

HEW LOCKE

The newly empty plinths are all potential Fourth Plinths, The Art Newspaper, October 2017, Issue no. 294, p.68

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## **Comment** Constant Comment

## 'The newly empty plinths are all potential Fourth Plinths'

The artist Hew Locke says a creative response to memorials dedicated to slave owners and empire builders can reveal hidden histories





first started looking at Victorian statutes around 12 years ago, but I have been thinking about them much

years ago, our i have been been and the set of the set of the set of the longer than that. I'm full onger than that. I'm full onger than that. I'm full onger than the top-notch academic sculptors who made these statuss. I'm proposal's beat and the proposal's became the work. For a project in Bristol ten years ago, I took hotographs of statutes that I printed large scale and then decorated. They included Edward Colston [1636-1721] who is a very divisive figure to the city. He was a slave trader but the was also a philanthropist and founding fither of Bristol There is a Colston bun, a Colston Tower, and there was Colston Hall, which will now be renamed. For years there has been a be renamed. For years there has been a debate about what do you do with his

debate about what up you to the marked memorial. I would not have been allowed to dress Colston's memorial in reality—o course, I would like to. I could do it wearing a balaclava in the middle of the night and dodging the police, but , - 01

I want to do things upfront and deal with the layers of complexity. For me the statue of Colston is aesthetically the best statue in Bristol. Of all the Victorian statues in the city—it was erected in 1895—it is probably the most visually attractive. That is where it gets really interesting. George Washington's statue in Trafalgar Square stands right outside the National Callery in London. A copy of Jean-Antoine Houdon's marble exulpture in Richmond, Vrignia, it is obviously a symbol of the special relationship between Britain and the US. But Washington was a slave owner and I cannot get over that at all. So, I made an "impossible proposal" for Washington, with him surrounded by skeletons and, in small letters, the annees of some of the 300 slaves he owned.

names of some of the 300 staves ne owned. That reality of him does not go down well with some. But you cannot get away from the fact that that is what he was. You can't own people and expect to be revered. I think there should be discussions in America about what to do with Washington, or for that matter Thomas Jefferson, to remember that these founding fathers rowned slawes

remember that these founding fathers owned slaves. My plich for the fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square was based on an equestrian statue nearby in Portland Place of Field Marshal Sir George Stua White, who won the Victoria Cross in the Second Afghan War. Called

"Black people in **America have** been living under this for so long. It's like an open sore"

Sikandar, the piece is about the burden of history, so I covered him in medals but twice life-sized. He is weighted down with the history of military campaigns in Afghanistan. The idea was that after all of these years, here was that after all of these years, here we are fighting again in Afghanistan. Four years ago, I was at Prospect in New Orleans and at that time the debate had really heated up about taking the city's Confederate memorials down. I was seeing these statuses around town and wondering if is use availe memory to homoroo. Consert

statuse around town and wondering if it was really going to happen. General Lee was on a column, which really raised him up in Alelson's Column way. In the context of New Orleans and race, that's a problem that black people in America have been living under this for so long and it's like an open sore. So it's understandable that it is time to let these things on These statuse are toxic. There's no redeeming them. But the thing is, how to do it? I know that the Civil War is only





yesterday in the South, because after the end of slavery so many things were left not sorted out. There was nothing like the promised 40 acres and a mule. My late father lived in Atlanta, Georgia, so I know the city and its history. I have visited the Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama and the plantations where slaves became servants after emancipation. But in Atlanta you also have visible became servants after emancipation. But in Atlanta you also sort of counterbalance. Perhaps in some parts of the US a counterbalance of people like [former slave and abolitionis] Frederick Douglas. I also think that something temporary could be done when Confiderate statues are removed. The newly empty plints are all potential Fourth Plinths. But permanent public art pieces are difficult to get right. There is lot of dodgy art, particularly in highly charged spaces. The additional problem on some of the plinthis is the dedication on them, typically to 'The Glorinous South'. So that it makes it even more difficult to gat something permanent on them. I were additional for until Powerberj organised by Kunshulik Brenen, temporarily organised by Kunshulik Brenen town dall. The Lindhow-based artist was speaking to Javier Pis

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