

V&A



UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS
TRACES OF THE TRADE
DISCOVERY TRAILS EXPLORING
LINKS BETWEEN ART, DESIGN
AND THE TRANSATLANTIC
SLAVE TRADE

20 FEBRUARY —
31 DECEMBER 2007

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UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS TRACES OF THE TRADE

To show how art and design were linked into the transatlantic slave trade, the V&A has highlighted objects on display in its permanent collection. Many of these objects also recall the legacies of the slave trade that remain in Britain today and continue to shape our society.

The five trails, with each one telling its own story, feature objects that have been chosen for their hidden and often unexpected links to slavery. High-profile black Britons bring their perspectives to the trails, showing how art and design reflect the trading of slaves and amplify the links between Africa, the Caribbean and Britain.

01

TRAIL 1: CONSUMING THE BLACK ATLANTIC

LEVEL 3, BRITISH GALLERIES, ROOM 65

The appearance of exotic goods in British shops and homes was the outcome of a sophisticated trade network between Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. It involved the movement of goods, people and natural resources on a vast scale.

Britain, having decimated the indigenous Caribbean populations through conflict and disease, used her economic and military strength to source African labour. With the help of manufactures created specially for African markets – guns, alcohol, iron – the British engaged leaders and traders in Africa, who then obtained slaves that could be shipped across the Atlantic to work on plantations. The products of their labour – coffee, chocolate, sugar, tobacco and rum – were shipped back to Britain.

Marilyn Heward Mills
Writer

*Marilyn Heward Mills was born in Switzerland in 1968 to a Swiss mother and a Ghanaian father. She grew up in Accra, Ghana, and came to England to study law at Durham University in 1988. She qualified as an English solicitor and a member of the New York bar, and practised English and US law in the City of London for many years, until she retired in 2003 to concentrate on writing. Her first novel, *Cloth Girl*, was published in June 2006 to critical acclaim and has been short-listed for the Costa First Novel Award.*

"Coffee, sugar, chocolate – things I would struggle to live without. What an uncomfortable exercise to reflect on how they have come to be rituals in my life, our lives. And then there is the additional, pinching knowledge for me – that some of my African ancestors allegedly made fortunes from the abhorrent trade in men and women – perchance the man, the woman, who harvested the sugar that glistened under lock and key in this dish, or the coffee that was poured hot from this pot, the tobacco stored in these boxes. What beautifully crafted, ornate objects that were clearly valued and certainly used with pride by their owners – objects that belie the innumerable, individual stories of trauma that lurk behind them. Uncomfortable truths indeed! Looking at these items, innocuous in their cases, the question that troubles me is whether we have come far enough from that past? Do we need to examine where the things we buy today came from, and how they came to be on the shelves in our stores, on the tables in our homes?"

SUGAR BOX

London, 1683–4, silver. Museum no. M.419-1927. Room 65, Case 9: *Dining before 1700*, no. 12

With the colonisation of the Americas, the Caribbean became the world's largest source of sugar. Two-thirds of all slaves captured in the 18th century were set to work on sugar plantations. Conditions were especially harsh, with dangerous machinery and several harvests a year, but slave labour, plus improved production and processing methods, enabled traders to reduce their costs. As prices fell, demand spiralled. By the late 1790s, the 'white gold' that had once been the delicacy of the aristocracy was part of the diet of the British poor.

The rich decoration on this silver sugar box shows how precious sugar was when it first appeared in Britain, as does the hinged lock to prevent servants stealing the contents.



CHOCOLATE POT AND STAND

London, about 1680, gilded silver. Museum no. M.6:1 to 3-1992. Room 65, Case 12: *Tea, Coffee and Chocolate*, no. 9

Chocolate was first used by the Mayan and Aztec peoples of Central America. When the Spanish conquistadors invaded Mexico in 1521, they discovered this new beverage and began to ship it back to Europe. For many years chocolate remained an expensive and exclusive commodity. In France it was controlled by state monopoly and restricted to members of the court.

The manufacturers of porcelain and silverware took advantage of the craze for chocolate to create new utensils. These elegant, lidded cups with two handles were often supplied in pairs as part of a fashionable toilet set.

Even in the 21st century, slavery is still part of cocoa production. Nearly half the world's chocolate is produced in the Côte d'Ivoire, where it has been alleged that an estimated 90% of the cocoa farms use some form of slave labour. Many of the slaves are children from the poorer neighbouring countries of Mali, Burkino Faso, Benin and Togo.



COFFEE POT

London, 1799–1800, silver. Museum no. M.396-1922. Room 65, Case 14: *Mechanisation and Markets*, no. 14

Until overtaken by tea in 1720, coffee was Britain's most popular 'tropical' drink. Initially imported from the Middle East in the early 1720s, it later became a staple crop of the plantations in Jamaica and other West Indian colonies.

In the latter half of the 17th century 'coffee houses' sprang up all over London and other large towns and cities. They soon assumed a central position in the social, political and economic life of Britain. Apart from being places to meet friends, exchange news and read newspapers, they were important in the transatlantic trade. Merchants, bankers, insurers and ship owners would gather in the coffee houses and sometimes use them as a venue for slave auctions. The 'hue-and-cry' advertisements that publicised runaway slaves circulated in the coffee houses.



