

An Allegory of the Black Atlantic

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The Victoria Memorial stands at the end of The Mall, majestically sited in front of Buckingham Palace. The multi-tiered monument cum fountain was erected as a tribute to Queen Victoria following her death in 1901 after her long reign as the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1837–1901), as well as the Empress of India, ruling over the world's largest empire for much of the nineteenth century. It is surrounded by large bronze guardian figures with walking lions, representing *Peace*, *Progress*, *Manufacture* and *Agriculture*, at its four corners. Designed by Sir Thomas Brock in the beaux arts and Edwardian baroque style, the central monument soars twenty-five metres tall. It is topped by *Winged Victory* – a gilded bronze figure standing on a globe with a victor's palm in one hand – with female personifications of *Constancy* and *Courage* sitting just beneath her. Eagles with spread wings symbolising empire are perched on the east and west sides. An elaborate scheme of allegorical figures sits below the base, including the queen herself carrying a sceptre in her right hand and an orb in her left with the inscription 'Victoria Regina Imperatrix'. A nautical theme incorporating mermaids, mermen and hippogriffs is illustrated in the frieze that runs along the marble walls of the lower basin into which the water cascades gently down. Emblematic of *Sea Power*, also referred to as the allegory of *The Children of the Sea*, the Memorial represents the naval power of Britain and 'the maritime greatness of the Empire', in Brock's own words.¹ The Memorial was hailed as a huge success on completion (though some criticised the conventional imagery), with its maker celebrated and knighted. It is one of the largest monuments dedicated to a king or queen of England.

From the beginning, the Memorial was intended to be part of an 'architectonic scheme'² conceived in relation to the east entrance of The Mall, creating an axis from Trafalgar Square to Buckingham Palace. Funding for the Memorial was gathered from around the British Empire, and included major donations from the Australia House of Representatives and the New Zealand government. During 1902, tribes from the west coast of Africa sent goods to be sold, with the proceeds going towards the costs of the memorial. Sufficient funds for the Memorial itself were soon raised but when it became clear that funding for the surrounding scheme was still short the plans were modified. Gate piers were erected, on which inscriptions representing the colonies appeared below sculptures of nude boys with European features. These formed a triangulated axis that situated the Memorial (and symbolically the British Empire) squarely within its place in the world, with 'South Africa' and 'West Africa' on the gate piers at the end of The Mall to the east of the Memorial, 'Canada' on the outer piers onto Green Park to the west, and 'Australia and the Malay States' on the gate piers leading to Birdcage Walk, on the south side. The only other major colony not represented was India, which erected its own memorial in honour of its Empress of India, in the form of a museum and gardens in Calcutta.

Though the scheme was only partially finished, the dedication ceremony took place on 16 May 1911. It was 'a scene of unparalleled magnificence and splendour'³ of a carefully orchestrated pomp and circumstance in which even the colour of the drapery used to unveil the statue of Queen Victoria was highly debated: 'the purest white' was eventually chosen. The ceremony was presided over by King George V and his first cousin Wilhelm II of Germany – grandsons of Victoria who arrived together with their families in royal procession. A large contingent from Parliament also attended, as well as representatives of various armed forces, which 'in the glory of their pre-war uniforms was a sight unequalled in the world', as it was later described.⁴

Kara Walker's commission for the Turbine Hall begins here, some hundred years after the unveiling of The Victoria Memorial, as a gift, in her words, 'from one cultural subject to the heart of an Empire'.⁵ This new large-scale public sculpture uses the form of the original monument to present a counter memorial. Playfully subverting the usual commemorative function of such a monument and the symbolic power that it represents, Walker inverts the sculptural logic and allegorical function,

metaphorically and symbolically turning it inside out. *Fons Americanus* upends the usual narrative and mythologising role of public monuments, to expose the underbelly that props up official accounts of history. In questioning what is remembered, and how, the artist is deconstructing the power dynamics embedded in the narrating of history, making us confront violent pasts. For Walker, ‘history is a genre’ and as art historian Rebecca Peabody notes, ‘in some instances, perhaps, history is determined barometrically rather than linearly; it is the pressure, the intensity of the event, that makes it historic rather than the veracity’.⁶

