

Monumental Impact: How can public art create inclusive public spaces? Transcript

Mavreen Arhin 0:05

Welcome to *Monumental Impact*, a talk reflecting on the politics of remembrance and memorialization, co-produced by UP Projects and Autograph. This talk tonight takes place within the current exhibition, which is *The Island* by Mónica de Miranda. This exhibition also reflects on time and memory by presenting the land as a repository of time where ancestral and ecological memory are linked to colonial excavations that are continuing to unfold. The following exhibition will be Sasha Huber, *YOU NAME IT*. Sasha Huber explores how colonial histories are imprinted onto the landscape through naming and acts of remembrance, asking what action does it take to repair the inherited traumas of history. Huber's artworks present a vision of how we can tenderly and with care refute the damage already inflicted by history and challenge the terms by which we remember. The artist questions who and what we memorialise, and more importantly, how we do so. Please do come and see the exhibition, which is on until the 25th March. This talk tonight segways beautifully between the two exhibitions. Just to give a brief intro on this talk, which draws on themes of identity representation and the legitimacy of monuments. We'll explore a number of public art projects recently commissioned in London including, recent tributes to the Windrush Generation and their descendants, and snowball from there. So, I'd like to hand over to Emma Underhill, who is the Founder and Director of UP Projects to talk about these commissions and the related public programmes that are in motion - there we go!

Emma Underhill 2:07

Thank you. Thanks, Mavreen. Thank you all for coming and making the effort today. I think it's been quite a challenging day, sort of politically, weather and everything so thank you so much for coming. It feels a little bit overkill to be having all these microphones, but we are actually recording this as well. So, for the purposes of recording, we're also going to give a visual description of ourselves. So, I'm a white woman. I'm about five foot six, I'm wearing a green dress I have blonde hair and glasses, my pronouns are she/her. So, I guess firstly, I just wanted to introduce UP for those of you of you that don't know us, I think quite a few of you do. But we are a public art commissioning organisation. And this year we are celebrating our 20th anniversary, which is very exciting. And we're programming a number of events through the autumn under the umbrella *Now We Are 20* and this is one of those events. And over the past 20 years, we have been commissioning various public commissions all over the country in physical space. But we also run a

programme of digital commissions which is looking at the digital realm as a site for public art. And we also run a learning and development programme called *Constellations*, which is for artists, producers, curators who are interested in social practice. And that runs on an annual basis. So firstly, I guess I wanted to thank Mavreen and Mark Sealey and everyone at Autograph for working with us on this event. It's really exciting to be here and in this beautiful exhibition. And UP Projects, we for the last sort of two or three years, I've been thinking a lot about monuments and memorials and the role that they can play, or they could play in relation to public spaces and the communities that exist in those spaces. And we are really proud of the role that we played in the sort of commissioning process of The National Windrush Monument which unveiled at Waterloo Station earlier this year. So commissioned by Basil Watson, and our role as sort of public art consultants, we offer consultancy as well as commission ourselves, on that project was to sort of guide the artist selection process and also to guide the public engagement process. And we work very closely with the Government Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and also the Windrush Commemoration Committee to guide that process. And it was a very important commission, contributing to better representation of diversity in the public realm, and also very important to many members of the British Caribbean community. And that came through very, very strongly through that public engagement process. However, I think it's really important that we acknowledge that the parameters and the expectations, I guess, that was set by the commissioners, meant that the commission had certain limitations. And then it might not actually be all able to be as progressive, as discursive as it perhaps could have been. And so for that reason, and you know, as a public art commissioning organisation, we wanted to also commission almost like a counterpoint to *The National Windrush Monument*. And so we invited Sonia E Barrett to develop *Rush Me* as part of our digital commissions programme. And we invited her to sort of more fully explore narratives around migration, identity, belonging, hybridity, and sort of look at recontextualizing Windrush, both historic - historically and through a sort of contemporary lens. We're also very aware of the Hackney Windrush commissions by Veronica Ryan and Thomas J Price that also launched earlier this year. So that really is the backdrop for today's discussion and we wanted to put together this talk, to continue the conversation around monuments and memorials, and explore whether such commissions need to be monumental in scale and materiality to have impact or indeed whether they could take an alternative approach, can foster - that would foster a more inclusive approach; inclusivity that better serves the diversity and hybridity of the people that populate these public spaces. So, I'm really pleased that the curator, producer, writer, mentor Melanie Abrahams is able to moderate today's discussion. I think you've all received by bios of the speakers, but Melanie has collaborated with many amazing artists and writers and different organisations throughout her career. And she was also the Curator and Caribbean Community Engagement Consultant on The National Windrush Monument. And it was fantastic

to be able to work with Melanie on that project. So, I will now hand over to Melanie to introduce everyone else, and I hope you enjoy the discussion.

[claps] 7:17

Melanie Abrahams 7:19

Thank you, it's a great pleasure to be here. What we'd like to do, in addition to there being presentations, is to really encourage you to be part of this conversation for us to converse together, for us to explore these themes, in particular, in terms of what it means to us, within quite challenging times. And also, as definitions are changing of public art of the way that we as consumers, as citizens, as members of the public, should have access to monuments and public art as well. So, we're really encouraging for us to be frank and honest and conversational this evening. So please think about what questions you might want to ask whilst the presentations are on. So, it's a real pleasure to be here this evening partly because that, you know, I'm in the company, good company of Sonia E Barrett and Errol Francis. Also, because I feel that this question is a jumping off point. This idea of there have been a number of public art projects recently commissioned in London, which do pay tribute to Windrush, to the Windrush Generation and their descendants, I say this also being aware that Windrush and the aspect of talking about the Windrush Generation is complex and challenging, and at times problematic as well, because obviously, the Windrush was a particular moment in history. But if we look at the context of Caribbean people, and British Caribbean people, of which I'm a part of that, there were many ships and boats, there were many ways in which Caribbean people made their way here in England and have made their home and have chosen to live and engage with Britain. So, we should be aware of that, that there's perhaps a political aspect to Windrush which needs examination as well. So, we're looking at the role of monuments, whether they are still important, in what ways are they important to us? How has the nature of them changed? And I say that kind of being really aware, and also being really interested in Sonia E Barrett and her digital work, and the playfulness and the exploration within which she is challenging notions of what public art can be. And I do encourage you, if you haven't already seen *Rush Me* to, yeah, please have a look online. So, as we move into these different spaces, which include digital spaces, how is public art being redefined and being redefined for us? And by us, I mean, the hybrid diverse, complex communities and peoples within Britain as it ever changes? Also, in what ways can it be serious yet playful? Can it be open and expansive? Can it challenge the tropes of monuments? And I say that, in that we're all probably aware that monuments, as well as being a reminder of people and events. They're also a painful reminder of racism, sexism, segregation, various types of othering, various types of a lack of focus on intersectionality. And the many ways in which many of us have multiple identities. Also, I say this in terms of as someone who loves to be creative, and I love creating, I will often move towards

