

## **Tate Britain: Curating Britishness and Cultural Diversity**

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### **Introduction**

'Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture' as a research project was initiated in 2005 by the Education Department at Tate Britain and fell under the auspices of the Curator: Cross-Cultural; a post predominantly defined by its remit to diversify content and audiences across programmes and events. This is not an insignificant fact. At its core, Tate Encounters emerged out of the recognition that there had been no demonstrable change in the demographic representation of audiences at Tate Britain, which continues to attract only 3% from ethnic minorities.<sup>1</sup> This is despite recent major shifts in the role of the museum, the central one being from cultural warder to regeneration catalyst and social agent, in addition to: the repositioning of the museum from the periphery to the centre of the public realm; the reconstruction of the individual visitor to 'customer' to 'member of the public'; the democratisation and popularisation of culture (reflected in the dramatic increase in numbers of visits to museums facilitated by free entry); the increasing socialisation of the museum environment; and last, but not least, the high levels of funding for targeted programming. This lack of representation presents a challenge to all museums in an increasingly multicultural nation and with increasing political pressure to respond. For a museum such as Tate Britain, charged with a 'national' role to collect, display and interpret the National Collection of British Art, it also poses questions about identity and concepts of Britishness. Other issues also come to the fore such as: the historical formation and contemporary nature of the collection as well as the relationship of museum practice to the social and political context in which it operates.

The ways in which Tate Britain has engaged with these problematics, I will suggest, are embedded, though not defined by, two very distinct paradigmatic and discursive relationships that it has sustained over the last thirty years: firstly, with the Academy (its original professional and disciplinary home in the practice of art history and fine art), and, secondly, with Government (its historical source of subsidy, more recently

configured as contracted investor). In this pyramidal structure, which consists of the museum, the academy, and the political, the role of the Education Department has played an integral role – translating and mediating the agendas and debates generated by these two constituencies. In this role, Education has also found itself simultaneously aligned with the work of art as aesthetic object and experience (defined by traditional curatorial concerns) and the work of art as the subject for educational experience and interpretation for the targeted audiences of cultural policy imperatives. Navigating a relationship with the space opened up by its practices in the museum, Education remains positioned, however, primarily in relation to academic and governmental policies, and as such performs two central roles: it holds ideas and practices outside of the museum’s core work for the museum to nurture in nascent form before assimilating into the mainstream, and, acts as a quarantine for ideas and practices less urgent and resolved in their relationship to the museum’s own practice. In this guise the Education Department can be viewed as performing the most radical and the most conservative practice in the museum – producing and reproducing new discourses and narratives.

Evolving out of government-led cultural policies of access and social inclusion in the 1990s and measured by target numbers of attendance, the implementation of ‘cultural diversity’ policy invariably became the responsibility of the Education Department, which was first and foremost realised through dedicated and targeted programmes under the auspices of ‘audience development’. As can be seen in the current contract with government, section four, ‘Tate’s Contribution to the delivery of Government Objectives: Audience Development – Diversity’, “Tate has become experienced and successful at engaging a wide range of audiences through its education programme”<sup>2</sup> Tate Britain, in an arguably reactive mode, under the pressure of target performance, and in line with the wider cultural sector, absorbed the ideological assumptions of cultural diversity policy without the opportunity to interrogate what meaning these held for the particular practices of the visual artist, the museum, and its audiences. Simultaneous to shifts in government cultural policy, the Academy (primarily represented by the New Art History with the emerging discipline of Cultural Studies) was also leading a challenge to the Modernist paradigm of the museum and art’s autonomy, as well as championing the new discourse of Post-colonialism alongside, more recently Identity Politics.

As this paper will discuss, the creation of Tate Britain in 2000 not only coincided with challenges about the wider value and display of the Collection in relation to issues of national identity, but it also coincided with major changes in the political view of the value and role of museums. The historical origins of the racialisation and politicisation of cultural policy is discussed here to reveal the extent to which issues and debates concerning the engagement with minority audiences are only now beginning to be negotiated on the walls of the museum rather than primarily through Educational activities. The potential role of Tate Encounters to inform this critical moment of renegotiation with the language and conceptualisation of cultural diversity within the defining practices and discourses of Tate Britain as a gallery is discussed, later in this paper, within the context of a new culture of research that holds the potential for different practices and knowledges to usefully permeate across the museum.

