

# Queen Victoria on the Move: Hew Locke's *Hinterland*

ANA CRISTINA MENDES 

School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon, Portugal

This essay examines the artwork *Hinterland* (2013), a painted photograph of the statue of Queen Victoria in Georgetown, Guyana, by Hew Locke, a Guyanese Scottish artist. Inspired by the global movement against colonial symbols ignited by the Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter protests in 2015 and 2020, respectively, which saw the toppling of statues of colonial figures, the essay explores the themes of void, surface, invisibility, and visibility present in Locke's artwork. The essay builds on the idea that moving an object, which changes its position, alters its perspective, in contrast to toppling, which entails complete removal. The statue of Queen Victoria still stands in Georgetown, though it has been moved over the years. The idea of "moving on" (Mbembe) is introduced as a transformative way of looking at colonial statues as visual artifacts so as to emphasize the movement in space and time involved in transtemporality (speaking to the dynamic recontextualization of Victorian figures amidst contemporary societal shifts) as opposed to the act of toppling, which implies a complete break from the past—an abrupt erasure.

## INTRODUCTION: STATUES MOVING BACK AND FORTH, AND MOVING ON

STATUES representing colonial values have recently—and very visibly—come under fire. Colonial legacies are inscribed deep within the very fabric of public spaces, which now stand increasingly exposed as sites of reckoning. These sites, masked by the quiet naturalization of power, have surfaced as spaces where the question of historical accountability collides with the demand for visibility, and the violence of epistemic erasure is laid bare. They are landscapes of memory and forgetting, where the debris of empire resists dissolution, compelling us to confront the enduring specters of oppression and silence that haunt our present. This essay explores an artwork that engages directly with these spaces. *Hinterland* (2013), by the Guyanese Scottish artist Hew Locke (b. 1959, Edinburgh), unfolds the landscape as a site where the familiar narratives of empire are unsettled and makes visible the ghosts of coloniality surrounding the statue of Queen Victoria in Georgetown, Guyana.

---

**Ana Cristina Mendes** is professor of English studies at the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon, Portugal, where she teaches courses in cultural studies, visual culture, adaptation studies, and English history and culture. Her latest book is *Decolonising English Studies from the Semi-Periphery* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). Mendes currently serves as chair of the Association for Cultural Studies.

*Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 53, No. 4, pp. 505–538.

© The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

doi:[10.1017/S1060150325000154](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150325000154)

After the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and other instances of police brutality against African Americans—made visible through the Black Lives Matter protests that reverberated throughout America and then across the world in the summer following Floyd’s murder—many public monuments have been the target of protests. Notably, many Confederate monuments in the U.S. South have been torn down by protesters and officially removed by authorities, some to “graveyards,” some relegated to storage, and some just melted down. British statues underwent a similar public reevaluation. A statue of Queen Victoria, sculpted by George Frampton and initially unveiled in 1905 outside Leeds Town Hall and then moved to Woodhouse Moor in the Hyde Park area in 1937, was defaced and sprayed with slogans such as “racist,” “colonizer,” “justice,” “BLM,” and “slave owner”—even though ownership of enslaved people in the British Empire had been abolished in 1833 and Victoria ascended the throne in 1837.

The Black Lives Matter movement provoked powerful reactions to monuments, adding fresh urgency to an issue that has been debated for a long time. From policymaking to academia, different answers have been offered to the challenges that statues pose as material embodiments of the historical and present values of the societies that erected them and continue to display them in the public space. This essay will employ as a central theme an idea posited by Achille Mbembe in 2015, when he argued for the removal and recontextualization of a statue of Cecil Rhodes—the onetime prime minister of the Cape Colony, mining magnate, and arch-imperialist—on the campus of a public university in South Africa, which had remained standing for more than two decades after the end of apartheid. Mbembe describes how Rhodes, the master-builder of British colonialism in southern Africa, and others like him, “spent most of their lives defacing everything the name ‘black’ stood for.”<sup>1</sup> He suggests that a productive way to deal with statues of these colonialists would be to put them “to rest” in “a new kind of institution, partly a park and partly a graveyard”; this, Mbembe goes on to argue, would “allow us to *move on* and recreate the kind of new public spaces required by our new democratic project.”<sup>2</sup>

The “moving on” Mbembe envisions, understood as the restitution of public spaces that is demanded by democracy, can be exemplified by Guyana’s public handling of a statue of Queen Victoria after gaining independence from Britain in 1966. This monument was sculpted by Henry Richard Hope-Pinker, commissioned to celebrate Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in 1887, and inaugurated seven years later in Georgetown in 1894. The statue resembles many others of the monarch erected in former British colonies—some now hidden from view and



**Figure 1.** Marble statue of Queen Victoria by Sir Thomas Brock, Cubbon Park, Bengaluru, Karnataka. Photo by Escoba Zillion, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

others still standing as, for example, the marble statue by Sir Thomas Brock at the southeastern edge of Queen's Park in Bengaluru's Cubbon Park (fig. 1) and the bronze statue by George James Frampton at the Victoria Memorial Hall Complex in Kolkata (fig. 2). In the statue displayed in the capital of Guyana, Victoria is looking straight ahead, with a slight frown. On the queen's head stood a stylized version of St. Edward's crown, the traditional British coronation crown, later replaced by a smaller crown adorned with carvings suggesting diamonds. Standing tall and imposing, Victoria holds a scepter in her right hand and, originally, an orb featuring George and the Dragon in her left. A veil, symbolizing her widowhood, flows from beneath the crown down her back, merging seamlessly with the voluminous formal robes that appear to



**Figure 2.** Bronze statue of Queen Victoria by George James Frampton, Victoria Memorial Hall Complex, Kolkata. Photo by Biswarup Ganguly, *CC BY 3.0*, via Wikimedia Commons.

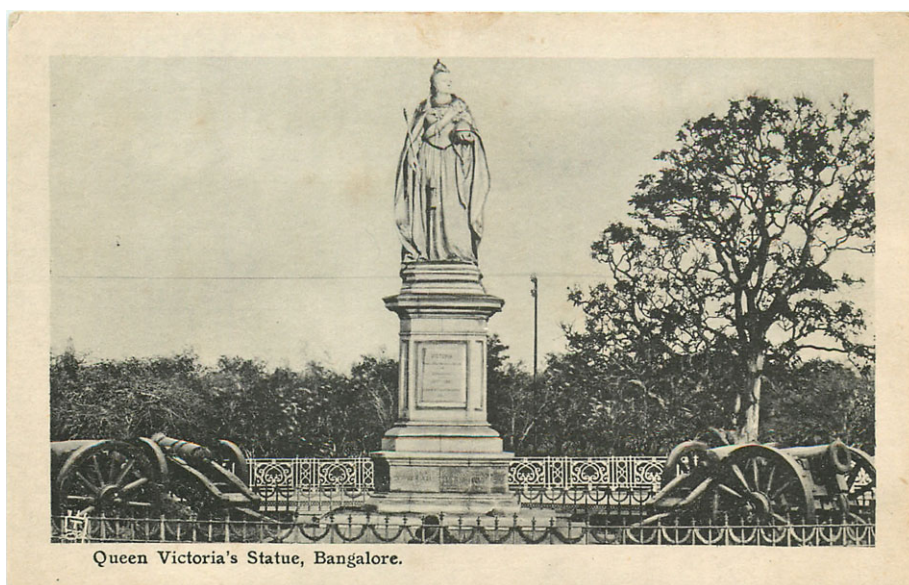
be supported by invisible hands. These heavy, layered robes are striking, conveying majesty and grandeur (fig. 3).

The role of monumentalism in empire building in the Victorian era cannot be overstated. Concurrently, in the photographically captured image of imperial statues such as these, we confront not merely inert objects but conduits of living memory, forms charged with the spectral weight of empire. The existence of postcards with photographs of Queen



**Figure 3.** Marble statue of Queen Victoria standing before the High Court in Georgetown, Guyana. Photo by David Stanley.

