



British Art Studies

July 2016

British Sculpture Abroad, 1945 – 2000

**Edited by Penelope Curtis and Martina
Droth**

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Britishness, Identity, and the Three-Dimensional: British Sculpture Abroad in the 1990s

Courtney J. Martin

Abstract

This essay examines how sculptural discourse was absent from British art shown outside of Britain in the 1990s, despite the international prominence of two distinct groups of British artists: the so-called Young British Artists (YBAs) and other British artists folded into a postcolonial or identity-based construction.

Authors

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Introduction

In May 1992, on the twenty-fourth anniversary of the political and cultural upheavals of May 1968, the artist and writer on art Michael Corris used the occasion to satirize what he saw as the growing *Americanization* of contemporary British art. Footnoted in Corris's tongue-in-cheek manifesto was a prescient description of the state of British art that would follow it for an entire decade:

The conceptualization of a new generation of artists who are fixed in the ambered abundance of London is subject to a number of constraints that abrade and unsettle the normal logic of promotion and curatorial space. Theoretically, the relationships between class, race, and gender must be made visible, as these ultimately determine how the most important questions of "membership" within a newly imagined avant-garde are settled. The "new generation" of "young British artists" is a cultural phenomenon formed out of specific needs expressed primarily in terms of a presumed national culture. But even that celebratory discourse is subject to pressures brought to bear by historical responses to the collapse of British colonialism, its neocolonialist aftermath, and the prevailing consciousness of the subordination of the early-20th-century English avant-garde in painting and sculpture to the Continental avant-gardes and, domestically, to the practice of literature. That tension continues to be felt by contemporary English curators as a "preference" for the semi-abstract, the blandly narrative, and the environmentally anecdotal in art.¹

It is likely that Corris's reference to "young British artists" was an allusion to the exhibition *Young British Artists I* that preceded his essay that spring at the Saatchi Gallery in London. The first in what was to be a series of generationally themed group shows supported by Charles Saatchi, this exhibition gathered together a group of artists that had come to the forefront of contemporary art in London. Their prominence, or "celebrity", put them into an ongoing conversation about the changes in London's art landscape involving collectors, young artists, and the media.² The Saatchi exhibition and Corris's article cemented the name "Young British Artists", or the equally popular acronym YBAs, into the lexicon of the art world.

Biennialization

British art in the 1990s seemed to be dominated by the YBAs. Artists associated with this moniker, such as Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, became household names as their work became indistinct from their personal lives as reported on in the media. The visibility of these artists was parallel with their rise in the art market, which had another corollary—the redefinition of the art market’s London axis. In this decade, art dealers, commercial art galleries, periodicals, and auction houses began to spring from and/or focus on art and artists in London. For example, *Frieze* magazine launched from London in 1991. A false cognate, in title, of the *Freeze* exhibition curated by Hirst in London in 1988, from its inception *Frieze* documented the YBAs and, by the middle of the decade, the robust art scene in Glasgow, dubbed the “Glasgow Miracle”.³ Though it did not bill itself as a national vehicle, its earliest issues prominently featured art made in Britain, artists living in Britain, and concepts emanating from a specifically British perspective, making it a resource for what was happening inside the country for those in and outside of it.

Beyond London, the conceptually driven and explicit objects being produced made these artists and this city a locus of curiosity. By the late 1990s, many of the artists identified (interchangeably) with either the YBAs or with the coolness of London’s art scene, were also heralded abroad. A number of exhibitions sought to export so-called “Cool Britannia” out to the world, and invitations were made to individual artists to show some aspect of this aesthetic. This trend met another one in which artists sought and gained representation from commercial galleries internationally, who then showed their work at art fairs, further dispersing the artists globally. The 1990s also saw the rise of international annual, biennial, and triennial exhibitions. Before the 1990s, the Venice Biennale (founded in 1895), the São Paulo Art Biennial (founded in 1951), and the quinquennial *Documenta* (founded in 1955) were, with a few exceptions, the only major showcases for artists as representatives of their nations or for demonstrations of thematic trends. After 1989, there was an increase in the non-commercial, non-national, non-institutional and temporary, international display of art.⁴

The so-called *biennialization* of contemporary art has its roots in the 1990s and describes the global distribution mechanism of art as a temporally fatiguing system with no seeming end or beginning. According to this idea, art was marketed, shown, and sold, with no distinction made between the function of an exhibition at museums, commercial galleries, art fairs, or temporary non-institutional spaces. Biennialization uprooted nationality for the possibility of global exposure. If all of contemporary art was focused on, or oriented towards, New York at the start of the decade, by the end of it, New York was only one place in which art could be recognized as global. And

yet the wide availability of information about art (through fairs, dealers, and shows) ran hand-in-hand with a kind of democratization of art whereby more artists were being seen by more people in more places. Corris's call for the recognition of "class, race, and gender" as well as an aesthetic reckoning with colonialism, may have benefited some of those artists swept into the YBA circuit (the discourses of feminism and class analysis are certainly two methods of entry into the work of Emin and Sarah Lucas). Other British artists came to the fore at exactly the same time as the YBAs, concurrent with their media notoriety, but separate from it.

