

# IKON



## Frequently Asked Questions

Hew Locke: *Foreign Exchange*

14 June – 15 August 2022

Victoria Square, Birmingham

### About the artwork

#### **What is *Foreign Exchange*?**

*Foreign Exchange* is a temporary public sculpture by Guyanese-British artist Hew Locke. It is a reimagining of Birmingham's city-centre sculpture of Queen Victoria, presented by the Birmingham 2022 Festival and commissioned by Ikon.

#### **Why is the artwork called *Foreign Exchange*?**

Hew Locke often uses titles that can be read in different ways. *Foreign Exchange* might remind us of the exchange of cultures, wealth, labour and DNA that happened during the Empire – all of which continue across the Commonwealth today. Our culture in the UK today is a result of these exchanges.

#### **Why is Hew Locke interested in Birmingham's Queen Victoria statue?**

Queen Victoria remains the most commemorated British monarch in history. For the artist, public sculptures of Queen Victoria in Commonwealth countries have been an enduring fascination, driving his exploration into their symbolic power. Birmingham's city-centre statue reminded Locke of another of Queen Victoria that he used to pass every day on his way to school in Guyana.

Despite its location, the statue is often overlooked – so familiar that it becomes invisible. By reimagining the sculpture, Hew Locke hopes to draw new attention to it.

## **What do the five replicas of Queen Victoria represent?**

### **Why are they standing in a boat?**

Ships and boats are carriers of many meanings, both symbolic, and actual. Here, they evoke centuries of trade, migration and complex histories. Encircling the original statue are five smaller statues of Queen Victoria, being shipped across the world. The helmets allude to that worn by Britannia: the national personification of Britain. Statues and busts of Victoria were 'gifted' and erected in every country in the Empire – often copies of each-other, or made by the same sculptors. Before Birmingham's, Sir Thomas Brock had already made three statues of Queen Victoria in Worcester, Cape Town and Lucknow. He later made statues of the monarch' in Belfast, Bangalore (Bengaluru), Hove and many other towns.

### **What do the medals they wear represent?**

Each of the five smaller statues carry a replica of a medal relating to an important colonial battle. They are: the Second Afghan War (1878–80) medal, the East and West Africa medal (1892), the Ashanti Campaign medal (1901), the Serangapatam battle medal (1801), and a medal commemorating the centenary of the capture of Trinidad and Tobago by the British Royal Navy in 1797.

### **Why is this artwork temporary?**

The artwork is presented in the context of the Birmingham 2022 Festival and will remain on view through the summer months, and during the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. Locke has conceived the sculpture as a temporary intervention, hoping residents will pay more attention to the original statue, when it is revealed again.

### **Does the artwork affect the existing statue?**

The artwork is a temporary intervention that wraps around the existing statue and will not alter or affect the statue's original state. The work has been made with world-renowned sculpture fabrication specialists Pangolin Editions to ensure the full preservation of the existing statue.

### **Why is this happening now?**

Originally unveiled in 1901, Sir Thomas Brock's marble figure of Queen Victoria was recast in bronze by William Bloye and members of Birmingham School of Art in time for the Festival of Britain in 1951. Seventy years on, Locke reimagines the sculpture for the Birmingham 2022 Festival, drawing attention to the craftsmanship of Brock and Bloye while utilising new technologies and materials to bring the sculpture into the twenty-first century.

*Foreign Exchange* forms part of Hew Locke's twenty year-long "impossible proposals" project that reimagines public sculptures around the world. His detailed preparatory sketches for Queen Victoria, made during his solo exhibition at Ikon Gallery in 2019, are now becoming a physical reality thanks to the opportunity offered by the Birmingham 2022 Festival. This temporary work is seen within the context of a wide-reaching Festival of performances, events and projects which consider our place in the Commonwealth, the present moment and stories of Birmingham and the West Midlands.