Using water and waterborne disaster as the central motif of *Fons Americanus*, Walker creates an allegory of the Black Atlantic. The mythical waters of the Atlantic Ocean often figure in Walker’s work, representing both the primordial beginnings or the ‘original sacrificial site’ that give way to ‘the collective ancestry of Europeans, Africans and Americans’,⁷ as curator Yasmil Raymond has noted, and the artist’s own ancestral lines. Walker’s preoccupation with the antebellum South – a time roughly from the late eighteenth century until the start of the American Civil War in 1861 when plantation-era agriculture cultivating staple crops such as cotton, tobacco, sugar and rice, all reliant on slave labour, led to great economic growth – finds its antecedent in the British Empire and the origins of her own identity as an African American woman. *Fons Americanus* uses water as a metaphor for the interconnected histories of Europe, America and Africa, and unleashes a range of visual references that excavate the ambitions, fates and tragedies of peoples across three continents. Walker weaves together a wide and rich set of references (see pp.60–95), including the seascapes of the nineteenth-century American painter Winslow Homer and the English Romantic painter J.M.W. Turner’s sublime maritime landscapes, as well as real-life figures from history (Toussaint L’Ouverture and Marcus Garvey) and fictional and mythical ones (like Emperor Jones and the Sable Venus). She cuts across history and time as well as real and imagined space, using fact, fiction and fantasy to narrate her own origin story of the Black Atlantic.

The tradition of European baroque fountains becomes the vessel from which she delivers her message about the violent, tragic beginnings of an African-American identity. Inspired by the Trevi Fountain and the fountains in the Piazza Navona she first encountered at first hand during a residency at the American Academy in Rome, Walker appropriates the theatre, spectacle and grand personifications of seas and oceans found in fountains such as Bernini’s *Fountain of the Four Rivers* 1651. Bernini’s monument depicts the Gods of the great rivers in four continents – the Nile in Africa, the Ganges in Asia, the Danube in Europe and the Río de la Plata in America – as symbols of discovery and domination, and of the power and glory of the Pope and the Catholic Church. Walker’s *Fons Americanus* subverts the narrative intention and mythologising of power in such monuments, using water instead as a destructive and catastrophic force. Intentionally rendered in rough form, as if in the process of being either shaped or eroded, the elements in the elaborate iconography of Walker’s fountain take on the surface of the moulded clay used during their genesis in the artist’s studio. In place of the permanence of stone and gleaming white marble, Walker’s memorial appears to take shape from wet clay, seemingly emerging from the concrete floor of Turbine Hall, from the depths of hundreds of years of colonial exploits that lie buried in cities like London.

II

Walker introduces us to *Fons Americanus* with a discrete sculpture in the form of a large-scale clam shell, standing alone in the vast expanse of the Turbine Hall. The familiarity of the form we first encounter belies what we see inside it. Traditionally giant shells have cradled and supported mythical symbols of history – for example, in Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* c.1484–6, depicting the goddess of love arriving on the shores of civilisation on an enormous scallop shell – but in Walker’s sculpture we discover a scene of melancholy and tragedy. Her beautifully rendered shell encloses a

weeping boy, almost completely submerged in water. His head floats just above the surface, as if drowning or emerging from the dead, with pools of water running from his eyes.

