

Commemorative  
Space **Artist**  
**Reflections on  
Monumentality  
in Leeds**

Edited by  
Rebecca Senior



In 2020, Leeds City Council was one of over a hundred local authorities to announce a city-wide review of its statues and monuments. This energetic inquiry into the UK's commemorative landscape was a response to the protests and direct action that had resulted in the removal, destruction and reinterpretation of historical monuments to imperialists and white supremacists across the world. The Leeds review aimed to interrogate and understand how communities engage with physical representations of people in the public realm. This renewed critical engagement with monuments as sites of culture-making emphasised their power as reflections of biased and racist attitudes and ideologies, the legacies of which persist today.

Monumentality – as a concept and as a quality – is formed according to personal vantage, social and geographical place and historical moment. The idea of what constitutes a monument has never been fixed. What is clear is that the common perception of the monument as a permanent, immovable object is over. The material hierarchy of traditional monument construction, such as bronze, granite and stone, has been interrupted by ephemeral creative interventions including graffiti, placards and posters.

This publication was formed against the backdrop of the Leeds 2020 review, and a desire to share the myriad ways that contemporary artists in the city engage with the idea of monumentality now. The artists in this publication – Emii Alrai, Simeon Barclay, Samra Mayanja, Jill McKnight and James Thompson - are all currently based in Leeds and were invited to produce a 300-word response to the idea of monumentality in relation to the city. The resultant works address complex and interwoven issues of identity fabrication, destruction and manipulation, and speak of the significance of location, displacement, ghosts and memory to the artists' relationships with the buildings and spaces of Leeds. This publication does not offer any clear answers as to what monumentality is, but reveals some of the many entanglements and nuances that shape artistic approaches to monumentality in the city today.