an approach which is about having agency and sometimes this aspect of monuments and monumentalism is the antithesis to myself as an individual being able to have agency. I'm not saying it's like that all the time, but I'm saying at times, because of the nature of monuments and sometimes the narrow focus, it can perhaps be more attuned towards institutional practice which is untrammelled, which is immovable, and which is - which lacks a porousness. Whereas I tend to more move towards hybridity, multifarious, diversity and choice. So, the challenge is, how might we engage with monuments but also how might we also re-identify monuments? There may well be monuments in plain sight that we do not recognise. There may be monumental aspects to our experiences, which we should be paying more attention to, alongside the monuments that were meant to be revering as well. So, what I'd like to do is to invite the first speaker, Errol Francis, and just to give a recap, because I'm sure you received bios, I just like to say he's the AD and the CEO of Culture&. He studied photography and fine art at Central Saint Martins and his doctoral research was at Slade School of Fine Art University College. And it focused on post-colonial artistic responses to museums. He's also been heavily working within and also influencing the practice of mental health and wellbeing throughout his work. And that's included him having a role as the head of the Arts Mental Health Foundation, and also directing the Anxiety Arts Festival in 2014. And he's also been researching but also supporting areas of expansiveness with regards to dementia, and the promotion of social interaction and public health through the arts. So please give a warm welcome to Errol Francis.

Dr Errol Francis 13:04

Thanks very much, Melanie. That's really kind. Okay and good. Welcome, and good evening to everybody. It's great honour to be asked to talk about this. It started with a conversation with Emma, actually, sort of a grumpy email that I wrote about public art projects and so that's how I ended up being on this panel. But it was an interesting challenge to respond to the brief itself. And I've sort of put this title of the brief as it were of the event, *Monumental Impact: How can public art create inclusive public spaces?* because I detected within that sentence or phrase, a number of terms that I see as kind of somewhat antagonistic towards each other. And that's why I've put them in bold, which is the idea of monumental, the idea of public art and then inclusiveness and public spaces. There's a lot of things going on there that I wanted to try and tackle in this presentation. And so I'm going to sort of look at them in three parts, which is to look at public space, consider monumentality and inclusivity. I've started with this picture actually, of an artwork that was in Hyde Park in 2018. It was, it was commissioned by the serpentine galleries. And the artist Christo and Jeanne-Claude, most well known for their wrapping of monumental structures like the Brandenburg Gates in Berlin. And this is unusual in a way in their practice in that a three-dimensional object which they created in their own right. And it basically considered to consist sort of 7500 oil barrels strapped together and attached to a pontoon that was anchored to the bed,

the lakebed of The Serpentine in Hyde Park. And I thought I'd begin with that because it raised all of the questions, in fact, that this talk is concerned about - what is monumental in our contemporary world? Or what is a monument and what is its meaning? And the place where it is in high worry where it was in Hyde Park. It was a temporary structure and so I think it asked this question about temporality, and whether monuments need to be always with us. And the other thing is, what does it mean? And Christo declined to give a meaning for this structure. It's a huge thing. I mean, 7500 of these oil barrels, a lot of people suggested that it was about some comments about oil or fossil fuels, but it's just a big thing. And the name "Mastaba" is an ancient structure from Mesopotamia, which is to do with tombs, and there's another meaning which it could be a stool that you sit on. But I think this idea of abstraction, something that is really visually arresting in a space that we have access to, and which ask the question, actually, about what, what is public space? So that kind of helps to lead on to the first question that I was asking myself really, is whether or not a public space truly exists. I was wondering whether does a public space mean that it's a, it's a private space to which the public has access like a shopping centre, or indeed, Hyde Park itself is supposed to be a public space, but in fact, it's a highly regulated space, it's a Royal Park. So, in fact, it has, there are certain constraints about what you can do there, basically. So, the idea of public space to me has a connection with rights, legal rights, in fact about what you can do there who can go there. And I would say that there probably no spaces that are outside the control of the state, and even those within our private, you know, our private abode. So I would find it probably better to speak of the idea of public realm, which Emma did use that phrase, because the word realm signifies an element of control, if you notice, when Prince Charles was made King, one of the phrases used was that the realms, he referred, they refer to the "United Kingdom" and the "realms". And I think that really gives an idea of spatial political truck control over a territory, or a space. So, in fact, I think the idea of public realm, to me is a bit more accurate. I'm not sure whether public art itself can create public space, but it can exist within such spaces, and sometimes redefine those spaces. And it's because of this antagonism between control and leadership, control and ownership. That I think we get this dichotomy between what can exist within the space, and who does the space belong to? And oh, sorry, can we go to the next slide? Yep, so this particular place in Hackney, to me really inaugurate some of these ideas. It's Gillett Square in Hackney. It's a former car park that the council tried to redevelop in roundabout 2008. And they got this really trendy landscape architects called J & L Gibbons to design this place. And the phrase used by the architects was that Gillette's career was going to be an example of localism, which they defined as a space which doesn't/haven't got a predefined purpose. And it could form its own ways of existing, if you like. And it all started off as you see the pictures as rather than, you know, party, good time, space of sort of restaurants and music spaces around there. And I went there recently, this a couple of months ago, and I was just really, really shocked at what the place looked like. This was an