Victoria's statues—such as the one from Bengaluru, formerly Bangalore (fig. 4)—signals more than the popularity of the photograph as a medium. It reflects an era in which photography, newly democratized, came to serve both imperial ambition and the work of commemoration. These postcards bearing photographs of the queen were not simply souvenirs, memorabilia, or objects of aesthetic pleasure; they worked as agents of empire, forging a tangible connection to Victoria herself, the “mother of the empire.” Through this mass-distributed token, subjects across the empire were invited into intimacy with power—invited to touch, to claim, to display the image of a distant sovereign.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 4.** Postcard depicting Queen Victoria's statue in Bangalore, date unknown.

The statue of Victoria in Guyana, like all public monuments, is therefore layered with a deeply symbolic meaning that has shifted over time and space. In the aftermath of the socialist revolution in 1970, this statue was first moved from its commanding location in front of the Law Courts and relegated to a seldom-visited back area in the Botanical Gardens in Georgetown—a location that is “partly a park and partly a graveyard”—where overgrown vegetation began to engulf the statue. This relocation goes beyond a mere change in location; more than a spatial shift, it signifies an epistemic reordering, a purposeful move by the new republic to assert a renewed center of authority. Here, Victoria endures yet is obscured—her imperial grandeur displaced, a specter to be glimpsed amid the overgrowth but not revered. The removal indicated the severing of all ties to the British monarchy. These ties had been established in 1831, when the territory became the colony known as British Guiana, first ruled by William IV before Victoria. In 1970 the new republic refused to let the statue rest as a benign historical marker. The Botanical Gardens were not the final resting place of that statue: in 1990 it was moved back to its original place outside the Law Courts, reflecting a shift in ideas about how to manage traumatic national histories and strengthen relations with the former colonizing power (especially as the Co-operative Republic of Guyana has belonged to the Commonwealth of Nations since 1970).



**Figure 5.** Marble statue of Queen Victoria, Georgetown, Guyana, 1954. Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

After her sojourn in the (figurative) ash heap, abandoned in the overgrowth of the Botanical Gardens for years, this statue of Victoria no longer carries the same meaning that it did when it was unveiled in 1894 outside what was then known as the Victoria Law Courts building. The statue had already been tarnished and damaged by anticolonial protests in 1954 (fig. 5), sent back to the colonial metropole for restoration, removed on official recognition of Guyana as a republic (following independence in 1966), and dumped on its side in the Botanical Gardens in 1970 (fig. 6), before the formerly beheaded and defaced stone artifact, representing the British monarch, was authorized again by the independent nation by having it reoccupy its original position in 1990. Nevertheless, despite this reinstatement, its place in the public space has continually remained contested—a contestation that included being



**Figure 6.** Statue of Queen Victoria, Georgetown, Guyana, removed upon official recognition of Guyana as a republic, c. 1970. Corbis.

covered in 2018, symbolically, in red paint (fig. 7). Recontextualized by its travels—a material “moving on” that is also a transtemporal “moving back”—Victoria’s statue in Georgetown presents an invitation to reconsider the history of imperial power that this stone public artifact was designed to narrate, the colonial ideals of authority and control that it was made to embody, and the sovereignty that it performed, as well as the violence it enacted as a public art form.<sup>4</sup>

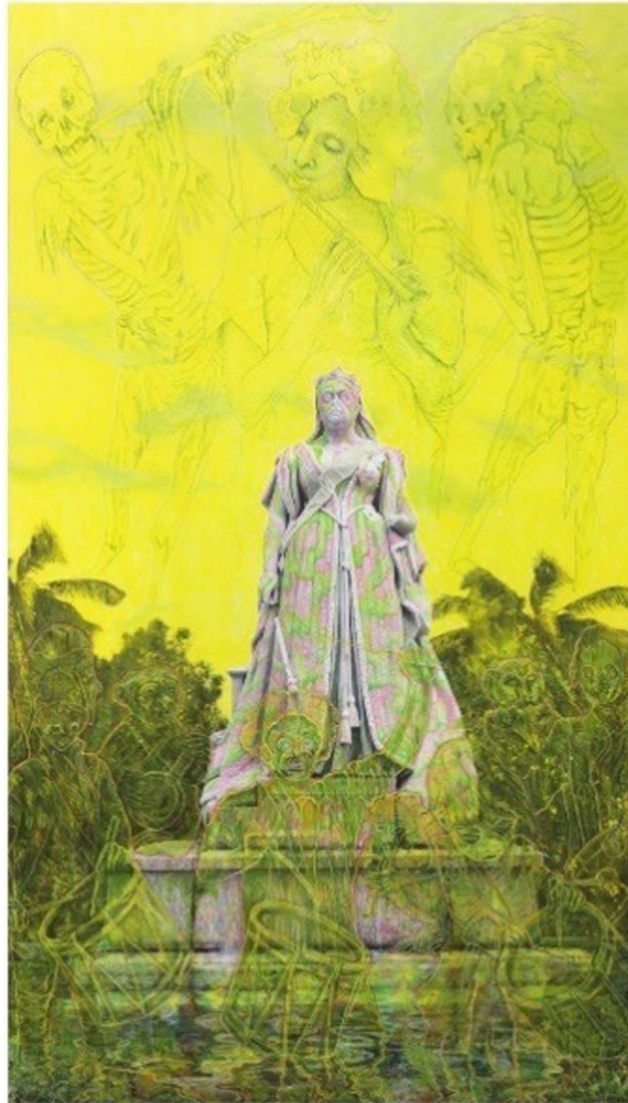
By remaining in public spaces, statues of colonial figures act as more than mere markers of history; they remind us that colonialism is not a relic but a spectral force, operating through the infrastructures of modern life. At the same time, they (or the “unauthorized” interventions on them) allow us to envision new futures that move beyond coloniality. It is essential to keep in mind the ambivalent dimension of transtemporality here, namely, the way a narrative spans different temporal contexts, connecting the past and present by recontextualizing themes, characters, or issues from one era *into* another.<sup>5</sup> This transtemporality insists on a multilayered temporality, intertwining past, present, and future. A transtemporal perspective highlights the continuity of certain social,



**Figure 7.** Statue of Queen Victoria, Georgetown, Guyana, 6 June 2018. Photo by Mark Jacobs.

cultural, or political dynamics, where coloniality is not a singular event but a lingering condition, in the *longue durée*. Simultaneously, acts of defacing or toppling colonial statues can be seen as evidence of a rupture in this transtemporal continuity, an attempt to break the symbolic link between the colonial past and the present. Defacing or toppling colonial statues are practices of future-making, forms of reimagining a world unbound from colonial logics. In their defiance, these acts disrupt the illusion that colonial symbols are inert or that history has “settled.”

Following the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 and the impact that toppling statues of colonial figures has made on global visual cultures, this essay is inspired to look anew at Locke’s artwork *Hinterland* (2013) (fig. 8), a painted photograph of Queen Victoria’s statue, which still stands in Georgetown. Locke’s reworking of the photograph raises questions about void and meaning, the attacking of colonial surfaces, and the rewriting of history: these are the thematic threads that follow in this article. Moving something, changing its position, results in altering the perspective on a particular object, in contrast to the act of toppling, which suggests removing it altogether. Locke’s reframing of the colonial monument,



**Figure 8.** Hew Locke, *Hinterland*, 2013. Acrylic paint, ink, and pen on a C-type photograph. Hales Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Charles Littlewood.

refusing to portray Victoria in pristine marble, could be interpreted as an act of symbolic toppling—a spectral “pre-toppling”—in that it deconstructs and erodes the authority granted to the monarch. Yet the notion of “moving on” (borrowed from Mbembe and understood as a form of restitution of public spaces), as opposed to toppling, is favored here. “Moving on” suggests a different way of looking at and understanding how

colonial statues as visual artifacts involve larger issues (social, political, philosophical), underscoring an idea of moving in space as well as forward in time, the movement that is entailed in transtemporality. At a metadiscursive level, the notion of “moving on” also prompts us to interrogate the current state of Victorian studies, a field that continues to monumentalize certain figures—particularly Victoria herself—and encourages us to consider new approaches for engaging with them.<sup>6</sup>

#### VOID: MAKING STATUES “VISIBLE IN-VISIBLE” IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's contention that “le monde est cela que nous voyons,”<sup>7</sup> Mbembe argues that power in the colonial space “consists fundamentally in the power to see or not to see, to remain indifferent, to render invisible what one wishes not to see. And if it is true that ‘the world is that which we see,’ then we can say that in the colony those who decide what is visible and what must remain invisible are sovereign.”<sup>8</sup> Mbembe's commentary on the power “to see or not to see,” on the visible and the invisible, provides an important way of thinking about public monuments, public spaces, and their colonial legacies. Voiding, defacing, or “moving on” statues provides a means to claim power in public spaces, while creating remnants of imperial authority.