# Foreword

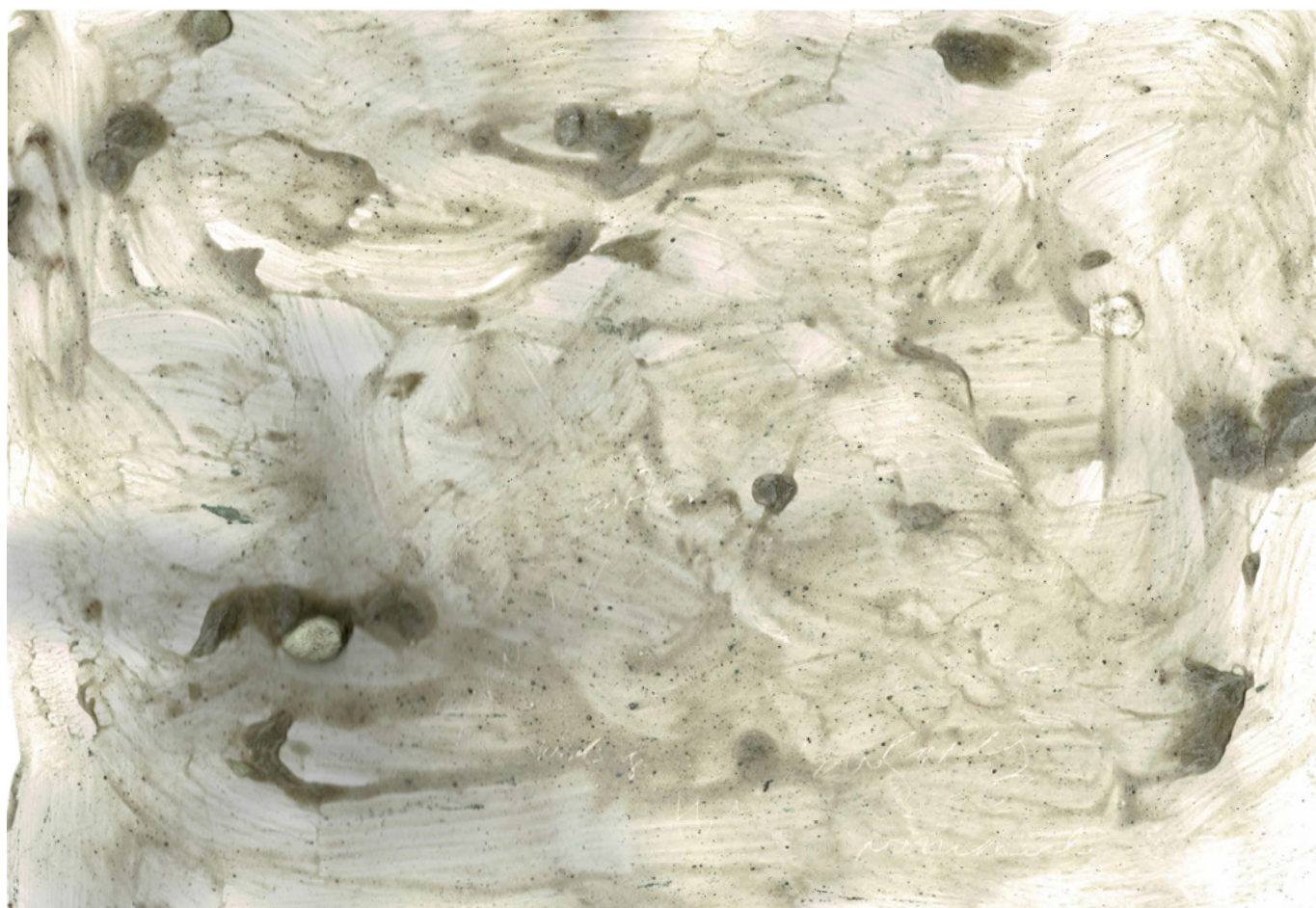
## Rebecca Senior

# Emii Alrai

Emii Alrai is an artist based in Leeds. Alrai's practice is informed by inherited nostalgia, geographical identity and post-colonial museum practices of collecting and displaying objects. Focusing on the ancient mythologies from the Middle East alongside personal oral histories of Iraq, Alrai weaves together narratives by forging artefacts and visualising residues of cultural collision.

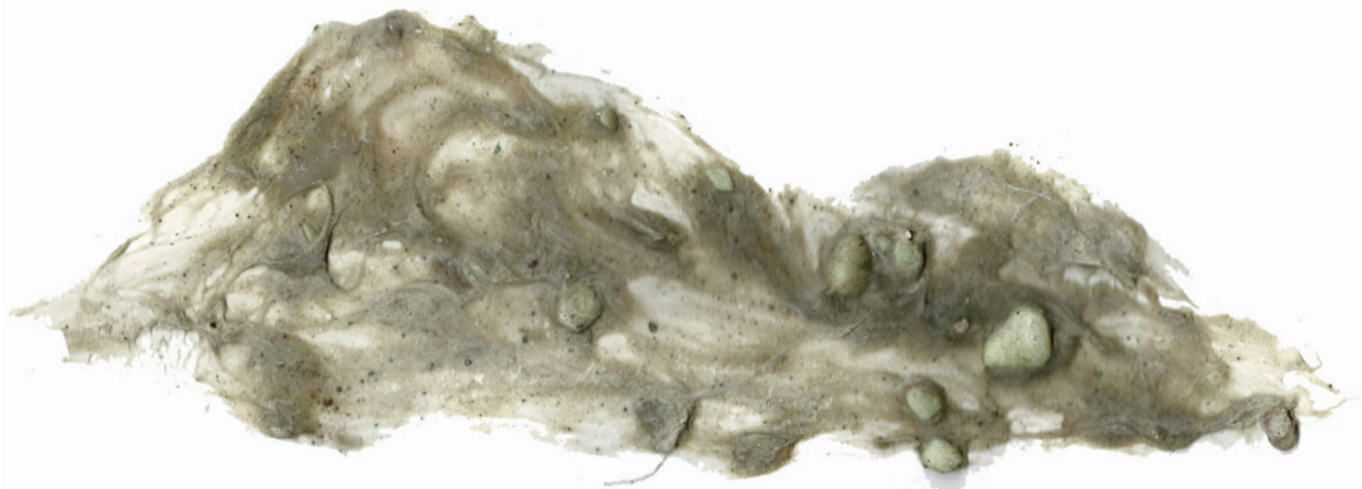
Drawing references from objects in museum collections, ancient writing from the Middle East and cultural memories, her work questions the value and origins of artefacts, as well as navigating the experience of diaspora.