Freeze and The Other Story

From this vantage, if biennialization over-exposed one set of British artists in this decade, another was given some degree of recognition by the same channels of distribution. We might trace this point of contact and diversion to two London exhibitions in the late 1980s: *Freeze*, held in the summer of 1988, and *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, which opened in the fall of 1989 and closed in the winter of 1990. Historically, student exhibitions have played a great role in British art, and *Freeze* can be seen as part of this legacy. Curated by Hirst in the disused Port of London Authority Building in Surrey Docks, the summer before he graduated from Goldsmiths College, *Freeze* is often noted as the touchstone for the YBAs because it included sixteen artists with which it would later be identified.⁵ The show also established an exhibition style that moved away from the "white cube" towards a more unpolished aesthetic of high ceilings, rough floors, and open, undivided galleries that would be replicated, even when not situated in an actual warehouse. It also established a dictum for the reception of British artists outside of Britain to be young (for a time), white (with few exceptions), and to make conceptual art. It was an alternative to the degree shows held that year because Hirst made the selection and then promoted the exhibition as a professional endeavour, not unlike *New Contemporaries*, the annual juried exhibition of art school graduates selected by established artists and arts professionals and held in a major British arts institution.

While *Freeze* may have shown one side of the art world, *The Other Story*, by contrast, introduced another. Curated by the artist and writer Rasheed Araeen, the show was an exploratory survey of the several decades long accomplishments of African, Asian, and Caribbean artists in Britain (fig. 1).⁶ It brought together artists working in various media and from different periods to be the first major museum exhibition of non-white British artists in Britain. Unlike *Freeze*, which was seen by few people outside of the immediate art world context, *The Other Story* was viewed widely and thought to be a popular success, if not a critical one.⁷ Conversely, *Freeze*'s

smaller audience included collectors like Saatchi, curators, and others with a wide international reach. Since both shows predate *Frieze* magazine, there is no way to evaluate how the insider/outsider publication would have measured the shows locally for international consumption.



Figure 1.

Installation view, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London, 29 Nov. 1989— 4 Feb. 1990 Digital image courtesy of Rasheed Araeen Archive / [Asia Art Archive](#)

Though *The Other Story's* local success and the international curiosity it aroused did not attract commercial galleries or significant collectors, Araeen's endeavour seemed to mark a shift in the ways that British museums were responding to the country's changing demographics in line with the ways that museums in America and in Europe were addressing the questions proposed by postcolonial theory.⁸

Despite their marked differences, *Freeze* and *The Other Story* were constitutive of a period and modelled the way that British art would be shown abroad during that period. If *Freeze* was the originary event for the YBAs, then *The Other Story* performed this operation in reverse, perhaps postcolonially, explaining the presence of non-white British artists in the decades that preceded it. From their openings, each would become the referent for the ways in which these two, seemingly divergent, groups of artists could be understood or shown. That said, neither exhibition, in its installation or in its accompanying material, made note of the presence of sculpture in their shows, despite the fact that both included significant works that would characterize the periodized style that was transported out of the

country. It is worth mentioning that both Araeen and Hirst acted as curators and participants, placing their own sculpture prominently in their respective exhibitions.⁹

For all of these artists, YBA or not, the question of sculpture is complicated. In Britain, some of the best-known works (to the art world and to the general public) in the 1990s were three-dimensional: Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (House)* (1993), Emin's *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995); or the shark, the house, and the tent. These works gained international attention once they were displayed or promoted outside of the country. Rarely, however, do we think of their status as objects with depth that exist in space. Each is subsequently reduced to its surface qualities (the shark in the tank or the cast house) which, in some measure, treats them as if they are conceptually and physically flat. This is not to say that these objects were misunderstood as two-dimensional media (painting, prints, or photographs). Their flattening was literal, owing in part to the conflation of their concept with their construction (Whiteread's *Untitled (House)* was a cast of an actual terrace house, and Emin claimed to record every being in whose presence she had fallen asleep or with whom she had shared a bed) and to the way in which sculpture can still be overlooked if it is not presented as traditional sculpture (that is, without a plinth, not carved or modelled). A reconsideration of this decade needs to take into account the misrecognition of the variety of multi-dimensional objects or installations that could be called sculptural.

How then might we look at these three overlapping concerns: the over-exposure of the YBAs nationally transmitted out to the rest of the world; the exposure of other British artists folded into a postcolonial or identity-based construction; and the absence of sculptural discourse in the appraisal of both? For both groups, spectacle subsumed media. True to the aesthetic concerns, market conditions, and institutional responses of the decade, the question of identity, be it an ethnic designation or a consumption strategy, framed the reception of and set the terms for British art and artists abroad in the 1990s.¹⁰ This essay stands as a survey of this decade, while the other essays in this section zero in on key intersections of artists and the international in the 1990s that take shape around, with, and through the ideas surveyed here.