### **The Changing Place of Britain in Tate**

On 24 March 2000, Tate Britain opened its doors to the public on Millbank where the Tate Gallery had always been housed since its creation in 1897. As a gallery, Tate had a complicated history with its British aspect, which came in and out of focus at different times for different reasons. When it first opened to the public in 1897, its official name was the 'National Gallery of British Art'. It had been specifically built and designed to house the collection of nineteenth-century British painting and sculpture given to the nation by the industrialist Sir Henry Tate. Together with British paintings transferred from the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, the gallery's responsibilities were specifically for modern British art, defined then as artists born after 1790. In 1917, however, the gallery assumed the additional responsibility for the national collection of international modern art and for British art dating from the sixteenth century and was subsequently renamed the 'Tate Gallery'.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis on 'British' however, was always retained to some extent in the displays of the permanent collection up until 1990. At that point, the current Director of Tate, Nicholas Serota, radically rehung the Collection, which introduced a more integrated history of British art with the international collection. As he wrote in the Foreword to the first guide to the newly hung displays:

The distinctive character of the Tate Gallery derives from the unusual range of its Collections. Most major museums across the world are devoted to either 'classic' or 'modern' art or to a 'national' or 'international' view. The Tate

manages to combine all these forms in one small building and in so doing spreads confusion, but also the seeds of great potential ... In the sixties the Tate ... made a separation between the two collections 'Historic British' and 'Modern' absorbing twentieth-century British art into the story of the development of international modern art ... Now at a time when many different strands of contemporary British art are highly regarded abroad ... it is perhaps right to break the rigid divisions between British and Foreign, Historic and Modern.<sup>4</sup>

In an increasingly international art world and with a desire to expand the international scope and reception of the Collection, diminishing the focus on a notional British school of art, as well as an academic canon of the same, was not only desirable but also strategic. This had the added benefit of concealing gaps in the collection that a chronological hang had revealed. It also avoided the distinction of the Collection by notions of nationality. The embodied value of the Collection, as the representation of British art, culture, and identity, was nonetheless evident and clearly open to critique in the late 1980s and 1990s, during which time revisionist art history focussed on collections as the manifestations of historic formations of society, race, and gender organised by the dominant, elitist classes.

As an academic discourse, Postcolonialism clearly created a significant impact on cultural studies in the 1980s, notably in the UK, through the writings of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, but its permeation into the visual arts was slow and fragmented. The display 'Picturing Blackness in British Art', selected and curated by Paul Gilroy in 1996, is an early example of Tate's engagement with the postcolonial challenges to meaning and identity as presented within the Collection. The display brought together works from across three centuries and included the artists: Benjamin Robert Haydon, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Powell Frith, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Sonia Boyce and Lubaina Himid. The display argued that: "Any discussion of the representation of blackness in British art demands political as well as aesthetic sensitivities":

... when so ignored by official history, black British citizens, and indeed citizens of any minority group, can become vulnerable to exclusion from the nation's sense of itself. Since 1945, Britain has frequently been perceived as a society disrupted by the arrival of colonial immigrants who have supposedly brought disharmony, division and a brash, assertive multi-culturalism. This

idea of intrusion has triggered appeals to a mythic past, an imaginary, culturally simple, racially homogeneous and monochrome Britain in which there were no blacks. Such misinterpretation has served to soothe continuing uncertainty surrounding Britain's post-war, post-imperial identity, culture and national character. This display addresses some of the myths of Britishness ... The changing perception of blackness and Britishness presented in this display is not a minority issue. It is not something of significance primarily only to those who have previously been excluded and ignored. It is an essential ingredient in the development of a sense of nationality free of 'racial' division. This is an urgent goal for us all.<sup>5</sup>

The display invariably provoked a strong reaction from broadsheet critics. For instance, one article was headed 'A black mark for the Tate' and lambasted the gallery for betraying its duty, while another called it 'a wretched little exhibition'. As one commentator noted, however, the critics were as much 'irritated with the polemic that was forced upon them' as they were with the alternative historical reading of the works.<sup>6</sup> That the polemic had been imported by an external academic rather than a Tate curator might to some extent account for the vociferous nature of the critical response. Whatever arguments can be had on the shortcomings of the display, in retrospect it did sit in a provocative relation to Tate's audience and posed difficult questions in a relatively isolated and unsupported context within the space and practices of the gallery. The languages and debates of Post-colonialism had not yet filtered through to general curatorial practice, and the political clarion call of Gilroy's text must have seemed at best provocative and at worst confrontational to an audience more aligned with a modernist aesthetic.