moment  
mountain  
monument

vessel  
grave  
a form caught between two tensions



Monuments are strange places  
they live as saponified bodies on pedestals  
histories are placed tightly in their cold hands  
we forget that they are also landscapes

The taste of them is acrid and rotten  
and well booted, whole and complete  
faces of the past living in the present  
exalted





If geographies could be monuments  
we would maybe feel them tremble  
stones could be faces, and soil could be limbs  
histories might find space to stretch

instead of bronze, monuments could be gardens or bodies or homes  
water, flesh, vessels  
waiting to be filled with the narratives of the present  
instead of the static of the past

maybe we might stop waiting for them to fall into ruin  
and instead value through their constant shape shifting

blossoming, blossoming, blossoming



# Simeon Barclay

Simeon Barclay (b. 1975, Huddersfield, UK) is an artist whose practice draws upon a rich vein of popular culture to make works that activate complex cultural histories whilst addressing the complexity of memory, inheritance, aspiration and desire. Barclay received his BA from Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds in 2010 and an MFA from Goldsmiths College, London in 2014.

He has exhibited both nationally and internationally including at the Southbank Centre, Tate Britain, South London Gallery, London; Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool; Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Workplace Foundation, Gateshead; Holden Gallery, Manchester; The Tetley, Leeds; Cubitt Gallery, London; The Bluecoat, Liverpool; Jerwood Space, London; Galerie Lisa Kandlhofer, Vienna; Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels; Arcadia Missa, New York and W139, Amsterdam. Simeon lives and works in Leeds.

**Monumentality**  
**Notes, Speculations and Digressions**

**Roger Stevens Building**  
**University of Leeds**  
**Chamberlin, Powell and Bon**

**Dr. ZAIUS:** *You shouldn't go out there Taylor, you might not like what you find.*

**TAYLOR:** *Why? what's out there?*

**After Taylor trots away and Dr. Zauis is released, Lucius asks,**

**LUCIUS:** *What will he find out there doctor?*

**DR. ZAIUS:** *His destiny.*

The climatic scene at the end of the 1968 sci-fi classic Planet of the Apes, might serve as a metaphor for imagining the hysteria and fear brought about by the first wave of mass immigration to Britain.

**‘You were there, so we are here’**

Functions as eloquent shorthand that acutely describes the imperial adventures that would one day culminate in the arrival of sharply attired young men, wishing to sow their aspirational desires.

they are the future embodied in presence,

they are the future embodied in form,

in plaid, fitting square on the shoulders.

in an unstable container of meaning, sewn together in all enveloping orange tan drape