The statue of Victoria still standing in Georgetown bears visible scars. The left hand and the head were destroyed by dynamite in the 1954 anticolonial protests—a symbolic transgression. The protests were triggered by the Colonial Office's repressive actions in response to the 1953 election wins by the People's Progressive Party (PPP) of Guyana. The literal void in the materiality of the statue, the hollowness in the statue that was fixed when it was moved back to the metropole for restoration, is reminiscent of the artistic statement advanced by the installation *Coronation Park*, created for the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015 by the Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective (formed by artists Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta). The Raqs project offers a valuable case study on colonial monuments and their contexts, and shares the desire for revision and recontextualization that animates Locke's art. In particular, this installation resonates with Mbembe's notion of a park for dead statues: Raqs's installation is titled after the actual New Delhi Coronation Park, built in 1877 as the site for the “Proclamation Durbar,”<sup>9</sup> during which Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India and where, in 1911, the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary as Emperor and Empress of India was



**Figure 9.** Raqs Media Collective, *Coronation Park*, installation at the 56th Venice Biennale, 2015. Eight sculptures (resin), nine plinths (wood and bitumen), and nine plaques (faux black marble).

commemorated. Illustrating Mbembe's idea of "a new kind of institution, partly a park and partly a graveyard," the open ground at New Delhi Coronation Park has housed relics of imperial statuary, effigies of British monarchs and viceroys, moved from their original locations in the decades that followed independence in 1947.<sup>10</sup>

Raqs's *Coronation Park* is comprised of nine fiberglass sculptures, replicas of the imperial statues standing in the eponymous park in New Delhi that are already dilapidated and covered by pigeon droppings, but are now rendered in a state of even more disrepair, "hollow, disfigured, cut up or bent, standing on or beside plinths."<sup>11</sup> All the figurative sculptures in the Raqs installation display some void: the face or even the whole head is missing, only the feet remain, or the body is absent, a void wrapped in a robe. Each plinth (a bitumen-coated wooden pedestal) bears an acrylic plaque with an excerpt from George Orwell's reflective essay on imperialism, "Shooting an Elephant," first published in 1936 (see, e.g., fig. 9).<sup>12</sup> The figures memorialized in this pseudoroyal statuary have lost part of themselves, echoing the loss and hollowness of the relics that inhabit the Coronation Park in New Delhi: literally hollowed out, they have been stripped of their commanding status and imperial authority, made piecemeal and partial.

The artistic disfiguration of the statues in Raqs's *Coronation Park* puts the question of defacing statues into a historical perspective more broadly. In this art installation, disfiguring has been used to question

authority, an authority expressed and reinforced by those in power through statuary from antiquity to today. Moreover, those outside of power have struck at that authority by defacing its symbols for just as long. For example, Pharaoh Hatshepsut, one of the few historically confirmed female pharaohs in Egypt, had her image and titles defaced after her death (when her co-ruler and stepson, Thutmose III, ascended the throne), and the tombstones, murals, and busts of Roman emperors sentenced to *damnatio memoriae* by the senate were routinely defaced and erased.<sup>13</sup> Reflecting on issues of permanence and impermanence in monumental art, Deborah Cherry observes: "The re-siting or demolition of monumental statuary bespeaks a desire not only to obliterate the individual commemorated, celebrated, and honored, but to recast the history which that individual and the statue has come to signify and to rewrite the history of the space in which it is situated."<sup>14</sup> If we regard the act of erecting statues as fundamentally an act of memorializing—of making these figures revered—they can be read as phatic objects (essentially communicative artifacts with the primary function of affirming presence and addressing public consciousness), and the act of defacing, destroying, or moving these statues therefore poses ongoing questions: Who should be remembered, and who should be publicly venerated? When we regard monuments as phatic, we begin to see them less as static inscriptions upon the landscape and more as active participants in social life. Monuments' phaticity opens a channel of communion, linking those who govern with those who are governed, drawing attention to those whom the state deems worthy of occupying prominent spaces. Statues, then, do not merely occupy space as inert structures. By regarding statues as phatic, we bring forward the social implications of their standing and their defacement, focusing on who is addressed, who is silenced, and what histories are invoked or erased.

Moving statues—into Mbembe's suggested combination of park and graveyard, for example—is a form of defacement, for it undermines the statues' power. W. J. T. Mitchell writes: "Of all forms of art, public art is the most static, stable, and fixed in space: the monument is a fixed, generally rigid object, designed to remain on its site for all time."<sup>15</sup> In India, in close connection with the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century glorification of the British Empire and the attempt to solicit a new mass public celebration of this imperial power as it was facing increasing opposition, more than fifty imperial statues were commissioned between 1869 and 1921; meanwhile, statues of Victoria were being attacked from at least 1908 onward.<sup>16</sup> The seeming permanence of the history that public

statuary represents, as statues underwrite so much received history, is undercut when statues are moved or removed. After the independence of India in 1947, almost all the statues of Queen Victoria, as remnants of British rule, were removed from their original sites, and many were abandoned in the backyards of various government offices and museums. For example, the statue of Queen Victoria by Thomas Brock, which was unveiled in 1905 in Agra (in a grandiose ceremony presided by the Prince of Wales, the future King George V, during his six-month tour across British India), was removed in 1947, to be replaced by a marble statue of Motilal Nehru, a member of the Congress Party and leader of the Indian independence movement.

The marble statue of Queen Victoria in Georgetown, Guyana, is located geographically in South America and culturally in the Caribbean. As we have seen, its movement began after independence in 1966 and the socialist revolution in 1970, when the statue was removed from outside the Law Courts and discarded behind the Botanical Gardens. Perhaps inspired by the reinstatement of the statue of Victoria, Locke created two artworks in 2013, *Hinterland* and *Victoria*, that work across three media: painting, photography, and sculpture. The artworks resignify this particular statue and, in doing so, statuary itself—the archetypal public art form of nineteenth-century empires—as well as the figure of Queen Victoria, who is the grand signifier of colonialism, extractivism, enslavement, and indentureship in the colonial/colonized landscape of Georgetown. Statues of Queen Victoria remain a source of inspiration for Locke. In 2022 he engaged with the city center sculpture of Victoria in Birmingham in the public artwork *Foreign Exchange*, commissioned by Ikon Gallery for the Birmingham 2022 Festival, part of the Commonwealth Games’ cultural program (fig. 10).

From 1966 to 1980, Locke grew up in what was then a newly independent Guyana, and he “stumbled” more than once on the statue of Victoria in Georgetown’s Botanical Gardens. He describes thus the moving on of the statue in this postcolonial landscape: “When I first stumbled across her in the gardens it was a real shock to me. Her dethroning was a symbolic act following Guyana becoming a socialist republic—but more than this, it was a statement of personal power by the President. It was then a second shock when I saw her returned to her original position—following the easing of relations with the mother country. A gesture of good will possibly, or cynically, in return for aid.”<sup>17</sup> For Locke, the statue of Victoria was both absent—remote, isolated, inaccessible—but present; like colonialism itself, it could never entirely fall out of living memory into oblivion, as it was tied to a neocolonial



**Figure 10.** Hew Locke, *Foreign Exchange*, temporary public sculpture, Victoria Square, Birmingham, 2022. Resin, fibreglass, and steel frame around pre-existing bronze statue. Photo by Stuart Whipps.

project of development aid. Yet, as Ariella Azoulay writes, “what was taken by the unstoppable imperial movement”—such as “the occupation of land, the extraction of natural resources”—“cannot be parsimoniously redistributed through charity, educational uplift, or humanitarian relief.”<sup>18</sup> The statue of Victoria was “visible in-visible,” to use Jacques Derrida’s term for “an invisible of the order of the visible that I can keep in secret by keeping it out of sight.”<sup>19</sup> Being “visible in-visible” is as political as being visible, as it is counted as being present. With the painted photographs *Victoria* and *Hinterland*, Locke brings the media of sculpture and photography together in ways that also ask us to rethink the imperial links of these forms of visual expression and the role of the visual in the imperial enterprise more broadly.

