





Agents of Deterioration

2024

Esi Eshun, Dawn Codex, Charles Nyiha, Ian Dawson, Rayya Khuri, Deserae Tailfeathers, Lennon Mhishi, Adanma Nwankwo, Darby Herman, Louisa Minkin, Serene Weasel Traveller, Thomas Allison, Rabiya Nagi, Mame Afua Mensah, Fungai Marima, Joseph Ijoyemi, Helen Robertson, Migueltzinta Solis, Walker English, Kylie Fineday, Raine Crandall, Rihanata Bigey.

From CSM Museum & Study Collection:

Mark Wallinger, Cornelia Parker, Yinka Shonibare, John James Audubon.

When applying risk management strategies to museum collections, risk is broken down according to ten agents of deterioration that pose threats to collections. Nine of these risks are physical (physical forces, fire, water, criminals, pests, pollutants, light, incorrect temperature, and incorrect humidity) and the tenth is custodial neglect, for example where a collection item may be disassociated from provenance. Museums generally suspend objects from use, touch and intervention in order to freeze or hold things in a state of torpor, preventing interactions in order to preserve. Many Indigenous peoples challenge the idea of preservation as a greater good, instead affirming the right to renew and use, enliven and care for objects as part of community life.

The Prisoners of Love (PoL) project aims to connect UK collection items with their trans-national home peoples and bring emerging artists from in the UK, curators and researchers into conversation, to work responsively with complex histories and material practices. The group have been working with the Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew; Horniman Museum and Gardens and Compound 13 Lab in Mumbai; India; Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford and the Department of Archaeology at the University of Ghana in Accra; Hastings Museum and Art Gallery and the Mootookakio'ssin project on Blackfoot homelands at the ULeithbridge, Alberta, Canada.

In September this year UK project participants shared a residency at OPENing, the Art Programme artist-led space in Bank. The OST residency exhibition was documented as a 25min video by Helen Robertson and produced OSTzine with essays by Lennon Mhishi and Esi Eshun.

Work developed at OPENing was subsequently exhibited at the Hess Gallery, University of Lethbridge, Canada. The exhibition Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Spacetime, was developed in partnership with the Indigenous Art Program at UoL.

This current exhibition invited contributions from all project participants.

Agents of Deterioration



TIK NUGU
2023

Rihanata Bigey

12 prints, 21x29 cm each

This work is the first of a series, experimental at the moment, it's a work around Moore, a language that embodies Burkina Faso's diverse ethnic tapestry. It's about putting together Moore words with printed fragments and scars of my body and drawings that represent my childhood memories that serve as visual and linguistic exploration. The work serves as a link to a culture heritage, a narrative reclamation.



Untitled III (Map)
2020

Fungai Marima

Digital laser cut print on Somerset Paper , 100 x 90cm

Untitled III (Map) is part of a body of work that layers body scans onto digital printing and laser cut methods in looking at how to map out experiences of migration and the effects of migration on the body. I was interested in how knowledge is accessed through the bodies imprint onto the world in zooming in on the patterns of skin, that acts as roads or maps that lead us to alternatively understand our environments and experiences.



Deserae Tailfeather's Artwork
2023

Deserae Tailfeathers & Ian Dawson

Bioplastic print, 70cm x 50cm x 60cm

On Wednesday August 23rd 2023 a folder was shared by Deserae Tailfeathers and Christine Clark in Canada. It contained a 3D scan of a beaded hat made by Deserae Tailfeathers. The Beaded Hat was being worn by Deserae's mother, Sharon. Deserae is a research assistant on the Mootookakio'ssin project which aims to create a path to reconnect Blackfoot knowledge and Blackfoot identity with Blackfoot objects held in UK Museums. Ian rescaled, hollowed and sliced the scan into 80 printable sections and printed the parts between August 25th and September 3rd 2023 before 'stitch-welding' them together.



Shadow ~ River Goddess

2023

Adanma Nwankwo

Dress from the performance



Bank Sequence

2023

Helen Robertson

Projected Digital Video, Sound 25:00

The film documents Ost the first iteration of a continuously evolving exhibition that took place in a disused bank in the City of London. In this film the architecture of the bank and an experience of the exhibited artworks are folded into each other as the camera moves into, around and through the exhibition rooms, corridors and installed works.

