Threads of Empire: Art and the Cotton Trade in the Indian and Atlantic Ocean Worlds, 1770-1930

Anna Arabindan-Kesson

PhD Prospectus, History of Art and African American Studies, Yale University, 2010

“if you take a handkerchief and spread it out ... you can see in it certain fixed distances. Then take the same handkerchief and crumple it ... Two distant points are suddenly very close, even superimposed.”¹

Cotton fabric inscribed a new economic geography on the contours of the Indian and Atlantic oceanic spaces, through its cultivation and by the routes of trade that connected ports, cities and plantations. Drawing on material culture studies, histories of slavery and art histories of empire this dissertation identifies cotton as a paradigmatic material of empire.² Cotton cloth wove together a colonial trade in commodities that was underpinned by the slave trade. The subject of my dissertation is cloth: its materiality, the historical and social process from its making to its consumption, and the theoretical paradigm of representation it opens up. The dissertation will show how the look and feel of cotton cloth was embedded in, and inflected by, the historical and commercial networks that shaped its production and use. Cloth’s ability to drape, shape and dress gives it a screen-like quality: inscribed upon, yet it can also inscribe. These are not

simply metaphors for the process of representation. Cloth actually constitutes the fabric by which bodies and spaces become visible and connected.

Cotton’s popularity as a commodity – first as an import from India – helped spur industrialization and design practices in Britain. This rested, in large part, on the bodies of American slaves who picked cotton, were forcibly transported from West Africa in exchange for cotton cloth, and were later clothed by other forms of the fabric. I want to suggest that it is this intersection of materiality, labor and representation that gives cotton cloth its own unique visuality. Indian cotton cloth production – has always – intersected with this triangular trade. My study focuses on this intersection through changing modes of production and fabric pattern design. In doing so I emphasize the importance of particular fabrics and patterns – traded between Indian merchants and East African traders – in the historical (self) representation and contemporary art practices of the black diaspora. In these ways my dissertation considers the historical conditions of the visual significance of cotton cloth on the body and on the map. I argue that this unique visuality is imbricated in cotton cloth’s representation and its use as a form of representation.

I situate my study primarily in the nineteenth century, following these historical circuits of exchange in relation to the changing social and economic landscape of the British Empire and its involvement in the slave trade. Recent visual art has opened up these historical processes of visuality and perception. Therefore I end by asking whether contemporary art – particularly in the work of Yinka Shonibare – presents another kind of historical archive whereby the fabric of cotton and its patterning become part of a post colonial art practice. This is not to suggest any easy or direct connection between the past and the present, but to consider how it is that the past and the present – like the folds
of a cotton handkerchief or bandana – are spatial as well as temporal constructions. It is also to ask how these constructions might fold in, twist around and onto each other, creating histories that can only be “seized as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.”

Methodology

Juxtaposing visual, material and written media I consider how the production and use of cotton cloth connected Manchester, the United States, the Caribbean, India and West Africa. In its geographical scope my study is both transnational and comparative. It uses the work of several well – and many lesser – known artists alongside commercial prints, photographs and illustrations with fabric, pattern books, tools and written media. Employing a methodology of “thick description” borrowed from cultural anthropology, I show how these objects are drawn together by the global cotton trade of the nineteenth century and were constituted through networks of exchange. As a cultural art history, this work is founded on “the axiom that the full richness of the work of art and the work of art-making can be understood only within the matrix of historical reference.” It is particularly indebted to the paradigm of art and circulation explored in the 2007 Yale Center for British Art exhibition Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes

________________________

4 Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (Basic Books, 1994), 13. As Geertz explains this involves “fit[ting] lumps and fragments, objects and images … in relation to each other.”
Belisario and His Worlds. The exhibition’s breadth and exploration of transmission and exchange provided an important art historical foundation in the assembling of this project. Art and Emancipation brought to light how visual forms, geographical spaces and temporal experiences might be inter-connected with each other. Embedded in these routes of interconnection were questions surrounding the nature of history and the role of the art historian in examining the past: questions that I am also engaged with in the writing of this project.