The need and desire to engage more purposefully with notions of Britishness and identity was informed by Postcolonial debates, and clearly arose four years later when Tate Britain opened in 2000. As Stephen Deuchar, the first director of Tate Britain, wrote in his Foreword to the first published guide to Tate Britain:

Though the concept of a national gallery of British art may not seem automatically modern, with its roots in a nationalistic, centralist Victorian ethic scarcely in harmony with twentieth-first century society, Tate Britain's agenda is determinedly contemporary. As its, and the name of this book [Representing Britain] tend to imply its concern with art's place in the political and cultural entity that is Britain – and questions about art's contribution to

varying kinds of national identity will certainly form an undercurrent to our programme of displays, exhibitions and publications. In today's immediate climate of progressive regional devolution on one hand and European integration on the other and with increasing awareness of a population representing many ethnic and social positions, interrogating the roles of art in defining and challenging ideas of national identity may be a responsibility of Tate Britain, but it is also an exciting opportunity. For as well as providing a rich diversity of meaning and aesthetic pleasure, art can offer a key to opening up some of the pressing questions and debates about the nation, its history and future. Tate Britain's programme is not intended to be an extended investigation into the Britishness of British art.<sup>7</sup>

The opportunity to engage with and reveal this 'undercurrent' was enabled by Tate's adoption of a more radical curatorial approach of thematically hanging the Collection, which replaced the longstanding traditional art historical approach of a linear, chronological sequence of displays telling one 'story' of British art (and, by association, Britishness). By using this approach, the work of artists of different generations and origins were juxtaposed. This provoked new and multiple readings of the Collection and challenged the orthodoxies of traditional art historical discourse based on genre and medium.<sup>8</sup>

While some displays were more successful than others, one that drew attention from the critics was 'Artists Abroad', which brought together the Zanzibar-born British contemporary painter Lubaina Himid with nineteenth-century British born painters such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Richard Dadd and Philip Wilson Steer, among others. As Andy Morris has analysed in his essay, 'Redrawing the boundaries: questioning the geographies of Britishness at Tate Britain', this display signalled the gallery's desire to present a notion of Britain that was rooted firmly in the world beyond the geographical confines of Britain and acknowledged the changing world within Britain.<sup>9</sup>

In many respects, as Andy Morris identifies, both Tate Britain's conception and its opening displays were symptomatic and reflective of the political and social climate of the mid to late 1990s. During this period, there had been a concerted move to rebrand Britain as a dynamic, innovative, and creative new player on the global stage, which was most clearly symbolised by Britpop, Britart, Cool Britannia and the

creation of the Millennium Dome. Much of this emphasis on the 'new' of Britain was generated by the political language and strategies of Blair's Labour, the moves to create distance between the heritage-orientated era of Thatcherism, and the dawn of a new political era moving into a new millennium. Hence, unsurprisingly, the Department of National Heritage was renamed the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Within this context, the 'Artists Abroad' display clearly engaged with the new rhetoric and identity of an inclusive Britain, reflected in the display text: "... what home and abroad mean have become more complex with the growth and recognition of a culturally diverse Britain." But as Andy Morris goes on to argue: "There is a need to talk of multiple identities and differences within Britishness and this is what brought Himid and Turner together ... but it is this 'bringing them together' which causes problems ..."<sup>10</sup> For Morris, the display opened up discussion, but a discussion framed principally by the act of juxtaposition that suggested simple journeys of departure and arrival for the migrant as well as shared meaning with real or imaginary trips for the artist traveller; the act of travel being the binding principle of display. This approach to presenting diverse stories within the Collection is recognised by Morris as a positive move, albeit a partially realised one, which is reflected in his remark: "... if it is to remain a coherent reappraisal, reflexivity demands that the quest for a more nuanced, complex understanding goes to the very centre. The criticisms of Tate's approach ... seem to endorse the notion that, at present, the Tate is caught 'between camps'"<sup>11</sup>.

It could be argued that at the heart of these two camps lay the anxiety and ambiguity of a curatorial approach as yet unresolved in how to respond to the new political imperatives of addressing diversity in experience, and curating the work of art beyond its visual autonomy. It also alludes to the curatorial dilemma of how to integrate new stories of national identity into the Collection narrative when potentially unsupported by comparable works or a wider set of political and social narratives other than those framed by art history. Indeed, historically, as a gallery of fine art, Tate Britain's relation with changing discourses of meaning, experience and interpretation had first and foremost evolved out of the practices and disciplines of fine art, art history and more latterly cultural studies, visual culture and museology, rather than political or sociological discourses embracing issues such as race, migration and identity.

In retrospect, it is perhaps surprising how controversial the new Tate Britain displays were (and indeed Gilroy's in 1996), given that questions around identity and belonging had been circulating in the cultural domain, and the contemporary visual arts, for almost twenty years. On the other hand, it is perhaps just indicative of how entrenched the modernist tradition was at Tate, and how resistant some of its key constituencies were towards any political incursion into this. But these responses were no doubt also informed by another, more dramatic change in the wider cultural arena: the progressive politicisation of art through the funding and cultural policies of the 1980s and 1990s which focused on the 'minority arts', access, social inclusion and cultural diversity.

