of slavery still are today. It also highlighted how valuable multiple viewpoints are in the interpretation of objects. We believe that this level of personal feeling is something that could not have surfaced if the gallery had curated the exhibition internally.

Alan Rice's label text in the exhibition for the Slave Models read as follows:

'Four Models of Freed Slaves', 1834-36
Brazilian maker
Mixed media

These four models were made to mark the freeing of his slaves by Ralph Henry Samuel long before emancipation in Brazil (1888). Perhaps the 1833 legislation to free slaves in the British Empire gave the plantation owner the impetus to emancipate those on his British-owned piece of Latin America?

The figures themselves, although individualised and dressed in clothing that reflects their newly enfranchised status, are modelled after caricatured images of Africans and could have been influenced by the blackface minstrel depictions emerging in the 1830s. One female figure carries a white baby, illustrating that black women were often the primary carers of their masters' children. Her depiction shows the disturbing relationships between masters and slaves in the colonies.

Presented by Margaret Langdon in 1977 (T.1977.9-12)

Comments from fellow Guest Curator, SuAndi:

If it had simply been a matter of choice without hesitation, I would have chosen to place these horrendous things back into the darkest corner of the collection cupboard.

They do not resemble me or any other Black person. Yet still I recognise that they are meant to be all of my people. Formed and shaped into raggedy dolls for the children of the plantation owner to drag behind them much the same way as slaves were dragged into labour.

To hide the past, to conceal those parts of it which displease, hurt or offend is to collude with those who only want to speak of the past as a time of pride and glory. What civilised person is proud of how the British Empire was built?

My fellow curator was right in his decision to include them. To trap them under glass like the very specimens they are. To have them stare out at the visitor with their beady dead eyes. They represent the silence of the slave.

After the exhibition opened, we received the following alternative comment on the Slave Models from Leslie Braine Ikomi, a collector of Black art and images, and member of the Community Advisory Panel at The Manchester Museum:

I understand that these dolls were produced around the 1830s, specifically for the family.

I do not think they portray stereotypes based on minstrels.

They are too early for this.

It is my opinion they were made in the image of the slaves on the plantation who possibly cared for the children.

There is no argument they are images of slaves, but I do not think the images are racist, on the contrary, I think they were made to remind the children of the servants they were closest to.

Images portrayed after 1860 were minstrelsy.

Minstrelsy relegated Black people to dehumanizing roles.

Skin the colour of coal, ruby lips around a toothy grin, tattered clothing, buffoons, foolish and stupid.

Lazy, singing and dancing, child like.

The dolls here are black with red lips, but remind me of African dolls I have seen for sale in West African markets made with felt, wool and cotton cloth.

Dolls made by Africans, in the image of the people around them, not intended to be racist.

These remarkable models will continue to provoke further research and debate.

A comments book accompanies most exhibitions, a traditional mechanism for logging feedback, where visitors can respond and share their opinions about what they have seen or experienced. Within this exhibition, however, there was a noticeable difference in the way that visitors used and engaged with the comments book. The usual discussions of enjoyments or dislikes were absent, being replaced with carefully considered, and often heartfelt, responses.

Many visitors expressed strong feelings in response to the exhibition and the thought-provoking and sensitive nature of the subject matter. This often resulted in them using comments in the book as a reflective and conversational tool to express their exhibition experiences. We noticed many people sitting for long periods just reading and contemplating the viewpoints and thoughts of others, and then often referring back to previous entries when writing their own responses in the book.

The comments book reflected a complex view of difference amongst people who visited the show. Everyone that came to *Trade and Empire* saw the same artworks and objects; all will have read the same narratives, storyboards and labels; but through the mediation of their personal experiences and histories each left with their own questions, answers and understanding.

Many visitors' comments remind us that slavery and its complex legacy in many forms of oppression are not only historical abominations and but also appallingly, major contemporary concerns:

Thank you for this exhibition. While I appreciate that its focus is on the abolition of the British slave trade, it would be interesting to see more information on slavery as it exists in the present day. Exhibitions like this can sometimes give the impression that all evils are confined to the past

and that such things don't exist anymore, when slavery is actually more prevalent now than it ever was!!

Kevin Dalton-Johnson is right to say there has been no apology for the terrible crimes committed against the African people. But apologies and forgiveness cannot save without reconciliation and for true reconciliation to take place we must put right the terrible legacy of these past misdeeds today. That is, put an end to the unfair trading system that continues to keep the African people in slavery today.

This must end NOW!

An interesting exhibition. However, I do not feel it can fully convey the true horrors of slavery both in the past and present day oppression. There are also no real positive depictions of African culture to counter the negative depictions of slavery. I am also shocked at how much anger this exhibition has generated in this book.

For two weeks after *Trade and Empire* opened in mid June 2007, it ran in parallel with *The Castaways Project*, a multi-media installation by the artists Virginia Ryan and Steven Feld in the Whitworth's Mezzanine Court. Steven Feld's audio recording of the Atlantic Ocean breaking on the shorelines of Ghana, where many of the British slave ships loaded their captured human cargo for the appalling Middle Passage to the Caribbean and the American mainland, was a powerfully resonant ambient soundscape which could be heard in the *Trade and Empire* gallery below. Feld described how his work tried to capture "signs of multiple human and material pasts, on the shorelines of Ghana in the present. Composed from recordings made along Anomabo Beach, *Anomabo Shoreline* . . . [creates] an acoustic memory of where the Gold Coast becomes the Black Atlantic."

Having the sound of the contemporary Black Atlantic permeating the *Trade and Empire* gallery provoked moments of contemplation where we reflected not only on the horrors of slavery but also on the resilience of the human spirit that were bound up together in the history that we were working with in preparing this exhibition. It also provoked an awareness that the real point of marking the bicentenary in 2007 was to help us realise that we still inhabit a world ineradicably marked by slavery's legacy and its shocking current reality and that we have much to do to redress the balance of history in the present and the future.

Footnotes

[1] The *Revealing Histories* project had a commitment in 2007-08 to offer a year of events that were co-produced by the eight participating venues and the public. *Revealing Histories* believed that the full potential of the project could only be achieved through community engagement and this was divided into four main activity strands that involved public interaction: *In my view; In conversation with; In my film;* and the *Revealing Histories* website.

For the Whitworth, *In my view* meant working with the four guest curators to develop new narratives and reveal hidden histories from the artworks and objects in the Gallery's collections. We worked to produce an exhibition that could act as a catalyst to generate public discussion and reflection about the many issues that surround slavery and its legacies.

For *In conversation with* the Gallery worked with a group of local young people and an adult community group in February 2008. *Trade and Empire* was used to generate an intergenerational discussion about the value of culture, the history of slavery and its legacies. Through a creative writing workshop participants explored their personal feelings about the issues surrounding slavery and formulated questions that were put to the four guest curators. The process was filmed and is now being screened on the *Revealing Histories* website.

The *In my film* project also took place in early 2008 and was a partnership between the Whitworth Art Gallery, the Manchester Museum and Manchester Art Gallery. Film company, Reel Manchester facilitated two groups of local young people aged 18–25 to produce a film that responded to exhibitions, trails and interventions at the three organisations. The final film is currently being screened on the *Revealing Histories* website and offers an alternative interpretative voice.

The *Revealing Histories* website partnership includes photographed objects from all the participating venues' exhibitions, trails and interventions and acts as a forum for public debate around the issues that arise. It aims to capture a sense of what happened in Greater Manchester to mark 2007-08 and gives a lasting presence.

Alongside these projects the Whitworth Art Gallery offered discussion and debate days open to the public and delivered curator-led talks to adult and youth community groups, the prison service, museum and gallery professionals, university students, schools and colleges.

It was always imagined that *Trade and Empire* would evolve throughout its life, allowing additional public voices to shape the interpretation of the objects. Various entries within the comments book were placed alongside conventional object labels within the exhibition and posted alongside object photographs on the gallery website to presence a variety of perspectives from the public.

MANCHESTER AND THE SHADOW OF THE BLACK ATLANTIC: TRADE, EMPIRE AND SLAVERY IN THE WHITWORTH ART GALLERY COLLECTIONS

Alan Rice

"We must face the ultimate contradiction that our free and democratic society was made possible by massive slave labor"

David Brion Davis (Davis 2006: 6)

As John Oldfield relates in his excellent book *Chords of Freedom: Commemoration, Ritual and British Transatlantic Slavery,* the commemorations of the centenary of the Abolition of the British slave trade in 1907 "passed with barely a murmur" (Oldfield 2007: 91) as Government and its agencies as well as extant anti-slavery groups such as the *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS)* virtually ignored the marker date of March 25. At the height of Britain's imperial power, there seemed little incentive to mark a date that celebrated a landmark social reform, which in the conception of many influential commentators impacted on few current British citizens. What a difference in the multicultural Britain of 2007 where, as James Walvin in reviewing Oldfield's book and detailing a host of local and national initiatives comments that, "(E)ven for those working in the field and involved in some of these activities, the volume and ubiquity of the commemorations have been staggering" (Walvin 2007: 398). Of course, the commemorations have not been unproblematic with many questioning the almost universal veneration of the Parliamentary white man's role whilst Black British contributions have sometimes been marginalised. This vision of white philanthropy and Black subservience reached its apotheosis in the film *Amazing Grace* (2007) where Black contributions to Abolition are marginalised and yet another opportunity to tell a more nuanced narrative of inter-racial radicalism is spurned to follow the Hollywood dollar.

One of the few publications to mark the anniversary in 1907 had been the *Manchester Guardian*, which in an editorial on the legacy of Wilberforce named him as the "apostle and evangelist of abolition" (Oldfield 2007: 92). In 2007 and indeed in the run up to the commemorations during 2006, print and broadcast media (with the contemporary *Guardian* and the BBC taking a leading role) served up a bumper crop of articles, dramas and documentaries about the anniversary, debates about reparations and links to the struggle against contemporary forms of slavery which still affect millions of people in cocoa plantations, domestic service, the sex trade and textile manufacture in all corners of the world. Notably, contemporary campaign groups such as Anti-Slavery International have been able to proselytise in a favourable context where the subject is at the forefront of the British public's consciousness. People trafficking was highlighted most effectively in an advertising campaign which riffed on the famous image of the Slave Ship *Brookes*. The 1789 image of a Liverpool slaver with serried ranks of enslaved Africans packed into the hold of the ship was brilliantly juxtaposed onto a diagrammatic image of a modern passenger jet showing how the exploitation of human labour for profit continues into the twenty-first century. If nothing else the commemorations of 2007 have thankfully not allowed us to merely view slavery as an historical issue, its contemporary face has, thanks to the campaigners for Fair Trade and against modern slavery, been very much pitched to the foreground.

The commemorations in 2007 gave us the opportunity to tell the historical story of Manchester's involvement in slavery and abolition in a new spirit of openness and scholarly vigour. Our brief as guest curators was to scour the lists of objects researched by the Whitworth curators to find objects which could reveal narratives that would tell the complex story of Trade and Empire and help us fully to remember the slave past. To tell a tale of the local and the global and their interaction; the wealth created for Manchester and the savage consequences for enslaved Africans through this Triangular trade. Malachy Postlethwayt in 1746 outlined this centrality, contending that "(T)he Negro Trade and the natural consequences from it may be justly

esteemed an inexhaustible fund of Wealth and Naval Power to this Nation" (Postlethwayt 2003: 202), and this wealth continued beyond the abolition of the trade in 1807 as Manchester, along with other metropoles of the empire, established its riches at least in part on the basis of slave-produced goods in the British Empire and beyond.

Selection for such a chronologically and geographically wide-ranging exhibition was difficult, a trial and error process which led to some dynamic objects being jettisoned. It is important here to discuss these judgements, as important objects left out of the exhibition mainly because of space or aesthetic taste meant certain dynamic narratives remained in the storeroom. The etching of Richard Cosway's *Mr and Mrs Cosway in a Garden, with a Black Servant* (1784) (Fig. 6), a wonderfully decadent Italianate garden scene with an ornately dressed Black servant would have enabled us to tell the amazing story of that servant John Stuart, otherwise known as Quobna Ottobah Cugoano.

Having been kept as a slave in Grenada, he eventually came to London where he served the court painter Richard Cosway, whose depiction of him here indicates the exotic nature of the luxury and wealth that flowed into Britain from the system of chattel slavery that created the fantastic wealth of the plantation economies in the Americas. The conspicuous consumption that enabled the employing (or owning) of a Black servant and the dressing of him in finery is a familiar trope and one that has often been commented upon by academics and displayed by curators in exhibitions of Black presence over the last three decades. Probably, it is the familiarity of the image that meant that none of the curators were inclined to use the print. The depiction is almost too familiar and has, in the context of black representation, become commonplace. However, with the development of SuAndi's *The Door of No Return* installation, this image could have come into its own. For, Cugoano was much more than a manservant, being one of the most important London-based African opponents of the slave trade in the 1780's. In fact his autobiography, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, preceded Olaudah Equiano's more famous 1789 *Narrative* by two years and contains one of the most graphic and verifiable African eyewitness accounts of the process of enslavement on the West African coast. A Fante born in around 1757 in the village of Ajumako, he was kidnapped aged around thirteen before being sold off the coast. He was kept for three days in the dungeons at Cape Coast Castle, a thankfully short stay in those hellish rooms. He describes how he,

Fig. 6 Richard Cosway, *Mr and Mrs Cosway in a Garden, with a Black Servant* (1784), etching.
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

...heard the groans and cries of many and saw some of my fellow-captives. But when a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, it was a most horrible scene; there was nothing to be heard but the rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and groans and cries of fellow men. Some would not stir from the ground, when they were lashed and beat in the most horrible manner. I have forgot the name of this horrible fort; but we were taken in the ship that came for us, to another that was ready to sail from Cape Coast... (Cugoano 1996, 149)

William St. Clair, the historian of *The Grand Slave Emporium* that the castle represented, describes how the Cosway "picture of splendid civilised living ... contains the only representation that is known of a person who passed through the dungeons of Cape Coast Castle" (St. Clair 2006: 247). As such, despite its aristocratic provenance and its fantastic appearance even within that privileged purview, it has tremendous historical value in documenting an individual African's amazing journey from slave dungeon to manservant as a stepping stone to a significant role in opposing the very trade that had transported him around all three sides of the Atlantic triangle. The same image we rejected because of its seeming familiarity within the discourse of images of the African other, in fact contains a back-story that not only complicates our understanding of

slavery but also throws light into the darkest of sites of memory that inhabit the Circum-Atlantic, the dungeons of the African coast slave forts. Juxtaposed to *The Door of No Return* it becomes an important historical document of survival against all the odds of historical forgetting.

Another interesting image which none of the curators took up was an arresting portrait of an aristocratic black figure depicted as a sporting Renaissance man (Fig. 7).

