# Haptic tactility : how design processes can remediate identities past and present

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# Haptic tactility:
# how design processes can remediate identities past and present

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**There is little known of the prehistory of the Caribbean and the Taino people – the first inhabitants of the region. From the island of Jamaica, significant Taino artefacts are currently held in storage in the British Museum. This project explores how one 'brings to life' their identities, and how this may engage with contemporary jewellery and object making practices.**

**The project has wider implications for minority communities – particularly for those subjugated by western imperialism from the end of the fifteenth Century to the late nineteenth century and, arguably, for many up to and including the various independence movements following World War Two. This period has contributed to the many factors that create an invisibility of black artists and their contributions to a wider art history.**

**In addressing the significant problem of 'invisibility', the aim of this thesis is to investigate how contemporary jewellery and object making processes, methods and outcomes can act as catalysts for re-integrating fragmented and dispersed relationships. In addition, the thesis aims to examine and challenge the invisibility referred to above, by refusing historically entrenched hegemony and Euro-centricity, while foregrounding the early history of the Caribbean and its artefacts and what relationship they may have to contemporary practice.**


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# CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Problem of Invisibility

> There is a terrible burden of invisibility and eradication that history has bequeathed the Black-British artist.[1] – Eddie Chambers, 2014

> Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a bio-chemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality.[2] – Ralph Ellison, 1952

The above words of American novelist, Ralph Ellison, and what he was highlighting in 1952, is still very relevant over six decades later. According to Black-British academic and artist, Eddie Chambers, writing in 2014, 'Perhaps most alarmingly, what might be called an invisible-izing of Black British artists continues right up to the present time.'[3] Although from different eras and cultural backgrounds, both authors articulate the essence of my research and my institutional journey through a tertiary education in design. In addition, more recently, historians are envisaging 'black British history … as a global history and – perhaps more controversially – as a history of more than just the black experience itself.'[4]

Cataclysmic events in the history of the Caribbean, especially slavery, resulted in Black artists and their practices not being recorded by the predominant colonial culture. As a consequence, oral histories (that included cultural values that could be reinterpreted and passed on to wider groups) usually remained invisible and unheard.[5] In addressing the significant problem of 'invisibility', the aim of this project is to investigate how

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[1] E. Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art: A History from 1950 to the Present*, I. B Tauris & Co. Ltd, London, 2014, p. 2.
[2] R. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Random House, New York, 1952, p. 3.
[3] E. Chambers, p. 2.
[4] D. Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History*, Macmillan, London, 2016, p. xxi.
[5] According to P. Archer-Straw in her study of Harry Johnston's photographs taken by him in the Caribbean between 1908-09, black creativity continued even if largely unrecognised. See P. Archer-Straw, *Photos and Phantasms: Harry Johnston's photographs of the Caribbean*, exhibition catalogue, The British Council, London, 1998, p. 50. As an example, Archer-Straw cites 'illustration 35' to which Johnston gave it the caption 'A Jamaican Negro' and the title 'A Jamaican Artisan'. As Archer-Straw notes of the unnamed Jamaican artisan (p. 50): 'He holds a fan that the title suggests he made. Very little documentation exists that provides evidence of black artistry or craftsmanship for this period. This has led many historians to conclude that black creativity as witnessed in Africa had been stymied by the colonial experience. Photographs such as this prove otherwise.' According to Chambers Biographical Dictionary, Johnston was an 'English administrator, explorer, writer and artist' who 'played a significant part in the partition of Africa'. See U. McGovern, *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, 7th edn, Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd, 2002, p. 812. As Archer-Straw has noted (p. 10), after Africa, Johnston later undertook a trip in the early 20th century to the Amercias including the Caribbean.

contemporary jewellery-making processes, methods and outcomes can use haptic tactility as a catalyst for re-integrating fragmented and dispersed relationships, while constructing meaningful forms of memory of, and identity with, the Taino, the original inhabitants of Jamaica. In addition, the project aims to examine and challenge the invisibility referred to above, by refusing to accept historically entrenched hegemony and Euro-centricity. Instead it focuses on the pre-colonial Jamaican Taino and their objects. In an almost forensic manner, these objects have the ability to document and tell stories that transform the suppressed existence of Taino culture into something far more tangible. The Taino story animates the object, and, in turn, the object gives life to the story. Without these objects and the stories of their makers, the Jamaican Taino culture is open to fabrication and remains a kind of spectre, with which the next generation cannot identify.

