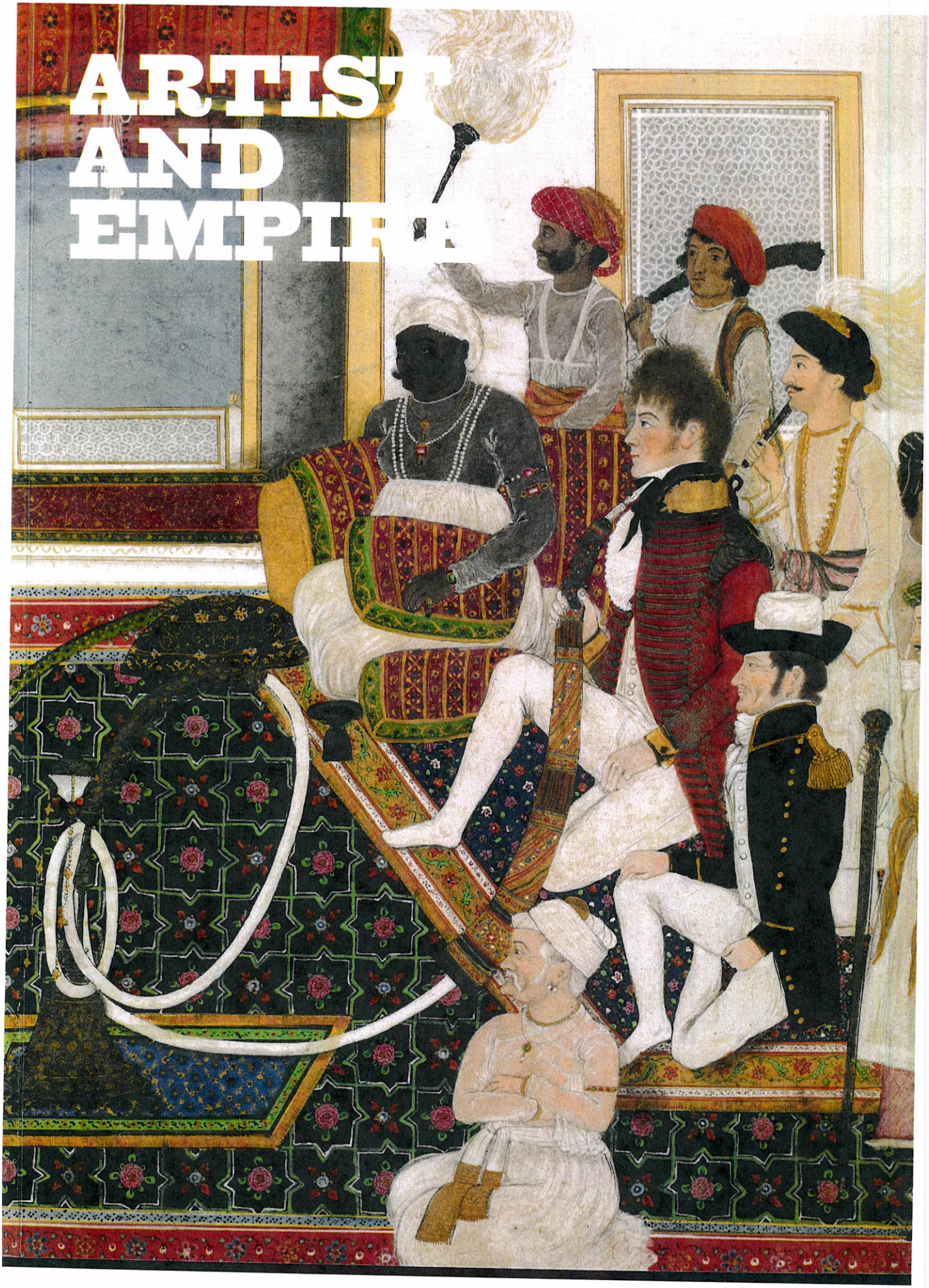
ARTIST AND EMPIRE



OUT OF EMPIRE

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This section looks at trans-national modern art within the British Empire in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. During this period, diverse national modern art movements evolved on a a world stage, contributing to International Modernism. As nations won independence, British territories shrunk to little more than Great Britain and artists from increasingly diverse and complex backgrounds ted on the art, experience and legacy of empire.

he British and other empires created an interconnected world by the twentieth century, an equally interconnected art. The revivocal, traditional arts that accompanied nationalist movements in n and elsewhere took place in an irreversibly non-local, cosmon context, and contributed to the international perspective that ndamental to modern art. In the nineteenth century, the idenion and celebration of medieval and vernacular arts and crafts lemented new nationalist ideals. In Britain the gothic that dressed ouses of Parliament and other state styles was exported throughe world as a British imperial brand, and the classical European ion of representational painting was held up as the exemplary, ated in everything from state portraits to school books. These ncreasingly challenged, however, in every part of the Empire, by ative local arts and crafts, allied to alternative national identities dependence movements.

