

Hew Locke

The Ambassadors

Apr 29 — Jun 25, 2023 | The Lowry, Salford, UK

The Lowry is delighted to present Hew Locke's *The Ambassadors*. Originally commissioned by The Lowry in 2019, this is the first opportunity to present this major new work by the acclaimed Guyanese-British artist in Salford. Locke's sculptural installation consists of four Black figures on horseback, acting as envoys, bringing messages from the past to the future. Their animals are weighed down with baggage, and they themselves are festooned with glittering symbols that echo our real past and real cultures. There is a cascade of stuff; Benin bronzes, portraits of Toussaint Louverture, colonial medals, six-guns, slave pennies, symbols of justice. With these figures, Locke offers a counterpoint to traditional statues and monuments, subverting their symbols of colonial power, and questioning who our society chooses to memorialise and celebrate.

Michael Simpson, Director of Visual Art at The Lowry says: "The Ambassadors is by far The Lowry's most important commission to date, given Hew Locke's international reputation; the quality of the work and the wider political and social debates that surround public statuary. The Lowry was proud to commission *The Ambassadors* in 2019, and it was hugely disappointing that the Pandemic prevented us from showing them sooner. We are now thrilled to be able to present them as originally planned in Salford and for our audiences to enjoy."

Since being commissioned the works feature in the landmark group exhibition *In the Black Fantastic* at the Hayward Gallery, London (29 June – 18 Sept 2022) and Kunsthall Rotterdam, Netherlands (19 Nov – 10 Apr 2023), Locke's *The Ambassadors* will now have a solo presentation at The Lowry, Salford.

The works will be shown alongside a bespoke wallpaper featuring imagery from Locke's ongoing *Share* series; these now-obsolete historical documents are source material symbolising the history and movement of power, money and ownership. Locke reworks these certificates by embellishing them with acrylic paint, to obscure or highlight information. The exhibition will also feature three new *Share* works that hold direct connections to north-west England including certificates from the Manchester Ship Canal Company, and the Middleton and Tonge Cotton Mill, adorned with a painting of Mahatma Gandhi who visited the Lancashire mill during the *Swadeshi* movement in 1931.

Visitors to the exhibition will have an opportunity to create their own response to *The Ambassadors*. In an adjacent gallery space transformed to look like an artists' studio or workshop, visitors have access to a range of craft materials and guidance to make their own mini monuments, medals and coins, or to design the embellishments for an equestrian statue, and to be displayed in the gallery space.

Zoe Watson, Contemporary Curator at The Lowry says: "Hew Locke's intricately layered and visually powerful work allows us to re-examine and contemplate questions such as who should be immortalised in our society, and why? We invite our own audiences to ask those questions for themselves, inspired by Locke's fantastical visions, which open a gateway to a vast multitude of possibilities."

Alongside the permanent LS Lowry Collection, The Lowry presents a regularly changing programme of contemporary exhibitions commissioned by or curated in-house by The Lowry. This major commission was made possible thanks to Arts Council England and Salford City Council.