Identified as Le Chevalier de Saint Georges (c.1740-1799), he could have provided for the exhibition a positive image of black achievement against great odds. Maybe he was a little too exotic and continental to tell the particularised Manchester stories we wanted to tell. His real name was Joseph de Bologne an international composer, violinist and reputedly one of the best fencers in Europe. As discussed by Phillip Herbert in a recent biographical sketch, he was born in Guadeloupe, the son of the wealthy plantation owner George do Bologne and his mother Nanon, an African slave; he had been educated in France from 1753 receiving a gentlemen's education at La Boessiere's Royal Academy of Arms, a prestigious fencing academy. A distinguished composer and violinist, he became leader of the Concerts des Amateurs orchestra in 1769 but was prevented from becoming a director of the Paris Opera in the late 1770s by racial discrimination. He gave fencing exhibitions to the Prince of Wales and between 1790 and 1793 was involved in the French Revolution as a member of the National Guard. Such a larger than life biography would have provided an interesting counterpoint to Henry Box Brown's later performative life and enabled us to contextualise *Le Traite des Negres* wall hanging with an actual French/African/Caribbean's dynamic life, born to a slave mother but becoming a gifted equestrian, musician and fencer, an aristocrat and latterly a revolutionary. (Herbert 2007: 426-7)

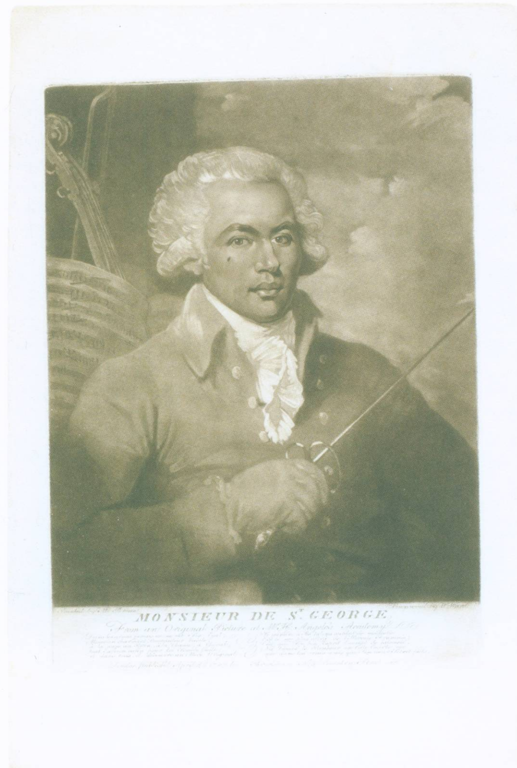

Fig. 7 William Ward, *Monsieur de St. George [Joseph de Bologne, Le Chevalier de Saint Georges]* (1788), mezzotint
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

I hope this description of two extremely interesting objects we guest curators (at least at first) declined to use in the exhibition, exemplifies the wealth of materials that a gallery like the Whitworth possesses that could have potentially illustrated the nuances of the legacies of the slave trade in dynamic and informative displays. These sins of omission were dictated by constraints of space and time, but this catalogue allows us to reflect on and discuss these images and their potentiality. They show that sometimes what is left out is not marginal to the central narrative of an exhibition, rather its nuances are only latterly fully understood by the hard-pressed and sometimes monocular curators. Only when these objects were sidelined did their nagging images work on my conscience. Their back-stories deserve to be told as much as those of the works we chose to exhibit.

Some of the objects we chose for the exhibition are already quite familiar to regular visitors to the gallery. Thomas Hearne's watercolour views of St. Kitts and Montserrat are given a new focus by the show's determination to contextualise these seemingly innocent views by juxtaposing the realities they occlude (Figs. 8 and 9).

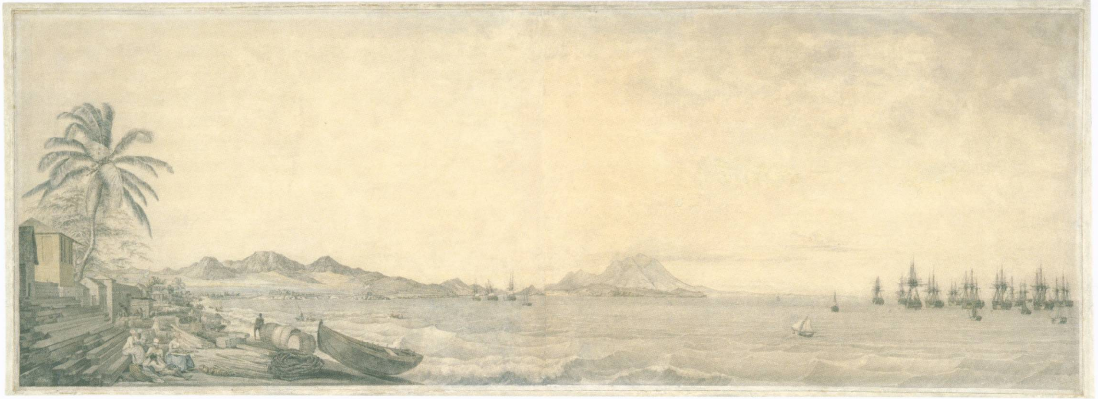

Fig. 8 Thomas Hearne (1744-1817), *View of St. Christopher's: The Salt Pond, part of St. Christopher's and Nevis from the Shore at Basseterre* (1775-76)
Watercolour and bodycolour over pen and ink on two joined sheets of laid paper
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 9 Thomas Hearne (1744-1817), *The Island of Montserrat from the Road before the Town* (1775-76)
Watercolour and bodycolour over pen and ink on two joined sheets of laid paper
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

These are two of eight surviving watercolours from a set of twenty commissioned by Sir Ralph Payne, Governor-General and Captain-General of the Leeward Islands, which were British sugar colonies in the West Indies. The impression that Hearne intended to convey for his patron in *View of St. Christopher's* was that the island was a well-defended, well-planned and stable British colony. At the same time the image effaces the inhuman misery of slavery that underpinned the economic and social system. It is extraordinary to think that this work and *The Island of Montserrat* are rather like contemporary company annual reports, celebrating economic success and power. The seven windmills, visible on estates around the island, were for processing sugar cane. Sugar production had developed by the 1770s into a process that closely resembled the modern assembly line so that such bucolic scenes only serve to hide the realities of labour and daily life on the islands. Plantations throughout the Americas fed the European (and particularly British) desire for sugar. Such tropical commodities are crucial trade goods in the development of the modern world. As David Brion Davis notes, "slave-grown commodities were the precursors to the endless number of products, many of them still produced by poverty-stricken, low-paid workers in the developing world, that we now purchase in the shopping malls of modern high-income societies, in the expectation that they will satisfy non-subsistence or psychological needs" (Davis 2006: 247). These watercolours then are key pointers to the development of modern economies despite their pandering to a rural idyll.

Not content with Hearne's romantic view of slave contentment in a benevolent British Empire, we determined to give voice to a Black witness to realities on these two adjacent islands. The veracity of the African passages of Olaudah Equiano's have come into dispute since the publication of Vincent Carretta's 1999 *Slavery and Abolition* article; however, Equiano's sojourns in Montserrat and its neighbouring islands as a slave owned by the Quaker Robert King and then subsequently as a free man are supported by a wealth of documentary evidence. His eyewitness accounts of the cruelty of conditions for the Black slaves on the island were movingly recorded for the exhibition installation by Brian Morgan. Equiano describes how,

in Montserrat I have seen a negro-man staked to the ground, and cut most shockingly, and then his ears cut off bit by bit, because he had been connected with a white woman who was a common prostitute: as if it were no crime in the whites to rob an innocent African girl of her virtue; but most heinous in a black man only to gratify a passion of nature… (Equiano 1996: 222)

Other eyewitness accounts are sprinkled through his autobiography attesting to the everyday nature of the abuse of slaves in the plantation economy. Later he describes how,

While I was in Montserrat, I knew a negro man named Emanuel Sankey who endeavoured to escape from his miserable bondage, by concealing himself on board of a London ship: but fate did not favour the poor oppressed man; for being discovered when the vessel was under sail, he was delivered up again to his master. This Christian master immediately pinned the wretch down to the ground at each wrist and ankle, and then took some sticks of sealing-wax, and lighted them, and dropped it all over his back. There was another master who was noted for his cruelty, and I believe he had not a slave but what had been cut, and had pieces fairly taken out of the flesh: and after they had been punished thus, he used to take them and get them into a long wooden box or case he had for that purpose, in which he shut them up during pleasure. It was just about the height and breadth of a man and the poor wretches had no room when in the case to move.
(Equiano 1996: 223-4)

Equiano's testimony is supported by the long-term resident of St. Kitts, James Ramsey, who used his nineteen year sojourn on the island to produce his attack on the iniquities and cruelties of the plantation system, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784). Resident on the sugar islands contemporaneously with the African who brought himself out of slavery there in 1766, his account attests to a similar catalogue of horrors to Equiano's autobiography. Ramsey describes how,

I once saw an instance of a negro on suspicion of having stolen some poultry hung up about eight or ten feet from the ground, the weight of his body being supported by his hands tied behind his back with a rope passed over a beam. He was kept suspended in great agony for many hours, but no discovery was made.
(Ramsey 2007: 115)

The level of everyday abuse throughout the Americas in the slave system makes a mockery of Hearne's bucolic scenes.

Equiano's fame has grown exponentially over the last twenty years, culminating in his image adorning a royal mail stamp issued this year to commemorate the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. The portrait below (Fig. 10) comes from the frontispiece of his book published in 1789, which exemplifies the incredible journey the enslaved African had made from his status as chattel in Montserrat to a self-made literate gentleman in London.

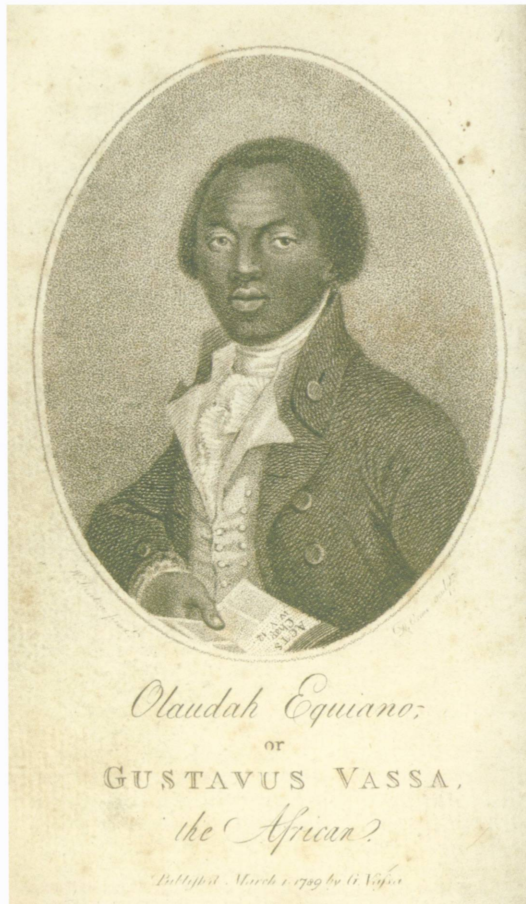

Fig. 10 Daniel Orme (c.1766-c.1832), *Portrait of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), stipple engraving
Photograph courtesy of Local Studies and History, Birmingham Central Library

Much to the chagrin of his pro-slavery opponents, he married a white woman, Susan Cullen and had two daughters. When he died in 1797 he left £950 to his surviving daughter Joanna in his will (Equiano was one of the very few African-descended Britons to write a will in the eighteenth century). Such a vast sum (around £80,000 in today's currency) shows Equiano as an extremely successful author and marketer of his work, enabling him to become "the first successful professional writer of African descent in the English-speaking world" (Carretta 2006: 366). Showcasing a figure like Equiano enables us to tell a much more nuanced story than the Hearne watercolours alone could tell. He not only provides an insider commentary on the scenes they depict, showing their partiality and occlusion, but also illuminates the way that some slaves, despite the horrific oppression in the plantation colonies of the Americas, managed to escape and construct lives that exemplify their courage and resourcefulness in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds.

Ex-slaves such as Equiano bring some of the most interesting stories to bear for an exhibition such as this and Henry Box Brown's incredible escape from bondage in Virginia in 1849 is a stellar example. After his family were sold to a man in North Carolina, Henry Brown decided to flee to freedom. His method was to have himself posted in a box from the slave-controlled South to the relatively free North. Aided by the free Black American, James Caesar Anthony Smith, he was posted from Richmond, Virginia to the city of Philadelphia. Marked, "This side up with care", the box (3ft long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep by 2 feet wide) was mailed to James Johnson, 131 Arch St. On one part of the journey Brown's box "was surrounded by a number of passengers; some of whom stood by and often sat on the box. All was quiet and if he had attempted to turn he would have been heard" (Ruggles 2003: 33); and despite his sign the box was actually upended on two occasions. The 350 mile journey took 27 hours to complete. In Philadelphia the box was opened and the phlegmatic Brown declared "Good Morning, gentlemen!" as if he had arrived on a train. The engraving of his resurrection from the box has become an iconic Abolitionist image and Brown became an overnight sensation changing his name to Henry Box Brown to commemorate his unique method of escape (Fig. 11).

Fig. 11 Samuel Rowse (1822-1901), *The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia, who escaped from Richmond, Va., in a box 3ft. long, 2½ ft. deep and 2 ft. wide* (c.1850-60), Reproduction of a lithograph
Photograph courtesy of the Bristol Record Office

The irony of Box Brown choosing to incarcerate himself in a confined space (much like the cramped coffin-like conditions on the notorious slave ships or indeed the boxed punishment described by Equiano above) to facilitate his emancipation gave his story particular resonances for our Trade and Empire theme as does the link to people trafficking in confined spaces that his escape evokes.

However, our display of materials about Brown was not only to allow us to make such needful if general connections, for Brown is linked to Manchester and indeed the wider North of England, both just after his escape when he arrived as an Abolitionist speaker and performer and later by his residence here. He arrived at Liverpool in 1850 and in common with other Black Abolitionists he visited Britain to relay his story and help internationalise the cause. He brought with him a remarkable diorama, *The Mirror of Slavery* and toured throughout Britain with it. In the North-West he displayed it at many venues in Manchester as well as in Darwen, Blackburn, Bolton, Preston, Atherton, Leigh and Carlisle. It was in Manchester where he made the contacts to enable him to publish the second edition of his book *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*. It was published in 1851 by Thomas G. Lee, Minister of the New Windsor Chapel in Salford. It is the definitive edition of his *Narrative* and its successful Transatlantic publication here attests to the widespread support for abolition in Manchester and the surrounding cotton towns. For instance, John Turner from Ashton, just outside Manchester, and the working-class secretary of the local branch of the Union and Emancipation Society, described slaves as "working men and women who are defrauded of the fruits of their labour and the ownership of their own bodies, because they are guilty of having a skin not coloured like our own" (Blackett 2001: 32). Brown, like many other Abolitionist visitors, tapped into this nascent Transatlantic radicalism.

Brown went further than writing and orating, however, and would often re-enact his escape in the very box that he had used for his escape. In May 1851 "he was packed up in the box at Bradford" and forwarded to Leeds on the 6 p.m. train. "On arriving at the Wellington station, the box was placed in a coach and, preceded by a band of music and banners, representing the stars and stripes of America, paraded through the principal streets of the town … the procession was attended by an immense concourse of spectators." James C. A. Smith who had packaged Brown for his original escape "rode with the box and afterwards opened it at the musical hall". In all Brown was in the box for 2¾ hours, a mere bagatelle in comparison with the occasion of his amazing escape. The carnivalesque atmosphere of such events upset many of the more po-faced abolitionists, but was undoubtedly extremely important in publicising the Abolitionist cause to the widest possible audience, the non-literate as well as the literate. Soon after this amazing performance, Brown broke with his collaborator Smith in an argument over money – their split was made public astonishingly in the *Manchester Guardian* of 9 August 1851 where a joint advertisement advised that their partnership had been "dissolved by mutual consent" (Ruggles 2003: 133).

Over the next twenty years Brown flits in and out of view, but continues his career as a performer with his box and new diorama still essential props as his trajectory moves toward mesmerism and magic as well as Abolitionist discourse. Most intriguingly, new census evidence from 1871 has him living at 87 Moreton Street, Cheetham, Manchester, with his English wife, Jane, two daughters and a son, and Brown was by now doing well enough in his chosen profession of public lecturer to have a servant. His second partner, a white Cornish woman, had given birth to two children, Agnes aged 10 in Stockport and Annie aged 1 in Manchester. Handbills to accompany his lectures in Worcester, Massachussets in 1878 showed him still trading on the notoriety of his box and his marvellous feat of escapology. After 1878 he slips from view, but his radical

Transatlantic performativity can be celebrated here in Manchester which provided a new family life and Abolitionist and artistic career trajectories for Brown. Like Frederick Douglass before him, Brown found his trip to Britain a truly liberating sojourn (Rice and Crawford 1999) that changed not only his own life but helped to form a more radical consciousness especially here in the North-West.