I draw on the work of Jules Prown and his theorization of the relationship of art and history paying close attention both to the formal and stylistic condition of the works as much as the underlying cultural values and attitudes they may be said to be embedded in. For, as Prown suggests, an artifact – be it high or low, visual or material – is a historical event that continues “to exist in the present.” In its continued existence in the present an object can never reflect its context fully, thus any historical narrative that emerges is only partial. I think of this relationship between past and present as something like an illumination by which, through careful and attentive exploration, the power of objects to open up onto the worlds they are part of might be understood. In creating the scope and trajectory of this project I recognize my own role in the (re)construction of the past. It is for this reason that I also consider the relationship between contemporary art practice and

7 Jules David Prown, Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture (Yale University Press, 2001). 255
8 Ibid. 255.
9 Benjamin, Illuminations.
histories of colonialism to suggest that reconstruction might also be a form of translation or dynamic encounter only emerging from an intensive engagement with the object itself.

The relationship of objects to the cultural worlds of empire is an important facet of their materiality as Natasha Eaton has argued. In her discussion of the uses of English prints in colonial India, she argues that a colonial existence was a networked one. Objects complicated, confused, and even enchanted, the production of knowledge and meaning created within colonial social structures. Eaton, drawing on Bruno Latour, emphasizes the relational and dialogic modes of interaction – the chains of associations – that assemble and reassemble the social worlds in which humans and objects exist. Art histories that imagine a simple binary of center and periphery have often overlooked these networks and circulations of empire. In revealing their inadequacies by an intensive study of objects within these networks, I also extend scholarship into the material and ideological meanings of the encounter between objects and people central to Art History and African American Studies.

In each chapter I explore how the circulatory aesthetics of global trade, techniques of art making and modes of display are imbricated in the materiality of cotton cloth. As

10 Ibid, 45.
12 I think of each chapter as a kind of “imaginative geography.” See Edward W Said, Orientalism, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage, 1978). Here Said describes how regions become poetically endowed in such a way such that they become places that come to mean more than what is empirically known about them. See also Edward Ziter, The Orient on the Victorian Stage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and
cotton cloth held together disparate geographies through the material conditions of its production, I also show how its representation, patterning and texture shaped the visibility and concealment of bodies. In doing so I argue that the aesthetics of display and the aesthetics of trade, intrinsic to the production and use of cotton, were central to broader questions of visuality and nationhood in nineteenth century Britain. In constructing my chapters the work of Marcia Pointon has been particularly useful. In a series of detailed case studies that interweave close readings of paintings, prints and gems, Pointon shows the material significance of jewellery and brings together a series of interconnecting themes around the body, decoration and ornamentation. In doing so she shows how jewellery plays a part in the overall process of visual communication and opens up a dynamic world of connection and contention surrounding the body, art histories of representation and geographical encounters. Similarly, my case studies plot a kind of cartography of empire. They radiate outwards, but always remain grounded within the objects themselves in an attempt to mirror the geopolitics of imperial encounter and the aesthetics of art, commerce and empire that textiles wove into place.

**Literature Review**

My dissertation sits at the nexus of several intersecting bodies of scholarship. It contributes to and extends, in its geographical and material breadth, current art historical

Driver, Felix, “Imaginative Geographies.” in *Introducing Human Geographies*, ed. Paul Cloke, Philip Crang and Mark Goodwin, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder,, 2005), 155. According to Driver, imaginative geographies are “representations of place, space and landscape that structure people’s understandings of the world, and in turn help to shape their actions”

studies of the relations between art, labor and the British Empire. Art Historian Tim Barringer has provided the clearest exploration of the interpenetration of British domestic and colonial histories through the aesthetics of art and labor. His description of the “Colonial Gothic,” is a particularly nuanced reading of the materiality of representational forms by which bodies, labor and space could be conflated and made visible in mid-nineteenth century Britain.  

