

SAINSBURY CENTRE



Travel

DECOLONISATION ACTIVITY

Sainsbury Centre
2019–2021

DECOLONISATION ACTIVITY AT THE SAINSBURY CENTRE

The Sainsbury Centre is committed to doing more to increase access and to make its collections relevant to contemporary audiences from diverse back grounds in the region and beyond. The decolonisation of the gallery space, both digital and physical, is an evolving process and one that affects all areas of our activity. Decolonisation has come to embrace a whole host of issues for museums and the Sainsbury Centre acknowledges the need to reassess many areas of practice. Currently the Centre is addressing decolonisation through the following objectives:

- Devising public programmes that engage more inclusive audiences.
- Broadening the interpretation of the collections to encompass a range of voices, views and narratives.
- Revealing the colonial histories and provenance of objects with an emphasis on transparency.
- Diversifying the collection through acquisition.
- Developing an artist residency programme addressing decolonisation.

Over the last three years, the Centre has undertaken a considerable range of projects and activities that engage with decolonisation in various way. Decolonisation is long-term objective and requires sustained action, but we hope that the Centre's initiatives move discussion forward and open up space to think about how and with whom we engage, how we acquire and display objects and how we communicate.



Sethembile Msezane, photograph: Andy Crouch

**EXHIBITIONS
DISPLAYS AND
RESIDENCES**



EXHIBITIONS DISPLAYS AND RESIDENCES

Magdalene Odundo: The Journey of Things 3 August – 15 December 2019

Magdalene Odundo: The Journey of Things brought together more than 50 of Odundo's works with a large selection of objects chosen by her from across the globe and spanning 3000 years. The show revealed the rich and diverse range of objects and making traditions that have informed the development her work. The installation *Transition II*, formed of 1,001 individually suspended glass pieces, was shown in a new site-specific configuration.

Magdalene Odundo DBE is one of the world's most esteemed artists working in the field of ceramics. Born in Kenya in 1950, Odundo moved to the UK in 1971 to attend art school. After choosing ceramics as a preferred medium, she travelled to Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria to study their ceramic traditions. Her journeys around the globe have led Odundo to explore her own diasporic identity and the charged role that objects have played, and continue to play, in intercultural relationships today.

The exhibition design by Sir David Adjaye reflected the transnational themes of the show, with islands of plinths, allowing for juxtapositions of objects from across the world. The exhibition was developed by The Hepworth, Wakefield.



Magdalene Odundo: *The Journey of Things*, photograph Andy Crouch

Sonny Assu residency and display **(Un)named Maker** Summer 2019

Un(named) Maker was a display curated by leading Canadian Kwakwaka'wakw artist Sonny Assu. In the summer of 2019 Assu was artist-in-residence at the Sainsbury Centre, hosted by the research project 'Beyond Spectacle: Native North American presence in Britain'. Sonny's work utilises both pop art and traditional North West coast practices to interrogate cultural identity and western constructions of indigenous culture. Assu said: "The Sainsbury Centre, world renowned for its unique collection and 'homey' feel, has two kinds of artworks in its collection: works by named Western artists and unnamed works, by indigenous or non-European artists, which are marred by the spectre of colonial collection practices. Through the act of decolonising museum spaces, we can learn to recognise how these objects came to be here, and why they remain nameless and silent. Shifting the museum narrative away from the colonial mindset is a focal point within indigenous art discourses, and this conversation will continue to grow, challenging collections worldwide."

Following the success of the residency the Centre acquired *Dance As Though the Ancestors Are Watching* (2019) with the help of a grant from the Art Fund. The work relates and responds to the important, historic Chilkat Robe in the Collection. This project supported the Centre's mission of integrating historical and contemporary art to encourage greater accessibility and understanding.

Sethembile Msezane residency and display Summer 2021

Multidisciplinary South African artist Sethembile Msezane joins the Sainsbury Centre between March and June 2021, as artist-in-residence and UEA Global Talent Fellow.

Msezane is well known for her embodiment of Chapungu, the Great Zimbabwe bird, during the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town in 2015. Her artistic practice includes performance, photography, sculpture and film to explore ideas of spirituality, memory and African systems of knowledge. Taking as its starting point an ivory snuff spoon in the Sainsbury Centre collection, Msezane's project will connect historic objects in UK museum collections and the tobacco ban during South Africa's recent COVID lockdowns. During her fellowship, Msezane will explore the role of snuff and museum objects as ways of connecting with ancestors.

Msezane will develop an intervention towards the end of her residency. Developed with UEA host researcher, Chris Wingfield, Associate Professor in the Arts of Africa, this fellowship is the first to be hosted collaboratively between the Sainsbury Centre and the Sainsbury Research Unit.