Manchester's radicalism had been a byword in British political life from the late eighteenth century and it had played a significant role in the fight against the slave trade. In December 1787 the Northern metropolis organised a petition of 10,000 signatures, the largest of the 1787-8 campaign. It represented around "two-thirds of the town's adult males". As Seymour Drescher contends, "Manchester's contribution was particularly valuable to the London Committee. It undercut the traditional morality/policy dualism in British culture that had discouraged or undermined earlier appeals against the Anglo-Atlantic slave system. Manchester was the epitome of a booming hard-nosed manufacturing town" (Drescher 2007: 48). The town also made a significant contribution to the successful campaign of 1806-7, when in response to a pro-slavery petition from Sir Robert Peel and other cotton manufacturers (430 signatures), around 2,400 anti-slavery signatures were gathered in very short order. (a full transcript can be viewed at www.parliament.uk/slavetrade). Many of the signatories to both these famous petitions owed their livelihood to slave produced goods such as cotton, yet the moral case against slavery outshone their seeming economic interest.

An 1843 pamphlet by an anonymous Mancunian shows how this perception continued into the campaign against slavery after the ending of the slave trade. Although his call for a boycott of slave-produced cotton did not sway the captains of industry in the town, he describes how

If you buy stolen goods, you become a 'participator in the crime'.... (I)f we purchase American cotton, knowing that wretched system under which it is produced, we become aiders and abettors of the American slaveholder and participators with him in the criminality of the system of American Slavery. (quoted in Sherwood 2007: 50)

The American Civil War of 1861-65 brought to a climax the paradox of Manchester's slave-produced wealth and its humanitarian radicalism and this is foregrounded here by Emma Poulter's brilliant juxtaposition of J. M. W. Turner's English landscapes with the daguerreotype of the Black labour that ultimately enabled their purchase (Fig. 26). There is of course more to the slaves and their emancipated, yet still exploited, sons and daughters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than the sum of their labour however, and we decided to show this through their wonderful blues songs. These songs showcase the triumph of the human spirit despite poverty and degradation. The paradoxical fatalism and radical naysaying of the blues is an apt response to the alienation caused by exploitative plantation and post-plantation labour regimes. These work songs make repetitive tasks more palatable and protest the oppression of single-crop cultures and the debilitating economic systems they encourage. For instance, 'Boll Weevil' by Willie Williams highlights the degradation caused by the insect to cotton workers tied to the production of this single crop.

Boll weevil here, Boll weevil everywhere,
Boll weevil here, Boll weevil everywhere,
Looked in my meal barrel, and boll weevil,
He was there

Boll weevil flew up, he took a circle 'round the moon,
Boll weevil flew up, he took a circle 'round the moon,
Said, "Good-bye farmers, I'll see you another year."
(Williams 2000)

In the exhibition we juxtaposed these blues songs with contemporary versions of Manchester weavers' songs that speak to the harsh conditions in the factories that made finished goods from the raw cotton. These ballads are, of course, together with African retentions, a significant contributor to the Blues form that developed in late nineteenth century Black American culture. But our point is not just to make a Transatlantic link based on musical form, but also to show how such dynamic musicking showcases the links between oppressed workers on these two continents, those living under wage slavery in Manchester with those under chattel slavery in the Americas. An anonymous cotton spinner from Manchester makes this connection and even claims that factory labour can be worse:

The negro slave in the West Indies, if he works under a scorching sun, has probably a little breeze of air sometimes to fan him: he has a space of ground and a time allowed to cultivate it. The English spinner slave has no enjoyment of the open atmosphere and breezes of heaven. Locked up in factories eight stories high, he has no relaxation till the ponderous engine stops, and then he goes home to get refreshed for the next day; no time for sweet association

with his family; they are all alike fatigued and exhausted.
(Thompson 1963: 201)

This polemical and arguably hyperbolic intervention speaks to the truth of the Transatlantic exploitation of labour and the fight against it which was to reach its zenith during Lancashire's cotton famine of the early 1860s. It is a testimony to the radicalism of a majority of Manchester's population that despite the hardship caused by the blockade of cotton imports by Abraham Lincoln's government, many supported it wholeheartedly in order to defeat the Southern slave power. In part at least this story of Transatlantic radicalism can be told through the music sung in the fields and factories thousands of miles apart.

In contradistinction to optimistic radical alliances between workers on different continents and in contrasting labour regimes, the exhibition also foregrounded more troubling narratives from the legacy of slavery. Nothing could be more mundane than Abraham Solomon's 1845 portrait of

Fig. 12 Abraham Solomon (1824-62), *Mrs Rosa Samuel and her three Daughters* (1845) Pencil with black chalk and white chalk on grey paper
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 13 One of *Four Models of Freed Africans, formerly enslaved* (1834-36)
Unknown maker, Brazil
Mixed media
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Mrs Rosa Samuel and her Three Daughters, an everyday portrait of a Victorian family at ease in their place in the world (Fig. 12).

However, this family portrait belies the dark history of slavery that made the Samuel family's wealth. Rosa, the matriarch of the family was born in 1809. She married her cousin, Ralph Henry Samuel a prominent member of the Jewish community in Liverpool, and a textile merchant who with his family also ran a successful cotton plantation in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The family made regular visits to their Brazilian plantation, unlike many plantation owners who were notorious absentee landowners who left their holdings entirely in the hands of often brutal overseers.

What makes their Brazilian connections so interesting is that they brought back with them the four models which we exhibited alongside the portrait (Figs. 13, 14, 15, 16).

These four brightly dressed models are fascinating "mementos" of the Samuel family's sojourns in Brazil. They offer a unique insight into the dynamics of the slave-master relationship which have ramifications far beyond this one family's ideals and motivations. Made in the 1830s to mark Samuel's freeing of his slaves, they are brightly and ornately dressed in clothing that reflects their newly enfranchised status. We have no knowledge as to the motivation of Samuel in freeing his slaves long before emancipation in Brazil (1888); however, we can speculate that the legislation to free the slaves in the British Empire in 1833 gave him the impetus to emancipate those on his British-owned piece of soil in Latin America. The figures themselves, although individualised and dressed imaginatively in their market-day best, are rather crudely modelled after caricatured images of Africans and could have been influenced by the nascent blackface minstrel depictions emerging in the Circum-Atlantic world in the 1830s. We can speculate that the models were played with by the daughters of the house and reminded the whole family of their Brazilian holdings when they were back in Britain. One of the female figures carries a white baby, showing how closely involved in the

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

Fig. 16

Four Models of Freed Africans, formerly enslaved (1834-36)
Unknown maker, Brazil
Mixed media
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

family's life Black slave/servants were. Psychologically they reveal the family's need for their African servants to be contained and confined in representations ordained by their master even after their actual emancipation. These figures are representative of the family retaining control of their docile Black servants: this reflects a continuing theme in Black-white relations and representations, the infantilisation of Africans through slavery, imperialism and colonialism. These objects bring with them many dilemmas for curators. Should we be preserving objects that potentially glorify a racist system that has ramifications for visitors today? As each model will take over £2,000 to conserve, can such expense be justified for objects that are so tainted by their ownership and the troubled history of racial representation they exemplify? The curators wanted the exhibition to serve as a starting point for debate on these issues, but realise that the very unveiling of such troubling objects is problematic for many visitors. The fact that childrens' playthings are implicated in this grimy racial politics tells us all we need to know about the deep running sore of racism that the legacy of slavery and imperialism has created for British people into the twenty-first century.

It is this pernicious legacy that the Ghanaian-born, Brixton-based artist, Godfried Donkor is interested in and critiques through his wonderful triptych of collages in response to the infamous pro-slavery print *The Sable Venus*, which Bryan Edwards had used as a key illustration in his *History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 3 vols., 1793-1801. Pro-slavery images such as Thomas Stothard's *The Sable Venus* were as much part of the propaganda war as Abolitionist images (See Fig. 17).

Twenty-first century viewers of Stothard's image should not be too shocked by its wilful distortion, however, as *The Sable Venus* is more representative of the consequences of the slave trade than of its reality. Its portrayal of luxurious ease is a projection of the surplus value attendant on this Black body. This will create a more easeful life in Europe and America because of a supply of labour that has no wage costs and will eventually reproduce itself at no extra cost. The price of the phenomenal expansion of human possibilities in the Atlantic world was paid by captive Africans and their descendants with their blood and sweat. Donkor's Triptych, *The Birth of Venus* (2005) speaks back to this image (Figs. 18, 19, 20 and detail).

His response to Stothard's image answers excess with collaged depictions of bodies indulging in sexual

Fig. 17 Thomas Stothard (1755-1834), *Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies* (1794) Engraving
Illustrated in Bryan Edwards, 'History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies', 3 vols., 1793-1801
Collection: The John Rylands University Library Manchester

pleasures, reflecting the pornography of slavery with his own borrowings from pornographic imagery. The three images are designed to overwhelm the viewer with an excess of repeated images, in much the same way that Stothard created his *Sable Venus* as an excessive cornucopia of sexual possibility that the exploitation of slavery made possible. Flesh in Donkor's images is the primary narrative too; however, he shows us the reality of the exploitation and forced relationships that slavery gave rise to. His naming of his piece *The Birth of Venus* inscribes this as a seminal image in the making of relationships between races and sexes in the Atlantic world. Close examination of the sun's rays in his collage shows Donkor using pages from the *Financial Times*. The pink colouring

Fig. 18

Fig. 19

Fig. 20

Godfried Donkor (b.1964), *The Birth of Venus I, II and III: Triptych related to Stothard's Voyage of the Sable Venus* (2005)
3 collaged sheets
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

of the paper makes its own comment on flesh, however, and his use of the newspaper here also highlights the commodification of this flesh through the workings of commerce. The financial figures can be seen imprinted on the paper illustrating how late eighteenth century mercantile capitalism like contemporary global markets hide their exploitation behind financial returns. Donkor foregrounds the wealth that flows from the juxtaposition of flesh and labour that the original *Sable Venus* had merely hinted at. To an extent at least, he puts the blood and sweat Stothard had left out back into the image.

Donkor's collages were also juxtaposed in the exhibition with prints by his eighteenth-century hero William Hogarth and they often have a similar satirical import to his precursor. For instance, in *Dessert* (2001) he juxtaposes the Prince Regent with a Caribbean servant woman (Fig. 21).

She supplies him with tropical goods from the wealth-producing West Indies. The voluptuous fruits are presented alongside her body, which the rapacious Regent desires to devour along with his dessert as is indicated by his fork that he holds to his mouth like a phallic cigar. New and tropical pleasures come from the exploitation of Britain's colonies

Fig. 21 Godfried Donkor (b.1964), Dessert (2001) from *Vauxhall Pleasure* series
Collage
Collection of the artist

and the famously indulgent Regent will satisfy all his appetites. Donkor shows here how racial exploitation follows directly on from imperial expansion.

Hogarth's use of Black characters reflects a growing Black population during his lifetime, especially in London, and as servants to the aristocracy throughout the country, so that by the end of the century there were several thousand Blacks in Britain. This Black presence has often been omitted in popular British historical accounts, which have traditionally dated the arrival of a significant Black population to the Windrush generation that settled after the Second World War. Donkor is fascinated by this earlier presence and uses collage techniques to insert an African presence where it has been elided and foreground it where it has been sidelined. For instance in the Caribbean stick fighters in *London Mob* (2001) and the homage to the early Black prize-fighter in *Tom Molineux and Tom Cribb* (2001) (Fig. 22).

In the exhibition, our juxtaposition of Donkor's work with his hero, Hogarth showed how Donkor also strategically inserts black figures which pose questions regarding national identity and multicultural lifestyles of relevance to both Hogarth's time and his own.

Linking Britain to its ex-slave colonies in the Americas and to African roots and routes from there was a concern of much of the work in the exhibition. Althea McNish embodies this in her ancestry, life and praxis. A painter from early in her Trinidad childhood, Althea McNish came to London as a student and made a career in textile and wallpaper design in the late 1950s. Bringing tropical colour to Britain, she became the country's only Black textile designer of international repute. As a member of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) she took part in its seminars and exhibitions, and organised CAM work for the BBC magazine programme 'Full House' in February 1973, which proclaimed to the British public the presence of the Caribbean arts. McNish's career as a rare Black and female presence helped develop recognition of multicultural issues in the hitherto conservative design world. As John Weiss argues, her use of cultural resources in London allied to her Caribbean background led to her unique hybrid style:

> *it is noteworthy that Althea McNish and her fellow textile design students at the Royal College of Art carried on much of their studies inside the V&A Museum. The imperial collection of cultural resources had long been regarded as natural sustenance for the textile designer, and this respect for and reliance on exotic sources of imagery has its parallel in Trinidadian culture.* (Weiss 2007)

She used imperial resources for new purposes. McNish's ancestry and life reflect the triangulation of the African diaspora. Her paternal ancestor came from Senegambia in the eighteenth century, before being enslaved in Georgia, fighting for the British in the war of 1812 and then settling in Trinidad in 1816. In recognition of this her textiles were displayed in a triangular form speaking to Africa, the Americas

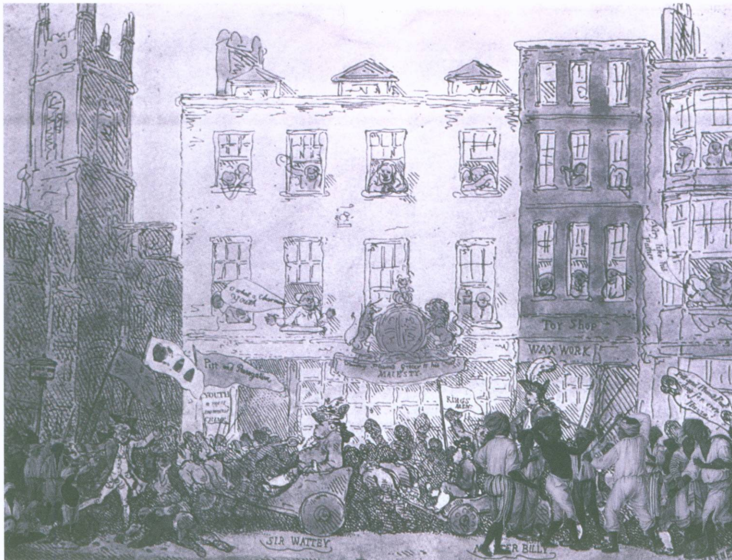

Fig. 22 Godfried Donkor (b.1964), *London Mob* (2001)
Collage
Collection of the artist

Fig. 23 Althea McNish (b.1932), *Golden Harvest* (1959)
Screen-printed cotton satin, Hull Traders Ltd
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 24 Installation shot of *Trade and Empire*, including Althea McNish's textiles displayed in a triangular form alluding to Africa, the Americas and Europe.

and Europe (Figs. 23, 24). The rich tropical colours of the three textiles exhibited here form a contrast with much British design of the time. All have a musical quality akin to the improvisation of African music and its stepchild, jazz. These and the painterly technique make for a unique Caribbean contribution to the world, bringing a legacy from the designer's homeland that colours Britain in a new vein. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the marvellously tropicalised *Golden Harvest* (1959) which was the result of a weekend spent in the countryside in 1957.