SNUFF BOX

England, about 1680, cowry shell mounted in silver. Museum no. M.1023-1926. Room 65, Case 23: *Silver for Men*, no. 25



TOBACCO OR SNUFF GRATER

London, 1762–3, silver. Museum no. M.1078-1927. Room 65, Case 23: *Silver for Men*, no. 35

Europeans first discovered tobacco through their encounters with the indigenous peoples of the Americas, who used it in barter and trade. Being a robust and adaptable crop, it was easily transferred to Britain's colonies in America and the West Indies in the early 17th century. There, thanks to the cheap labour of enslaved Africans, it brought economic success to the colonies. Bristol and, later, Glasgow became the centres for tobacco processing.

Like sugar, tobacco was a luxury commodity when first imported into Europe in the 1620s, hence the fine craftsmanship of this snuff box and tobacco grater. Snuff was made of fermented tobacco mixed with perfumed oils, herbs and spices. It was sold in a compressed block to be grated into a fine powder. Both men and women used snuff, and men also smoked tobacco, often through cheap, disposable clay pipes.

Believed to have 'pacifying' properties, tobacco was given to plantation workers and those who underwent the horrors of the Middle Passage. In Britain it remained strongly associated with black Africans. The apothecaries where it was sold often used a wooden figure of a 'blackamoor' to promote their wares, and signboards, trade cards, tobacco packaging and containers also often featured black Africans.



02

TRAIL 2: BLACK SERVANTS IN BRITISH HOMES

LEVEL 2, ROOMS 52B & 54
LEVEL 3, ROOMS 74 & 69

There has been a black presence in Britain since at least Roman times but numbers remained small until the second half of the 17th century. From 1650 Britain's increasing involvement in transatlantic trade, particularly the trade in slaves, brought more and more black Africans to its shores. Some came as the servants of plantation owners settling down to enjoy the wealth generated by their slave-worked properties in the West Indies. Others were acquired as a 'perk' of the job by sailors working on slave ships, and were then deposited with friends or sold to wealthy families. Others came with government officials and naval officers when they returned home from service overseas. Many more came simply as slaves. By the mid 18th century there were small but significant numbers of 'free blacks', some working as labourers or craftsmen, but the majority were household servants: pages, valets, footmen, coachmen, cooks and maids.

Sonia Boyce
Artist

Born in London in 1962, Sonia emerged in the early 1980s as a figurative painter, gaining critical attention in the black British arts movement for works that spoke about racial identity and gender in Britain. Since the 1990s she has worked increasingly with other people in what she likes to call 'improvised collaborations'. At the same time, her concerns have gradually shifted to more generic issues, i.e. public versus private space; visibility and invisibility; desire, intimacy and multiplicity. Sonia uses different media to create penetrating accounts of the anxieties and passions in urban life. She has exhibited extensively in the UK and abroad, and her works can also be found in the Tate and the V&A. She currently teaches at Central St Martins School of Art, University of the Arts London, and has recently completed an Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts on the dynamics of collaboration in her art practice.

TEA BOWL AND SAUCER

Worcester, 1756–7, porcelain with a transfer print of *The Tea Party* by Robert Hancock. Museum no. C.96-1948. Room 52B, Case 2: *Taking Tea*

The images on this tea bowl and saucer were originally engravings, but they were reproduced on a wide range of ceramic goods using the new technology of transfer printing. They show a fashionably dressed European couple taking tea in a garden, accompanied by a pet dog and a young black servant, who pours hot water from a kettle into a teapot.

The ceramic items on which they appear were intended for the consumption of coffee or tea – which for white British tastes required the addition of West Indies sugar. Together, the objects and image work together to reinforce each other's fashionable and exotic associations.

"It remains a continuing debate in art schools whether art is devalued by a relationship to politics. 'Surely, the arts are supposed to levitate our spirits above the everyday?' was often an accusation levied at young black artists like myself during the 1980s. Given the heatedness of this debate, I am amazed by the extent to which British artisans and artists were employed to support the slave trade. These fine and decorative objects were meant to epitomise sophistication, cultured behaviour and aestheticism. Yet, how could something so delicate as this tea bowl and saucer – whose purpose now seems so innocent (a nice cup of tea) – delight in, yet hide such a brutal set of social relations?"



PLATE II FROM A HARLOT'S PROGRESS

William Hogarth, 1732, etching. Museum no. F.118:37. Room 54, *Parlour from 11 Henrietta Street, London, 1727–1732*

Like many of his contemporaries, William Hogarth was critical of the rich and their craze for transatlantic commodities. He often used his work to ridicule the moral weakness of the ruling class and to reveal the exploitation that existed in London, then the trading capital of the world. He used black figures as rhetorical devices to underline the lack of 'civilisation' among white British society.