British art curriculum was disseminated in schools and colleges ghout the Empire. Colonial landscape, figure and still-life subjects epresented in illusionist watercolour and oils, while local styles neglected, or reserved for decorative, applied art. This attitude istilled by the Anglo-Indian George Birdwood, last Keeper of the n Museum in London (founded 1801), in the title and content book, *The Industrial Arts of India* (1880). John Griffiths, head of bay School of Art and Industry, challenged the prejudice that n artists were best suited to decorative work; he removed the word try' from the school's name and trained and encouraged fine . His institution also contributed to scholarship on Indian art. hs did not address the bias against decorative stylisation per se, ver, and his main interest was in Indian painting which accorded lassical tastes, notably the Ajanta murals (p.211). In 1911 one iffiths's most successful students, Manchershaw Pithawalla, was st Indian painter to be welcomed in London with a solo show, presentational paintings praised as an exemplar of successful lation (p.186).

thers campaigned against the oppression of British values. fluential young writer on Indian culture, Ordhendra Gangoly -1975) wrote: 'No doubt we feel proud that the art of Ajanta is in y inferior to Greece, but Ajanta is not only significant for its past, valuable as a future ideal.'[1] The Principal of the Calcutta School and Keeper of the Government Art Gallery, Ernest Havell, and Abanindranath Tagore introduced Mughal art to the curriculum and encouraged an independent Bengal School of Art. In 1910 Birdwood reiterated the belief that India had no spiritual fine art tradition to an audience at the Royal Society of Arts, describing medieval Hindu architecture as inferior to gothic and likening an image of the Buddha to a suet pudding.[2] This prompted Havell, painters William Rothenstein and Christiana Herringham (p.210), Sri Lankan scientist and writer Ananda Coomaraswamy and others to set up the international India Society. It successfully promoted Indian culture and independence, and members included Jawaharlal Nehru, who would become the first Indian Prime Minister in 1947.

Non-European culture was at this time becoming a vital component of twentieth-century avant-gardes who were challenging tradition. In Europe they were frequently inspired by the collections which had been accumulated by European empires in the great museums, especially the British Museum in London and the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, as well as by world art displayed at the huge international exhibitions and by the activities of scholarly societies and scholars and artists who travelled. African, Oceanic, Asian and South American artefacts informed the powerful geometric simplifications that would dominate modernism: the cubism and expressionism that made the names of Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Jacob Epstein and many others. Ananda Coomaraswamy, for example, was an influential trans-cultural figure. A member of the English arts and crafts movement, his first book, *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (1907), was written with his English wife, Ethel,

Fig.11
Eric Gill 1882–1940
***Eve* 1928**
Bath stone
73.7 x 15.2 x 15.2
Tate. Bequeathed by Hugh W. Rawlinson 1963

and printed at William Morris's Kelmscott Press. His respect for hand craft was in sympathy with the adoption of direct carving by a new generation of sculptors such as Epstein and Eric Gill. Gill was inspired by Coomaraswamy's lectures and wrote to Rothenstein, 'Heaven is via Elephanta, Elura, and Ajanta'.[3] This enthusiasm was reflected in *Eve* 1928 (fig. 1 l), which interpreted its Christian subject through both early European and Indian sculpture: the etiolated lines of the gothic saints at Chartres combine with the taut curves of Hindu goddesses. Between the wars, Dora Gordine achieved a more austere simplification through studying Chinese and Indonesian sculpture in the East. The 'reticent grace' of her figures, exemplified by the series of heads she made for the British administration for Singapore City Hall (p.246), complemented the sleek, angular modernist interiors of her cosmopolitan clientele.[4] In 1930s Calcutta, the Bengal School was superseded by the more abstract styles of artists such as Jamini Roy and Hungarian Indian Amrita Sher-Gil. Sher-Gil drew on her visit to Ajanta, and Roy developed qualities he identified in popular, religious Kalighat and other folk art to found Indian modernism.[5] In the 1940s, Australian Aboriginal idioms contributed to the evolution of the expressionist style of the pioneering modern Australian painter, Sidney Nolan (p.221).