Magiciens de la Terre

One of the first pronouncements for the international reception of British art in the 1990s was the late 1980s show *Magiciens de la Terre*, in which British artists Araeen, Tony Cragg, Shirazeh Houshiary, and Richard Long all showed sculptural installations deemed global rather than national or the binary of contemporary/traditional then used to evaluate the work of living artists along an eastern/western split. Curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, *Magiciens de la Terre* was on view in the summer of 1989 at two locations in Paris, the Pompidou Centre and La Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette. Its presentation of one hundred artists, half from the “west” and half from “outside the west”, was explicitly in response to the problematic rendering of the west relative to the rest of the world in the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition, “*Primitivism*” in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984–85). MoMa’s show in New York seemed to reify existing denigrations about art produced outside of Europe and America as, in some sense, completed only by the engagement of Western masters such as Pablo Picasso.¹¹ Martin’s initiative sought another tack—to see all makers of objects as not simply artists but as shamans able to harness their otherworldly power in order to conjure art. While Martin’s curatorial plans have been heavily criticized for the “ethnographic” presentation of art and artists, he has also been lauded for attempting to democratize the field of contemporary art in a more inclusive manner.¹² I would argue that Martin’s failure is also his success. By equalizing all of the artists as magicians (and by extension, suggesting all art is a magical act), he imbued non-western artists and non-white artists in the west with one of the oldest tropes of art history: the artist as a naive genius. The problem therein, of course, is that he returns to the well-worn dictum of artists as naifs, not as skilled agents operating within a global system of aesthetics and commerce.

The other achievement of Martin’s show was to highlight the shared global interest in the three-dimensional. Of the one hundred artists in the show, a great majority presented objects in space. For a show that did not announce itself as sculptural, its display (not only that of the works, but also the two large locations used to house them) implied that the international (museum) standard for new art embraced all manner of installation art and multiple dimensions. True to the utopian concept of the exhibition, the four artists living in London were not understood within the frame of the show as British (in the sense of the YBAs), but neither were they shown together elsewhere as examples of global artists in the 1990s. Certainly Long is considered under the rubric of British land art, and Araeen and Houshiary are often labelled as Pakistani and Iranian, living in London, though not necessarily British. Though he agreed to be in the show, Araeen used his participation as a stage to protest it as an avenue of “chasing either exotica or the famous European

artists". ¹³ A few years later, Chris Ofili (whose work was not shown in *Magiciens*) delivered a riposte that addressed the problem that exhibitions like this presented to artists:

It's what people really want from black artists. We're the voodoo king, the voodoo queen, the witch doctor, the drug dealer, the *magician de la terre*. The exotic, the decorative. I'm giving them all of that, but it's packaged slightly differently. ¹⁴

Into the following decade, *Magiciens* would be a foil against which which artists of colour measured both the reception and presentation of their works within exhibitions, books, and collections that sought out race and ethnicity as an aesthetic medium.

Kapoor, Venice and *The Other Story*

In 1989 it was made known that Anish Kapoor had declined Araeen's invitation to participate in *The Other Story*. This revelation was almost simultaneous with the announcement that the Indian-born Kapoor would represent Britain in the XLIV Venice Biennale in the following year. In the run up to the Biennale, Kapoor was asked why he had declined to participate in *The Other Story*. He answered:

Because I believe that being an artist is more than being an Indian artist. I feel supportive to that kind of endeavor. I feel it needs to happen once; I hope that show is never necessary again. Western artists have been able to look at non-Western influence and make it part of Western culture in some very energizing ways. But it's never happened the other way round. I think we are in a time where it is possible. ¹⁵

The public attention to Kapoor's role in Venice coincided with *The Other Story's* proposal (in one of Britain's most prominent public venues) that there was an undisclosed history of neglected British artists, based solely on race or ethnicity, which was challenged by Kapoor's pending apotheosis in Venice. Instead, answers to Kapoor's abstention from the exhibition were generated as speculation in the media. Richard Dorment described the invitation to be a part of the exhibition as being placed in a "humiliating situation". ¹⁶ In the *Independent*, Andrew Graham-Dixon referred to Kapoor as "extremely successful" with a preference for "open competition", which was, presumably, disallowed by the exhibition. ¹⁷ Perhaps in anticipation of this

contention, Araeen wrote in the postscript to the exhibition catalogue that Kapoor, along with Houshiary, Kim Lim, Dhruva Mistry, and Veronica Ryan, declined to be in the exhibition as a result of fear, though the nature of that fear was never explored.¹⁸ In the few months between the closing of *The Other Story* in February 1990 and the opening of the Venice Biennale in the spring, there was a sense among Britons, at least, that Kapoor's show would be met by as much critical and popular interest by international audiences as *The Other Story* had been in London.