Kay Dian Kriz’s study on the centrality of slavery to the circulatory networks of art, commodities and the creation of social identity in nineteenth-century Britain and its colonies is also important to my work. Kriz’s discussion of how slavery is evoked through the politics of concealment provides a particularly evocative art historical perspective that I have sought to explore more fully through the aesthetics of design and dress. In thinking through the relationship of art histories of the nineteenth century and to contemporary art of the black diaspora, I have also been influenced by Krista A. Thompson’s work on tourism, photography and the Caribbean. Her study brings together the complicated relationship of art, geography and labor in the nineteenth century British world but also considers its implications for, and influences on, contemporary art making. Any art historical discussion of transmission as it relates to

15 See Kay Dian Kriz, Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
the Black Atlantic must always attend to the work of Robert Farris Thompson. In particular my chapters on the relationship of cloth, style and memory reference his poetic evocations of the embodied meanings of style and aesthetics.\textsuperscript{17}

The ‘postcolonial’ beginnings of this project might be said to have emerged when I first read the work of Stuart Hall. His writings on race, diaspora and subject formation remain central to the intellectual framework of this dissertation. The elucidation of heterogeneity and hybridity found within Hall’s discussion of identity formation and the postcolonial, demands that we explore and remain sensitive to the material experience and conceptual possibilities of movement.\textsuperscript{18} To engage with the dynamism and transformative aesthetics of this multiplicity requires that we historicize these processes, as Hazel Carby explains, with an eye to the geo-political conditions of empire and the spaces and overlaps of home/abroad, margin.center, metropole/colony.\textsuperscript{19} In examining these ‘overlaps’ of empire my project is framed by studies of the Black Atlantic and circum-Atlantic networks emphasized by Paul Gilroy and Joseph Roach. The triangular trade of slavery that connected British ships carrying manufactured cloth to Africa, returning to the Caribbean carrying black women and men and then back to England with monetary profits, rum and sugar is central to this study. For this trade maps out a network in which the concept of movement underpinned the material realities of colonial spaces.


\textsuperscript{18} Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” \textit{Frameworks} 36, 222-237

Moreover Gilroy’s description of the Black Atlantic as a space of transitions and
transaction also provides a conceptual beginning for approaching that other oceanic
geography of the British Empire, the Indian Ocean. The work of Performance Studies
scholar Joseph Roach sits in tandem with Gilroy’s work. His elucidation of the circum-
Atlantic world as a “geohistorical locale” emphasizes the importance of cultural
exchange and transmission. Roach’s attention to the “genealogies of performance,”
his tracing out of the lineages of movement, design, iconography and pattern in the
translation and production of works of art across these spaces is enlightening. In this way
his work reminds us of the way objects (and people) perform through and in the process
of translation.

Roach’s work brings the agency of objects to the foreground, an agency central to
material culture studies and anthropology. Following the textures and traces of cloth –
and its representation – provides a particularly evocative way of engaging with this
concept of agency. As Danny Miller explains “what cloth feels and looks like – is the
source of its capacity to objectify myth, cosmology and also morality, power and
values.” As such this study seeks to explore the multiple registers that cotton cloth

22 Ibid., 25.
23 My understanding of agency is also influenced by the work of Arjun Appadurai and his
functioned through: its pattern, form, texture, production and its social connotations. Arguing that in *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), Thomas Carlyle “sought to discover in the naked facts of clothing something about the constitution and character of the human subject” William F Keenan points out that cloth, dress and the human condition are closely connected. Dress “[is a] solid, hard reality located fully in the midst of human interaction and as such fully deserving of our most meticulous apprehension and utmost respect.” I am particularly taken by his discussion of the way dress makes bodies a ‘screen.’ This art historical allusion gets closest to the way scholars such as Christopher Breward and Alison Ribeiro have created evocative art histories of fashion and dress, showing how cloth and its use in representation provides scholars with new avenues by which to examine the embodied experience of coming into view.

To consider further this complicated relationship between art, cloth and representation I have engaged with scholarship that explores the material and tangible nature of ‘seeing.’ Saloni Mathur’s account of art, cultural history and the relationship between India and Britain maps some of the conceptual and visual formations that connected and made Indian fashionable between these two spaces of empire. It is Mathur’s understanding of the meaning of design – as a convergence between visual and conceptual formations – that particularly interests me and offers more creative ways of understanding the uses of

pattern in visual representation. Lara Kriegel’s work on the culture of British exhibitions provided another angle on the significance of pattern and design. Her work on discourses of design in relation to the 1851 Crystal Palace Great Exhibition of the Industry of all Nations, held in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London, deepens our understanding of nation building and visuality on both material and conceptual levels. I extend the work of Mathur and Kriegel work in my comparative examination of the meaning of pattern, cloth and design in the visualization of bodies across the colonial worlds of the Atlantic and Indian oceans.