European and American artists' engagement with non-European art was often based on an idea of it as primordial and universal, with little regard paid to its local significance and history, but beyond Europe it continued to represent national pasts and futures. Australia was independently federated in 1901, New Zealand and Canada became self-governing dominions in 1907 and 1931, and India and Pakistan in 1947. Participation of soldiers from all parts of the British Empire in the First and Second World Wars promoted such ideals. In October 1945, the fifth Pan-African Congress (founded in the eighteenth century) was held in Manchester and delegates such as Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah, Kenyan Jomo Kenyatta and the chair, Trinidadian George Padmore went on to lead independence in their countries. The Angolan campaigner and intellectual Mário de Andrade described this period as one of 'cultural reclaim': 'the great era of the affirmation of differences ... of the defiance of those who, after admittance to the privileged enclosure of the alma mater of the dominant world, called it in question and thus opened the way to the challenge of that very world'.[6]

During the 1930s, a cosmopolitan London cultural scene promoted equality: the sculptors Edna Manley, with her husband Norman Manley, founder of the Jamaican People's National Party, and fellow Jamaican Ronald Moody, with his brother Harold, founder of the League of Coloured Peoples, for example. Moody's sculpture was best recognised in Paris, which in 1937 became the centre of the international Négritude movement that emerged, in the face of growing fascism, from common cause between students and scholars from French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean, the United States Harlem Renaissance and the *negrismo* movement from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. It aimed for cultural decolonisation, an appreciation of the history and culture of black people and increased attention to the collective colonial experience, including slavery. After the war, many more young artists came to study in Europe. Frank Bowling, Aubrey Williams and Donald Locke were among the first generation to arrive in London from British Guiana, and Ben Enwonwu and Uzo Egonu came from Nigeria. Egonu remembered the West African Students' Union as 'a place to read newspapers and get news from home, to engage in long discussions about the times'.[7] They too spent time in Paris's more tolerant artistic milieu, where the Left Bank Clamart Salon tea-shop was the Négritude base. Moody, Enwonwu and others published essays in Négritude journals such as *Présence Africaine*, edited by Alioune Diop and Andrade.

These artists employed a diversity of art forms to critique imperialism and imperial art and to assert a new world avant-garde.[8] Moo adopted direct carving and developed the simultaneously personal and 'universal' language that was a tenet of international modern a Central to this was his synthetic approach, incorporating concepts a characteristics derived from a diversity of sources and studies, whic became fundamental to many African and Caribbean artists after t war. In 1956 a leading Négritude voice, the Senegalese poet, cultur theorist and future president Léopold Sédar Senghor, argued that f black culture to transcend its past and realise its modernity, it must combine an ethnocentric and eclectic approach.[9] Ben Enwonwu, a graduate of Oxford and the Slade and the first African artist to win worldwide fame, put it clearly in *Présence Africaine* the same year. 'I w not accept an inferior position in the art world,' he wrote.

> European artists like Picasso, Braque and Vlaminck were influenced by African art. Everybody sees that and is not opposed to it. But when they see African artists who are influenced by their European training and technique, they expect that African to sti to their traditional forms ... I do not copy traditional art. I like what I see in the works of people like Giacometti but I do not co them. I knew Giacometti personally ... I knew he was influence by African sculptures. But I would not be influenced by Giacom because he was influenced by my ancestors.[10]

After Nigerian independence in 1960, a group of students at Zaria Art School rejected the British curriculum and launched a modern African art movement based on a concept of 'Natural Synthesis'. 'I Contemporary Nigerian artist must accept those influences that are vital to him,' Yusuf Grillo explained. 'It does not matter whether th are drawn from Yoruba sculpture or Picasso paintings.'[11] Isabel Raw horne, who unlike her associates Epstein and Giacometti had reject the influence of so-called traditional African art, travelled and studi with the Zaria artists in 1961 (p.223).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Asian artists Li Yuan Chia, Avanish Chandra and Balraj Khanna championed a similarly synthetic, spiritually and psychologically universal art. Artists from all around the Commonwealth had international careers, moving between anc exhibiting in their countries of birth, Britain and other locations. Some, such as Locke and Bowling, Chandra and Khanna, participa in international abstraction and spent time in the United States. Th part in modernism was not uncritical or passive, however. They mai tained what Nigerian-born artist, curator and scholar Olu Oguibe has described as 'an ambivalent rhetoric of difference and visibility' Artists originating in the British Empire broadened the boundaries modernism, he says: 'They gave it edge, expanded its formal vocabu lary, and ensured that it engaged a broad range of ideas and issues r vant to the human condition.' Moody's sculpture engaged with nucl warfare, for example, and Bowling's colour-field-like map paintings consider the African diaspora.[13] In 1975 Locke exhibited the *Plantat Series*, in which biomorphic ceramic forms set within grids remind th viewer of the regulation of the cane fields and the people who work them (p.229).[14] While modernism tended to eschew social themes a consciousness – the Cold War, for example – these artists assayed a modernism embracing global political issues.