in trilbies knowingly tilted toward the past the present the future

their future

our future

a future

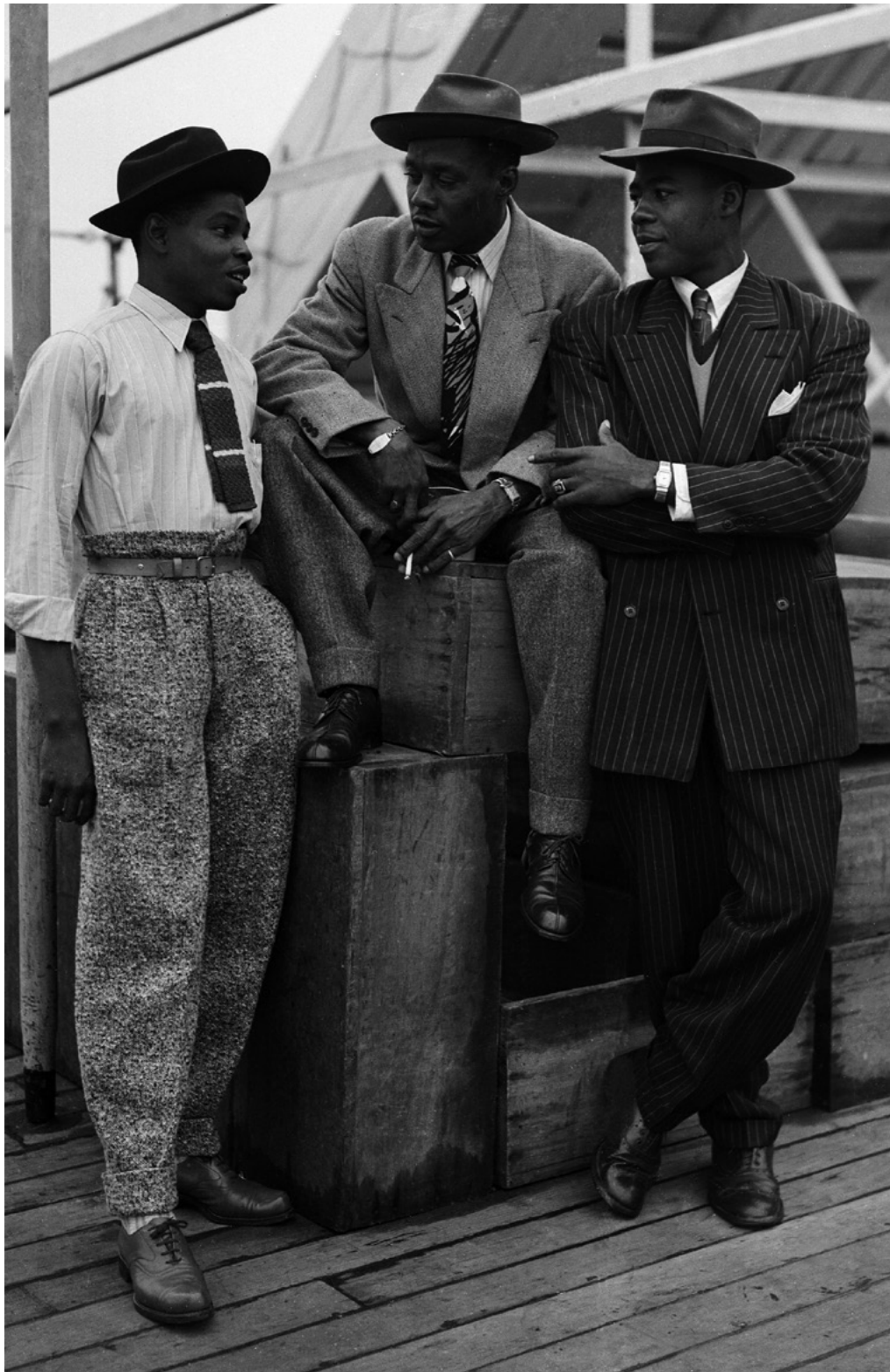
simultaneously all at the same time

The arrival from Britain's fallen dominions, brings a stark realisation, symbolises the nation's destiny, a future,  
their future

our future

that like Taylor's future, they have difficulty reconciling with.





Three Jamaican immigrants arrive at Tilburg Docks, Essex, June 22, 1948, on board the Ex-troopship SS Empire Windrush

Left to right; John Hazel, a twenty-one year-boxer; Harold Wilmot, thirty-two; and John Richards, a twenty-two-year-old carpenter

Photo: Douglas Miller

## **Britain's resuscitation**

**Blaring from the television and just about audible over the New York rasp of the reality TV star Judge Judy, my dad recounts how...**

doze white man mus a bin jealous oui  
boy... deh wondering... how...  
how dem boys able to comin a factory and wok machin

in a deh bes suit.