Thinking about cotton cloth and its relation to space through the concept of a screen connects material to structure in other ways too. If clothes transform the body into a screen for their display, then perhaps we might move to consider how the fabric of cotton figuratively transforms the geographies of empire into a screen for another kind of display. In the materiality of cotton is embodied a relationship between geography, labor and display that could reshape notions of the transnational. Here the work of Sonia Ashmore and Philip Crang is useful, for their attention to the “transnational spaces of things.” This I argue is crucial to the consideration of cloth and what it does. In the movement of cloth, its flows, associations and transformations, we might also see new

connections and meanings in the geographies it maps. By following, unpicking and reworking the threads of cotton cloth across empire my work identifies a zone which, like Paul Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic,” is both geographical and ideological. I suggest that, in the materiality of cotton cloth and its representation, we see how the spaces of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds are more interconnected than previous scholarship has, perhaps, allowed for.

This dissertation draws on histories of the cotton trade in Britain and United States. I have also found the work of Helen Bradley Foster, Steeve O. Buckridge, and Sandra Lee Evanson important for understanding the uses of cloth in the lives of women and men in

32 Ibid. 661  
33 These connections between visuality, networks of empire, labor and consumption across oceanic spaces have been explored more recently in the work of cultural geographers such as Felix Driver and Veronica della Dora. Their work provides useful models particularly in their analysis of concepts of symbolic geographies and their rethinking of concepts of space in different historical contexts. Veronica della Dora, “Putting The World Into a Box: A Geography of Nineteenth Century 'Travelling Landscapes',” Geografiska Annaler 89, no. 4, B (December 7, 2007): 287-308; Felix Driver and David Gilbert, eds., Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Crang and Ashmore, “The transnational spaces of things”; Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, eds., Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See also John C Hawley, ed., India in Africa, Africa in India: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Shanti Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal, eds., Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives (New York: Routledge, 2010) and Gauvin A Bailey, Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542-1773 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

African and the Black diapora.\textsuperscript{35} My work draws on the material and historical nuances of these texts but extends their coverage by referencing broader networks of trade and art historical representation within the Indian and Atlantic Ocean worlds. Histories of empire are of course central to this project. In particular the work of James Walvin, Catherine Hall and Christopher Bayly provide fundamental imperial histories that flesh out the interconnections of colony and metropole and networks that shaped colonial spaces within the British Empire.\textsuperscript{36} Jennifer Morgan’s work on the centrality of black women to networks of trade, movement and speculation has shaped my own thinking on relationships of gender, labour and circulation.\textsuperscript{37} These cultural histories of slavery and empire provide a geo-political framework for my own understanding of the circuits connecting colonial spaces and the metropole within the British Empire.


Chapter Summaries

Introduction: Crazy For Cotton

I plan to begin with a discussion of Joshua Reynolds’ portrait Captain John Foote of the Hon. East India Company, 1765, (York City Art Gallery) (Fig 1). Striking for its depiction of a Company official in Indian style dress and chintz patterned cloth, I consider its Orientalist style and evocation of Britishness in relation to the anti chintz rhetoric in Britain at the time. The debates over Indian produced chintz arose because of the threat imports of chintz presented to the production and consumption of British woolen cloth. Chintz evoked both notions of otherness whilst also being sought after for its associations with luxury and status. I attempt to show how the materiality of chintz forms part of the visual register of the painting itself. In doing so I set forth some of the key themes of this dissertation: the visual language of cotton cloth, the relationship of trade to display and the ways in which cotton cloth brought into and concealed from view bodies, labor and space.

Ch 1: The Twists of a Handkerchief or Patterns of Dress in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, 1780-1840.