### **Towards Cultural Diversity**

As Richard Hylton has comprehensively charted in *The Nature of the Beast: Cultural Diversity and the Visual Arts Sector; A study of policies, initiatives and attitudes, 1976-2006*, minority arts funding emerged in the 1970s out of certain political discourses of the time, most notably Race Relations, and to a large extent has retained this association and remit.<sup>12</sup> Looking back, Hylton identifies the publication of Naseem Khan's report *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, published in 1976, as a key moment in the political racialisation of cultural policy, since the report had been funded by the Arts Council, the Gulbenkian Foundation, and the Community Relations Commission, (the latter had been set-up following the introduction of the Race Relations Act of 1965 and 1968.)<sup>13</sup> In her report, Khan focused on the benefits that ethnic arts could bring to a multicultural Britain and emphasised the ethnicity of different forms of cultural practice, such as festivals, that could be conceived under the umbrella of 'ethnic minorities' community arts'. Later the same year, Rasheed Araeen, the artist, critic and later founder of *Third Text*, published a counter-challenge to these views with his essay 'The Art Britain really Ignores'. For Araeen, *The Arts Britain Ignores* represented a "recipe for cultural separatism" and offered no analysis or ways forward for Black artists to be recognised and valued in the mainstream. On the contrary, for him, the report reasserted the view that "somehow the sensibility in the art activity of black people is inherently related to their 'ethnicity' and is necessarily different from and alien to the mainstream."<sup>14</sup>



Following the Brixton Riots and Scarman Report of 1981, the multicultural discourse of Race Relations was subsequently supplanted by the new discourse of Anti-racism and was most notably taken-up and championed by the Labour-controlled Greater London Council (GLC), which ran from 1981-86 under the leadership of Ken Livingstone. Cultural policy sat at the heart of the GLC's Anti-racist strategies, which identified and configured the arts as key agents of social change and political influence. In seeking to affect these strategies, dedicated committees such as the Ethnic Arts Sub-committee (1982) and later the Race Equality Unit (1985) were established with significant levels of ring-fenced funding, which substantially increased year-on. As Richard Hylton documents, these Units at the GLC did not just fund arts projects, exhibitions or events, but transformed the model and role of funder from one of provider to one of initiator and instigator, setting out the terms and references to which artists and performers should respond.<sup>15</sup>

But, as Hylton also notes, despite the positive impact in many areas, by so closely aligning issues of race with cultural practice and by seeking to establish an independent black arts sector, the GLC, "paid little attention to potential differences and conflicts between art forms and artistic concerns ... Instead of considering these issues as possibly determining factors in shaping the nature of any given project, the organising principles for supporting Black artists focussed almost exclusively on their 'Blackness' as the single and most important legitimating factor for their inclusion."<sup>16</sup>

With the disbanding of the GLC in 1986 by the then Thatcher-led government, the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) took up the lead role for the funding of black and minority ethnic arts. In 1989, the Arts Council published their own report titled *Towards Cultural Diversity*, which focused on, "the concept of a broad heterogeneous national culture; its make-up reflecting the diversity of cultural achievement issuing from contemporary society."<sup>17</sup> Comparable to the former GLC's programming initiatives, the Council also adopted a more pro-active role in promoting different types of events, for example initiating the annual Black History Month.

While the Tate's exposure to the policies of the GLC and ACGB was limited, given its national status and central government funding, its own engagement with the changing social role assigned to art and culture was nonetheless evident during this period. Following the Toxteth riots in Liverpool in 1981, conversations had begun with the government about the regeneration of the Albert Dock. Consequently, the creation of a new gallery, Tate Liverpool, was incorporated into the plans for the area

by the Merseyside Development Corporation, opening in 1988 as the Tate of the North and home of the National Collection of Modern art in the North of England<sup>18</sup>. For the Conservative government of the day, the more pressing imperative for the cultural sector was not the promotion of, or engagement with, such issues as minority arts, but rather the economic value of the sector and its value for money in terms of government subsidy. As Sara Selwood has charted and discussed, it was under the successive Conservative governments of the late 1980s and 90s that the culture of accountability and data-based evidence emerged, redefining the 'arm's length' principle of national funding for the arts and more closely aligning it with central government objectives.<sup>19</sup> This was most notably marked by the introduction in 1996 of contractual Funding Agreements between the Government and national museums and galleries and paved the way for the more interventionist policies of New Labour when they came to power in 1997. It was during this time that the Department of National Heritage was replaced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