In Venice, Kapoor showed seven objects, all of which were within the sculptural idiom: single stand-alone structures, multi-part installations, and a wall relief.¹⁹ The most substantial of these was *Void Field* (1989; [fig. 2](#)): sixteen rough-hewn stones, each punctured by a hole and installed into a single room, through which viewers could narrowly traverse. The abyss of the hole, outlined in Kapoor's signature blue-black pigment, suggested the void of the title.²⁰ Though Kapoor's entry was not billed as sculptural, it was a decisive response to the question of what British art wanted the world to acknowledge as its national artistic output, by way of the world's oldest temporary biennial exhibition of art. The solid success of Kapoor's pavilion reinforced the long-held prominence of British sculptors internationally, starting with Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth and leading up to Anthony Caro. Though Kapoor may have seemed like an adventurous choice for Britain's entry (he was young and not born in Britain) he already had an international reputation. He had shown with Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York since the mid-1980s and received critical reviews for these shows and other group outings across Europe for nearly as long. In contrast with the ways in which the press pitched him against Araeen, Venice audiences received the work without controversy, so much so that he was awarded the Premio Duemila (the prize awarded to young artists) for his effort. Almost immediately after Venice Kapoor began to be considered for the large-scale public commissions that have defined his practice from 2000 to the present.



Figure 2.

Anish Kapoor, *Void Field*, 1989, 16 elements, sandstone and pigment, each element 125 x 125 x 125 cm Digital image courtesy of Anish Kapoor / Photo: Gareth Winters, London

Brit Art in New York

The 1990s inaugurated a string of exhibitions in America loosely themed around the emergence of a new school of British art. These include *Twelve British Artists*, curated by Clarissa Dalrymple for the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in 1992; the New York version of the London exhibition, *Lucky Kunst* (1993), which was held on 42nd Street; the museum-scaled "*Brilliant!*" *New Art from London* (1995-96), curated by the then Chief Curator at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Richard Flood; and, of course, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, which was on view at the Brooklyn Museum from the fall of 1999 into the new year. The point is not so much that these shows were in America, but that most of them came to New York, which at the time, was conceived of as the centre of the art world. So Corris's concern over *Americanization* should then be specified as the potential for *New Yorkification*, since the activities of the art world mostly happened in New York, not in the rest of the United States. If part of the YBA construct was the necessity to be on a par with New York art and artists, then showing in New York was crucial.²¹ What then can be made of the fact that there were a few other shows that delivered non-white and immigrant British artists to American audiences during this period? The exhibitions *Interrogating Identity* (1991) and *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian, and*

Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966–1996 (1997–98) looked at the particular role of black British artists, often in the context of the former British empire or the Commonwealth. Both sets of exhibitions, while having little crossover in terms of participating artists, had two features in common: the inclusion of sculpture and, what Julian Stallabrass has called, the “Britishness of British art” in the 1990s.²²

The first of these exhibitions was *Interrogating Identity*.²³ Originating at New York University’s Grey Art Gallery in the spring of 1991, the show was, according to one of its curators, Kellie Jones, the outgrowth of a fascination with “black British culture” because of its “transnational practice”.²⁴ With its focus on objects that explored personal identity, often through the vehicle of nation or culture, the show was an early participant in the period of so-called identity politics in art. Later, exhibitions such as the 1993 Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial would cement this decade of art in America as one that was deeply political, ambivalent about the art market, and invested in pursuing the body as a medium.²⁵ In all cases, identity is the American adjective for what, outside of the US, might be described as postcolonial. Of the eighteen artists in the exhibition, nearly half were British or living in the UK during the run of the show, including the sculptors Mona Hatoum, Keith Piper, Donald Rodney, and Yinka Shonibare.²⁶ Though Piper and Shonibare did not exhibit three-dimensional works, Hatoum and Rodney did.

While *Interrogating Identity* was not the first exhibition outside Britain in which Hatoum participated, it was one of the first in which she showed an installation, *The Light at the End* (1989; [fig. 3](#)), instead of a film/video or a performance, the work for which she was more well known in the late 1980s.²⁷ First shown in London in 1989, *The Light at the End* is a multi-part installation in which a vertical, rectangular gate structure blocks an area to create a human-scale cell-like enclosure in the installation’s negative space.²⁸ The installation requires a darkened space so that the single light shone onto it spotlights the central structure. In New York in the early 1990s, this work would have fit easily in an exhibition alongside Sol LeWitt’s free-standing grids or Dan Graham’s architectonic pavilions, the latter demonstrating how the body can be physically contained within an aesthetic object.



Figure 3.