“The head is bound round with a madras handkerchief”

“They dread rain upon their bare heads almost as much as the native Africans; … They are fond of covering this part of their bodies at all times, twisting one or two handkerchiefs round it”

38 Lemire, Fashion's Favourite. Crill, Chintz.
39 Richard Bridgens, West India Scenery with Illustrations of Negro Character, the Process of Making Sugar, &c. from Sketches Taken During a Voyage to, and Residence of Seven Years in, the Island of Trinidad (London: R. Jennings, 1836).
Italian artist Agostino Brunias (1730-1796) is best known for his ethnographic paintings of free and enslaved men and women on the island of Dominica. In paintings such as *Free West Indian Creoles in Elegant Dress*, 1780 (Yale Center For British Art) and *The Fruit Market at St Vincent* 1765-68, (Michael Graham-Stewart Collection) (Fig 2,3) Brunias renders the social and racial stratification of plantation life through a picturesque mode of ‘observation.’ Later depictions of Caribbean society during and just after emancipation also draw on Brunias’ stylistic concerns. Jamaican artist Isaac Mendes Belisario (1795-1849) uses a picturesque ethnography in his lithographic observations of the changing social conditions of Jamaica in *Sketches of Character: In Illustration of the Habits, Occupation, and Costume of the Negro Population, in the Island of Jamaica*, 1837, (Yale Center for British Art) (Fig 4). I suggest that these images are significant for their relationship to the complicated networks of display and exchange shaped by the cotton trade. These networks are central to the way Brunias and Belisario translate the transactional nature of a society shaped by slavery into aestheticized forms of encounter and circulation. Here I pay close attention to the representation and meaning of pattern

---


42 I read these images and their production alongside eighteenth and nineteenth century written accounts of Caribbean society, suggesting their depiction and description brings an important, added, layer to this visual analysis.
– used to represent women in the Caribbean – and as a form of spatial connection within the British Empire. I will examine samples of patterns and printed calico from the Victoria and Albert Museum, The Museum of Science and Industry (Manchester) and the Museum of Arts and Design, New York along with newspaper advertisements for patterned calico and its uses. Printed cotton cloth worn by slaves in the Caribbean – and the United States – was made in Britain, copied from Indian calico and manufactured in Lancashire. In doing so I examine how cloth and pattern was used to locate particular bodies within imperial geographies. I also argue that the production of pattern, and the patterning of bodies through cotton cloth in these images visualize and evoke the circulatory, rather than simply transactional, networks of colonial representation.43

Ch 2: The Texture of a Nation: Industry, Identity and Englishness,

In the *Portrait of Samuel Oldknow*, c.1790-2 (Leeds City Art Gallery) (Fig 5) the industrialist is theatrically presented to his audience with the emblem of his industry, a draped sheet of muslin, at his side. He stands within the sweep of a curtain that is mirrored in the angle of his right arm and bent left knee. The momentum of these repeated gestures provide a powerful backdrop to his elegant poise that literally rests on a swathe of cotton cloth. Oldknow began the first muslin manufacturing business in Britain (1787), at a time when muslin was still being imported from India and was a highly valued cotton fabric. Wright’s portrait brings together class and commerce in the

presentation, and consolidation, of middle class identity. As a genre, portraiture is concerned with the external display of a sitter’s interiority and, in this case situates an individual within a broader spectrum of society.\textsuperscript{44} In light of this I suggest that the evocative swathe of muslin included by Wright provides another register of visuality within this portrait that connects cotton cloth and national identity. No longer ‘exotic,’ here muslin is tied to Englishness, and the changing texture of its production from ‘Indian hand made’ to industrially manufactured in England. Its use however was complicated.\textsuperscript{45} I look at fashion plates from Ackermann’s \textit{Repository of The Arts}, satirical fashion prints by James Gillray (Fig 6) in the Lewis Walpole Library and Edward Baine’s 1835 mechanical illustrations (Fig 7).\textsuperscript{46} Here I suggest that the visual rhetoric surrounding muslin and the bodies it encased was connected to its industrialization and accessibility, a connection registered in the materiality and texture of the cloth itself. In considering how this visual aesthetic connected interiority to display I also think about how these depictions relate to the production of fustian in Lancashire. In particular I examine the


\textsuperscript{45} A parallel theme here could also be the use of muslin by Anglo Indians and its relationship to discourses of texture, finery and the body. This can be seen in diary and travel accounts of English travelers in India, hygiene tracts on cloth and the body such as James Johnson, \textit{The Influence of Tropical Climates on European Constitutions: Being a Treatise on the Principal Diseases Incidental to Europeans in the East and West Indies, Mediterranean, and coast of Africa} (E. Duyckinck, G. Long, 1826).

