

Tuesday 14 June 2022

Birmingham 2022 Festival and Ikon launch *Foreign Exchange*: a temporary public artwork by acclaimed artist Hew Locke which reimagines Birmingham's Queen Victoria sculpture

- Titled *Foreign Exchange*, the work is presented by the Birmingham 2022 Festival and commissioned by Ikon
- It launches on Tuesday 14 June 2022 and will remain on view throughout the summer and during the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games
- This is Locke's first temporary public sculpture, culminating from two decades of research and exploration into historic statues



Foreign Exchange by Hew Locke, a temporary public artwork presented by the Birmingham 2022 Festival and commissioned by Ikon.
Photo by Shaun Fellows. Courtesy of Birmingham 2022 Festival and Ikon

Launched today, Birmingham's city-centre sculpture of Queen Victoria has been reimaged by acclaimed Guyanese-British artist Hew Locke. Presented by the Birmingham 2022 Festival and commissioned by Ikon, *Foreign Exchange* will remain on view through the summer and during the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. This temporary work is seen within the context of a wide-reaching festival of performances, events and projects which all consider our place in the Commonwealth, the present moment and stories of Birmingham and the West Midlands.

Originally unveiled in 1901, Sir Thomas Brock's marble figure of Queen Victoria was recast in bronze by William Bloye and members of the Birmingham School of Art for the Festival of Britain in 1951. Seventy years on, Locke draws attention to the original craftsmanship of Brock and Bloye, meanwhile bringing a diverse social and historic focus to a Birmingham heritage asset. A monument overlooked by passers-by, it is brought into the twenty-first century to become a significant contemporary artistic gesture.

Reaching over seven meters high, *Foreign Exchange* wraps around the existing Queen Victoria statue, preserving its original state. Depicting a boat carrying five smaller replica statues of Queen Victoria, each figure wears a helmet, reminiscent of that worn by Britannia, and a replica medal signifying an important battle in the history of the British Empire. Exploring the symbolic power of public monuments, Locke's vision is to create "an iconic image, leading a cohort of other statues to represent the home nation throughout the Empire". **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.**

Born in Edinburgh in 1959, Locke lived in Georgetown, Guyana, from 1966 to 1988 before returning to the UK. His interest in the power of statues originates from his childhood in Guyana where he passed a sculpture

of Queen Victoria every day on the way to school. Whilst he has been reimagining historical statues for twenty years, *Foreign Exchange* is Locke's first temporary public sculpture. His detailed preparatory sketches, made during his solo exhibition at Ikon Gallery in 2019, formed an important departure point for the project.

Located in Birmingham's Civic Quarter, *Foreign Exchange* enhances the monument's role as a place of discussion and celebration for the city and its visitors. Running alongside the project, the Birmingham 2022 Festival and Ikon are offering extensive public engagement and education programmes, including free creative learning activity packs for schools, guided tours, workshops and a school's showcase celebrating artworks by pupils from local schools responding to *Foreign Exchange*. Locke will also take part in an In Conversation with curator and cultural historian, Gus Caseley-Hayford, at Birmingham Cathedral on 14 July.

Hew Locke says:

"The culture in the UK today is a result of centuries of foreign exchanges, including across the former Empire. In this work, I was keen to make something that was relevant to all the people of Birmingham, and to people visiting the city for the Games. Representations of Victoria are scattered across the UK, and also existed in every country represented by athletes at the Commonwealth Games, enabling them to engage directly with the artwork. More personally, this project is the realisation of a long-held dream for me, and a continuation of my engagement with the city of Birmingham."

Raidene Carter, Executive Producer for the Birmingham 2022 Festival, says:

"Hew Locke adds an important voice to the honest conversations we want audiences to have through the festival this summer as we welcome the Commonwealth Games. *Foreign Exchange* is an artwork that has been in the making for a long time, well before contemporary discussion about statues surfaced, and we're excited to be realising his long-held vision alongside Ikon, to show that now is the time and Birmingham is the place that can engage the world with thought-provoking, brave and awe-inspiring public art."

