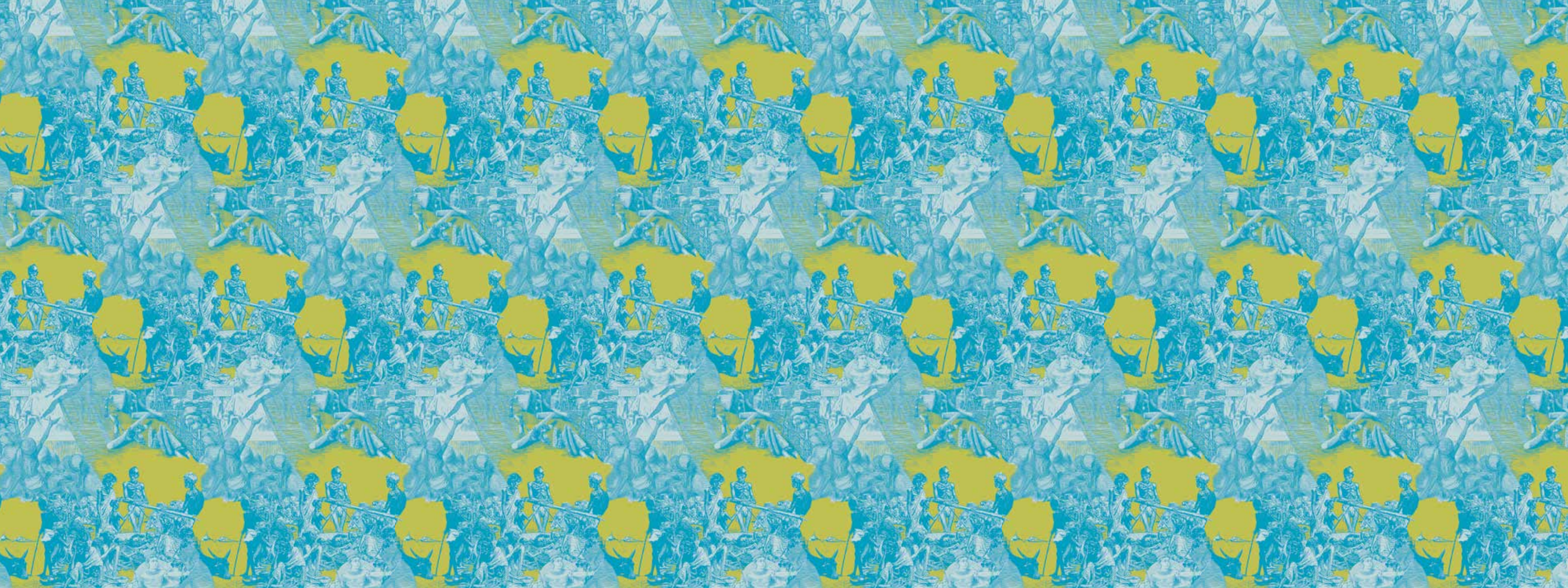




**F L U X**

P A R I A N UNPACKED

MATT SMITH





The Glynn collection of parian ware was accepted by H. M. Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the estate of G. D. V. Glynn, and allocated to the Fitzwilliam Museum in 2016.

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Front & back cover: W.H. Kerr & Co., Worcester, *Ariadne/Female on the rocks*, parian ware, mid to late 19th century, C.778-2016; p. 8: Examples of parian ware busts from the Glynn collection; p.13: Unknown British parian manufacturer, *Sir Salar Jung* (1829-1883), parian ware, mid to late 19th century, C.888-2016; p. 53: Ridgway, Dates & Co, Stoke-on-Trent, *George Frideric Handel* (1685-1759), [detail], parian ware, mid to late 19th century, C.862-2016

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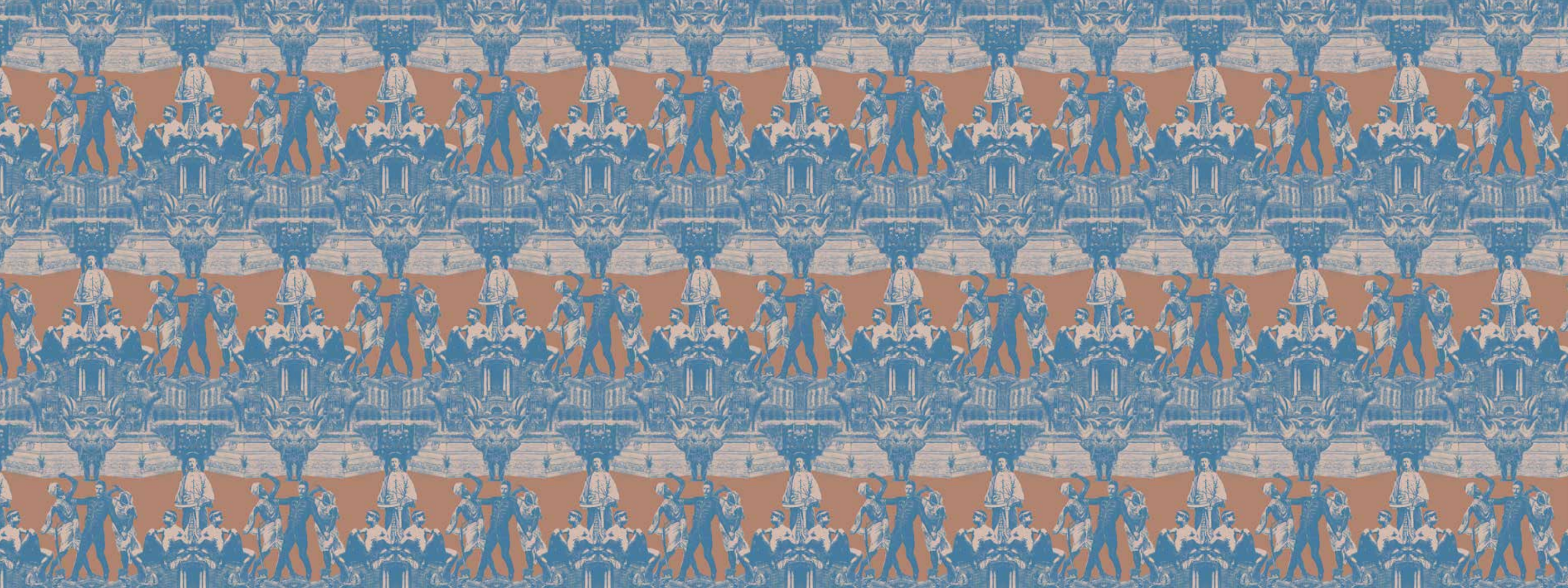
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P A R I A N UNPACKED

MATT SMITH

The  
Fitzwilliam  
Museum  
CAMBRIDGE







# F O R E W O R D

In 2016, the Fitzwilliam Museum was allocated the G.D.V. Glynn collection of parian ware, which had been accepted by H.M. Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the Glynn estate. Keen to bring this exceptional collection of over 350 pieces to public attention, my Research Associate, Helen Ritchie, suggested that we invite artist-curator Matt Smith to collaborate on an exhibition, given his expertise in creating works in this technically-challenging and complex material and his impressive history in interpreting museum collections with an 'outsider's eye'. Happily, Matt accepted our invitation, and the result is the visually stunning, thought-provoking, and intentionally challenging *Flux: Parian Unpacked* (Octagon and other galleries: 6 March - 1 July 2018).