While many of the statues of Victoria that populated the former British colonies were taken down, the one that Locke indexes through its photographic representation and turns into the artworks *Victoria* and *Hinterland* ended up back in its initial place, despite the actions of anticolonial protesters who had initially managed to banish the statue, committing it to temporary oblivion. Locke’s piece interrogates the monument as a public object, drawing attention to how such sculptures operate within collective memory. It draws us into a confrontation with

the past that refuses to be consigned to “official” history’s archives, instead intruding upon the present with unsettling insistence. In particular, *Hinterland* reterritorializes the statue’s location, a reminder of the imposition of foreign rule, counteracting the forced deterritorialization of colonialism, shifting it from a colonial space to a postcolonial location by including an imaginary “natural” landscape. I refer to the landscape in *Hinterland* as “natural” throughout this essay because the artwork performs its reterritorialization as an aesthetic construct, using a form of what Donelle N. Dreese has termed (in the context of postcolonial ecocritical literature) “mythic reterritorialization”; as Dreese argues, “mythic reterritorializations take place when writers salvage the stories and places from the past and rewrite them in order to claim an identity and to establish a sense of place concurrent with their present sense of self.”<sup>20</sup> In Dreese’s terms, *Hinterland* attempts to “heal and decolonize fragmented and disappearing cultures” through the strategy of attacking colonial surfaces, both that of the photograph of a colonial statue and, by association, the stone statue itself.<sup>21</sup>

#### SURFACE: ATTACKING COLONIAL SURFACES

“For me it is essential to take a pristine printed photo and then attack the surface, as a reaction against the purity of the photographic image.”

—Hew Locke, “About Statues”

For nearly two decades, Hew Locke has been questioning monumental statuary—busts and statues—by engaging in what he has described as “mindful vandalism” in a series of works such as *Natives and Colonials* (2005–), *Restoration* (2006), *Sikandar* (2010), *Tate* (2015), *Patriots* (2018), and *Souvenir* (2019–). On the genesis of his series of painted photographs, Locke recounts that his ongoing series *Natives and Colonials*, which he began in 2005—well before the more recent visible debates about the removal of imperial artifacts from the public space—“became about impossible proposals”: they “started as a proposal to get a statue-dressing project off the ground in London. Nobody was willing to take this project up, so the proposals—i.e., the painted photographs—became the artwork.”<sup>22</sup> Speaking of *Churchill*, from the series *Natives and Colonials*, Locke explains how the “impossible proposals” project involved engaging with the multidimensional affordances of photography and sculpture and their dynamic interplay: “It’s a bit like magnets which repel each other: asking what do you have to do to get this balance where they don’t repel

each other but they work in harmony.”<sup>23</sup> For Locke, the “impossible proposal” is a layered interrogation, a shifting exchange between object and representation, sculpture and photograph. It draws in the statue itself, the act of concealing it, and the photograph that captures this concealing gesture—each layer compounding the complexity. Here, the artwork moves beyond the material, engaging in the act of obscuring and exposing, drawing attention to the flat surface of the photograph and the relief emerging from within it. Locke’s upward-angled shots, capturing the statues in their full authority, reveal a “magnetic” dynamic of attraction and repulsion between the image and the monument, a relationship that oscillates between tension and convergence.

Through these “impossible proposals,” Locke instigates an intervention where the limits of sculpture and photography blur, converge, and resist, embodying an interplay between dimensions, between depth and surface. In this way, his “impossible proposals” ask us to consider our changing relation to public art over the last two centuries. As Mitchell notes, such art has always projected a fantasy—of “a monolithic, uniform, pacified public sphere”—but what is needed now “is a critical public art that is frank about the contradictions and violence encoded in its own situation, one that dares to awaken a public sphere of resistance, struggle, and dialogue.”<sup>24</sup> Guyana’s statue of Victoria was covered in red paint in 2018 as a response to the violence of public art that Mitchell describes. It was an act of vandalism, some might say, linking this action with the “mindful vandalism” that Locke had imprinted on statues since at least 2006, and particularly when he also layered paint over a photograph of that statue in 2013. Locke’s mindful vandalism first involved attacking the surface of the photograph of the statue, as he “would never be allowed” to attack the surface of the statue itself.<sup>25</sup>

Locke uses the surface of the photograph of the statue as a drawing board to intervene not only with the statue but with photography itself: “this three-dimensional treatment of the image was also about the idea of vandalizing photography . . . . It’s about attacking the preciousness of the photograph as well as the preciousness of the object that I’m actually proposing to cover.”<sup>26</sup> Also involving the third medium of painting, the photographic surface is where the mindful vandalism directed at public statuary begins. What does it mean to translate a statue into a photograph and then approach it with mindful vandalism, as Locke has done in his painted photographs of statues? Each medium has a different type of status, intention, and effect. Through photography, Locke already questions the permanence and stability of these sculptures. As Roland Barthes observes, photography is impermanent and evanescent.

Photography, for Barthes, holds a paradox: it fixes a moment in time, preserving it, yet simultaneously reminds us that this moment is fleeting. At the moment of framing, the photographer decides what is important: what stays within the frame and what is captured by the camera shutter. This is a furtive moment that cannot be accessed afterward in its completeness. As Barthes puts it, “In Photography, I can never deny that the thing had been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past . . . . The name of Photography’s *noème* will therefore be: ‘That-has-been,’ or again: the *Intractable*. . . . What I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (*operator* or *spectator*) it has been here, and yet immediately separated.”<sup>27</sup> Photographs thus span time (the moment of the photo’s taking and the moment of its viewing); this quality is what Barthes emphasizes as photography’s *noème*, or the events that have come and passed since the framing.

In addition to their evanescence (so different from the statue’s attempts at permanence), photographs provide a powerful medium for Locke because they are unruly. As Azoulay observes, despite the photographer’s decisions about what to include in the frame and what to exclude, “What is recorded in photographs is always more than what was intended, even though this more can be kept ‘visibly invisible.’”<sup>28</sup> Azoulay’s idea of the “visibly invisible” resonates with Derrida’s notion of *différance* and his analysis of the spectral, or what is ever-present yet defers absolute presence. Whereas Derrida’s *différance* is the process that allows meanings to proliferate, always unfolding yet never fully present, Azoulay extends this to photography, suggesting that the medium holds a “surplus” of meaning: content that was never consciously seen by the photographer yet remains imprinted in the image, haunting it like a shadow. Azoulay, too, stresses the odd transtemporal nature of the photograph, its “potential history,” in line with what Barthes describes as the photo’s “‘That-has-been,’ or . . . the *Intractable*,” the present-perfect tense connecting the referent of the photographic representation to the present.

Taking these ideas from Barthes and Azoulay, we can consider how the surface serves as a medium for the viewer’s experience of seeing. Locke’s painted photographs represent a transtemporal and intermedia interchange between viewer and work: they document, to deploy the words of art critic Nicolas Bourriaud, “the itinerary, the path, as a dialogical or intersubjective narrative that unfolds between the subject and the surfaces it traverses.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the painted photographs are an invitation to reflect upon how the dialogue between the subject and the surfaces is an intersubjective act that imprints itself both on the

person who moves and the spaces that are touched. It becomes a series of layered inscriptions, where each step echoes, reverberates, and reacts with the histories that linger, often silently, on the surfaces being crossed. In Locke's painted photographs, the surface cannot be detached from what is supposed to lie underneath: depth, archive, history. Through a rhizomatic series of connections, these artworks can be reflexively seen as "radicant" artworks, which, as defined by Bourriaud, are rooted in what lies below the surfaces, revising "'official' history in favor of plural accounts."<sup>30</sup> In the case of *Hinterland*, Locke uses the statue of Queen Victoria in Guyana—or rather, a photograph of the statue—as an object of memory and critique, allowing it to serve as both artifact *and* site of interrogation of "official" history.

