

## HEW LOCKE

Tate Britain Commission 2022: Hew Locke, *The Procession* review – An overriding mood of unquenchable subversive energy, Mark Hudson, *The Independent*, 22 March 2022



Installation image of Hew Locke's *The Procession*, Duveen Commission, Tate Britain, March 2022 – January 2023. Photo © Tate (Joe Humphries)

Hew Locke's sculptural interrogations of Britain's imperial past may be bang on the spirit of the still-smouldering Black Lives Matter moment. But there's an elliptical, miniaturist finesse to the British-born, Guyana-raised artist's work – even when it's not physically small – a reluctance to make the obvious statement that made me wonder how he'd fare in Tate Britain's massive Duveen Galleries. Classic Locke works such as *Souvenirs*, antique busts of long-dead royals, encrusted in gold jewellery referencing the colonial past or *For Those in Peril on the Sea*, a flotilla of miniature boats suspended in a church nave in Folkestone, go for the evocative association, rather than the bombastic overkill necessary to make an impact in these enormous spaces.

I needn't have worried.

The first figures in *The Procession*, Locke's installation for this year's illustrious Tate Britain commission, have all the model-making intricacy and precise cultural referencing you'd expect: a group of fife and drum-playing children dancing towards the gallery's enormous neo-classical entrance, decked out in clothes printed with the share certificates of long-obsolete colonial companies,

sporting masks that draw on the forms of Guyana's historic colonial architecture. But far from being models, they're life-sized and followed by 145 more mostly adult figures parading through these august and sterile halls in an all-dancing, horse-riding, stilt-walking, flag-wielding bricolage of painted cardboard and patch-worked and silk-screened fabric. Locke and his apparently small team of assistants have clearly been very busy.