

# **Black Atlantic**

**Power, People, Resistance**

**LARGE PRINT GUIDE**



# Content notice

This exhibition is about enslavement and racism. It includes objects linked to violence and exploitation.

Please speak to staff who can signpost you to support resources. There is seating throughout and there is a reflection space for everyone's use in the final area.

## Introduction

# We all tell Stories

Stories help us make sense of our world. They help us distinguish fact from fiction, and history from myth. This story is about what happened when European empires colonised the Americas and transported more than 12.5 million people from Africa to these colonies as slaves between 1400 and 1900. Colonial enslavement affected every part of the Atlantic world, including Cambridge. Asking new questions about how enslavement and empire shaped the University of Cambridge Museums has led to discoveries about the objects they hold, the people who collected them, and how their stories connect Cambridge to global history.

These objects reveal the wealth that Cambridge drew, and continues to draw, from Atlantic enslavement.

# We all tell Stories

They also demonstrate that people always resisted oppression. By resisting colonial slavery, people produced new cultures that continue to shape our world. These cultures are known as the Black Atlantic. With insights from contemporary artists, we can rethink our connected and complex histories, and create a better story: one of repair and freedom.

## Object Label

# Ongoing research

**Spring 2023** This painting is renamed 'Portrait of a Man in a Red Suit' by Exeter curators, revising earlier suggestions that it represents one of two famous 18th-century Black African commentators on enslavement, Olaudah Equiano or Ignatius Sancho. Research continues into the sitter's identity: is he a free man, a valued servant, or neither? Where, when and why was he painted?

Unrecorded maker, England

'Portrait of a Man in a Red Suit', about 1740–80

Oil on canvas

Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery,

Exeter City Council: 14/1943

Donated by Percy Moore Turner, 1943

## Object Label

# The Cambridge graduate

**1764** Sporting the gold nobleman-status gown of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, a 19-year-old Richard Fitzwilliam smiles as his MA graduation portrait is painted. Commissioned by his college tutor Samuel Hallifax, the portrait was inherited by Hallifax's son, Robert Fitzwilliam Hallifax – so called because Fitzwilliam was his godfather – and given to the Museum in 1819. The painting enters the collection as object number one.

Joseph Wright of Derby (1734–1797)

'Portrait of The Hon. Richard Fitzwilliam, Future 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam of Merrion (1745–1816)', 1764

Oil on canvas

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: 1

Given by Robert Fitzwilliam Hallifax, 1819

## Section Panel

# Who gets remembered and why?

Here are two people connected by the history that creates the Black Atlantic. Both paintings were made in England in the second half of the 18th century, by artists who skilfully suggest an individual, living presence.

The name of the Black man has been lost or was never recorded. An outdated interpretation suggests he is Olaudah Equiano, a prominent writer and abolitionist who lived in Cambridgeshire towards the end of his life. But the fact that after decades of research his identity still remains unknown highlights the ways the dominant culture in Britain has failed to record Black sitters' identities and histories.

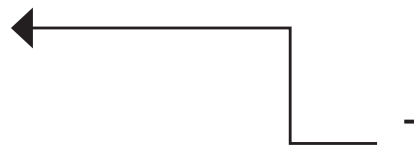


## Who gets remembered and why?

The name of the white man is Richard Fitzwilliam. In 1816, Fitzwilliam bequeaths the enormous sum of £100,000, along with a substantial library and art collection, to the University of Cambridge. This bequest funds the building of this museum named in his honour, and still supports it today. At the time, the fact that Fitzwilliam's riches come from a grandfather made wealthy in part by the transatlantic trade in enslaved African people is not deemed problematic. Institutions choose which facts they record and the stories they tell. This exhibition tells, for the first time across the University of Cambridge Museums, a more complete story.

## User's Guide

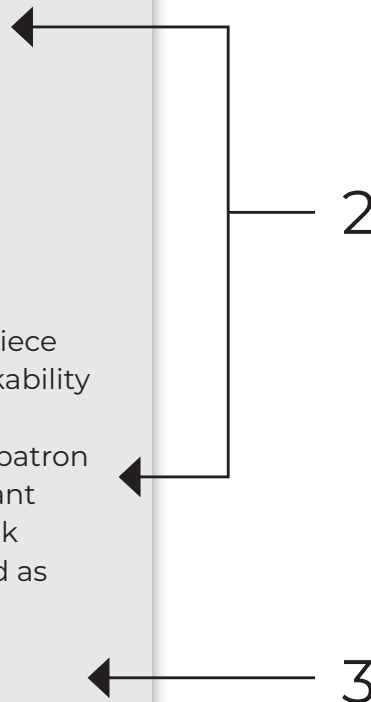
# A user's guide to objects and labels



### Ivory and fashionable portraiture

**1700** The ivory-carver David Le Marchand uses a piece of African elephant tusk, prized for its colour, workability and sheen, to carve this virtuoso low-relief profile-portrait of the aristocratic Elizabeth Eyre. Neither patron nor artist probably consider how the heavy elephant tusks are transported on the backs of captive Black Africans to West African ports where both are sold as commodities.

David Le Marchand (1674–1726)  
'Portrait medallion of Elizabeth Eyre (1659–1705)', 1700  
African elephant ivory  
Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: M.12-1846. Given by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, 1946



**1** Each object is chosen by the curators to help tell the exhibition's story. This ivory portrait appears in the section on European fashion, materials and transatlantic enslavement.

**2** The title and the text is written by the curators, artists and other contributors with input from the interpretation editor as well as internal and external readers. Texts are in the present tense to make their content more immediate and aim to:

- Say something about the object, its subject, its maker and its context
- Help tell the story of transatlantic enslavement and the Black Atlantic.
- Look at these histories from different perspectives.

**3** This summary text (known as the ‘tombstone’) lists the artist, the object’s title or subject, when or where it was made or found, the materials used, the institution it now belongs to, its catalogue number, should you want to look it up to find out more and where known, how the object was acquired and who collected or donated it. This factual information is often incomplete and shaped by historic bias; the names of Black and Indigenous artists and creators were rarely recorded. We have chosen to use the term ‘Unrecorded’ rather than the usual ‘Unknown’ or ‘Anonymous’.

# Acknowledgements

The Fitzwilliam Museum would like to thank the artists, private collectors, museums, archives and organisations who have so generously lent to the exhibition. We would also like to acknowledge our many collaborators and advisors for their help and expertise.

Generous funding from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, was critical in making this exhibition possible.

## **Exhibition Co-curators**

Dr Jake Subryan Richards, The London School of Economics and Political Science

Dr Victoria Avery, The Fitzwilliam Museum

# Acknowledgements

Continuation

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Pocc

This exhibition has been made possible as a result of the Government Indemnity Scheme. The Fitzwilliam Museum would like to thank HM Government for providing Government Indemnity and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity.

The Museum would also like to thank the Government for support provided by the Museum and Gallery Exhibition Tax Relief scheme through HMRC.

## Section Panel

# Glimpses of the world before Atlantic enslavement

West Africa, the Caribbean and Europe have independent histories before being connected through violence by transatlantic enslavement. Each has complex social and material cultures. In sub-Saharan West Africa, people form political communities with extensive agricultural systems, long-distance trade networks and rich cultural lives. In the Caribbean, the diverse Indigenous peoples develop their own artforms and sophisticated political systems. Enslavement exists as an alternative to execution for war captives across all these societies, but to different degrees. Importantly, before the transatlantic slave trade, enslavement is neither racial nor necessarily inherited.



# **Glimpses of the world before Atlantic enslavement**

We can still glimpse these worlds through the objects these people made and those that collectors have given to Cambridge institutions.

## Sub-Section Panel

# Africa: Akan goldweights



Akan speaking peoples

Among the great cultures of sub-Saharan West Africa are the Akan – a linguistic group including the Asante, Fante, Brong, Akyem, Akwapim, Akwamu, Kwahu, Aowin, Wassa, Assin, Denkyira, Sehwi and the Adansi ethnic groups of present southwestern.

## Africa: Akan goldweights

Among the great cultures of sub-Saharan West Africa are the Akan – a linguistic group including the Asante, Fante, Brong, Akyem, Akwapim, Akwamu, Kwahu, Aowin, Wassa, Assin, Denkyira, Sehwi and the Adansi ethnic groups of present southwestern Ghana and southeastern Côte d'Ivoire.

Over centuries, the Akan mine gold, and sell it on vast trading routes across the Sahara Desert. From 1400 they develop a system of 'mmbrammɔ' or goldweights, to measure gold dust, the Akan currency. Goldweights are acquired by both Dutch and British colonial collectors, but in the late 19th and early 20th centuries they are also gathered by Black collectors, and enter the University of Cambridge Museums.

## Group Object Label

# Akan ambassadors

**From the late 1400s** skilled metalworkers cast highly individual brass weights to give form to the rich Akan tradition of 'mmbɛ' or proverbs, as well as to its belief systems, weaponry, animals and the geometric forms of Akan symbology. Traders travel great distances with these weights, along with scales, blowers, sifters and spoons, to conduct transactions. Even far from home, the weights are ambassadors for Akan values and culture.

# Akan ambassadors

## **1 Unrecorded Akan makers, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)**

Small balance scale for weighing gold and scoop, likely made in late 19th or early 20th century

Brass

Permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library: ORCS.4.05 Purchased from a Hausa trader by D M Lawson when working as a Gold Coast telegraph engineer between 1926 and 1932, and later donated to the Royal Commonwealth Society, whose collections were acquired by Cambridge University Library in 1993

# Akan ambassadors

## 2 Unrecorded Akan maker, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)

Goldweight in the shape of a European sword, made at an unknown date, perhaps 19th century

Brass

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 2010.254. Presumed collected by Sir Cecil Hamilton Armitage, purchased by Maurice Cockin, inherited by Celia Barclay, 1961. Given by Dr Gordon Barclay, 2010

# Akan ambassadors

## 3 Unrecorded Akan maker, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)

Goldweight in the shape of an Akan sword,  
made at an unknown date, perhaps  
19th century

Brass

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,

University of Cambridge: 1927.173.2 H

Bequeathed by Professor Sir William Ridgeway, 1927

# Akan ambassadors

## 4 Unrecorded Akan maker, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)

Goldweight in the shape of a bird with a body formed as a 'Nyaconton' or god's knot, and European cannon for wings, made at an unknown date, perhaps 19th century

Brass

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 2015.241. Given by Mrs Sylvia Spooner and Professor Edward T Spooner, 2015; acquired by Arthur C Spooner between 1926 and 1963



# Akan ambassadors

## 5 Unrecorded Akan maker, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)

Goldweight in the shape of a 'nsin dua' (carved wood) bowl with four birds perched on its rim, made at an unknown date, perhaps 19th century

Brass

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 1934.1123 I. Given by Mrs Bernard Senior, 1934, from her husband's collection

# Akan ambassadors

## **6 Unrecorded Akan maker, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)**

Goldweight in the shape of a 'sankofa' (go back to fetch) bird, which refers to an Akan proverb on the importance of learning from the past in order to face the future, made at an unknown date, perhaps 19th century

Brass

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 1981.81 B. Given by Mrs G A Cruise from the collection of her husband, Mr L Cruise, 1981

## Group Object Label

# Ghanian pride

These weights are among more than 700 Akan goldweights in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology collection in Cambridge, from a small group gathered by the Ghanaian anthropologist Dr Alexander Atta Yaw Kyerematen. The knotted fibres are the symbol of wisdom, while the other two weights refer to Nyame, the supreme god in Akan cosmology: a figure sacrificing a bird at the 'Nyame Dua' (tree of god) and a geometric structure pointing skywards possibly to Nyame's dwelling place.

## Ghanian pride

### **7 Unrecorded Akan maker, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)**

Goldweight in the shape of a piece of knotted leaf or fibre, made at an unknown date, probably 20th century

Brass

### **8 Unrecorded Akan maker, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)**

Goldweight in the shape of a man sacrificing a bird to Nyame at the Nyame Dua tree, which has a bowl containing three eggs in its fork, made at an unknown date, probably 20th century

Brass

# Ghanian pride

## 9 Unrecorded Akan maker, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)

Goldweight in the shape of a four-sided pyramid, made at an unknown date, probably 20th century

Brass.

All Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,  
University of Cambridge: 1970.19, 1970.18, 1970.16

These three weights were collected by the Ghanaian anthropologist Dr Alexander Atta Yaw Kyerematen. He appears to have given them, along with two others, to Mary Cra'ster, an assistant at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in the 1970s, during a research trip to Cambridge. The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (as it is now called) owns more than 700 Akan goldweights.

## **Ghanian pride**

### **Alexander Atta Yaw Kyerematen (1916–1976)**

A Ghanaian anthropologist who was trained at Oxford University, Kyerematen is the founder and first director of the Centre for National Culture in Kumasi, Ghana. His work, both scholarly and social, focuses on the preservation of his native Asante culture, in all its forms, for the benefit of Ghanaian people.