Locke's artwork is composed of an acrylic painting on a chromogenic print (or C print for short); the C print is of a photograph of the marble statue of Victoria, which Locke has painted over in solid and tropical colors,<sup>31</sup> superimposing upon it otherworldly images. Locke's process involved overlaying and overwriting bright color onto Georgetown's statue of Queen Victoria and, to complicate its colonial presence further, outlining images of suffering and death, such as ghostly figures and skeletons.<sup>32</sup> The monument here is more than marble; Locke reconfigures it into a "necropolis" of sorts, a staging ground where the dead refuse silence. Such spectral imagery illuminates the parts of "unofficial" history this imperial artifact was designed to obscure: the historical figure of Queen Victoria is inextricable from this colonial hinterland. *Hinterland* also erodes the original statue's authority by visually embedding it within a landscape of haunting figures—the darker side of empire—that loom above and around the queen. The skeletal figures imply that, far from representing "development" and prosperity, Victoria's reign left a legacy of death and exploitation in the colonies. These figures haunting Victoria's statue evoke the specters of colonial violence, calling for a reckoning with the historical traumas imposed by imperial rule and the need for epistemic restitution.

#### HISTORY: EPISTEMIC RESTITUTION THROUGH TRANSTEMPORALITY

Colonialism expanded at the expense of the natural world, both in the enclosure and privatization for profit of existing common lands in Britain and in the ravaging of local forests and plant life in colonized countries under British rule. In the time of empire, the tropical forest held a charged and saturated image, for the common practice of colonial deforestation by the British was not only due to economic motives

associated with the need to clear the land for the establishment of rubber, cotton, and sugarcane plantations (i.e., the agro-industrial system of enterprise integral to imperialism) but also related to other forms of imperial control of society, culture, and even epistemology. These control measures were based on political justifications (that the tropics were “in need of British intervention and management”),<sup>33</sup> medical preconceptions (regarding the alleged health risks posed by tropical forests), and widely held cultural constructs that “clearing and tilling the land brought beauty to the landscape”—adjusting the landscape to take a homely shape, or anglicizing it.<sup>34</sup>

The colonial expansion in British Guiana was a form of “ecological imperialism,”<sup>35</sup> with an economy based on sugarcane production that violated the ecological balance of the landscape. The plantations demanded substantial areas of land, generating a commodity crop dependent on the labor of enslaved African workers. As Edward Said points out, such racialized “geographical violence” is the basis of imperialism and colonial expansion, through which “virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control”; the violence brought about by “the presence of the colonizing outsider” entails “the loss of locality,” which means that the land’s “geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored.”<sup>36</sup> Because of this, Said goes on to argue, “the land is recoverable at first only through imagination.”<sup>37</sup> This imagined recovery can occur through processes of adaptation, like that carried out by Raqs’s installation *Coronation Park* or by the efforts to move, deface, and resignify the statue of Queen Victoria in Georgetown. As creative acts of disfiguration, these artistic adaptations recontextualize monuments and strip them of their original authority, providing an opportunity for the viewer to reimagine landscapes of the past, present, and future.

In *Hinterland*, which resignifies the statue of Victoria through critical revision, Locke conjures some of the ghosts who haunt Guyana’s history and the memory of geographical racialized violence. The work inscribes figures enclosing Victoria, bringing into the landscape other lives as a collectivity, lives changed by the British Empire, adding them to the layers of memory attached to the statue and to that location. Around the base of the statue, a palm oil plantation is added as a scenic backdrop. This imaginative restitution of Georgetown’s “natural” landscape, which is absent, or rather “visible-invisible”<sup>38</sup>—obliterated by the imperial plantation system—highlights how the encroachment of monoculture oil palm plantations expands the colonial projects of deforestation, land degradation, and resource exploitation in Guyana initiated by the Dutch

and British for their sugarcane plantations and continue today in the neocolonial plantations. Guyana's economy still relies on resource exploitation, as it did under the Dutch and the British, when British Guiana's economy primarily relied on sugarcane plantations.<sup>39</sup>

The photographic representation of the statue of Victoria stabilizes the imperial landscape. The camera shutter freezes imperial values in the frame,<sup>40</sup> but this static permanence is destabilized when Locke paints the photograph of this statue, superimposing onto it spectral figures and a plantation of oil palm trees that is now part of Georgetown's neocolonial landscape. Regardless of the medium of representation—either sculpture or photography—the figure of the “mother of the empire” is anything but immutable. In *Hinterland*, the statue of Queen Victoria still stands prominently against a bright yellow background; yet, while the regal figure is still visible—the statue is neither toppled nor removed but rather spectrally “pre-toppled”—Victoria is rendered in shades of ghostly pinks and greens, which give her a weathered look that sharply contrasts with the usual solidity and grandeur of imperial sculptures of Victoria. What is made invisible in Locke's reimagining is the statue's physical solidity and its traditional function in empire building as a marker of imperial pride. What remains visible in the painted photograph is Victoria's full figure; her imposing posture is intact for viewers to unmistakably recognize her, reminding us of her historical role as the “Empress of India” and ruler of Britain's vast colonial empire.

For Locke, the photographic representation of the statue of Victoria, the statue itself as the photo's subject, and the statue's original (and current) location are all sites of epistemic restitution. The statue's original marble materiality is lost in Locke's overpainted photograph. In the statue itself, Queen Victoria, in traditional regal attire, draped in a formal dress and crown, stands in a posture meant to convey imperial authority. However, Locke's muted, pastel color choices convey a sense of decay and sickness to the former ruler, and the juxtaposition with the spectral figures destabilize her power. In particular, these spectral forms appear to be floating above and around Victoria, suspended in the intense yellow background and yet entangled with the faded/fading statue itself. They carry grim expressions and gestures that suggest oppression and violence, making visible in the landscape the suffering and death that the statue, in its original form, would typically obscure. The figures include colonial subjects, who appear to be indentured workers from India brought in to work on the sugarcane plantations of British Guiana and members of the Amerindian communities. Skeletons are singing and banging on

traditional drums, subverting the mastery of the colonial ruler who stands as the focal point of the image, and an outlandish figure playing the flute hovers right over Victoria.<sup>41</sup>

The flute player in *Hinterland* invokes a fugitive temporality, a haunting that is at once resonant and resistant to colonial mastery. The flute here is not merely an instrument but an emissary of spectral memory. In its sound is an echo that refuses to be silenced, a resonance that drifts through histories of enslavement and indenture, exposing the wounds inflicted upon bodies and lands. This flute does not soothe; it summons. It conjures a world where the crimes of the colonial past refuse to be buried, insisting on resurfacing, reuttering what the colonial archive has sought to efface. As Derrida observes, specters are those “who are no longer” and “those who are not yet there”; the flute’s musical motif also invokes the absent present, for it corresponds to Derrida’s order of “absolute invisibility,” which “falls outside the register of sight” such as “the sonorous, the musical, the vocal or phonic.”<sup>42</sup>

The “natural” landscape that *Hinterland* represents through absence and substitution is not an “exotic” scenery, a backdrop meant to showcase Victoria’s statue; it is the central subject, in and for itself, in its materiality. It is the result of the ecological disruption wreaked by extractivist British high imperialism’s plantation economy in Guyana that endures in the oil palm plantations that are now part of Guyana’s “natural” landscape.<sup>43</sup> The “natural” landscape of this tropical ecology, represented *in absentia* in Locke’s composition, was erased to create an imperial ethos. The evoked imaginary “natural” landscape, the aesthetic and sensory experience of hidden colonial subjectivities that it offers, reveals at the material, aesthetic, and conceptual levels the strong and centralized model of political power that sustained the colony. The work accentuates the symbolic and allegorical dimension of the “natural” landscape that is no longer there. We experience the allegorical forest as its recovered, now-absent counterpart.