A Victorian invention marketed as a cheaper alternative to white marble, parian is a ceramic material made from porcelain and 'flux', a purifying agent. Once ubiquitous – with parian busts and statuary groups found in many 19th-century middle-class homes – neither the material nor the people it was used to commemorate are easily recognisable to most contemporary viewers. Nor would we necessarily celebrate the once fêted lives and work of these people today. It is this notion of 'history in flux' that Matt has brought to life in this exhibition.

Matt has curated a radical display in the Octagon in which many of the Glynn parian busts are included, with a handful singled out for particular scrutiny and re-evaluation around the walls, set against a backdrop of specially designed wallpaper that highlights lesser known and often shocking aspects of their careers, particularly in relation to Britain's

colonial past. In addition, Matt has created a number of new works in parian – some in traditional white, others in untraditional black - in response to the Fitzwilliam's collections. These can be seen in galleries throughout the museum, creating new conversations and relationships within the permanent displays.

We are grateful to the Arts Council for its generous Grant for the Arts which made Matt's involvement possible, as well as to the Fitzwilliam's financial supporters and 2018 business partners. We are also grateful to Sadiah Qureshi and Namita Gupta Wiggers for their contributions to this catalogue. As ever, this exhibition and its accompanying gallery interventions, and the associated public programmes would not have been possible without the fantastic work of the 'home team': sincere thanks to all staff, but especially Mella Shaw, David Evans, Hannah Kershaw (Exhibitions team), Nik Zolman, Andrew Maloney and Tim Matthews (Applied Arts Technicians), Anna Lloyd-Griffiths (accessioning and gallery labels), Mike Jones and the Photography Department, Rachel Sinfield and the Press, Marketing and Events Department, Miranda Stearn and the Learning team, Ayshea Carter (designer of this catalogue), Jane Felstead and Visitor Services, Phil Wheeler and Museum Security, and above all, Helen Ritchie and Matt Smith without whose combined vision and passion this timely and highly relevant exhibition would not exist.

*Dr Victoria Avery, FSA  
Keeper, Department of Applied Arts*



# UNPACKING PARIAN

Matt Smith

The Glynn collection of parian ware, which consists of 363 pieces, was allocated to The Fitzwilliam Museum in 2016. It is both overwhelming in its scope and relatively homogenous in its content. While it includes some classical figures, the majority of the collection is comprised of busts of celebrated Victorians and Edwardians.

Parian ware is porcelain clay that has had flux added to it.<sup>1</sup> Although some coloured examples exist, parian ware was usually white. It takes its name from the white marble found on the Greek island of Paros, which was highly prized by ancient sculptors and used in the creation of the Parthenon marbles.<sup>2</sup>

Developed in about 1840, parian allowed manufacturers to slip-cast busts of influential people cheaply.<sup>3</sup> Parian ware became known as 'statuary porcelain'.<sup>4</sup> Sculpture was no longer solely the preserve of the very wealthy. The mass production of these domestic busts coincided with a time 'when the British Empire was at its peak'<sup>5</sup> and reflects the interests and attitudes of the period. Although there are some exceptions, such as the Belleek factory in Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, the production of parian ware largely tailed off around the time of World War I.

The addition of flux to porcelain results in the shiny, marble-like appearance of the clay. It also makes the clay unstable and liable to

melting during the high temperature firings required. Therefore, the flux which gives the porcelain the look and status of marble, also makes it unpredictable and liable to change. I was interested in exploring these contradictions.

Since flux is the material which turns porcelain into parian, I wanted to investigate how the idea of flux – or change – could be explored in the exhibition. The acquisition of the Glynn collection allows us to consider change in a number of ways. The new objects alter the collections at the Fitzwilliam by increasing the number and range of objects held by the Museum. They also allow us to review our perception of the existing collections by creating new dialogues between the recently acquired and existing objects. Their addition into the Fitzwilliam's collections also provides a moment for us to consider the impact of what is, and is not, included in the Museum.

The acquisition also allows us to review the lives of those portrayed in the busts and possibly to change our view of their histories. While these busts were made to commemorate and fix people's place in history, the exhibition seeks to unpick how our views of the past, the establishment and historical figures change over time - histories in flux.





#### EMPIRE DAY

(Mr. Nehru has ordered the removal of statues of British rulers in India.)

*ERE the cords of the Commonwealth sunder, keep the forces of rupture in check,  
Give heed to the remnants about ye, and save what ye can from the wreck.  
Remove not the ancient landmark; though ye deem it a token of shame  
It may yet contain something of value; ye may find a use for the same.*

Cartoon from Punch Magazine, 22 May 1957 © Punch Ltd

## HISTORY IN FLUX

Of all art forms, sculpture is one of the most contested during periods of changing social attitudes and political regimes. In Britain, the relevance and appropriateness of numerous public sculptures are being debated. The #RhodesMustFall campaign, taken up by Oxford University students, calling for the removal of Cecil Rhodes's statue from Oriel College<sup>6</sup> and Afua Hirsch's argument for the reviewing of Nelson's place in Trafalgar Square in light of his defence of slavery,<sup>7</sup> both opened up passionate and ongoing debates on how we should view these figures. In the United States, the appropriateness and relevance of confederate statues has been similarly debated and has led to many being removed from public spaces.<sup>8</sup>

The visual power of statues is repeatedly harnessed and exploited. For example, it has been argued that the toppling of a statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in 2003, which received widespread press exposure, was heavily cropped to hide the involvement of US troops, thereby promoting a positive message to the Western viewers.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, in Bulgaria in 2011, a 1950s soviet war memorial was spray-painted, turning the bronze figures into various characters including superheroes, Ronald McDonald and Santa Claus, to the reported anger of the Russian foreign ministry.<sup>10</sup>

The Glynn collection comprises statues made mainly for domestic, not public, spaces. In private spaces, these busts reflect the owners' interests, but when they move into the public space of the Museum, they start to gain agency as stimuli for discussion and debate and, importantly, they can become politically charged.

