



## AUDIO DESCRIPTION

**HEW LOCKE, *SOUVENIR 10 (PRINCESS ALEXANDRA)* 2019**



Hew Locke, *Souvenir 10 (Princess Alexandra)* 2019 © Hew Locke. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2024. Photo: Anna Arca.

This is an audio description of the artwork *Souvenir 10 (Princess Alexandra)* by Hew Locke. It'll take about 5 minutes to listen to.

The artwork is a portrait sculpture, or bust. It shows the head and shoulders of a young woman, which have been embellished with layers of additional decoration by the artist

Hew Locke. The bust is made of Parian ware, a type of porcelain imitating white marble. The original marble version was made by a Victorian sculptor called Mary Thornycroft in 1868 and is owned by the Royal Collection. Hew Locke added all of the modern ornamentation to this porcelain copy in 2019.

The head of the sculpture is about the size of an adult's hand, making it smaller than life-size. The young woman is shown calmly looking into the distance. She has classical features that are reminiscent of the statues of ancient Greece and Rome. Her hair is shown parted in the middle and neatly pulled away from her face. Her head is adorned with a headpiece made of gold lace, which is covered with dark rubber snakes in a variety of colours – dusty pink, sky blue, jade green and dark brown, some patterned with stripes and some plain. They fall around her head to her shoulder like curly hair. The snakes make the sculpture look a bit like ancient statues of Medusa, the character from Greek mythology who had snakes instead of hair.

The woman's clothing has been completely covered by Locke's decorative additions. He has added layers of lace in white, grey and gold. The grey layer in the middle is edged with strings of beads in bright red, blue and yellow, from which an old, tarnished war medal hangs in the centre. The intricate gold lace around her neck forms a high collar decorated with beautiful gold-coloured leaf shapes. But the most striking detail is the little golden skull right in the centre of her chest, an image of death which contrasts strongly with the portrait of this elegant young woman. This kind of addition is known as a *memento mori*, a Latin phrase that means 'remember death'.

The bust is mounted on a white pedestal, another element that is based on classical sculpture. The deep red colour of the wall behind the work makes the white of the bust and the gold details stand out. This piece blends classical beauty with modern, mythologically inspired elements. But who is she and why did the artist decorate her in this way?

She is Princess Alexandra of Denmark. She married Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, later Edward VII in 1863 when she was just eighteen. The original bust was made in the same year, with smaller Parian ware reproductions distributed as subscription bonuses to celebrate their royal wedding

The bust was sculpted by Mary Thornycroft, a British artist who became primarily known as royal sculptor, commissioned by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert to create sculptural portraits of members of the royal family. The British royal family is similarly ever present in

the work of Hew Locke, for whom images of the royal family have served as symbols of British power, history and identity.

Locke often fuses historical sources with his own political concerns to create space for a greater understanding of historical iconography. During our in-conversation event in 2022, he said,

"It's all about the idea of the exotic, the desire for the exotic and the fear of the exotic at the same time."

Locke's *Souvenir* series (2018–onwards) explores the national nostalgia for the imperial past by appropriating Victorian Parian busts of the British royal family and embellishing them with regalia, masks, textiles and replica insignia. Busts of Princess Alexandra, along with Albert Edward and Queen Victoria recur throughout the series.

The burden of colonial history is conveyed by physically weighing down each 'souvenir'. Locke manipulates and provides colourful reinterpretations of these sculptural images of the royal family.

On display in the gallery you can also experience other sculptures by Mary Thornycroft alongside related archival material, including photographs and letters. Four works from Locke's *Natives and Colonials* series of overpainted photographs are also on display, which similarly provide colourful reinterpretations of London public monuments, including the Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens.

Throughout the exhibition, we invite you to consider what happens when the work of a Victorian royal sculptor quite literally clashes with a twenty-first century reframing of monarchy and memorialisation.