Mona Hatoum, *The Light at the End*, 1989, iron, steel, brass, glass, aluminium and electrical elements, Edition: 3/3 Digital image courtesy of Mona Hatoum / Photo: Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

In the context of her earlier work and within the exhibition, however, the gate-like structure was a kind of body backed into a corner, just as the enclosed space created by the gate and the walls suggested a cell or trap, large enough to imprison a human body. The enclosure is further enhanced by Hatoum's use of electric heating elements on the bars of the gate. Engaged to capacity, they provide light and warmth in equal measure with danger. In either reading, the subject was under surveillance due to the spotlight. For Hatoum, readings of this kind followed the discourse of her work in the previous decade, in which her biography as a Palestinian woman in exile (doubly so, first with her family from Palestine to Beirut, then alone from Beirut to London following the outbreak of the Lebanese war in 1975) was transposed literally over it, with little attention given to the specifics of her practice.

Though Hatoum has discussed the necessity of aligning her work in this way ("At the beginning it was important to think about the black political struggle as a total political struggle"), in the 1990s she moved away from the politics of Britain in the 1980s after participating in three of the most important "black" group shows of the decade: Araeen's *Third World Within: AfroAsian Artists in Britain* (Brixton Art Gallery, London, 1986); *The Essential Black Art* (Chisenhale Gallery, 1988); and the previously discussed *The Other Story* (1989).²⁹ I would argue that the shift from time-based media and body art to

installations allowed Hatoum the platform from which her whole practice could develop materially. *Interrogating Identity*, then, was an important show for Hatoum because it allowed an international audience not specifically versed in British cultural politics to see larger-scale work outside the frame of that context. To show in New York was important for any artist in the 1990s, but for Hatoum this was doubly true, as it moved her beyond the smaller group shows in London that did not attract dealers or collectors.

Arguably, for those new to her work, the exhibition's triple-country platform (Britain, Canada, and the United States) further promoted Hatoum, who might not have been read as "British" in that context. It is no surprise then that *The Light at the End* was one of the first works to ignite the reading of Hatoum's objects within the Minimalist idiom.³⁰ Hatoum's intent, or the political content that was read into her work in the 1980s, are not the point. Rather, I want to suggest that when she began making three-dimensional objects and showing them outside of Britain, viewers (critics, curators, collectors, and general audiences) began to situate them as Postminimalist: this entailed a shift in focus away from biography, to take into account the style, construction, and period affinities of her practice. This is not to suggest that the New York centred, male-dominated art history of Minimalism is apolitical or devoid of cultural intention. A key aspect of Hatoum's Postminimalist reception grew alongside the reconsideration of the relative absence of women in early Minimalist discourse, such as Jo Baer, Eva Hesse, Nancy Holt, Agnes Martin, Howardena Pindell, Dorothea Rockburne, and Anne Truitt.

Between 1991 and 1995 Hatoum was included in several other exhibitions outside Britain, which could be divided equally between those that called on her to perform a blend of ethnicity and politics, and those that did not. Among the former were the Havana Biennales of 1991 and 1994, which were geared to recognize artists from the so-called "third world"; and *Heart of Darkness*, on view at the Museum Kröller Müller in the Netherlands in 1995, which sought to draw a link between postcolonialism (by way of Joseph Conrad's novel) and artists working in the realm of identity. In contrast, in the Museum of Modern Art's 1994 group show, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties*, Hatoum, placed alongside Whiteread, was not construed as British, but was employed to make the case for Minimalism's afterlife as inclusive of women artists outside the immediate New York context. Hatoum's participation in the Istanbul Biennial in 1995 coincided with the year in which she was nominated for the Turner Prize (which was awarded to Hirst). From 1995 to the end of the decade, Hatoum's sculpture would be known internationally by way of large-scale solo exhibitions of sculpture and installation, like her show at the British School at

Rome in 1995, or her first international retrospective in 1997 held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

Ofili's Three-dimensional Painting

Held jointly at three locations in New York, *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian, and Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966-1996* (1997-98), opened two years before *Sensation* at the Brooklyn Museum.³¹ In the same way that *Freeze* and *The Other Story* were twinned, so too were *Transforming the Crown* and *Sensation*. Noticeably, *Transforming the Crown* gained much from Jones's *Interrogating Identity* and Araeen's curatorial premise, just as *Sensation* drew from Hirst's *Freeze* and the subsequent group shows of British artists that he curated in London. Further complicating this interaction between *Transforming the Crown* and *Sensation* was the surprising overlap between the two shows, despite the fact that they both claimed to represent British national identity. Various iterations of *Britishness* (or identity) were explored here in much the same way that class, race, gender, and sexuality were explored as aspects of "identity" elsewhere in the decade. If *Sensation* brought about "Cool Britannia", *Transforming the Crown* doubled the novelty of Britishness by adding race to the equation and drawing heavily on the literary concept of the transatlantic recently put forward by theorist Paul Gilroy.³² Yinka Shonibare was the only artist that the two shows had in common. Shonibare's installations, however, were not the focus of the attention. Much of that went to Chris Ofili's painting, *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996; [fig. 4](#)).