The form of the scallop shell derives from Walker's fascination with the image of *The Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies* (above and p.73). This engraving by British artist and book illustrator Thomas Stothard (1755–1834) was originally published as the frontispiece to the 1801 edition of the book *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*. It portrays Venus as an African woman who stands on an opened half-shell; surrounded by white cherubs, she is being towed in a dolphin chariot across the Atlantic Ocean. Accompanying her is Triton, the Greek god and messenger of the sea, who carries the British flag triumphantly and guides the procession. It is an allegory that mythologises the Middle Passage and the exploits of the British Empire. The image is made all the more disturbing by the text of the book, which was written by the British politician Bryan Edwards. A staunch supporter of the slave trade, Edwards justified slavery on the grounds of the huge economic benefits for England, detailing the value of goods exported from the West Indies into England and Ireland over the span of a hundred years, between 1698 and 1798. Stothard's engraving is in turn based on Isaac Teale's 'The Sable Venus: An Ode' (1793) – a poem that celebrates (and denigrates) African beauty through sexual domination. The image of the Sable Venus serves a dual function as it is a mythologising of the Empire through the justification of exploiting the black body. The image has been the subject of much study and scholarly interpretations. Regulus Allen notes that it 'exemplifies three fundamental tenets of the Black Venus construction: the invocation of black beauty ultimately is employed to show the beauty and superiority of whiteness, the Black Venus remains a sexually desirable figure despite her representation as aesthetically inadequate, and this attraction to the inferior undermines the very pretense of white supremacy that the figure was created to uphold.'⁸

Walker herself reproduced the image in an artist's book accompanying an exhibition in 1997 at The Renaissance Society in Chicago. In 2015, American poet Robin Coste Lewis co-opted the imagery to ambitious ends, writing a 79-page narrative poem comprised entirely of titles, catalogue entries or exhibit descriptions of objects from Western art history in which a black female figure is present. Excavating thousands of years of art objects, of systems of classification, of the politics of representation, and of racial stereotyping in the 'invisible graveyards' of the museum, Lewis's poem is a meditation on the cultural depiction of the black female body and becomes a textual companion to Walker's visual investigations of the representation of black subjectivity.⁹

Walker's sculpture connects also to Bunce Island in Sierra Leone, which houses the ruins of a colonial slave-trading fortress. First settled and fortified by English slave traders circa 1670, Bunce Island was one of a long string of commercial forts built along the West African coast from which thousands of Africans were transported across the Atlantic. It is where captured men, women and children met their fates to be sold on the plantations of the New World, and where those who refused to board slave ships were tortured and dropped into the 'Hole of the Brave'. The fortress was attacked and destroyed multiple times. As David Olusoga notes, 'this litany of destruction and reconstruction is testimony to the importance of the island to the British and evidence of the outrageous profits generated by the trade in enslaved Africans ... It was, in a way, a proto-industrial production line, along which captive Africans were brought and sold, sorted, processed, warehoused and literally branded – marking them out as human commodities.'¹⁰ Coming across a video on a tourist site about Sierra Leone, Walker was inspired to create an image embodying this history. All that remains today on the island are remnants of stone fortifications and a commemorative plaque which reads:

Bunce Island was one of forty major European forts build along the West African coast during the slave trade era. Bunce Island (originally Bence) was at the limit of navigation for ocean-going vessels, a meeting place for European traders and African merchants coming from the interior. A series of British firms operated here from about 1670, including the Royal African Company and

the London firms of Grant, Oswald & Sargeant and John & Alexander Anderson. The British traders purchased slaves, gold, ivory, camwood, etc.

From about 1756, they shipped slaves in large numbers to South Carolina and Georgia, where American rice planters paid high prices for slaves from this region. During its long history, Bunce Island was attacked twice by pirates (1719, 1720) and four times by the French (1695, 1704, 1779, 1794). The present fort is the last of six on this site, rebuilt following the last French attack. After Parliament prohibited the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, Bunce Island was used as a sawmill and trading post. It was abandoned about 1835. In 1948 Bunce Island was declared a national monument.