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attempted and unregulated space. And when I started to read up about it was incredible the sorts of things that have gone on there, including sexual assault, rape, and even a fatal machine gun attack. And it made me think that this experiment in, you know, public - the public realm had actually faced and failed and that the, it did mean to have this connection with art, but it had failed. But there was one thing that I noticed that the next slide, please, that was just quite extraordinary. And it was this art piece, it's a wall of mirrors, that all these different convex mirrors that have been arranged in a grid pattern. They're all angled in different angles. And this creates this quite, I thought, quite extraordinary mosaic. The interesting thing is, nobody knows who made this artwork, I've tried to find out, nobody knows it. So, it was an intervention there and I think this if there is a thing, if we're talking about inclusivity, and public access, or public access into the public realm, this particular intervention, I've found really interesting because it hasn't been curated. It just exists there. And you may not like it, I thought it was quite an interesting visual intervention into the - into the space and ask this question about to whom does the space belong and who can actually, as it were instal or curate artworks into the space? Contrast with the next one, please, which is this is Kings Cross. This is the area behind Kings Cross Station that has been redeveloped and is now the site of companies like Google and Central Saint Martins is there. It's been developed by a developer called Argent. And it's the opposite to Gillette Square in the sense that it's highly regulated and designed and organised. And public art is an integral part of the strategy of the developers to attract people, if you like, to the space and this particular piece by Amalia Pica is called Semaphores. And it's a play on the type of signalling that railway is used to use to send messages. It's used in the military as well. She's an Argentinian artist, and these, it was a very in terms of inclusivity, or I don't think the community had any say in putting these works there, because it's the developers that were involved in it. But this particular artwork does attempt to engage people in it and participate in it. So, you can actually send messages to people, there's a part of the installation where you could send messages and the structures move. And it's a kind of play - playful idea. And I think that it does raise the question about what/how art is being used by developers and real estate people as a kind of regeneration device, if you like. And it is kind of, it's kind of hard to compare it in a way to the Gillette Square experiment, because in a way, you want to have something that is actually much more bottom up instead of developers. But actually, the interesting thing about being in this particular space, there's very little risk of any of the things happening, that I've just said that happened in Gillette Square. So, this idea that actually regulated, highly regulated public spaces are places where you can engage with art in a, in a way that is safe or not threatening in other ways. So, it just, to me sort of a really contrast between what goes on in the place like Gillette Square and a highly regulated place, and how you can experience something that is said to be public. That's what those do for me. But I wanted to move on to monumentality, and I felt that it's especially since 2020,

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monumentality, and the Black Lives Matter movement, it's been a real shockwave really in terms of public artworks and public monuments in particular, and the questioning of the idea of the representational type of historic public monuments; the idea of their permanence. So, you know, in comparison to that Christo installation, that what I think happened in especially in 2020, was this challenging of the idea that something statues that have been put up in the 19th century should be relevant now. And that dead white men on pedestals - why should we still be celebrating these people? And that there have been demands for alternative public statuary and that also the recognition that these types of monumental sculptures typically favourite white male subjects except Queen Victoria. If you go on the art UK website, Queen Victoria breaks the mould in terms of female representations in public statues, most public statues are male. So, they seek to be permanent within specific spaces, public and private. And they redefine them with meaning and they are often historically revisionist. So, the obviously this next slide please this example, I considered to be the making of an artwork even though it was described as an act of vandalism and the people who did this. This is Colston - statue of Colston in Bristol, torn down in the summer of 2020 and thrown into Bristol Harbour. I found this a performative intervention by the public into this, this monument, and that actually it was productive rather than destructive. So, what actually happened after he was tossed into Bristol Harbour was that he was fished out again the following month and taken to next slide, please - Mshed Museum in Bristol, and it is an extraordinary I thought procedure of conservation, which is that the graffiti on Colston was stabilised by the conservatives. And he's now displayed in this supine position as a commentary on somebody who was involved in the slave trade. And this reason why the statute was taken down was because of events around George Floyd, the killing of George Floyd. But I actually find this new display of Colston to be a productive transformation in the sense that there were all these conversations for about 10 years with the City Council about this statue, and the public took it into their own hands to take it down. And we now have this new representation, which I think is redolent with meaning about this man, who was a member of the Royal African Company and involved in the slave trade. So next one, please. So, in the summer of 2020, so this was in 2019 actually, or was it actually it was before just slightly before this, the artist, Kara Walker, the African American artist, apparently was in a taxi on her way to the airport when she drove past this monument. This is the Victoria Memorial outside Buckingham Palace. It was designed by Aston Webb, and it was put up in 1911. So, it was 10 years after the Queen dies. And for me, and I think for Kara Walker as well. It is one of the most vulgar and ostentatious imperial monuments in London, and Kara Walker decided to make her work about this - a response to this statue. And what was amazing about it is that the display - Kara Walker's display went up in 2019, we had the pandemic, the Tate - at Tate, it, the show was suspended and then reopened in 2020, which couldn't be more perfect. Next, Next slide, please. So, this is the work of Fons Americanus, which I found probably one of the most moving public