Figure 4.

Chris Ofili, *The Holy Virgin Mary*, 1996, acrylic, oil, polyester resin, paper collage, glitter, map pins, and elephant dung on linen, 243.8 × 182.8 cm Digital image courtesy of Chris Ofili and Victoria Miro, London / Photo: Stephen White

Ofili's painting of the Virgin was deemed vulgar and profane by New York's mayor, Rudolph Giuliani and by the state's standing Archbishop and Cardinal, John O'Connor, due to the elephant dung that Ofili incorporated into the work. While much has been made of Giuliani's public denunciation of the painting, and his attempt to withdraw public funding from the museum while nevertheless profiting from the publicity surrounding the ensuing controversy, little attention has been paid to the work itself. While technically two-dimensional, *The Holy Virgin Mary's* most offending element, the dung, was three-dimensional. The painting—depicting a black Madonna, swathed in the Renaissance iconography of a blue gown and emerging from a yellow-gold background—was a multi-media object composed of collaged paper, oil paint, glitter, polyester resin, map pins, and dung. A rounded mound of dung protruded from the surface of the work as a stand-in for the Marian figure's

breast. Ofili also used dung for the two posts that supported the bottom edge of the work, elevating it from the floor in the manner of a pedestal and turning it into a standing object. From this placement, the dung allowed the work to rest at an angle against the wall, so that the space between the wall and the work was visible from either a side or frontal view. The painting's installation method—propped up and leaned against the wall—returns to the implicit proposition made by Magiciens de la Terre in 1989 that multi-dimensionality was a key component of contemporary art. Here, a two-dimensional painting is enhanced by (and later denigrated for) its acknowledgment of the space around it, in the manner of sculpture.

Though I would not argue that Ofili intended his object to be anything more than a painting, it is sculptural. Within its three-dimensionality, I think it is worth considering the way in which the sculptural element of his work, the dung, received the kind of media attention in New York that had previously been granted to Whiteread's *Untitled (House)* (1993), Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), or Emin's *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995); all of which (the latter two were on view alongside Ofili in *Sensation*) were evaluated on the basis of their literalness, rather than their merit as art objects—let alone as sculpture.

Conclusion

By the latter part of the 1990s, the questions that were posed to British sculptors had changed. Installation art, for one, became a widely accepted form, and the artists once grouped as YBAs were frequently considered singularly and within sculptural norms. Even more transformed were the ways in which these artists responded. Corris's pronouncement on the *Americanization* of British art in the 1990s fell flat against the tide of globalization, which called for artists to be represented everywhere in a manner that negated a specifically national affiliation. Perhaps the best example of this is Rachel Whiteread. In 1993 Whiteread made national and international headlines for her *Untitled (House)*, a cast interior of a London terraced house on the site of the original home. In that year she was awarded the Turner Prize, which led to other accolades, nationally and internationally. Frequently, Whiteread, like and along with Hatoum, was placed within the discussion on New York Minimalism. For critics, the demolition of *Untitled (House)* was comparable to the erection and removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981; removed 1989) from federal property in lower Manhattan.³³ Perhaps it was this type of comparison that shifted her career away from the grouping of YBAs (despite her inclusion in *Brilliant* and *Sensation*) and towards the realm of public art commissions and the larger recognition and international success that they offered.



Figure 5.

Rachel Whiteread, Holocaust Memorial, 1995-2000 Judenplatz, Vienna, mixed media, 3.8 × 7 × 10 m Digital image courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, Lorcan O'Neill, Rome, and Gagosian Gallery

In 1996 Whiteread was commissioned to produce a memorial in Vienna to commemorate the more than 65,000 Austrian Jews who died under the National Socialist regime. Her proposal was selected from a competition to which ten artists, a mix of Austrian and other nationalities, were invited to submit proposals. It was chosen on its merit, but likely also due to her earlier success at completing large-scale public art works. True to Whiteread's practice and to the needs of the site—a public square in Vienna's former Jewish Ghetto—the sculpture was to be representational to the extent that it invoked the books on library shelving from which it was cast and titled, but abstract enough to veer away from the didactic or the illustrative. Though the sculpture, *Nameless Library* (1996-2000), was to be erected in the fall of 1996, it was delayed for a host of reasons for four years until the fall of 2000 (fig. 5).³⁴ It is important to see this work as a product of the 1990s rather than of the millennium, by which time the idea of Whiteread's *Britishness* and connection to the earlier conceptual bent of the YBAs had been relinquished. As a commission belonging to this decade, *Nameless Library* feels risky (a non-Jewish, British sculptor called to commemorate the Holocaust in Austria) and slightly ahead of its time. Yet it also achieves to some degree the ambition that the conjoined identity/postcolonial ethos of the decade sought: an art that would ultimately reflect and refer without the weight of representation, in all senses of the term. By the turn of the

millennium, British art outside Britain answered the call to the global economy and the postcolonial in ways that reflect how those issues were being addressed in Britain. The difference between inside and outside was one of reception.

