

## **Reflective Journal**

### **World Reimagined Residency 2022 – Journey to Discovery**

#### **‘Home from Home’**

As a British born artist who migrated back to the Caribbean island of Dominica three years ago, I reflect on my return to the UK as one of the artists commissioned by The World Reimagined, an organisation leading a major educational project to increase awareness of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and related history in Britain. My stay involves a six week arts residency across two sites, Wysing Arts Centre in Cambridgeshire, England and Hospitafield Arts Centre in Arbroath, Scotland. The first three weeks is a research and development phase. The second phase will painting of my design onto a sculptural globe. This will be one of 100 globe sculptures to be sited in ten major cities across the UK as part of a series of history trails and educational activities.

#### **March 10<sup>th</sup> Journey Over**

I arrived in the UK today and really grateful for this amazing opportunity. This is an opportunity to explore and create, to reconnect to the British landscape, the place of my birth and home for most of my adult life, to see family again. Reflection on how I connect to both the Caribbean and United Kingdom as ‘Home’ is something which informs my practice and which I think about as I cross the Atlantic Ocean. This time, masked up, holding my corner on the long plane journey over from Dominica, limited conversation in these ‘Covid times’. How quickly as humans we form habits, segregate, make others feel ‘different’ and alienated. I reflect on the wars taking place right now, lives uprooted and the resulting trauma. I question, is the global situation today a continuation of the same story of economics, greed and dominance, is it all interconnected?

#### **14<sup>th</sup> March 2022 Wysing Arts, Centre**

The first three weeks of my residency will be spent at Wysing Arts Centre, a beautiful and welcoming arts space set in the Cambridgeshire countryside. A space for artists to reflect, experiment and create. As I venture outside I am struck by the beauty and freshness of this spring day. The plants I am so familiar with burst forth from moist soil with healthy new growth; nettles, daisies and brambles. Greeted by a sunny headed dandelion...I smile, so different to the Caribbean species with their droopy heads, but family all the same. A thorny bramble catches my arm, pulling me back...reminding me to be careful but confident in my step. I wander along grassy verges, climb wooden styes and walk past fields and bare branched woodland. How great it feels to be free. Through the trees I catch glimpses of an impressive church steeple. I pass a man with dog and we greet each other briefly and move on. I suddenly feel slightly uncomfortable and glance back long after...reaffirmed by my senses as in the distance he stands and stares. I emerge into the village of Bourne to the welcome sound of children playing in a school yard, walk past quaint houses with neat gardens and straw thatched roofs which take me back in time.



*Pen drawing tinted with natural nettle pigment from the site*

### **15<sup>th</sup> March**

Today on opening the door to a cold, grey, wet day, I promptly closed it back. I have become disconnected to the cold British weather which I feel I need to now mentally prepare for. Taking advantage of the grim weather for indoor explorations of the Wysing site, I enjoyed the gallery space where 'A Tender Ascent', an immersive audio – visual installation is showing. This show brings together choreography, sound and sculpture, a culmination of experimental collaboration between choreographer Maeva Berthelot and musician, vocalist and DJ Coby Sey, with sculptures by Andre Bavard. The surround sound and boom boxes in the seats worked well with the imagery

taking the body through a powerful and very emotive trip. Time was spent also looking through the portfolios of artists who hold studio spaces here and had interesting conversation and sharing with staff and artists as they came and went. There is a community spirit here and great to know there are spaces like this where artists feel at home.

For me it is important to touch base with feelings after a long journey and explorations of 'cultural duality'. What does it mean to be 'at home' in two contrasting geographical and cultural locations where weather, landscape and culture all contrast. This opportunity is a luxury as an artist and I value lone time and opportunities to connect with other creative minds.

### Mapping Space



I occupy a very comfortable live/work unit at Wysing which looks out onto open fields at the front. This will be home for the three week research phase of my residency. Circles are mapped out on the wall and floor to visualize the size of the sculptural globe to be painted. Each circle being 1.4 m in diameter with key words placed on the edges and within. These circles have now become entities in themselves, spaces of grounding and reflection which I circumnavigate, spaces where I return to find myself. By physically placing myself within the circle on the floor, walking the circumference, dancing, sitting in the centre or placing of object and sketches within it, each object for that moment becomes the point of focus. Strangely this 'circle of centering' has become an integral part of my daily process at Wysing before painting and even during the painting process. I ponder on the reflexivity and investigative nature of my practice and the questioning of the things I am passionate about; home, family, plants, landscape, history, textiles and entanglement. According to Mersch (2017) Re-search is a question that questions its own quest, so I feel confident in my search, for whatever I am searching for and go where the threads lead me.