Photo: Courtesy of the family of Dr Alexander Atta  
Yaw Kyerematen

## Group Object Label

# A game of wits

Many goldweights depict 'oware' or 'warri', a two-player board game popular among the Akan and still enjoyed within some African-heritage communities today.

The game involves 48 nickernut or seed counters, distributed in four sets in each pit, except the pits at the ends, where captured counters are collected. Through strategic play, the objective is to outwit the opponent and accumulate 25 or more counters.

# A game of wits

## 10 **Unrecorded Akan maker, Kingdom of Asante (Ghana)**

Goldweight in the shape of a warri board,  
made at an unknown date, perhaps  
19th century

Brass

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,

University of Cambridge: Z 14833.14

Donated in 1951 with unrecorded provenance



# A game of wits

## 11 **Unrecorded maker, probably West Africa**

Warri board in the shape of a boat, with playing counters, likely made in early- to mid-20th century

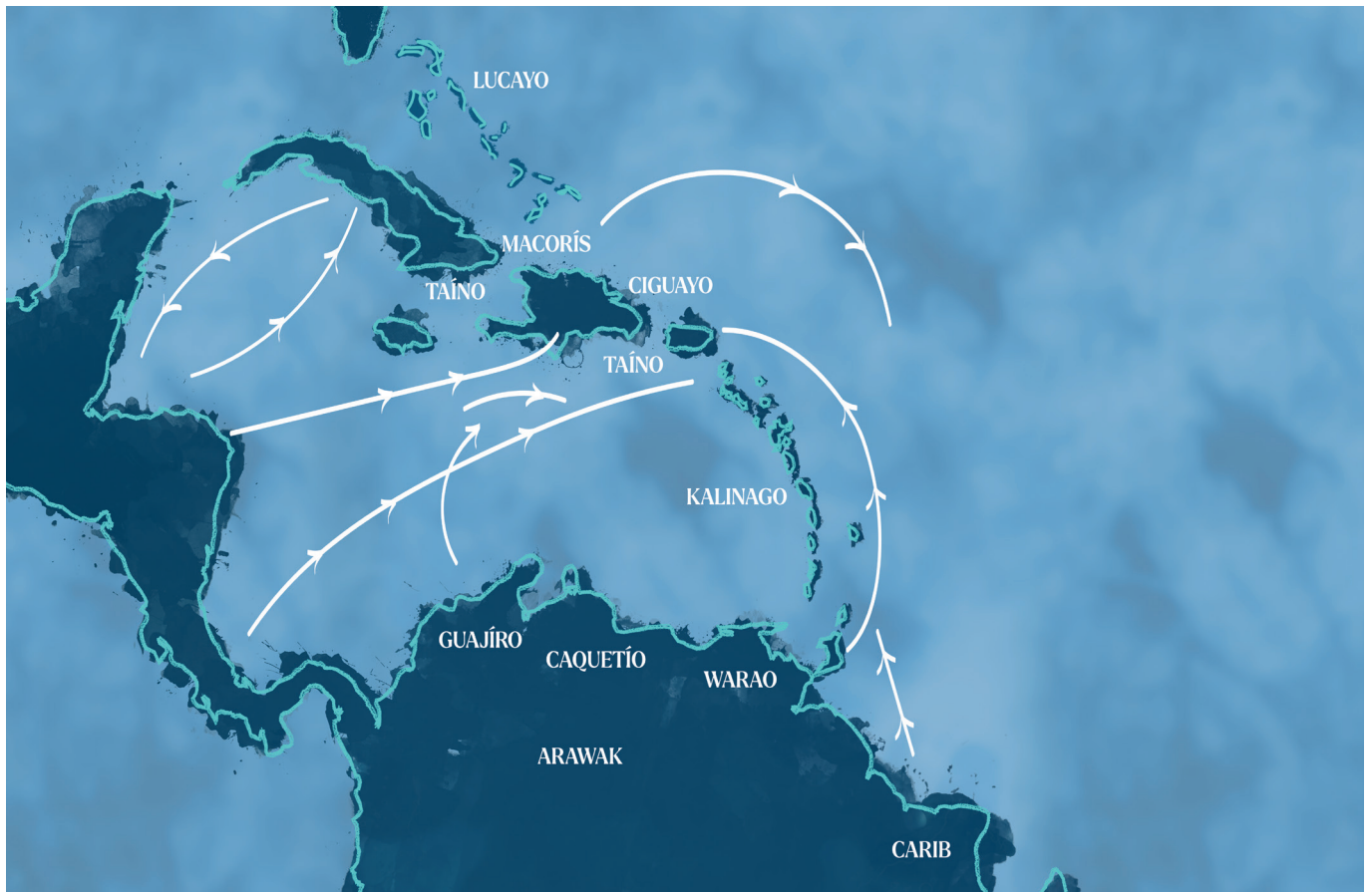
Wood and seeds

Permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library: ORCS.4.07

Presented by Mrs Marjorie Gibb in 1962 to the Royal Commonwealth Society, whose collections were acquired by Cambridge University Library in 1993

## Sub-section panel

# Indigenous islands in the Caribbean Sea



Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean

From ancient times, Indigenous people in the Caribbean migrate along two sweeping paths between the mainland and the islands.

## **Indigenous islands in the Caribbean Sea**

One route runs from Yucatán to Cuba and southwards, the other from the Guianas through Trinidad northwards up the Lesser Antilles. As people settle on the islands, they build villages, grow crops and express themselves through pottery and stone sculptures of human faces and animals. In the 1800s, almost 400 years after the Spanish conquest of these islands and subsequent suppression of these cultures, a former Cambridge student, whose family owned plantations in Barbados, collects objects originally owned by Indigenous groups. These are then purchased for the University Museums.

## Object label

# Taíno power

**14th Century** This 'duho' or ritual seat is made at the height of Taíno culture (11th–16th centuries) on the island now home to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. A creature that is part-human and part-animal stands on all fours. In bold curving lines, the sculptor dresses the creature in a cotton belt around its middle, an object of great value that chiefs give each other as gifts. Taíno people gather around this wooden throne for political and spiritual ceremonies.

Unrecorded Indigenous Caribbean maker/s, Taíno chiefdom (Haiti)

Duho (ceremonial seat for a leader), 14th century  
Guayac wood (*Guaiacum sp.*)

Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac: 71.1950.77.1 Am  
Given by Mr and Mrs David David-Weill, 1951

## Group Object Label

# Dynamic cultures across land and water

### **About 4000 BCE–before 1500 CE**

The Indigenous Taíno and Carib peoples in the Caribbean islands make objects to support their way of life. Stone axes in the shape of petals are used to carve canoes from tree trunks to row between islands. Stone tools aid agriculture while objects such as wooden walking sticks are made beautiful with dexterous basket-work. From Haiti, Jamaica, Dominica and St Vincent, these now-rare objects bear witness to these cultures, almost entirely wiped out by European empires.

# Dynamic cultures across land and water

## 1 Unrecorded Indigenous Caribbean maker, Haiti (Ayiti)

Large axe, possibly an axe head, unknown  
date, pre-Columbian

Stone, probably rhyolite

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,

University of Cambridge: 1951.355

Given by Louis Colville Gray Clarke, 1951

# Dynamic cultures across land and water

## **2 Unrecorded Indigenous Caribbean maker, Dominica (Wai'tukubuli or Kairi)**

Walking stick, late 19th or early 20th century

Wood and basketry. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 1937.1320 B  
Given by Walter William Skeat, 1937

## **3 Unrecorded Indigenous Caribbean maker, Jamaica, Santa Cruz District (Yamaye)**

Elongated axe, unknown date, pre-Columbian

Black stone. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 1888.46.3 A  
Collected and given by Joseph Jackson Lister, 1888

# Dynamic cultures across land and water

## 4 Unrecorded Indigenous Caribbean maker, St Vincent (Hairouna)

Long knife with serrated edges, unknown  
date, pre-Columbian

Stone

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University  
of Cambridge: 1901.2

Collected by Brown of Bellair in St Vincent, 1900; given  
by Charles Cave, 1901



## Group Object Label

### A colonial collector

A large axe for cutting wood, and a small adze, or blade, for cutting food. Small amulets of a fish and a head to carry for luck or display at home. All were made by different Indigenous peoples across times and locations. What connects them is the man who gathered them from the Caribbean: a Cambridge graduate and 19th-century British collector and colonial official, Sir Thomas Graham Briggs, whose family owned enslaved people and plantations in Barbados.

## A colonial collector

### **5 Unrecorded Indigenous Caribbean maker, Antigua (Waladli)**

Large axe, unknown date, pre-Columbian

Stone

### **6 Unrecorded Indigenous Caribbean maker, St Vincent (Hairouna)**

Adze, unknown date, pre-Columbian

Green stone

### **7 Unrecorded Indigenous Caribbean maker, St Vincent (Hairouna)**

Amulet in the shape of a fish, unknown date, pre-Columbian

Soapstone

# A colonial collector

## 8 Unrecorded Indigenous Caribbean maker, St Vincent (Hairouna)

Votive head, unknown date, pre-Columbian

Burnt clay

All Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,  
University of Cambridge: Z 2510, E 1894.47, Z 39515  
(alternatively 1894.52), E 1894.50

The collection of Sir Thomas Graham Briggs (1833–1887) was purchased after his death by his nephew, Charles Kenrick Gibbons (1856–1918), son of Lt Col William Barton Gibbons (1802–1872), a Justice of the Peace for Barbados, who was compensated in 1836 along with other family members for the Sandfords estate in Barbados following the abolition of slavery. Gibbons sold part of his uncle's collection to the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in 1894.

## **Sub-section panel**

# **Europe: slavery before racism, Blackness before slavery**

From the ancient world to the present day, many societies have enslaved people under different circumstances. Enslavement has meant many things within different cultures, but generally the enslaved are designated as powerless outsiders whom others can buy and sell. In ancient European cultures, the victors in battle often punish the vanquished with enslavement.

Before the era of transatlantic enslavement, European artists rarely portray Black people. When they do, they usually depict them as honourable individuals. From the 1600s onwards, as the enslavement and trafficking of African people gathers momentum, the modes of depiction change.

## **Europe: slavery before racism, Blackness before slavery**

The work by contemporary artist Barbara Walker, included here, imagines an alternative to the increasing marginalisation and secondary status African people are given in European art from the Renaissance onwards.

## Object label

# Unnamed

**In this 19th-century plaster cast of a 400 BCE original**, a Greek woman named Hegeso sits in a rippling dress as she chooses jewellery from a box presented by an unnamed young woman. Rather than racialised characteristics, the adolescent's shapeless dress, smaller stature and lack of name mark her out as enslaved. Like most stelai, or tombstones, the image and inscription commemorate only the elite person's status and ignore that of the enslaved person.

Unrecorded Ancient Greek maker, Athens

Grave stele of Hegeso, daughter of Proxenos, about 400 BCE

Plaster cast made about 1884 by Martinelli, Athens, after a Pentelic marble original

Museum of Classical Archaeology, University of Cambridge: 206

Purchased in 1884 from Martinelli of Athens

## Object label

# Punishing captives

**200 CE** As with the tombstone alongside, clothing – or lack of it – is the chief marker of captivity in this marble relief from the Roman city of Smyrna. The top two rows feature clothed, helmeted soldiers leading chained, almost naked men. They are likely war captives or social outcasts. In the bottom row, a lion kills a bull whilst an ibex fights a second lion. A fight with the animals may await the captives.

Unrecorded Ancient Roman maker, Smyrna (Izmir, Turkey)

Relief of soldiers leading enslaved chained men with a wild animal fight below, 200 CE

Marble

The Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Bequeathed by John Selden, 1654: AN Michaelis 137

## Object label

# A man of status

**About 1525–30** The Dutch artist Jan Mostaert draws our attention to this man's gloved hands and what he holds: a sword and a luxurious bag – both signs of wealth and high status. This portrait suggests the wide-ranging roles that Black people played in Europe before the era of transatlantic enslavement. The man's identity is uncertain but he may be Christophle le More, an archer and bodyguard to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

Jan Jansz Mostaert (about 1474–1552/53)

'Portrait of an African Man', about 1525–30

Oil on oak panel

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam: SK-A-4986

Purchased in 2005 from the art dealer R Noortman, Maastricht, with support from the Vereniging Rembrandt and additional funding from the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, the Mondriaan Stichting, the VSBfonds, the BankGiro Lottery and the Rijksmuseum Fonds



## Object label

# The Black king

**Mid-1550s** Although the Bible only speaks of ‘wise men from the East’ bringing gifts to honour the newborn Christ, the Italian painter Zuccari follows European artistic conventions by depicting three kings – one of whom is a Black African named Balthazar. Zuccari paints this king as equal to his peers in terms of richness of costume and closeness to Christ. Over time, interconnections of religion, racism, enslavement and colonial power influence the image of the Black king.