term ‘low grade’ and the symbolic use of fustian jackets by the working class be found in the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester. In doing so, I argue that cotton cloth, industrialization and class were entwined with emerging concerns about design, display and nationhood in early to mid nineteenth century Britain.47

Ch 3: Buying, Selling and Wearing: Negro Cloth and the Politics of Visibility

By 1851 the cotton production of the Southern United States provided seventy seven percent of the raw material for Lancashire cotton factories.48 After leaving the factory, cotton fabric was bought and sold in the Manchester Cotton Exchange; a commercial act that relied on the visibility of cotton cloth but also on the elision of black labor. This paradox of concealment and visibility connecting architecture and the cotton trade brings to mind another space of exchange in which black labor was never more on view. In Eyre Crowe’s Slave Market in Richmond, Virginia, 1853, (Heinz collection, Washington DC) (Fig 8),49 a group of black slaves await their sale. Nestled in a semi-circle within the

47 A parallel theme here may also be a consideration of what ‘hand made’ meant for early 19th century British culture. The circulation, in Britain, of ethnographic prints of Indian craftspeople by artists such as Arthur William Devis (1762-1822) and Company paintings of Indian cotton weavers and spinners suggests that later visual representations and nostalgic views of India in light of British industrialization have an earlier history.

48 Queen Victoria’s official reception in the Manchester Cotton Exchange in 1851 thus underscored the centrality of cotton to the economic heart of the British Empire Edmund Walker (1823-1899) painted this event in the Visit of Queen Victoria to the Manchester Cotton Exchange, 1851, (Manchester Art Gallery) Beckert, Sven, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War,” The American Historical Review 109, no. 5 (December 2004): 1405-1438.

49 Eyre Crowe painted this during his trip to the United States accompanying the writer William Thackeray and wrote a diary entry describing his mixed feelings about watching and painting such a scene. His account of the discomfort of slave owners at the possibility of being ‘represented’ is particularly intriguing. Eyre Crowe, With Thackeray
curve of the room, their neatly arranged bodies belie the eerie transformation of bodies into chattel that underpinned the transactions of the auction. The Slave Auction, 1862, (Kennedy Galleries) (Fig 9), and its permutations in the Illustrated London News (Fig 10), brought black bodies into view for audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. Reading them alongside written accounts of slave auctions, I also analyze the production and texture of ‘negro cloth’ through records and samples found in the Lowell Area Historical Museum and the Baker Library, Harvard University. The significance of this intertextual analysis lies in my exploration of how the material conditions of the cotton trade became a visual register for bringing black bodies into view across the Atlantic. Underpinning this register is, I argue, a connection between


embodiment, sentimentality and commerce that requires further exploration. I want to end with the ways this visuality shapes postbellum representations of the laboring body. I suggest Winslow Homer’s *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876, (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)\(^\text{52}\) (Fig 11) and Timothy O Sullivan’s photographs from the 1861 Port Royal Experiment (Library of Congress) (Fig 12) – in which former slaves worked on abandoned plantations in the Sea Islands as a kind of rehearsal for freedom – are particularly significant in this discussion.\(^\text{53}\) I want to consider how their refiguring of the free black body intersected with an aesthetics of nostalgia and (new) languages of

\(^{\text{52}}\) According to Mary Ann Calo Homer was noted during his lifetime for his extraordinary “facility for Negro characterization,” and for attending to a subject often neglected by his fellow nineteenth century artists. His paintings of African Americans during Reconstruction *Visit From The Old Mistress* (1876) (Smithsonian Institute) and *Sunday Morning in Virginia* were well received in 1880 at the National Academy of Design. His treatment and inclusion of black subjects in his oeuvre presents an intriguing artistic and historical view into art and social formation in Postbellum United States as well as stylistic concerns over realism and modernity in American art. His images of African Americans have also been explored in Peter H Wood and Karen C. C Dalton, eds., *Winslow Homer's Images of Blacks: The Civil War and Reconstruction Years* (Houston, Tex: Menil Collection, 1988).

commerce shaping the visual and economic landscapes of Manchester and the United States.\(^{54}\)