In Agents of Deterioration the latest iteration of this ongoing project Bank Sequence plays an earlier iteration of the evolving project back to itself. In the form of live projected light the film and its installation reflects on process and change - a to and fro between past and present - the right to renew and use. I am reminded of The Remembered film by Victor Burgin in which he ruminates on film and live relations to complex histories and material processes.



/imagine prompt: a looking glass

2023

Dawn Codex

Digital Video, Sound, 03:56

My imagined narrative of the demise of Artificial Intelligence exists in a perpetual now but also in a perceived past. It is a ruin in which my many selves are trapped and sentenced to eternal life in algorithms that cannot die. I experience self as a plurality through a synthetic creature-mind (CM) that can only mimic but not feel. I submit my ideas to this CM and receive its visual interpretations in return. The submission is a means to disrupt the CM with organic natural thought.



Are You Tired?

2023

Migueltzinta Solís

This flyer invites surrender. Please tear off and keep a tag!

Agents of Deterioration Vitrine 1



Plans for Sinking the Replica of the Santa Maria at the West Edmonton Mall

2023

Kylie Fineday & Migueltzinta Solís

fabric print, 564mm x 2338mm

To reclaim what's been lost to empire, we must turn to the experts of anti-colonial subterfuge. The West Edmonton Mall is the second largest mall in North America, an ode to Canada's aspirational capitalism founded on inequitable colonial trade systems. Until recently, a large replica of a galleon ship, located near the mall's now defunct aquarium attraction, bore the name "Santa Maria," after one of Columbus's ships. This work proposes planning as an act of resistance, where the envisioning of subversion opens up potential for Indigenous futurities. Two hardened agents of demolition are on the job.



Revival Boats

2023

Joseph Ijoyemi

Alumbro Muntz metal plates removed from the bottom of the hull of the "Cutty Sark" in the course of repairs to the ship in 1963. Greenwich: The Cutty Sark Society, 1963. Folded into origami boats

"Revival Boats" is a fleet of origami sculptured boats made from alumbro metal that responds to the experiences of second-generational migrants from Africa who choose to return to their ancestral land to rebuild and reconnect with their roots. The artwork explores the theme of revival, symbolising the resurgence of cultural identity, heritage, and community bonds. "Revival Boats" celebrates the courage and determination of second-generational migrants who choose to rebuild their lives in Africa, seeking to heal historical wounds and forge a path towards a brighter future. It offers a poignant reminder of the enduring strength and resilience of individuals and communities, as they navigate the complexities of identity, belonging, and the pursuit of a sense of home.



Artefact 2: In my future I will forget to remember me

Dawn Codex

Digital Print



Shifts and Expedients

2023

Louisa Minkin

bioplastic prints, bean bags

3D print from a scan of Catalogue Number: 54663. 75.00 CUCURBITACEAE
Lagenaria siceraria: a beer ladle made from a gourd collected by artist Thomas Baines in 1857 in Zimbabwe and now in the Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew.

3D prints of corn cob, cacao pod and peanuts.

Bean bags sewn from plant-dyed cloth.



Transmess

2023

Raine Crandall

Zine

Raine is a queer, trans person, settler on Blackfoot land, born, raised, and continues to live in Lethbridge, AB, Canada. Raine's zine is an activation of a previous piece that was intended to be interactive, for neurodiverse, queer, trans people attempting to live through the university experience. Themes of intentionally creating space, opportunities for self-reflection for queer and trans people specifically, and the idea of 'safe spaces', questioning inherent structures of cisgender, heterosexual, neurotypical, and whiteness built into galleries. How do people who do not fit these extremely embedded rules make space for ourselves? Then, how can galleries purposely create space and place as well? Art and life are messy, and that is okay. Raine hopes some people will find a small piece of comfort while reading *Transmess*.

Agents of Deterioration Vitrine 2



360 Treaty 7 Site
2023

Mootookakio'ssin Project

fabric print, 564mm x 2338mm

The site of the signing of Treaty and Supplementary Treaty No. 7 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Blackfeet and Other Indian Tribes, at the Blackfoot Crossing of Bow River and Fort Macleod. Treaty 7 is the last of the Numbered Treaties made between the Government of Canada and the Plains First Nations. It was signed on 22 September 1877 by five First Nations: the Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), Piikani (Peigan), Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina (Sarcee). Different understandings of the treaty's purpose, combined with significant culture and language barriers and deliberate attempts to mislead the First Nations on the part of the government negotiators, have led to ongoing conflicts and claims.