Taddeo Zuccari (1529–1566)

‘Adoration of the Kings’, about 1555–60

Oil on panel

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: M.31

Bequeathed by Charles Brinsley Marlay, 1912

## Object label

# A different angle

**2020** Barbara Walker reimagines the National Gallery's 'Adoration of the Kings' by the 16th-century painter Paolo Veronese using pencil and white embossed paper. She shifts our gaze to the lines of sight of three Black figures, the king (left) and two anonymous Black attendants.

Rather than the angels above or the kneeling kings, these three people's view of the Christ Child now captures our attention.

Community often weaves together the people Barbara Walker (born 1964) depicts: servicemen and women who have fought for Britain, Black figures in historic masterpieces, and customers in Afro hair barber shops.

## A different angle

Ranging across painting, drawing and installation art, and across scales from small pieces of paper to large walls, Walker centres Black people across place and time in her portraits.

Barbara Walker (Born 1964)

‘Vanishing Point 17 (Veronese)’, 2020

Graphite on embossed Somerset Satin paper

Private Collection

© Barbara Walker, 2023

## A different angle

**“I’ve always been drawn to the figure, not necessarily, or not only, its portraiture aspects, but more so body politics. Black people are often on the receiving end of images, but art school provided me with the important opportunities to think about how as an artist I had the power to push back, and to create images other than the nasty corrosive caricatures of Black people frequently peddled by the mainstream media and dominant culture.”**

## Section panel

# Cambridge wealth from Atlantic enslavement

Trading companies in 17th-century Europe are crucial to slave-trading and colonial expansion. Inspired by Dutch models, slave-trading companies, including the Royal African Company (RAC) and South Sea Company (SSC), are founded in Britain with state support.

Operating from coastal forts, merchants employed by these companies lend guns and trade goods to enslavers within sub Saharan Africa. Repayment takes the form of war captives. This cycle of guns for captives expands into systematic and ruthless methods of trafficking. Profits from this trade flow into the family of the Fitzwilliam Museum's founder. They also shape the collections across the Cambridge University Museums.

## Cambridge wealth from Atlantic enslavement

In the 1600s and 1700s, enslavement also permeates daily life in Britain: scientists create hierarchies of skin colour and coins celebrate the royal patronage of slave-trading. To make the defence of trading routes and slaving voyages more successful, Parliament offers a prize to any person able to invent an instrument to calculate a ship's position at sea accurately.

The wealth and prestige generated by enslavement allows the University of Cambridge to gather objects, art and materials from across the globe. These collections both reinforce and celebrate Britain's position as the leading Atlantic slave-trading power of 18th-century Europe.

## **Sub-section panel**

### **Royal patronage**

From the 15th century, ruling monarchs in Europe give crucial financial and political support to establish overseas empires. In Britain, the crown sponsors expeditions to acquire colonies in North America and the Caribbean. White colonisers attack and commit a genocide of Indigenous peoples through firepower and the spread of European diseases. They claim land rights, and use forced labourers to grow crops.

Initially, white people, including servants and people convicted of crimes, work for a fixed period on plantations alongside captive African people. By 1700, British colonies pass laws that create racial categories and stipulate that white people are free whereas Black people are enslaved.

## **Royal patronage**

This colour bar disregarded the truth that there is a single human race. Discrimination is reinforced by historical racist science, promoted by the Royal Society, Britain's leading scientific institution.



## Object label

# Frobisher's gold

**15th and 16th centuries** Many transatlantic expeditions begin as attempts to find a faster passage to India than circumnavigating the African continent. Martin Frobisher, a late 16th-century slave-trader, tries three times to find a northwest passage above Canada. When in 1578 he brings home dark earth that seems to glimmer with gold, he wins Queen Elizabeth I's patronage. But the glimmer is a mirage. Frobisher's 'gold' turns out to be a worthless aggregate of common minerals: fool's gold.

Specimen of fool's gold

The Polar Museum, Scott Polar Research Institute,  
University of Cambridge: N: 759a

Given by A Hutchinson, 1927; originally collected on the third expedition led by Martin Frobisher on Meta Incognita (Baffin Island, Canadian Arctic), 1578; later deposited at Darford Priory

## Object label

# Royal patronage for science and slavery

**1663** The newly restored King Charles II, depicted here as a classical sculpture, sponsors the Royal Society, Britain's chief scientific body, and the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa. In this illustration for a book promoting the Society, navigational instruments, books and a gun appear in the foreground. In the background a long telescope is visible. The text describes these institutions of science and enslavement as twin sisters.

Thomas Sprat (1635–1713)

'The History of the Royal Society of London, for the Improving of Natural Knowledge' (London, 1667)

The Royal Society, London: 7769

Once owned by Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour (1721–1764)

## Object label

# Historical race-based sciences

**1686** Richard Waller publishes this table after years of discussing colour, including skin colour, at the Royal Society. To describe colours accurately users should compare an object with the 'nearest' colour on the chart, and then use the 'word affixt to that Colour'. The seventh colour from the bottom on the right is 'Æthiopicus' or 'Negro-Black'. This is one example of the enormous role European scientists play in the justification of enslavement and anti-Black racism.

Richard Waller (died 1715)

'Table of coloures' published in 'Philosophical transactions', vol 16, issue 179 (1686–87), pp 24–25

Ink and watercolour on paper

Trinity College, Cambridge: 310 b 6A 8

Once owned by Thomas Kirke (1650–1706), a former Trinity student

## Object label

# Invented categories

**2023** Keith Piper constructs a box with 15 pots of pigment arranged according to an invented system of skin tones. Slave-owning societies used arbitrary racial categories such as these to discriminate against people of Black heritage. Not every person in the Americas with Black heritage was enslaved, but they all suffered racial discrimination regardless of whether they were enslaved or free. Piper subverts how museums display historical material and highlights how racist ideologies continue to impact the present day.

Keith Piper (born 1960) spends his childhood in Birmingham before attending Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham.

## **Invented categories**

In 1979, he forms the radical BLK Art Group with artists Marlene Smith, Eddie Chambers, Claudette Johnson and Donald Rodney to address issues of class, gender and race. This collaboration, and many more that it inspires, spur today's British Black Arts Movement, equipping artists with an enduring visual language and political literacy.

Keith Piper (Born 1960)

'The Coloureds' Codex (Enlightenment Edition)', 2023

Wood, paper, pigment

On loan from the Artist

© Keith Piper

# Invented categories

**“The ‘Coloureds’ Codex’ exists as an ironic and parodic commentary upon what evolved as an imposed hierarchy of social privilege within the brutal spaces of the slave plantations of the 18th and 19th centuries. They are a set of imposed hierarchies that still resonate into the present day, re-echoing through systems of ‘colourism’ and implied social and aesthetic value.”**

## Object label

# Kingly creatures

**1662–1726** A tiny elephant with a castle on its back can be glimpsed beneath the looming heads of three British monarchs.

The symbol indicates that the gold used in these coins – which was mined by enslaved people in West Africa – came to the Royal Mint via the Royal African Company (RAC), which Charles II helped to establish.

The RAC's elephant and castle logo last appears on gold coins made in 1726 during the reign of George I.

# Kingly creatures

## The Royal Mint, London

Five guinea coin with head of Charles II and Royal African Company logo, 1676

Five guinea coin with head of James II and Royal African Company logo, 1687

Five guinea coin with head of William III and Royal African Company logo, 1699

Gold

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:  
CM.YG.3606-R and CM.YG.3629-R, both bequeathed  
by Arthur W Young, 1936; CM.5.

1359-1933, bequeathed by James Stewart Henderson,  
1933



## Object label

# From a royal company to private enterprise

**1796** This small token known as an Ackey coin tells a big story. Around its edge reads 'FREE TRADE TO AFRICA BY ACT OF PARLIMENT [sic] 1750'. This act transfers the assets of the Royal African Company, such as its coastal slave-trading forts, to the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa. Private merchants pay the new company to use the forts for their slave-trading ventures and these coins become their local currency. The shift to private enterprise contributes to a huge increase in British slave-trading.

Soho Mint, Birmingham

Quarter Ackey, 1796 (first issue)

Silver

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

CM.W.156-R

Unprovenanced

## Object label

# (Un)free trade

**1818** As well as celebrating the 1750 Act for Free Trade to Africa, this token made for the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa depicts two Indigenous men as heraldic supporters with the symbols of slave-trading: the sailing ship and the old logo of the Royal African Company, the African elephant with a castle on its back.

Probably Soho Mint, Birmingham

Half Ackey, 1818 (third issue)

Silver

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

CM.1698.1963

Given by the late Miss Jean Ritchie, 1963

# Black Atlantic definition

‘Black Atlantic’ refers to the creation and transmission of cultures by people of the African diaspora as they confronted transatlantic enslavement and empire and their pernicious afterlives.

It was first used by Robert Farris Thompson in his book ‘Flash of the Spirit: African and AfroAmerican Art and Philosophy’ (1983) to describe the shared artistic practices and belief systems among people of the African diaspora. Paul Gilroy developed the concept in ‘The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness’ (1993). He argued that through the movement of people, ideas and material goods across the Atlantic, Black cultures transcended the boundaries of any single place.

## **Black Atlantic definition**

In this sense, the Black Atlantic represents a rich conceptual space for limitless imagination, transmission and exchange. This exhibition and its associated book, as well as the Fitzwilliam's future series of related exhibitions, explore the history of the Black Atlantic and the powerful Black Atlantic political visions that have shaped – and which continue to shape – our world.

**AV label**

# **The racialisation of enslavement**

Animation by Stephanie Caw

## Sub-section panel

# Making money: Dutch connections

A significant part of Richard Fitzwilliam's wealth, and many of the artworks in this Museum's founding collection, come from his maternal grandfather, Matthew Decker.

Growing up in Amsterdam, Decker witnesses the success of companies using private investor money to colonise overseas territories. Captives are shipped from sub-Saharan West Africa to plantations in the Americas and forced to work as enslaved labourers in complex and lucrative systems of trade.

In 1700, Decker brings this knowledge to England. In 1711, he helps to establish the South Sea Company (SSC). People who had previously lent money to the state receive SSC shares instead of repayment of the loan.

## **Making money: Dutch connections**

The SSC also obtains the monopoly to traffic African people to the Spanish Americas.

The prospect of profit from slave-trading, and the conversion of more government debt into company stock, makes the SSC shares an attractive investment to many. The SSC helps put enslavement at the heart of early British capitalism.

## Object label

# Fitzwilliam's slave-trading grandfather

**About 1720** Matthew Decker, wealthy from the slave-trading ventures of the SSC and RAC, has his portrait painted. His full-faced pose, fine silk jacket and projecting elbow assert his authority. Decker's profits and some of the Dutch paintings he buys are later inherited by his grandson Richard Fitzwilliam, providing the founding collections of this museum, and money for its construction. The original bequest is still returning interest payments to the University, which helps fund the museum. Part of the museum's work today is focussing on ways to address this legacy.

Theodorus Netscher (1661–1728). 'Portrait of Sir Matthew Decker, Baronet (1679–1749)', about 1720  
Oil on canvas. Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: 443. Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816



## Object label

# Cultivating a reputation

**1720** Flamboyant and dramatic, this pineapple sits above its foliage like a portrait head. Behind it stretches Decker's estate in Richmond, then in rural Surrey. The contrast between the 'exotic' fruit and refined landscape highlights Decker's achievement: his wealth from slave-trading has funded the cultivation of the first crop of pineapples in England. As the Latin text at the bottom reveals, this specimen is served to Decker's guest, King George I.

Theodorus Netscher (1661–1728)

'Pineapple grown in Sir Matthew Decker's garden at Richmond, Surrey', 1720

Oil on canvas

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: 357

Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount

Fitzwilliam, 1816

# Brazilian wood in Rembrandt's studio

**1650** Adopting a bold pose, this man is dressed in a military breastplate and plumed hat. Beneath the paint are wooden boards made of capomo and marmelero, two woods from Brazil, at this time a Dutch colony. Indigenous and African captives cut and transport these trees, which are shipped to Amsterdam. Despite Rembrandt's studio using goods that derived from transatlantic enslavement, the artist himself often depicts Black people living in his neighbourhood in Amsterdam with the same care and psychological insight as his white sitters.

# Brazilian wood in Rembrandt's studio

Studio of Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606–1669)

'Portrait of a Man in Military Costume', 1650

Oil on panel made of South American woods capomo  
and marmelero

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: 152

Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816

Former owners include the Count de Fraula (until  
1738) and the Earl of Bessborough (until 1801)

## Object label

# Madness of greed

**1721** The artist William Hogarth mocks South Sea Company investors for the wild speculation that helped to create the South Sea Bubble, a major financial crisis in which the share price rises out of control and then crashes. Isaac Newton, the eminent Cambridge scientist, loses huge sums as a result. The Bubble leads him allegedly to declare, “I can calculate the motion of heavenly bodies, but not the madness of people”. Might he have seen his own madness reflected in Hogarth’s biting satire?