What is to be said of how we commemorate history, of how we acknowledge those who refused to board slave ships as an act of resistance and who sacrificed their own lives in the face of a life of subjugation? How do we account for the actions of those who profited from the lucrative business of the slave trade, who benefited from the royal charters that gave merchants monopolies over forts like Bunce Island? History should be remembered in the specificity of the event, in the gruesome and detailed accounting of what was lost and not just what was gained. By the 1680s, the Royal African Company was conveying about five thousand slaves across the Atlantic each year. The governor of the company was the Duke of York (later King James II) and so many of those enslaved were branded 'DY', while others were seared with the company's initials, 'RAC'. In the early years that the Bunce Island fort was in operation, between 1672 and 1689, the Company transported between 90,000 and 100,000 slaves in total. Its profits made a major contribution to the increase in the financial power of those who controlled the City of London, including the commercial networks of banks, insurance companies, shipbuilders and brokers who all exploited the trade for their own ends.¹¹ By the 1790s, a quarter of Britain's income came from imports from the West Indies alone, contributing to the vast accumulation of wealth by plantation owners such as William Beckford, who was also Lord Mayor of London in 1762 and 1769.¹² Walker's weeping boy resurrects these forgotten episodes of history, the terrible facts too difficult to swallow, the ghosts that still inhabit Bunce Island and the truth behind London's wealth founded on the profits from slavery. He resurfaces from the watery depths to call into question what we choose to remember and that which we forget, as the tragic counterpart to heroic images of discovery and conquest.

III.

The central monument of *Fons Americanus* consists of a cadre of figures positioned on a multi-tiered platform. Mimicking the architecture of the Victoria Memorial, these figures reference art-historical sources, from Winslow Homer's *Gulf Stream* 1899 to J.M.W. Turner's *Slave Ship* 1840 and from William Blake's 'The Guardian Prince of Albion' from his poetical work *America: A Prophecy* of 1793 to Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* 1991, as well as the artist's own iconography. The elaborate tableau of figures that unfolds around the monument both utilises and subverts the conventions of storytelling.

With arms splayed open to the skies and head arching back as water spouts from her neck and breasts, the Venus-like figure on top supplants *Winged Victory* with a personification of abundance. For the artist, the figure represents both a wet nurse and a priestess of a syncretic Afro-Brazilian or Afro-Caribbean religion. These religions developed in the New World when enslaved Africans were forced to convert and worship European religions and so began to mask their traditional African beliefs and customs within Roman Catholicism and Christianity imagery. Candomblé, for example, is a religious tradition that originated in Salvador, the capital of the Brazilian state of Bahia, at the beginning of the nineteenth century and is the creolisation of traditional Yoruba, Fon and Bantu beliefs brought from West and Central Africa by enslaved captives in the Portuguese empire. Literally

meaning ‘dance in honour of the gods’, Candomblé was condemned by the Catholic Church and its followers were persecuted violently. Santería is an Afro-Caribbean religion based on Yoruba beliefs and traditions that grew out of Cuba, merging aspects of Yoruba religion along with Roman Catholicism and indigenous cultures. Many of these syncretic religions use trance ceremonies for communicating with ancestors and deities, which are often performed by women priests. Thus, Walker’s Venus, her mother of civilisation, is represented as an Afro-Brazilian/Caribbean priestess perched atop the fountain in an entranced state calling upon the gods, spirits and deities. She towers over the monument as ‘the daughter of waters’¹³ with liquid spouting from her neck and breasts representing the blood and milk that together become the ‘amniotic fluid’ that gives birth to the Black Atlantic.

The second tier of figures wraps around a quatrefoil pedestal. Seated in a majestic pose and looking down the length of the Turbine Hall, the figure of a sea captain takes the position of Queen Victoria on the Memorial. This figure alludes to a gamut of historical figures, mostly captains and seafaring adventurers of different political moments and social/cultural histories, including François-Dominique Toussaint L’Ouverture, Marcus Garvey, Paul Cuffee and Emperor Jones. L’Ouverture (1743–1803) was the hero of the Haitian Revolution who instigated a slave revolt that led to the abolishment of slavery and the founding of the republic of Haiti. Jamaican-born black nationalist and leader of the pan-Africanism movement Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) authored ‘The Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World’ and advocated for the establishment of independent black states around the world. Cuffee (1759–1817) was an entrepreneur, sea captain and abolitionist born free into a multiracial Quaker family in Massachusetts. He built a shipping empire in New England, was one of the first to initiate the ‘back to Africa’ efforts and led expeditions to Freetown, Sierra Leone with the aim to establish a colony of free Blacks. Emperor Jones is the eponymous character from Eugene O’Neil’s 1920 play about an African American former Pullman porter who kills another black man in a game of dice and escapes to a small Caribbean island where he sets himself up as emperor; he recounts his story in flashbacks as he attempts to escape from his former subjects who have rebelled against him. Walker’s figure is a synthesis of these real-life heroes and fictional characters that represent for her the desire and will to fight against European colonialism, while also revealing the contradictions within the attainment of power and domination.