Excited by the colour of the Essex cornfields glowing in the British sunlight, Althea McNish developed drawings and watercolour sketches she brought home from that weekend into a repeating design using both black monoprint and textured colour. As she says herself, "My early exposure to the Caribbean environment led me to transform the tiny flowers of the British hedgerow into tropical exuberance" (Weiss 2007). It, along with McNish's other wonderful designs, should warn us against a reductive critique of Black Atlantic arts that wants to make it either merely a critique of imperial legacy or a consequence of it. McNish's exuberant textiles transmit their own powerful message about the limitations of such narrow views, showing that the legacies of trade and empire are both complicated and at times breathtaking in their simplicity.

SLAVE GROWN COTTON, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND CULTURAL INVESTMENT IN INDUSTRIAL MANCHESTER

Emma Poulter

... Every slave in a southern state is an operative for Great Britain. We cannot work rich southern soil by white free labour and if you will have cotton manufacturers, you must have them based on slave labour.

Thomas Cooper, South Carolina, 1830.[1]

Introduction

Manchester's connections to slavery are often overlooked. Where cotton, the lifeblood of the city during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, came from and the slave labour used to grow it is often left out of textbooks or omitted from museum and gallery displays. The story of cotton is integral to the histories and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and its impact on Britain, yet until now it has been largely written out of the nation's history. 2007 marked the bicentenary of the passing of the Parliamentary Act abolishing the British slave trade. The significance of that year and the pressing need to contextualise the transatlantic slave trade and its legacy within British history led to various initiatives being set in motion nationwide, aimed at examining these issues and reconciling the culture of amnesia that exists concerning these histories and the nation's collective memory. In Greater Manchester the *Revealing Histories: Remembering Slavery* initiative represented one such project aimed at providing a wider understanding of the transatlantic slave trade and its impact and legacy within the North West.[2]

In February 2007 I was invited to be a guest curator for the exhibition *Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery* at the Whitworth Art Gallery. This exhibition was part of a year long series of events connected to the *Revealing Histories* theme, aimed at examining museums and galleries and the social and economic history and industrial heritage of Manchester.[3] I was particularly interested in demonstrating the connection between the wealth generated via the cotton industry and its use by individuals at the time and by later generations to make what I refer to as 'cultural investments'. These cultural investments are evidenced through the establishment and patronage of museums and art galleries in the region as well as in the donation of fine and decorative art, and other objects, to their collections. It was these connected histories that motivated my curatorial approach towards the *Commerce and Collecting* installation.

Fig. 25 Cotton Bud Fountain (1996), St Ann's Square, Manchester
Photograph taken by Emma Poulter

Fig. 26 Photograph of *Commerce and Collecting* installation, *Trade and Empire* exhibition

By juxtaposing valuable watercolours by the artist J. M. W. Turner that were bequeathed to the Whitworth Art Gallery by cotton industrialists and their families (who will be discussed in detail below) with an image of Black cotton workers from the American South, the connection between exploitation and the enormous wealth amassed through slave grown cotton is made clear (Fig. 26).

I also wanted to show how other objects from the collections at the Whitworth Art Gallery and elsewhere could be used to complement these stories. Manchester was the world's first industrial city, shaping and being shaped by this milieu of economic growth. The Whitworth Art Gallery and its collections together with other cultural institutions in the region, echo the city's nineteenth century regional and global connections, embedded within which are its links to the transatlantic slave trade. Objects used to demonstrate these links in the *Collecting and Commerce* installation included an African 'war drum' which incorporates a piece of cotton textile, probably made in Manchester, on loan from the West African collections at the Manchester Museum; twentieth century raw cotton samples grown around the world, lent by Bolton Museums and Archives (one of the Revealing Histories partner organisations); and a piece of roller and block printed cotton from the Whitworth collections which dates to circa 1830. The significance of these objects will be discussed later.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Britain underwent a rapid transformation from a predominantly agricultural nation with small-scale production to become a centre of industry, commerce and trade. Manchester was at the forefront of this Industrial Revolution and its economic growth was dependent on one commodity in particular – cotton. Every ounce of this cotton had to be imported into Britain from overseas plantations, the majority of which depended on slave labour.

An estimated 12 million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic into slavery. Enslaved people were denied basic human rights and the inhumane treatment experienced on slave ships and plantations cost many their lives. Life on the plantations was harsh for those who were enslaved, whilst the plantation owners and those benefiting from the trade in raw and manufactured cotton on both sides of the Atlantic, made vast economic gains. As the historian Eric Hobsbawm explains: 'the most modern centre of production thus preserved and extended the most primitive form of exploitation' (Hobsbawm 1968: 58).

At first it was the slave plantations of the West Indies that provided Manchester with raw cotton alongside the traditional sources of the Middle East and India. However, from 1790 the American South became the focus for cotton production following the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney, allowing the short-staple Upland variety of cotton to be cultivated which, unlike the traditional long-staple Sea Island variety, was not restricted to coastal locations. As a result huge swathes of land were given over to slave grown cotton plantations on upland and inland locations (Walvin 2006: 108). By 1802 America had become the largest supplier of cotton to the British market (Edwards 1967: 89).

It was the import of slave grown raw cotton and the export of manufactured cloth which created the wealth on which modern Manchester was built during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With its complex and extensive global connections the economic prosperity of the city and its surrounding areas grew, bringing about widespread change. This prosperity is reflected in Manchester's built environment, through the mills, warehouses, banks, and other buildings linked to the machinations of trade such as the Royal Exchange (formerly known as the Cotton Exchange) and the Free Trade Hall. It is also shown through the infrastructure of the region, the canals and railways that were built to enable the movement of products including raw and manufactured cotton around the region. Less evident but just as pervasive, cotton wealth underpinned and became embedded within the newly established museums and art galleries that were built to showcase this wealth, and through the objects that make up some of their collections, a connection which provides the focus for the research presented in this essay.

Economic prosperity brought about other changes too; the rise of the cotton industry meant that Manchester's population spiralled, multiplying more than ten times from 17,000 to 180,000 people between 1760 and 1830 (Hobsbawn 1968: 56). Living and working conditions were crowded, dirty and dangerous. Whilst some grew very rich through cotton, it caused great deprivation and hardship for many more, widening the gap between the very poor (who came to Manchester in great numbers to find work in the mills, factories and warehouses and who lived in the many slum areas which grew up in and around the city) and those who profited from industrialisation, the mill owners, bankers, and other businessmen and industrialists.

Cotton and the businesses and products associated with it influenced the lives of virtually everyone living in Greater Manchester during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many people were involved with cotton directly through working in the cotton mills, by trading in raw or manufactured cotton, or by working in firms that dyed or printed the manufactured cloth. Integral to the manufacture of cotton were the inventors and the engineers who made and repaired cotton machinery. Indeed, the rapid growth in the cotton industry would not have been possible without parallel developments in engineering. Other people were involved with the cotton enterprise indirectly by working in businesses associated with cotton wealth such as banking, shipping and insurance. The connectedness of cotton to everyday life is perhaps most tellingly revealed by the fact that most people in Manchester and elsewhere in Britain would have worn clothing made from slave-grown cotton.

Global connections

The value of goods annually supplied from Manchester and the neighbourhood for Africa is about £200,000 … This value of manufactures employs immediately about 18,000 of His Majesty's subjects, men, women and children …

Samuel Taylor, Manchester manufacturer, 1788.[4]

Although Britain abolished its slave trade in 1807, slavery itself continued in British colonies for more than another generation, and slave grown raw cotton continued to be imported into Manchester from America. As late as 1860, America continued to supply over 88 per cent of the cotton imported into Britain (Bailey 1994: 40). The general decline in the price of raw cotton between 1799 and 1857 helped to reduce the price of British manufactures. As Barrie M. Radcliffe puts it: 'The cost of raw cotton was the largest single element in production costs, and cheap cotton enabled Lancashire to conquer world markets' (1982: 89).

Manchester's link with the transatlantic slave trade not only stems from the import of slave grown raw cotton but there was also a great demand for cotton goods in West Africa where they were traded with African merchants on the coast for enslaved peoples. Britain became the world's leading slave trading nation during the eighteenth century and in 1770 a third of Manchester's textiles went to the African market (Thomas 1997: 11).

Even after the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807, merchants in Manchester and Liverpool continued to supply goods to Spanish and Portuguese slave traders based in Cuba and Brazil who were active as late as the 1880s (Richardson 1994: 76). As Walvin describes: 'as long as slaves were bought on the African coast … Lancashire textiles provided a means of exchange' (2000: 159).

Fig. 27 *'War drum' with floral Fabric* (c.1898), Ilorin, Nigeria
Collection: The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester
Photograph taken by Emma Poulter

This drum was collected in 1898 in Ilorin, Nigeria. According to its donor it was 'both rare and special and very difficult to get hold of'.[5] The drum includes a piece of manufactured cotton textile probably made in Manchester. It is not known if this fabric was made especially for the African export trade; it may have been exported to meet the needs of the growing number of Europeans based in Nigeria at this time. However, its use in this object reveals the complexity of trade operating between West Africa and Manchester during the late eighteenth century, demonstrating how manufactured goods became integral parts of African objects (Fig. 27).

Fig. 28 *Roller and block printed cotton* (c.1830)
Probably made in Manchester
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

In the collections at the Whitworth Art Gallery there are various examples of cotton textiles that were produced by Manchester firms during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whilst at first the connection between these vibrant textiles and Manchester's connections to transatlantic slavery may appear unclear, as I mentioned above it was slavery which enabled cotton to be grown cheaply, aided also by a fall in production costs as a result of mechanisation. Although more detailed research is needed to identity exactly where the cotton used in these textiles was sourced and to pin-point the exact markets to which they were destined, it is likely that some of these pieces are made of slave grown cotton, and some may also be examples of the types of manufactured goods destined for sale in Africa. The example on display in the exhibition dated to the 1830s and is typical of the roller and block printed manufactured cotton being produced in the Manchester area at this time (Fig. 28).

Various archives around the North West provide examples of the import of slave grown commodities and the export to slave colonies of goods manufactured in the area. For example, Oldham Local Studies and Archives and Saddleworth Museum hold documents dating from between the 1820s and the 1860s relating to John Buckley and Sons who were manufacturers and merchants from Saddleworth near Oldham. These show that the company were buying slave-grown cotton from Bahia in Brazil whilst exporting woollen garments known as cassimeres.[6]

Manufactured cotton made in and around Manchester was also a vital commodity in demand in the plantations themselves. This can be traced through the Greg family, owners and proprietors of Quarry Bank Mill on the southern outskirts of Manchester, now managed by the National Trust. The founder of Quarry Bank Mill, Samuel Greg, was born in Belfast in 1758, but had connections with the wider colonial world of the Atlantic. His father was a merchant, manufacturer, ship owner and owner of lands in America and the West Indies. In 1766 Samuel was sent to live with his maternal uncles Robert and Nathanial Hyde in Manchester and in 1778 he entered his uncle's textile manufacturing business, one of the largest trading firms in the city. Within four years Samuel had risen to the position of partner of the firm when Robert died leaving him an inheritance of £10,000. Samuel Greg also inherited the Hillsborough Estate, a large sugar producing slave plantation on the West Indian Island of Dominica which John Greg, Samuel's uncle, had originally purchased. In 1783 Samuel Greg built Quarry Bank Mill and each year he supplied the enslaved Africans on his estate with clothing made at the mill. By 1831 the Gregs owned five factories in Greater Manchester, over 4,000 power looms, employed over 2,000 people and turned four million pounds in weight of cotton into cloth.[7]

As well as the basic clothing provided for enslaved people on plantations, fine Manchester cloth was also in demand from merchants, plantation owners and other individuals based overseas who were connected to the slave trade. Bolton local studies and archives, holds correspondence between John Fray, a merchant based in Montego Bay, Jamaica, and his uncle Robert Heywood a cotton manufacturer based in Bolton. The correspondence, dating to around 1815 gives details of the various types of cloth required for sale in Jamaica.[8] These letters are particularly revealing of the connections that existed between a slave colony and Greater Manchester during this period.

On the 26th May 1814 John Fray wrote:

I have the pleasure to say the Berlin arrived at Rio Buena on the 7th May and on the 14th I viewed the goods all safe, accept my best thanks for the trouble you have had with this selection…

John Fray then goes on to detail his next order

I should also wish you to have a few pieces of very neat satin they must be very fine and even when bleached and prepared they make rather neat although rather expensive trousers for Spaniards who are very fond of such goods … you can hardly form an idea of anything neater than the finest quilting made up into small cloths or close fitting pantaloons …

I wish I could spare a month to be with you, I would make you an excellent export merchant.[9]

Slavery therefore boosted the Lancashire textile industry in various ways, the trade between England, Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean playing a crucial role in the rise of industry in Manchester and elsewhere in Britain. Tellingly, by 1801 Manchester and Liverpool had become the largest provincial cities in Britain.

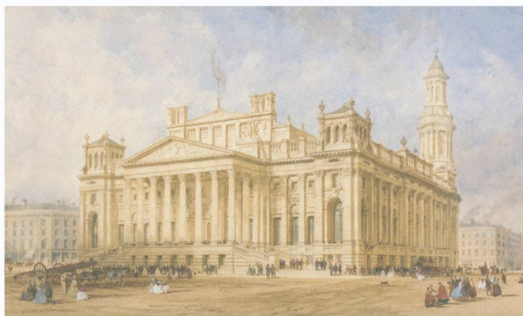

Fig. 29 *Perspective Design for the Royal Exchange, Manchester* (c.1867-74)
Office of Alexander Mills and James Murgatroyd, Architects
Pencil, pen and ink, watercolour and bodycolour
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

In 1729 Manchester's first Exchange was built to serve as a meeting place for merchants and manufacturers, creating a hub for Manchester's economic activity. As Manchester grew as a centre for cotton trade and manufacture, importing slave grown cotton and exporting manufactured cloth, so the exchange was rebuilt and extended. Following a visit by Queen Victoria in 1851 it became known as the Royal Exchange, described as the 'biggest room in the World' (Scott 1976). In the collections at the Whitworth Art Gallery is the architects' perspective design for the Royal Exchange when it was rebuilt between 1867-74. This was displayed as part of the *Commerce and Collecting* installation to emphasise the connection between cotton, commerce and the city's growing affluence during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The decline of the cotton industry precipitated its closure as a commercial building in 1968. It is now home to the Royal Exchange Theatre Company (Fig. 29).

Cotton wealth and cultural investment

I believe it is a fact that whenever there is a very successful period in trade it is a good time for the sale of pictures

Manchester Calico printer, Edmund Potter, 1864.[10]

Economic prosperity in industrial Manchester was translated into cultural wealth via a network of institutions established within the city, which provided the commercial classes with a sense of identity and status both during their lifetimes and posthumously. As well as a plentiful supply of raw cotton and readily available markets for manufactured cotton, the Lancashire cotton industry also depended on developments in engineering and it is in this way that Joseph Whitworth, to whom the Whitworth Art Gallery owes its existence, was linked to the city's booming cotton industry. Born in Stockport in 1803, Whitworth became the foremost mechanical engineer of his day, amassing his substantial fortune making tools to repair the machinery vital to the industrial revolution. From 1853 he also began to produce armaments, creating the 'Whitworth Rifle', an improved version of the Enfield rifle. Whitworth's guns were used by both the Confederate and Union armies in the American Civil War, and the first shot of the conflict was said to have come from a Whitworth rifle (Atkinson 1996, Kilburn 1987). Whitworth had no children; in his Will he stipulated that his estate, which amounted to over 1.2 million pounds, be administered for charitable and educational purposes by three legatees, his wife Mary Louisa Whitworth; Richard Copley Christie, Chancellor of the Diocese of Manchester; and the solicitor Robert Dunkinfield Darbishire (Hawcroft 1985: 209-210 & 227). Darbishire and Whitworth were business associates; Darbishire was Whitworth's financial adviser, but they also became good friends (ibid: 210). On Whitworth's death in 1887 it was the decision of Whitworth's legatees that an institution be founded in his memory and in the same year a meeting was called at Manchester Town Hall to discuss the establishment of an Institute of Art and Industry. However, the original scheme was reliant on obtaining financial support from the Manchester

Corporation and after a breakdown in negotiations they refused: 'because of differences of opinion regarding the control of Whitworth funds and the authority of the legatees' (ibid: 212). Despite these setbacks the Whitworth Institute obtained its charter in 1889, was opened to the public in 1890 and soon became known for its collections of watercolours and textiles.[11] The original plan for an accompanying technical school never materialised (ibid: 214).