Footnotes

- 1 Michael Corris, "British? Young? Invisible? w/Attitude?", *Artforum* 30, no. 9 (May 1992): 106.
- 2 *Young British Artists I* was on view at the Saatchi Gallery from March to Oct. 1992. It included the work of John Greenwood, Damien Hirst, Alex Landrum, Langlands & Bell (Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell), and Rachel Whiteread. See Sarah Kent, ed., *Young British Artists [I]*, exh. cat. (London: Saatchi Collection, 1992).
- 3 The designation of the success of artists, galleries, and the Glasgow School of Art in the 1990s as the "Glasgow Miracle" is attributed to London-based curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist and has been circulated widely since the mid-1990s. Ross Sinclair recalled an anecdote in which Obrist coined the term in reference to Douglas Gordon on the occasion of the Scottish artist being awarded the Turner Prize in 1996. See Sinclair, "What's in a Decade: The Glasgow Miracle vs. Utopian Modernism Done by Third World Peasants", in *Circles: Individuelle Sozialisation und Netzwerkarbeit in der zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Christoph Keller (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2002), 193-99.
- 4 Here are a few examples to illustrate the proliferation of temporary international exhibitions in the 1990s. Though the Istanbul Biennial and the Dakar Biennale (rebranded as Dak'Art in 1996) date to 1987 and 1989 respectively, they are constituted in the following decade by the shows that join them a few years later, such as France's La Biennale de Lyon (1991), and the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) in Brisbane, Australia, and the Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates, both 1993. The first editions of the now-defunct Johannesburg Biennale and the extant Gwangju Biennale in South Korea were launched in 1995, along with the SITE Santa Fe Biennial, which opened alongside its eponymous institution. In the following year, the itinerant biennial Manifesta staged its first event in Rotterdam, and was thereafter held in other European cities or sites (the Trentino-South Tyrol, for one) of regional conflict. By 1998, some countries hosted more than one biennial in different cities. This is the case for the Berlin and Liverpool Biennials, founded in 1996 and 1998 respectively, in countries with existing successive annual art exhibitions.
- 5 *Freeze* was on view from 6 Aug. to 29 Sept. 1988, and included the work of Steven Adamson, Angela Bulloch, Mat Collishaw, Ian Davenport, Angus Fairhurst, Anya Gallaccio, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Michael Landy, Abigail Lane, Sarah Lucas, Lala Meredith-Vula, Stephen Park, Richard Patterson, Simon Patterson, and Fiona Rae.
- 6 Curated by Araeen, the show was on view at the Hayward Gallery in London from 29 Nov. 1989 to 4 Feb. 1990, and included the work of Araeen, Saleem Arif, Frank Bowling, Sonia Boyce, Eddie Chambers, Avinash Chandra, Avtarjeet Dhanjal, Uzo Egonu, Iqbal Geoffrey, Mona Hatoum, Lubaina Himid, Gavin Jantjes, Balraj Khanna, Donald Locke, David Medalla, Ronald Moody, Ahmed Parvez, Ivan Peries, Keith Piper, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Kumiko Shimizu, Francis Newton Souza, Aubrey Williams, and Li Yuan-chia.
- 7 The audience surveys and attendance book for *The Other Story* are overwhelmingly positive (Hayward Gallery Library). The exhibition was also favorably received by the public in its travelling venues: Cornerhouse, Manchester, the Manchester City Art Gallery, and the Wolverhampton Art Gallery.
- 8 For one contemporary view of museums at the beginning of the decade, see Ivan Karp, "How Museums Define Other Cultures", *American Art* 5, nos. 1/2 (Winter/Spring 1991): 10-15.
- 9 Hirst showed *Boxes* (1988), along with spot paintings that were painted directly onto the wall, and Araeen showed several three-dimensional objects: *Sculpture No. 1* (1965), *Sculpture No. 2* (1965), *Second Structure* (1966-67), *Structure Blue* (1967), *Lal Kona* (1968-69), *8b5* (1970), and *Chakras* (1969-70).
- 10 Looking back to the 1990s, Kleeblatt offers an evaluation of the importance of "identity" to exhibitions then and more recently. See Norman L. Kleeblatt, "Identity Roller Coaster", *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 61-63.
- 11 For one reading of this issue, see Pablo Lafuente, "From the Outside In: 'Magiciens de la Terre' and Two Histories of Exhibitions", in Lucy Steeds and others, *Making Art Global (Part 2): Magiciens de la Terre, 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013), 8-22.
- 12 Jeremy Lewison wrote in full, "Broadly, the western artists were chosen for their affinity with ethnographic or 'primitive' art ([Shirazeh] Houshiary, [Richard] Long, [Jean-Michel] Alberola, Tony Cragg, [Louise] Bourgeois), or for issues relating to the third world." See Lewison, "'Bilderstreit' and 'Magiciens de la Terre'. Paris and Cologne", *The Burlington Magazine* 131, no. 1037 (Aug. 1989): 585.
- 13 This statement is taken from Araeen's transcribed statements at the exhibition's public colloquium. Reprinted in Rasheed Araeen, "Magicians of the Earth: On 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989", in *Exhibition: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Lucy Steeds (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2014), 129.
- 14 Marcelo Spinelli, Interview with Chris Ofili, in *"Brilliant!" New Art from London*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1995), 67.
- 15 Douglas Maxwell, Interview with Anish Kapoor, *Art Monthly* (May 1990): 11.
- 16 Richard Dorment, "Vexed Questions of Colour", *Daily Telegraph* (London), 9 Dec. 1989.

