

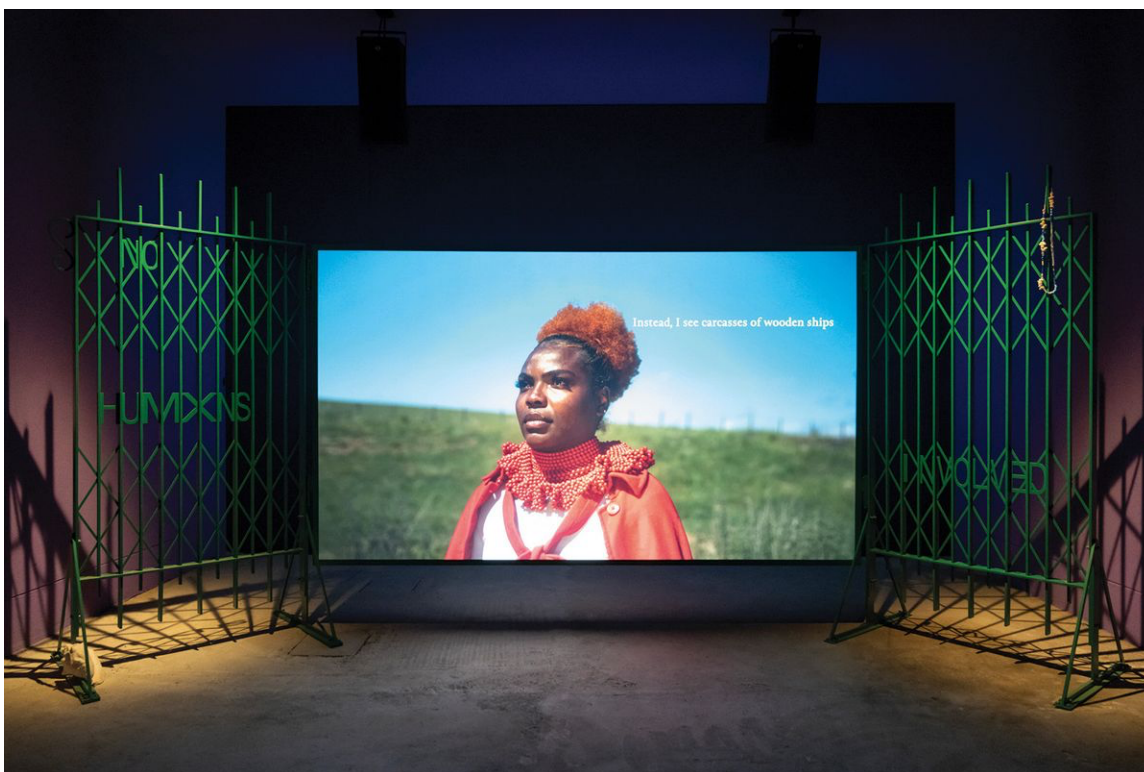
# REGEN PROJECTS

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**THE ART NEWSPAPER**

## A twisted tale of sugar and slaves: Alberta Whittle uncovers awkward truths in UK show

The Barbados-born artist confronts the unpalatable past of Guy Ball, the great-grandfather of the Holburne Museum's founder



Alberta Whittle's *Lagareh—The Last Born* (2022) was created for the 59th Venice Biennale  
Photo: Matthew Arthur Williams, © Alberta Whittle. Courtesy the artist and The Modern Institute, Toby Webster Ltd., Scotland+Venice & Forma

Displayed at the Holburne Museum is a 1722 ledger from a 400-acre sugar plantation in Barbados owned by Guy Ball, the great-grandfather of the Holburne Museum's founder, Thomas William Holburne. Disturbingly, at some point 150 pages have been removed, leaving only one legible section, prompting the question: what was someone trying to hide?

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Rather than hiding history, Alberta Whittle's new works for her exhibition *Dipping Below a Waxing Moon, the Dance Claims Us for Release* deal directly with the unpalatable elements of the Holburnes' past. Whittle was born in Bridgetown, Barbados, and is very familiar with the area where the Ball's Plantation had been located. In 2019 she even wrote an epitaph for those who had died while working there.

That epitaph will be included in this show, alongside several new pieces that spread beyond the museum onto billboards and posters around Bath. A central work, *Matrix Moves*, is a group of sculpted figures frozen in various stages of the limbo dance, capturing the physical contortions that enslaved Africans had to perform for their owners. The bending bodies stand alongside limbo poles that are impossibly low—a metaphor for the continued manoeuvring that people of colour must endure living in white European environments.

Several of the figures have hands that appear to be cast in Wedgwood porcelain. "Alberta wanted to connect the show back to her heritage and link it to what the museum holds," explains the curator Will Cooper. "In a collection like the Holburne, there are difficult stories, but there are also things like the history of Josiah Wedgwood's push for abolition, and we want to talk about all of those histories at once to give a full picture of what that story was."

There will also be a display of Whittle's moving image works, including the museum premier of *Lagareh—The Last Born*, about the transatlantic slave trade and Black British experience today, created when the artist represented Scotland at the 59th Venice Biennale last year.

Alberta Whittle: *Dipping Below a Waxing Moon, the Dance Claims Us for Release*, Holburne Museum, Bath, 27 January-8 May