*There is no political power without control of the archive,  
if not of memory.*  
Jacques Derrida<sup>11</sup>

Bringing new objects into a museum collection requires planning. They take up space and further stretch the limited resources available to look after the collections. They also potentially re-frame the existing collections and allow us to look at them afresh. Over time, we forget that these newly-acquired objects were not always in the collections of the museum and they become part of the cultural mirror in which we see ourselves and our society reflected.

The role of museums in society, like sculptures, is increasingly being discussed. There are numerous tensions that hold the potential to fiercely divide professional and public opinion. Traditionally, it is argued that museums should be centres of connoisseurship, showcasing the most exceptional of objects, placing their aesthetics above all else and removing them from lived lives. More recently, museums are increasingly seen as reflections of society, with an active part to play in discussing and shaping the culture within which we live.

The majority of the busts in the Glynn collection were created in the second half of the nineteenth century, at a time when the British Empire was at its most dominant. It is therefore unsurprising that many of the people depicted in the collection have links to colonialism. Historical objects can tell us much, but not all histories are remembered. In the whole of the Glynn collection, there is only one bust of someone who is not Caucasian. The collection tells a skewed, sanitised version of history, and particularly of colonial history.

Working with this collection made me reflect on the histories I was not taught at school in England. I repeatedly learned about Henry VIII's six wives and could still colour in most of their outfits from memory. I also



learnt of the battles won by the British in World War II. History was served up with a dollop of plucky Dunkirk spirit and always came with a happy ending, placing England – and it was nearly always England – in a glowing light.

When I was a child I moved with my family from England to Brazil for four years. I was taught Brazilian history. I heard how European countries ruthlessly exploited other countries economically. To the ears of someone who had been educated in England, it was literally unbelievable. This experience helped shape my understanding of Britain's past and has helped me question Britain's dominant view of its history.

The former Director of the British Museum, Neil MacGregor, talked of his experiences in Germany, where a determination to 'find the historical truth and acknowledge it however painful it is'<sup>12</sup> stands in contrast to the endorsed historical narratives often found in Britain.

The Home Office produces a book that contains 'Everything you need to know to pass your Life in the UK test',<sup>13</sup> thereby enabling non-nationals to learn what the State deems is necessary for them to know in order to become permanent residents or citizens of the UK. In this book, the Home Office states that '...there was, for the most part, an orderly transition from Empire to Commonwealth, with countries being granted their independence'<sup>14</sup>, a truly 'sunny side'<sup>15</sup> view of a contested and complex set of histories.

MacGregor also talks about the German word *Mahnmal*. Defined as monuments to national shame,<sup>16</sup> or as warnings of events that should not be allowed to happen again, they perform a very different social function to celebratory public sculptures. The installation in the Octagon Gallery at the Fitzwilliam, which marks the start of the exhibition, could be read as a *Mahnmal*. Surrounding the white faces of the parian and their unseeing eyes, six different wallpapers have been created, one for each blank wall. Each wall addresses one aspect of Britain's past in relation to people represented in the parian ware collection. From the 'scorched earth' policy of the Boer War, to the Irish Famine, the

implications of British colonialism had a huge and often brutal effect on millions of people.

Once again, these six wallpapers allow the atrocities of the British Empire to form a backdrop to the celebrated heroes who invaded countries around the world. However, even more than being a *Mahnmal* to the injustices of the Empire, this installation warns of the severe lack of education and discussion about our less palatable histories. Too often, we are served a seductive and privileged view of the past – when Britain was great and constantly on the side of 'good' – a past so heavily edited that the reality of the present can never live up to it.

This heavily-skewed treatment of the past has possibly detrimental effects for Britain's future. While Britain may be ill-informed about what happened overseas, the people affected by those actions are often not, as the campaign for compensation for those who 'suffered torture and sexual abuse when detained by the British colonial administration during the Mau Mau insurgency in 1950s Kenya'<sup>17</sup> illustrates.

With the prospect of post-Brexit Britain needing to form new political and trading relationships, the idea of developing trading relationships 'with the Commonwealth as "Empire 2.0"' has been discussed.<sup>18</sup> However, as David Olusoga has pointed out this is based on:

... a national conversation about the lost empire that is all too often an internal monologue, largely focused on what 'we' did or did not do, and whether or not 'we' should be proud of it. [While w]hat 'they' – the people of the former empire and the current Commonwealth – felt about it then, and think about it now, rarely enters into this solipsistic debate.<sup>19</sup>

With better understanding of the brutality and oppression that formed the centuries of Britain's colonisation of Ireland, the associate editor of The Daily Telegraph might have checked himself before tweeting, 'Ireland has poisoned UK politics and brought down governments for centuries.'<sup>20</sup> While Britain may have a hazy grasp on what happened overseas, what is currently happening in Britain is certainly being noted abroad.<sup>21</sup>

To view the installation within the Octagon gallery simply as a criticism of the people singled out is to miss the point. These busts were created to memorialise and celebrate individuals. The installation seeks not to talk of whether these were good or bad people, but to include a more balanced view of their lives and the differing views of them held by those who were colonising, or those who were colonised.

## THE MUSEUM IN FLUX

As the migration of people from Britain to other countries changed histories overseas, so the migration of those people reading the Home Office's publication changes the history of Britain. By its very nature, all change has an effect.

I was interested in what change the influx of the Glynn collection of parian would have on the existing collections within the Fitzwilliam and how the established history of the Museum might be altered and reviewed in light of these new additions. I therefore decided to set up conversations between pieces from the Glynn Collection with objects in the galleries. In ancient Greece, Ariadne provided a thread which allowed Theseus to find his way out of the Minotaur's labyrinth. Within this exhibition, she provides the thread which literally links the parian ware to the existing sculpture collections, and in particular the French bronze of *Theseus*

*combating the Minotaur* by Antoine Louis Barye. Another Greek – Narcissus – sees himself reflected in the mirrored pools and allows us to see ourselves both physically, and metaphorically, reflected within the Museum.