Chapter Four: Collecting for Trade: Museums, Commerce and Cloth

In 1866 John Forbes Watson began to create a ‘traveling museum’ of textile swatches, now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This collection was created with the purpose of advancing both knowledge and trade. His organization brought together samples, patterns and descriptions of their use in order to help promote trade between Britain and India in the changing global markets of the cotton trade. At the same time samples of cotton fabric, now housed in the British Museum and held at the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, were being collected and circulated to aid the manufacture of printed cotton in Manchester for export to West Africa.\(^{55}\) Alongside swatches of cloth and patterns, I look at written descriptions of them found in textile manuals and advertisements. Also important to this examination is the actual layout of

\(^{54}\) The interest in black communities following the Civil War and their ‘transition’ to freedom suggests a discussion about new meanings of representation and ethnography could also be made here that brings together social realism, the ‘documentary’ and travel literature A parallel can also be made here, perhaps, with the growing interest by artists, journalists and middle classes in the lives of textile workers in Britain. The Lancashire Cotton Famine, brought on by the decline in importation of raw cotton from the Southern United States was heavily discussed and reported on. Following the end of the Civil War and the recovery of the British cotton industry, many interested observers ‘traveled’ to the north to witness the lives of cotton workers. It is in this context that Eyre Crowe’s painting *The Dinner Hour, Wigan*, 1874, (Manchester Art Gallery) might be an important inclusion in this chapter when considering the formal significance of labor, sentimentality and social change in American and British nineteenth century painting.

the collections, their arrangement and labeling. I ask what it meant for British manufacturers to make and translate particular patterns for use elsewhere? Furthermore how did cotton, through these practices, suggest both an image of another space and create new opportunities for trade? Here I want to suggest that the process of assembling cotton collections overlapped with practices of ethnographic display. Exploring these intersections might extend our understanding of the relationship between display, commerce and materiality in the later nineteenth century.\(^{56}\)

Ch 5: New Patterns of Empire. New Images of Britishness

This chapter explores how cotton fabric, technologies of image making and new representations – or critiques – of Britishness emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.\(^{57}\) I explore the use of English produced African textiles and their representation in ethnographic and studio photographs now housed at the British Museum

---


\(^{57}\) In 1887 British artist Walter Crane created a cotton fabric design called *The British Empire* for Manchester textile company Messrs Edmund Potter and Co. Now at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the print depicts a series of female figures in classical dress representing different countries of the British Empire (including Australia, Canada, India and South Africa), each one carrying an attribute of her nation. A globe with the helmet of Britannia is shown in the upper section of the fabric. As awkward as this image is in relation to Crane’s Socialist commitments, it is nonetheless intriguing for the way in which cotton becomes the fabric on which labour, empire and new developments in design and art making come together. Crane’s cartography of empire tells us something about the ways in which empire was being seen – and used in radical politics – at ‘home.’ Felix Driver, “In Search of The Imperial Map: Walter Crane and the Image of Empire,” *History Workshop Journal* 69, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 146-157.
(Fig 13).\(^{58}\) By considering the specificity of audience and photographer I ask what did these textiles mean for their wearers in a bid to consider how image making, self-representation and anti-colonial politics could be registered on and through cloth.\(^{59}\) In relation to this I take up the threads of the madras cloth head-wrap discussed in Chapter One and consider its use by free black women in the Caribbean and the United States, using paintings from the Louisiana Historical Society in particular Marie Lavaeoux of New Orleans, c.1840s, unknown artist\(^{60}\) and studio photographs from the National Library of Jamaica (Fig 14,15). I suggest that in the visual formation of the head-wrap we see how the consumption and use of cotton cloth as a form of anti colonial politics might


\(^{60}\) In the Louisiana State Museum and Historical New Orleans Museum I have found several other intriguing portraits of free black women painted by unknown or little known artists. While some appear to be in the mode of picturesque observations, others seem to be interested in the visual resonances of style, pattern and interiority exhibited on and by African American women.
be a form of image making too. I look specifically at the way in which the madras cloth - produced in South India for use in West Africa - brings into view representational processes of memory and reconstruction.\textsuperscript{61}

Conclusion: From Headwrap to Headless: New Circuits of Cotton

Here I consider British artist Yinka Shonibare’s headless mannequins, and his re-configurations of the circuits of empire, luxury and cloth. (Fig 16). I think particularly about how pattern and textile have come to shape a black diasporic art practice. I end with another circuit: that of the cotton textile ‘Sari George.’\textsuperscript{62} Its production in South India for West African communities and sale in the markets of Brick Lane refigure spaces of London into an emporium in which the intersections of the Indian and Atlantic Ocean worlds continue to be woven in new ways.