Eric Williams in his book *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) was the first to argue for the direct link between slavery and Britain's economic and industrial growth. The issue of exactly how much profit, direct and indirect, was invested in Britain as a result of the slave system remains open to debate. However, the wealth and prestige evidenced in industrial Manchester, through its architecture, cultural institutions and collections, stands as testimony to how some of the wealth generated by the cotton industry and associated businesses was utilised by industrialists and their descendants.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries new generations of rich industrialists and other businessmen whose wealth derived from businesses associated with the cotton industry became established in Manchester. By 1860 Manchester had become 'Cottonopolis', 'a city of a hundred mills and a market for the products of another two thousand' (Farnie 1993:1). According to Mary B. Rose, 'during the nineteenth century, cotton manufacturers represented one of the most significant classes in the growing economy'; she also notes the tendency for, 'second and third generation mill owners to devote an increasing proportion of their income to pursuits outside their businesses' (Rose 1979:79). Such pursuits included collecting, as well as the patronage and donation of objects to cultural institutions in Manchester such as the Whitworth Art Gallery, allowing industrialists and their families to use some of their cotton wealth to publicly demonstrate their social prestige and refinement.

As Michael Howard, the author of the *Guide to Manchester Art Gallery* has described:

The wealthy and influential businessmen of the city created … institutions that would not only serve the community but would give Manchester a sense of identity and purpose. Celebrated and castigated in equal measure as a place of manufacture and commerce, the city had a need to show the world that it was also a centre of culture and taste (2002: 4).

Via the collection and donation of material culture, attributes associated with a middle class 'urban' identity could therefore be acquired and performed by individuals in Manchester, cementing the connection between culture and class (Bourdieu 1984). Within this context, cultural institutions such as the Whitworth Art Gallery acted as 'laboratories' fashioning taste through the acquisition, interpretation and display of material culture (Hill 2005: 144-148).

Cotton industrialists

Alongside the founding of cultural institutions, Manchester's cotton wealth was also directly associated with collecting. This connection is exemplified through the Turner watercolours displayed in the *Trade and Empire* exhibition. Now part of the Whitworth's collections, these were originally owned by the McConnel family, whose wealth stems from the business partnership of James McConnel and John Kennedy founded in 1795.

McConnel and Kennedy's business was founded on producing cotton machinery, but at the turn of the nineteenth century the firm concentrated their efforts on cotton spinning, specialising in the luxury market. McConnel and Kennedy used Sea Island cotton, a high

Fig. 30 J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), *St. Agatha's Abbey, Easby, Yorkshire, from the River Swale* (1798-99) Watercolour over pencil
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

quality slave grown crop confined to a small coastal area of America. The firm was one of Manchester's major employers and by 1833 was employing 1,553 people, 200 more than any other spinning firm (Lee, C. H. 1972: 152).

In 1826 John Kennedy retired from the firm passing on the business to his son Henry McConnel (1801-71). Henry used some of his wealth to indulge his taste for modern art, becoming a major collector and a patron of a number of artists including Turner and Landseer. In 1839 the magazine the *Art Union* wrote of his collection as being 'unrivalled out of London', and the Times described him as 'the pioneer of art collecting in Lancashire' (cited in Treuherz 1986: 38).

For the *Art Treasures Exhibition* held in Manchester in 1857, the largest fine art exhibition ever to be held in England, McConnel lent works by Thomas Uwins and William Collins and the Manchester artists J. P. Knight, J. F. Tennant and Miss Mutrie. This exhibition, which attracted nearly a million and a half visitors, was intended to demonstrate to the rest of Britain as well as Europe, that despite its industrial underpinnings, art occupied an important place within the city's civic culture. However, the ways in which the collections of fine and decorative art on display were also linked to the city's entanglements with the transatlantic slave trade remained hidden. It is pertinent to note that 2007 marked not only the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade, but it was exactly 150 years since the *Art Treasures Exhibition* was held, (marked by the commemorative exhibition at Manchester Art Gallery).[12] Although staged fifty years after the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807, it is important to make the connection between the *Art Treasures Exhibition* in 1857 and the ways in which some of the wealth amassed through the transatlantic slave trade continued to accrue (through Manchester's continued connections to slave grown cotton for example) and percolate through British society after 1807.

The McConnels were also directly associated with some of Manchester's cultural institutions. James had been one of the founding subscribers of the Royal Manchester Institution (now Manchester Art Gallery), which arranged regular art exhibitions to which McConnel lent various paintings including *Venice* and *Keelmen* by Turner (Treuherz 1986: 38). Although much of his collection was sold at Christies in 1886, Henry McConnel's daughter Mary Worthington bequeathed a number of paintings to the Whitworth in 1904, including a watercolour of St Agatha's Abbey in

Fig. 31 J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), *Upnor Castle, Kent* (1832-33)
Watercolour and bodycolour
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Easby, Yorkshire by J. M. W. Turner that was displayed in the *Trade and Empire* exhibition (Fig. 30). Eastlake's *Christ Blessing little Children*, which was part of Henry McConnel's collection was also donated to Manchester Art Gallery, as was a sculpture by E. H. Baily (ibid). In the 1830s, during the cotton boom, Henry McConnel's collection expanded; however, in the late 1840s when prices fell he was forced to sell five paintings, including his Turners. When the firm's fortunes recovered in the 1860s he began to collect again (ibid: 40).

The other J. M. W. Turner watercolour used in the *Commerce and Collecting* installation, *Upnor Castle, Kent*, was also owned by a cotton manufacturer and his wife (Fig. 31). Sir Edward Tootal Broadhurst was a third-generation cotton manufacturer and director of the firm Tootal Broadhurst Lee Co. Ltd.[13] He was a governor of the Whitworth Institute and he and his wife amassed a large collection of pictures that were bequeathed to the gallery in 1924 on her death. As I mentioned earlier, two main types of cotton were grown on slave plantations in the southern states of America. The fine 'Sea Island' cotton used by McConnel and Kennedy and the shorter staple 'Upland' variety. Upland cotton produced a strong yarn, which was more suited to the spinning machines of firms such as the Tootal Broadhursts. By 1801 upland cotton had become the basis for cotton manufacturers in Manchester (Edwards 1967: 95).

Conclusion

The British proceeded to transform the Atlantic World and in the process, they transformed themselves by their involvement in slavery.

James Walvin, Making the Black Atlantic: Britain and the African Diaspora. (2000: 19).

... this is everybody's history. You can't relate it to one group or one ethnicity. It's a global history.

Maria Amidu, Development Manager, Understanding Slavery. Museums Journal 2006 (106: 11, p.29).

Manchester's position as the world's first industrial city was inextricably linked to slave grown cotton. The economic legacy of the slave trade remains evident in the city through its historical landmarks such as the Royal Exchange, the Free Trade Hall and most recently the Cotton Bud fountain, which was unveiled in St Anne's Square in 1996.

The import of slave grown cotton into Manchester via the nearby port of Liverpool during the late eighteenth century continued up until the 1880s, providing the raw material that allowed Manchester to achieve its status as the world's first industrial city. The manufactured cotton produced in Manchester was exported around the world, in particular to the West Coast of Africa where it was exchanged by British slave traders for enslaved Africans up until 1807, although after this date British manufactures continued to be included in the goods shipped to Africa by other slave trading nations such as Spain and Portugal. In addition to this, fine Manchester cloth was also in demand by slave plantation owners and other people living abroad who were connected to the slave trade.

Burgeoning industry in Manchester during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the growth of related businesses such as banking and insurance, meant that Manchester's, and indeed Britain's economy went from strength to strength. Eager to demonstrate that Manchester was not only a place of commerce but also of culture and taste, the city's elite created a network of cultural institutions, which industrialists and businessmen patronised and to which they contributed collections, translating some of the region's cotton wealth into cultural investments. The objects and art works that were displayed in the *Commerce and Collecting* installation in the *Trade and Empire* exhibition reveal the interconnectedness that exists between histories of slavery, slave-grown cotton and Manchester's industrial and economic growth, whilst also demonstrating the city's desire to be a centre of culture and collecting.

As I hope this essay and the *Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery* exhibition have demonstrated, narratives relating to the complex histories of slavery, its impact and legacy, are not confined to one type of object or to collections donated at a particular time, but slavery has a resonance across many collections, institutions and periods. This challenges the idea that histories of slavery are limited to the port cities, or speak only about Black History. On the contrary, the cotton enterprise of Greater Manchester and the peoples and places with which it was connected are inextricably connected to the permutations of the transatlantic slave trade.

Manchester would not be the city it is today without its eighteenth and nineteenth century connections to the transatlantic slave trade. There is no single way to tell these complex and often uncomfortable stories. Like any process, revising the approach museums and galleries take to their collections takes time. However, what is clear is that these initiatives must not be confined to 2007, but form part of changing attitudes to contemporary museum and gallery practice in the long term. Museums and galleries often display objects, paintings and other forms of material culture as being representative of a particular time and place. *Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery* challenges this approach by showing how collections tell many stories relating to intersecting cultural pasts and by revealing how these narratives are of major significance today.

The histories of Britain, Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas have been intertwined for so long that it is inevitable that stories relating to these histories are reflected by objects in the collections housed in museums and art galleries in the North West. It is vital for research to continue to be undertaken into collections to bring these meanings to the surface and for institutions to confront these issues within their displays and educational programmes. What is particularly important is that we continue to use museum, gallery and archival collections to open up a critical space, and to raise questions about our shared past, present and future.

Footnotes

[1] Letter from Thomas Cooper to George Philips. Philips was the son of a Manchester cotton manufacturer of the firm Philips and Lee. Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office, ref: DR 198/ 15.

[2] From November 2005 to June 2006 I was appointed as the principal researcher for the *Revealing Histories: Remembering Slavery* pilot project, a partnership between ten cultural institutions with MLA North West and Manchester Consortium of Museums. The project's initial findings are detailed in the report *Revealing Histories: The Impact of Slavery in Greater Manchester* (Poulter 2006).

[3] For more information see www.revealinghistories.org.uk.

[4] Statement to the Privy Council, cited in J. E. Inikori, 1989: 369. Samuel Taylor was commissioned by the Manchester cotton manufacturers to present their case to the Privy Council committee on the slave trade in 1788.

[5] Salford Museum and Art Gallery accession register. The African collections at Salford Museum and Art Gallery (formerly Peel Park Museum) were transferred to The Manchester Museum in 1969.

[6] Oldham Local Studies and Archives. Commercial Directories, 1814, 1816-17. Saddleworth Museum Archives, MGXVA15,16,18.

[7] http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/TEXgregR.htm

[8] For a more detailed discussion of the Heywood family's link to the transatlantic slave trade see Poulter 2006: 40-43.

[9] Bolton Local Studies. Heywood letters, ZHE/10/17.

[10] Statement to a Select Committee, cited in Seed, 1988: 66.

[11] The name of the institution was changed from the Whitworth Institute to The Whitworth Art Gallery in the late 1920s, *Report of the Council to the Governors for the Year 1926*, The Whitworth Art Gallery Archives.

[12] Art Treasures in Manchester: 150 years on. Manchester Art Gallery, 6 October 2007 – 27 January 2008.

[13] http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/46780

WHAT A CELEBRATION: WHEN ONE IS TOO MANY

SuAndi

At least this year, this year of 2007, allows the slave trade to be revisited, indeed profiled, in a way that does not "accuse" Black folk of "bleating on" about something that happened so long ago.

I have been there. I have heard that.

The Bicentenary of the Abolition of the British Slave Trade has, ironically, brought employment to many on both sides of the race line. Curators have rushed eagerly to recruit from the *black-arts* marketplace.

Arts publications swelled with calls for Black artists to submit proposals and applications. They carried out interviews and read submissions from their empowered positions over that of the artist. Surely, I am not the only person who has connected this image to ones from history. To be blunt: they, like the slave trader, have picked the "best" from the many who have paraded in front of them in order to present their goods (exhibits) in the best possible light.

Some staff played safe and made direct contact with artists they had worked with previously. Others had that certain audacity to invite themselves into community groups to offer their support. Each and every one of them knew exactly what they wanted for their venue, so that this comradeship had hidden intentions, which was a search for a non-emotive account that would attract visitors and expand the education programme.

The bicentenary had also brought with it an opportunity for individual professional development – or self-profiling and career advancement, although not necessarily for the Black artist.

The question is whether, after 2007, anyone within the power structure will consider it appropriate or necessary to revisit this history yet again?

However, as much as I stand by my opinion (well here it is in print) the truth is that, as far as I am aware, none of the artists nor the contracted curators have endured slavery, and neither have any of the gallery or museum staff been slave traders. I have no space in my creative heart for guilt scenarios. I live and was born in the UK so my life has benefited from, and therefore is tainted by, the legacy of the slave trade. I am more interested in the consequences of the trade on this 21st century living. I therefore set this scene to illustrate how the positions of power of white over Black remain within today's society.

This hugely imbalanced power structure is over-visible within the arts and cultural sectors, and highlights its lack of Black-owned galleries and museums (although 2007 did witness the opening of three major Black managed spaces – Rivington Place and the Bernie Grants Arts Centre, London, and The New Art Exchange, Nottingham). Nevertheless, with very few exceptions, museums and galleries have maintained boards of management as fixed as the fabric of their brick exteriors.[1]

It was necessary therefore for many of the commemorating events to occur within community locations. To be sure, these events were not celebrating the abolition with a glorification of William Wilberforce.

In the hearts and knowledge of Black people, it was vital that we honoured the bravery of Nana and the Maroons (also known as Queen Nanny or Granny Nanny). The named Africans such as Olaudah Equiano (c.1745 – 31 March 1797), also known as Gustavus Vassa, along with Frederick Douglass (February 1818 – February 20, 1895) and Harriet Tubman (c.1820 – March 10, 1913), and those whose names we will never know who, under the darkness of night, risked their lives to escape the whip and the lash. Those who managed to ride the "Underground Railway" out to Canada – Africans who had struggled for their freedom to ignite the support of the abolitionists.

Following close behind were the English white working class, who had endured their own oppression under the upper class England that was lining its velvet pockets with the wealth of their labour. These lowly regarded people recognised the humanity of the slave and the lack of humanity of the plantation owners and slave traders.

Lastly, and maybe most importantly, there was the fright in the belly of every plantation holder; even those who had

never stepped foot on the land from which they banked income. For them came the "terror" of numerous slave uprisings that happened across the colonies to de-stabilise slavery. These rebellions showed not only that the "beast" was not docile and obedient, but that it was self-determining and strong.

There were even some who bought their freedom via the exchange of dollars or skin tones; for sex had the power to birth children so light that freedom came as a result of the shame of their rapist fathers who feared to keep such children close, yet found their light skins too white for them to sell as slaves. In these cases there was no profit, just loss.