The captain figure is flanked to his left by a man on his knees, in a posture of submission. To his right is a sculpture of a menacing tree with a hangman’s noose, referring to the horrific, extrajudicial act of lynching commonly practiced by white supremacist mobs in the antebellum South. The tree is situated on the monument in the place of the scales of justice on the Victoria Memorial. At the rear of the pedestal is a maternal character, holding a coconut at her breast. The coconut signals the fruits of life, yet it is held awkwardly and negligently as if to suggest that at any moment it might be dropped onto the head of the person below. Under her skirt, a man crouched at her feet is depicted in a position of being subjugated. This tableau offers a biting critique of the Victoria Memorial, where a maternal figure is depicted with a suckling infant and a baby clasping onto to her ankle.

Below, in the two concentric pools of *Fons Americanus*, is a scene of a disaster at sea with wave motifs and sharks circling around the figures, as well as swimmers, ships, and fragments of bodies emerging from its shallow waters. In the upper inner pool, Walker’s allusion to Turner’s *Slave Ship* 1840 – a work she has come to on a number of previous occasions – merges with a more contemporary referent, Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* 1991. Inspired too by Winslow Homer’s *Shark Fishing* 1885 and John Singleton Copley’s *Watson and the Shark* 1778, Walker’s predatory sharks writhe in wait as they circle below the figures.

Originally titled *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming On*, Turner’s celebrated painting was inspired by a real-life incident that took place in 1781 on the slave ship *Zong*. Facing a storm ahead the captain threw overboard hundreds of dying and sick bodies being transported through the Middle Passage, in order to collect insurance payments for slaves ‘lost at sea’.

Shocked by this story, Turner painted this work and exhibited it at the Royal Academy in London in 1840, during a meeting of the Anti-Slavery League. Walker's sculpture of a slave ship on one end of the lower basin brings Turner's sublime painting of this horrific event to life in a three-dimensional scene of baroque grandeur. The lower basin also features an abstracted figure with dreadlocks, who appears to be washing something, possibly an item of clothing. This figure is a Maroon – a member of one of the Caribbean communities who were originally descended from escaped slaves. In the eighteenth century, Jamaican Maroons fought two wars against the British, both of which ended with treaties of independence. At the front and back of the lower basin are two figurative motifs that punctuate the narrative as bookends to *Fons Americanus*. In front stands a partially submerged fishing vessel that is reminiscent of Winslow Homer's *Gulf Stream*. Much like the painting, which Homer made in Maine in 1899 after one of his trips to the Bahamas, the motif depicts a black man in a leaky boat stranded at sea. Art historians have read Homer's painting as symbolic, connecting to heightened racial tensions of the time, though others attribute it to the sense of mortality that the artist was feeling after his father's death. In *Fons* we see a homage to Homer, the figure and boat lifted out of his painting. The name 'K. West' is scrawled on the stern of Walker's boat, an allusion to the music star Kanye West. The work depicts a precarious situation of a man adrift at sea, facing the prospect of impending attack. At the back of the lower basin is a sculpture of a man retrieving a bullet-ridden body. This calls to mind Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old African American boy who was killed in Mississippi in 1955. Accused of offending a white woman, and so violating the strictures of conduct in the Jim Crow-era South, Till was abducted, beaten and shot in the head before his body was weighted and forced to sink to the bottom of the Tallahatchie River. His mother insisted on a public funeral service with an open casket where the young boy's bloated and mutilated body could be shown to the world. His brutal murder and the acquittal of his killers became one of the rallying points of the Civil Rights movement. In *Fons Americanus*, Walker represents Till's story as a religious imagery of martyrdom.