In Locke’s painted photograph, the “natural” landscape becomes a character in this process of neo-Victorian reparation and restitution and the recognition of the other, and it is indissociable from the individual and the community. As Martinican writer Édouard Glissant contended in his work on creolized ecology (in the context of Caribbean transplantation of peoples via the African slave trade, European migration, and later migration from other outposts of the British Empire), relationships with the land are fundamental in this discourse and are under threat as communities become alienated from that land. In this scenario, landscape “stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as

a full character.... The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history.”<sup>44</sup> Locke’s image also offers another layer of meaning via the linkages between indigeneity and the “territorializing, often arborescent conceptions of nation and culture”<sup>45</sup>—the entwinement of the Indigenous forms of being (here, specifically, the Amerindian communities of Guyana) with (tropical) nature. This imbrication is vital to recovering the lost materiality of culture and land. However, it is also romanticized and limiting: as Arjun Appadurai notes, the Indigenous people can be spatially incarcerated or confined by the attribution of ecological immobility,<sup>46</sup> an attribution that can “retrospectively recolonize” them.<sup>47</sup> The ascription of Indigenous status carries with it an anticipation of territorialization, an existence essentially tied to the land, static, entrapped, rooted in with the native soil, entangled in the sense of being ontologically inseparable from the soil. This links with ideas of “rootedness” that undergird nativist and exclusionary fantasies of affiliation to a given land and give rise to border-building to keep outsiders off the territory. It also links with romantic fantasies of Indigenous people’s “authentic” connection to the soil, which can be another form of racialization and cultural essentialism. Might *Hinterland* betray, even if unwittingly, a romantic vision of the Amerindian communities of Guyana, uprooted from their land by the actions of the colonizers? Can this be characterized as a work of what Liisa Malkki calls “magic naturalism,”<sup>48</sup> intent on making the Indigenous populations visible by stressing their essential, symbiotic link with the land? In this conception, Indigenous people are not simply inhabitants of the land but extensions of it; they embody its spirit, its rhythms, its histories. “Magic naturalism” hence situates the Indigenous subject as inseparable from the land, erasing the artificial boundaries imposed by colonial cartography and emphasizing instead a geography of interconnection, a landscape of mutual inhabitation. Can “magic naturalism” be a way of re-enchanting a world that colonial modernity has tried to flatten and disenchant?

As a cultural form, *Hinterland* triggers a sense of temporal disjuncture. It upturns the power relations of hegemonic discourse, the victors’ narrative of the past, that blanked out colonial subjectivity: the statue of Victoria is still visible and in place, but the superimpositions blur it as if its image had been erased or crossed out. Upending Derrida’s description of the subject that haunts as “not identifiable,” as figures that we “cannot see, localize, fix any form,”<sup>49</sup> Locke makes the colonial subjects that haunt *identifiable*. Their form is no longer unfixed; they are not displaced but emplaced; they are no longer hidden outside the field

of view but visible within the photographic frame. Indeed, they hold more power than they did in life, in actual presence, for to declare the death of something is to give it renewed strength in spectral form. The conjuration of the specter occurs at the precise moment when the subject pronounces themselves free from their past, declaring its death.<sup>50</sup> These ex-centric figures in Locke's artwork can thus be seen and—as his inclusion of the flute implies—heard. What Jamaica Kincaid calls the “unspeakableness of slavery” (in *A Small Place* set in Antigua) is in Locke's work made to speak; the violences of enslavement that fed sugarcane production in British Guiana to enrich British companies are forcefully articulated.<sup>51</sup>

*Hinterland* visually contextualizes its ostensible subject—the statue—within the suppressed histories of violence associated with colonial rule that it encodes, rendering visible the ghosts of coloniality surrounding Victoria's statue in Georgetown. It forges—in the sense of both authentically “creates” and deceptively “counterfeits”—an encounter with a long-gone “natural” landscape and the Indigenous presences it contained, superimposing them as ghosts—ever-present specters of colonial violences—onto the “documentary” image of the statue. In the duplicate site of the image, the past becomes visible. The work routes around the colonial landscape, reaching the neglected past and reforging the landscape as it might have been, depicting a “potential history” that never was, but through the power of photography now is. At the same time, the work represents the dispossessing and subjugating power structure of colonialism itself, a structure that, as Athena Athanasiou writes, creates “dispossessed” subjectivities, rendering them subhuman or hauntingly all-too-human; the work's combination of presence and absence, of material and immaterial ghosts of the past, depicts how “a metaphysics of presence is mapped onto particular bodies, selves, and lives as absence, obliteration, and unarchivable spectrality.”<sup>52</sup> Colonialism is not only a physical but also an ontological violence. This violence acts through a “metaphysics of presence,” inscribing certain bodies and lives with absence, relegating them to the status of spectral, unarchivable “hauntings” that lie just beneath the surface of the colonial edifice. In Locke's work, we sense the painful irony embedded in Athanasiou's notion of dispossession: to be dispossessed is not simply to lack or to have been deprived, but to be marked by a form of hypervisibility as well, to inhabit a state of “all-too-human” humanity on the edges of erasure. *Hinterland* enacts this duality, bringing forward what is hidden, invisibilized, within the presence of these statues—the violence of their

original intent—while also creating a space where invisibility becomes palpable.

In Guyana, even decades after independence, certain subjects remain invisible. The term “hinterland” (chosen as the title of Locke’s artwork) denotes the inland geographical areas inhabited chiefly by Amerindian communities—in other words, the backcountry beyond the land that is “visible” or “known.” Locke’s representation builds on this notion of an Indigenous hinterland with its preexisting traces of indigeneity, gesturing toward its status as a sacrifice zone forever compromised by the damaging impacts of monoculture. The idea of “hinterland” encodes territorialization, for designating an area as a hinterland can be construed as making an imperial and colonial territorial claim on that land.<sup>53</sup> The designation itself becomes a form of imperial possession.

As an imaginative and epistemic restitution of the haunted hinterland, Locke’s work *Hinterland* undoes the Indigenous/Amerindian subjectivities’ “unarchivable spectrality” by creatively unearthing their invisible presence in the land. Locke’s artwork makes the hinterland’s nature legible as a “Gothic repository” of obscured, hidden subjectivities, gathering layers of spectral histories, concealed from the untrained eye.<sup>54</sup> It thus renders the hinterland not merely as a forgotten space but as an immense, textured archive. Here, the familiar imperial narratives are unsettled within the landscape, their comforting surfaces shattered, revealing ghostly figures that populate the fringes of history. This “gothic” character is not just a style but a method of radical reclamation, a way of rendering visible what colonialism has strenuously erased.

The different forms of invisible indigeneity that *Hinterland* documents were rooted in a process of dehumanization, which justified the empire’s acquisition of as much foreign territory as possible, both in service of imperialist extraction and in creating new markets for British manufacturers. To view Locke’s works is to feel implicated in these imperialist activities: as Avery Gordon explains, to encounter “the ghostly presence, the lingering past, the luminous presence of the seemingly invisible” implies the acts of knowing and doing: “when you know in a way you did not know before, then you have been notified of your involvement. You are already involved, implicated, in one way or another, and this is why . . . , when it appears to you, the ghost will inaugurate the necessity of doing something about it.”<sup>55</sup> Forcing an encounter with the ghosts of the colonial past, Guyana’s statue of Victoria remains controversial. Perhaps, like *Hinterland* and *Coronation Park*, it embodies its own call to action on the part of the spectator. Calls for removing this statue of Victoria continue to persist: as we

have seen, as recently as June 2018, protesters threw red paint on the statue. The ghostlike presences represented in these artworks are made to reinhabit the site of Victoria's statue in Guyana, just as the statue's removal and restoration participate in the dynamic that *Hinterland* depicts and creates. Locke's artwork forcefully—and literally— projects the past onto the present to transform the present.

#### CONCLUSION: REVISION, RESTITUTION, AND TRANSTEMPORALITY

The same type of neo-Victorian revision and epistemic restitution that animates Locke's painted photographs, as well as the installation *Coronation Park* by the Raqs Media Collective, is at work in the actual site of Victoria's statue in Georgetown with which this essay opened. Through transtemporality, *Hinterland* casts us back into the past even as we stand in our present, enabling a neo-Victorian revision employing photography and concerned with statuary as a colonial tool. Since the sixteenth century, Guyana had been part of European colonial scrambling for territory and resources. Locke photographically represents the imperial monument, which remains outside the Law Courts in Georgetown despite continued protests, to trace a continuity between histories of plunder, resource extraction, deforestation, rapacious conversion of the land for agricultural expansion, and other forms of violence toward Indigenous subjects (such as enslavement and indentured labor, forced migration, abduction, eviction, famine, and erasure of Native languages) and the same phenomena's modern faces in today's palm oil industries. Through *Hinterland*, Locke forges a transtemporal link connecting the Dutch and British colonization of Guyana starting in 1814 with the present-day resource exploitation of the country's arable lands for monoculture oil palm plantations.