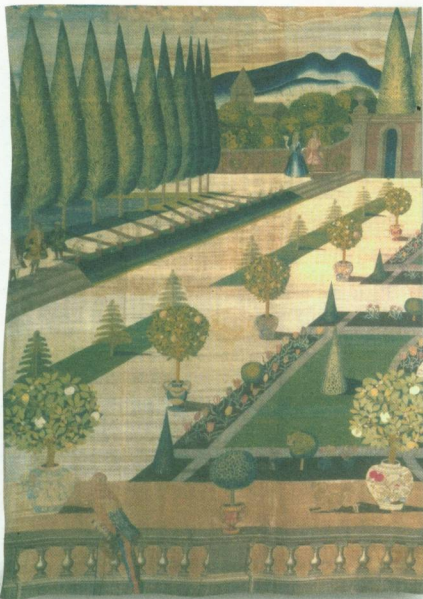
Here, the figure of the young black page highlights the moral decline of 'Hackabout Moll', a simple country girl drawn into prostitution following her arrival in the city. Interrupted by her secret lover as she takes tea with a wealthy Jewish merchant, Moll tries to create a distraction by knocking over the tea table. The presence of the monkey, the tea things, the mahogany table and the turbaned black page all point to the colonial source of the merchant's wealth and to the overriding theme of exploitation. The upright pose of the page and his widened eyes invite us to consider this scene of immorality from his perspective.



EMBROIDERED HANGING FROM
STOKE EDITH (DETAIL)

England, 1710–20, linen with wool and silk.
Museum no. T.568-1996. Room 54, *The Nobility
1660–1720*

Stoke Edith in Herefordshire was rebuilt by Paul Foley, Speaker of the House of Commons, in 1697. In this embroidery, the ordered symmetry and harmonious design of the house and grounds present an idealised vision of wealthy and fashionable life in the early 18th century. On the left can be seen a well-dressed black servant accompanying the two European figures. Black servants at this time were coveted status symbols, with the same 'exotic' associations that made Chinese porcelain and Indian chintzes so desirable.

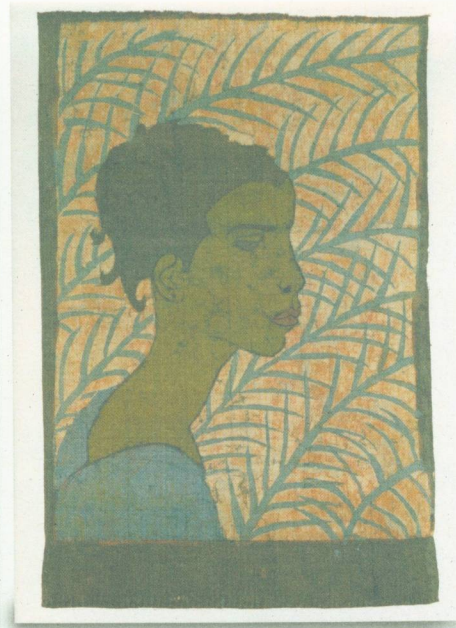


PORTRAIT OF A TRINIDADIAN WOMAN
(THE ARTIST'S SERVANT)

Alice M. Pashley, 1926, silk batik. Museum no.
T.513-1934. Given by the British Institute of
Industrial Art. Room 74

Although slavery had long been abolished, the historically embedded divisions between race and class continued to create social unrest in Trinidad right into the 20th century. Between 1845 and 1917 there was an influx of cheap labour from India, China and Madeira. These indentured labourers came on short contracts, after which they were free to return home or to buy plots of land in Trinidad. Many of them were wealthy enough to have black African servants. 'Freed' African slaves did not have the same privileges or social position.

By calling her piece *The Artist's Servant*, the creator of this batik alludes to these deep-rooted power structures. Her nameless subject is shown in bold profile against a 'primitive' patterned backdrop of tropical leaves. The technique, a form of wax resist known as batik, was popular in Europe and the USA for its exotic associations with Indonesia and West Africa.



THREE CUPS (ONE SHOWN BELOW)

Germany, probably Augsburg, about 1710–20,
gilded silver with enamel. Museum nos. 877,
877A-1882 and 1943-1898. Room 69, Case 4:
The Collector's Cabinet, no. 33

These tiny enamelled cups illustrate the fashion for exotic goods that swept through Europe's wealthy homes in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Two cups of the same design feature a sumptuous European interior, with a female musician and a couple drinking coffee out of Chinese porcelain. Exotic associations can also be seen in the man's 'Eastern' clothes and in the young black page stretching out his hands before a roaring fire. One of his duties would have been to tend the fire.

The other cup presents a fashionably dressed European couple walking in a formal garden, accompanied by a dog and a young black servant wearing a white wig.



03

TRAIL 3: BRITAIN & THE WEST INDIES

LEVEL 2, ROOMS 52 & 56C
LEVEL 4, ROOM 120

The West Indies brought vast profits to the European colonists, particularly as the sugar industry took off. But they also required a constant flow of slaves from Africa to work the plantations. Two-thirds of these slaves were used in the production of sugar. The rest were forced into harvesting coffee, cotton and tobacco, or in some cases, mining. By the late 18th century by far the most successful West Indian colonies belonged to Britain, with British Guiana and key islands such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados giving it an edge over all other competitors. This advantage was reinforced when France lost its most important colony, Saint-Domingue (western Hispaniola, now Haiti) to a slave revolt in 1791.

Rudolph Walker OBE
Actor

Born in Trinidad in 1939, Rudolph broke many barriers by working extensively in theatre and becoming the first black person to star in a major television series. He arrived in Britain in 1960 and established himself in repertory, including the Nottingham Playhouse, the Mermaid and the Malvern theatres. His big break came in 1972, when he was cast as one of the main characters in the television series Love Thy Neighbour. Despite its controversial use of racist language, this was a popular series, unprecedented on television at the time. Walker continued to perform at the Tricycle, the Theatre Royal Stratford, the Royal Court and the Young Vic. He regularly appears on the BBC television soap Eastenders. Rudolph received an OBE in the 2006 Queen's Birthday Honours List for his services to drama.

