

Transcript

Honouring Our Ancestors

Tina Tamsho-Thomas

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Manchester Art Gallery

Part of Revealing Histories: Remembering Slavery

Tina Tamsho-Thomas

I will just pour libation today to thank my ancestors for guiding me to this point in my life and in my career.

I am just going to start with the first poem which is called **Maafa**. As you can see from there it is a Swahili word for human catastrophe.

From global inhumanity emancipation came
More than 20 million Africans couldn't hear its name
20 million human beings died on land, ship and sea
So the greedy of this planet could take sugar with their tea.

Sugar has been the metaphor through slavery, enslavement. And I found it very challenging and very interesting to look at that. Because I was trying to find a new language rather than you know the whip, the chain, this, this, this, you know, I was trying to find another way of expressing the horror and trauma of what happened to the African race.

Bonbonniere (*drumming in background*)

I am Bonbonniere,
made in my masters' image, elegant,
delicate, decorative, attractive, delightful,
veneered, refined, ornate, beautiful.
Emblem of Europe's plundered wealth and power.

I am Bonbonniere,
possessed by prosperous, profiteering, predatory pilots,
predatory pirates who made their heap, their
pile, their mint, their ill gotten gains from madness,
insanity, misery, cruelty, base inhumanity, bastard brutality,
butchery, debauchery, depravity, iniquity,
gluttony and greed.

I am Bonbonniere,
from my exquisite minted mouth I wretched
Europe's bitter anthem and sweetened the stench
of blood drenched world hypocrisy.

I am Bonbonniere,
owned by respected, up-right, self-righteous,
judicious, un-clean living, filthy rich, scum,
parasites feeding off the fat of the land.
African heritage, African land.

[Applause]

Icing on the Cake, and this one is actually about the whole issue now of whether to give an apology, I'll be doing another poem later on that. The real issue for us as Africans is reparation. How does anybody, you know over 200 million people, that is for us to think about. One of the ways they could start is by stop closing down all our youth projects and so that our young people are on the streets etc, without any consultation with us. They could actually stop the guns coming in that are killing our children. We live now in an age of terror alert. You can't take a baby's bottle through and yet guns are coming into our communities killing our children. They could do that. That is where they could start.

Icing on the Cake (*drumming in background*)

Icing cracks like masks.
Masking strange fruit, putrid peel, rancid minds, caned rum.
Callous depravity, senseless savagery
Sugar cane, sugar beat, sugar cane, sugar beat.
African drums, heart beating African drums
Beating, beating, beating, beatings, beatings, beatings, beatings, beatings
African drums, we want cake not crumbs
We are waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting.
African drums, cake not crumbs.

[Applause]

We Came before Columbus (*drumming in background*)

We came before Columbus,
but we brought civilisation,
the East Afrikan Rift Valley,
saw the dawn of human creation.

We lived in harmony tribe with tribe,
living together side by side.
We bought our land,
with cowrie shells and beads,
taking only from the earth,
our basic human needs.

Afrikan woman
worked in field and home,
and reigned supreme,
on the Afrikan throne.

Queen Nzinga of Angola,
fought the Portuguese,
defeated them in battle,
created unity and peace.

We came before Columbus,
but it was not we,
who enslaved civilised nations,
for the brutal cause, of colonialisation.

It was not we who invented Capitalism,
or authorised Queen Victoria,

to impose regal Imperialism.

But it was we, the Egyptians,
who moulded glass from sand,
transmuted alchemy to science,
across the global land.

And it was we who invented traffic lights,
Red, Gold and Green,
a universal symbol,
of Garrett Morgan's freedom dream.

Yes, we came before Columbus,
and though he brought us dread!
we're still here,
we survived,
the man him long time dead!

[Applause]

Thank you. The reference to Garrett Morgan there is, Garrett Morgan was a freed slave, freed from enslavement and he patented traffic lights. So that was that. And even though Columbus is dead, his ideas are very much alive in buildings, in the air, in the media and all around us. And when I looked at racism before and analysed it in that way, the point of that is to say yes, there is a form of mental illness. It is bad for white people and it is bad for African people, for black people. And really we need just to look up sometimes and remember what I said before. That we have more in common with each other than not.

My final one, it's called **Sound Rhythm** (*drumming in background*)

It's the moment, it's the movement, it's a sigh, it's the why, it's the cry, it's the cry, it's the sigh of the moment.
And the moment stands still,
till the sigh creates movement and the movement passes by
with every blink of an eye.
When all the colours in the sky and that's no lie.
My, my, my. I got a fly. Bye bye. Bye bye. Bye bye.

[Applause]

Female

Ladies and gentleman, I just want to say a huge thank you to Tina for that fantastic performance. I really hope that you enjoyed it as much as we did in working with Tina over the last few months. If you would like to respond in any way, please do, we'd love to hear from you. Can we just put our hands together again and say thank you very much.

[Applause]

End of performance

All poems © Tina Tamsho-Thomas
Bonbonniere commissioned by Manchester Art Gallery
African Drums: Percussionist Ikem Nzeribe
Filmmaker: Jonathan Addy