artworks - it's in the Tate, it's in the turbine Hall. But I consider that to be a public space in the definition that I've given in the sense that we're all have access to the Tate. But she's responding to a public monument. And this this piece, the name Fons Americanus, so "Fons" is the Latin word for fountain. But the wordplay on it "Fon" is also a name for the ben - the people from Benin in Nigeria. So, it's an amazing wordplay, but it's a response to the Victoria Memorial. And instead of all the celebratory imperial imagery of the Victoria Memorial, we have these references to basically the middle passage of the slave trade. And there are references to paintings as well like J. M. W.'s painting - the J. M. W. Turner's painting, The Slave Ship, which shows slaves being thrown from a ship into the sea, and she shows the people being pursued by sharks in the fountain. So, it's a very dystopian idea of a fountain topped off by this female figure whose breasts are expressing this water. I found it one of the most powerful commentary is really about public monuments and how we commemorate an historical period. The thing that I found most moving about this piece is that it doesn't exist anymore. It was destroyed. It was meant to be, you know, it was cut up and recycled. And I found that, in itself, a really amazing commentary on the idea of permanence and monumentality that this extraordinary, huge piece that filled The Turbine Hall actually only exists now as a photograph. Oh right, so the next so the next slide, I wanted to contrast with in terms of scale, and monumentality is this piece, this really, really famous piece, The Angel of the North by Anthony Gormley, it was 1998. It was a millennium project, but it's said to be the most viewed public art piece in Britain. I've not you can make other comparisons; the figure is 33 million spectators a year. The reason is because it's by the A1 motorway, and you can see it from the train, the East Coast train going up to Scotland. So, in terms of in terms of monumentality, and permanence, I think it raises a lot of questions about access, and it does access me and the number of people that see it. It was really, really controversial when it was first proposed. A lot of people didn't want it. But it's now considered to be one of the most popular artworks. I've got to hurry up because I'm running out of time. This was another really, really interesting project which raised these questions about permanence. The Duke of Cumberland, it's an equestrian statue that used to be in Cavendish Square in London, the Duke of Cumberland was another controversial figure, he was involved in the Battle of Culloden, the putting down of the Jacobite Rebellion in 1746. The statue used to be there in Cavendish square. It was taken down in the late 19th century to be renovated. And it was never put back. And I, this particular piece by Meekyoung Shin, who's a Korean artist, she recreated the statue out of soap. And it gradually disintegrated over a period of about a year and it just became this kind of skeleton. And again, I thought it really was a really interesting commentary on monumentality, and permanence, and also a reinterpretation of the historical period. I've got to hurry up. I haven't got time to, to see - to say everything. I'll show you everything. I just wanted to share this a piece. This is Henry Moore. You know, his - Henry Moore reclining figures. They're really famous. But I discovered

this piece on I didn't know this until recently, it was on a council estate in South London. And it really represents this kind of high modernist period where council estates, architects of council estates, wanted to make public art available to the community. And it's one of London's interesting secrets that this thing is there in the middle of this estate. Really, it seems to be well loved, and certainly well looked after. And yeah, raises questions about inclusivity. This is in a truly public realm. It's where people live, and you get this great artwork, what does that raise and it's something that hardly happens. Now. I'll just end by sort of mentioning this piece - this this was an installation that I made in Brixton, in an exhibition that I did in 2015. And it was a temporary thing that we put up in electric Lane in Brixton. This photograph by Rotimi Fani-Kayode is from this collection, Autograph Collection. And extraordinarily it's, it was still up two years ago in electric lane. And it was an unintended public art installation of a photograph that is impermanent. But I actually recently saw that it's on a trail of public art. Street art - that's it - in Brixton. So, another intervention that I wanted to just enter nearly this is the penultimate one. This is the Duke of Wellington statute in Glasgow. And this extraordinary I think, this extraordinary intervention, is that these traffic cones that have been put on his head, which I think really it does a bit like the equestrian statue that I showed you that it really questions. Duke of Wellington, why should we be celebrating this guy? And these traffic cones were put on his head. The city council tried to stop them for and being there, there was a huge public outcry. And it's now permanent. The City Council has accepted this kind of alteration of this equestrian statue. And finally, I just wanted to mention that at Culture& we are involved in reinterpretation works of these types of monuments. And currently we are - we have worked with the National Museum of Wales on the reinterpretation of painting. But currently, we're working with the City of London, The Guildhall on this statue on the right of William Beckford, who was a slave owner, he actually owned plantations where my family is from in Jamaica. So, I've felt very conflicted about this project, actually, but we are working on an interpretation of this statute because it was originally going to be taken down, but due to the government's retain unexplained laws, it can't come down. And we're working on an artistic response to this statue. So that's my overview of - sorry, can I just end on the last one on public monuments. I just wanted to end on referencing Thomas J Price who's a great sculptor, and I think raises all of the questions that I've been talking about who do you celebrate because the people that Thomas J Price has in his sculptures are not Dukes and military commanders. They're ordinary people. And I think it raises a really interesting question about monumentality, permanence, and accessibility.

[claps] 36:40

Melanie Abrahams 36:46

Thank you. Thank you, Errol, for a rich selection, and also some provocative questions, which I hope we can explore after this. It's now my pleasure to introduce Sonia E Barrett, who performs composites of plants, animals, elements and people to create interventions that present the objectification and commodification. Also, I think it's important for us to consider that she also thinks about and explores how to change perceptions of phenomena in nature that are a given, which very much relates to this conversation about monuments. Underpinning much of her work and projects as a challenge to dominance and normative Western European values, also unpacking the boundaries between the determined and the determining, with a focus on race, gender, and other aspects. So please give a very warm welcome to Sonia E Barrett.