**The New York Times Magazine**, February 10, 1985. **New Art, New Money** —  
The Marketing of An American Artist by Cathleen McGuigan  
Photograph: Lizzie Himmel

But when you dressing, you dressing. Galahad tailor is a fellar in the Charing Cross Road that Moses put him on to and the tailor surprise that Galahad know all the smartest and latest cut. He couldn't palm off no slack work on the old Galahad at all. And one thing, Galahad not stinting on money for clothes, because he get enough tone when he land up in tropical and watchekong. Don't matter if the test tell him twenty guineas or thirtyfive pounds, Galahad know what he want, and he tell the fellar is all right, you go ahead, cut that jacket so and so, and don't forget I want a twenty-three bottom on the trousers.

And the crowning touch is a long silver chain hanging from the fob, and coming back into the side pocket.<sup>1</sup>

1. Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin Books, 1956), 72.

### **Meanwhile...**

There is early on, a sense that England, old Blighty, could be coming to terms with modernity, reaching out for the future and embracing international trends... but Brutalism having been greeted first with great acclaim and fanfare would within five years, come to represent for traditionalists in this green and pleasant land everything wrong with society, alien architecture that threatened civilisation as they knew it.



1. Memorability as an image:
2. Clear exhibition of structure; and
3. Valuation of Materials “as found”.

Remembering that an image is what affects the emotions, that structure, in its fullest sense, is the relationship of parts, and that materials “as found” are raw materials.

—

Reyner Banham  
Architectural Review  
9 December, 1955

their future

our future

this future is created from the ruins of the past



Chamberlin, Powell and Bon  
Roger Stevens Building  
University of Leeds

Photo: Modern Mooch  
[Modernmooch.com/tag/roger-stevens-building](https://modernmooch.com/tag/roger-stevens-building)

Within the University of Leeds, architectural styles jostle like children trying desperately to get teachers attention,  
victorian,  
gothic revival,  
neoclassical,  
greek revival,  
art deco  
chief among them is The Parkinson Building  
tall,  
upwards,  
elevated,  
lofty,  
grand,  
exalted,  
you can't miss it, that bright white phallic symbol in the sky

Unbeknown and nestled deep where the uninitiated city dweller dare not go...

Brut....

Abrupt...

A bold intent

A brazen sculptural affront, playing a sleight of hand, making it difficult to apprehend, to frame its noble self...

as a distinct autonomous object, my relationship with it has become porous, I am consumed whole, embedded.

Politeness reserve distance allows its architecture to unfold in time...

my time, with each step taken perspectives evolve from all angles in a continuous gestalt

that reveals...

the future embodied in presence,

the future embodied in form,

in a robustness that stands stout

in repetition, reinstating its... reinstating its point for being present

in being divisive in the face of conservatism, preservation and nostalgia

in being resistant to being exhumed of its social agenda, fodder for tea towels mugs etc

in a swagger that reveals there is no conceal or conceit it is what it is

in an unified container of function, synthesised, drawn together in an all enveloping

monumentality

in an alien architecture that attempts to re imagine the world anew

in planes and surfaces that overlap, dissect, collide and unfold suggesting the past

the present

Our future

a future

this future



simultaneously    all at the same time

# Samra Mayanja

Samra Mayanja is an artist and writer based in Leeds whose central concern is what moves us and what it is to be moved.

Her work spans writing, performance and film and is an effort to commune disparate voices and to generate around and beyond what's inconceivable, lost or arrives in tatters.