All of this we have known, always known. Not necessarily through the study of books – we already know that history books rarely tell the truth. As Black people we have known these stories simply by looking and listening to each other. The many tongues of our ancestors have diversified into the languages of the Europeans, and so many of us have features and facial bone structure that passed the history of slavery on from one generation to another. As a woman of mixed-race heritage, I do not want you, the reader, to confuse blood lines such as mine with children born out of rape for enforced breeding as happened on the plantations. There is no similarity between the two relationships, for one is from freedom of choice while the other is not dissimilar from a farmer increasing the breeding potential of his stock.

In Black communities up, down and across the UK, there was a determination to honour our ancestors in their millions. To bring peace through rituals to their souls because their bravery and their survival will never be forgotten, nor supplanted by an image of a white man in a frock coat. It was the **trade** in slaves that built the foundations of the British **Empire**.

The Whitworth Art Gallery borders Rusholme, Moss Side, Hulme, and Chorlton on Medlock, leading into Longsight, areas of settlement for different sectors of Black communities. Moss Side and Hulme in particular are now tainted with the tag of ghettos simply because "we live there". This media labelling reveals not simply racism but a genetic belief of superiority of culture of one people over another. It was this cultural conflict that Whitworth staff wished to debate in an exhibition on the doorsteps of multicultural, multiracial neighbourhoods.

There was never a desire to give a detailed account of human trafficking; a morbid list of how many suffered, this is a number no one will ever know. It is possible that the number of captive Africans who survived transportation to the New World may well have been lower than those who died or were murdered before being shipped – or those who were "simply" thrown overboard during the passage.

There was never the intention to compensate for the trade via an exhibition of positive images of Black people, for this would have been too easy an eradication of what lay in the collection of this fine gallery, which was founded in 1889. The problem with historians is their ability to lose history: to discard what is unfavourable and to polish the rest until it glitters and shines.

Our remit, as four curators representing Africa, England, Asia and the Caribbean, was to bring into view selected items of the Whitworth's permanent collection, admired by millions over the years for their aesthetic beauty, and then to reposition them in a blood line back to the slave trade. To consider their value in the currency of human trafficking that plundered Africa and filled the vaults of local banks, the wallets of trade and shipping, the cotton industry and further into the factories with which Manchester has always been associated.

It presented an exhibition sure to irritate the purists; the arts connoisseurs who may still refuse to allow their minds to make the connection between the slave trade and a painting, sculpture or etching. They may still believe that art stands in its own arena – a result of one individual's creative skill. They may argue that the arena is a pure space that has no link to the spillage of human blood. Is this not the same as seeing the might, the elegant sophistication and intellect of Rome without the Coliseum, or indeed Germany under the Nazis without the gas chambers? Each holocaust took life and left its imprint on all the facets of culture.

The difference for Africans is that our blood was spilt, our bodies laboured not as humans but as chattels. We were beaten, abused and sexually molested, first as the property of our captors and then by whoever purchased us into a life-long contract.

Those genteel folk, who lived in the big plantation house surrounded by finery of furniture, linen and paintings. Those same folk who took it upon themselves to ship back home to England souvenirs by the way of similar objets d'art. They saw no connection between their cultural consumption and the whipped black bodies that toiled the land picking cotton and

sugar cane. For them "the blacks" were a brutal necessity in order to turn crops into profits so that they might enjoy a privileged life, often of a far higher standard of living than any that would have been afforded them in England. These people (I will allow them this respectful title) had little or no understanding of how the rhythms of Africa, the fabric designs and clothing, pottery shapes and the very landscape they looked out on from their lace-covered windows were impacting on their lives. They did not realise that their lives could never again have a monocultural foundation.

Know this: -

If a landowner with investment in the colonies bought an estate it was from the profits of slavery.

If a merchant built a large house or a gentleman's club it was from the profits of slavery.

If a factory owner expanded his business or improved the machinery it was from the profits of slavery.

It is true that there was also profiteering from English labour. It is also true that labour conditions were hard for rural and factory workers, hard and brutal. Nevertheless, no comparison can be made with the conditions that captive Africans (now called without exception slaves) were enduring under the tropical skies of the (then so-called) West Indies and the new world of America, out into the Southern American countries of Brazil and beyond.

Philanthropic investment into all England's major cities by the purchasing and opening of art galleries and museums were all the result of the profits of slavery.

And with what to fill new cultural structures, like the World's Fairs from the mid-nineteenth century, to entice visitors – those who had "seen" Europe in all the finery of the Italian and French movements, visited Rome, endured the heat of Egypt? Something new was needed. Something a little more exotic and, in more than one case, the exotic was breathing, as it became increasingly popular for live Africans to be put on show.[2]

The barbarity of these exhibitions, the lack of humanity towards the people forced into being displayed in similar settings to those of animals in the zoo, serves only to illustrate which side of the race line the true savage existed in those times.

If I, as British born and of Black heritage, can accept that my life is ordinary, and yet luxurious in comparison with so many of my relatives back home in Africa. If I can accept that the foundations of the society I live in has benefited from the slave trade. If I can accept that my hands are therefore unclean, then why can't everyone else?

There is not a bank, stately home, gallery or museum from the 18th and early 19th century whose initial investment is not tainted by the slave trade. If we can agree on this then we will finally accept that in the words of Gary Younge[3] our actions today are the consequence of the history of tomorrow.

That the English discovered Africa is one of those ignorant comments that are spouted over a pint of beer or even a chilled white wine in many a local public house or bar. *"They were much better off when we ruled their countries"* is another. The most astonishing aspect of such embedded national pride is that it passed almost genetically from one generation to another. It begs one to wonder how a country that is so proud of its colonial past, its mothering of others, its high standard of living and democracy and its outstanding education system can be at the same time exploitative, internationally aggressive and so outright stupid.

The Pan African Congress was held in Manchester in 1945. This was one hundred and thirty-eight years after the Abolition, yet the delegation gave accounts that sharply illustrated the hold that colonialism and imperialism maintained over the continent of Africa and the West Indies.

Mr. E. P. Marks, Coloured Workers' Association, denounced the Anglo-Saxons for their exploitation of the African peoples from the time they first went into Africa until the present day. He stated that the existence of the Negro is necessary to the white man's existence, or he would have wiped out the Negro long ago. It was only by co-operation that this terrible scorpion can be driven out of our land. Rome, Portugal and Spain had all been powerful nations at one time, but no one power could dictate to the world forever, and any day the coloured peoples would unite and crush imperialism, just as Germany had been crushed. He sympathised strongly with the grievances of Ethiopians.[4]

Mr. Claude Lushington (Trinidad) West Indian National Party:

Most of the land in the West Indies is owned or leased by large sugar companies whose head offices are in London, oil companies in Trinidad backed by South African and British capital, and the landed gentry. Very few peasants own any land. In the sugar industry before the war, wages

were 35 cents a day for males and 14 cents a day for females. Since the war, though the cost of living has increased over 200%, wages are only 60 cents for males and 45 cents for females. Prices paid to the cane farmers are $400 a ton and more. Salaries paid to doctors and members of the medical services are far below the standard of many clerical workers.[5]

Mr. Samuel I. O. Andrews (Grenada):

The West Indies as a whole have been robbed and plundered, and although King Sugar grows and lives all over the islands, the benefits are not enjoyed by the workers, but by such firms as Tate & Lyle, who, with a capital of £10,000,000, made £11,000,000 profits in five years. I warn this Government and the Colonial Office that the time has come when our eyes are wide open, and we will no longer tolerate the injustices which have been imposed on us for so long. This Government will do well to take heed of what Lord Halifax said in 1921: "The whole history of the African population of the West Indies inevitably drives them towards representative institutions, fashioned after the British model. We shall be wise if we avoid the mistake of endeavouring to withhold a concession ultimately inevitable until it has been robbed by delay of most of its usefulness and of all its grace."

The Africans and African people are on the march and they will not halt until they reach their goal.[6]

Congress Resolutions: Economic: West Africa[7]

(a) That there has been a systematic exploitation of the economic resources of the West African territories by imperialist powers to the detriment of the inhabitants.

(b) That the industrialisation of West Africa by the indigenes *(sic)* has been discouraged and obstructed by the imperialist rulers, with the result that the standard of living has fallen below subsistence level.

(c) That the land, the rightful property of West Africans, is gradually passing into the hands of foreign governments and other agencies through various devices and ordinances.

(d) That the workers and farmers of West Africa have not been allowed independent trades unions and cooperative movements without official interference.

(e) That the mining industries are in the hands of foreign monopolies of finance capital, with the result that wherever a mining industry has developed there has been a tendency to deprive the people of their land holding (e.g. mineral rights in Nigeria and Sierra Leone are now the property of the British Government).

(f) That the British Government in West Africa is virtually controlled by a merchants' united front, whose main objective is the exploitation of the people, thus rendering the indigenous population economically helpless.

(g) That when a country is compelled to rely on one crop (e.g. cocoa) for a single monopolistic market, and is obliged to cultivate only for export while at the same time its farmers and workers find themselves in the grip of finance capital, then it is evident that the government of that country is incompetent to assume economic responsibility for it.

From 1945 we take an historic leap to 2005 only two years before the commemoration of the abolition of slavery and sixty years after the Pan Africanists met in Manchester. Global media attention turned to New Orleans as Hurricane Katrina spread her wrath. Thousands upon thousands watched in horror as the city was swamped by water and racism that left the poor (who are mainly people of colour) behind whilst the rich (and mainly white) were rescued with speed and compassion. Over 1,500 people died in Greater New Orleans and $105 billion was needed for reconstruction. This reconstruction was not only to rebuild homes; I doubt that very little would be spent in rebuilding the plantations now used as tourist income by the city governors. It is possible that the thousands upon thousands of tourists who visited for the abandonment of the Mardi Gras had little inclination of how this great city had come into being. During the slave trade New Orleans was the most prosperous community of the South. It was also a principal port, playing a leading role in the slave trade.

I can find no accounts of the resulting income of import and export of the New Orleans docklands but I am confident that the cost of reconstruction equates closely to the income of the slave trade. Therefore is it not questionable that in such an affluent society as the United States of America where Black people, who are born and bred in theory free Americans, were still treated like a valueless commodity whose lives are held so cheaply that when they become a liability everyone just walks away and abandons them.

History does repeat itself.

There is a strong belief that the Black man will never be *THE MAN*: will never have complete power nor complete self-determination.

Eenie, meanie, miney, mo
Catch a nigger by his toe
If he squeals let him go
Eenie meanie miney mo

Whilst I wish to keep to one side the debate on the lyrical use of the word nigger in contemporary music, this nursery rhyme (a favourite Ku Klux Klan chant) can be used with regard to our response to refugees and asylum seekers. With certain right-wing government support, we are encouraged to consider them all as no-account, work-shy, sly and possibly sexually depraved.

How similar is this profiling to that used by the supporters of the transatlantic trade towards Africans?

History does repeat itself.

My home is resplendent with African artefacts. Sculptures, cloth, pottery – a collection that has taken me time to consider and then purchase. I smile when my friends, my English friends begin to place pieces with similar origins in their living rooms. I see Fetish dolls beside television sets as curry and other spiced food simmers in the kitchen.

History does repeat itself.

The value of this page, this chapter, and this book is a tree. A perennial woody plant. It lives. It lives a life that can surpass numerous generations of human living. And as with this tree the chip that each Black person carries on his shoulder passes from one generation to another. It lives and, like the tree, with each year of denial of the culpability of England's past in the massacre and trade of Africans, the bark of this chip, this living woody plant, grows thicker and thicker.

We carry these memories inside of we
What for you is history captured in a book sealed paint on canvas
Is the nightly wail of terror
That wets our eyes each morning and for a moment the midst of dawn is tinged with sorrow
Anger is an ailment long ago pacified by endurance
And the possibility that tomorrow our ancestors
Will not simply be honoured
But revenged
So that the true history
Will be recorded
So that all children
Black and white will understand
That we were people before we were slaves[8]

We live today in a society of short memory. Popular culture and instant stardom, and even faster disappearance from the limelight have diminished our memory skills. For too many, yesterday only impacts when it brings with it a personal interaction. When something, when life itself, inflicts on the person, it is remembered beyond anything else that passes through time. I wanted somehow to encapsulate this into the exhibition so that each visitor might experience the terror that contemporary Africans throughout the Diaspora carry within us.

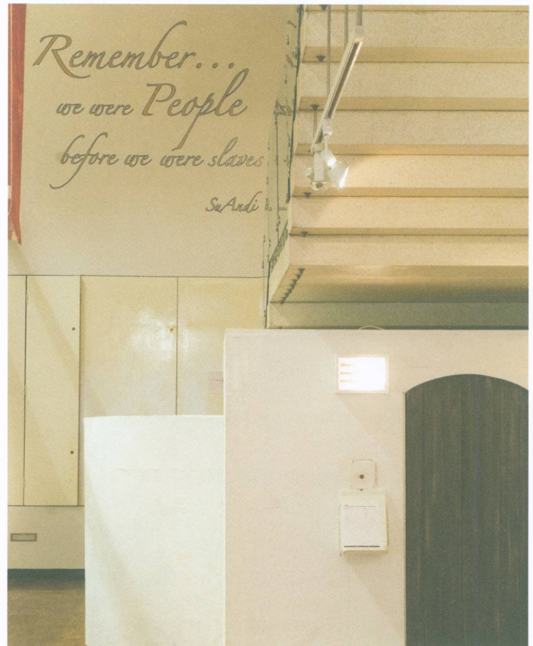

Fig. 32 SuAndi, *The Door of No Return* installation in *Trade and Empire* exhibition (2007-08)

So much rightful attention is given to those who were stolen. Very little regard has been given to those who were left behind. Here too was a cost, a price for the freedom they continued to live.

..."I'm coming you said
Early morning standing out from the fire
Foraging to gather maize for Fufu,
Deliberate you trail long paths to outer regions to discover a
Delicacy of ripe plantain "beg me, bake well".
Night finds you missing
Empty space staring bright in a moonless darkness
Treading water bound human captive
You left one morning and did not return.[9]

The Door of No Return was the final contact that the captured Africans had before they were transferred onto the ships. Kept in almost total darkness as they were, the door, which was no more than a space in the exterior wall of the slave castle, must have seemed much larger than it actually was, as the bright light of day shone through it to blind the already fragile eyes of those being forced through its unyielding sides.

If the value of the slave trade and the examples of arts within the exhibition still could not penetrate through to the understanding of the cost of human life, then I hoped that a few minutes within The Door of No Return might bring the past into today's reality.

In the pitch-dark interior my voice begins...

We will miss you now that you're not with us
We will miss you with hearts full of pain
We will miss you like days without sunshine
We will miss you as though every day is rain
In the morning, the evening and all through the day
Your smile like the summer, in the cold of the winter and all through the year
We will miss you
We will miss you
We will miss you now you've gone away
And we'll remember
We always will remember
We always will remember you like yesterday
We miss you
And remember you
Miss you
And remember you
And remember you
And keep you in our hearts

The drumming of Ethiopian Daniel Tz follows, and the only way to leave is through a small gap in the side of the structure. Once outside you are invited to tie a knot of memory for someone you have "lost" – someone who has passed. Someone you will never see again and to hang this knot on the fishing net suspended from the gallery staircase.

We are all connected to someone else. And because of this connection we are all connected to each other.

Let me return to the late great reggae maestro Robert Nesta Marley:

"If you know your history
Then you will know where you're coming from"

This is where I come from, as the Liverpool daughter of a Nigerian father:

I speak in English.
Think in English.
Read in English.
Live beside the English.
Survive the English.
Appear English.
But my soul is African[10]

Though I have no knowledge that any member of my family was captured and sold into the slave trade, I remain connected to this history. As we all are.

Footnotes

1 One exception is The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester, where the culturally diverse Community Advisory Panel has a strong advisory role over policy, acquisitions and disposals.