[claps] 37:36

Sonia E Barrett 37:40

Hello, thank you for the introduction. Thank you for that presentation. And thank you all for being here. Really appreciate it. So, in terms of art, I think it really matters, what it is, where it is, and which publics can access it. So, on my first slide, I've got a picture of a Benin bronze. And I think that that is really important. And then from a Benin bronze we can see. Okay, this is a picture of The Queen Mother of Benin, so it really matters, who owns who owns a piece, where it is and how accessible it is. And I always talk about public - "public-s" because of all different people I think are important. I'd say this is what I where I start with public art. But at the same time, if we can move to the next slide, we intuitively know what is public art and what is private art. When Michael McMillan put the West Indian living room in a publicly accessible space, a really private landscape that was actually heavily controlled by members of the Black communities that you could come in, became a public artwork. So, in this case, who own the artwork then, or whether it's shared on a public or private land becomes less relevant. The move from the private to the public becomes the most important thing. In a very important sense. This artwork now belongs to all of us. That's because maybe the next slide. Public art is art in the public, and public art speaks. In an important sense, this work belongs to all of us now, because art lives also in the imaginary and is not only possessed through capitalism. So not only capitalistic possession of a work is important, but also to possess it in your imagination is important. And although we don't own the living room, we all have it in a sense in a very real sense. So, I think really public art is simply art that's in the public, and sculpture speak or public art speaks. So, this, this brings me to the next most important thing for me, the most important thing is what can be said in public? To whom? Where? How? How many times? And at what price? These are the things that public art and controversies with public art seem to boil down to again and again. Who can be - what can be said in public? To whom? Where? How many times at one price? At what price? Okay,

so I've been given an opportunity to say something in public. And what kind of opportunities do I have? If we can go to the next stop. So, Audre Lourde says, *visa vie* "we have the oppression, oppression, your silence will not save you". But in terms of public sculptures of black people, or black communities, do we sometimes help think that speaking of our service will somehow serve us - save us? So, if we talk about our service, will it save us from a type of repression? And I think speaking of our safe service will not save us. But reflecting on it might. Now, Spivak asks *Can the Subaltern Speak?* And not so long ago, it was not even clear, that black people could speak. So, members of my family who have stood at Waterloo, and have turned away from the hands of children, who were social that they were looking at a monkey that they were feeling for the tail, once it becomes clear, that we can speak the question becomes more relevant. What can be said in public to whom, where how many times and at what price? So, if you take to the next slide, in 1997, when the late Samuel King and Arthur Torrington started the yearly celebration of the Windrush Generation, they decided to speak about the Empire Windrush in public, but not just speak about it, they decided to speak about it in terms of celebration. This was a highly radical thing to say. It's really radical in 1997, to talk in celebratory terms about the arrival of black people in this country, on a boat - on that particular boat. And it makes me wonder, what is the equivalent radical thing to say, today? *Visa vie* is black citizenship. In Britain, what is that thing that could be said in public? So in my practice, I've really been dealing for many years with the unarticulated and the un-articulatable, things about being black, really I've been a bit unpacking using sculpture, kind of the sunken publicly forgotten horror of slavery as a kind of open, visible, physical Freudian slip in the multi-generational spaces of wealth in this country, and across Europe. So, if I have the opportunity to be commissioned to make art in a digital public space, I want to take the opportunity to be as radical as the one that Arthur Torrington took almost 35 years ago. So, if we move to the next slide, so I created this work, *Rush Me* to be to create a kind of expansive landscape that critically unpacks the call for help on the part of the British Government, rather than celebrating the value of the West Indians that answered that call in the 50s. It's really contextualised the relationships between the islands over centuries addressing some of the vast history outside of that relationship. It's a space that shares how the call for help is echoed over time, repeating and being answered in different ways by different black people through the centuries. But rather than seeing the digital space as somehow neutral and a given, the work points or some of the digital conventions that correlate in interesting ways with being black in Britain. The digital space really struggles with understanding if we are robots or not, maybe the next slide. So, I thought this has really interesting relationship with experience of being black as it - in Britain. So, there's - so I rewrote the "Windrush" and "Rush Me". It's a comment on how we've been moved again and again. So, from Windrush to Rush Me and it's written in the style of CAPTCHA, which was, which is the way that the computer decides whether you are human or not, and I think that there's a

correlation between the black experience and the digital experience. And that there's this confusion as to whether you are human or not. I really enjoyed the reCAPTCHA idea. And the cyclical sign that's in the reCAPTCHA suggests that we might keep being involved in things that maybe don't understand whether we're human or not. So, I just want to maybe just go into the lobby area, I'm just going to show three quick kinds of outtakes of the space. So, in - I created three rooms, and there's going to be four. And it's there are starting points and members of the public can come into these rooms and suggest what could be expanded, what could, what could be added. So, this one is this public space in Hubs Mozilla where we get to join a room and we get to decide what we look like, we can change that avatar, we can accept this one, and go in like that. We entered the space, and it's the kind of mash-up of the Windrush and every other type of transportation that the Caribbean people have been moved in. There's a film embedded in the space made up of 24 other films. And it's made of so many different films, because I think that maybe the articulable in black British relationships is probably spoken in the in between space of everyday visual media. So, in terms of the back, there's three figures that appear in the film. And these figures are all a call for help. So, the station focuses on the call for help rather than answering the call. So, we have someone who says, "I want to fight", there is someone who says, "I'm sick" and we have someone who says "I demand you transport me there at once". These individuals are all in the film, and they are portals to three different spaces that really look, take a deep dive into why, why we were, because of help that that are being asked for. So, if you click on each door, you go through a trapdoor capital. It is not a space where you can decide how you're moving through; you can see people in a few different places.

[inaudible]

So, for me sharing the struggles and the successes of our community in terms of our individual - indivisible, from environmental devastation, or a productive symbiosis with the environment, though radical. So, in the healthcare space, this happens so our struggle is aligned with struggle for environmental and environmental devastation, and our devastation is aligned. And I see this as a way in which to view healthcare. So, it really starts there are like wardrobes all the way through, and it starts really with my great grandmother, who nursed my father back to health, using bush tea - local tea from her own garden. And my grandmother who came to this country, leaving my father behind to nurse the British public to health. So, we then got a glimpse of an intact forest based medical systems in pre-colonial - if we could just go back one - in pre-colonial Africa. This is the intact healthcare space here, full of plants, we know now that many of these plants have medicinal properties that would - were powerful. This is the intact society. And then we also get a glimpse of the devastation of the deforestation of these spaces. We also glimpse if we go through, Africans rushed to their - to the