## Q5) Are there any monuments that you miss?

### LOADS!

Roscoes, The Hayfield, New Roscoes, The Serbs Club, The Croats Club, The Phoenix, The International. It's a sign of the time I guess. Fforde Grene. Nowt better. Dire straits, Hank Wangford, Sex Pistols, every frikkin group/band you could EVER imagine played there. Only place you could go in with £2.50 to your name, get pissed, watch a Tyson fight, play Hot Chocolate on the jukebox and come home with half a leg o'lamb for Sunday's dinner, 3 DVDs (that weren't at the cinema yet, probably still in production) and three pound change (and the taxi was only 0.80p home! 😊 Best pub, EVER. EVER. Long live the Ffordey. This brings so much memories of the bakery that was life of the Chapeltown people. Miss Parris' Bread and her legendary patties, sugar cakes and coconut tarts. Sadly passed away now. The Pointer is dead too. I went past and noticed it yesterday. This was my mothers local. She used to meet her friends there most nights and we always knew where to find her. She didn't get drunk. Victoria pub on the corner didn't survive the fire (now a shop called Paws for Thought) and on the right was the Roscoe pub, both Tetley houses. They killed The Hayfield too and it was listed! To beat it down, was, as the Prime Minister has said, 'to lie about our history'.

I miss Vicky too. I'd give anything to sit down and reason with every part of her.

I fell for Vicky pretty much straight away, even when the onlookers gawked, I kept my focus on her. She was so caring, sometimes too caring. She changed the course of my life. I didn't really know how to love but Vicky showed me a kind of nurturing that I couldn't leave. I'd do anything for her. One time she had the words "slave owner" and "racist" daubed on her, so I spent the day washing them off. My parents met Vicky and they learned how to love her too. She was so lonely up there before she had us to lean on.

I saw the "Real Queen" in the mid to late 50s stood near a van on Chapeltown Road. I waved as she drove past. I think she visited Burton's factory and some other places on the same visit. At times I couldn't believe that a statue erected in tribute to her was thrown into my waters. Sometimes at night I'd take a ladder to her feet and kiss as much of her as I could reach. Writing against her shins with my entire body and stretching up to cup her knees. Our first date was on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1905 or a bit after, she didn't talk much just let me rattle on about myself.

In the 1950s on Sunday nights after I had been to the club, which used to be at the bottom of Barrack Road near the Blind Institute, most of us would walk up Chapeltown Road to Cantors and hang about outside talking. I remember having salami and chips. Then I would cross the road and get the tram to see Vicky. I did that every Sunday until Vicky wasn't there anymore.

EDL / National front were on Twitter talking about how they'd been in Hyde Park protecting statues that Sunday. Why couldn't they have saved Vicky? She was carted off in chains and cut into bits. My Vicky! Now her left hand is an ASHTRAY outside the train station. Upwards of her shoulders were SEVERED and is buried in the art gallery/museum waiting to be plonked in a vitrine. Everything else, was cut into four pieces and sent to the furthest points north, east, south and west. I read somewhere that the dust they swept up from chopping her up is being used for a new cycle lane on Easterly Road. She's everywhere all at once except the spot where I loved her to be, up on her plinth looking over me. When I go there now I just talk to her right hand with my cheek pressed against it, firmly stroking her sceptre. That's all we have of her now.

**Rest in peace Sheepscar.**

**Rest in peace The Hayfield.**

**Rest in peace Vicky.**

Thank you to my friends Paul and Carmen for all the Leeds knowledge that you have nourished me with over the years. Love you both! There are places that my camera cannot see but that I can sense thanks to the stories you have shared with me. Chapeltown Road and Sheepscar, my long walk to town, is layered with fainted monuments, fragments of past lives and the stories I imagine.

# Jill McKnight

[jillmcknight.com](http://jillmcknight.com)

Jill McKnight (b. 1990, Sunderland) is an artist based in Leeds who works with sculpture and writing. Central to their practice is exploring their working-class, feminist and artistic lineages to tell stories that would otherwise be lost or overlooked.

McKnight was awarded a Henry Moore Foundation Artist Award (2020) and selected as a Yorkshire Sculpture International Associate Artist (2019). Recent exhibitions include *All His Ghosts Must Do My Bidding* at Wysing Arts Centre; *Associated Matter* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park (both 2019); *KNOCK KNOCK* at South London Gallery and *Known Unknowns* at The Saatchi Gallery (both 2018).