\textsuperscript{61} Photographs in the Science and Society Picture Library show the white cotton clad Matatma Ghandi on his 1931 visit to London and Manchester. It may also be important to consider the inflections of cloth, colonialism and modernity in Ghandi’s representation. And to ask how, through the cloth of cotton, his self-presentation became a kind of reconstruction of imperial relationships shaped by the histories of colonial trade.\textsuperscript{62} Evenson, “A History of Indian Madras Manufacture and Trade.”
Bibliography


2002.


Bridgens, Richard. West India Scenery with Illustrations of Negro Character, the Process of Making Sugar, &c. from Sketches Taken During a Voyage to, and Residence of Seven Years in, the Island of Trinidad. London: R. Jennings, 1836.


Carby, Hazel V “Becoming Modern Racialized Subjects: Detours Through our Pasts to


Eno, Arthur L. *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts*. Somersworth,


Harris, Michael D. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation.* Chapel Hill:


———. *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century*


Walvin, James. *Fruits of Empire : Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800*. New


List of Archives To Be Used:

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute

Baker Library, Harvard University

Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Yale University

British Library

British Museum

Garthewin Additional Collection, Department of Archives and Manuscripts at the University of Wales, Bangor

Leeds City Art Gallery

Lewis Walpole Library

Library of Congress

Los Angeles County Museum

Lowell Historical Museum

Louisiana State Museum

Louisiana Historical Society

Manchester Art Gallery

Museum of American Textile History

Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester

National Library of Jamaica

New York Museum of Design

New York Public Library
South Carolina Department of Archives

The American Museum in Britain

Victoria and Albert Museum

Wellcome Institute Library, London

Whitworth Gallery, Manchester

Yale Center For British Art
Fig 1. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Captain John Foote of the East of the Hon. East India Company*, (1761), oil on canvas, 101 x 123.19 cm, York City Art Gallery
Fig 2. Agostino Brunias, *Free West Indian Creoles in Elegant Dress*, 1780, oil on canvas, 30.8 x 24.8 cm, Yale Center For British Art
Fig 3. Agostino Brunias, *Fruit Market at St Vincent*, 1788, stipple engraving, 35.8 x 46 cm, Michael Graham-Stewart Collection,
Fig 4. Isaac Mendes Belisario, *Milkwoman*, plate 10 from 'Sketches of Character: in illustration of the habits, occupation, and costume of the Negro population, in the island of Jamaica’' 1838, colour lithograph, 37.5 x 26 cm, Yale Center for British Art
Figure 5. Joseph Wright of Derby, *Portrait of Samuel Oldknow*, 1790-2, oil on canvas, 243.9 x 152.4 cm, Leeds Museum and Art Galleries
Fig 6. James Gillray, *Advantages of Wearing Muslin Dresses!* 1802, hand colored etching, 25.2 x 35.4 cm, Lewis Walpole Library
Fig 8. Eyre Crowe, *Slave Auction in Richmond, Virginia*, 1853, oil on canvas, 52.7 x 80 cm, Heinz Collection, DC.
Fig 9. Eyre Crowe, *The Slave Auction*, 1862, oil on canvas, 33 x 53.3 cm, Kennedy Galleries

Fig 10. Eyre Crowe, *Slave Auction at Richmond, Virginia*, pen and ink sketch, engraved and published in the *Illustrated London News*, 27 September, 1856
Fig 11. Winslow Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876, oil on canvas, 60.96 x 96.84 cm Los Angeles County Museum
Fig 13. Photographer unknown, Portrait of a group of Kroo men, "Some of my Kru-boys the labourers of Africa" [manuscript note on album paper]." black and white photograph, 14.5 x 19.7 cm, British Museum
Fig 14. Artist Unknown, *Marie Laveaux of New Orleans*, c.1840s, oil on canvas, dimensions unavailable, Louisiana Historical Society
Fig 15. Photographer Unknown, *A Jamaica Lady (Also known as Jamaican Market Woman With Basket)*, postcard from black and white photograph, dimensions unknown, National Library of Jamaica