Jonathan Watkins, Ikon Director says:

"Once again, it has been a privilege for Ikon to share an adventure with Hew Locke – a long journey, especially for him, towards the realisation of an artwork located in the public realm that raises important questions concerning those we see, out and about, elevated as statues. Typically, he is touching on serious subject matter, very relevant now, with wit and grace."

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

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Milly Carter Hepplewhite and Yaz Ozkan on 020 8969 3959 or email milly@pelhamcommunications.com and yaz@pelhamcommunications.com

Social Media Handles - Instagram, Twitter and Facebook:
[@birminghamcg22](#) [@ikongallery](#) [#B2022Festival](#) [#ForeignExchange](#)

Links:
birmingham2022.com/festival
ikon-gallery.org
hewlocke.net

Notes to Editors:

Additional comments and statements

Peter Knott, Area Director for Arts Council England says:

"It's great to see ground-breaking work like *Foreign Exchange* by internationally renowned artist Hew Locke being showcased in the city, as part of the Birmingham 2022 Festival. Hew is well known for his reimagining of historical statues, bringing them to life and offering fresh perspectives of the past."

"Arts and culture has the power to spark debate, transporting us to new places and changing our perceptions of the world. I hope everyone who visits Birmingham over the summer is able to take the time to see the work to truly appreciate all that it offers."

Cllr Jayne Francis, Birmingham City Council Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism says:

"What an amazing and inspirational work of art to help welcome the world to Birmingham! Our city is fantastically diverse and a real cultural hub which we want to celebrate, not just as part of the Birmingham 2022 Festival but far into the future, leaving a real legacy for the city and people. *Foreign Exchange* is public

art at its best; thought-provoking, dynamic, bold and fun – a perfect fit for our bold and brilliant city. Thank you Hew and thank you Ikon for making this happen.”

Robyn Llewellyn, Area Director, England, Midlands & East, National Lottery Heritage Fund says:

“We are pleased to support this thought-provoking artwork and its vibrant programme of accompanying activities and engagement, as part of our wider support for the Birmingham 2022 Festival. It is one of hundreds of commissioned projects for the Festival that wraps around the Commonwealth Games.”

About the Birmingham 2022 Festival

The Birmingham 2022 Festival unites people from around the Commonwealth through a celebration of creativity, in a six-month long programme, shining a spotlight on the West Midland's culture sector.

Running from March to beyond the conclusion of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games in September, the festival aims to entertain and engage over 2.5 million people in person and online.

Delivering over 200 projects across the region including art, photography, dance, theatre, digital art and more the festival will embrace local culture and generate lasting change and a creative legacy beyond the games with funding to community led projects from Birmingham City Council's Creative City Grants scheme.

Major support has been dedicated by Arts Council England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Birmingham City Council and Spirit of 2012. The Birmingham 2022 Festival is grateful for further support from British Council, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, National Lottery Community Fund, Canada Council for the Arts, the High Commission of Canada in the UK, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Create Central, Creative New Zealand, UK/Australia Season 2021/2022, and Birmingham 2022 Organising Committee.

To learn more, view the full programme of events or get involved visit:
birmingham2022.com/festival

About Ikon

Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features British and International artists working in a variety of media while Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars.

Hew Locke's *Foreign Exchange* is part of Ikon's *Arrivals* programme for Summer 2022, concerned with the international movement of people and ideas and organised to coincide with the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. Locke's talk with Gus Caseley-Hayford is part of Ikon's Migrant Festival (14 – 17 July).

Ikon has a history of commissioning major public artworks. In 2021, 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.

ikon-gallery.org

About Hew Locke

Born in Edinburgh in 1959, Hew Locke lived from 1966 to 1980 in Georgetown, Guyana, and is currently based in London. He is a Royal Academician and obtained a B.A. Fine Art in Falmouth (1988) and an M.A. Sculpture at the Royal College of Art, London (1994). His work is represented in many international collections including those of The Government Art Collection, The Pérez Art Museum Miami, The Tate Gallery, The Arts Council of England, The National Trust, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Brooklyn Museum, New York, The New Art Gallery Walsall, The Victoria & Albert Museum, The Imperial War Museum, The British Museum and The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds. His work *The Procession* is currently on view at Tate Britain as part of their annual Commission series, and forthcoming projects include the 2022 Metropolitan Museum Façade Commission in New York.