As the DCMS's first report signalled in 1998, its aims reflected the manifesto policies of the government as a whole with a focus on: "the promotion of access, for the many not just the few; the pursuit of excellence and innovation; the nurturing of educational opportunity and the fostering of creative industries".<sup>20</sup> It also responded assertively to the agendas and policies presented by the Social Exclusion Unit, which the government had set-up in 1997 to consider ways in which joined-up government departments could address and overcome issues of social exclusion: "art and sport can not only make a valuable contribution to delivering key outcomes of lower long-term unemployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications, but can also help to develop the individual pride, community spirit and capacity for responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration programmes themselves."<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, in 1999, Chris Smith, as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, identified 'cultural diversity' as the fourth of eight reasons to fund the arts, declaring:

... we must recognise and celebrate the cultural diversity of our country. It is no longer true to conceive British culture as being a monolithic entity: we need rather to speak of British cultures. And a healthy, thriving, publicly funded arts system needs to develop organically as society develops, reflecting and sustaining the full diversity and richness of our national identity and our cultural traditions.<sup>22</sup>

The emphasis on cultural diversity policy gained significant momentum following the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 and the publication of the Race Relations (Amendments) Act in 2000 and the Macpherson Report in 2001. But as the new language and discourse of cultural diversity emerged, it seemed to become conflated and associated with the policies of social inclusion and access, which suggested, by implication, that there was an inherent link between all three policy issues emanating from race and ethnicity, rather than class or gender, etc. This conflation of political issues and policies, in relation to the arts in general, has had, as Tony Graves has argued, a limited benefit and impact given the reactive nature of their conception:

... the fact that arts organisations are defining people as belonging to a particular ethnic group has, in a sense, removed the right of black arts practitioners to define themselves. It could be argued that official bodies have appropriated the language of identity. Another problem with cultural diversity policy is its association with issues of 'access'. There is an idea that cultural diversity is principally concerned with social inclusion and using the arts as an instrument of social policy – which could diminish the essence of art, and perpetuate the sense of a ghettoised area of activity. The focus on aesthetics that should lie at the heart of arts policy has been to a large extent submerged by concerns (important as they are) over ethnicity and inclusion.<sup>23</sup>

### **Tate Britain: Towards an integration of practice and policy**

By the opening years of the new millennium, the issues around minority arts, which had occupied the Arts Council and its clients since the 1970s, had found currency in the national museum sector, prompted by cultural diversity policies expressed as part of the public sector agreements with government.<sup>24</sup> At Tate Britain, while displays such as 'Artists Abroad' engaged with new stories, much of the more explicitly focused activity around 'cultural diversity' was, in line with the wider sector, initiated by the Education department. An early and notable example includes the display of the work of Donald Rodney as part of Black History Month (October 2004), accompanied by a programme of talks by black artists and critics as part of the month long national event. In one of the more high profile projects, the black artist Hew Locke was also commissioned to create a new work, 'King Creole', in 2004 to mark British Art Week. Straddling the full scale of the classical pediment across the main entrance to Tate Britain on Millbank, the work featured the Portcullis coat of arms of the Houses of Parliament emblazoned with a skull and cross bones and festooned with artificial flowers. As Nicholas Serota reported in his speech at the closing of the Commission for Racial Equality in December 2005, Tate had also recently acquired work by artists including: Mona Hatoum, Isaac Julien, Yinka Shonibare, Zarina Bhimji, Chris Ofili, Steve McQueen and Rosalind Nashashibi, who, "all draw productively upon past events and narratives of international conflict, exchange and migration".<sup>25</sup>

Following the creation and appointment in July 2005 of the new post of 'Curator: Cross-cultural' in the Education Department, a more strategic approach to combining knowledge and expertise across curatorial and educational practice emerged and a closer working relationship across departments. This led to more experimental interventions into the main gallery space with more discursive forms of interpretation that included: multi-authored work labels, DVD filmed interview compilations with cross-generational contributors, and more socio-historical material on supporting display microsites on Tate Online. Notable examples of this include: the exhibitions: 'Seeing Africa; East-West: Objects between cultures' and '1807 – Blake, Slavery and the Radical Mind'.<sup>26</sup> Debates and study days were also organised (which continue today) to reconsider the history of both Black British art and the politics of cultural diversity. A lunchtime forum was also established, bringing together black artists, curators, critics, policy-makers and funders, which discussed and critiqued the proposed and current programmes.

What was apparent in 2005 and increasingly so, is how contested the debate around the political racialisation of culture has become, informed by both second and now third generation black artists, critics and curators such as Sonya Dyer, Richard Hylton and Munira Mirza. Opening up discussions around the positive action funding programmes being directed at Black and Minority Ethnic groups (such as the Arts Council of England's 'Decibel' programme), they have begun to question whether targeted initiatives have, indirectly, helped to support the status quo while simultaneously contributing to the further marginalisation of artists, writers and curators<sup>27</sup> At Tate, responding to the level of debate in the cultural sector and with a view to developing more strategic approaches to diversifying Tate's audiences and workforce, a new group called 'Tate For All' has also been established. This consists of representatives from across all departments at Tate, who are engaging with the terms of debate being set out by both policymakers and practitioners such as Dyer.