DIGITAL INITIATIVES

Digital and website projects over the last 18 months encompassing a range of themes have included interviews and projects with leading cultural figures. Curator, cultural historian and broadcaster Gus Casely-Hayford, Director of V&A East and formerly, the Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., talked to Ghislaine Wood about the Sainsbury Centre and the changing nature of curatorial practice around the world. His interview explored the transformative philosophy of the Sainsbury Centre and issues of repatriation. Fashion designer Duro Olowu was interviewed by Tania Moore about his encounters with Odundo's work and the importance of travel and curiosity in finding inspiration. The New Perspectives podcast series saw writer and UEA academic Claire Hynes talk to

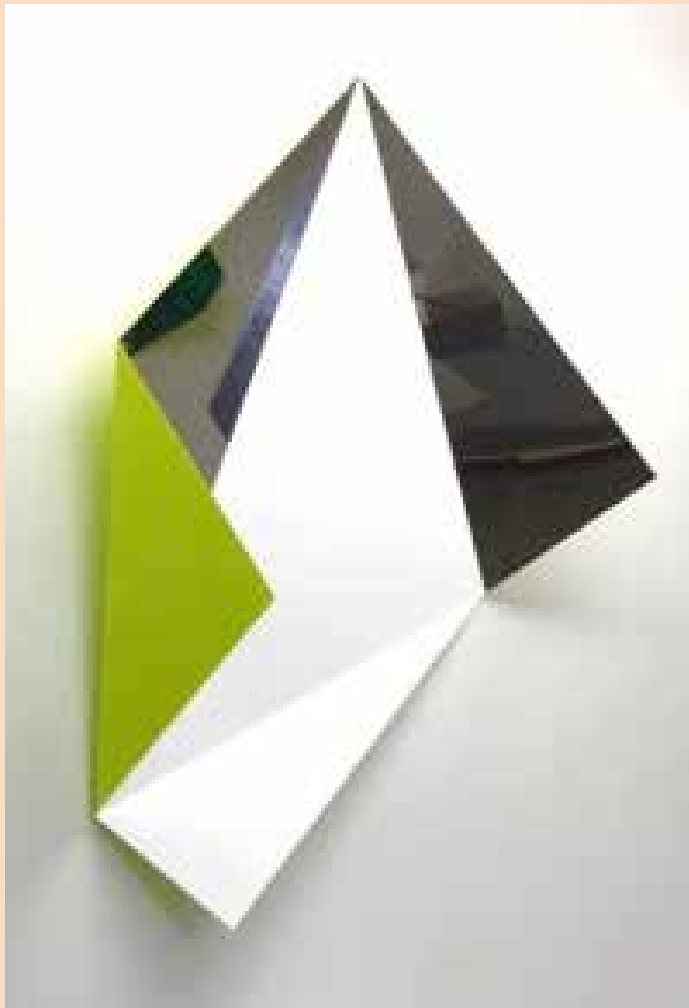
Nell Croose Myhill about the theme of mother and child and her response to a work in the collection, and Dr Martin Mahoney exploring the colonial roots of the Anthropocene through a pair of inuit snow goggles in our collection.

The Gatsby cataloguing project is a major new initiative to make information on the collection fully accessible online and to reveal object provenance information, providing transparency on the histories of acquisitions of objects in the collection. The Sainsbury Centre is also participating in the Digital Benin project, an international initiative to provide information on Benin objects in collections around the world.



ACQUISITIONS

The Centre has actively acquired several works over the last two years which aim to diversify the range of artists represented in the collection, create dialogues with historic works and highlight decolonising issues.



Rana Begum (b.1977, Bangladesh)

No. 684, LFold

2016

Paint on mirror finish stainless steel

Acquired 2019

Purchased with support from Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund; the Art Fund; and the Sainsbury Centre Founding Friends

No. 684 LFold was acquired after the Sainsbury Centre hosted Rana Begum's first museum exhibition in 2017. Begum blurs the boundaries between sculpture, painting and architecture, drawing inspiration from the urban landscape and the geometric patterns of Islamic art and architecture. *No. 684, LFold* was displayed in the East End Gallery in 2018 and in 2020 will be in the major exhibition *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951*.



Sonny Assu (b.1975, Canada)

Dance as Though the Ancestors are Watching

2019

Acrylic on panel

Acquired 2020

Purchased with support from the Art Fund.

Sonny Assu painted *Dance as Though the Ancestors are Watching* whilst on residency at the Sainsbury Centre as part of the research project *Beyond the Spectacle: Native North American Presence in Britain*. Assu combines Kwakwaka'wakwak and Pop Art styles. This painting takes the form of historic Chilkat Robes, one of which is in the collection at the Sainsbury Centre. The painting will be included in an exhibition on indigenous art from the Northwest Coast in 2023.



