

RA

Press Release

Royal Academy of Arts

Entangled Pasts 1768–now

Art, Colonialism and Change

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Main Galleries

3 February - 28 April 2024

Supported by



In February 2024, the Royal Academy of Arts will present *Entangled Pasts, 1768–now: Art, Colonialism and Change*, an ambitious exhibition bringing together over 100 major contemporary and historic artworks as part of a conversation about art and its role in shaping narratives around empire, enslavement, resistance, abolition and colonialism. Spanning over 250 years, from the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768 to the present and informed by the RA's ongoing research into its links with colonialism, the exhibition will engage over 50 artists connected to the institution to explore the relationship between art and our understanding of the past.

An exceptional variety of art will be brought together including important international and UK loans as well as works from the RA's collection and archive, ranging from large-scale painting, sculpture, immersive installation and film to intimate works on paper and poetry, presenting new contexts in which these pieces can be interpreted and understood. Artworks by leading contemporary artists including Frank Bowling RA, Sonia Boyce RA, Lubaina Himid RA, Isaac Julien RA, Hew Locke RA, Yinka Shonibare RA and Kara Walker Hon RA will be shown in dialogue with works by artists from the past, including Joshua Reynolds PRA, Thomas Gainsborough RA, John Singleton Copley RA and J.M.W. Turner RA – tracing connections across time and place to reflect on how art is entangled with colonial histories and revealing the international underpinnings of 'British' art.

The exhibition was programmed in 2021 in response to the urgent public debates about the relationship between artistic representation and imperial histories. These debates were prompted by the Black Lives Matter protests and the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol in 2020. Additionally, the RA's Summer Exhibition 2021, coordinated by Yinka Shonibare with the theme 'Reclaiming Magic', aimed to "transcend the Western canon which formed the foundations of the Royal Academy". Shonibare's strong curatorial statement inspired the RA to organise an exhibition that will look outwards, creating links with people and places around the globe, with a strong emphasis on British artists of the African, Caribbean and Indian diasporas, for whom an exploration of colonialism and its legacies has been fundamental.

Entangled Pasts will be presented across the RA's Main Galleries, organised into three thematic sections that intertwine narratives across time. *Sites of Power* will examine absence and presence in Grand Manner portraiture and history painting, reflecting on the decades surrounding the foundation of the RA, which saw both the height of Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and the emergence of the movement for abolition, as well as new networks of artistic patronage associated with the East India Company. *Beauty and Difference* will trace the proliferation of aesthetic norms via drawings, prints, poetry, sculpture and photography in works that embody the moral contradictions of the Victorian age, during which abolition became a fashionable theme for artists while Britain continued aggressive colonial expansion. *Crossing Waters* will take an international perspective on the widespread legacies of the Middle Passage, including its far-reaching ecological consequences, through immersive spaces that offer time to reflect on our common history, its ramifications, and parallel issues today.

Highlights will include historic portraits such as Joshua Reynolds' *Portrait of a Man*, probably Francis Barber, c.1770 (The Menil Collection, Houston) and Thomas Gainsborough's *Ignatius Sancho*, 1768 (The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), which will be shown alongside contemporary portraiture including Kerry James Marshall Hon RA's *Scipio Moorhead, Portrait of Himself*, 1776, 2007 (Private Collection) and Sonia Boyce's *Lay Back, Keep Quiet and Think of What Made Britain So Great*, 1986 (Arts Council Collection, London). Genre painting and sculpture including Johan Zoffany RA's *The Family of Sir William Young*, 1767- 69 (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) and Francis Harwood's *Bust of a Man*, 1758 (The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles) will convey the construction and upholding of racial hierarchies, while John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark*, 1778 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), an allegory of transatlantic politics, will be amongst work that demonstrates that empire was a crucial subject for artists and viewers. This contemporary history painting caused a sensation when a version of it was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1778 and has not been shown outside Boston since 1993.

Further highlights will include Hew Locke's major installation *Armada*, 2017-2019 (Tate, London), on display in London for the first time, consisting of a giant flotilla of model boats recalling different periods and places. Past works of Empire in India will be in conversation with works by contemporary artists of South Asian heritage including Shahzia Sikander, Mohini Chandra and the Singh Twins. The ocean as a site of mourning and collective memory will be evoked through significant painting and sculpture including Frank Bowling's *Middle Passage*, 1970 (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), Ellen Gallagher Hon RA's *Whale Falls*, 2017 (Private Collection) and Ei Anatsui Hon RA's *Akua's Surviving Children*, 1996 (October Gallery, London), as well as John Akomfrah RA's panoramic, three-screen film installation *Vertigo Sea*, 2015 (Private Collection). The exhibition will

culminate with sculptures on a human scale, including *I'd Rather Stand*, 2022, a work by recent RA Schools graduate Olu Ogunnaike and Lubaina Himid's *Naming the Money*, 2004 (International Slavery Museum, Liverpool), an expansive installation of life-size painted cut-out figures and an ode to human resilience, community and creativity.