Elsewhere, the parian ware seems to talk loudly without help. *The Young Emigrant* is surrounded by the four seasons who turn away from him. Underneath Millais's *The Twins, Kate and Grace Hoare*, two identical parian busts are joined in a contemporary parian ware intervention, locked in an unending tussle: both seeing and looking away.

One of the joys of being an artist is that you can create objects to mark histories that fall outside the realm of material records. Recreating Gainsborough's portrait of *Heneage Lloyd and his sister, Lucy* using found plaster moulds moves the portrait away from simply being a conspicuous display of wealth and power, and speaks of those who have had to adapt to the world to make do. Meanwhile, *Other Kinds of Love* references the bestial narratives at the heart of the two adjacent bronze figure groups by the Italian sculptor Massimiliano Soldani Benzi – *Ganymede and the Eagle* and *Leda and the Swan* – exploring how a layer of patina,<sup>22</sup> the long-standing tradition of Classical mythology and the authority of the museum setting can move a subject from unacceptable to acceptable.

As an artist, I am continually drawn back to making connections, both historically and visually. Within the exhibition, I have also had the opportunity to make connections between my own new work and the existing collections, relying less on didactic narratives and more on shared ideas of form.

The bronze collection proved a fertile area of investigation. The casting techniques used by both bronze casters and manufacturers of ceramics



share similarities and I was interested in how, with moulds made from found objects, I could start a visual dialogue with works from the permanent collections. These new objects will never be the same as the existing bronzes, but they might help us look at them with new eyes and understand them better.

This close reading of the mainly Italian bronze collection – which, due to its relatively uniform size and colour, can easily be (mis)read as a unified whole – highlighted the playfulness, material challenges and, at times, peculiar forms of the originals. It also created a connection between myself and the makers of the Renaissance and Baroque bronzes – trying to work out why and how things had been constructed as they had.

This idea of dialogue and exploration continued in the porcelain galleries at the Museum. While these interventions avoid the hierarchies inherent in comparing ceramics and bronze, they raise questions of their own. Bringing work made by an individual – what would often have been called studio ceramics – into a gallery of work that was mostly made by teams of people in factories, addresses issues of agency and identity. Hopefully, and more importantly, these new interventions will encourage people to stop and look at the objects they are in dialogue with, to see the collections afresh.

During the last eighteen months, Britain has been in flux in a way that I have never seen. Many people have insisted on partial and fixed views of what ‘makes’ Britain. The collection of parian ware provides a similarly partial and fixed view of history. The truth is always more complex, nuanced and inclusive.

At the core of this exhibition is the truth that nothing stays the same, and change is inevitable. We choose what we see and what we wish not to see. How we view what we see is influenced by the knowledge we bring

with us as much as the information that a museum chooses to present. There is, of course, no final word on history, or these objects. They will be used and reused by the Museum to tell many different stories in the future. What we need them to tell us, and their futures, will always be in flux.

Using one voice to argue for plural ways of interpreting the past would be perverse. I am therefore incredibly grateful to the team at the Fitzwilliam, and especially Helen Ritchie, Victoria Avery, Mella Shaw and David Evans for sharing their knowledge and views. I would also like to thank Namita Gupta Wiggers and Sadiya Qureshi for their fascinating writings in this catalogue. Debt is also due to Richard Sandell from the University of Leicester’s School of Museum Studies, artist Jasleen Kaur, curator Catrin Jones from the Holburne Museum, Bath and Mary Beard from the University of Cambridge for engaging in lively debate around the subject. I would also like to thank two very talented artists – Kristin Larsson, who blew the mirrored glass bubbles and Johan Bisse Mattsson, who designed the wallpapers.

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<sup>1</sup> Fluxes are materials that are added to ceramic bodies to lower the melting point of the clay.  
<sup>2</sup> Dennis Barker, *Parian Ware* (Princes Risborough: Shire Publications Ltd, 1998), p. 3.  
<sup>3</sup> Slip casting is when liquid clay (slip) is poured into plaster moulds.  
<sup>4</sup> Robert Copeland, *Parian, Copeland’s Statuary Porcelain* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors’ Club Ltd, 2007), p. 20.  
<sup>5</sup> Barker 1998, p. 3.  
<sup>6</sup> Peter Scott, ‘Oxford students’ fight to topple Cecil Rhodes statue was the easy option’, *The Guardian*, 2 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/feb/02/students-cecil-rhodes-statue-campaign-oxford-orient-college>, accessed 19 October 2017.  
<sup>7</sup> Afua Hirsch, ‘Toppling statues? Here’s why Nelson’s column should be next’, *The Guardian*, 22 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/22/toppling-statues-nelsons-column-should-be-next-slavery>, accessed 19 October 2017.  
<sup>8</sup> Eric Foner, ‘Confederate Statues and “Our” History’, *The New York Times*, 20 August 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/20/opinion/confederate-statues-american-history.html>  
<sup>9</sup> Max Fisher, ‘The Truth About Iconic 2003 Saddam Statue-Toppling’, *The Atlantic*, 3 January 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/01/the-truth-about-iconic-2003-saddam-statue-toppling/342802/>, accessed 19 October 2017.  
<sup>10</sup> Tom Parfitt, ‘Russia not amused at Red Army statue re-invented as Superman and friends’, *The Guardian*, 22 June 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/22/russia-red-army-memorial-painted>, accessed 19 October 2017.  
<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz (trans.), ‘Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression’ in *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer 1995), p. 11, note 1.  
<sup>12</sup> Neil MacGregor, ‘Britain forgets its past. Germany confronts it’, *The Guardian*, 17 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/apr/17/neil-macgregor-britain-germany-humboldt-forum-berlin>, accessed 13 November 2017.  
<sup>13</sup> Home Office, *Life in the United Kingdom, A Guide for New Residents*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Norwich: TSO, 2016).  
<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 52.  
<sup>15</sup> Neil MacGregor, ‘Britain’s view of its history “dangerous”, says former museum director’, *The Guardian*, 7 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/oct/07/britains-view-of-its-history-dangerous-says-former-museum-director>, accessed 1 December 2017.  
<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Esme Cleall, ‘Compensation for Mau Mau Victims: remembering The Violence of the British Empire’, *History Matters*, 7 June 2013, <http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/mau-mau-compensating-victims-colonial-violence-british-empire/>, accessed 1 December 2017.  
<sup>18</sup> David Olusoga, ‘Empire 2.0 is dangerous nostalgia for something that never existed’, *The Guardian*, 19 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/19/empire-20-is-dangerous-nostalgia-for-something-that-never-existed>, accessed 1 December 2017.  
<sup>19</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>20</sup> Kathy Sheridan, ‘Why is British public so ignorant on Brexit?’, *The Irish Times*, 29 November 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/kathy-sheridan-why-is-british-public-so-ignorant-on-brexit-1.3308465>, accessed 1 December 2017.  
<sup>21</sup> Rachel Flaherty, ‘UK newspaper says “naive, young” Varadkar should “shut gob” on Brexit’, *The Irish Times*, 18 November 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/uk-newspaper-says-naive-young-varadkar-should-shut-gob-on-brexit-1.3297219>, accessed 1 December 2017. See also Jennifer O’Connell, ‘The Irish are just making trouble because they lost. A bit petty isn’t it really?’, *The Irish Times*, 30 November 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/the-irish-are-just-making-trouble-because-they-lost-a-bit-petty-isn-t-it-really-1.3310033>, accessed 1 December 2017.  
<sup>22</sup> Patina is a thin surface layer on a bronze, often created using corrosive materials to create specific surface colours and finishes.