Monumentality seems at odds with the artistic practices of me and many of my peers working in Leeds. Our community is changeable and precarious. The city attracts hundreds of art students each year and in my six years here I have made many friends from these courses, while gathering at exhibition openings and talks. We work where we can and with what we can get, often using cheap materials, if making non-digital work at all. Even the studio spaces where we work are fleeting, as tenancies change hands against Leeds' ever shifting landscape. There is something exciting in our adaptability, in this flux. We come from a longstanding trove of artists making exciting work in the city without a permanent legacy, but (if we're lucky) are archived away to be found by those who care to look.

The monuments around the city look down on the artists. Monuments made by Victorian sculptors born and working in London. They were erected as a permanent and (literally) elevated tribute to powerful figures, to be admired and respected by ordinary people of their time and for future generations. In the rush of my everyday life they had been so commonplace as to blend into the background, never attracting my gaze upwards beyond their stone plinths. Now, in dialogue with the graffiti articulating the colonial oppression they perpetuate, they are reframed. It is staggering to stand before tangible images of figures like Queen Victoria and Robert Peel knowing my own ancestors, like the majority, were too poor to have left behind ego-documents<sup>1</sup> or physical evidence of any kind.

I fantasise about us making new artworks from the bronze and stone of the monuments that speak to our communities and times, then of future generations reusing this material, over and over, towards an ever-evolving discursive and reflective space.

1. Such as photographs, diaries and letters.





Jill McKnight, Maquette for *The Artist*.

# James Thompson

[jamesthompson.info](http://jamesthompson.info)

James Thompson is a Leeds based artist who works across sculpture, moving image and performance.

His work deals with the perception of space and its interpretation, using pre-existing spatial situations as the starting point recorded and re-interpreted to construct new multi-dimensional experiences of reality.





Recording Performance II – Memorial to Queen Victoria statue, Leeds, 2019

**Day 3 of 3:**

**Final attempt – Victoria, Friday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019, 09:18am**

Out of place, out of time. The statue seems to protrude through the ground from a surface below like the pinnacle of a subterranean skyscraper. A question to what hides beneath.

I walk from the camera across tarmac and grass. As I step onto the elevated sandstone footing, surrounding Victoria, to begin piling slabs of clay in the far corner, I feel moved into a sort of parallel space separated from the park. Under the weight of the statue as though walking into a theatrical freeze frame, time seems slowed. I become aware of my movements, the park, the camera but at the same time distanced from it. On this island invisibility drops, passers-by accustomed to spectacle in that part of the park overt their gaze on the way to somewhere. Actions normalised.

This close, I trace the perimeter of the statue; India, Australia, Canada, Africa. My fingertips stained by the thin layer of Victoria, dissolved by acid rain onto the Portland stone plinth.

The closest I get to touching the figure itself.

In the space behind the owls' wings that mark each corner, a family of ladybirds hibernate in the micro-climate of bronze radiated by the early spring sun.

Samra and I discuss ways to approach the statue in the camera blind spot behind the back of Victoria. We propose to move in sequence, to collect a slab of clay, to pick our spot, to use any means to push the hardening clay as far as we could reach onto the statue.

**Go.**

We emerge from Victoria's blind spot, collect a slab of clay and aim for the only part of a figure in human reach, the left toe of Peace. At first the leather hard clay resists, rejecting its proposed new form. We keep working the material until it softens. Unmoving, the statue responds with a low growl that seems to resonate from deep within the hollow bronze. A call to Marsden, Peel, Wellington perhaps. No action.

Editor  
Rebecca Senior

Designer  
Ashleigh Armitage

Published March 2021

With thanks to [corridor8.co.uk](https://corridor8.co.uk)

This publication was supported by SPF-QR funding awarded to the University of Nottingham by Research England.

Cover image: Gravel Moor taken from Monument Moor in Leeds. June 2020.  
Rebecca Senior.