ports, afforded no health care; left to their fate, which is which is a death. So those that are too tired to move out of reclining are about to die and those who still have the energy are tied to the remaining vegetation to ensure that they also will have their fate. So, the work considers how Africans were then rushed to the Caribbean on ships. If we go through this and then already and we discover some of the medicines in the Caribbean only to abuse them all over again. And the deforestation that happens in the Caribbean. As we approach - as we move again, by plane, by boat to break we approach the black iron railings of a block of Victorian style NHS Hospital, which only then turn to bars as requests and requests for health care public systems in this country often turned into a space of detention and subsequently deportation. In the space is also a box of British medicines that were contemporaneous with the medicine - with the society that was intact that we saw. This is an Edwardian box. The medicines house - are housed in a mahogany box, many of these medicines were ineffective, and some of them were even deadly. But in order to create this box, mahogany trees were felled. Each mahogany tree was supporting about - each mahogany tree was supporting about 749 species of trees and about 150,000 flowering plants in just - in the span of one mahogany tree. Over half the medicines that we now use in in Britain, are - come from those tropical forests. And such as those forests that were just decimated, we're examining their medical properties. There's a play on Damien Hirst's - Damien Hirst's medicine cabinet. This one is locked up, not for transportation. But this one is locked up because the synthesised not only were the actual plants, medicinal plants stolen and destroyed for everyone. But those, those few that were remained are synthesised and unavailable to the African and Caribbean countries because they have been painted to down to the molecular level, which means that in 2015 alone, 1.6 million African people died from medicines that are already synthesised and available because they couldn't afford to purchase them. These are some of the hard, hard realities of - in the medical space. I just - I've just - there's much more there. But I'm just going to leave that at that point. I also have a wall which is, which is contemporaneous, it's called "Earn, Learn and Return". And again, the reCAPTCHA logo is furnished, it is finished here. Because currently, Boris Johnson's policy is to invite people to come over to earn, learn and return. So, they have a five-year visa which means that these people who come now will never even be able to draw down on the NHS, to the care they provide, they themselves will never receive it. So, this is the current situation. And I just think that in terms of health care, it's so interesting to take this very long view. Windrush is part of so much more, we could just leave this space and go to the final room which is the medic military room. It's a very long view on this call for help, "I want to fight". Often "I want to fight" becomes "I want to find you" in terms of relationships between black and British people. And the first room in the medical in the in the military space is a room of no valour. The highest military award that you can have in in British military is the Victoria Cross which is for valour. And so in this first space, we see combat with no violence, where I want to fight - fight you but

only after you are immobilised here overwhelming fight firepower, ropes or chains. So, we see the maxim gun and that's Mr. Maxim firing, firing it, which was how can unison - well how it how that went. And it's incredible to see the firepower of that. So, in the month from that space, we move into a thank you, we see, there are many figures here. There are figures that show all the different ways that that black people have fought white British rule, fought with it, fought without it, fought before it, fought for it and against it. So, they all stand in a space with their feet on the ground, and we could wander between them and their stories, often centuries apart, and in different geographies, both complicate and simplify an understanding once because of the age of sculptural proximity. Little - the stories are fascinating, and they're all excerpts here. And I really do heavily on Lubaina Himid's ideas here with where she liberated this - the servants from the paintings. But everything is narrated rather poorly by me, mainly to show the problem of an individual curator, but also to point to the similarities between these and the differences between these, these different worries. So, at the back, we have a - an explosion, an explosion of things coming out of a plantation that is being set on fire. But what's coming out are all the things that are delayed that were donated by civilians in the Caribbean to help the war effort, the world war effort. So, it's - so British citizens in the Caribbean giving to citizens who were mobilised in the world war. Also got all the objects of war, Caribbean objects of warfare, some of which are more enigmatic. That's all explained in the space. And very quickly, on the back wall, we have again, this nod to the contemporary. We see the current advertising campaign of the British army, which is to advertise in terms of the fact that, to join the army is to, is to belong. So that's the - that's the call to arms in the world war in the Bahamas. That we see on the far right by for example, this is belonging, which is an ironic in effect, featuring also members of the Caribbean Community in Britain. Belonging then happens in the bombed-out space in another in a foreign country, when you join the British army. Yeah, so that - so that's, that's the thing that that I really wanted to share. It's just a very quick run through those spaces and spaces are there to be augmented. And we've already had lots of augmentations, from the Black Futures Conference in Birmingham, who intervened and said even more. And so, this space is designed for people to want to come in, there are shelves here where people will be able to share what their - what their military, what they think is valuable in terms of military I brought in a broad way. And there's also a mirror so that people can document themselves leaving that space - that in the space, and then share that digitally with other people. Yeah, so those are the spaces. And that's where I'd like to wrap up.

Melanie Abrahams 58:21

Thank you.

[claps] 58:22

Melanie Abrahams 58:28

So, we've got around 15 minutes before the end, we'd like to make it as most as productive as possible. So, if we maybe just dive into questions around, I mean, obviously, the provocations have been, what is public art for you? But also, what are the significant and notable examples of public that you'd like to share? Bearing in mind everything that we've heard today, and the different presentations? Or if you don't have a particular question and would like to make a comment, you're know, you're welcome to do that as well. So, would anyone like to?

Audience member 59:11

I can start. Errol, you talked about - well first of all, thank you so much for the wonderful presentations. Errol, you talked about public art as defined by access, but also defined by ownership. And I wonder if there's another way or if we can think about other ways to define public space. And I wonder if care, if public space could be defined by care?

