

Memento

Extracts from the Empire

by Joshua Lue Chee Kong

During my time in London for the Transatlantic Residency, I have been looking at the memory of objects through the fragments of pottery I have uncovered in Trinidad and Tobago. I have been able to consult with conservators and experts in English ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Museum of London Docklands. I was also able to pay a visit to the Wedgewood pottery factory in Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire, England which was the industrial hub for ceramic production in the 19th century.

Another part of the research was participating in mud larking, which involves me walking the foreshore of the Thames river during low tide to look for fragments of history. These would mostly include ceramic shards and clay pipes discarded from the 17th into the 19th century. I have been collecting all the items I have been finding and cross-referencing the patterns with the ones in Trinidad and building a social media archive on Instagram called Memento Archives.

From a Caribbean perspective gained from my research and recovering the fragments of the former empire from the river bed was similar to the actions that produced the raw materials such as sugar, tobacco and cacao to be harvested from the Anglo-Caribbean region. These raw materials were shipped to England and were processed into various luxury products. However, with the raw materials, I have been finding (clay pipes and ceramic shards) on the riverbed. I intend to turn them into a powder. A found brick and a blunt cement object will both act as a mortar and pestle and will be used to crush the materials.

I have collected containers such as a tobacco snuff box, sugar sifter and chocolate biscuit tin box to store these extracts that were once part of the empire. These vessels will be shipped back to three artist residencies in the Anglo-Caribbean. The three residencies are NLS Kingston (snuff box), Fresh Milk (sugar sifter) and Alice Yard (chocolate biscuit tin box). Each vessel will come with their own special edition letterpressed certificate of authenticity giving the residency ownership of the material to be used by artists in their work. Additional special editions were made for the British Council, Delfina Foundation, Autograph ABP, Gasworks and Hospitalfield as thank you gifts for allowing me to take part in this residency.