AFTER EMPIRE

The profile of British artists from the new Commonwealth countrie was at its peak in the 1960s. In 1965 Chandra's abstract expressioni *Hills of Gold* was the first modernist work by an Indian British artist enter the national collection at the Tate Gallery (p.227). In 1966 the

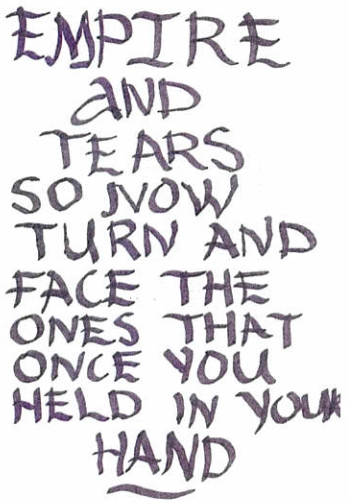

Fig.12
Donald Rodney 1961–1998
Page from Sketchbook 3, 1983–4
Tate Archive

ibbean Artists Movement (CAM) was launched, promoting Caribn writing, music, drama, film and visual art in which Moody, Wils and others were active.[15] This momentum was not consistently ntained, however. CAM folded in 1972 and during this decade, sh political and cultural allegiances shifted from the Commonlth to the United States. Increased immigration was accompanied omestic tensions and prejudices. When Black and Asian artists' s was exhibited, it was often judged either according to narrow, conceived notions of 'authenticity' to 'traditional' characteristics, s inauthentically derivative of what was perceived as an intrinsical- 'estern modernity, what Oguibe calls a 'pincer action of derivative authentic'.[16] In 1989 Rasheed Araeen displayed Black and Asian lern art in *The Other Story* at the Hayward Gallery, including work handra, Khanna, Williams, Moody, and Locke's *Trophies of Em-* This important exhibition examined the modernism of African, ibbean and Asian artists resident in the UK and drew attention to relative marginalisation.

n the aftermath of the Empire, artists in Britain questioned its l, cultural, political and aesthetic legacies. *The Other Story* included unger generation of artists that had emerged in the 1980s, includhe only four women, Lubaina Himid, Sonia Boyce, Mona Hatoum Kumiko Shimizu. In the early years of the decade, Himid had cud a series of exhibitions showcasing young Black and Asian women ts committed to challenging stereotypes.[17] Their work synthesised y sources, but, like Locke, employed a montage strategy of collage assemblage to create something less seamless than their modernist ursors, in which hybridity, paradox and contradictions were more picuous. Quotations from the past engaged directly with the visual uage left by empire in a way that communicated something of its plex, ongoing currency. Textile and other patterns, for example, often employed in playful allusion to the nineteenth-century comification of 'decorative' non-European styles, the twentieth-cenabstraction that still dominated the 'fine' arts, and the artistic and nomic debt owed in general by Europe to non-European cultures.[18] a Boyce's *Lay Back, Keep Quiet and Think of What Made Britain so Great* 1986 (p.230), exhibited at her solo show at the AIR gallery in 1987 and again in *The Other Story*, was purchased for the nation by the Arts Council. Like *Trophies of Empire*, it appropriated imperial language in its title as well as its imagery. Boyce's self-portrait challenges the tribal characterisations of indigenous African, Indian and Australian people in three tableaux taken from Victorian wallpaper, representing the 'background' imperial values that survived into Boyce's own world. The prominence of the surrounding floral pattern interrogated the art historical convention of marginalising Black and Asian art, and art made by women, as ornamental and craft-based.

1982 also saw the founding of the BLK Art Group in the industrial Midlands, including Keith Piper, Marlene Smith, Eddie Chambers and Donald Rodney. They too worked with assemblage and installation, as well as sculpture and painting, and explored the possibilities for appropriating, critiquing and reinventing past art. Rodney addressed the legacy of museums and galleries. In a conversation with David Lawson, he proposed a work which re-created in the Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain) the white classical gallery building with sugar cubes, alluding to the material that had brought Britain the prosperity and confidence which had fed the building and its collection, and the human cost that underpinned it.[19] In his notebook in the Tate archive (fig.12), Rodney set out his thoughts on a reassessment of the art of the Empire and contemplated the pain and difficulty this would involve:

> Empire and Tears
> So now turn and face the ones you held in your hand.
> And when comes that day … Will you face the reckoning with washed hands and clear conscience?
> Living ornaments the relics of yore that are in your museums your homes and in your books my eyes see the craftsmen of long ago …[20]