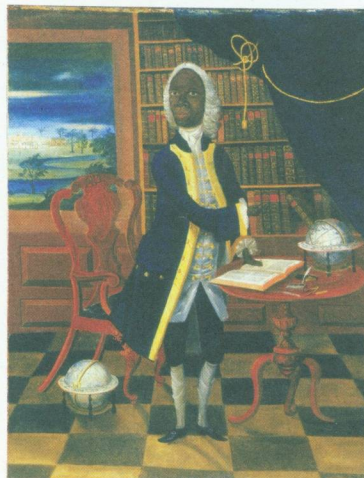
PORTRAIT OF FRANCIS WILLIAMS

Unknown Jamaican, British or American painter, about 1745, oil on canvas. Museum no. P.83-1928. Room 52, *Portraiture*

Francis Williams was born around 1700 to John and Dorothy Williams, a free couple who within ten years of being given their freedom had amassed significant property and wealth through Jamaica's sugar industry. When his father died in 1723, Francis inherited a substantial fortune, including land, trading interests and slaves, but he preferred to live off his inheritance than attempt to increase it. Although to modern eyes Francis is compromised by his profiting from enslaved Africans, he is also a notable example of a rich, free black man who wrote Latin verse and enjoyed a European lifestyle.

The portrait presents Francis as a scholar in his study. The accoutrements of his education and learning – a celestial and a territorial globe, dividers and other instruments – are clearly visible. Beautifully bound books line the shelves behind him, and his left hand rests on an open book headed *Newton's Philosophy*. But while the painting clearly locates Francis within the tradition of European scholarship, it also – by virtue of the open window that reveals the sparkling landscape of Spanish Town – sets him firmly within a Jamaican setting.

“Notice the European setting of the painting, the representation of the ‘exotic’ background also. Remember too, that black people over the centuries held prominent roles within British society.”



COMB CASE

Jamaica, 1673, tortoiseshell. Museum no. 524-1877. Room 56C, Case 4: *Britain and the Indies 1660–1720*

The tortoiseshell case and combs are among the earliest surviving works of art made in Jamaica that reflect European influence. The style of the decoration suggests that they were all made by the same unknown artist. The decoration on the case relates directly to Britain's seizure of the island. The newly awarded arms of Jamaica are engraved on one side, while three plants important to Jamaica's economy are represented on the other.

“All made by hand, maybe by an African or Arawak. See the artistry that existed, fantastic creativity. Growing up in Trinidad you made your own objects – even a scooter, we probably invented the wooden wheels for it! The image on the case reminds me of a theatrical setting.”



SNUFF GRATER

Britain, about 1700, silver with steel grating plate. Museum no. 1348-1902. Room 56C, Case 4: *Britain and the Indies 1660–1720*

Europeans first discovered tobacco through their encounters with the indigenous peoples of the Americas, who used it in barter and trade. A robust and easily adaptable plant, it was transferred in the early 17th century to Britain's colonies in the southern states of America and the West Indies.

This snuff box has a hinged lid and two compartments. A block of compressed, powdered snuff would have been kept in the smaller one, while the larger compartment, fitted with a perforated grater, would have held the grated snuff powder. The tightly closing lid is essential for keeping snuff dry. This lid is engraved with the monogram 'HE' for the Edmonds family of Yorkshire and the family crest of a three-masted ship in full sail.

"Interesting that a ship is the engraved image on the grater, particularly when you remember the way slaves were transported from Africa and the agonising torture of the Middle Passage, many to harvest this tobacco crop. Interesting the accessibility to cigarettes today and the numerous health warnings that come with them."

SUGAR BOX

Possibly by John Sutton, Britain, 1683–4, silver. Museum no. 53-1865. Room 56C, *Britain and the Indies 1660–1720*

Made for storing sugar, this box has a clasp and can be locked. Its decoration, in a style known as 'Chinoiserie', is similar to that used in embroidery. The motifs were usually taken from the decoration on Chinese porcelain and other works of art imported from the East.

Sugar was produced in such terrible conditions that the slaves rebelled. Between 1640 and 1713 there were seven slave revolts in the British sugar islands. The situation in Jamaica was especially volatile. There, plantation slaves ran away to join settlements of escaped slaves, or 'maroons', established during the earlier Spanish colonisation of the island. In Britain, too, sugar provided a focus for the abolitionist movement. Like today's Fair Trade campaigners, abolitionists in the late 18th century urged a national boycott of West Indian sugar.

WILLIAM BECKFORD AGED 21

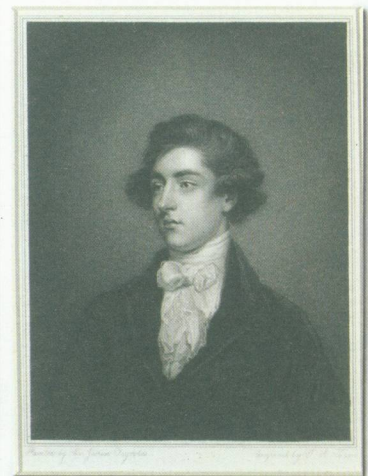
From a 1782 oil painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, etched and engraved by T.A. Dean, 1835. Museum no. E.2046-1919. Room 120, Case 22: *William Beckford, the Collector*

William Thomas Beckford was one of the great collectors and patrons of his era. To house his collections, he built a vast Gothic extravaganza known as Fonthill Abbey.