IV.

This is not the first time that waterborne disasters have featured in Walker's work. In 2006, invited by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to make an exhibition that juxtaposed her own works with historical artworks from the museum's collection, Walker responded with a project titled *After the Deluge*, which referenced the events around Hurricane Katrina. The natural catastrophe in August 2005 and the devastating effect of its aftermath on the mostly black residents of the greater New Orleans area was a tragedy of epic proportions. The media images that flooded the news channels shortly after the event pictured sites of desperation, houses literally and figuratively turned inside out in a city that was 80 per cent underwater. To any American it was a shameful moment in recent history—from the failure of the levees and floodwalls built by the Army Corps of Engineers to protect its citizens to the scenes at the Superdome sports complex housing over 15,000 stranded inhabitants. The disaster highlighted the gross inequity of black lives and the racist politics that still shape American policy and public discourse.

Walker's response, in the form of an exhibition and a visual essay, attempted to understand the horror, tragedy and perspective of these events through the metaphor of water. She brought together Turner's *Slave Ship* and Winslow Homer's sensitive depictions of black life in nineteenth-century Americas, including *Gulf Stream*, along with the studies made during Homer's two winter trips to the Bahamas in 1884–5 and 1898–9, as well as other works of art from throughout history. These were woven together into a larger narrative, interspersed with her own drawings such as *Middle Passage* and textual interventions typewritten onto index cards, that attempted to trace, in Walker's own

words, 'the transformative effect and psychological meaning of the sea'.¹⁴ As she wrote in the accompanying publication:

This book is simply not about New Orleans or Katrina or waterborne disaster. It is an attempt to understand the subconscious narratives at work when we talk about such an event ... Black life, urban and rural Southern life, is often related as if it were entity with a shadowy beginning and a potentially heroic future, but with a soul that is crippled by racist psychosis. One theme in my artwork is the idea that a Black subject in the present tense is a container for specific pathologies from the past and is continually growing and feeding off those maladies. Racist pathology is the Muck, aforementioned. In this book's analogy, murky, toxic waters become the amniotic fluid of a potentially new and difficult birth, flushing out of a coherent and stubborn body long-held fears and suspicions.¹⁵

One can't help but draw a line from the media images of the desperate citizens trying to keep afloat in New Orleans to the Tallahatchie River in Mississippi that carried Emmet Till's mutilated body and to Homer's fisherman on a leaky boat drifting in the Caribbean. For Walker, the seas, rivers and tributaries flow together and connect back to the original sin of the transatlantic slave trade. The waterways that forcibly transported Africans across the Atlantic, carrying human cargo on British ships sailing from Africa and in turn brought goods like cotton and sugar cultivated in slave plantations to London, Liverpool and Bristol: these are the birthing channels of the Black Atlantic, where modern industry and economy come into existence. Walker's notable 16mm film using shadow puppets titled *8 Possible Beginnings or: The Creation of African-America, a Moving Picture by Kara E. Walker* 2005 visualises this genesis, with a giant black female sea creature consuming the floating bodies of dead slaves representing the Middle Passage.