2 Human zoos (also called "ethnological expositions" or "Negro Villages") were 19th and 20th century public exhibits of human beings, usually in a "natural" or "primitive" state. The displays often emphasised the cultural differences between Western and non-European peoples. Ethnographic zoos were often predicated on unilinealism, scientific racism, and a version of Social Darwinism. A number of them placed indigenous people (particularly Africans) in a continuum somewhere between the great apes and human beings of European descent. For this reason, ethnographic zoos have since been criticised as highly degrading and racist

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gary_Younge
International Creative Forum: South Bank Centre, London, 10 November 2007

4 1945 Pan African Congress. Ethiopia and the Black Republics
October 17th, 1945. Second Session

5 The Problem in the Caribbean October 18th, 1945. Second Session

6 The Problem in the Caribbean

7 Congress Resolutions: Economic: West Africa

8 SuAndi unpublished

9 There Will Be No Tears ISBN © SuAndi 1 90016 00 1

10 © SuAndi

TONY PHILLIPS: *THE HISTORY OF THE BENIN BRONZES* (1984): A METAPHOR FOR DIASPORIC DISPLACEMENT

Kevin Dalton-Johnson

Introduction

I am a Black professional visual artist who has lived in Manchester for the past 25 years. My specialism is ceramics, where I feel at home, making large expressive sculpted busts that act as a visual diary of events that reflect my identity and journey as an African Diasporic man living in the United Kingdom. This style of working has proved extremely important at different junctures in my life, from a boy to a man. A brief insight into my background will explain why this process of visual catharsis is so important and why I selected the series of prints by Tony Phillips, *The History of the Benin Bronzes*, to interpret in the *Trade and Empire* exhibition.

I was raised in a predominantly white middle class area of Nottingham called Arnold, where being Black was problematic. Here racist abuse and taunts were the norm, with me and other family members having to deal with the harmful effects of this on a daily basis, with little or no support. There were quite a few occasions when I was badly beaten by skinheads and National Front supporters, with one particular fight resulting in me staying in hospital for almost a month due to injuries inflicted by milk bottles and motorbike chains. Other family members encountered the same hatred and can recount similar experiences. Living in Arnold was very different to Hysen Green where we lived previously (one of the most notoriously violent areas in Nottingham). Like most communities, Hysen Green had its problems but at least there was a strong, thriving Black community there that gave us much needed support and helped us to cope with the negative reaction to our Black identities. As a direct result of my experiences of racism and violence I felt pressured to reject my black identity, culminating in feelings of confusion and self-loathing, as I felt displaced, lost, and lacking a sense of identity and belonging. These feelings were compounded by the rejection from Black people because we lived and were schooled in a white middle class area. Needless to say, this rejection from both sides generated feelings of alienation, confusion and anger, which had to be vented. Initially this outlet was through fights and aggressive outbursts. However, I am relieved to say a chance meeting, ironically with a 'white' visual artist – Hughie O'Donoghue – changed my mode of expression to one that was positive and included the practice of modeling clay, used as a cathartic medium, where the plethora of emotions I was experiencing could be released and channelled in a positive direction.

My interest in clay as an expressive medium began during a workshop conducted by Hughie O'Donoghue, as part of the Visual Arts degree programme at Bretton Hall University College. O'Donoghue's work resonated in me with a sublime power and strength that I found totally captivating. During an intense workshop, he showed me that clay could be used as a powerful vehicle for self-expression and did not have to be confined to making functional objects. From this point I used clay to produce self-portrait busts that showed my feelings as a Black man living and working in the United Kingdom (Fig 33). My work became expressive and cathartic, dealing with issues of race, bigotry, child abuse, sexuality, and, more importantly in the context of this exhibition, isolation and displacement as experienced by many of my African diasporic brothers and sisters here in the UK.

For the past twenty-five years I have been working as a professional artist, have continued to use my work as a tool to release suppressed emotions and have exhibited at many national and international venues. But, more important has been my work with BAA (Black Arts Alliance) – being involved with and conducting numerous workshops and events – which has enabled me to help others of varying ages and backgrounds to use art in a similarly expressive way, to understand who they are and their

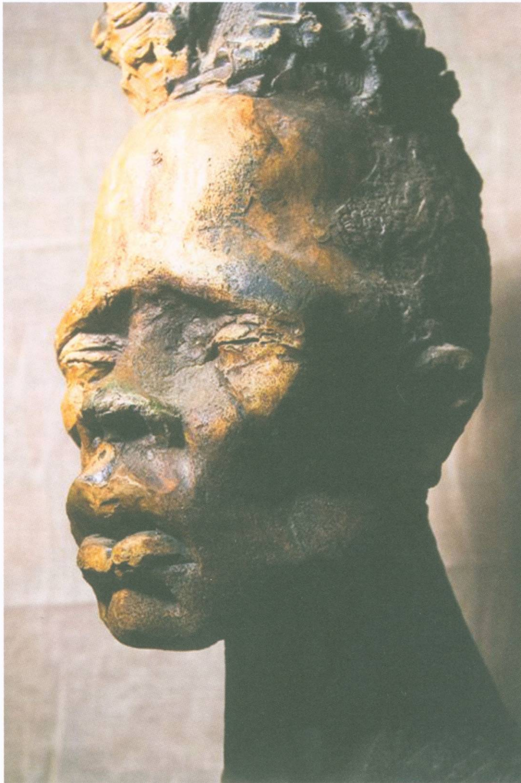

Fig. 33 Kevin Dalton-Johnson, *Anguish Within* (1987) Ceramic bust
Photograph by Eddie Rhead

different identities and how these identities can be interpreted and represented through the arts.

During my teaching career, which has also spanned twenty-five years, I have been able to take this expressive style of working further, as I have deliberately chosen to work with young people who have similar background to me, who are usually very receptive to this style of work and teaching, as they often feel similar emotions and are also often misunderstood. For example, in my sculptures and drawings Black identity is represented and a range of issues are dealt with. Within my role as teacher there is a dual outcome. Firstly, my teaching helps others to overcome their difficulties and issues of identity through using art as a powerfully expressive, therapeutic and empowering tool. Secondly and equally important, being a Black man in the role of a teacher, in what are usually predominantly white schools where Black teachers are rare, and being effective in this role, enables me to challenge negative perceptions of the Black male, which are widely held by many young people. This aspect of my work explains why I felt attracted to the position as a guest curator for the *Trade and Empire* exhibition at the Whitworth Art Gallery.

At the beginning of the project myself and the other guest curators, Alan Rice, SuAndi and Emma Poulter, all of whom are from different backgrounds and professions, were invited to meet at the Whitworth with David Morris (Head of Collections) and Andrew Vaughan (Learning and Interpretation Manager). At this informal meeting the aims and objectives of the exhibition, along with an explanation of our roles were clearly explained and discussed. It was at this meeting also that the gravity of this undertaking suddenly struck me. For as I sat in the inner sanctum of the gallery and took in the smell of the old wooden panelling, shelved with books and artefacts that informed me of their age and Eurocentric importance, I began to realise the significance of a 'Black man' being actively engaged with making decisions about how my ancestors and the horrific events of the African Holocaust should be presented in a public exhibition.

The guest curators were presented with a wide range of images and artefacts from the gallery's collections related to the exhibition themes of trade, empire and the legacies of slavery. Throughout this first meeting it was very difficult for me, a person new to this area of activity, to control a plethora of emotions. In my head were painful images of my ancestors, evoked by the pictures and artefacts presented to me. At the same time, many questions occurred to me as David and Andrew continued to describe the parameters for the show.

"Will I be able to use the pictures and artefacts effectively, to communicate the true devastation and horror of the slave trade? Will the Whitworth's collection facilitate my main objective to present my ancestral history in a way that all my brothers and sisters will relate to, or will I unwittingly slide into the Eurocentric perspective we have unfortunately now come to expect? How many other Black brothers and

sisters have had this opportunity?' How many pictures and artefacts have been interpreted and presented in this one establishment, without even the faint echo of a Black voice? Will my selection and interpretation of the collection give my ancestors 'The Captured Africans' the respect and honour they truly deserve?"

These are important questions that any Black person would need to consider in similar circumstances and could not be ignored. Such questions, as well as filling me on the spot with absolute fear and awe, helped to validate the importance of being asked to be involved in this innovative project and justified why my answer had to be 'yes.'

The last time I was so overwhelmed by feelings of awe and self doubt, with my ancestors willing me to go forward, was when I came out of an intense interview, after winning the STAMP (Slave Trade Arts Memorial Project) commission to make a public sculpture for Lancaster to mark the city's involvement in the forced transportation of approximately 24,950 Africans across the Atlantic and into slavery in the West Indies and the Southern States of America (Fig. 34). The aim of STAMP was to make sure that future generations have local spaces where they can effectively remember those whose lives were blighted by the slave trade. The *Captured Africans* sculpture became the first of its kind in the UK. As I stepped out of the interview room in the Maritime Museum in Lancaster, the daunting magnitude of what I had just undertaken to do hit me. However, this sense of responsibility also motivated me to produce, with the support of others, a highly successful public sculpture. I feel proud to have created this sculpture, which is widely held to have honoured our African ancestors, and was validated by a ceremonial libation conducted by Preston King and the positive feedback received from the many African Diasporic brothers and sisters present at its inauguration in 2002. Drawing on this unique and special experience, I hoped to meet my objectives as a guest curator for *Trade and Empire* and hopefully complement the perspectives of my fellow curators.[1]

Fig. 34 Kevin Dalton-Johnson, *Captured Africans* (2002), public sculpture in Lancaster
Photograph by Eddie Rhead

Amongst the images and objects that were presented to the guest curators, *The History of the Benin Bronzes*, a series of etchings by Tony Phillips, was the only set of images that I felt allowed me, in the role of curator, to use my pedagogic skills, artistic skills and expertise. Further, and more importantly, I felt that these images would allow me to draw on my experiences as an African diasporic male who, like many others, is constantly confronted by the resonant after effects of the African Holocaust and the legacies of colonialism that are still so influential in today's globalised and media-driven society. By focusing on the effects of the slave trade, some of which are illustrated in *The History of the Benin Bronzes* and experienced by most diasporic Africans, I hoped to balance the exhibition by creating a contemporary context that would complement the historical contexts presented by Dr. Alan Rice, Emma Poulter and SuAndi.

Issues of identity are crucial to understanding today's society and more specifically the African Diaspora. Black identity is highly problematic in the UK today and many people of African Diasporic origin have to live with the negative consequences of this on a day-to-day basis. Close analysis of the representation of Black people in the major tabloid newspapers, and popular and visual cultures, reveals how the Black male in particular is still vilified and is continually used as a scapegoat for society's problems. The media has now developed particular forms of language designed to keep negative perceptions of Black people in the forefront of our minds. It is therefore a regular occurrence to see references to 'Black on Black crime', and the association of Black youths with the terms Hoodies, Urban, Ghetto, and BME, which are used pejoratively. There appears to be a regular and effective use of the same language and rhetoric used previously in colonial times to marginalise and control Black people. Because at the same time 'Black' has also become a highly marketable commodified image that has been successfully repackaged and sold to a consumer led globalised world, many are unaware of the powerful colonial constructs underlying this harmful legacy. In this context, race is not the only category of identity that has proved to be problematic, but so too has sexual identity. Issues of identity become far more problematic and complex when both race and sexuality collide in the figure of the Black gay male (BGM), which is the primary focus of my research and artistic work.

While pursuing these issues, it became painfully clear that the reason the Black community seems to find the BGM an impossible figure to accommodate is because many of the present Afro-Caribbean belief systems are predominantly Christian, and are still largely governed by ideologies inherited from the colonial period. This position has continued with only limited resistance, because indigenous beliefs were wiped out during the period of colonial domination. The afro-centric movement in Jamaica, whilst it still exists and is gathering popularity, is not as influential as Christianity, which still largely controls Jamaican popular cultures. Along with the removal of indigenous belief systems under colonialism went the removal of culture and identity, the result of which has been the displacement experienced by many Afro-Caribbean/African Diasporic people, who now have limited and fragmented information about their culture and heritage.

It is now important to look into the background and heritage of the artist Tony Phillips to understanding the motives behind the creation of *The History of the Benin Bronzes* and to explain why I identified with this artist and selected his work for the *Trade and Empire* exhibition.

Printmaking techniques and the recovery of Black history

Tony Phillips is a Black artist born in Liverpool in 1952. He studied mural painting at Lancaster Art College, graduating in 1972. He remained in Lancaster until 1977, working as an artist involved in street theatre, community work and social activism. In 1977 Phillips made the decision to move closer to London, and relocated to Shrewsbury, where he remained until 2001, before moving to Italy. Tony Phillips was involved in the seminal exhibitions *Black Art: Plotting the Course* (1988) and *History of Identity* (1991), both curated by Eddie Chambers, who worked tirelessly to widen the spectrum of Black artistic practice. Phillips contributed his most ambitious works to these exhibitions and this work resonated with Eddie Chambers' Pan-Africanist sensibility and wit.

Tony Phillips' work has explored themes of consumerism, capitalism, the dislocation of the human from nature, the nude, history, the passage of time and the visual, the role of the individual in society, and painted and printed images of Liverpool. He has worked to develop and define his own visual language in printmaking. His print series have often had a strong narrative theme. Usually he creates the first image and then prints the whole edition of impressions from this plate before moving on to the next image. The same plate is then used to form another image from either later or earlier in the narrative sequence, with some area of the first image on the plate left unchanged, some altered, and some obliterated entirely. Tony Phillips has made many series of prints in this way, including *Jazz*, *Guide to the 20th Century* and *The History of the Benin Bronzes*. This device works perfectly to illustrate the theme of diasporic displacement and the difficult and fragmentary process of recovering Black cultural history.

The thematic richness of this approach to making a series of prints, combined with the powerful subject matter, was what attracted me to *The History of the Benin Bronzes*. When I first saw the series the narrative pulled me in immediately and demanded my attention, as it was so closely related to my own interests and research. I also felt

that these prints constituted a crucial repository of images representing the Benin past, and an argument for returning the bronzes to Benin. On closer inspection, it became apparent to me that the artist had used the same plate to create more than one image in the story, which led me to believe that there was more to the print series than was apparent from simply understanding the narrated sequence of events.

The second half of *The History of the Benin Bronzes* presents a narrative of violence, hypocrisy and the ironies of cultural identity, through picturing events surrounding the British Punitive Expedition into Benin in 1897, which resulted in the sacking and burning of the city, the looting of thousands of bronze and wooden artefacts, and the sending into exile of the Oba (the spiritual and political leader) of the city. The series of prints then ends by showing the dispersal of the Benin sculptures around the Western world, ending up in various auction houses, galleries and museums, the academic lecture theatre and the private lounge, where they are discussed and admired.