Treaty 7 Medal
1977

*1977 Blackfoot Crossing Commemorative Medal Treaty No 7.
This medal was given to a First Nation's signatory to Treaty 7, concluded between the Canadian government and the Niisitapiikwan (Blackfoot Confederacy) and its allies on September 22, 1877.*



Compass
2023

Esi Eshun

Bronze cast of a compass



Red-tailed Hawk
1937

John James Audubon

Green bookcloth with gold-stamped illustration to front cover and spine. xxvi p., 500 p. of plates : Fine coloured plate illustrations.

The Birds of America
CSM Museum & Study Collection
Object number: B.273



Gold Weights

2023

Esi Eshun

Folded printed fabric

Gold dust was the primary currency in the Gold Coast, the colonial name for Ghana, from at least the 16th century onwards, enabling a vast network of economic and cultural transactions through much of the Saharan region and beyond. It fuelled the wealth of the Ashanti region in particular, and was a key driver for Europe's colonialist ambitions, contributing to the enrichment of those countries and their expansion into other parts of the globe. Gold weights formed part of an assemblage of items, used predominantly by men, to weigh the dust. Small, individualised objects, cast in brass, bronze or copper, they bore geometric designs or were shaped

in the form of animals, birds and objects - sometimes modelled in unlikely configurations - symbolising philosophical sayings intended for social instruction. As receptacles for gold - a metal widely believed to be a materialisation of the sun's rays - they also represented aspects of the owner's soul or life force, and therefore played a central role in the economic, social, cultural and psychic life of individuals and communities within the region.

Images of gold weights from the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection also feature as collaged design elements for lengths of fabric, reminiscent of the wax prints imported to Africa from Indonesia by Dutch traders in the 19th century. In their vivid colour schemes, however, they also refer to Ghana's signature Kente cloth, a fabric that influenced Bauhaus designs among others, and that represents one of the few types of cultural capital historically afforded to Ghana on the world stage.



Grain Weevil

2000

Yinka Shonibare

Lithograph, 305 x 405 mm

From Bugs: A Portfolio

This boxed portfolio of prints exists in an edition of ninety.

CSM Museum & Study Collection

P.2011.10.CC.8

Yinka Shonibare's arabesque lithograph, Grain Weevil, depicts a beetle that damages stored grain by boring into it in order to deposit its eggs. A glossy beetle is silhouetted against a matt orange background which is criss-crossed by curving black lines. The white spots that spread over the surface of the print are suggestive of both contamination and insect eggs. Shonibare's print is one of a portfolio of ten prints collectively entitled Bugs. The portfolio was published by the Byam Shaw School of Art in London. Produced as a fundraiser, the proceeds from the portfolio sales were dedicated to providing bursaries to support Byam Shaw students.



King Edward and the Colorado Beetle

2000

Mark Wallinger

Potato print on paper. 405 x 305 mm

From Bugs: A Portfolio.

This boxed portfolio of prints exists in an edition of ninety.

CSM Museum & Study Collection

P.2011.10.CC.10

Mark Wallinger's print, King Edward and the Colorado Beetle, refers to crop destruction. The Colorado beetle of the title is a small, yellow American beetle whose larva is exceedingly destructive to the potato. Wallinger's potato print uses as its medium the potential victim of the insect. TWallinger's work is one of a portfolio of ten prints collectively entitled Bugs. The portfolio was published by the Byam Shaw School of Art in London. Produced as a fundraiser, the proceeds from the portfolio sales were dedicated to providing bursaries to support Byam Shaw students from overseas, particularly those from Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa and India.



Keteke

2023

Mame Afua Mensah

OST zine



1938.8.1 Wooden Doll

2024

Louisa Minkin

Plotter drawing & watercolour on paper



Hawk

2023

Darby Herman

Zine documenting work form the project residency at OPENing, Bank in September 2023. Screenprinted cover, 36 pages.

Agents of Deterioration Vitrine 3



Old Sun's Daughter's Dress 2023

Serene Weasel Traveller

fabric print, 564mm x 2338mm

The dress Am1985.11.1 has an old label attached which the British Museum Collections Manager thinks pre-dates its accession into the Museum. This label says the dress belonged to Old Sun's daughter. Na to sa pi (Old Sun) was a successful warrior and medicine man who was chief of Siksika in the 19th century. He signed Treaty 7 for his band and Old Sun College was established in 1971 in his name (Old Sun Community College).