FRAGILE  
DANS LES ELEMENTS









# THE VIOLENCE OF IMPERIAL NOSTALGIA

Sadiah Qureshi

On 9 March 2015, protesters at the University of Cape Town declared that allowing a statue of Cecil John Rhodes to stand on campus valorised a man whose imperial profiteering was predicated on racism and the exploitation of colonised peoples. The protest soon spread across South Africa and, eventually, to the University of Oxford. Within a month, the statue in Cape Town was removed. As the dissent gathered pace, 'Rhodes Must Fall' became the motto of a broader movement against nostalgic depictions of imperial heroes and ongoing forms of discrimination in universities. In Oxford, protesters focused on Oriel College, where a statue of Rhodes adorns the façade after he donated £100,000 to the college.<sup>1</sup> When wealthy donors considered withdrawing £100 million of funding, the college decided to keep the statue in place and Rhodes still stands over all entrants.<sup>2</sup> Rhodes may not have fallen yet; nevertheless, calls for his removal resonate with broader and long-standing concerns about the ethics of displaying the past. Critics accused protesters of wanting to 'rewrite' history.<sup>3</sup> Yet, in many senses, such responses fail to engage with what is really at stake in such movements: namely, identifying, acknowledging and removing endemic structural problems of racism in *reparative* form.

In the current political moment, we are increasingly likely to encounter calls to decolonise the British past, whether renaming buildings, removing and re-contextualising statues or re-presenting museum collections.<sup>4</sup> Each of these calls reminds us that public displays and collections of heritage are not neutral archives of the past, but political records of collective and selective commemoration and remembrance. In this essay, I want to discuss *Flux: Parian Unpacked* in the light of such concerns. After all, exhibiting a collection of notable Victorian figures cast in hardened whiteness is a perfect opportunity to critically engage with calls to decolonise the museum. In particular, I explore how temporary exhibitions such as *Flux* might lead the way in re-presenting existing collections to change the narratives around canonical historical figures. Ultimately, I hope that such exhibitions will lead to enduring change so that museums embed decolonised perspectives into their permanent displays.

Any number of the historical figures in this collection of parian ware are problematic, but the figures highlighted on the walls of the exhibition gallery are notable for the violence that established their reputations.



During Queen Victoria's reign, the famines in Ireland (1845–1849) and India (1876–1879), the 1857 uprising in India, the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860) and the Anglo-Boer wars (1880–1881, 1899–1902) are just a few examples of conflict that are memorialised in this collection through figures such as Robert Peel and William Ewart Gladstone, Henry Havelock, Colin Campbell and Herbert Kitchener.

That such political and military men dominate the collection says much about how imperial heroes were made and why they were valued within Victorian Britain. The 1857 uprising in India became the turning point of British rule in the subcontinent and the making of Henry Marsham Havelock. Previously, the East India Company ruled indirectly but, after the uprising, it was stripped of this power, and direct rule established as broader pessimism regarding indirect rule strengthened. Havelock was awarded the Victoria Cross for his service in 1857.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the conflict, imperial propaganda fed the panic with reports of mutineers attacking British officers and their families, and included widespread rumours of rape. In an attempt to quell Indian resistance, British officers tried to use spectacular performances of power to assert their authority. For instance, when Indian sepoys were sentenced to death they were often tied to cannon, with their chests blocking the muzzle. The guns were then fired leaving behind smouldering, dismembered bodies. Occasionally, the heads of 'mutineers' were collected as war trophies with skulls even turned into ink-wells or other desktop relics.<sup>6</sup> Having served in Egypt and Sudan during the 1880s and 1890s and already a well-established celebrity, Kitchener served in the South African War of 1900 to 1902 (Second 'Boer War').<sup>7</sup> One of his tactics involved destroying farms and gathering together the homeless families, including many women and children, into 'concentration camps' that were segregated into black and white.<sup>8</sup> A generation of children were lost in these camps due to diseases whilst survivors suffered from depression and other forms of psychological distress. It would be wrong and historically

misleading to exhibit memorials to these British officers without acknowledging the roles they played in establishing and perpetuating violent rule across the British empire.

Among the political figures in this collection of parian, one of the most interesting is William Ewart Gladstone. He is usually remembered as a great liberal statesman, whose career included serving as the Chancellor of the Exchequer and being the only person to serve as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom four separate times. Anyone who has visited Gladstone's Library in Wales, completed after his death, will also know him as an extraordinarily voracious reader and collector of books. There are numerous memorials to Gladstone across the country, including a portrait by Sir John Everett Millais in the National Portrait Gallery and an imposing statue in the Strand, London. At the end of 2017, a slightly lesser known memorial hit the headlines. Students Alisha Raithatha, Tinaye Mapako and Tor Smith started a campaign to rename Liverpool's Roscoe and Gladstone student halls of residence.<sup>9</sup> They objected to honouring a family enriched through enslavement and the incongruity of featuring his name alongside the prominent abolitionist William Roscoe. It is well known that legislation ending the British slave trade passed in 1807; yet, far fewer people are aware that slave-ownership remained sanctioned until the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act ended the practice in the Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape.<sup>10</sup> 1807 is often celebrated by those eager to emphasise the moral capital of the British state whilst erasing the previous centuries of slave trading and failing to mention that enslavement continued for decades.<sup>11</sup> Even in 1833, the enslaved were not freed immediately but forced into apprenticeships that extracted a further five years of servitude. The newly freed received nothing for their lost liberty or forced labour. Instead, around 47,000 slave-owners were paid a total of £20 million in compensation, around £16 billion in today's terms and raised through government issued bonds. By enlarging private estates and financing core infrastructure, such as the railways

and banks, disinvestment from plantations and compensation filtered into the British economy, transformed urban and rural landscapes and ensured that the post-abolitionist state continued to extract wealth from enslavement. Crucially, the largest sum of £106,769 was paid to John Gladstone, William's father, for 2,508 enslaved people.<sup>12</sup> On 3 June 1833, in William's maiden speech in the Houses of Parliament, he defended his father against accusations that his estate mistreated the enslaved and the interests of plantation owners in general as the details of the compensation were decided.<sup>13</sup>