The enormous wealth on which Beckford's lifestyle depended came from the exploitation of enslaved Africans. His father was England's first sugar plantation millionaire and his mother was the widow of Francis Marsh, another Jamaican planter. With the abolition of slavery, however, the Jamaican plantations ceased to be profitable. Falling sugar prices caused Beckford to sell some of his estates, but the income raised by the devalued plantations was not enough to meet his debts. Forced to sell Fonthill Abbey and its contents, he retired to Lansdown Crescent, Bath, with a small selection of his art. He died at Bath in 1844.

Beckford's legacy is preserved in the objects collected by him now residing in the National Gallery and the V&A.

"Amazing. Everyone would hail, 'Beckford, look at what he's done for British art and design', not really understanding on whose back he acquired such wealth and fortune. The text panel here is even misleading, as it should first relate to how Beckford amassed his wealth, which for me is the most important piece of information."



04

TRAIL 4: REPRESENTING SLAVERY & ABOLITIONISM

LEVEL 3, ROOM 111
LEVEL 2, ROOM 52
LEVEL 4, ROOMS 118 & 120

Much of the visual culture relating to the abolition of the British slave trade emphasises the role of white abolitionists such as William Wilberforce and Granville Sharpe over that of African campaigners such as Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana. The influence of the religious movements that drove abolitionism, such as the Quakers and various Protestant groups, can also be seen. Common is the African surrounded by broken shackles giving thanks for his freedom.

Ty Musician and Rapper

Ty is a critically acclaimed MC and producer. He has been nominated for the prestigious Mercury Music Prize and has won numerous hip hop awards. He has taken his vision of hip hop culture into prisons and schools, and appeared in the studios of Newsnight. Ty has long been involved in the spoken word/poetry scene, ever since his pivotal involvement in the mid-1990s Ghetto Grammar organisation: 'It was the beginning of us trying to formulate platforms for ourselves rather than waiting for someone else to do it.' Ty has just released his third album, Closer.

"Upon visiting the V&A and looking at the objects on my trail I realised they evoked more of an impression than I expected. At least three of these are subservient black slaves begging for something important – probably their lives. The striking images in the bookplate, probably the equivalent of the GQ Magazine of its time, of two former slaves Job Ben Solomon and William Ansah Sessarakoo, startled me because it demonstrates the complexities of that time. Both were captured and brought to Britain as slaves until their parents, who were royalty in Africa, reached out and had them freed and restored to gentleman status. How could they swing this? What type of power of persuasion would you need to be able to bargain like that? It raises issues!

The spoils and results of slavery are unclear at most times, so I think it's important to understand these objects further. Subservient images were used by abolitionist movements for political causes around the world. They give a patronising impression – the female figure of Britannia, for instance, offering comfort, the image of the black man in a pose of supplication beseeching his white brother to spare him the horrors of slavery. These themes run deep throughout this period and may still be true if compared to contemporary efforts such as Live Aid. These uncomfortable truths are still right here under our noses today!"

A CAPTIVE

France, about 1660–1700, bronze. Museum no. A.20-1950. Room 111, Case 4: *Modelling and Casting, Bronze*, no. 34

France colonised islands in the West Indies in the 17th century, with the aim of transforming them into profitable sugar-producing economies fuelled by the labour of enslaved Africans. French involvement in the transatlantic trade continued to grow over the following century, but in 1791 there was a massive slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, one of the most profitable colonies. On 1 January 1804, the territory became Haiti, the first black republic.

This decorative bronze figure was made in France in the 1660s, during the reign of Louis XIV, whose chief minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, was the architect of French colonial policy. The figure is probably one of a pair made to embellish a clock or a piece of furniture. Its pose – on one knee, with the wrists manacled together and the face uplifted in an attitude of supplication – clearly identifies the figure as a slave. The 'native' dress, with feathered headdress, shield, quiver and arrow, and a skirtcloth with a decorative waistband, suggests that it may represent one of the Four Continents, who were often shown as female figures. However, as slavery spread throughout the New World, these accoutrements became synonymous with the depiction of slaves.




JOB BEN SOLOMON AND WILLIAM ANSAH SESSARAKOO

From *The Gentleman's Magazine & Historical Chronicle*, published by R. Newton, London, 1750, print on paper, engraving. National Art Library: PP.501.G. Room 52, *Fashionable Living, Portraiture*, no. 16

This double portrait provides a rare example of positive imagery of black individuals with known links to slavery. The style of the portraits, with the sitters shown with dignity and gravitas, is in the European tradition.

Job Ben Solomon (1701–73), also known by his African name Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, was born in Gambia, West Africa, to a prosperous Muslim family. At the age of 29, he was captured, sold and transported to work on a plantation in Annapolis, Maryland. He ran away but was caught and imprisoned. Through this, he met lawyer Thomas Bluett who realised Solomon's high status and bought his freedom. In 1733, they travelled together to England, where Solomon learnt English and became a prominent intellectual (his transcriptions of the Koran are still preserved in Oxford). He later returned to his homeland where he resumed his inherited position.