Locke's *Hinterland* performs critical epistemic work by putting social and environmental justice at the forefront as it relays its troublesome messages about power and privilege: the gap between represented space and lived reality is made permeable, and its spectral subjects, situated between absence and presence, give rise to a sense of ontological uncertainty. By visually referencing the lingering ghostly presence of and in this landscape, there is a "moving on," as the statue is once again recontextualized. The site of the statue (which was moved and then removed) is now a primary site of imaginative and epistemic restitution: Locke provides a new visual context in which the statue can no longer be read uncritically as a representation of imperial power, for it is a ghost. It has been symbolically killed, sent to the "graveyard," and though it had

risen again, its power was changed when it was moved back to its original position. Its original meaning is now absent, void, and damaged, like *Coronation Park's* missing parts of imperial statues. This is the tactic at work in the artworks I have examined here: when Indigenous or subaltern spectrality is made to overlay the image of the colonial ruler, it brings to the fore and makes visible the oppressive past of the artist's ancestral homeland, the ravaging of the land through the exploitation of material and human resources, and the Indigenous epistemologies the empire tried to suppress through epistemicide and extractivism.

Like these artworks, the statue itself invites postcolonial interpretations, which use oppositional reading practices to observe the extent to which the European colonial past continues to *haunt* (in the Derridean sense) the present—even beyond its direct aftereffects on those previously colonized subjects. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida sees haunting as working through both the absence of a ghost and the out-of-jointness of time (in his reiteration of the Shakespearean phrase from *Hamlet*). For Derrida, haunting “does not mean to be present”;<sup>56</sup> this notion is also applied to imperial public art and architecture by Cherry in her study of the statuery of Trafalgar Square in the context of urban landscapes more broadly. As Cherry points out, Trafalgar Square (like the Law Courts in Georgetown) was central to an imperial narrative in the nineteenth century because it is centrally located in a capital city that was the center of an empire, the hub from which the British Empire was run. She describes how an uncontested and conflicted past continues to haunt the present: “ghostly traces flicker in the palimpsestic present of the capital's urban fabric.”<sup>57</sup> In making her argument, Cherry draws on Derrida's concept of haunting from *Specters of Marx* and its allusion to palimpsestic indentations of past and present (and future conditions of possibility, especially during times of social transformation) in ways that are useful to us here. In Cherry's words, Derrida “meditates on what the dead have to say to the living, on what the past imposes (and has already imposed) on the future, and on ghosts, who confound any separation of the living and the dead. Usually unseen and invisible, ghosts are reminders of what from the past remains unacknowledged and unresolved in the present. Derrida is concerned with mourning and remembrance. Both may be elicited by monuments.”<sup>58</sup> In Trafalgar Square, following dialectical processes of destruction and construction, traces of the past “sur-vive” or “live-on” in the present, to use Derrida's terms. We can see in this passage the strange transtemporality of the specter that haunts public art that is now “out of time”; these historically dislocated works in Trafalgar Square echo the

pieces of Victorian revision that I have examined here. We can also see the idea of restitution at play, in how these re-visions of the past that will not stay dead can help us better understand that past from our current vantage point. As Cherry notes, public monuments can also be seen as Freudian “mnemonic symbols,” which derive meaning in each moment from the encounter with the subject in urban space. Thus, the public statues’ “mnemonic” work can “conjure other lives, ghosts and specters who are often overshadowed by these notable actors in imperial history” whose lives are ostensibly memorialized in the statues. Instead of gesturing to the simple past, she says, public memorials can trigger “a recollection of the colonial and imperial past that summons its ghosts and demands a reckoning.”<sup>59</sup> In Derrida’s formulation: “Spirits. And *one must* reckon with them. One cannot not have to, one must not not be able to reckon with them, which are more than one: the more than one/no more one.”<sup>60</sup> A moment of reckoning is demanded when ghosts are conjured, whether through protests against public memorials dedicated to Queen Victoria, like the Georgetown statue, or revisions of them like *Hinterland*.

In a world haunted by specters of colonial conquest, the call for reckoning becomes both urgent and inexorable. The ghostly apparitions of colonial violence, conjured by collective remembrance and resistance, erupt in spaces once sanctified by statues of Queen Victoria and other imperial figures. When it was first displayed in 2013, Locke’s painted photograph *Hinterland* served as a searing critique of imperial remains in postcoloniality,<sup>61</sup> questioning the contested authority embodied in the celebrated figures of empire. *Hinterland* emerged as a powerful yet contained gesture, resonating within the bounds of postcolonial critique and Locke’s personal engagement with Guyanese heritage and the haunting legacies of colonial identity. At this moment in history, its symbolic undertones appeared primarily to interrogate a landscape of memory that was unresolved yet held quietly within the bounds of art discourse. The work operated as a spectral “pre-toppling,” a phantasmal rehearsal of the questions colonial monuments would eventually force upon the public sphere. Seen through this lens, *Hinterland* became an invocation of disquiet, an uneasy reckoning with monuments that loomed as relics of a past that was not yet fully unburied.

In the shadow of the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall movement and the global resonance of Black Lives Matter in 2020—protests demanding renewed confrontation—*Hinterland* is transformed. No longer merely an archival gesture by Locke, the work now resonates as an urgent call to interrogate the visibility, or indeed the erasure, of colonial legacies. In this

revising, Locke's work is less about empire's artifacts, such as the marble statue of Victoria that still stands tall in Georgetown, and more about the politics of what remains visible, what demands removal, and what colonial afterlives must be faced anew. And now, in 2025, *Hinterland* pulses with an urgency and an activist intensity, bearing witness to the prophetic currents that Locke's treatment of Victoria now seems to have channeled. The disquiet surrounding colonial monuments has transmuted into a radical call for decolonization, and *Hinterland*, with its overlays of skeletal figures and spectral textures, appears to have intuited this seismic shift. It no longer reads simply as a critique but as a haunting—an anticipatory vision that aligned, almost uncannily, with future demands to dismantle, reimagine, or transform public spaces bearing colonial scars.

An example of this anticipatory vision can be read in the 2018 defacement of Queen Victoria's statue in Georgetown, which resonates as if Locke's artwork had, in some untraceable way, primed such an intervention. Though the link between Locke's work and the throwing of red paint onto the statue remains indeterminate, *Hinterland* may well have catalyzed consciousness—planting seeds that eventually bore the fruit of action. Locke could be said to have amplified public awareness, transforming a once static figure into an "object of haunting," a monument whose neutrality had already been unsettled in the past, its innocence stripped away to reveal an embodiment of unresolved violence.

In the post-2020 world, *Hinterland* reverberates with expanded meaning, standing shoulder to shoulder with movements calling for the removal or recontextualization of monuments honoring colonial architects like Cecil Rhodes and Edward Colston.<sup>62</sup> *Hinterland* is endowed with an almost spectral foresight by this global tide of events, as if Locke's imagery had envisioned the eventual toppling or transformation of these icons. His skeletal figures now signify more than the ghostly afterlives of empire; they have become signifiers of justice, reclamation, and the political afterlives of decolonial gestures. In this, Locke's haunting was not only a reflection on colonial legacies but an invocation of the forces to come—an anticipation of collective historical reckoning. In summary, while *Hinterland* in 2013 may have engaged the echoes of the violence of British rule in Guyana, in 2025 it speaks as a harbinger of decolonial gestures that had become mainstream by 2020. This retrospective reading imbues *Hinterland* with layers of precognition and resistance, positioning Locke's work within an unfolding decolonial continuum that traverses memory, spectrality, and the prophetic cadence of art as social critique.