When news of the Liverpool students' campaign broke, opponents quickly defended William as a heroic liberal with the aim of defending an assumed fact of history. The former leader of the Liberal Democrats, Tim Farron noted: 'If this is true, this really is liberalism eating itself. If Gladstone isn't safe, then we should simply pull down every statue just in case. This is the "snobbery of chronology".'<sup>14</sup> It is true that the Gladstone family's enrichment from enslavement is hardly unusual in the nineteenth century; however, Farron's defence is remarkably weak and would only work if everyone long dead believed that enslavement was acceptable. An incalculable many did, but we also know that the abolition of the slave trade, and subsequently slave-ownership, was predicated on the resistance and activism of people, enslaved and free, who recognised the immorality of depriving human beings of their liberty. When memorials to slave-traders and owners are defended as merely exemplifying acceptable past attitudes, apologists betray their own historical ignorance of sustained abolitionist activism.

In the debates over memorialising the past, rather than assuming that we must be bound by the choices of our predecessors, we need to make our own choices. After all, there are many options available that do not require us to continue celebrating Victorian heroes, and, more rarely heroines, who have been publicly memorialised, but do

allow us to embed historical nuance into discussions of the British past. For example, if older statues and memorials are to be left in place they could be re-contextualised with new plaques or labels that replace hagiographies with critical discussions of their subjects' lives and legacies. After all, how many people would really want to keep memorials to men such as Gladstone if they had grown up routinely encountering an acknowledgement of his enrichment from enslavement alongside the details of his political career? Would Britons be so nostalgic for an imperial past if the national curriculum provided considerably better coverage of imperialism or if we had a national museum devoted to British imperial history in which the violence and racism of British rule was fully recognised?<sup>15</sup> Within other museums, galleries could be permanently reconfigured to juxtapose familiar objects with responses from contemporary artists who reflect upon the politics of such work.<sup>16</sup> As this exhibition shows, it is possible to take even deeply problematic objects and reconsider how they might be exhibited to acknowledge contemporary political sensitivities whilst simultaneously initiating new conversations about embedding permanent changes into museum galleries. At an institutional level, museums urgently need to employ curators from a much wider range of backgrounds and on permanent contracts, rather than outsourcing decolonisation work to community representatives under the guise of public engagement.

It is worth pausing here and considering the difference between inclusion and decolonisation. It is not enough for museums to simply add depictions of people of colour or new works by people of colour to their galleries. Such inclusion is an important element of broadening the coverage of collections to beyond their foundational moment. However, on its own, inclusion will do nothing to change the overall narratives that museums present to the public. Rather, such inclusion enables a few figures or works of art to be woven into existing stories and claims of diversifying to be made. This is precisely how inclusion can function as

tokenism and protect against lasting, meaningful change.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, decolonisation involves radically rethinking the overall narratives museums use to display their collections. Instead of merely including works by marginalised artists and communities, decolonised displays would co-curate galleries with a broader range of people to incorporate and showcase genuinely different perspectives. For instance, when I see imperial history displayed within museums, indigenous communities are usually referred to in the third person. It is much rarer to see museum labels that use ‘we’, ‘us’ or ‘our’ to embed indigenous perspectives within discussions of imperialism. The first time I encountered ‘we’ being used in this sense was at Melbourne Museum where local Aboriginal peoples had co-curated a gallery devoted to First Peoples. I still remember the shock and pleasure at seeing these voices within the confines of an institutional space from which they had been historically excluded. In this political moment, we need to distinguish between inclusion and decolonisation, and always push for the latter. It is an imperative that is rooted in both historical sensitivity and political necessity.

Rejecting visions of the British past, and notions of Britishness, rooted in the erasure of British imperialism violence is critical.<sup>18</sup> Not only are such histories predicated on misleadingly selective recollection, but the disavowal frames an astonishing range of political discussion about a whole host of marginalised groups including immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Ultimately, such erasure has been predicated on ignoring the long-standing presence of people of colour in Britain and the racism at the heart of British imperialism. Imperial nostalgia increasingly feels both prevalent and fashionable.<sup>19</sup> For a person of colour, such nostalgia often feels like being forced to bear a yearning for a time when whiteness ruled, women were refused the vote, people of African descent were enslaved and colonised populations the world over were exploited for their labour and natural resources. Sometimes that desire is rooted in genuine obliviousness and can be removed through

education. However, with an increasingly powerful far-right across Europe and in America, longing for a past in which whiteness reigned is increasingly becoming a deliberate and politically motivated rejection of common humanity and the ideals of human equality.

In contemporary Britain, hardly a day seems to go by without a politician defending ‘British values’ and insisting that Britain will be Great again. The promise that things will be better is hardly original. Rather, it is a consistent feature of political discussion during lean times when we all hope for future prosperity and election campaigns. Yet, it is striking that such nostalgia is rooted in the longing for a very particular kind of imperial power. In a speech outlining plans for withdrawing from Europe, Theresa May euphemistically described Britain’s ‘history and culture’ as ‘profoundly internationalist’.<sup>20</sup> Her words epitomise the routine and audacious historical erasure that museums, curators and historians must not reinforce, but challenge. Britons are hardly unique in indulging selective and flattering memories of the past, but we are living through particularly fraught discussions over who belongs in Britain, and at what cost, whether prompted by broader debates over Scottish independence and Britain’s future relationship with the European Union. In this climate, decolonised histories of Britain are urgently required. Within the museum, I hope to see the violence of imperial nostalgia routinely acknowledged and exposed as galleries are rehung and new curatorial voices are given space to express themselves. I hope that the cumulative impact of renewed efforts will be a new generation for whom inclusion is not an unwelcome sop to political correctness, but much-needed, and expected, historical veracity.