Co-joined with many of these debates about how best to raise the representation of the minority populations in public life is also one of the most contentious and elusive debates that British society is currently engaging with across generations, classes, and political divides: what approach should be assumed to ensure social cohesion in a multicultural society – integration (interculturalism) or self-selecting cultural separation (multiculturalism)? And what constitutes British and Britishness as an expression of the former? While the scope of these debates might seem to sit well outside the historical defining practices and role of Tate Britain, Tate, by its own definition has 'pioneered the 'Social Model' of the 21<sup>st</sup> century museum that locates and identifies it as a significant contributor to the social and cultural fabric of the national life. Indeed, it recently noted to government how 'Tate is greatly encouraged by the [government] emphasis on the central role of museums and galleries in the cultural, social and educational life of the nation.'<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the discourse of Britishness embodied in increasingly urgent political debates around the need to assert a more coherent national identity – and thereby ensure greater social cohesion – has identified the museum as an important site for people to engage in these debates. As the government consultation report, *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Life: The Value of Museums* states, museums offer, "a way for us all to see our place in the world. This is all the more important as society changes and new values of nationality and community emerge .... They are a means of helping citizens understand their place in the world and its heritage ... museums are spaces where people can explore personal beliefs

in amongst universal truths. In short, they can show how events and beliefs from the past shape people's experience of the present, and help create a sense of identity. Because cultural identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not necessarily defined by national borders."<sup>29</sup>

As political discourse and policies aimed at developing and defining national identity move centre stage, with suggestions that the government is considering the creation of a new museum of British History, Tate Britain's place within these debates becomes all the more complex.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the Minister of State for Culture, Margaret Hodge, is shortly scheduled to give a keynote speech on 'Britishness, Heritage and the Arts' which will consider 'the role of the arts and heritage sector in promoting shared values and a common identity ... [as] Issues of social cohesion, diversity and identity have moved to the centre of public debate. With evidence of increased community tensions in some parts of the country and with immigration consistently at the top of the political agenda, the Prime Minister has argued that promoting a shared sense of Britishness is an important way of improving social cohesion and fostering good relations between people from different walks of life.'<sup>31</sup>

As Stephen Deuchar noted in his Foreword to the first of the new gallery's catalogue, the role that art can play in, "opening up some of the pressing questions and debates about the nation, its history and future" was acknowledged in the conception of the gallery. This continues to be engaged with through both the collection displays and the exhibition programme. But as Deuchar also noted in 2000: "Tate Britain's programme is not intended to be an extended investigation into the Britishness of British art". The latter point does not necessarily read as a position of resistance, rather, one that acknowledges the historical fluidity of the designation of British, and particularly in relation to the formation of the Tate Collection. To this day, there is no finite working definition of British within Tate's practice nor are works of art designated as belonging to either a British or International collection, but rather one whole Tate Collection. In this respect the formation of the notional British collection partially reflects an ambiguity acknowledged by government, which noted in the 2007 Green Paper *The Governance of Britain*, that, "our relative stability as a nation is reflected in a relative lack of precision about what we mean to be British."<sup>32</sup>

## The Value of Research

For nearly two decades museums have been under scrutiny and pressure from two sectors. Firstly, government with its increasing demand for accountability, economic viability and social impact evidence; and, secondly, from the Humanities sector within academia that calls for a more critical and reflexive engagement between curatorial and museum practice and cultural theory in order to deconstruct the nineteenth-century Enlightenment project that is the museum. While Tate pioneered new ways to open up access to the museum through the creation of Tate Liverpool and Tate Modern - constructed as major social and economic regeneration building projects - Tate Britain's role as a social museum has primarily been framed by its own historical identity and formation, which is primarily articulated through its relationship with its audiences, rather than its locality, spectacular architecture and/or public realm persona.

This social role has until recently been the responsibility of the Education Department, creating an interface between the museum and the public through a range of informal activities. These informal activities are primarily aimed at the audience target groups identified by government agendas of social inclusion, and more recently social cohesion. As discussed at the opening of this paper, however, the majority of initiatives aimed at diversifying audiences across the sector have not translated into effect. Indeed, despite the plethora of projects accompanied by both qualitative and quantitative research and evidence, very little has changed in the demographic make-up of visitors.<sup>33</sup> This is supported by the latest government report, *Culture on Demand: Ways to engage a broader audience*,<sup>34</sup> which notes: "Understanding why drivers affect demand rather than simply identifying them is an area which 'remains unusually enigmatic despite about forty years of increasingly sophisticated analysis'."<sup>34</sup> Moreover, as the report also notes: "evidence shows that significant barriers to attendance and participation remain, in the form of access, time, and more importantly 'interest'. But unpacking lack of interest is an elusive concept requiring further explanation and understanding."