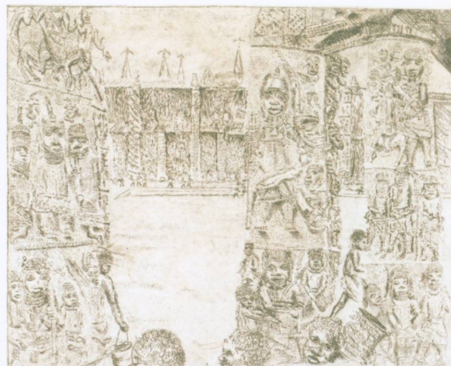

Fig. 36 Tony Phillips, Plate 3, *The Oba's Palace* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 35 Tony Phillips, Plate 7, *Punitive Expedition 1897* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

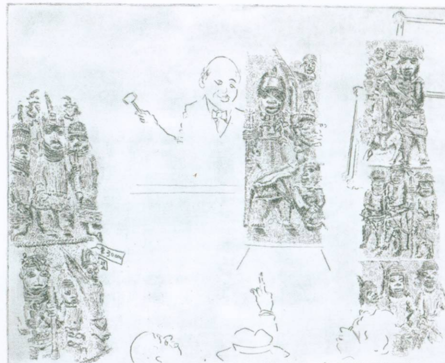

Fig. 37 Tony Phillips, Plate 8, *The Auction* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 38 Tony Phillips, Plate 1, *Ancestral Heads* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 39 Tony Phillips, Plate 9, *The Gallery* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 40 Tony Phillips, Plate 2, *Divine Kingship* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 41 Tony Phillips, Plate 10, *The Lecture* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

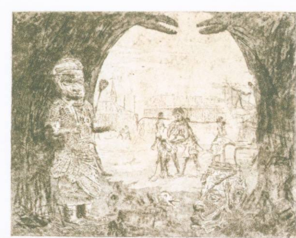

Fig. 42 Tony Phillips, Plate 4, *Shrine of Sacrifice* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 43 Tony Phillips, Plate 11, *The Lounge* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 44 Tony Phillips, Plate 5, *The Ododua Dance* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 45 Tony Phillips, Plate 6, *The Punitive Expedition* 1897 (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Fig. 46 Tony Phillips, Plate 12, *Face to Face* (1984), etching
Collection: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

When the Benin sculptures were brought to the West, they were widely seen as some of the greatest examples of bronze casting in existence, and as important works of art that helped to define the Western taste for what was seen as a 'primitive' Black aesthetic. However, their original function was far more important than just providing a visual confirmation of entrenched British and Continental European colonial ideologies. These sculptures were integral to the beliefs and customs of Benin civilisation.

The first five prints of the sequence were created late in the production process of the series, from plates used previously to make the images showing the bronzes in Western contexts. These images from the beginning of the narrative series show the bronzes intact in their original contexts in Benin society, where they performed a complex variety of functions: – as religious objects involved in ritual sacrifice, ancestral worship, and dance; as magnificent symbols of the power and the strength of the Oba and the people of Benin, warding off evil spirits and the challenges of neighbouring communities; and as decorative objects enhancing the beauty of the Oba's Palace. The details of these lost functions and lost social contexts, were imaginatively redrawn and reconstructed by Tony Phillips in the process of reusing the plates and making the prints; a process that was at the same time an attempt to recover important contexts in Black history, disrupted by the expansion of the British empire into Benin in 1897.

Modern African Diasporic displacement is metaphorically revealed in *The History of the Benin Bronzes*. For in showing the Benin sculptures stripped of their original meanings and presented in a totally different context, where they are misunderstood and misread, Tony Phillips also alludes to how African diasporic people have been forcibly removed from their home and placed in a totally different environment, where they too are misunderstood, and degraded. This is further complicated by misinformation as a result of the rewriting of history to suit Eurocentric colonial ideology. All this makes it extremely difficult for displaced African diasporic people to reclaim their true heritage, which is needed if they are to proudly own their identities as black people. I propose that the inability to reclaim cultural heritage, which is now locked into a Eurocentric framework of history, has greatly contributed to the growth of a disenfranchised generation of young Blacks, who are today presented with the commodified Black identity that harks back to colonial ideologies. Once the viewer understands the purpose of reusing the plates, and repeating images in the series, the prints themselves take on new meanings that are powerful and empowering to the diasporic gaze. Knowledge is power and gaining an insight as to how and why our cultural heritage was removed and where it has gone, provides us with the starting point required for a strategy of reclamation and empowers those engaged in this positive activity to move forward.

The Benin Bronzes Revealing Histories Table Installation

The Benin Bronzes Revealing Histories Table installation was designed to show how easily new stories can be created, just by changing the sequence of a few facts, thus highlighting one of colonialisms most effective strategies, the re-writing of history and the removal and re-configuring of information. The installation was an important aspect of my input to this exhibition, as the second narrative of dislocation and displacement exposed by *The History of the Benin Bronze* prints is subtle and easy to miss. The idea to use the puzzle format for the table came from the frustration I felt as a child when I would try to solve similar letter puzzles, free in a 'Lucky Bag', bought from the local corner shop. I recalled how moving just one piece incorrectly could cost you dearly in time, like the wrong twist of a Rubik's Cube in the 1980's.

In the installation, the information that was removed and re-configured was the history of the Benin Bronzes. The effect of using the table could also be compared to Chinese whispers, where a series of people each contributes their interpretation of a simple message, which then becomes unrecognisable by the time it arrives at the last person in the chain. With the table, a similar principle applies: with each person that changes the order of the interlocking blocks, the original sequence and story become more and more distant. It symbolises the difficulty faced by so many people of the African Diaspora who strive to find their original cultural heritage but are faced with information presented from a western Eurocentric perspective and artefacts that are situated in a context totally at odds with their original purpose and use.

The other items in the installation were included to create a context for the table and to symbolise an oppositional clash of cultures. The wicker sofa and rug represented the living room shown in *The Lounge* print, where the Benin Bronze is viewed solely as a decorative ornament that has no other function other than to be admired from the

Fig. 47 Kevin Dalton-Johnson, *The Benin Bronzes Revealing Histories Table* (2007-08), with Tony Phillips' print series, *The History of the Benin Bronzes*, on the right hand wall.
Installation photograph from the Trade and Empire exhibition

comfort of a chair. The rugs were deliberately purchased from IKEA, a flagship of modern domestic consumption in Western Europe, to stand for the globalised consumerism that has helped to reinvent and repackage Black identity and made it prevalent in today's popular culture. The drum represented African diasporic people and objects like the Benin Bronzes, which have been removed from their original homeland and are now misunderstood out of context. The drum had changed its meaning from being an important instrument that creates a gateway to ancestral communication, to being merely a commodified ethnic ornament.

Tony Phillips' print series *The History of the Benin Bronzes* pictures how these culturally specific and internationally important sculptures were looted by the British army and then venerated by the bourgeoisie of Western imperialist countries as objects of great beauty and highly advanced craftsmanship. During the same period the European states and their agents considered the subjugated African peoples as 'primitive', uncivilised, and worthy only of the enforced imposition of Western standards and ways of life. This is a sad reflection on the nature of imperialism and on human interaction: that the reality of brutal repression and suffering can be discounted, while artefacts acquired as a result of this brutality can be aesthetically admired.

Tony Phillips eloquently states that the journey of the Benin Bronzes parodies the artistic process itself, in which the artwork, once it leaves the hands of the artist must make its own way in the world, become subject to the misinterpretations, prejudices and changing contexts of human circumstances, and hope to still have a message to convey wherever it ends up. In his skilful refiguring of the Benin Bronzes narrative, Phillips has been able to extend the story further, to show how the damage caused by the removal of enslaved Africans to foreign lands, has led to misinterpretation, prejudice and confusion. *The History of the Benin Bronzes* print series provides a contemporary context that helps to visualise the detrimental effects of the colonial legacy and the African Holocaust that was the slave trade.

Footnote

[1] Preston King is a member of a family known for its activism during the Albany Movement. King was convicted of draft evasion in 1961, after he refused to comply with orders from the Albany draft board addressing him as "Preston," rather than "Mr. King." King jumped bail following his trial and lived abroad until 2000, when he received a pardon and returned to Georgia. A prominent academic, who in 1986 taught in England, firstly at Lancaster University and then at the University of East Anglia who today lives in Atlanta.

AFTERWORD

Lemn Sissay

Revealing Histories

In the eighties and my late teens I lived in a Lancashire village dominated by cotton mills. The Lancastrian was proud, independent, tea-drinking, working class and English. He couldn't be further, in space, time and experience from Africa, America and the slave trade? In fact, the tea, the sugar used in it *and* the cotton from the mills were all produced by slaves. His livelihood and all the industries that surrounded it were directly dependant on the slave.

Coronation Street, the oldest soap on British television, harks back directly to that time through the sewing factory. These little factories surrounded the area of the mills – I worked in one. How is it that such a massive trade as The Slave Trade, the fuel of industrialisation, could become so invisible to those who benefited from it? Revealing Histories proves through art that the connection to slavery was as close to the Lancastrian as the cuppa he "supped".

Still, it was a shock to see my village mentioned in Revealing Histories. It's all down to Henry 'Box' Brown (1815-c.1880) who became a freed slave. An abolitionist supporter in America published his life story, *The Narrative of the Life of Henry 'Box' Brown*. And the second imprint published in Salford is here in the *Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery* exhibition.

Henry 'Box' Brown travelled from America to England to tour this narrative as part of the abolitionist campaign. My village – Atherton – is just one of the places he performed *and* Leigh. I worked in a clothing factory there on an Eastmans Cutter. Henry 'Box' Brown visited other Lancashire towns, listed here, some that are now in the grip of the British National Party. Is it miseducation that has led to such organisations gaining momentum?

Emma Poulter displays some convincing evidence of the dark roots of Industrialisation in the *Commerce and Collecting* section, which features the cotton industry and its role in the slave trade. There is a picture of a more famous freed slave who wrote his story – Olaudah Equiano – and a reading from his autobiography. Being a writer myself whose work was first printed in Lancashire by a benevolent socialist printer, it gives me great pleasure to see writers included here. 'Box' Brown toured in the same way I toured just over one hundred years later. I wonder if we ever read in the same town hall?

So this is a radical exhibition, revealing history that was actively suppressed. It was the Empire that I read about at school and not the "holocaust", a word mentioned in this exhibition by Kevin Dalton-Johnson, to describe the exploits of Empire. The Benin Bronzes caught my eye. Specifically Dalton-Johnson's Revealing Histories Table installation which shows how easily *"confusions of meaning can occur when objects are removed from their place of origin. The dislocation and displacement experienced by Africans is depicted through the bronzes"*.

Meeting a people in a foreign land and then acting on a compulsion to enslave them is in my mind barbaric and primitive behaviour. Therefore the Abolition of The Slave Trade Act is primarily a way of the British civilising the British. Wilberforce was clear about this. Britain, its society and psyche, is built upon the profits and ideas that were gained through slavery. Here it is in Revealing Histories, British history, our history. In facing the truth of our past we can create a profound and peaceful present.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr Alan Rice

This essay was completed during a sabbatical generously supported by my colleagues at UCLAN and the AHRC. Particular thanks to Will Kaufman at UCLAN who covered for me. It was a great privilege to work with the curatorial and interpretation teams at the Whitworth (especial thanks to the Director Maria Balshaw, David Morris, Andrew Vaughan, Frances Pritchard and Dominique Heyes-Moore). My fellow guest curators Emma Poulter, Kevin Dalton-Johnson and SuAndi were great colleagues throughout. I would like also to thank the living artists and their representatives (Godfried Donkor, Althea McNish and John Weiss) who were very generous with information about their inspirational work.

Dr Emma Poulter

I would like to thank various individuals for their help in securing the loan of objects and images for the *Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery* exhibition; Daniel Smith at Bolton Museums and Archives, Malcolm Chapman and Abigail Stevens at Manchester Museum. My thanks too, to those individuals for their support, Maria Balshaw, David Morris, Andrew Vaughan and Heather Birchall at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Philip Sykas at Manchester Metropolitan University and Sarah Croucher at Wesleyan University, U.S.A. Lastly my thanks goes to the Whitworth Art Gallery for inviting me to work with them on this exhibition, and to my fellow guest curators Kevin Dalton-Johnson, Alan Rice and SuAndi.

Kevin Dalton-Johnson

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the artist Tony Phillips for his artwork, *The History of the Benin Bronzes*, which inspired my interpretation of the exhibition Trade and Empire. In allowing me to show these prints, Tony provided me with the opportunity to illustrate and expose the dislocation experienced by many displaced African descendants who live with the harmful effects of a dislocated heritage. I would also like to acknowledge my African ancestors who survived the atrocities of the African holocaust and who continue to give strength to many who seek to reclaim their cultural heritage and dispel the many myths associated with our Black identity.

SuAndi

My partner during Trade and Empire was Daniel Tz who not only brought his amazing drumming skills to enhance the Door of No Return installation but also for his "ear" and editing suggestions for my chapter.

To Clive Hunte for his film skills.

To Clive who built the "Door of No Return" and knew immediately what I was seeking to achieve. I love it when such knowledge is right there from a person whose ancestry has no African links.

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Final thanks to Andrew Vaughan and David Morris for always being open to my ideas and opinion that at times challenged their original conception of the exhibition.

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Emma Poulter: Slave grown cotton, economic growth and cultural investment in Industrial Manchester

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BIOGRAPHIES

SuAndi
I am the Liverpool daughter, of a Nigerian father. I am a Black woman. Since 1985, I have taken to the stage as a live artist, keynote speaker, panel contributor and, in my best clothes, as the poet. I have not limited myself to desk, pen and paper. My aims are to help heal wounds and eradicate misconceptions that can develop into blatant racism and thereby empower individual self-worth. I love the power of laughter, the depth of wisdom and a good piece of gossip. I have spent half my working live at the helm of National Black Arts Alliance, and in 1999 I received the Queen's O.B.E. for my work in the Black arts and culture sector.

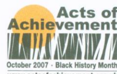
Kevin Dalton-Johnson is an African Diaspora British/Jamaican visual artist born in the United Kingdom. He creates powerful and emotive ceramic busts, which provide a spiritual connection with his African ancestors and are informed by personal experience and post graduate research at the University of Manchester. In 2005 he was commissioned to produce *Captured Africans*, the first memorial public sculpture for enslaved Africans, sited in Lancaster. He has also engaged in international residency programmes with IFAA (International Festival Arts Arnhem) and Tolhuistuin (funded by Fonz BKVB). His most recent solo show was *Emptiness: Art in Red Light*, De Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, in September 2010.

Dr Emma Poulter works at the British Museum, London, in the Learning and Audiences Department. She is currently responsible for the development and management of the Museum's 'Talking Objects' programme. In 2008 she completed a PhD at the University of Manchester researching the West African collections at the Manchester Museum. Emma's interests lie in promoting new approaches to museum collections, unravelling their connections to histories of collecting, trade and colonialism. She also works as a museum consultant and was the principal researcher for the *Revealing Histories: Remembering Slavery* pilot project.

Dr Alan Rice is Reader in American Cultural Studies at the University of Central Lancashire. He has published widely in African American Studies, including editing with Martin Crawford, the first book of essays on Frederick Douglass's 1845 visit to Britain, *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Reform* (Georgia UP, 1999). *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* was published in 2003, and *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* in 2010. He is academic adviser to and board member of the Slave Trade Arts Memorial Project (STAMP) in Lancaster, which was responsible for the commissioning and building of the first British quayside monument to the victims of the slave trade, unveiled in Lancaster in 2005.

Poet, playwright, performer, broadcaster and artist in residence, **Lemn Sissay** was born in 1967 in Lancashire to Ethiopian parents. One of the UK's best-known performance poets, Lemn has produced five poetry collections and has also edited a volume of contemporary Black British poetry. He is a regular broadcaster on radio and television. His work has become public art, particularly in Manchester where his poems appear on buildings and streets, and he has recently been commissioned to write poetry as public art for the 2012 London Olympics. Lemn recently received an honorary doctorate from the University of Huddersfield and an MBE for services to Literature.

Lola Young, Baroness Young of Hornsey, is a freelance Arts and Heritage Consultant. Awarded an OBE in 2001 and appointed as an Independent Crossbench life peer in 2004, Baroness Lola Young has written and broadcast extensively on culture, identity, film, arts and media and advised national organisations on culture and diversity issues. Formerly Head of Culture at the Greater London Authority and before that Professor of Cultural Studies at Middlesex University, Baroness Lola Young is currently visiting professor at Birkbeck College, University London, Honorary Associate Fellow at Warwick University and an English Heritage Commissioner. Her book, *Fear of the Dark: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Cinema* was published in 1995.



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