Sessarakoo (alternative spelling Ansa Sasraku) was the son of an Akwamu king who ruled a vast stretch of what is now Ghana, from Denkyira to the Accra plains. To improve communications with European traders, the king arranged for his son to be educated in England. Sessarakoo was entrusted to a British sea captain, who instead sold him into slavery in Barbados. He was rescued through his father's influence and eventually arrived in London, where he became a high profile figure, his story retold through prints, poems, newspaper reports and *The Royal African* (1750).

While their high-born status enabled these two men to escape the harsh conditions of the slave trade, and even to gain prominence and respect in London society, their experience was exceptional.

MEDALLION FOR THE SOCIETY FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

Modelled by William Hackwood, manufactured by Josiah Wedgwood and Sons Ltd. About 1787, jasperware mounted in gilded metal. Museum no. 414:1304-1885. Level 4, Room 118, Case 3: *Wedgwood and Neo-Classicism*, no. 26

Abolitionists were aware of the importance of effective visual propaganda, and with the ceramics manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood as a supporter they benefited from the input of someone familiar with the marketplace.

Wedgwood was on the committee of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST). He based this medal on the Society's seal. Produced to raise funds and support for the abolitionist cause, it shows a kneeling, enchained African beneath the inscription 'Am I not a man and a brother?'

The image quickly gained prominence and was used in numerous anti-slavery initiatives. Like other similar images, it relied on creating an emotional impact. By doing so, it presented the black African as a passive and depersonalised victim requiring the mercy and intervention of the white Briton. While such imagery helped bring about the end of slavery in Britain and her colonies, it also created a legacy of unequal power relations that would endure long after 1807.



JUG SHOWING BRITANNIA OFFERING COMFORT TO A SLAVE

John Turner. Staffordshire, about 1800, stoneware. Museum no. 2510-1901. Room 120, Case 11: *Objects of Commemoration*, no. 8

The use of beer jugs to promote political causes extended back to the 1770s. The motifs were usually allegorical or concerned with sports and pastimes. By contrast, this jug shows the ending of the slave trade. It depicts the patriotic image of Britannia 'offering comfort' to a kneeling African slave. Apparently unique, the jug may have been commissioned by a prosperous client involved in the anti-slavery campaign. This was highly unpopular in many quarters, especially Bristol and Liverpool, which were actively involved in the transatlantic slave trade.



TRAIL 5: GOLD & SLAVES: TRANSNATIONAL TRADE LINKS

LEVEL 3, ROOMS 116 & 66

VISITOR PARTICIPATION TRAIL

Slavery and slave trading were already firmly entrenched in many African societies before the contact with Europe. In general, however, slaves in African communities were treated as junior members of society with specific rights. Given traditional, small-scale methods of agricultural production, slavery in Africa was quite different from that which existed in the commercial plantation environments of the New World. However, African chiefs, traders and merchant princes played a significant role in the new forms of slavery and were largely responsible for the supply of slaves from the interior to the coast.

The desire to eradicate the trade in slaves in Africa was given as a motivating factor in the 'Scramble for Africa', which saw much of the continent divided up between imperial European nations during the second half of the 19th century. Britain had a number of trading forts on the Gold Coast but did not establish control over the Asante region until 1902. On 6 March 1957, the Northern Territories Protectorate and British Togoland were united as independent 'Ghana' under the leadership of Dr Kwame Nkrumah. Ghana was the first colony in sub-Saharan Africa to win its independence and it inspired nationalist movements across the continent.

ASANTE GOLDWEIGHTS FROM GHANA

In the Asante kingdom in Ghana ample supplies of gold generated wealth and political influence. From around 1600 small weights (*mbrammoo*) in brass and bronze were used to weigh the gold dust that formed part of all commercial transactions. Everyone involved in trade and commerce owned, or had access to, a set of weights and scales. The weights were made using the 'lost wax' method of casting. Geometric shapes and designs predominated among the early weights, but more naturalistic representations of court regalia began to appear in the 17th century. By the 18th and 19th centuries the weights reflected a wide range of human and animal figures, often in scenarios representing popular Asante proverbs.

GOLDWEIGHT IN THE FORM OF A BOX

Asante, 1850–74, brass. Museum no. Circ.707-1969.
Room 116, no. 6

Boxes like this are also called *abampruwa* or *adakawa*. This one combines a sheet bronze base with a cast bronze lid. The lid has a slightly raised geometric pattern with a figure of a bird in the centre.



GOLDWEIGHT IN THE FORM OF A WAR HORN

Asante, brass, 1850–74. Museum no. Circ.82-1971.
Room 116, no. 3

The horn has been bound with wire or fibre in four places. War horns were an important element of Asante court regalia and horn blowers were present at royal processions.

GOLDWEIGHT IN THE FORM OF A CARTRIDGE BELT

Asante, brass, 1850–74. Museum no. Circ.84-1971.
Room 116, no. 7

As powerful traders of gold and slaves, the Asante were able to import the European fire arms required to maintain, and extend, their rule. Their cartridge belts were modified versions of those worn by Europeans, with extra pouches and slits for holding knives.