Dr Errol Francis 59:49

Well, I think what you've just heard is a reference to sort of spaces, actually hospital spaces which I used to work with, and I think you are right. Am I understanding you correctly, you're asking if public space can be defined by care is that, well, yes, because I used to work in hospitals. National Health Service, so I guess it's public, it's one of the, you know, it's public healthcare. And in fact, I had an arts practice in those spaces. It's, I find it triggering actually, just to think about it, in fact, because it was so - such a disturbing experience, for me actually, that working with NHS was, it was, I had to get used to the idea that you needed to protect people, particularly black people from the NHS, and the sorts of things that happened in these spaces, which were, as you say, defined by care, but in fact, in my experience, it was just defined by the absolute opposite. You know, I got involved in inquiries into the deaths of young black men who were restrained by the police in a hospital setting and lose their life in that setting. So, what you're asking is a quite complex question, because in fact, what I started to experience the NHS as was a space of uncaring in a place where you could lose your life, you know, that we depend on it as a care system. But actually, the bit of it that I kind of experienced was quite horrifying. And I was working, was trying to protect the black community from what could happen to them in these spaces. So, talking about the definition of space, space, in terms of care is actually complex, because it can be the opposite, as well. Am I answering your question?

Melanie Abraham 1:02:01

Thank you. And I get I guess, just to quickly add to that, the act of activism is often an act of care. And often we, we don't sort of mix these different emotions, or different propensities together, we sort of segment them. But actually, the act of curation as well "cūrāre" to care for, as well, you know, has the kind of essence

underpinning it. And again, we can often be removed when we get within the industry of doing things as opposed to the original intentions that we maybe had when we joined it, as well. Would anyone else like to ask a question? Or maybe you're contemplating, so maybe I'll sort of pose something. So, I think, I think maybe there's definitely something about wellbeing, mental health in terms of mental good health, and this aspect of particularly black people, but also people of colour, and how they have been affected through monumentalism. And, and kind of the acts of monuments, and the acts of kind of placing and placeholders of monuments. And so I wonder, given that now we're moving towards different times where we're constantly or increasingly challenging and questioning our place within these kinds of frameworks. And using our voice more to have agency, what would you say would be the possibilities for the future in terms of not just how we as practitioners, but the general public might get engaged a bit more in terms of being able to challenge monuments and monumentalism?

Dr Errol Francis 1:03:45

Well, I mean, that's why I showed the slide of the thing in Bristol, because I just found that to be, you know, these guys, you know, they were prosecuted, you know, in the courts for doing what they did. But in fact, I saw it as a very productive act of dealing with this sort of historical memory that Sonia has been reminding us of, actually, of these buried ancestral memory, if you like, that is represented by these - by these statues. So, I think that this process has started and that is why the government was so threatened by this that they had to pass a law do you know that you're going to be prosecuted, the punishment for damaging a statue is more severe than rape. That's the way they did that and that they were so alarmed by this popular uprising against this sort of colonial monumentalism. So, it's a very contested period that we're living through with regard to monuments. And I think Sonia's work has reminded us of what needs to be commemorated or what needs to be or what is hidden by these, these type of colonial trophies.

Sonia E Barrett 1:05:15

For me to challenge monumentalism, it's not it's kind of it's a very good start, but it's not enough to add to, to change existing sculptures. We need to make new spaces that don't - so we don't take that as a priori, the way to do things. Right, so not to respond to a sculptor, but to think anew about how can we gather - not have someone over us, but walk through? And how can we respond to - respond to not one individual history but histories? And how do they connect? And how can we together walk through spaces that connect these histories? And, and that's what I wanted to do with this monumental intervention, which like spans like this massive time, and can be added to and taken away from and I just think that's like, really important. But of course, we don't live in this space. We live in squares with these figures. And these figures need to be challenged in real - in the real world. But also, we mustn't neglect making spaces that don't start with this, because we can't

always start with a man on the on the plinth, we have to. Yeah, and I just think that's the history that came comes much before him. And not only for the black community, but also for all communities here in Britain. And how interesting to look at that space, think that's really, really generative.

Melanie Abrahams 1:06:58

Yeah, and I think if the just to quickly add to that, if we also think about the emotional and the psychological sites as well, that we have, as well. So, looking outside of fixed monuments there, if we use the aspects of recapturing, if we were to recapture our actual histories and our memories, we could revisit it in terms of certain monumental aspects or memories that we had discarded, because they weren't seen as the monuments at the time that we've been forced to look out or encouraged to look at. You know, it's also how we kind of reimagine ourselves in a way that kind of can progress us and bring us forward. You had a question?

Audience member 1:07:41

Yeah, thank you. I was wondering about the use of materials. And I was particularly interested in sculpture which doesn't exist anymore that's been recycled. I mean, quite often, call outs for public art are kind of durable materials. So, my question really was around changing contexts and these huge commissions, which are essentially materials that don't decay and, so thinking about the environment, as well, in the context of, you know, with making work that doesn't, doesn't decay, the energy that's involved in creating it, when actually we have so much stuff already? And how does that relate to the kind of art in the public realm?

Dr Errol Francis 1:08:32

Yeah, I mean, I think the Kara Walker piece was interesting in that regard, from an ecological point of view, because Tate said it was recycled actually the material, and she's done other pieces actually made out of sugar as well in New York. But apart from the ecological aspect, I just think there is a kind of what some of the practice of these artists is asking is do we have the right to dictate to future generations who is going to be or what is going to be commemorated. So, it's a bit like I've done if you've seen these Victorian buildings of shops, where the name of the shop owner is engraved, and you think, and it's still there and you think gosh, in the 19th century, people thought, you know, that somebody's shop would still be, you know, this idea of permanence, right? And the public sculpture or public monuments, such as the, you know, like these questions, statues, for example, dictating on future generations that this historical figure a bit, you know, like the Confederate statues in America. So, so I think this idea of being specific to the moment the artist is responding to the moment and is not making this arrogant assumption about future generations I think is really interesting. And the other thing, I think it also is abstraction and play that often is done nice black artists, that we've got this burden of representation. And I think the idea of a monument these

abstract, that doesn't actually mean, and that's why I showed the Christo thing. It's just visual planning, that's often denied to. My teacher at Central Saint Martins was Sonia Boyce and she used to say that me - she used to say, "I don't need to be called a black artist - there are times when I just want to do visual play". That's it, you know. And so, I think that those contradictions are raised by what kind of monuments we decide to make.