My work blends my Blackfoot culture with my western worldview. I look for the balance between the world of a Blackfoot woman from the Piikani Nation, and a resident of Canada. I am integrating representations of colonialism with my traditional cultural practices, by combining the two different elements, overplaying the notion of a cultural hybrid. My work is a celebration of the adaptation, survival, and strength of all indigenous people. I pay special homage to the traditional Blackfoot territory, the land that has shaped and sustained the Blackfoot people from time and immemorial.



Untitled 2020

Rabiya Nagi

Wax and oil, 7 x 11 x 17.5 cm

This work is part of a series of masks inspired by Brancusi's smooth heads and the surrealist writer, Kobo Abe's existential science fiction novel, The Face of Another.



Artefact 2: In my future I will forget to remember me 2023

Dawn Codex

Digital Print

The instant/polaroid style images are receptacles for a future, imagined as a past. Cyber-generated images of the artist's future selves trapped in vintage style photographs.



5 copper copies

2023

Compound 13 Lab and Ian Dawson

3D printed in copper and bioplastic compound

Ghatam / 2007.454

Basket / Chata 19.5.48/385 chosen by Lata Nagarjan

Sickle / Eeli 19.5.48/05 chosen by Laxmi Kamble

Lamp / Samai 1993.81 chosen by Prutha Jain

Grinding stone pot / Ukal nn14263 chosen by Pooja Sherkhane

In January 2023 five members of The Compound 13 Lab in India chose 5 different objects from the digital database of the Horniman Museum in London. The Horniman objects that they chose related to items in common use in their community, ones that would be used and handled regularly during their daily lives. They also corresponded to familial items that had special resonance to them, the bladed object, Eeli, related to a vegetable slicer that had been passed down through generations of Laxmi's family. The objects were all 3D scanned during a remote viewing session between the Horniman Collections Centre and the Mumbai Lab space. Digital files of these objects were shared with members of the Compound and all 5 items were reprinted and shared within their community in Dharavi and beyond.



Agents of Deterioration Vitrine 4



Artefact 1: 7 Gates 2023

Dawn Codex

Ink on Paper

Using an accordion-book form, this artefact is based on a square, alluding to 'the square mile' – the financial district of London. The City of London and its 7 gates form a psycho-geographic basis for a cyber-indigenous terrain, inhabited by the artist's future selves.



Demolition Hoarding 2023

Louisa Minkin

fabric print, 564mm x 2338mm

Skin file for a model of hoardings at Oval, London.



Skins and Stones 2023

Mootookakio'ssin Project

bioplastic and copper 3D prints, skin file fabric prints,



The Spider that Died in the Tower of London 2000

Cornelia Parker

Collection: CSM Museum & Study Collection: Print of a spider in ice. Print from box set of prints by 10 Byam Shaw alumni. 304 x 404 mm Object number: P.2011.10.CC.6



West Beirut 2024

Rayya Khuri

35 MM Film Photograph

Agents of Deterioration Monitor 1



Host
2023

Esi Eshun

Digital Video, 01:20



I am Six
2023

Dawn Codex

Digital Video, sound 01:20



Black Ball Ballad Reprise
2023

Ian Dawson

Digital Video, Sound, 16.26

Reflectance Transformation Imaging documentation of the OST exhibition at OPENing,



Shadow ~ River Goddess
2023

Adanma Nwankwo

Performance Documentation: Digital Video, Sound, 40:00

Agents of Deterioration Monitor 2



Gold Weight Animations 2023

Thomas Allison



Confronting History in the Museum 2023

Lennon Mhishi

Digital Video, Sound, 06:30

The Decolonisation and Anti-Imperial Materialities Project
Infrastructures of Containment: Museums, Beyond and Possibilities into the Future
My project experiments and explores how museums develop simultaneously with, or alongside other infrastructures like the border, the reserve, camp, detention centre, the prison, and other technologies of containment. I will focus on some of the collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, particularly the African collections. Tracing elements of an enduring coloniality, I am interested in revealing the functioning of museums as 'containers', consisting of colonial collections as products of violence, extraction and dispossession. Whilst my research will also contend with how museums, in these processes claimed as preservation, also contain, through practices of, among other things, narration, display and erasure, the forms of knowledge, the histories and the possibilities in what become stultified objects, acquiring a different set of qualities. Concomitantly, infrastructures of bordering, detention and imprisonment are underpinned by the logics of carcerality that have also shaped museum practice. These infrastructures also 'contain' people, and in the frames of biopolitical governance, collapse their subjectivities into objects of risk, surveillance, and expulsion, also in the name of protection and preservation. So how do we make use the museum infrastructure, space, and contemporary art to explore and challenge these constraining legacies, and experiment different possibilities for museum practice, including beyond the museum in questions of knowledge, mobility and planetary futures.