William Hogarth (1697–1764)

‘The South Sea Scheme’, 1721

Etching and engraving on paper

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

22.K.3-100

Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816

## Object label

# 1 Indonesian silver

**1723** The letters SSC for the South Sea Company encircle royal symbols on these silver coins, each worth a crown. In 1722, two years after the crash in share price, the SSC finds a hoard of silver in present-day Indonesia. It sells the silver to the Royal Mint, which turns it into crowns, half crowns, shillings and sixpences: a currency of colonial capitalism.

The Royal Mint, London

Two silver crowns with head of George I and royal arms with 'SSC' (South Sea Company initials) to indicate origin of silver, 1723

Silver, from Indonesia

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

CM.5.1498-1933 and CM.5.1499-1933

Both bequeathed by James Stewart Henderson, 1933

# 2 Making money for the transatlantic trade

**15th–19th centuries** Millions of bracelet-shaped metal bands, called manillas, are used as a common currency in West Africa. They are manufactured cheaply across Europe and used by Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, French, British and Danish traders to buy captive people, gold, wood and ivory. This set, made for the British Bank of West Africa Ltd in the late 1800s/early 1900s, proves that British colonial exploitation continues long after the abolition of the slave trade. Manillas are finally outlawed as legal tender in British-ruled Nigeria in March 1949 when more than 30 million of them are withdrawn.

## 2 Making money for the transatlantic trade

Unrecorded makers, probably Birmingham

Ten manillas with a 'British Bank of West Africa Ltd'

linen money bag, late 19th or early 20th century

Likely copper alloy

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: CM.525-2008 through to CM.534-2008

Given by J C B Jean Austin, acquired by the donor's father, Col J B J Austin, during service in the Colonial Police of British West Africa, 1926–53

Made for the British Bank of West Africa Ltd

## Object label

# Tokens of ownership

**1788–1792** Due to a shortage of legal coinage, unofficial copper tokens are made in the UK and shipped out for use by settlers in British colonies in the Caribbean.

The tokens here, designed by an owner of large sugar plantations in Barbados, Sir Philip Gibbes, combine imagery that references British monarchy – the Prince of Wales feathers with the motto ‘I serve’ (3) and George III in the guise of Neptune riding the waves (5) – with the image of an enslaved Black man and a pineapple (3 and 4).

**3–4 John Milton (1759–1805), London**

Two ‘Barbados pennies’, 1788

Copper



# Tokens of ownership

## 5 John G. Hancock, Birmingham

‘Barbados half-penny’, 1792

Copper

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

CM.W.154-R, CM.BI.2918-R, CM.W.155-R

All unprovenanced

# Object label

## An invested education

**1645–1747** Three enslavers are among the first owners of Gerrit Dou's painting of an atmospheric Dutch schoolroom: William, Prince of Orange and stadtholder of the Dutch Republic (the future William III of England), James Brydges, 1st Duke of Chandos and investor in the South Sea Company and Matthew Decker, Richard Fitzwilliam's grandfather. This work is later inherited by Fitzwilliam and becomes part of the Founder's Bequest.

Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)

'The Schoolmaster', 1645

Oil on panel

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: 33

Bequeathed by Richard,

7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816

## **Sub-section panel**

### **Technology for the transatlantic trade**

Do advances in technology always mean progress? In the era of transatlantic enslavement, crossing oceans is a dangerous business. Before the 1760s, ship crews have no reliable way to calculate how far east or west they are – the longitude problem.

This hampers merchant and naval seafaring so much that Parliament offers a substantial reward for a solution to the problem. New navigational instruments, often made of materials gathered by enslaved people, fuel the boom in colonial expansion and slave-trading – to the intense suffering of millions of people.

## Object label

# Slavery and the search for longitude

**1714** Parliament offers enormous cash prizes for a solution to calculating longitude at sea – a vital aid to navigation. Its British Longitude Act proposes that the instrument be tested “from Great Britain to any such Port in the West-Indies” (Caribbean) – the chief destination of slaving vessels. The chronometer, which can measure time, even when moving, becomes the ultimate solution. This one, manufactured in London in 1828, is encased in enslaved-produced mahogany.

Robert Molyneux (operated 1811–1854)

Two-day marine chronometer, in gimbal and fitted box, London, 1828. Metal (brass, steel, silver), glass, wood (mahogany) and ivory. Whipple Museum of the History of Science, University of Cambridge: 2581  
Transferred from Institute of Astronomy, University of Cambridge, June 1980

## Object label

# The University, longitude and enslavement

**1765** St John's College, Cambridge, opens an observatory to support astronomical research and uses instruments, including this sextant, to measure the angle between the horizon and the sun, moon or a star. Seafarers use sextants to determine their latitude (north-south position) and, with astronomical tables, longitude (east-west position). This method is more affordable than chronometers and helps make sea-trading, including slaving voyages, more efficient.

Edward Nairne (1726–1806)

Sextant with frame of reinforced brass plates and index mirror with three coloured filters, London, about 1770

Brass, wood and glass

Whipple Museum of the History of Science, University of Cambridge: 1081

By permission of the Master and Fellows of St John's College, Cambridge, since August 1951

## Object label

# Commanding places and people

**1690** This globe promotes English maritime trade and colonial expansion, with trade routes marked in black and depictions of Indigenous peoples. South America is covered with a scene of 'tribal' conflict, using racist stereotypes first designed by the Dutch artist Nicolaes Berchem. This expensive object aims to convey the owner's wealth and underscores their racist world view, as well as England's attempts to colonise people and places.

# Commanding places and people

Robert Morden (about 1650–1703), William Berry (about 1639–1718) and Philip Lea (about 1660–1700)  
14-inch terrestrial globe with 12 hand-coloured gores (tapered shapes to fit the spherical surface) printed from copper engravings, marking circumnavigation routes of Sir Francis Drake and Sir Thomas Cavendish, London, 1690

Mahogany, paper, brass, iron, pigment

Whipple Museum of the History of Science, University of Cambridge: 2691

By permission of the Provost and Scholars of King's College, Cambridge

# Promoting geography and enslavement

**Mid 1670s** John Seller's navigational chart of Europe (top left), West Africa (centre) and the east coast of Brazil (bottom right), illustrates the Royal African Company's 1672 charter. These were all places involved in the transatlantic slave trade. The company's crest and cartouche below are strategically placed on Africa to suggest proprietary rights and geographic knowledge. But, beyond owning a handful of forts on the 'Gold Coast', the company knew nothing of the continent.

John Seller (1630–1697), 'A Chart of the Seacoasts from the Landsend of England to Cape Bona Esperanca' from 'The English Pilot, the Third Book, Describing ... the Oriental Navigation' (London, 1677)

Permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University  
Library: Hanson.bb.46



**AV label**

# **Transatlantic enslavement**

Animation by Stephanie Caw

## Object label

# Eyewitness

**1789** Olaudah Equiano publishes his life story, 'The Interesting Narrative', to promote and raise funds for the campaign to abolish the slave trade. In the book, and on speaking tours that likely begin in Cambridge, he recalls being enslaved as a boy in West Africa and forced onto a slaving ship destined for Barbados.

Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa) (about 1745–1797)  
'The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself', 2nd Edition (London, 1789)  
Permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University  
Library: RCS.A.43c99e.2

## Eyewitness

Olaudah Equiano (about 1745–1797), according to his autobiography, is born in Igboland, in what is now southeastern Nigeria, where he is captured and sold to transatlantic slave traders. After many years in captivity in the Americas, Equiano achieves what was impossible for most: he purchases his freedom. He goes on to become an effective campaigner against enslavement. He publishes his autobiography and embarks on a book tour in the UK to promote abolition. In 1792, he marries Susannah Cullen, a woman from Soham, Cambridgeshire, with whom he has two daughters. Equiano's 'Interesting Narrative' went through nine editions in his lifetime and is still in print today.

**“The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.”**

**AV label**

# **Olaudah Equiano: extracts from 'The Interesting Narrative'**

Performed by Jyuddah Jaymes

Directed by Sharon Walters

Camera/editor Mat Sunderland

Sound Dan Rosen

Produced by Thing of Beauty

# Warfare between the British, Dutch and Spanish empires

Between 1652 and 1784, the British and Dutch empires fight four huge wars over trade and colonial possessions. Both sides celebrate their naval power through the arts, although by the mid-18th century Britain achieves maritime pre-eminence.

Conflicts also arise over slave-trading. In 1713, Britain gains the right to the Spanish Asiento, or contract, which grants a monopoly to traffic enslaved African people to the Spanish Americas. Previous holders of this contract include the Portuguese and Dutch.

## **Warfare between the British, Dutch and Spanish empires**

But by the 1730s war breaks out between Spain and Britain, in part over the Asiento's terms. As both abolitionists (opposers to enslavement) and artists reveal, British naval supremacy facilitates a huge rise in slave-trading.

## Object label

# A transatlantic battle in the North Sea

**1666** A major naval battle is fought in the North Sea between the English and Dutch over trade routes, including over the transatlantic trade in enslaved people between West Africa and the Americas. Storck, an accomplished seascape painter from Amsterdam, creates a patriotic scene in which the Dutch ship 'De Zeven Provinciën' (Seven Provinces), just left of centre, emerges victorious in a blaze of gunfire against English ships (on the right and sinking in the foreground).

Abraham Storck (1644–1708)

'The Four Days' Battle, 1–4 June 1666', about 1666

Oil on canvas

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: 106

Given by Thomas Halford, 1855

## Object label

# Pro-slavery punch bowl

**1760s** Proclaiming 'Success to the Africa Trade', this huge punch bowl is made in Liverpool, then Britain's chief slaving port, from which ships depart for West Africa to transport enslaved African people to British possessions in the Caribbean. George Dickinson, named on the bowl, is a Liverpool slave-ship owner and captain. He is recorded as having made five voyages on three ships, between 1763 and 1768, transporting a total of 725 captives across the Atlantic: 97 died. The decorations on the inner rim show military trophies and nautical missiles underscoring the violence of transatlantic enslavement.

Unrecorded makers, James Pennington's Manufactory, Liverpool. Punch bowl, about 1763–8

Tin-glazed earthenware (English Delftware)

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent:  
STKMG:536

Acquired by Enoch Wood (1759–1840) about 1770, who presented it to Hanley Mechanics Institute about 1828



## Object label

# British ships capture Portobelo

**November 1739** With “six ships only”, Vice-Admiral Vernon captures Portobelo in Panama, a key Spanish trading post. This war is fought because the British have been supplementing their profits from trafficking African people with smuggled goods, thereby avoiding duties to the Spanish crown. To celebrate this ‘victory’, the recently composed song ‘Rule Britannia’ is sung multiple times, with the line ‘Britons never shall be slaves’ taking on new meaning. Punch made from enslaved-produced sugar and rum is drunk from commemorative bowls like this.

Unrecorded makers, Liverpool

Punch bowl, after 1740

Tin-glazed earthenware (English Delftware)

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

C.1669-1928

Bequeathed by Dr J W L Glaisher, 1928

## Object label

# British bombardment as decoration

**March 1740** Following his Portobelo victory, Vice-Admiral Vernon leads his fleet up the River Chagres to bombard the Spanish fort and town of San Lorenzo el Real, a key stronghold controlling trade to Panama and Peru. Based on a widely circulated print, this plate depicts explosions over the fort, the Spanish customs house on fire, and many British naval flags, all in the fashionable blue and white Delftware style.

Unrecorded makers, Bristol pottery, decorated by Joseph Flower (about 1728–1785) after a print published by Henry Overton (1676–1751)

Dish, after 1740

Tin-glazed earthenware (English Delftware)

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

C.1568-1928

Bequeathed by Dr J W L Glaisher, 1928

## Object label

# Flying the Dutch flag

**17th and 18th centuries** Made in Delft and across the Dutch Republic from the 1630s, Delftware is a cheaper alternative to the blue-and-white porcelain exported from China. Likely made for a Dutch fireplace, these tiles end up at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, the home of the British curator and collector, Jim Ede. Ede displays them on an imposing dining table, which he records as being "one block of American elm shipped back as ballast in the 18th century when our empty slave-ships were returning to England."

Unrecorded makers, Netherlands, probably Delft

Two tiles, 18th century

Tin-glazed earthenware (Dutch Delftware)

Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge: 014 a-b 1985 c

Gift of Jan Heyligers to Jim Ede

## Object label

# An iconic image

**1808** Thomas Clarkson, one of the most famous Cambridge-educated abolitionists, uses this image of the stowage plan of the Liverpool-registered slave ship 'Brooks' to illustrate the appalling conditions for enslaved people. The cross-sections and bird's-eye view of each deck are adapted from a diagram produced by the Plymouth Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Here, without the original's descriptive text, the engraving becomes an iconic image.

Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846)

Fold-out diagram from Volume 2 of 'The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament', 2 volumes (Printed by R Taylor and Co, for Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808)

Trinity College, Cambridge: S.15.131

## Object label

# A conversation between father and son

**1987** In the first of a series of panels, Keith Piper pairs one of the iconic stowage plans of an English slave ship (similar to the one nearby) with an 1865 US catchphrase ‘go west young man’, encouraging white Americans to expand westward. What follows is a modern-day conversation between a Black father and son that reveals and resists the structural racism that continues to distort perceptions of Black masculinity and the Black male body.

Keith Piper (born 1960) spends his childhood in Birmingham before attending Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham. In 1979, he forms the radical BLK Art Group with artists Marlene Smith, Eddie Chambers, Claudette Johnson and Donald Rodney to address issues of class, gender and race.

# A conversation between father and son

This collaboration, and many more that it inspires, spur today's British Black Arts Movement, equipping artists with an enduring visual language and political literacy.

Keith Piper (Born 1960)

'Go West Young Man', 1987

14 monochrome photomontages, gelatin silver print  
on paper mounted onto board

Tate, purchased 2008: T12575

© Keith Piper

# **A conversation between father and son**

**“This ironically charged photomontage series, made between 1979 and 1987, articulated through an autobiographical mode of address, confronted anti-Black racism as experienced by young Black men in Britain in the 1980s. Over four decades have passed since the work was first conceived, but little has changed and its commentary is still as valid today.”**

## Section panel

# Fashion, consumption, racism and resistance

As transatlantic enslavement continues to rise during the 17th and 18th centuries, the products of enslaved labour cause profound changes to European culture and the racism at its heart.

This directly impacts how the wealthy choose to have their portraits painted and the furniture they commission for their homes. The products of transatlantic enslavement – mahogany, ivory and turtle shell (known as tortoiseshell) – become fashionable materials for European luxury goods. New pastimes and cultures of taste grow up around plantation imports grown and harvested by enslaved people: coffee and rum drinking, sugar consumption and tobacco smoking.



## **Fashion, consumption, racism and resistance**

But there is resistance. On plantations it is not uncommon for the enslaved to risk death to defy the violence and degradation of the system, and on both sides of the Atlantic objections to slavery gain traction. Black artists continue to challenge the history of racist stereotyping by depicting Black people in ways that emphasise their humanity and equality with any white sitter.

# Blackness in European art

The way artists in Europe depict Black people changes as European empires develop systems of Atlantic enslavement through trade and colonisation. At the start of this period, on the rare occasions when artists depict real Black people, they are more likely to show them as individuals, and in a variety of roles.

But as mass enslavement and support for the idea of the racial inferiority of Black people takes hold, new forms of depiction emerge and become acceptable. Black people are commonly shown in servitude to white people, or as an object of possession, and even as furniture. The range of pigments used to depict people of colour narrow from the later 17th century as painters resort to racist visual stereotypes, rather than careful observation.

## **Blackness in European art**

Less complex colour mixing results in visually less nuanced images of Black people.

Both enslavement and anti-Black representations continue far into the 19th and 20th centuries. Present-day artists challenge the on-going consequences of these damaging stereotypes to envisage new modes of representation.

## Object label

# Unidentified but dignified

**1635** The Swiss-born artist Wenceslaus Hollar etches this portrait of a black youth. Although the sitter's identity is not recorded, his features are so specific that it must be the portrait of a real person. The youth's luxuriant hair and fashionable hat-with-badge suggest he was a free man with money to spend on his appearance. Small prints like this are valued for their skill and widely collected.

Wenceslaus Hollar (1607–1677), after J Felix Biler  
(active 1630s)

‘Head of a Young Man Wearing a Cap’, 1635

Etching on paper

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

31.I.4-578

Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816

## Object label

# Collecting and classification

**Mid-1630s to mid-1640s** Whilst on his travels around Cologne and Antwerp, Hollar etches these portrait heads of six unrecorded individuals. His prints are later collected by connoisseurs such as Richard Fitzwilliam, who compiles six albums of the artist's work. This album contains Hollar's head and figure studies, arranged by Fitzwilliam according to date or size, except for this page where the rationale is racialised.

Wenceslaus Hollar (1607–1677)

Six Portrait Heads, 1635–45

Etchings on paper

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

31.I.4-579 – 31.I.4-584

Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816

## Object label

# Reversal

**2021** By embossing the outlines of a wealthy white family, Walker accentuates the contrast with the graphite drawing of the anonymous Black man in their midst. Using a Dutch 17th-century painting as her starting point, her reversal allows us to see him as an individual. The Black man may have been an attendant, but his clothing, position in the scene, and posture suggest that he could have been a business acquaintance instead.

Barbara Walker (born 1964)

‘Vanishing Point 29 (Duyster)’, 2021

Graphite on embossed Somerset Satin paper

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

PD.75-2022

Purchased with the Joan Anne Simms Fund, 2021

© Barbara Walker, 2023

# Escaping

**12 December 1702** An advert appears in a London paper offering a reward for the capture of a 16-year-old adolescent who has escaped the man who views her as his property. She is only referred to by her smallpox scars, her good command of English, her dress worn at the time of her disappearance and by the fact she has a bit of her ear missing from a dog bite – suggesting violence done to her in the past.

A second advert placed in a different paper a month later, which names her as Bess, makes it clear that she is still eluding capture.

## Escaping

While the numbers of enslaved Black people living in Britain were a tiny proportion of those trafficked from Africa and transatlantic colonies, the 18th-century British Black population was sufficiently large for those escaping enslavement to occasionally evade the many willing bounty-hunters to establish lives as free individuals. It is not known what happened to Bess.

Advertisement, 'Flying Post or The Postmaster', 12 December 1702

The British Library: Burney Collection Newspapers:  
© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved /  
Bridgeman Images



## Object label

# Idealising whiteness in European portraiture

**About 1651** The artist Lely portrays noblewoman Elizabeth Murray plucking an unblemished pink rose from a golden bowl proffered by her unnamed Black attendant. Through the manipulation of light and dark, in which the artist shows great technical skill, Lely deliberately contrasts the skin tones of mistress and servant. The child blends into the background shadows, rendered visible only by the whites of his eyes and the luminous pearl earring, the pair of which hangs from Murray's jewelled belt.

Sir Peter Lely (1618–1680)

'Portrait of Elizabeth Murray, Lady Tollemache, later Countess of Dysart and Duchess of Lauderdale (1626–1698) and an Unidentified Servant', about 1651  
Oil on canvas

The National Trust (Ham House, Surrey): 1139940

## Object label

# Spotlight

**2022** Barbara Walker brings our attention to the people on the margin by reworking a painting by the 16th-century artist Titian, of Laura dei Dianti, an Italian noblewoman, with an anonymous boy attendant. Walker's detailed graphite drawing overlayed with tracing paper focuses our attention on the child and on his expression, which seems more guarded than in the original. This challenges the repeated erasure of Black people from European visual culture.

Barbara Walker (born 1964)

'Marking the Moment 3', 2022

Graphite on paper overlaid with mylar

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

PD.76-2022

Purchased with the Joan Anne Simms Fund, 2021

© Barbara Walker, 2023

## Object label

# Out of the shadows

**2021** In reworking an early 18th-century portrait of George Keith, the Scottish nobleman and 10th Earl Marischal, Barbara Walker draws our attention to Keith's Black footman. He is possibly Ibrahim, one of the earl's servants. The original portrait suggests that Ibrahim, the horse, and the estate that stretches to the horizon are all part of Keith's possessions. In Walker's reimagining, Ibrahim's skill in handling the horse takes centre stage.

Community often weaves together the people. Barbara Walker (born 1964) depicts servicemen and women who have fought for Britain, Black figures in historic masterpieces

## Out of the shadows

and customers in Afro hair barber shops. Using diverse media, including painting, drawing, prints and installation art, and differing scales from small pieces of paper to large walls, Walker centres Black people across place and time in her portraits.

Barbara Walker (born 1964)

'Vanishing Point 25 (Costanzi)', 2021

Graphite on embossed Somerset Satin paper

UK Government Art Collection: GAC 19046

Purchased by Government Art Collection from Cristea

Roberts Gallery, 25 March 2022

© Barbara Walker, 2023

## Out of the shadows

**“I’m very interested in visibility and non-visibility in terms of marginalised communities. I use erasure as a metaphor for how the Black community is overlooked, ignored, and even dehumanised by society. In previous works you see me wash away, cut out, isolate or diminish certain aspects of an image and bring others to the forefront. In the ‘Vanishing Point’ drawings, embossing achieves that erasure.”**

## Object Label

# In his master's shadow

**1643** Likely after the successful Battle of Roundway Down, Cambridge graduate John Byron commissions this flamboyant and life-size portrait. Shown centre-stage as a Royalist army commander and fashion-conscious dandy, Byron's wealth and status are made clear by the grandiose setting, his well-groomed grey horse and a Black page in sumptuous livery. The child's upturned gaze towards his owner and marginal position (common devices in pictures including Black attendants) suggests a deference he may well not have felt.

William Dobson (1611–1646)

'Portrait of John Byron (1599–1652), 1st Lord Byron with an Unidentified Attendant', about 1643

Oil on canvas

University of Manchester, The Tabley House Collection  
Trust: 221.2

## Object Label

### In service

**Later 1670s** Elizabeth Murray, portrayed nearby, lives with this pair of stands at her stately home, Ham House. They take the form of young Black men wearing a racist fantasy of African dress that includes feathered skirts, bells and turbans. To serve as stands for candelabra or ornaments, they carry tambourine-shaped trays on their heads. Invented in Italy, this stereotypical representation of Black people as permanent servants becomes fashionable in England. Similar figures continue to be produced today.

Unrecorded makers, probably England or possibly Italy

A pair of torchères-on-stands, about 1675

Softwood, pigment and gold leaf

The National Trust (Ham House, Surrey): NT 1140088 and 1140088.1

# Dancing with poise

**2021** Sokari Douglas Camp makes the 'Jonkonnu Masquerade' series in which enslaved performers wear costumes referencing the Jamaican Jonkonnu festival, her own Nigerian Kalabari heritage and contemporary issues. Dressed in a stylised admiral's hat bedecked with imagery relating to slave-produced sugar and colonial-style English tea-drinking, 'Sugar Cane John Canoe' dances on the Union Jack, to spotlight the 'owner' of this multilayered history.

Sokari Douglas Camp welds and paints steel to create large, figurative sculptures that focus on socio-political issues and African diasporic history.



## Dancing with poise

An honorary Fellow of the University of the Arts London, she has had more than 40 solo shows including at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institute and The Museum of Mankind, London. Her public artworks include 'Battle Bus: Living Memorial for Ken Saro-Wiwa' (2004), a monument to the writer and Niger Delta activist.

Sokari Douglas Camp (born 1958)

'Sugar Cane John Canoe', 2021

Mild steel and acrylic paint

© Sokari Douglas Camp CBE, Private Collection,  
London. Courtesy of the Artist and October Gallery,  
London

# Dancing with poise

**“The burden he [John Canoe] carries exposes the factors responsible for his ordeal – empire, slavery, commodities, trade – and his restraint suggests the absolute poise he needed in order to survive.”**

Photo: Sokari Douglas Camp CBE.  
Courtesy of the artist.

## Object Label

# Questions of identity and representation

**1710** An eyewitness describes seeing this “bust of a Moor very well done from life – made, indeed, of nothing but coloured stones, with great skill” at a London royal residence. While the costly materials and life-size bust-format signify authority, this anonymous, objectified man is shown wearing a slave collar, identical in design to those made for dogs. Who is this man, and why is his image carved?

John Nost the Elder (1686–1710)

‘Bust of an Enslaved Man’, about 1700

Coloured marbles

Lent by His Majesty The King: RCIN 1396

# Enslavement and fashion

As drinking tea, coffee and hot chocolate, and smoking tobacco, become commonplace, the wealthy in Britain begin to buy fashionable items to store and consume these products. Many of these objects are beautifully designed and made. But they are not just collectors' pieces. The consumables they contain, and the materials from which they are made, such as mahogany, silver and turtle shell (known as tortoiseshell), are the products of enslaved people's work.

These objects sanitise the transatlantic slave trade so successfully that they blind their owners to its abject violence.

## **Enslavement and fashion**

They continue to be valued, collected and often admired uncritically. If we recognise enslaved and Indigenous producers as being as important as the designers, makers and owners of these fashionable pieces, how do we see these objects differently?

## Object Label

# 1 Everyday tea pot

**Later 18th century** Chinese tea supplants coffee as Britain's preferred hot drink and is commonly drunk with enslaved-produced Caribbean sugar. To match the boom in demand, tea-wares are produced to suit all pockets. This teapot, made from a cheap alternative to porcelain and using the latest printing technology, is decorated with a popular design that shows a wealthy white couple having tea prepared by a Black servant.