Mona Hatoum (b.1952, Lebanon)

Composition with Circles I

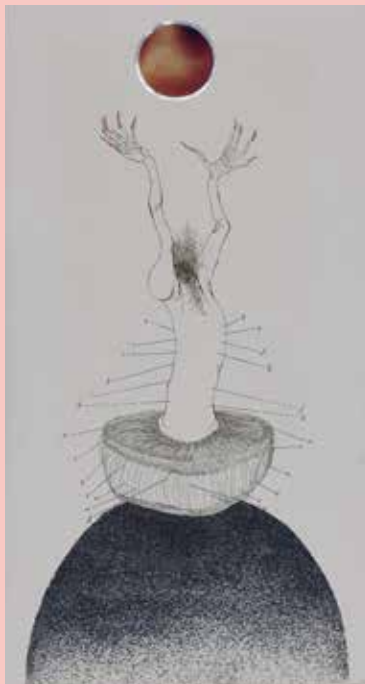
2018

Hair on handmade paper

Acquired 2020

Purchased with the New Collecting Award from the Art Fund

Composed of naturally formed circles of the artist's hair, this work builds on Hatoum's use of hair in her practice, beginning with her performance work from the 1980s. Her series of *Composition with Circles* and another related work, *Hair Mesh*, reference the grids and geometry of twentieth-century minimalism but subvert this through their bodily materiality.



Wangechi Mutu (b.1972, Kenya)
The Original Nine Daughters
2012
Suite of nine etchings with aquatint, linocut and collage
Edition 28 of 30
Acquired 2020
Purchased with the New Collecting Award from the Art Fund

The Original Nine Daughters refers to the original nine clans of Kenya. Mutu describes this creation myth as 'our Adam and Eve' and has here imagined the figures from which the clans descend. Mutu is based in New York and works across collage, film, sculpture and installation. Her work is often concerned with the violence and misrepresentation placed upon black women.



Somaya Critchlow (b.1993, London)
Untitled
2019
Oil on linen
Acquired 2021
Donated by the Green Family Art Foundation courtesy of Adam Green Art Advisory, and a private patron.

British painter Somaya Critchlow describes her work as an 'ode to paint', following the lineage of European figurative painting. She adopts a classical painterly style and approach to composition but her figures reference contemporary culture such as the stars of rap music and reality television. Although her work is in numerous museums in the US, this is the first work by Critchlow acquired by a UK museum.

Malangatana Valente Ngwenya is a painter and poet known as Malangatana. His work has often been associated with the socio-political concerns of Mozambique and its struggle for independence and civil war. He depicts the tragic consequences of war – violence, hunger and death. This drawing is representative of Malangatana's style, which combines the influence of such European modernist artists as Picasso and the traditional art of Mozambique.

PUBLICATION

Site Writing, Volume 1
Co-edited by Sarah Lowndes and Nell Croose Myhill and published by the Sainsbury Centre, 2020

This publication brings together extracts of texts by authors such as Ali Smith, Gaston Bachelard and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, alongside new pieces of writing by eight Site Writing participants to form new interpretations of the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection from a contemporary perspective.

LEARNING RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

Schools resources on our African Masks and the Benin Head have been updated to provide richer cultural context on the objects, their originating culture, and the colonial histories of their provenance and how they came to be in the collection. New resources are currently being co-developed with local schools on the topics of slavery, and the history and present-day impact of climate change on arctic peoples.

Sessions on Decolonising the Museum have been held with Masters' students in Museum Studies and in History, using power mapping to reveal hidden histories and tacit colonial practices in museum display and interpretation. A current project with Creative Writing students, invites students to use innovative digital approaches to respond to our collection using their own voice and considering those whose voices are/have been hidden or repressed in the stories we tell in the museum.

FORTHCOMING PROJECTS

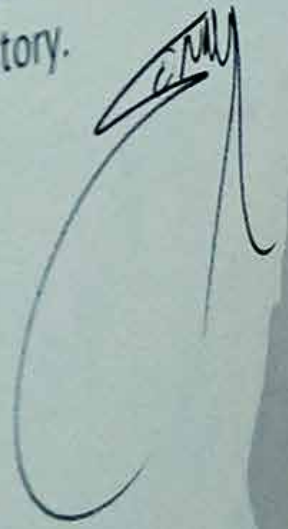
2022 will see a range of new projects but significantly the major exhibition Visions of Ancient Egypt which will explore the enduring influence of ancient Egypt, through the lens of decolonisation and alternate histories. The exhibition will include the work of a number of contemporary artists including Fred Wilson, Chris Ofili and Lorraine O'Grady.

The Learning team have been working with the BAMEEd East Network and are discussing a primary schools project on identity for 21/22.

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Sonny Assu, photograph: Andy Crouch