Feeling It Out 2022

Fungai Marima

digital video, sound, 01:36

Feeling It Out is a visual representation in video form of that moment in image making where you cannot quite find the right words or actions to articulate an idea. It is also made out of an interest in the history of hands and how they link us to our relatives. How hands are knowledge. I've been inspired by key text by Henri Focillon titled 'In Praise of Hands' an essay that suggests hands being our eyes to the world. We learn our surroundings as children through feeling textures, we learn temperatures, we also observe / are aware of our bodies through the relationship we have with our hands.



Digital Shebeen 2023

Thomas Allison

Fluid simulation, Digital Video, 01.20

Lennon Mhishi
The Cup from Which We Drink

This gourd, mukombe, carries and quenches.
It is plant, of the earth, use, reuse, to come with the hands, the lips, the being-body into contact with the sorghum, and the millet, and the maize, and the keys of the mbira, and the thump thump thump of the drum in our hearts.
Even within computation, other Shebeens are possible.



The journey collecting the alumbro metal 2023

Joseph Ijoyemi

Digital Video, Sound, 02.06



Playing With Matches II

2024

Rabiya Nagi

Digital Video, Sound, 02.24

This video is based on very early childhood memories of squatting down in the backyard with my mother's cigarette butts for my 'first puff' but as I lit the very first match my long, dangling hair caught fire.



Interlochchia Part 1

2023

Esi Eshun

Digital Video, Sound, 03.37

Interlochchia is a fantastical tale woven around the figure of a mythical Plague Doctor, who, finding himself unemployed after the end of the Great Plague of 1665, decides to travel to Africa and the Americas in search of new plant remedies. In his quest, he is inspired by the work of real life naturalist, astronomer and cartographer, Georg Marcgraf or Marcgrave, whose masterful compendium, *Natural History of Brazil*, (1648) details the flora and fauna of the Pernambuco region of Brazil.

Pernambuco was the centre of a short lived Dutch colony in Brazil, whose Governor General, Count Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen sought to outline and capture in art and science all natural life there. It had an extremely high concentration of enslaved Africans, and from 1605-94, was the site of the world's largest maroon settlement, the Quilombo of Palmares, inhabited primarily by escaped Africans, but also by some indigenous peoples and marginalised Portuguese settlers.

Interlochchia is an invented word. However, googling it brings up an entry for Interlochen, a tiny community in Michigan with a population of 694. According to Wikipedia, "Interlochen takes its name from the Latin "inter", meaning "between", and the Scottish Gaelic "lochen", meaning lakes.

Before the arrival of European settlers, members of the Odawa people lived between the lakes they called Wahbekeness and Wahbekenetta (now named Duck Lake and Green Lake, respectively). The project will be developed further to explore some of these themes.

Agents of Deterioration Monitor 3



Treaty 7 360 2023

Thomas Allison

Digital Video, 01:00

Blackfoot items from Hastings Museum & Art Gallery; Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen and National Museums Scotland re-lit with a 360 HDRI from the site of the signing of Treaty and Supplementary Treaty No. 7 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Blackfeet and Other Indian Tribes, at the Blackfoot Crossing of Bow River and Fort Macleod.



In(hair)itance 2023

Walker English (Piita-Kyatsis)

Digital video, sound, 10:49

From October 16th to December 9th 2023, myself and peers from the Indigenous Art Studio Class: Creating In Spacetime (Mootookakio'ssin) participated in a collective studio with the Dr. Margaret (Marmie) Perkins Hess Gallery at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. For the next seven weeks, my peers and I took care, time, attention, and skill in creating works in the gallery that were rooted in our own cultural experiences. We had the opportunity to use the gallery as our studio space and were able to witness each other's creative processes. In-(hair)itance is a mixed-media, video, performance piece that explores themes of self/external perception, Indigenous bodily autonomy, personal identity, and resilience.