Rodney died prematurely in the 1990s, and his vision began to be realised by other artists. The Yuendumu Australian Judy Watson offered a new response to the collections in the British and Pitt Rivers Museums, 'the relics of yore', focusing on the ethnographic displays and collections in a series of prints, *our hair in your collections, our bones in your collections, our skin in your collections* (p.232).[21]

The artistic legacy of empire broadly evolved through a synthesis that was simultaneously national and international, critique and reflection. In the twenty-first century the synthetic ideal has given way to something no less complex but less resolved, more dynamic. The central themes – an inventive cosmopolitanism of sources and outlooks, a social consciousness and an alertness to primitivising, ornamentalist and orientalising myths – return sometimes in poetic, reflective pieces such as those of Watson or the video-artist Zarina Bhimji, or in works that are more witty and carnivalesque. Artists such as Yinka Shonibare, The Singh Twins and Hew Locke, the son of Donald Locke, explore the role of art and artist in a post-colonial society through nuanced, multivalent embellishments of historic sculptures and paintings, often interrogating issues of identity.[22] The assemblages of Andrew Gilbert, a Scottish artist based in Berlin, address the imperial procession or battle tableaux familiar from museum vitrines, film, history painting and book illustrations, to comment on the imperial hero and history, entangling the military myths of Scotland with those of Africa and India and the modern day. Their style, an unsettling mix of humour and horror, at once parody the 'primitivism' of European expressionism and of army ritual. The array of alter egos that perform through his work exaggerate the restless identities, heritages and careers that artists now conduct on an even more connected global stage.

DONALD LOCKE 1930–2010
Trophies of Empire 1972–4

Ceramics, wood, metal, glass and other materials
190.5 x 129.5 x 20.3
Tate. Purchased 2015

Locke was born in the village of Stewartville, Demerara County, on the Atlantic coast of British Guiana, a colony that had grown under Dutch, French and British administrations orientated towards profiting from the cultivation of sugar. Locke's family moved to Georgetown, where his father was an artisan, a furniture maker, and his mother a primary school teacher. After school, Locke studied at the newly founded Working People's Art Class (WPAC), taught by the Barbadian artist Edward Burrowes who mentored a new generation of Guyanese artists.[68] The British Guiana Museum was dominated by natural history and ethnographic collections and Locke became fascinated by the indigenous Arawak and Carib artefacts and geological objects.

Locke taught in Georgetown from 1950 to 1970 with periods of study abroad. In 1952 he won the WPAC Gold Medal for an abstract painting, *The Happy Family*, and in 1954 a British Council art scholarship took him to study ceramics at the Bath School of Art and Design. In 1959 he won a grant to pursue an MA at Edinburgh College of Art, where he encountered members of the influential California Clay Movement, who encouraged him to exploit the freedom to improvise of the ceramic medium.[69] This complemented the experimental approach to materials and found components that Locke had learned with Burrowes, and provided an alternative to ceramic techniques that required conventional equipment not available in Georgetown.[70] After further study trips to Italy, Brazil and Scotland, in 1970 Locke settled in London.

Teaching and exhibiting in London, Locke began to incorporate metal, wood, leather and fur into sculptures, assemblages and installations, such as the *Plantation Series*. These were at once personal and political but left space for the viewer to recognise and react in a range of ways.[71] His masterpiece, *Trophies of Empire*, presents ceramic forms, vessels and other found objects in a wooden structure like a monument. The cylindrical ceramic elements are multivalent, 'a plastic punning rhythm'. They begin on the bottom like a row of bullets and a reminder of the regular sugar-cane stems that Locke recalled from his childhood, familiar from other pieces. As the eye travels upward, these modify to suggest corporeal forms, limbs or exaggerated phalluses, two of which appear manacled by leather belts. They also evoke 'fetishes' or artefacts collected, categorised and arranged in museum cabinets, or ornaments in a genteel drawing room, including a rose glass bowl and a delicate silver canister that connect plantation to drawing room.

During the 1970s Locke exhibited his work widely and gained an international audience. Further awards took him to the United States where he settled, continuing to sculpt and teach as well as paint and write, until his death.[72] *Trophies of Empire* was exhibited in *Donald Locke, Mixed-media Ceramics* at the Commonwealth Art Gallery in 1975 and *Afro-Caribbean Art* at Artists Market in 1978, and became a canonical work for younger artists of the 1980s, to whom it stood for 'forgetting and remembering. Collecting and re-collecting the discordant notes from past and present history, artists re-trace the historical lines of slavery and empire in the fabric of contemporary life.'[73] CJ