Unrecorded makers, Wedgwood factory, Etruria, Staffordshire, transfer printed by Guy Green, Liverpool  
Teapot, about 1780

Earthenware (Queensware), transfer printed  
Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:  
C.729 & A-1928

Bequeathed by Dr J W L Glaisher, 1928

## Object Label

# 2 Coffee: Anglo–Dutch café culture

**18th century** Coffee becomes the most fashionable drink in early 18th-century Europe, consumed in literary cafés and coffee houses but also bought from street-vendors. This pot is probably made in Leeds and exported to the Netherlands for decoration and sale. There, it may have been used to serve coffee sweetened with sugar, two goods produced by enslaved people in the Dutch-owned plantation colonies in the Americas.

Unrecorded makers, probably Leeds manufactory,  
probably decorated in the Netherlands

Coffee pot, about 1780–90

Lead glazed earthenware (Creamware) and enamels  
Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

C.1067 & A-1928

Bequeathed by Dr J W L Glaisher, 1928

## Object Label

# 3 Ivory and fashionable portraiture

**1700** The ivory-carver David Le Marchand uses a piece of African elephant tusk, prized for its colour, workability and sheen, to carve this virtuoso low-relief profile-portrait of the aristocratic Elizabeth Eyre. Neither patron nor artist probably consider how the heavy elephant tusks are transported on the backs of captive African people to West African ports, where both are sold as commodities.

David Le Marchand (1674–1726)

‘Portrait of Elizabeth Eyre (1659–1705)’, 1700

African elephant ivory

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

M.12-1946

Given by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, 1946



## Object Label

# 4 Tortoiseshell, snuff, hot chocolate

**1760s** Crafted from luxury tortoiseshell likely imported from the Caribbean, this palm-sized snuff box is filled with tobacco from the Americas and personalised by the miniature within its lid. This portrays an aristocratic European at her morning 'toilette' being brought hot chocolate – made from Central American cacao and enslaved-produced Caribbean sugar – by a Black servant. Attired in yellow 'Indian' livery, this African attendant would have been considered as 'exotic' as the chocolate, sugar and tobacco.

Unrecorded makers, possibly France or England  
Snuffbox with gold piqué point work and interior vignette under glass, about 1730–60

Tortoiseshell, gold points, bodycolour on card, glass  
Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: M.58-1984. Given by Dr & Mrs J C Burkill, 1984

# 5 The vampire hunts chocolate

**Late 1940s** The Akan 'sasabonsam', a vampire-like creature, lurks in the forest canopy to hunt prey. On both sides of the Atlantic, people refer to 'sasabonsam' sometimes metaphorically to represent a person who enslaves, harms or tortures others for his own pleasure. Osei Bonsu, a prominent sculptor from the Asante city of Kumasi, Ghana, carves this symbolic representation of the forest spirit in the 1950s. Bonsu was often asked to carve his signature style figures for colonial dignitaries.

# **5 The vampire hunts chocolate**

## **Osei Bonsu (1900–1977)**

‘Sasabonsam’, about 1950 Mahogany

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 2015.249

Given by Mrs Sylvia Spooner and Professor Edward T. Spooner, 2015.

Acquired by Arthur C. Spooner (1906–1996) during his extended colonial service in West Africa from 1929 until 1963

## 5 The vampire hunts chocolate

Osei Bonsu (1900–1977) is an apprentice to his father before becoming chief carver to three Asantehenes, the ruling chiefs in the Asante Empire. In 1924, after Prempeh I returns from British-imposed exile, Bonsu helps to restore the royal regalia, including the ultimate symbol of Asante power: the Golden Stool. Osei Bonsu's work is widely purchased by admirers and can be found in collections worldwide. This postcard, sent by Arthur C Spooner to his children on 15 October 1950, shows Bonsu carving a 'sasabonsam' at Achimota, Ghana.

## **5 The vampire hunts chocolate**

Unrecorded photographer

'Asanti legendary figure, sasabonsam'

Postcard, Ghana, late 1940s

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University  
of Cambridge: Spooner Collection File: P.167005.SPN

Given by Mrs Sylvia Spooner and Professor Edward T.  
Spooner, 2015

Photo: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,  
University of Cambridge

## Object Label

# 6 Cacao: 18th-century stimulant

**1760s** This expensive and fashionable porcelain pot is made in southern Germany for serving hot chocolate, an exclusive drink introduced from Mesoamerica by Spanish colonisers in the 1600s. Made from sugar-sweetened cacao paste, chocolate is valued in Europe as a stimulant, aphrodisiac and cure-all. This pot's rounded belly evokes the Mesoamerican tecomate, a drinking vessel formed from the bottom of a dried gourd, while its classical-inspired decoration Europeanises it.

Unrecorded makers, Nymphenburg Porcelain Factory, Germany, about 1765. Chocolate pot and cover, about 1765. Hard-paste porcelain, enamels and gilding  
Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

C.61 & A-1950

Given by Mrs Frances Louisa Dickson, Honorary Keeper of Ceramics, 1950

## Object Label

# 7 Sugar: a murderous commodity

**1760** This pot for holding refined white sugar is made in France as part of a high-end tea or coffee service for wealthy Europeans. Used for medicine, cooking, preserving, fermenting, flavouring and sweetening, cane sugar is produced by enslaved African people working in horrific and inhumane conditions on European-owned plantations in Caribbean colonies. Demand drives production, and increasing imports lead to lower prices, meaning sugar becomes affordable to most.

Unrecorded makers, Mennecy Porcelain Manufactory, France

Sugar bowl and cover, 1760

Soft-paste porcelain, enamels

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

C.1 & A-1959

Purchased with the Duplicate Objects and Donation Fund, 1959

# 8 Tortoiseshell and sugar: unnecessary luxuries

**Late 18th and early 19th centuries** These luxury sugar tongs are used daily to pick up sugar lumps for dissolving into fashionable hot beverages such as tea, coffee and hot chocolate. In a simple action these tongs bring together plantation commodities from Europe's many colonies reliant on enslaved and forced labour. The top of these tongs is made from turtle shell, also imported from the Caribbean. How can something so small encapsulate so much?

Unrecorded makers, probably England or France  
Sugar tongs, probably late 18th or early 19th century  
Mother of pearl and tortoiseshell; copper rivets  
Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University  
of Cambridge: 1921.63.173.  
Bequeathed by George Spencer Perceval



# 9 Silver, mahogany, sugar: the Founder's caddies

**1813** Viscount Fitzwilliam starts using his expensive new caddies, marked G, B and S on their lids to indicate their respective contents: green tea (unfermented), bohea tea (fermented) and sugar. Their fronts are engraved with his coat of arms, which reappears on the carry-case. The height of elegance and fashion, this tea-ware set is made from mahogany and silver, materials produced by enslaved people, and filled with Chinese tea and Caribbean sugar.

## 9 Silver, mahogany, sugar: the Founder's caddies

Box: unrecorded maker, England

Caddies: probably Henry Nutting (active 1790s–after 1815)

A cased set of two tea caddies and a sugar caddy,  
about 1812–13

Silver and mahogany

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

M.7-1965

Given by The Friends of the Fitzwilliam, 1965

## Object Label

# Mahogany and fashionable furniture

**1738–44** These height-of-fashion ‘elbow chairs’ are carved from mahogany, a tropical hardwood whose English name derives from ‘m’oganwo’, a term used by the Yoruba and Ibo peoples of West Africa. Enslaved African people on British-owned Caribbean plantations are forced to fell mahogany trees to clear land for plantation crops, resulting in lasting ecological damage. At first, merchant ships use it as ballast. But, following a Parliamentary Act of 1721, which allowed timber from British possessions in the Americas to be imported duty free, mahogany becomes the most widely used wood for British furniture. It is valued for its relative cheapness, ease of working, resistance to furniture beetle, red colour and lustre.

# Mahogany and fashionable furniture

William Kent (1685–1748; design) and unrecorded makers. Pair of upholstered armchairs, 1738–44. Mahogany and beech (with other later woods), modern yellow silk damask covers trimmed with brass nails and original cast brass corner bosses. Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: M.7A-2021 and M.7B-2021. Purchased and conserved with the Colin Granville Elliot Legacy Fund, 2021. Originally made for Charles, Viscount Bruce, later 3rd Earl of Ailesbury (1682–1747), for Tottenham House, Wiltshire.

## Object Label

# Sasa boa

**1935** Enslavers stereotype African people as savages and cannibals to justify enslavement. But for enslaved people, it is the enslavers who are sometimes represented by evil spirits that hunt them as prey: they take their bodies and turn their work into cash crops for mass consumption. The animal form of the vampire-like 'sasabonsam', known as a 'sasa boa' ('sasa' meaning 'ghost' and 'boa' 'animal') represents this danger among Akan people including those displaced to the Americas.

Osei Bonsu (1900–1977)

'Sasa boa', 1935

Wood (probably mahogany)

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 1936.205

Given by Captain Robert P Wild (1882–1946), having been acquired from Osei Bonsu during Wild's colonial service in West Africa from 1920 to 1938 as Inspector in the Mines Department of the Asante region

## Object Label

# Tobacco fiction

**About 1750–1820** This Dutch tobacco jar presents a powerful fantasy of uncontested white supremacy. On the dockside in Havana, Cuba, an Indigenous man holds a long-stemmed pipe and stands as if in relaxed conversation with a seated European merchant. Two barrels of tobacco leaf await loading onto a ship bound for Europe. The real process of tobacco production – the European seizure of land from Indigenous people and enslavement of African labourers – occurs off-stage.

Unrecorded makers, The Three Bells Factory, Delft, Holland. Tobacco jar, about 1750–1820

Tin-glazed earthenware; glaze, blue paint

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

C.64 & A-1997

Given by G H W Rylands in memory of his mother, Betha Wolferstan Rylands, 1997

## Object Label

# A moment's pause

**Before 1925** This fragment of a rough clay pipe is excavated from a site of enslaved people's homes in a goldmining region in Brazil. Until 1888, when Brazil becomes the last country in the western hemisphere to abolish slavery, enslaved men, women and children work six days a week under horrendous conditions in gold mines. They nevertheless raise families, tend crops, create their own culture and perhaps, in rare moments of rest, smoke a pipe of tobacco.

## A moment's pause

Unrecorded maker, probably Ouro Preto, Brazil

Tobacco pipe fragment, probably 18th or 19th century

Clay

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University  
of Cambridge: 1927.225

Bequeathed by Professor Sir William Ridgeway, 1927

Collected by Arthur Tisdall Samuels, 1925; given by him  
to Ridgeway, 1926

Excavated in an old compound for enslaved workers,  
Ouro Preto gold mines, 1925



## Object Label

# Smoking

**Mid-17th century** Smoking enslaved-produced tobacco is enjoyed by all levels of society in Europe. Here, the Dutch painter Van Ostade creates a scene designed to entertain the viewer with a glimpse of three middle-aged peasant men enjoying a relaxing smoke and drink. Their slouching postures contrast with that of gentlemanly smokers, who are often depicted as upright, well-dressed and smoking from longer pipes.

Adriaen van Ostade (1610–1685)

‘Peasants Smoking’, mid-17th century

Oil on panel

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: 64

Given by Augustus Arthur Vansittart, 1876

# Plantations: production and resistance

In the Americas, most enslaved people live and work on plantations. On these large agricultural estates, which they are forbidden to leave, they toil long hours, without pay, to grow crops such as sugar, tobacco and coffee for export to Europe. Despite the enormous dangers of resisting, enslaved people do challenge the plantation system by withholding labour, rising against enslavers and escaping. A tiny proportion are able to buy their freedom.

The final formal act to end enslavement in the Americas is an 1888 law in Brazil. But political authorities restrict the terms of emancipation.

## **Plantations: production and resistance**

Britain's parliament, for example, imposes an apprenticeship system that requires people freed from slavery to work for former enslavers for up to six years. Legal emancipation does not mean full freedom.

## Sub-section Panel

# Production, knowledge generation and exploitation



18th-century colonial territories in the Americas

As well as producing crops, plantations are sites of scientific knowledge. Many specimens in Cambridge collections, from plants to birds' eggs, come from these estates. Enslaved and free Black people contribute to major scientific discoveries, but their role is unacknowledged.

## **Production, knowledge generation and exploitation**

The emancipation movements of the 19th century do not compensate enslaved people for their unpaid labour, exploited skills or lost loved ones. Many free people have no choice but to remain working on plantations for former enslavers. Enforced poverty shapes work conditions and the environment in the 19th-century Americas.