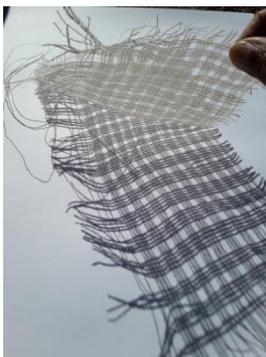
### Reflection on circles

Circles in many cultures represent life cycles and continuity. My ultimate task when I move on to the second half of my residency at Hospitafield in Scotland will be to paint the exterior surface area of the globe, a surface which will be publicly seen. The two circular spaces here at Wysing represent the inner core of the globe, the unseen workings and I guess in a sense, the soul of the globe, the soul which may or may never get seen by the viewing public. The artists' questionings,

pain, doubts, joys, triumphs, moments of revelation. The inner thought processes which go into creating. What manifests from the inside outwards is essentially 'the expanding soul'.

### 16<sup>th</sup> March Creative threads

The sun is out in all its glory today, warm enough for breakfast outside. A couple meetings today scheduled and spent some time picking threads to prepare for experimental textured printing. Why my obsession to pull threads, weaving stories, to make sense of history? It is this exploratory and reflexive time which artist need and crave, time to germinate ideas and have revelations. The sunlight on the woven fabric casts such amazing shadows feeding ideas for installation work and sculpture.



As each thread is pulled the structure of the fabric alters, weakening the stability. Each thread is a single entangled reflection or thought with a life of its very own. Each thread can be unravelled even further into strands, then fibres and dust like particles.

A walk up to the Wysing artist studio spaces, I meet two artists who were happy to share work in progress. We had a useful exchange about natural dyes and a book 'making Ink' was recommended. It always fascinates me listening artists talk about their journeys and what is important to them. Very often as artists we work in isolation, not always getting opportunities to fully share what we 'actually do' and that creativity to us is a fundamental human need, a sentiment not always understood. Feeling connected and valued as part of a community is also a basic need.

### Research and visits

#### 18<sup>th</sup> March Cambridge botanical gardens

Online research highlighted the glasshouse as a good place to visit as it included a mix of tropical economic as well as ornamental plants I am interested in sketching botanical specimens such as *Hevea brasiliensis* (rubber), *Swietenia* sp (mahogany), *Cabomba* (kapok), vanilla, coffee, sugar cane, rice and cotton. On my visit I identify many ornamental plants which grow in Dominica and find some new and unusual one which could inspire design ideas. One of the glasshouses is closed

for repair after the storms a few weeks ago, and I identify cocoa and kapok but do not see many of the economic plants which I was hoping to draw. I very productive and enjoyable day out.



Connecting to Tropical plants in the hot house section



Watercolour sketches of plants found in the hothouse which also grow in Dominica

## Meetings and introductions

The first week and a half went by quickly with meetings and introductions to various members of staff, dinner with visiting artists. A art exhibition ' Fabulations' in Cambridge centre with Rosie, studio time planning and preparing design ideas and sourcing art materials.

A pot luck lunch was arranged one week after my arrival with studio artists and Wysing staff. It was a great opportunity to share food together outdoors and find out more about individual artists practices. Later that afternoon Hannah and John did a studio visit to see how I was settling in and find out more about the World Reimagined project and my wider practice.

## New Hall Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> March

Accompanied by Hannah Wallis, assistant curator at Wysing, we were given a tour of New Hall Art Collection and gardens at Murray Edward's College by the curator Naomi Polonsky. The garden was beautifully laid out inspired by a vision of landscape designer Jo Cox.

As a textile artist the temporary exhibition 'What lies beneath' was of particular interest. Three pieces which caught my eye due to the use of unusual fibres and cultural significance were works by Enam Gbewonyo using womens' used stockings blended with cotton and bamboo yarn. This triggered memories of younger days when tights were an essential fashion item, always resorting to black tights as the shades never matched my skin colour. Older women selected shades such as 'tan' and 'chocolate brown'. Anya Paintalls' work exploring Welsh – Ghanain heritage using traditional rug hooking techniques incorporating real hair triggered stimulating conversation about the importance of hair in Black culture and taboos regarding disposal of hair. Nengi Omuku work using traditional Nigerian cloth known as Sanyan was fascinating new information. The cloth is woven from silken threads made by wild moths and used for clothing worn by wealthy Nigerian families in a pre colonial era.



## Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> March

### Quest for 'Golden Pineapples'

Wherever I travel a particular plant speaks to me in relation to my time spent in that place. My research in Cambridge for symbolism and plants with economic and colonial connections

highlights the pineapple (Ananas comosus) as such a plant. Appearing on each research visit. Pineapple were an important medicine and food for indigenous people int the Americas also used as a welcome symbol and considered 'King of fruits'. The first botanical image to appear in Britain was said to have been in 1629. Pineapples in the 18<sup>th</sup> century became symbolic of colonialism, high status, wealth, often grown in hothouses and specially designed pineries across Great Britain at huge expense. This fruit became a fashionable icon appearing in 18<sup>th</sup> amd 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture, tableware and art as seen in my visit to Fitzwilliam museum in Cambridge.



*Pineapple inspired architectural details at Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge and Staffordshire coffee jug made in mid 18<sup>th</sup> century in the collection.*



Journal sketch of architectural detail at Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

## Wimpole Hall and Walled Gardens Monday 28<sup>th</sup> March

Researching the history of the area I come across the name Wimpole Hall. This stately home aroused my curiosity as it was included in The National Trust interim report of properties with Colonial and Slavery connections. In the photo it appears ominous yet impressive in its grandeur. Gardens designed by Capability Brown and Repton, pineries and vineries, glasshouses stir my botanical interest. The building has a long history, changing hands from chancellors to writers. The National Trust has revealed the historical truths of such places with Transatlantic Trade and slavery connections. This has met with much opposition, in some cases I am told, threats of funding withdrawals for those who speak of such HIStories.

It saddens me to think that in the year 2022 there is still so much resistance to exploring alternative stories of trade and Empire. Everywhere we look in architecture, food, art, colonial history is entangled in the very structural fabric of the heritage landscape both here and in the Caribbean. The British have been very fastidious at keeping archives and documenting Empire with much information preserved in 'Black, White and Shades of Grey' for those interested in more balanced accounts of global history to view.

It is time to remove the bandages which hide the wounds and impact on the psyche and wellbeing of every single one of us, in one way or another. To acknowledge the emotions which keep us stuck, the trauma, the guilt, the shame, the blame. Give the wounds air and light to breathe, for the hole is where the healing lies.

My interest are drawn to Philip Yorke 1<sup>st</sup> Earle of Hardwicke (1690 – 1764) who together with Charles Talbot issued the 1729 'Yorke – Talbot' opinion which stated that runaway enslaved Africans coming to Britain were not free and could be legally returned to the plantations in the West Indies. There are accounts of pineapples being grown there. Gardener James Dall recorded a patent in 1830 for pine pits which were very efficient for growing pineapples without fire or heat, but using a system of leaf mounds 5 -6 feet high in front, 7 to 8ft high in the back and 5ft thick. These proved very efficient as he practiced this method for four growing 5 -600 plants with 250 fruit being cut annually as recorded in the The Repertory of patent inventions and other discoveries and inventions(1830). The cost of one pineapple plant in that period was phenomenal. In Dominica part of my practice is documenting growth. I have tried to grow pineapples and even in a tropical climate after three years I am only just seeing the baby fruit of my labours.



A visit to Wimploe Hall with Rosie the director at Wysing was very worthwhile. After walking round the ground floor interior of the house, we enjoyed the walled garden with many varieties of apple and cherry trees. Speaking to the National Trust Gardeners on site we were escorted into a greenhouse where we were shown baby Castor plants, another historic economic plant which grow profusely in Dominica. Castor (*Ricinus communis*) plants are known for producing the deadly poison ricin. In Dominica the plant has been used for centuries by Africans and indigenous populations to make Castor oil as part of local 'bush medicine', to treat skin conditions and as a hair tonic. We were also shown a modern brick built pit which was recently used for experimental pineapple growing. This however proved too costly and time consuming. The large and beautiful glasshouse which was once part of the right wing of the building was long demolished and there is no evidence of the original pineapple pits or pineapple growing on the site today.