When the Victoria Memorial was erected in 1911, it was celebrating Queen Victoria's 63-year reign, during which Britain acquired unprecedented power and wealth – its empire extended to the Americas, Africa, Asia and Oceania, and revolutionary developments in science, industry and culture made it the 'workshop of the world'. It was the time of the Great Exhibition – the world exposition held in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851 (a pet project of Victoria's husband, Prince Albert) that demonstrated the achievements in industry and manufacturing. Britain was on the world's stage as a symbol of the modern age. The full effects of the Industrial Revolution were to be felt during the Victorian era, with cities like Manchester in Lancashire dominating the global production of cotton textile with its steam and coal-powered cotton mills and mass-production factories. Towns and cities were transformed into commercial centres.¹⁶ The raw material that fuelled the textile industry came from the Mississippi Valley and the Deep South, grown and harvested by enslaved Africans. Though the Slave Trade Act was passed by the British Parliament in 1807, slavery was still commonly practiced in the Americas and West Indies well into the nineteenth century, directly benefiting the economy of Britain. As the historian David Olusoga notes: 'in the first half of the nineteenth century it was possible for slaves in the Southern states to spend most of their stolen lives producing cotton that stoked Britain's Industrial Revolution. By the time of America's Civil War in 1861 almost two million slaves laboured in the cotton fields, and New Orleans was linked to Liverpool by a ceaseless flow of slave-produced cotton. The black men and women of the American South are the missing persons in the popular retelling of our industrial heritage.'¹⁷

What Olusoga accounts for in his riveting book *Black and British: A Forgotten History* as the missing pieces of British history, and a reclaiming of the erasure of Africa and the role of slavery in Britain's empire building, Walker throws up and recasts in her counter memorial. Using storytelling, literary and allegorical devices, as well as the physical form of the fountain itself and all the connotations of power that it strives to mythologise, she upends and topples these dominant narratives, exposing the stories laying hidden under the marble surfaces and in the elaborate

iconographies of public monuments; lurking behind great heritage buildings in cities like London and Manchester and the industrial glory of former shipping docks in Liverpool and Bristol. She envisions the other side of the story and of the deeply entwined histories between Britain and America. Hers is a different origin story, a different mythological beginning, that in her own imaginative universe and visual iconography dredges up beautiful, violent and tragic images and all the physical and psychological pathologies of race that come from this beginning. Walker's provocation is a vision that turns the world upside down and inside out, where the waterworks in *Fons* extend metaphorically to the River Thames and flow out into the Atlantic Ocean, transforming into the bloodstream that connects 'our respective Mother-lands Afrique and Albion' and our shared collective identity.

- 1 John Anthony Sankey, 'Thomas Brock and the Critics: An Examination of Brock's Place in the New Sculpture Movement', PhD thesis, University of Leeds (Fine Art Department), 2 vols., 2002, 1, p.237.
- 2 Quoted *ibid*.
- 3 'The Unveiling of the Queen Victoria Memorial, May 16th 1911', British Pathé newsreel, reissued with commentary (1931) <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/the-unveiling-of-the-queen-victoria-memorial>
- 4 *Ibid*.
- 5 Quoted from Kara Walker's project proposal for the Turbine Hall installation (see p.56, above). The description of the iconography that follows in this essay is based on the project proposal, Walker's own writing on the work (see pp.54–8, above) and email correspondence with the artist.
- 6 Rebecca Peabody, *Consuming Stories: Kara Walker and the Imagining of Human Race*, Oakland, California 2016, p.20.
- 7 Yasmit Raymond, 'Maladies of Power: A Kara Walker Lexicon', in Philippe Vergne (ed.), *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Oppressor, My Enemy, My Love*, exh. cat., Walker Art Center, Minneapolis 2007, 'Water', p.355.
- 8 Regulus Allen, 'The Sable Venus and the Desire for the Undesirable', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, vol.51, no.3, *Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (Summer 2011), pp.667–91.
- 9 Robin Coste Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems*, New York 2015.
- 10 David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History*, London 2016, p.2.
- 11 Ann M. Carlos and Jamie Brown Kruse, 'The Decline of the Royal African Company: Fringe Firms and the Role of the Charter', *Economic History Review*, vol.49, no.2 (1996), pp.291–313.
- 12 *London, Sugar & Slavery: 1600 onwards*, permanent exhibition, Museum of London Docklands.
See <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london-docklands/permanent-galleries/london-sugar-slavery>
- 13 This phrase is part of Walker's title for the work; see p.17.
- 14 Kara Walker, *After the Deluge*, New York 2007.
- 15 *Ibid*.
- 16 Olusoga 2016, p.25.
- 17 *Ibid*., pp.25–6.