Sonia E Barrett 1:10:39

I think the environment is really important. And I'm, I've never had that opportunity to work with permanent materials I work with, I work digitally when I don't have a studio, I work with hair, I work with paper. I haven't had that privilege. So, I don't know if I would, if I have the opportunity to work in that kind of thing, if I would, if I would take, I don't think I would I think I would still use something impermanent. In fact, I've lost a lot of commissions, because I actually, I've always said, I've got to use something permanent, people don't like it. So, if you if you have that ecological understanding, then it's very hard to take - to pick up space in public if you're not married to the permanent. I think it's almost impossible. I, I think that ecological point of view is not something that's an extra thing that we think about afterwards, that arguably ecology, like, for example, the struggles of the black community, I think, have directly linked to environmental struggles. I hope to show that in this work, so that we can understand that some of the things that are wrong with our world have, they're all interlinked. There's not this one topic and the other topic that we just attend to now and then we tend to this and then we tend to that, but there's this really important links between all these things. And that's why kind of where we are, why we are where we are.

Mavreen Arhin 1:12:10

We've got a question over here?

Audience member 1:12:12

Well, I'm not sure it's actually a question. It's an old star. It's about this sort of ridiculousness and about play as well, because I live in a small town that is got a monumental cockerel in the middle of a roundabout, which is celebrating a five-toe cockerel that was left behind by the Romans. And I was just astounded and embarrassed when we got this. It's about 10 foot high. But the public have really taken into their hearts. And it's always festooned with soggy knitting, celebrating national events and local, you know, birthdays and what have you. And I just feel like can we have that a sense of play? Can the public be wrong? Can they can you know, can it be a bit tatty in a bit sort of embarrassing?

Dr Errol Francis 1:13:08

Yeah, I mean, I think that's a great example actually. And I think the, the Angel of the North's thing is a kind of, it was hated by the locals when they propose this

idea. And now, it's a fond thing, although going back to what Sonia was saying, I think there's white privilege involved in artworks like that, because I think that that type of huge thing is a certain type of artist who gets that kind of commission, right? And actually, I think, you know, the Anthony Gormley sculptures are all body casts of himself. So, there's another level of doing of what's being projected there with that that piece and as Sonia was saying, that I think there's a privilege according to who can work with certain types of materials, it was given that opportunity to work with bronze and steel and marble and all this kind of thing. Yeah, I mean, I think but I think playfulness is, I find that to be an important thing. As a spectator of art, I don't always want to be, I think wow, this might sound controversial. Being - the process of racialization also involves is involved in the relationship to imagery of being made to always consider myself as a racialized being. And so, the thing that I find kind of liberating, what I found, I did find the Christo thing fun, actually, was that I didn't have to think about anything. I was just looking at least oil barrel thinking, you know, and I think that's a privilege that often is denied us as, as black citizens and as black artists as well.

Sonia E Barrett 1:15:12

I think it's really wonderful question. I love tatty. I think tatty is really exciting. But unfortunately, people who commissioned art don't like it. And I think that the, if something is in use to someone, people take it into their hearts, even then, in a sense of that sculpture will always be a success, because it's bringing people together. And I think that that's kind of something that sculpture can do. And I mean, like I to make, so when I do make a larger, immersive sculpture, it's always almost always aerial, and enabling people to gather underneath it. And the interaction with people is absolutely like key. And I just feel like it doesn't, it's sometimes it doesn't matter what it is, it could be a cockerel, it could be, you know, a giant post box or something if people are coming together to do something that and that's that, for me, that's a big tick. And although it can be annoying maybe to see something that's incredibly unattractive. It's a great social value to bring people together. You know, even people, sometimes people love to hate something - that can bring people together to that's also not the worst thing that can happen. So, like, I just think that we yeah, we can open this space and just think in these different ways. And I think artists mostly would be open to it. But I think that the commissioners are not. You see, it's very interesting in your talk that you explained how often people were trying to wrench it back from public control, and then sometimes actually giving in the were like that, like how, how interesting to start from that spot, rather than yeah.

Melanie Abrahams 1:17:04

Thank you. I'd like to, as I bring this event to a close kind of chime with this aspect of not just the social value of bringing people together, but also the creative and the artistic value, and the change value and bringing people together which Sonia

and also Errol all have referred to. But also, this aspect of if we're talking about monuments and monumentalism, we also have to think about the monumentality of us as individuals and also as a collective force kind of going forward as well. And I think that there's been a lot of rich suggestions and exploration. So, it's come through here, which I hope we can think about in the days ahead. I'd like to thank Autograph and UP Projects for bringing this project together. I'd like to thank you for attending, and the podcasts will be available in the future. And I'd like for us to thank Errol Francis and Sonia E Barrett for their wonderful talk and contributions. Thank you.

[claps] 1:18:03

Emma Underhill 1:18:15

Thank you - can I just add my thanks to the panel also. Thank you so much for your generosity and providing such thought-provoking presentations and discussions. There's so much for us to take away. And I'm definitely going to be championing more tatty sculptures and definitely more inclusive activism approaches. And hopefully, you know, as a public art organisation, we can try to continue to push this agenda as well - continue the conversations, we definitely need to have many more of them so that we can start to change the way attitudes are towards these kinds of commissions. So, thank you so much. Thank you all for coming and for your very insightful questions as well. And I just wanted to take this opportunity also to congratulate and thank Sonia for *Rush Me*. It's not quite finished, we've got another room to go but it's such an extraordinary work and incredible achievement. So, thank you.

[claps] 1:19:10

Emma Underhill 1:19:16

And if you'd like to hear more from Sonia, we are also hosting an online event which I think is on, when is it, 24th November, *The Rush Me Talk Show* which is going to be hosted by Jamz Supernova online and you can find details about that on UP Projects' website. So do come back to that. And thank you all again for participating and thanks to Autograph for hosting us. Thank you for coming.