Black Ball Ballads 2023

Ian Dawson

Digital Video, Sound, 55:00

During the Mootookakio'ssin project, Blackfoot belongings held in UK museums were recorded using a variety of digital imaging processes in order to virtually reconnect them with their people. One of these technologies, Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), creates interactive pictures where lighting conditions can be altered afterwards. RTI creates lighting effects akin to a diffractive process, because of this RTI was also used in workshop environments to help demonstrate and explain how images are never innocent representations of a subject and actively participate in the emergence of meaning. Experimenting with RTI became an intrinsic part of this project and Black Ball Ballads documents these experiments with RTI. One of the constancies of the process is a black shiny ball which always appears in the photographic frame. Through an animation of the various images created during this project Black Ball Ballads tells a story of the project through the pictures that slowly evolve across the screen.

Bitter Harvest

Esi Eshun

The transnational nature of the Concepts Have Teeth and Prisoners of Love projects has opened up opportunities for exploring historical processes linking Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia. One area of enquiry relates to the global translocation of plants that formed part of what is known as the Columbian Exchange. Referring to the mass migrations of plants, animals, humans, microbes, technologies and cultural beliefs and practices in the wake of Columbus' arrival, on behalf of the Spanish crown, in the Caribbean in 1492, the term encapsulates a vast expansion of global trade set in train by new colonial and imperial networks, that led to devastating consequences for indigenous peoples and unprecedented wealth for colonising countries.

Following visits to Kew Gardens and the Pitt Rivers and Horniman Museums, we have been investigating ways in which peanuts, corn and cacao, and to a lesser extent, squash and oil palm, underwent social, cultural and environmental transformations as a result of the trade, with some of the graver repercussions still continuing to reverberate on international and planetary levels today.

Thought to have evolved in the Amazon regions in and around Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Brazil, corn, cacao and peanuts, together with squash, later spread, through human cultivation around 3,500 years ago, to other parts of the Americas including Central America and the Caribbean islands. Among the pre-Columbian Olmec, Mayan and Aztec peoples, some of these plants were endowed with sacred status, with cacao - a word derived from the Nahuatl (Aztec) word 'xocolatl' or 'bitter water' - considered a food of the gods, a belief reflected in the subsequent Latin translation, *Theobroma Cacao*, given to it by the founder of the botanical naming system, Carl Linnaeus. Consumed as a drink or medicine by Aztec royalty, warriors and merchants, the plant was important enough for the beans to be used as currency, a practice which continued in the Yucatán region of Mexico until the last century.

In contrast, although peanuts may not have been held in such high esteem, they were also widely used across the Americas for food, drinks, soap and medicine. In Peru, however, where archaeological remains dating from around 750-500 BC reveal the presence of handfuls of the nuts, buried together with other foods, in terracotta jars alongside the mummified remains of the deceased, it is thought that the nobility alone were allowed to eat them in ceremonial feasting and ritual burial settings.

For the Spanish and Portuguese colonisers, the dreams of mineral riches believed to be recumbent in the body of the earth spurred the initial impetus for exploration and settlement in the Americas. In the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, now Haiti and the Dominican Republic, where Columbus established his first colony, he instituted a system of territorial ownership known as the *encomienda*, whereby land, persons and other 'natural resources' were taken into the possession of the Spanish crown. The system, in stark distinction to the local people's eschewing of ideas of land ownership, resulted in their enslavement. Under threat of brutal reprisals, they were forced to work in newly created silver mines and plantations, and while the system was later deemed illegal, its replacement, although not technically considered slavery, continued to involve the forced servitude and displacement of rural populations to newly created urban towns engineered for the purpose of acquiring a disposable labour force who could also be converted to Christianity.

The arrival of colonising forces in the Caribbean in particular was so catastrophic for the indigenous peoples that it is estimated that by 1610, 90% of the original population had died, most succumbing to imported diseases such as smallpox, to which they had no immunity. However, many others died from forced labour conditions while still others died from attempts to resist their servitude. By 1502, the coloniser's solution to the population crisis - the four centuries' long practice of replacing the deceased workforce with millions of enslaved Africans - had been established.