The context in which Tate Encounters emerged as a research project is also indicative of the growing recognition in academia that new knowledge and understanding of diasporic experience and interest needs to be harnessed across the public sector. That is to say, Tate Encounters was conceived in response to the research opportunity created by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's strategic funding programme, 'Diasporas, Migrations and Identities' which aims to

“maximise the participation of scholars from a wide range of arts and humanities disciplines in researching, reflecting upon and discussing issues relating to diasporas, migration and identities, and their past and present impact on subjectivity and identity, culture and the imagination, place and space, emotion, politics and sociality.”<sup>35</sup> In responding to this programme, and arising from the Education Department, Tate Encounters identified a unique opportunity, highly distinct from targeted education projects, to engage in a longitudinal study focused on the self-reflexive analysis of experience and subjectivity of the diasporic individual. This would bring into play models of research and disciplinary practices unframed by the practice of the museum or defined by the racialised terms of cultural policy; namely, sociology, anthropology and visual cultural studies. Furthermore, the project has adopted a practice-based approach which purposefully constitutes the individual (in this instance self-selecting students from London South Bank University) as a co-researcher. This encourages a personal interrogation of the relationship between each individual co-researcher and the *specificities* of Tate Britain, as both a museum space and as a collection; and indeed, a collection that displays individual works of fine art.

The potential value of Tate Encounters to both produce new understandings of how Tate Britain is experienced and understood through a more nuanced account of the subjective identity of the individual co-researchers within the gallery, and to inform future practice and policy, is significant. To understand Tate Encounters’ value, it is necessary to locate the project’s emergence and contingency in relation to a history of approaches to cultural policy and academic debate that have previously existed, and been translated within the museum to engage new diasporic audiences. In this respect research, such as Tate Encounters, might also hold the potential to generate new practices and knowledges that are neither exclusively aligned with the work of art (curatorial expertise) nor the visiting public (educational expertise), but rest in generating new modes of encounter and interpretation within the gallery space rather than reproducing long-established ones.



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<sup>1</sup> This figure is relatively consistent with other national museums and galleries including Tate Modern. In 2006/07 Tate Britain had 49,000 Black and Ethnic Minority visitors (3%) while Tate Modern had 200,000 (4%). See 'Tate aims to increase ethnic minority visitors', *Art Newspaper*, July-August 2007, p.13

<sup>2</sup> See *Tate Funding Agreement 2005/06 – 2007/08*, DCMS, 2005, p.3

<sup>3</sup> For a full history of the Tate Collection and gallery see Frances Spalding, *The Tate: A History*, Tate 1998. For a summary overview of the same see <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/> accessed January 2008

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Serota, 'Foreword', *Tate Gallery: An Illustrated Companion*, Tate, 1990, p.7

<sup>5</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Picturing Blackness in British Art 1700s-1990s*, Tate, 1995

<sup>6</sup> See William Packer, 'A black mark for the Tate', *Financial Times*, 13 January 1996, p.14; Richard Dorment, 'Slaves to the Stereotype', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 January 1996, p.14; Tania Guha, *Art Exhibitions*, 10 -17 January 1996; Richard Cork, 'Old Black and White Truths in Colour', *Times*, 2 January 1996, p.11.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Deuchar, 'Foreword', *Representing Britain 1500-2000*, Tate, 2000, p.8

<sup>8</sup> The adoption of this thematic hang was also evident in the opening displays of Tate Modern. For more information about the Tate Britain displays see xxxx. The arguments for more interplay between works of different types and periods had been made by Nicholas Serota in 1996 when he delivered the Walter Neurath Lecture, published as *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art*, London 1997. In the published essay he identifies different models of curatorial practice across Europe since the 1980s which focus on the individual work of art and experience rather than 'the conveyor belt of history'.