## NOTES

1. Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 4.
2. Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 4 (emphasis mine).
3. I recognize that the history of photography in colonial contexts is addressed only briefly in this essay due to space limitations. However, I have explored this topic in greater depth in other works, namely Mendes, "Documentary Re-enactment"; and Mendes, "Unlearning Imperialism."
4. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art."
5. Mendes, "From Carts to Jet Engines." In this essay, I engage with the idea of transtemporality by illustrating how Michael Winterbottom's adaptation of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* juxtaposes two distinct temporal and geographical contexts—nineteenth-century Victorian England and twenty-first-century India—suggesting a form of temporal continuity between the past and the present, mediated through colonial and postcolonial dynamics.
6. In this way, the essay contributes to ongoing scholarly debates about "undisciplining" the field of Victorian studies. While I have researched this topic (Mendes, *Decolonising English Studies from the Semi-periphery*), I am indebted to one of the peer reviewers of this manuscript for highlighting this connection.
7. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 17.
8. Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 111.
9. During the British Raj, the Mughal term *darbar* ("noble court") was used to designate lavish, imperial-style ceremonial gatherings, forging a continuum between empires. In the case of George V's Coronation Durbar, the use of the Mughal term also strengthened the historical imperial link between Delhi, the former capital of the Mughal Empire, and the soon-to-be new capital of British India. The British moved the capital from Calcutta to New Delhi, inaugurating the city as the new capital of India in 1931.
10. For example, these relics include an impressive statue of George V, over twenty meters tall, that was moved to New Delhi Coronation Park after its face was disfigured just before Independence Day in 1965.
11. Lee et al., "Protest as Polyphony," 195.
12. Born in 1903 in British India, Orwell wrote the essay while serving as a police officer in the Indian Imperial Police Force in British-ruled Burma from 1922 to 1927.

13. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation*, 2–9.
14. Cherry, "Statues in the Square," 664.
15. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art," 890.
16. Steggles, "Set in Stone," 46, 48.
17. Locke, "About Statues."
18. Azoulay, *Potential History*, 12.
19. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 90.
20. Dreese, *Ecocriticism*, 24.
21. Dreese, *Ecocriticism*, 23.
22. Wood and Locke, "Photography, Painting and Impossible Sculpture," 282.
23. Wood and Locke, "Photography, Painting and Impossible Sculpture," 286.
24. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art," 898.
25. Wood and Locke, "Photography, Painting and Impossible Sculpture," 282.
26. Wood and Locke, "Photography, Painting and Impossible Sculpture," 286.
27. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76.
28. Azoulay, *Potential History*, 234.
29. Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, 55.
30. Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, 22.
31. On the use of color in his artistic interventions on statues and the myth of the whiteness of statues in antiquity (including the myth's implications for issues of race and aesthetics—even the notion that white supremacy has highjacked this myth), Locke explains: "For me the colour is vital because it's about reinvigorating these sculptures and putting across an idea that they could be brightly painted and colourful. This also hints at something which has been a constant concern of mine: namely addressing the idea that sculpture, particularly monumental sculpture, in Britain and in the West is still shaped by the fact that all the colour came off the Greek statues. If all the Greek statues had maintained their colour then we'd have a completely different view of what a monumental sculpture should look like, what colour it should be, and not this whole idea of the purity of marble or the elegant quality of the bronze" (Wood and Locke, "Photography, Painting and Impossible Sculpture," 285).
32. Related to this play between surface and depth, Locke notes his recurrent use of images of skeletons: "I'm quite obsessed with

- accentuating what goes on underneath the skin” (Wood and Locke, “Photography, Painting and Impossible Sculpture,” 283).
33. Tobin, *Colonizing Nature*, 2.
  34. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 65.
  35. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*.
  36. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 225.
  37. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 225.
  38. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 90.
  39. Until the passing of the UK Slavery Abolition Act in 1933, the sugarcane plantations worked almost exclusively with slave labor, and the extracted wealth went to British enslavers based especially in Glasgow and Liverpool, such as the Booker family (Draper, “The Rise of a New Planter Class?” 79).
  40. Azoulay, *Potential History*.
  41. This flute player echoes themes from the novel *My Bones and My Flute* (1955), by Guyanese author Edgar Mittelhölzer, where the past crimes of enslavement are likewise made to surface through skeletons and flutes. In *My Bones and My Flute*, the haunting flute serves as an instrument of return, calling forth the dead whose bodies and spirits remain bound to the soil by colonial violence. Similarly, in *Hinterland*, the flute transforms the space around Victoria into a contested, unfirm ground, where the mastery of the colonial ruler is challenged by the latent powers of those it sought to control.
  42. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 90.
  43. Mandle, *The Plantation Economy*.
  44. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 105–6.
  45. Malkki, “National Geographic,” 31.
  46. Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in its Place,” 37.
  47. Malkki, “National Geographic,” 30.
  48. Malkki, “National Geographic,” 30.
  49. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 169.
  50. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 202.
  51. Kincaid, *A Small Place*, 9.
  52. Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, 18.
  53. Kerr, *Eastern Figures*, 11.
  54. Doolan, “Hinterland Gothic,” 175.
  55. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 205–6.
  56. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 202.
  57. Cherry, “Statues in the Square,” 665.
  58. Cherry, “Statues in the Square,” 673–74.

59. Cherry, "Statues in the Square," 684.
60. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xx (emphasis original).
61. Young, "Postcolonial Remains."
62. Mendes, "From Crisis to Imagination."

#### WORKS CITED

- Appadurai, Arjun. "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place." *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1988): 36–49.
- Azoulay, Ariella Aïsha. *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. London: Verso, 2019.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by R. Howard. New York: Hill & Wang, 1981.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. *The Radicant*. Translated by J. Gussen and L. Porten. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009.
- Butler, Judith, and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
- Cherry, Deborah. "Statues in the Square: Hauntings at the Heart of Empire." *Art History* 29, no. 4 (2006): 660–97.
- Crosby, Alfred W. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death*. Translated by David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- . *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Doolan, Emma. "Hinterland Gothic: Subtropical Excess in the Literature of South East Queensland." *Tropical Gothic*, special issue of *eTropic* 18, no. 1 (2019): 174–91.
- Draper, Nicholas. "The Rise of a New Planter Class? Some Countercurrents from British Guiana and Trinidad, 1807–33." *Atlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2012): 65–83.
- Dreese, D. N. *Ecocriticism: Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literatures*. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Translated by J. M. Dash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989.
- Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Grove, Richard. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Kerr, Douglas. *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.
- Lee, Melissa Karmen, Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, et al. "Protest as Polyphony: An Interview with Raqs Media Collective." *ASAP/Journal* 3, no. 2 (2018): 187–202.
- Locke, Hew. "About Statues: Ongoing Series of Large Painted Photographs," [www.hewlocke.net/largepaintedphotos.html](http://www.hewlocke.net/largepaintedphotos.html) (accessed February 14, 2023).

- Malkki, Liisa. "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees." *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992): 24–44.
- Mandle, Jay. *The Plantation Economy: Population and Economic Change in Guyana, 1838–1960*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive." Lecture at the University of Cape Town, 2015. TRAFO – Blog for Transregional Research, <https://trafo.hypotheses.org/2413> (accessed February 13, 2023).
- Mendes, Ana Cristina. ———. *Decolonising English Studies from the Semi-periphery*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.
- . "Documentary Re-enactment in Raoul Peck's *Exterminate All the Brutes*: Countering the Work of the Imperial Camera Shutter." *Transnational Screens* 13, no. 2 (2022): 111–28.
- . "From Carts to Jet Engines': The Afterlife of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in Michael Winterbottom's *Trishna*." *Adaptation* 9, no. 2 (2016): 221–33.
- . "From 'Crisis' to Imagination: Putting White Heroes under Erasure Post-George Floyd." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 21, no. 5 (2021): 394–400.
- . "Unlearning Imperialism through Artistic Remediation: A Critical Pedagogy Approach." *Critical Arts* (2024): 1–19.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Le visible et l'invisible*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. "The Violence of Public Art: 'Do the Right Thing.'" *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 4 (1990): 880–99.
- Mittelhölzer, Edgar. *My Bones and My Flute: A Ghost Story in the Old-fashioned Manner*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1955.
- Orwell, George. "Shooting an Elephant." In *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*, 31–40. London: Penguin, 2009.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- Steggles, Mary Anne. "Set in Stone: Victoria's Monuments in India." *History Today* 51, no. 2 (2001): 44–51.
- Tobin, Beth Fowkes. *Colonizing Nature: The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760–1820*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- Varner, Eric. *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Wood, Jon, and Hew Locke. "Photography, Painting and Impossible Sculpture: Hew Locke's *Natives and Colonials*: Jon Wood in Conversation with Hew Locke." *Sculpture Journal* 15, no. 2 (2006): 282–86.
- Young, Robert J. C. "Postcolonial Remains." *New Literary History* 43, no. 1 (2012): 19–42.