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<sup>1</sup> Amit Chaudhuri, ‘The Real Meaning of Rhodes Must Fall’, *The Guardian*, 16 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/16/the-real-meaning-of-rhodes-must-fall>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Rawlinson, ‘Cecil Rhodes Statue to Remain at Oxford after “Overwhelming Support”’, *The Guardian*, 29 January 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jan/28/cecil-rhodes-statue-will-not-be-removed-oxford-university>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Chaudhuri, ‘The Real Meaning of Rhodes Must Fall’.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to remember that ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ resonated with older debates on the nature of memorialising the past. For a brief overview, see Madina Tlostanova, ‘Decolonizing the Museum’ in *Postcolonialism and Postsocialism in Fiction and Art* (London: Basingstoke, 2017), pp. 73–92.

<sup>5</sup> R. H. Vetch, ‘Allan, Sir Henry Marshman Havelock-, first Baronet (1830–1897)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12628>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>6</sup> This account of the uprising draws from Kim Wagner, *The Skull of Alum Bheg: The Life and Death of a Rebel of 1857* (London: Hurst & Co, 2017). Wagner is currently trying to repatriate Bheg’s skull to India for burial.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Neilson, ‘Kitchener, Horatio Herbert, Earl Kitchener of Khartoum (1850–1916)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34341>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Tinaye Mapako, ‘Gladstone’s Legacy Is Murky–My University Shouldn’t Glorify It’, *The Guardian*, 24 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/nov/24/gladstones-legacy-is-murky-my-university-shouldnt-glorify-it>, accessed 24 January 2018. Another obvious example is the call to rename buildings in Bristol named after the slave-trader Edward Colston. See David Olusoga, ‘Bristol: The City That Lauds the Slave Trader’, *The Guardian*, 27 April 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/27/bristol-city-slave-trader-edward-colston>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Antislavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Hall et al, *Legacies of British Slave Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). The project analysed every compensation claim made after the 1833 Act. Anyone can check if their ancestors received a share of the vast sum using the open-access *Legacies of British-Slave Ownership* database at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>.

<sup>13</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, ‘Gladstone, William Ewart (1809–1898)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10787>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Tim Farron, @timfarron, ‘BBC News – Liverpool students campaign to remove Gladstone’s name <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-42286341/liverpool-students-campaign-to-remove-gladstone-s-name> ... If this is true, this really is liberalism eating itself. If Gladstone isn’t safe, then we should simply pull down every statue just in case. This is the ‘snobbery of chronology’, 3:51am, 9 December 2017, <https://twitter.com/timfarron/status/939462474629308416>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>15</sup> In 2007 the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol closed its doors, with many of the items having been subsequently lost or sold. There is currently no permanent museum with the same mandate. ‘Items “missing” from British Empire and Commonwealth Museum’, BBC News, 10 December 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-20611866>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>16</sup> A fantastic recent example has been *The Past Is Now* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. See Sumaya Kassim, ‘The Museum Will Not Be Decolonised’, *Media Diversified*, 15 November 2017, <https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (London: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> I’ve previously made some of these final points in Sadiah Qureshi, ‘We Prefer their Company’, *London Review of Books*, 15 June 2017, pp. 39–40; and Sadiah Qureshi, ‘Decolonizing British History’, *Qualia’s Qualms*, 8 June 2017, <https://qualiasqualms.com/2017/06/08/decolonizing-british-history/>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Kehinde Andrews, ‘Colonial Nostalgia is Back in Fashion, Blinding Us to the Horrors of Empire’, *The Guardian*, 24 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/24/colonial-nostalgia-horrors-of-empire-britain-olympic>, accessed 24 January 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Theresa May, ‘Theresa May’s Brexit Speech in Full’, *The Telegraph*, 17 January 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2017/01/17/theresa-mays-brexit-speech-full/>, accessed 24 January 2018.













































# P A R I A N : P R E S E N C E A N D A B S E N C E

Namita Gupta Wiggers

Every one of Mrs Payne's piano students had the opportunity to earn a special prize for successfully memorising five pieces: a small bust of a famous composer of classical music. These 4½ inch-tall vinyl trophies felt significant in scale in the hands of a child. I worked hard to 'collect them all', stopping only when my ambition exceeded the stores of my teacher. Eight figures became nine; ironically the ninth was a second mini-bust of Beethoven that ended my interest in collecting these trophies. I had not given these busts much thought until viewing installations of and storage areas containing parian ware from the Glynn collection, now housed in the Fitzwilliam Museum. In retrospect, these twice-removed mini-busts barely resemble the parian copies to which they are unquestionably connected, let alone the original carved marble sculptures upon which they are based. Made of a creamy, slightly ivory-toned plastic, these objects may reference canonical Western composers and laboriously carved marble statues, but the materials and methods of their construction resembled my toys in the early 1970s more than monuments to culture, taste and refinement.

This collection of composers resided atop the upright piano, individual busts slowly disappearing over the years during moves and yard

sales. Produced by Halbe, the miniature busts are still in production; they satisfy a desire for inexpensive awards for music students, and simultaneously operate as a potential fundraiser for music programmes in the US. Each moulded bust sits atop a built-in round base upon which the composer's birth year, first initial and last name, and year of his death is moulded in a sans-serif typeface. In all cases, the composers' garments and hairstyles convey the time period in which they lived, with facial likenesses that seem realistic if not photographic. They are a magnificent tribute to the inventions of Benjamin Cheverton, a sculptor who received a patent for 'Machinery for cutting wood and other materials' in 1844, and for 'Methods of imitating ivory and bone' in 1850. Cheverton's machine made it possible to copy large marble sculptures on a reduced scale, and, importantly, in the round without damaging the original piece.<sup>1</sup> If, as Charles and Dorrie Shinn proclaim, Cheverton's 'successful machine was an enormous step forward in the production of parian figures and of great value to manufacturers ... [and] enabled a great deal of what had previously been very laborious work, necessitating a high degree of skill for its execution, to be avoided completely',<sup>2</sup> the Halbe plastic mini-busts take this mechanical production capacity to an extreme.