Entangled Pasts will explore how deeply the effects of colonialism have permeated the RA and its history, while also looking forward, inviting viewers to consider how conversations around these legacies might unfold in the future. The exhibition, together with the catalogue, talks, events and online content, will be a forum for acknowledgment, reflection and debate, taking the next step towards necessary change.

Organisation

Exhibition organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London. The exhibition is curated by Dr Dorothy Price FBA, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art and Critical Race Art History, The Courtauld Institute of Art, together with Dr Cora Gilroy-Ware, Associate Professor in the History of Art, University of Oxford, Dr Esther Chadwick, Lecturer in Art History, The Courtauld Institute of Art, Sarah Lea, Curator, Royal Academy of Arts and Rose Thompson, Assistant Curator, Royal Academy of Arts, with regular workshops with the RA Library, Archive and Collections team. Alayo Akinkugbe, Founder of [@ABlackHistoryOfArt](#), is Curatorial Researcher for the exhibition, supported by a grant from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. The exhibition is designed by J A Projects, with graphic design by Unyimeabasi Udoh.

Accompanying Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication with texts by Dr Dorothy Price FBA, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art and Critical Race Art History, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, Dr Cora Gilroy-Ware, Associate Professor in the History of Art, University of Oxford, Dr Esther Chadwick, Lecturer in Art History, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, Sarah Lea, Curator, Royal Academy of Arts, Rose Thompson, Assistant Curator, Royal Academy of Arts and Alayo Akinkugbe, Founder, [@ABlackHistoryOfArt](#).

Collection Gallery Cabinet Display

Running concurrently to *Entangled Pasts*, twenty of Lubaina Himid's paper works for *Naming the Money*, 2004 (her [RA Diploma work](#)) will be on free display in the RA's Collection Gallery cabinet, from 9 December 2023 - 16 June 2024.

The RA Collections Decolonial Research

As part of ongoing work into reassessing the Royal Academy's history and Collections, the Collections team have been investigating the links between the RA and its colonial past. The first report on the research can be found [here](#).

In 2021, the Collections team commissioned a review of the terminology used in the Royal Academy's cataloguing. Since then, work has been progressing to address biases and to contextualise some language found in the RA's online collection records. More about the RA's Race Equity and Inclusion work can be found [here](#).

Dates and Opening Hours

Press view: Tuesday 30 January 2024, 10am-2pm
Dates: Saturday 3 February 2024 – Sunday 28 April 2024
10am – 6pm Tuesday to Sunday
10am – 9pm Friday

Admission

From £22; concessions available; under 16s go free (T&Cs apply); Friends of the RA go free.
25 & Under: 16 to 25 year olds can access a half-price ticket (T&Cs apply).

Tickets

Advance booking with pre-booked timed tickets is recommended for everyone, including Friends of the RA. Tickets can be booked in advance online (royalacademy.org.uk) or over the phone (0207 300 8090).

Images

Publicity images for *Entangled Pasts, 1768 – now: Art, Colonialism and Change*, can be downloaded via this [link](#). By downloading the images, you acknowledge and accept the terms and conditions. These images can only be reproduced to illustrate a review or criticism of a work or report as defined by section 30 (i) and (ii) of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Social Media

Join the discussion about the exhibition online at:

Facebook /royalacademy

Instagram @royalacademyarts

Threads @royalacademyarts

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#EntangledPasts

Image Captions

Installation view of the 'Navigation Charts' exhibition at Spike Island, Bristol, 2017, showing Lubaina Himid RA, *Naming the Money*, 2004. © Lubaina Himid.

Image courtesy the artist, Hollybush Gardens, London and National Museums, Liverpool. © Spike Island, Bristol. Photo: Stuart Whipps

Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA, *Portrait of a Man*, probably Francis Barber, c. 1770

Oil on canvas, 78.7 x 63.8 cm

The Menil Collection, Houston

Photo © Hickey-Robertson, Houston

About the Royal Academy of Arts

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The Royal Academy is an independent charity. It does not receive revenue funding from the government so is reliant upon the support of its visitors, donors, sponsors, patrons and loyal Friends.

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