*1. Self reflecting our images in the mirror. 2. Dinner table setting in the dining area with pineapple at the top of fruit bowl. 3. Green house and sharing pineapple stories with gardeners.*

### **Other Cambridgeshire research of interest**

At the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century Cambridge had a strong Abolition movement with people such as Peter Peckard (1718 – 1797) vice chancellor of Magdalene college. He was instrumental in the movement giving sermons and producing pamphlets to bring an end to the British slave trade. He is said to have influenced famous abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce and also helped to finance Olaudah Equiano's book.

### **Tate Exhibitions Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> March**

#### **Life Between Islands – Tate Britain**

Life between Islands is an exhibition at the Tate Britain featuring the work of Caribbean British artists from 1950's to the present. The exhibition derives its title from the late cultural theorist Stuart Hall's memoirs 'Familiar Stranger: A life between Islands (2017). Hall inspires my thinking about duality, identity and belonging. He believes *"We are always in a process of cultural formation. Culture is not a matter of ontology of being, but of becoming."*

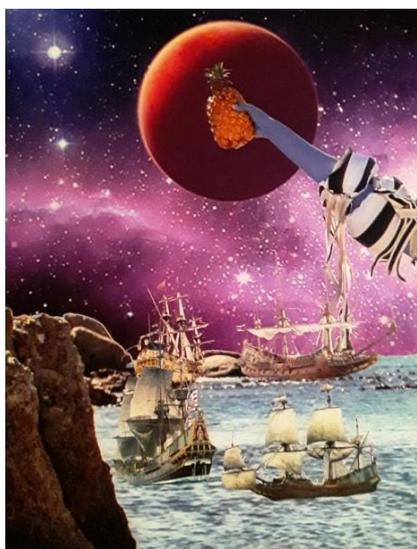
The exhibition was an emotional trip being able to personally identify with the historical transitions and struggles as a British citizen with parents of the so called 'Windrush generation'. I smile as I think of my Mum's reaction to this as she often stresses that she did not come to Britain on the 'Empire Windrush'.

My migration journey is important to my quest. I was born in Britain, went back to Dominica as a toddler, spent my informative childhood years in Dominica before moving back to Britain as a teenager in the 70's. I have lived here most of my adult life before relocating three years ago to live in Dominica once again. Even there I have a British stamp on my head as the accent, and certain mannerisms are ingrained. I am rooted in both places with a broken African ancestral root, very difficult to trace but which I feel strongly in my drum beat spirit.

Donald Locke's captivating and powerful installation pieced together from material fragments fused with Colonial imagery speaks of that spirit and left me emotionally moved as I worked my way through the carnival revellers, each one unique and frozen in time. I felt slightly disturbed as I hear a nearby father nearby say to a toddler "Do you think this person is happy or sad"...pointing to the image of a white man's head being carried along in a box by the procession. Carnival for me is such an important time of reverence, remembrance and celebration of emancipation. As both a carnival goer and costume maker I am caught up in Ingenuity and magic of this piece.

The exhibition is well curated and as we move through room by room certain pieces resonate deeply. 'Paradise Omeros' by Isaac Julien 1962, a humorous yet sad three screen projection fusing traditional West Indian scenes of the 70's with a young Caribbean British boys' uncomfortable and questioning alienation from 'his' culture. Very emotive and powerful.

Alberta Whittle's mesmerizing and haunting, Scottish ballads play as she moves against a backdrop of waves and mountains in a Scottish landscape. Soon I will be heading up to Arbroath, Scotland for the second half of this residency. I too will be exploring Scottish links and connections to former plantations in the Dominican landscape.



*Alberta Whittle (1980) Photographic work Celestial Meditations and 2 (2017/ 2018) and Video You can never touch the same water twice (2017)*

Lubaina Himid – Tate Modern



I feel like a tropical pineapple hunter as my prize appears once again as I go on to view Lubaina Himid's exhibition at The Tate Modern. The pineapple jelly mould stands out amongst the ceramic objects interspersed with miniature trees in her piece titled 'What are monuments for'.

### **Conclusion**

I have thoroughly enjoyed being at Wysing. The team have gone out of their way to make my stay comfortable and engaging. The organisation has a strong ethos of caring and caring, not only for each other but for the environment. It has been a very special experience connecting with amazing staff and artists. I value the sharing of technical expertise, conversation as well as exploring common personal, cultural and migratory experiences and building relationships with other artists on site. The balance of solo time and stimulating engagement has been invaluable. Spending time alone has highlighted my need for solo time and the importance of creating this space for creation and revival in a busy everyday life. I will take this experience forward with me in preparation for the next phase at Hospitafield and to strengthening of my practice. A big Thank you to all.