- 17 Andrew Graham-Dixon, "Pride and Prejudice: *The Other Story* at the Hayward and Anish Kapoor at the Lisson Gallery", *The Independent* (London), 5 Dec. 1989.
- 18 Rasheed Araeen, ed., *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989), 106. Ryan, for one, confirms that she declined to be a part of the exhibition, but denied that fear was the reason. Author's interview with Veronica Ryan, 6 June 2008.
- 19 In addition to *Void Field* (1989), Kapoor showed *It is Man* (1989–90), *Madonna* (1989–90), *Tomb* (1989), *Black Fire* (1990), *A Wing at the Heart of Things* (1990), and *The Healing of St Thomas* (1989) in Venice.
- 20 *Void Field* had been the focus of Kapoor's 1989 solo show at his London gallery, Lisson. This show was a teaser for what he would offer in Venice and for what was being left out of *The Other Story*.
- 21 Upon seeing *Sensation* at the Royal Academy, Alexandra Anderson-Spivy described it as a "chauvinistic exercise" for British art to "vanquish New York". See Anderson-Spivy, "The Freeze Generation and Beyond", *Art Journal* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 89.
- 22 This phrase frames a chapter in Julian Stallabrass's *High Art Lite: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art* (London: Verso, 1999), 237. Though highly critical of this period and the artists associated with it, Stallabrass's text was one of the earliest scholarly assessments of the YBAs, thereby helping to periodize the 1990s in Britain.
- 23 On view from 12 March to 18 May 1991, *Interrogating Identity* was co-curated by Jones and Thomas Sokolowski, then director of the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University. After closing in New York, the show travelled through 1993 to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Madison Art Center, Wisconsin; the Center for the Fine Arts, Miami; the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College, Ohio; and Duke University Museum of Art, Durham, NC.
- 24 Kellie Jones, "Art in the Family", in *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 14.
- 25 Roberta Smith, "At the Whitney, A Biennial with a Social Conscience", *New York Times*, 5 March 1993.
- 26 Rasheed Araeen, Allan deSouza, Roshini Kempadoo, and Ingrid Pollard were the other British artists in the show.
- 27 *The Light at the End* was first shown at The Showroom in London in 1989. Later that year, it was on view at the Oboro Gallery, a public venue known for showing video and hosting artist-curated projects in Montreal.
- 28 I am grateful to Mona Hatoum for providing a thorough description of *The Light at the End*.
- 29 "Michael Archer in Conversation with Mona Hatoum", in Archer and others, *Mona Hatoum* (London and New York: Phaidon, 1997), 14.
- 30 For one example of this, see Connie Butler's recollection of viewing *The Light at the End* in *Interrogating Identity* in 1991, in "'A Shock to the System': Connie Butler on Mona Hatoum's Red-Hot Minimalism", www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/book_report/phaidon-mona-hatoum-53046. See also Lynn Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 17–18.
- 31 From 14 Oct. 1997 to 15 March 1998, *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian, and Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966–1996* was split between the Studio Museum in Harlem and The Bronx Museum of the Arts. Simultaneously, the Caribbean Cultural Center hosted a solo show of Birmingham-based photographer Vanley Burke (*The Photographic Narratives of Vanley Burke*), which was billed as a component of *Transforming the Crown*.
- 32 Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* was published in Britain by Verso in 1993 and reissued in the US by Harvard University Press two years later.
- 33 For a longer discussion of *Tilted Arc*, see Harriet Senie, *The Tilted Arc Controversy: Dangerous Precedent?* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- 34 For two viewpoints on the commission and its delays, see Brian Hatton, "Judenplatz Vienna 1996: Architectural Association Exhibition Gallery, 6 November–12 December 1996", Architectural Association Files, No. 33 (Summer 1997), 88–93; and Robert Storr, "The *Struggle Between* Forgetting and Remembering", *Artnews* 96, no. 3 (March 1997): 127–28.

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