# Fiction in paint

**1650–55** Dutch painter Frans Post erases the violence of enslavement on a plantation in Dutch Brazil. Instead, he creates a reassuring visual fiction of idyllic, harmonious industry. In the midground, enslaved people work a water-powered sugar mill, while in the background, ships on the river wait to transport the produce to Europe. This picture, commissioned by the region's new governor, helps to establish the plantation landscape as a popular genre of painting that permits patrons in Europe a guiltless enjoyment of enslaved-produced goods.

# Fiction in paint

Frans Post (1612–1680)

'A Sugar Mill Driven by Water with Ovens where Sugarcane Juice is Boiled to make Sugar', about 1650–55

Oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre, département des Peintures: 1724

From the French Royal Collection

## Object Label

# 1 A drawing fit for an empress

**About 1813** This plant is so bold that it breaks out of its golden frame. Redouté celebrates the flowering of the bellflower *Centropogon cornutus*, a plant from the Dutch colony of Surinam. He paints it at Malmaison, the garden created by Empress Joséphine of France. Joséphine was born into a family that owned enslaved people in Martinique, a French colony in the Caribbean. Under Joséphine's direction, Malmaison becomes one of France's leading botanical collections.

Pierre Joseph Redouté (1759–1840). *Lobelia surinamensis* (now known as *Centropogon cornutus*), 1813

Watercolour and bodycolour over graphite on vellum, margins ruled in red and gold ink

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: PD.122-1973.39

Bequeathed by Henry Rogers Broughton, 2nd Lord Fairhaven, 1973



# 2 Creating scientific knowledge

**1705** Perched on a guava tree, a pink-toed tarantula kills a hummingbird. Although Merian, who painted this detailed scene, took interest in enslaved women's botanical knowledge, she used it, without acknowledgement, in her research. As tarantulas very rarely prey on birds, the scene may reflect a story told to Merian by an enslaved woman about Anansi, the wise trickster character in Akan folktales who takes the form of a spider.

Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717), 'Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium' (Amsterdam, 1705)

Permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library: MH.2.22

Given from the Royal Library to the University Library by George I, 1715

## Object Label

### 3 A New World of insects

**About 1701** The pioneering German naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian paints this highly detailed watercolour of a blue morpho butterfly. She has just returned to Amsterdam with her daughter and an Indigenous attendant from a two-year field trip in the Dutch colony of Surinam, northern South America, along with around 20 boxes of specimens. These include butterflies, beetles, hummingbirds and glow-worms, many of which appear in her ground-breaking study 'Insects of Suriname' published in 1705.

Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717)

'*Sisyrinchium* with blue morpho butterfly

(*Morpho helenor* or *Morpho achilles*)', about 1701

Watercolour on vellum

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: 1146B

Given by A F Griffith through the National Art-Collections Fund, 1925

## Object Label

# Rousing movement

**1706–8** Enslaved people of all ages celebrate their own culture on a plantation in the South American Dutch colony of Surinam. The artist, Dirk Valkenburg, depicts each figure as an individual. But by painting them with oiled and muscular bodies, he also notes their value as property to his patron, the plantation's Dutch owner. Shortly after painting this picture, these enslaved people rise up against oppression. Valkenburg testifies against the rebellion's leaders, and quits Surinam soon after.

Dirk Valkenburg (1675–1721)

'Ritual Party of Enslaved People on a Sugar Plantation in Surinam', 1706–08

Oil on canvas

SMK, National Gallery of Denmark: KMS376

Acquired in 1800

## Object Label

# 1 Black ornithologists' research

**1859–2023** This detailed illustration documents birds' eggs discovered on the Caribbean island of St Croix. Alfred Newton, a renowned scientist whose family owned a plantation in St Croix, and his brother, a colonial administrator, had been considered the ones to make these findings. They appear in the first volume of his ornithological journal 'Ibis'. But new research reveals that three recently emancipated Black ornithologists living on the Newton plantation – Andrew, Thomas and Robert – in fact collected three of these eggs. Alfred Newton's name adorns the Zoology Library in Cambridge.

Plate XII illustrating birds' eggs from St Croix within an article co-authored by brothers Alfred and Edward Newton in 'Ibis Journal', volume 1 (1859)

Zoology Department Library: AN.35(1)

This is Alfred Newton's personal copy

## Object Label

# 2 Thomas, Black student of birds

**20 March 1858** Thomas, a young emancipated Black man living on the Newton estate on St Croix, climbs a tree to collect these green heron eggs. His discovery appears, without credit, in the 'Ibis' – the first scientific journal in Britain for ornithology, the study of birds, co-founded by Alfred Newton. One of these eggs is illustrated as '6.' in the journal nearby. Thomas's case highlights a hierarchy imposed by Western academia. Although Indigenous and enslaved people have knowledge, it is only recognised as science when it is published.

Two eggs laid by a green heron (*Butorides virescens*)  
Collected by Thomas, Castle of St Croix, 20 March 1858  
University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge: UMZC s.p.  
220

Information written on eggs includes outdated  
taxonomic name: *Herodias virescens*

### 3 Publishing botanical research

**1781** Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society and advisor to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, authorises the publication of the findings from William Houstoun's research in Veracruz, eastern Mexico. Houstoun's name appears on the title page, but the names of the enslaved and Indigenous people who contributed to the research are not recorded. The entire book is in Latin – restricting the findings to those with a so-called 'classical' European education.

'Reliquiæ Houstounianæ: seu Plantarum in America Meridionali' (London, 1781)

Permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University  
Library: MD.53.74

# 4 Hidden collectors in colonial Mexico

**March 1731** Unnamed Indigenous and enslaved Black people collect this cutting from a willow tree, together with many other plants in Veracruz, Spanish colonial Mexico, for William Houstoun. Houstoun, a surgeon employed by British sugar plantation owners to keep the enslaved workforce alive and thus prevent the loss of profit, is reliant on local people to gather these specimens. He sends these plants to various collectors, including John Martyn, second Professor of Botany at Cambridge whose collection starts Cambridge's first Herbarium and Botanical Museum in 1763.

Specimen of *Salix humboldtiana* (*Salicaceae*) from Veracruz. Dried pressed organic matter, paper  
Cambridge University Herbarium, Department of Plant Sciences, University of Cambridge:  
CGE00007065. Donated to the University as part of John Martyn's *Hortus siccus* collection, 1763

## Object Label

# 5 Medicine or poison?

**1785 to 1800** Enslaved people in St Vincent probably cut this specimen from a tree (that can grow 25 metres tall) on the orders of Alexander Anderson, Superintendent of the island's Royal Botanical Garden. This plant, commonly known as the Jamaican Quassia, can both heal or harm: it is a food, a medicine against fever and parasites, and a poison. Anderson sends this specimen to Thomas Martyn, who followed his father as the third Professor of Botany at Cambridge, and adds this plant specimen to the University collections.

Specimen of *Picrasma excelsa* (*Simaroubaceae*) from St Vincent. Dried pressed organic matter, paper  
Cambridge University Herbarium, Department of Plant Sciences, University of Cambridge:  
CGE00007366. Part of Thomas Martyn's herbarium collections held in the University Herbarium



## Under the breadfruit tree

**1790s to 1820s** At first glance, the breadfruit tree stands as testimony to the success of British imperial efforts to transfer specimens from the Pacific Ocean to the Caribbean, in order to feed enslaved plantation workers and reduce rebellions. John Tyley, an artist of colour from Antigua, is remarkably innovative in his depiction. Unlike most European botanical artists, he includes a figure, indeed that of an enslaved man, enjoying a precious moment of rest.

John Tyley (Born about 1773–died after 1823)

*Artocarpus Incisus* (breadfruit tree), date unknown

Watercolour

The Linnean Society of London: MS/608

Purchased from Roseberys auction house, 2020

# Under the breadfruit tree

**John Tyley (active 1790s–1820s)** illustrates many botanical specimens with exceptional skill, at a time when rival European empires are establishing botanical gardens across the world for economic extraction, medicine and aesthetic pleasure. He depicts many specimens in the St Vincent Royal Botanical Garden in the Caribbean and sometimes signs his paintings according to the western convention using the word ‘del’ after his name – a shortening of the Latin word ‘delineavit’, meaning ‘he drew it’.

## Object Label

# The birdhouse

**1831** A hollowed-out calabash fruit provides a colourful home for purple martins.

Enslaved people in the USA make birdhouses like these. Naturalist and artist John James Audubon uses the work and knowledge of enslaved people to create many scenes, likely including this one, in the spectacular four-volume work 'Birds of America'.

Audubon never credits them in the text, which is paid in part by a subscription from The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, following his visit to Cambridge in 1828.

# The birdhouse

## **John James Audubon (1785–1851)**

‘Birds of America’, 4 volumes (1827–38)

Volume 1 open on plate 22 (Purple martin)

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

PB 1-2021

Acquired via a subscription taken by Vice-Chancellor  
Martin Davy

(1763–1839) after Audubon’s visit to Cambridge in 1828

## Object Label – This is a Rotation Label

# The Spoonbill's wing

**1831** The spoonbill's wing stretches towards the picture plane, so close we can almost touch it. According to naturalist and artist John James Audubon, the spoonbill's wing and tail feathers are 'manufactured into fans by the Indians and Negroes of Florida'. Despite using their ornithological skills and knowledge, Audubon never credits African-American or Indigenous people in his 'Birds of America', which is paid in part by a subscription from The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, following his visit to Cambridge in 1828.

# **The Spoonbill's wing**

**John James Audubon (1785–1851)**

‘Birds of America’, 4 volumes (1827–38)

Volume 4 open on plate 321 (Roseate spoonbill)

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: PB

4-2021. Acquired via a subscription taken by Vice-

Chancellor Martin Davy. (1763–1839) after Audubon's

visit to Cambridge in 1828

# Looking back to look forward

**2021** On two copper plates, and one resultant print, Whittle appropriates and reimagines a 16th-century illustration to a text of Christopher Columbus's exploits in the 'New World' in which an Indigenous 'Conjuror' is described as being 'very familiar with devils'. Whittle removes the print's original text and reworks the surrounding landscape to re-contextualise the Indigenous man. The wooden music stands are carved with ears, supporting the printers' plates like a musical score, suggesting we listen out for, as well as look at, the many ways long-lasting colonial words and images affect our present. Barbadian-Scottish artist Alberta Whittle (born 1980) is preoccupied with developing a personal response to the legacies of the Atlantic slave trade, unpicking its connections to institutional racism, white supremacy and climate emergency in the present.

## Looking back to look forward

Against an oppressive political background, and working across a variety of media, Whittle aims to foreground hope and engage with different forms of resistance.

Alberta Whittle (Born 1980). 'Hindsight is a luxury you cannot afford' multi-piece installation comprising: 'The Conjuror – looking back and looking forward', 2021. Diptych comprising two photo-etched copper plates with ink residue, each mounted on a hand-carved music stand.

'Hindsight is a luxury you cannot afford (the Conjuror)', 2021

Photo etching on copper plate printed on Somerset Velvet 250gsm paper; edition of 5 plus 2 artist's proofs  
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# Looking back to look forward

**“The Atlantic Ocean [is] a crucible for knowledge, a place of torture, a graveyard, a place to forge new communities.”**

# Plantation violence

On plantations, a small number of owners and overseers control the daily lives of enslaved people, who comprise the majority of the inhabitants.

The captive labourers are forced to produce crops for the economic benefit of plantation owners. Enslavers physically, psychologically and sexually assault the enslaved. Children of enslaved mothers are born enslaved. A plantation bell used to order the brutal working day, later owned and displayed by a Cambridge college, embodies this relentless violence. Donald Locke's artworks highlight the regimented nature and physical confinement of the plantations, and his materials and forms allude to resistance movements.

## Plantation violence

Jacqueline Bishop's ceramics reflect on both the exploitation of women and of natural resources on plantations.

**Content notice: This section contains racist and graphic images of the oppression of Black people on plantations in South America and the Caribbean.**

## Object Label

# Ringling across time

**1772** This bell is cast for the De Catharina sugar plantation in Demerara, a Dutch colony in present-day Guyana. Like other plantation bells, it is rung to signal the start and end of the oppressive working day for the enslaved workforce – a sound signifying brutality. In 1960, a former student of St Catharine's College, who worked for a British sugar corporation, finds and donates the bell to his old Cambridge college. It is prominently displayed at the front entrance and occasionally rung, for example on Armistice Day. In 2019, after its direct connections to enslavement are fully understood, it is removed. To undermine the violence embodied in this object, the exhibition curators have chosen to display it overthrown.

## Ringling across time

Unrecorded makers, bell-foundry, Dutch Republic

Bell made for De Catharina sugar plantation,

Demerara, Dutch Guiana (present-day Guyana), 1772

Copper-tin alloy (probably bell metal)

St Catharine's College, Cambridge

## Object Label

# Enslavement in Surinam

**1779** Throughout his book, John Gabriel Stedman depicts the crops, landscapes and people affected by the systemic violence of enslavement. Between 1772 and 1777, he serves in several Dutch terror campaigns, primarily against the Maroon people who have freed themselves from slavery. Between periods of service, he writes an illustrated diary, which forms the basis for his 'Narrative'. Jacqueline Bishop's work (nearby) critiques his often violent and misogynistic imagery.