GOLDWEIGHT IN THE FORM OF AN ANTELOPE

Asante, 1850–74, brass. Museum no. 5-1875. Room 116, no. 5

This brass weight is in the form of an antelope with extended horns. Antelopes were important animals to the Asante. Traditionally, they belonged to dead chiefs (*amanhene*). The V&A purchased this goldweight, plus two strings of beads, from a Sergeant Pearce for 4 shillings in April 1874. It is likely that Pearce had obtained them through the British invasion of the Asante capital, Kumasi, on 4 February 1874.



PAIR OF ANKLETS (ONE SHOWN BELOW)

Asante, 19th century, silver. Museum no. 380&A-1874. Room 66

Early European visitors to Ghana described dazzling displays of court regalia at the court of the Asantehene, the ruler of the Asante state. The region's natural gold resources had made the Asante wealthy, and the court regalia reflected high levels of skill and technology. The adornment of the Asantehene and court officials included numerous ornaments in cast gold, gold leaf and silver – necklaces, amulets, finger rings, bracelets and anklets – as well as textiles, in particular Kente cloth. This pair of silver anklets with looped pendants are in an unusual horseshoe shape, with a pin that draws out so they can be removed. It is possible that they were made to suggest the form of shackles, and were worn within a court setting to evoke the wealth that the Asante gained from their involvement in the slave trade.

On 4 February 1874, following Asante efforts to protect a coastal trading outlet, British forces invaded the state capital, Kumasi. The Asantehene, Kofi Karikari, fled leaving behind much precious regalia. The British seized this regalia and later sold it at auction at Garrard's, the London crown jewellers, as war indemnity. The V&A's Accession Register records the purchase of the anklets and twelve other items of Asante court regalia from Garrard's on 5 June 1874.



Share your views about these objects and the slave trade in Africa.



Please hand your completed form in at the Information Desks.

Name _____

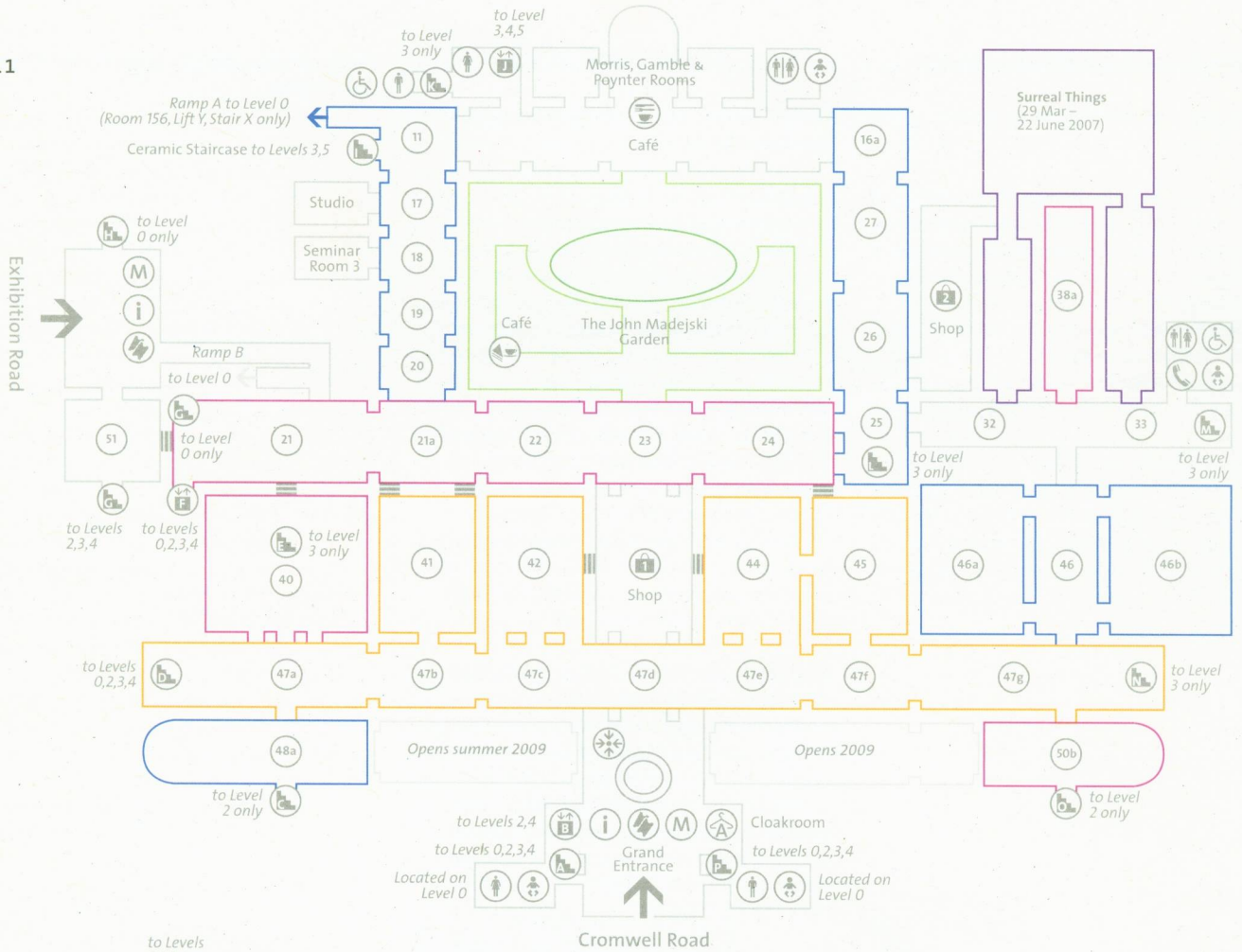
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TRACES OF THE TRADE