<sup>9</sup> Andy Morris, 'Redrawing the boundaries: questioning the geographies of Britishness at Tate Britain', *Museum and Society*, November 2003, pp.170-182.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180

<sup>12</sup> Richard Hylton, *The Nature of the Beast: Cultural Diversity and the Visual Arts Sector; A study of policies, initiatives and attitudes, 1976-2006*, Bath, 2007. For a review of Hylton's key points see Tiffany Jenkins, 'The 'disorganised apartheid' of cultural diversity', *the spiked review of books*, 17 May 2007

<sup>13</sup> The Race Discrimination Act was also passed in 1976

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, see Chapter Two, pp.31-41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* see chapter 3, 'The GLC', pp.43-56.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.48-49

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.63. The report's full title was *Towards Cultural Diversity: the monitoring report of the Arts Council's ethnic minority arts action plan*, ACGB, 1989

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Serota, 'The Art of the Unexpected', CRE, December 2006. That this signalled a dramatic shift in Tate's perception of its role and its articulation of its own identity was recently noted by Nicholas Serota in a speech to mark the closure of the Commission for Racial Equality, 'The 1990s saw major institutional shifts at Tate, as we moved away from the monolithic museum built on an imperial past. One of the motivating factors in Tate's physical re-establishment across four distinct art centres, operating from Liverpool and St Ives as well as London, was our wish to present many more stories – to complicate the historical picture with multiple views while encouraging our visitors to participate in finding their own.'

<sup>19</sup> See Sara Selwood, 'Measuring Culture', *Spiked*, 30 December 2002, pp1-21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>21</sup> See Selwood, p.7. Quote from *Arts and Sport. A Report to the Social Exclusion Unit*, London, DCMS, p.2 The Social Exclusion Unit defined social exclusion as 'a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, poverty and family breakdown.' For an analysis of how social inclusion policies were absorbed into the sector, or not, see See Richard Sandell, 'Social Inclusion, the museum and the dynamics of sectoral change', *Museum and Society*, 1 (1), 2003, pp.45-62.

<sup>22</sup> Chris Smith, 'Government and the Arts', Lecture at the RSA in London, 22 July 1999. Text reproduced in Eds Mark Wallinger, Mary Warnock, *Art for All?: Their Policies and Our Culture*, Peer, London, 2000, pp.14-15.

<sup>23</sup> Tony Graves, 'Deepening Diversity', *Spiked*, 13 June 2003.

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<sup>24</sup> The Tate's three-year funding agreement from 2003-06 includes as its second Strategic Priority the 'Opening up our institutions to the wider community, to promote lifelong learning and social cohesion' through amongst other activities, 'displays including the work of Jamaican born artist Ronald Moody at Tate Britain and from 'Tarzan to Rambo' which examines representations of race, colour and stereotyping in our society', see point 4.2.c., p.7

<sup>25</sup> See note 15

<sup>26</sup> 'Seeing Africa' (July to October 2006); 'East-West: Objects Between Cultures' (September 2006 to February 2007); and '1807: Blake, Slavery and the Radical Mind' (April to October 2007). See Tate Online for further information on all three.

<sup>27</sup> See Hylton note 10; Sonia Dyer, 'Boxed In: How Cultural Diversity Policies Constrict Black Artists', *Manifesto Club, Artistic Autonomy Hub, May 2007 Report*; Munira Mirza, *Culture Vultures*, Policy Exchange, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Strategy paper for Regeneration and Community Partnerships, Tate, 2008. See also, Tate Submission in response to the Consultation Report *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Life: The Value of Museums*, DCMS, 2005, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p.3, p.6. See also in the same consultation report sections on 'Museums and Identity' and 'Museums and Citizenship', pp.11-12. The role of the museum to contribute to social cohesion has also come into sharper focus following the London bombings of 2005. In his speech on Anti-Terrorism measures on 14 November 2007, Gordon Brown as Prime Minister, reported 'We will have joint work with the French and German Governments on building an appreciation of Islamic and Muslim heritage across Europe, the Arts Council of England, Tate Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and British Library will also be taking forward projects to promote greater understanding of the contribution of Islam to European history and culture.' See BBC Online, 14 November 2007.

<sup>30</sup> For articles on apparent government proposals for a new Museum of British History see 'A Museum of back-slapping will belittle our Island Story', *Guardian*, 15 January 2008, p.30 and 'A Museum of Britishness would show all that is great about Blighty', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 December 2007, p.26.

<sup>31</sup> On Tuesday 4 March, Margaret Hodge as Minister of State for Culture will give the keynote speech at an event organised by IPPR on 'Britishness, Heritage and the Arts'

<sup>32</sup> *The Governance of Britain*, HMSO, July 2007, p.54

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of the role of data collection in relation to delivering government objectives of social impact in the cultural sector see Sara Selwood, 'Unreliable evidence: the rhetorics of data collection in the cultural sector', *Culture Vultures*, 2006, pp.38-52. For a discussion on the effectual value of cultural policy informed by social objectives see in the same publication Eleonora Belfiore, 'The social impacts of the arts – myth or reality', pp. 20-37.

<sup>34</sup> See *Culture on Demand: Ways to engage a broader audience*, DCMS, July 2007, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> See [http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/apply/research/sfi/ahrcsi/diasporas\\_migration\\_identities.asp](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/apply/research/sfi/ahrcsi/diasporas_migration_identities.asp)