Captain J G Stedman (1744–1797). 'Plan of a regular Coffee Plantation' plate from John Stedman, 'Narrative, of a five years' expedition, against the revolted negroes of Surinam, in Guiana [...]' (London, 1796). Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge: PB 17-2020. Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816. Part of the Founder's Bequest, acquired by Viscount Fitzwilliam in 1797

# Violence and beauty

**2021** Jacqueline Bishop creates a dinner service recalling her Jamaican grandmother's prized bone china crockery, which "painted with bright, cheerful carriages and palaces, often hid a violent history of slavery and colonialism by European countries". The plates show the horrors of plantation violence, but also emphasise the dignity and fortitude of the enslaved – particularly women – deliberately framing them with beautiful Caribbean fauna. Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Jacqueline Bishop (born 1971) is a New York-based social activist, writer, poet and international multimedia artist. Jacqueline considers it her duty to tell stories that deal with distortions, invisibilities and erasures through her lived experience and also sees art "as an expression of our humanity."

# Violence and beauty

Jacqueline Bishop (born 1971)

History at the Dinner Table', 18-plate dinner service,  
first of an edition of three sets, Stoke-on-Trent, 2021

Bone china, print transfers, gold lustre

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge:

C.8A-R-2021

Given by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam, 2021

© Jacqueline Bishop

**“Slavery is a fraught subject. But if we  
confront history squarely in the face, we  
can all learn and start to move forwards. I  
hope my plates will be part of that process.”**



**AV Label**

# **Jacqueline Bishop: History at the Dinner Table**

Produced by Storya.co

With special thanks to the Paul Mellon Centre  
for Studies in British Art

## Object Label

# Colonial plantation legacies

**1972** Guyanaese artist Donald Locke begins his *Plantation Series* sculptures, later describing them as: “metaphors where forms are held in strict lines, connected as if with chains held within a structure of metal bars and grids, analogous to the system whereby one group of people were kept in economic and political subjugation by another group.”

## Donald Locke (1930–2010)

### 1 ‘Redoubt’, 1972

Ceramic, wood, formica and steel

Lent by the Artist’s Estate, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

© Estate of Donald Locke

### 2 ‘The Cage (Black Painting)’, 1977

Acrylic on canvas, fur, steel grid

Collection of Lorenzo Legarda Leviste and Fahad Mayet

© Estate of Donald Locke

# Plantations and enslavement artistic response

**1972–1979** While in London, Donald Locke creates a pioneering body of work. He masses and mounts bullet-like forms, reminiscent of sugar canes, lingams or phalluses, into rigid confined assemblages. They speak to the restraint and forced loss of identity imposed by the plantation system. Evoking the continued effects of enslavement after legal emancipation in the Americas in the 19th century, as well as the racial inequalities and injustices of the 1960s and 1970s, these works engage with the nascent discourses among Black activist-artists around entrapment and subjugation. The Guyanese artist Donald Locke (1930–2010) uses drawing, painting and sculpture in various media to explore the structures of physical, political and economic subjugation and exploitation under colonial rule.

# Plantations and enslavement artistic response

Working in Guyana and the UK before moving permanently to the USA in 1979, Locke also gives form and visibility to the unique contribution of Black artists and cultural leaders to global culture. His eldest son is Guyanese-British sculptor Hew Locke.

## **Donald Locke (1930–2010)**

### 1 'Plantation Piece #1', 1973

Ceramic, steel and fur.

Collection of Lorenzo Legarda Leviste and Fahad Mayet

© Estate of Donald Locke

### 2 'Mounted Bullet (Trophy)', 1974

Ceramic, wood, fur and metal.

Lent by the Artist's Estate, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

© Estate of Donald Locke

# Plantations and enslavement artistic response

**“Perhaps unique in the history of mankind, the Black man in the New World has been coerced in a harrowing agenda, the crossing of thousands of miles of cultural time in the space of a few short generations. He has moved from captive African to slave, to free citizen of the New World, precariously clothed in a hybrid ethnicity, a ‘creole culture’.”**

Donald Locke (1930–2010)

Portrait of Donald Locke in his London studio,  
early 1970s

Courtesy of the Artist’s Estate

© The Artist’s Estate, Atlanta, Georgia, USA;

Photo: Brenda Locke

# Remembering

From the earliest attempts to establish slave colonies in the Americas, enslaved people free themselves from slavery and form communities in places that enslavers find hard to reach, such as on mountainsides, in swamps and along winding rivers. These self-liberated people are known as Maroons. The objects they make use artistic symbols from Africa and the Americas to create a new Black Atlantic visual language. These objects also help the Maroons and their descendants to build communities that endure today.

The effects of Atlantic enslavement are still with us. Our socio-economic and political structures are moulded by persistent racial inequality.

## Remembering

These structures shape how we produce and consume goods, how we display art and artefacts, and how we develop scientific knowledge.

Alexis Peskine's 'Ifá' reconstitutes cash crops of coffee and timber into a haunting self-portrait that recalls how the Black Atlantic presence runs deeply in the blood of many still living today.

# Resisting and reconstructing

**2020** Nails are used both as symbols and tools in reconstructing the image of the Black body that continues to resist injustice and violence. In this self-portrait, the artist references the 'Ifá' divination system, a body of pre-colonial, ancestral wisdom passed down among the Yoruba of West Africa and in the diaspora. Peskine situates this African spiritual knowledge as a bridge connecting the past to the future.

Afro-French artist Alexis Peskine (born 1979) explores identity and the Black experience in his work. In his signature 'Acu-pictures', Peskine hammers nails – simple objects with transcendent power to perforate and puncture but also to construct and create – into wood stained with coffee and mud.



# Resisting and reconstructing

His portraits depict coolly resilient figures, who hold the spectator's gaze, echoing the spiritually charged *minkisi* or power figures of the central African Congo Basin, whose traditional functions were to protect, ward off evil and heal.

Alexis Peskine (born 1979)

'Ifá', 2020

Wagan and Vessie green pigment, nails, green gold leaf, coffee and earth on lumber wood core

© Alexis Peskine. Courtesy the Artist and October Gallery, London

# Resisting and reconstructing

**“I have always been frustrated with the idea of race; the fact that we don’t address it or do so in a hypocritical way. Encouraged to be an artist, I looked around but no one looked like me. I used to ask myself if I was an exception or was this a white vocation?”**

## Wall Graphic Text

# Ifá

I am here!

I come from a long, long line of strong, creative and beautiful people who survived despite the despicable crimes inflicted on them by hateful individuals whose feeble consciences were easily swayed by inhumanity, bigotry and greed.

Unleashing overwhelming physical and moral violence against My People, these weak individuals devastated entire communities, annihilated cultures and destroyed whole civilisations. They brutalised and displaced My People until they could no longer scream in their own languages.

They plundered and looted whatever they most craved, to build a harsh world in their own likeness: brutal, violent and selfish.

# Ifá

Making captives of our strong men and powerful women, they broke their backs, tormented their minds and abused their beautiful,uncomprehending children.

Those who could compete invested their capital: forming companies, outfitting ships, employing ruthless men to force My People over cruel seas, torturing and starving them to feed their lust for the ill-gotten gold of their inhuman trade. The immense profits of this despicable scheme they reinvested: funding royal institutions, endowing universities, founding schools, setting up newspapers and building museums like this one.

I am here!

My Grandfather's Grandfather was born in Africa and died in Brazil. My Grandfather's Father died when he was a young boy, followed a few years later by his Mother.

# Ifá

My Grandfather—Antonio—was 11-years-old when he, with his young brother, built his Mother's coffin from scavenged boards and hoarded nails. Then, he took care of all his siblings, raising them in his parents' place. These are the unseen, never-mentioned fruits of the inhuman monster that was slavery. My whole family in Brazil grew up in extreme poverty, entirely because of the white supremacist racism built into that abhorrent system. Literally tens of millions of Afro-Brazilians have inherited nothing today save this structurally maintained impoverishment, just like billions of other human beings around the planet.

Centuries of lies cover up and gloss over these misdeeds; ongoing attempts to humiliate and dehumanise us. The simple truth is that we are not the ones who will be humiliated forever by the report of these crimes. I know who was weak, who truly was strong.

# Ifá

I know that no amount of reparation can ever repay the blood price of this accumulated debt or repair the damaged dignity and tainted pride of the perpetrators of these malevolent crimes. My People's ancestors suffered and transitioned a long time ago. While the descendants of the planters and slavers who received millions of pounds in recompense for their "lost trade" reinvested again to reinforce the system by which they continue to plunder, destroy and despoil our precious Earth.

I am here:

— and I speak for all those who endured in silence, whose strength I inherit, whose creativity I present and whose power I witness in speaking the Truth for My People.

Alexis Peskine

## Object Label

# 1 The seat of power

**Before 1965** Blazing and dimming stars appear on this stool in a dark cross. This symbol of the sun's cycle comes from the Kingdom of Kongo (in present-day Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Republic of the Congo). It represents nature, journeys and power. Beginning in the 1600s, people from Kongo were trafficked into slavery in Surinam (present-day Suriname). Over the next 400 years, each generation of their descendants tell stories about Kongo's power, including through objects.

Unrecorded maker, Paramaka Maroon people  
Rectangular stool, Suriname, Sipaliwini District,  
probably mid-20th century (before 1965)

Wood, pigment and metal

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,

University of Cambridge: 1966.172

Acquired on a student-led Cambridge Expedition  
to Langa Tabiki, 1965

## Object Label

# 2 Harmony and play

**Before 1965** This dish is made by an unrecorded woodcarver from the Paramaka community, one of the six Maroon groups in present-day Suriname. Its design appears identical no matter where you position yourself, and the intricate carving in low relief has both harmony and a sense of play. Cambridge students on an expedition to Langa Tabiki purchase this and other Maroon objects, which they donate to the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, now the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Unrecorded maker, Paramaka Maroon people  
Dish, Suriname, Sipaliwini District, probably  
mid-20th century (before 1965)

Wood

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,  
University of Cambridge: 1966.174 A

Acquired on a student-led Cambridge Expedition  
to Langa Tabiki, 1965



## Object Label

### 3 Sacred symbols

The maker of this food paddle has incorporated intricate geometric patterns into a functional object. The symmetry of the triangles in the mid-section are offset by two contrasting symbols: the circular design of the hilt and the cross on the blade. The cross may refer to Christianity, one of the religions practiced by the Paramaka, Maroon people, alongside Winti – a belief system originating among the enslaved African people of Suriname.

Unrecorded maker, Paramaka Maroon people  
Food paddle, Suriname, Sipaliwini District, probably mid-20th century (before 1965). Wood. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 1966.176 B. Acquired on a student-led Cambridge Expedition to Langa Tabiki, 1965

## Object Label

# Canoe paddles

**Before 1965** People from two Maroon communities make paddles for canoes, their chief form of transport, and for the tourist market. The smaller one is for a Paramaka woman, the larger for a Ndyuka man. In each case, the bright, contrasting colours evoke a person's individuality and protect them from any external attempt to force them into a pattern of control. The intricate carvings on the handle may evoke Kongo, a political power whose origins lie in West Central Africa, or the patterns from Ndyuka cloth-making.

# Canoe paddles

## 4 **Unrecorded maker, Paramaka Maroon people**

Maroon woman's canoe paddle with carved handle and painted blade

## 5 **Unrecorded maker, Ndyuka Maroon people**

Maroon man's canoe paddle with carved handle and painted blade

Both made in Suriname, probably mid-20th century, before 1965

Wood and pigment

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,

University of Cambridge: 1966.180 A and 1966.180 B

Acquired on a student-led Cambridge Expedition to Langa Tabiki, 1965

## Section Panel

# Creating change together

Outside this exhibition, transatlantic enslavement and Black Atlantic cultures continue to shape our world.

The Fitzwilliam Museum and other University of Cambridge Museums acknowledge they still benefit from transatlantic enslavement in terms of their finances and collections.

The Museums are making a commitment to reparative justice. More exhibitions are planned. What do you think a world of repair and freedom might look like?

We hope you will join the conversation.

## Reflection Space

# **This space is for you...**

This space and the resources within it create an opportunity for you to engage with wider materials related to the exhibition. We invite you to sit, read, write, draw, talk, listen and reflect as much or as little as you wish. Your thoughts and responses are welcome.

## **Reflection Space**

**Feel free to read here**

But please don't take away.

## Reflection Space

# We value your reflections

You can leave this card on display or drop it in the comments box.

Your feedback will help us with future planning and may be used for research and promotional purposes.

Thank you.

## Reflection Space

# We welcome your feedback

You can leave your comments on the wall or post your thoughts and reflections here.

Thank you.