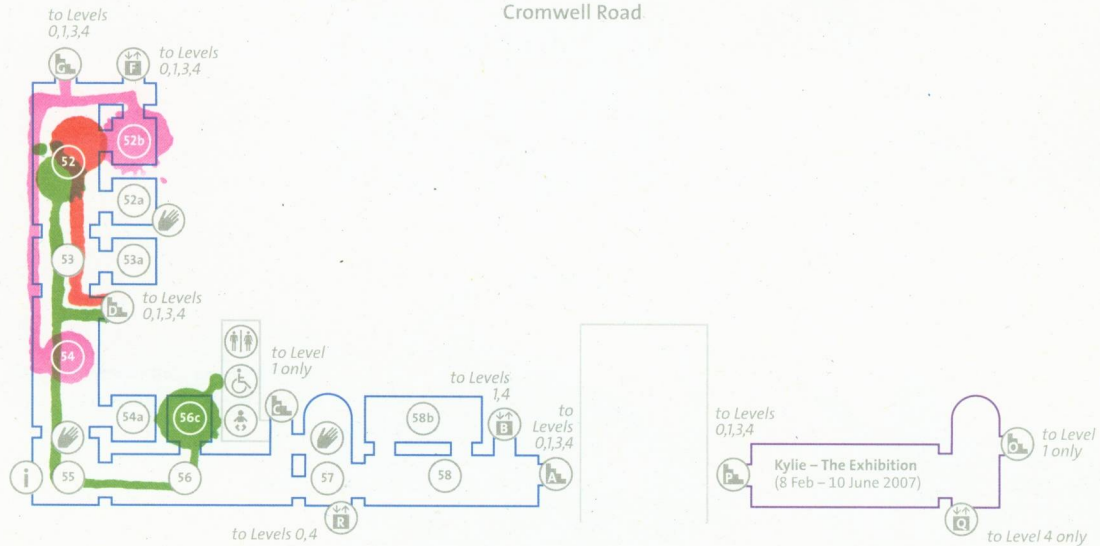
TRAIL ROUTES

- 1. CONSUMING THE BLACK ATLANTIC
- 2. BLACK SERVANTS IN BRITISH HOMES
- 3. BRITAIN & THE WEST INDIES
- 4. REPRESENTING SLAVERY & ABOLITIONISM
- 5. GOLD & SLAVES: TRANSNATIONAL TRADE LINKS

LEVEL 1



LEVEL 2



**OTHER OBJECTS IN THE V&A RELATED
TO BLACK HERITAGE**

THE BRIXEN ALTARPIECE

Tyrol, made about 1500–10. Museum no. 192-1866
Level 1, Northern Renaissance, Room 25

ZEBRA-SKIN CHAIR

London, 1931. Museum no. W.26-1979
Level 3, Twentieth Century, Rooms 72–74

PROCESSIONAL CROSS

Gondar, Ethiopia, 1831–9, Museum no. M.25-2005
Level 3, Sacred Silver & Stained Glass, Room 83

ROBE

Liberia, West Africa, 19th century
Museum no. T.66-1913
Level 3, Textiles, Room 98

THE TOY SELLER

William Mulready RA, 1835. Museum no. FA.149
Level 3, Paintings, Room 88

MODEL FOR A STATUE OF ALDERMAN

WILLIAM BECKFORD, LORD MAYOR OF LONDON

Nathaniel Smith, about 1770
Museum no. A.48-1928
Level 3, Sculpture, Room 111
Case: *Designs, Models and Multiples*

MINIATURE OF HENRY SWINBURNE

Richard Crosse, about 1775–80
Museum no. FA.640
Level 3, Portrait Miniatures, Room 90A

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

Cologne, Germany, about 1500
Museum no. C.74, 75-1919
Level 3, Sacred Silver & Stained Glass, Room 84

Other works by black artists, or relating to black heritage, can be seen in the Prints & Drawings Study Room on Level 4 (via Lift Y), tel. 020 7942 2563. It is open Tuesday to Saturday inclusive, 10.00–17.00. Bookings for group visits should be made through the V&A Bookings Line by telephoning 020 7942 2211 in advance.

AFRICAN OBJECTS AT THE V&A

There is no dedicated gallery space for African art at the V&A. The reason for this dates back to the 19th century, when the Museum was founded with the specific aim of collecting examples of good design. Since African art was then categorised as 'ethnography' rather than 'art', the Museum focused on the products of Europe and Asia. A few African objects were acquired as examples of skills or techniques, but it is only more recently that the collection has expanded to include work by black artists and makers from Africa and other parts of the world.

Outstanding collections relating to black and African heritage can be seen elsewhere in London, in the British Museum and the Horniman Museum especially.

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

**A SERIES OF EVENTS AT THE V&A
REMEMBERING SLAVERY**

A series of high-impact complimentary events and activities will take place at the V&A throughout the year, many in partnership with community and cultural organisations. These include talks and debates, theatre performances, carnival parades, dance, music, gallery installations, films, creative writing, poetry, storytelling, creative workshops, fashion shows and more.

For further information visit the Uncomfortable Truths website.

www.vam.ac.uk/uncomfortabletruths

V&A



Heritage

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