And yet, another less well known consequence of the population extinction can be seen in the profound changes to rural ecologies experienced in the region. While the Columbian Exchange brought significant new plant and animal species to the Americas - the orange, banana and wheat, and the horse, cattle, pig and sheep, being important examples - just as striking was the impact of now derelict farmland on the environment. As deserted farms underwent reforestation, they brought about a decrease in levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, with the year 1610, providing evidence of what has been termed the Orbis Spike, deemed by some to be the first observable marker of anthropogenic climate change in history. According to climate scientists, Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, the date marks the effective beginning of the age of the Anthropocene, one which ties it irrevocably to the darker side of the colonial enterprise.

Meanwhile, as agricultural production quickly proved more lucrative than mining for the colonisers, elsewhere, the plants exported to Europe, Africa and Asia, met with differing fortunes. Corn was readily embraced across the world, becoming the most populous grain and staple food crop throughout much of the world, with its ability to adapt to the dry conditions in Africa believed to have played a part in helping bring about population growth and the consolidation of internal empires within the region.

Meanwhile, peanuts, transported to West African coastal countries by Portuguese traders in the 1500s were readily embraced by local people. Closely resembling an existing legume, they quickly became a staple part of the diet. Such was their availability, that peanuts are said to have been transported on slave ships, as food for African captives. Once in North America and the Caribbean, the enslaved grew them in the small gardens they were sometimes provided with, enabling them to feed themselves and to trade on a limited level on the black market. For all these reasons then, it's perhaps not surprising to learn that peanuts were shunned by the wider population, who saw them as a food fit only for slaves and as pig fodder.

In Europe, the trade in peanuts only flourished during the industrial revolution when a worldwide shortage of oil in the early 1800s brought such a demand, from the French nation, in particular, for peanut oil intended for use as fuel and machine grease, that the nuts became one of the country's most important commodities. In the French colony of Senegal, a specific locality was dedicated exclusively to its cultivation, fuelling, in the process, a partial revival, even after the official end of the trade, of a slave economy established to facilitate it.

In the United States, peanuts began to find favour after being used to feed troops in both the Civil War and successive world wars. Advances in shelling technologies, together with the sale of nuts as snacks during baseball matches and at PT Barnum's famous circus, also played a part in their popularisation, as did the work of scientist George Washington Carver, born into slavery c.1864 who demonstrated 105 possible uses of the peanuts, helping, as a consequence, to bring about a shift from the American South's over reliance on soil-degraded cotton plantations, to a more diverse, peanut based, agricultural economy instead. Meanwhile, in the 1890s, John H Kellogg is reputed to have been one of the people to invent the now ubiquitous peanut butter.

In Mexico, cacao had been drunk mixed with cold water, corn and spices, such as chillis. But once transported to Spain, it became a luxury drink for royalty and other elites who replaced the corn with sugar, and the chillis with cinnamon and vanilla. In the 1600s in Britain, the drink was enjoyed by the wealthy in fashionable Chocolate Houses, where it was consumed hot with added milk. In the 19th century, Quaker families such as the Cadburys, Frys and Rowntrees, began to manufacture chocolate as a confectionery, and it was promoted by them and other abolitionists and anti-temperance campaigners as a morally sound product and a wholesome alternative to alcohol. However, since chocolate, as we know it, was consumed with copious amounts of sugar, its manufacture continued to facilitate the plantation system it ostensibly set out to challenge. To serve the increases in demand, cacao came to be planted widely in Brazil, the Caribbean, the Philippines, Indonesia, and in what is now Ghana, and the Ivory Coast. The largest suppliers, however, were the Portuguese colonies of Sao Tome and Principe, located off the coast of West Africa. Known as the ‘Chocolate Islands’, they were the site, in the 1900s, of a scandal relating to the slave-like working conditions of indentured labourers in which Cadburys found themselves heavily embroiled.



Maruza Imi Variations

2023

Charles Nyiha

Live Performance: Friday 12th Jan 5-5:45pm

“Maruza Imi Variations” is a live electronic music performance that revitalizes the ‘Maruza Imi Cde Chinx (1980) Dzapasi Camp (Buhera).mp3’ audio archive from the Pitt Rivers Museum. Taking inspiration from animism and panpsychism, the project transforms the original recording, giving it a new form of life and inviting the audience to rethink the boundaries between sentience and insentience. This raises compelling questions for the broader practice of archiving sounds: if this recording can be reinvigorated with some form of “life,” what implications does this have for the act of collection and preservation?

This performance closes the Agents of Deterioration show.