## About the artist

### **Who is Hew Locke and how can I find out more about him?**

Hew Locke RA Elect is a Guyanese-British artist who has been reimagining historical statues for twenty years. Born in Edinburgh in 1959, Locke lived in Georgetown, Guyana, from 1966 to 1988 and is currently based in London. He obtained a BA Fine Art in Falmouth (1988) and an MA Sculpture at the Royal College of Art, London (1994). His work is represented in many international art collections including The Government Art Collection, Tate, British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Locke is presently exhibiting *The Procession* as his 2022 Tate Britain Commission and will also be the next artist to undertake the Metropolitan Museum Façade Commission in New York later this year. In 2019, Ikon hosted a major solo exhibition of his work titled [\*Here's the Thing\*](#).

At the same time as *Foreign Exchange*, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery will exhibit Hew Locke's work *Souvenir 9 (Queen Victoria)* (2019), a mixed media installation acquired for the city's collection in 2021. In the same year Tate acquired Locke's work *Armada* (2019), with support from Art Fund.

For more information visit Hew Locke's [website](#).

### **Has Hew Locke made similar works before?**

Hew Locke has made similar works in other media – by photographing statues and then painting on the photographs; by collaging objects onto photographs; and by collaging onto porcelainware busts. More information available [here](#).

Locke has wanted to make an artwork like this, working with an existing public statue, for nearly 20 years but this is the first time he has been able to achieve this ambition. It is the natural progression of many years of research and experimentation by the artist.

## About the Birmingham 2022 Festival

### **What is the Birmingham 2022 Festival?**

The Birmingham 2022 Festival is a six-month programme of creativity that surrounds the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. The festival comprises a wide-reaching programme of over 200 performances, events, and projects which all consider our place in the Commonwealth, the present moment and stories of Birmingham and the West Midlands.

For more information visit the Birmingham 2022 Festival's [website](#).

### **Why has the Birmingham 2022 Festival presented this artwork?**

The Birmingham 2022 Festival is working with Ikon, Birmingham's flagship contemporary art institution, which has commissioned *Foreign Exchange*. In 2019, Ikon presented Hew Locke's critically acclaimed exhibition *Here's The Thing* – the artist's most comprehensive exhibition to date. The Birmingham 2022 Festival offers an apt moment to revisit Locke's work in Birmingham and to stage this significant artistic gesture.

The Queen Victoria statue sits in Victoria Square in Birmingham's city-centre, which will be a significant hub of activity for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. The square is an important and prominent cultural landmark, and Locke has engaged with the statue in a nuanced way. He has worked over many years with historical source material and investigating the power of public statues.

## About Ikon

### What is Ikon?

Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art gallery located in Birmingham, UK. It is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art in a context of debate and participation. Ikon presents a changing programme of exhibitions through the year and offers free entry for all. [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)

### How is Ikon involved in this project?

Ikon commissioned *Foreign Exchange*, following its 2019 solo exhibition with Hew Locke, *Here's The Thing* – the most comprehensive presentation of Locke's work to date. The project is part of Ikon's *Arrivals* programme (June - August), which is concerned with the international movement of people and ideas and organised to coincide with the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Ikon has a history of commissioning major public artworks. In 2021–22, Birmingham-born artist Osman Yousefzada covered the city's iconic Selfridges building in a five-ton canvas, creating one of the world's largest pieces of public art entitled *Infinity Pattern 1*. In 2014 Ikon unveiled *A Real Birmingham Family* by Turner Prize-winning artist Gillian Wearing, a permanent sculpture prominently located outside the Library of Birmingham.

### How does the project encourage public engagement?

Running alongside the project, Birmingham 2022 Festival and Ikon are offering public engagement programmes to educate audiences about the original statue, its history, and its heritage. This includes programmes which engage with local schools and families, giving future generations the opportunity to learn about the statue, as well as Locke's artwork and the important subjects and ideas it brings forth.

Foreign Exchange is generously supported by [Arts Council England](#), [National Lottery Heritage Fund](#), [Henry Moore Foundation](#) and the Ikon Investment Fund.