The objects reveal small clues about how they are made. I recall a fascination with the hole at the bottom of the base, the result, perhaps, of the removal of the sprue at the end of the process of pouring melted vinyl into a mould to form the bust. These holes were big enough to hint at an interior but too small to reveal it. Not fully trusting my memory, I purchased a ‘vintage’ Halbe bust of Johann Strauss from a vendor on the online marketplace, *Etsy*. The base proved the most intriguing, a place of visible flaws and remnants of the production process, including: rough edges along the opening of the hole, visible lines across the diameter, and tiny blobs of dried plastic that escaped or exceeded the mould’s capacity to hold liquid. Although listed as a ‘vintage’ plastic bust, the materials more closely resemble the dull, greyish off-white tones of 3-D printing materials today than the warm cream tones I recall from the 1970s. After reading the *The Illustrated Guide to Victorian Parian China*, in which the authors carefully delineate their system for valuing certain types of parian over others, I cannot help but wonder: how will future connoisseurship of these small, indestructible plastic figures be delineated?<sup>3</sup>

How parian was invented, by whom and which company, and the resulting impact on the colour tones or surface qualities of the resulting objects consume five of the eight chapters in *The Illustrated Guide to Victorian Parian China*. Marrying manufacturing history with clear delineation of what the authors value in terms of aesthetic qualities, the *Guide* reveals how parian reifies tensions between artwork and mass production, luxurious materials and the search for easier, faster, and less expensive ways of producing objects. A guide for collectors, and one written with nearly 100 years of hindsight, the publication is a handbook for the antique market treasure hunter stalking parian within the UK. Parian, however, appears to have reached the farthest edges of Britain’s former colonies. *The Illustrated Guide* contains a reproduction of an advertisement for parian groups produced by Turner & Wood, a company once based in Stoke-on-Trent (operational c.1880-88).<sup>4</sup> The first line of the advertisement, just above the name of the company states: ‘SILVER MEDAL AND FIRST CLASS CERTIFICATE AWARDED, CALCUTTA, 1884.’<sup>5</sup> While the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 brought multiple approaches to parian into public view and garnered support from Queen Victoria, the Calcutta Exhibition of 1883-84 reveals an opportunity to study how parian may have circulated within the British Empire.

Originated by promoter Jules Joubert, the endeavour is described in ‘The Official Report of the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883-84, Compiled Under the Orders of the Executive Committee’, as the first attempt made in India to hold an exhibition of an international character and with the specific intention of expanding industrial development and international commercial connections with India.<sup>6</sup> Joubert, who was originally from France and naturalised in New South Wales, Australia, had previously promoted the International Exhibition in New Zealand in 1882. Amongst hundreds of companies and products, Turner & Wood is the only company to list parian as a product.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, not only was this expansive international project initiated by British subjects from within Britain’s former colonies, but a British company used an award from an exhibition in India to strengthen its cachet ‘back home’. What parian remained in India, from the exhibition or other sources? Which Maharajahs commissioned parian portraits? How popular was the fragile parian amongst the British military living in India, Africa or New Zealand? While there is clear documentation and understanding of the popularity of parian with regards to the Art Unions of the Victorian Era, the Calcutta Exhibition provides an opportunity to explore further the presence and impact of parian. Formed in 1836, the Art Union movement’s objective was ‘the improvement of public taste and to advance civilisation by the improvement of art.’<sup>8</sup> To execute this goal, lottery winners were able to use their awards to purchase artwork from exhibitions following viewings; parian works constituted a popular component of such endeavours after 1845. The decision to produce commissioned parian prizes in a ‘convenient size’ or, more specifically on a domestic scale, ensured that works in keeping with specific Victorian artistic and cultural values were far more accessible to broader segments of the population, thereby enabling the inculcation of such values at home as much as within British colonial communities.<sup>9</sup> Were smaller-scale works transported as people moved from place to place? How did parian contribute visually to how communities imagined and reified national identity in the Victorian Era?<sup>10</sup>

Although produced intentionally for the home, parian objects nevertheless resided in public and visible spaces of display for the consumption and judgment of visitors. Home, however, is where efforts at inculcating communities often fail, particularly in colonial

and diasporic spaces. Little in such spaces and contexts can be neatly compartmentalised. In fact, there were two kinds of figurative objects in our Cincinnati, Ohio home in the 1970s. While the composers’ busts inhabited the piano, two delicately carved ivory *murtis*, each only 2¾ inches-tall were ensconced in the kitchen altar. Purchased in Mysore in 1961, they are two of only a few things that my father brought with him when he moved to the US for graduate school the following year. The ivory tones of these tiny yet highly-detailed sculptures of the Hindu goddess Saraswati and the god Vishnu, spoke of luxury and exquisite materials in a way that the creamy-coloured parian- and marble-inspired plastic busts did not. The ivory remains in my parents’ home to this day; the plastic busts disappeared long ago. If ‘parian was a discovery which essentially belonged to Britain’, as Charles and Dorrie Shinn argue, then what remains to be understood is how that British identity is constituted not only in the physical forms created in parian, but by what is absent as much as what is present.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles and Dorrie Shinn, *The Illustrated Guide to Victorian Parian China* (London: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd, 1971), p. 24.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 24.  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-24. ‘We have in our collection a bust of Beethoven that certainly shows the blue-ish green cast remarked upon by Leon Arnous, and in our opinion this greenish tinge is not as attractive as the usual beautiful tone of Parian. Whether the cause of the definite off-colour is due to some carelessness during one of the periods of firing or due to some detail in the original mixing of the slip, we are not in a position to say. This bust of Beethoven is not marked, apart from having the number 332 impressed on the back and the name of the composer impressed on the front, and we have not been able to discover the name of the firm which made it. It might even be of Continental manufacture.’  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 111.  
<sup>5</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>6</sup> M. H. Jackson, *The Official Report of the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883-84, Compiled Under the Orders of the Executive Committee*, p. xxxix, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=OmIOAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR26>, accessed 1 February 2018.  
<sup>7</sup> Shinn 1971, pp. 301, 422.  
<sup>8</sup> Dennis Barker, *Shire Album 142: Parian Ware* (Aylesbury, Bucks: Shire Publications Ltd, 1985), p. 11.  
<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 11.  
<sup>10</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).  
<sup>11</sup> Shinn 1971, p. 3.























































*Flux: Parian Unpacked* is a series of installations by artist and curator Matt Smith, on display at The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, between 6 March and 1 July 2018. The installations incorporate historic 19th-century parian from the G.D.V. Glynn collection of parian ware, accepted by H.M. Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the Glynn estate and allocated to the Fitzwilliam in 2016, as well as new works in black and white parian, made by Matt Smith in response to the Museum's permanent collections.

These installations question why museums have historically celebrated the lives of some people and not others, as well as whether we still wish to celebrate these once-feted individuals today, especially in relation to Britain's colonial past. Matt Smith uses the unstable medium of parian to show that museum collections and history are always in flux.

# The Fitzwilliam Museum

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CAMBRIDGE