For those who are dis-enfranchised by a colonialism that began in the fifteenth century, the on-going dilemma of 'non-presence' has resulted in a diaspora with a skewed global view and a distancing of its culture and art world. In a contrasting approach, contemporary media artist and theorist, Trinh Minh-Ha, uses film to explore the personal experience of post-colonialism and the migrant. From the perspective of a Vietnamese woman, her writing and films poetically investigate the notion of 'presencing' the 'boundaries' of art through film.[6] She further explains of her work, 'it is only in the transformative potential of the work that one can hope to make a difference in other ways of people seeing and experiencing.'[7]

Just as people see Minh-ha's films, Laura Marks believes that the eyes function like touch and uses the term 'haptic visuality'.[8] In the words of Marks, 'by staying close to the surface of an event,' I too employ the term haptic *tactility* to establish a connection between historic events, material history (i.e., the Taino objects), myself, and the

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[6] Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Between Dog and Wolf: Trinh T. Minh Ha', *Oneperson*, [SoundCloud], 2011, https://soundcloud.com/oneperson/between-dog-and-wolf-trinh-t (accessed 3 July 2017).
[7] ibid.
[8] L. Marks, 'Video haptics and erotics, *Screen*, 39 (4), 1998, p. 332. Available from: https://academic.oup.com/screen/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/screen/39.4.331 (25 July 2017). As Marks has explained (at p. 332), 'Haptic visuality, a term contrasted to optical visuality, draws from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinaesthetics. Because haptic visuality draws upon other senses, the viewer's body is more obviously involved in the process of seeing than is the case with optical visuality. The difference between haptic and optical visuality is a matter of degree, however. In most processes of seeing both are involved, in a dialectical movement from far to near, from solely visual to multisensory.'

viewer.[9] Museum objects are effectively hidden away from public view for periods of time resulting in a bodily disconnect between their intended audience and the intentions of the maker. To subvert the disconnect and regenerate dialogue between object and viewer, I seek to create connections that are embodied, visible and present as a form of tactile experience. In addressing these issues, my practice-led research proposes to discover whether studio processes and outcomes are capable of reframing connections with distant objects of cultural and historical relevance. It is through the process of their making and being experienced by the viewer, that they also make me visible.

## 1.2 Key Related Artists

Western twenty-first-century contemporary jewellery can be made up of a plethora of materials to attract and suit the individual. Displayed and carried on the body, impressed upon the skin and simultaneously transported from place to place, the worn object is an extension of the individual - part body, part mind. It is an intimate act, where the skin connects with a material object, forging a transcendental experience.

Much discussion on contemporary jewellery centres on its complex function and meaning, as well as being both a psychological experience and a physical medium. For example, jewellery artist, Mah Rana, articulates her process and the meanings imbedded within it, charged by her childhood memory of learning to tie her shoelaces:

> My piece Toknot keeps the memories I have of tying these knots, almost as if tying a knot would seal 'actual experience' in my head. Sounds, colours and smells as well as conscious and subconscious feeling from that time openly come back to me when I look at the piece, as if it were able to refocus my thoughts and take me back to the past or to bring the past back into present.[10]

Although she predominately works with her hands, in the above descriptions Rana only mentions three bodily senses and an awareness that pivots on her recollection into a transported reality. The cognitive practice of using her hands triggers memories of her past. To develop from this, the point of my research is to indicate whether there are other ways of visualising and engaging haptic experiences. My practice-based approach is to specifically use the physical sense of touch. Objects that have had an obscure presence or those that have been made invisible through their marginalised histories, can now be realised in tactile form through my jewellery interpretations. The art of

[9] L. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. xi.
[10] M. Rana, *Jewellery is Life*, exhibition catalogue, Fabrica, Brighton, 2002, p. 29.

touching an object of which I was not previously aware, but has historical connections to my past, has a way of revealing its identity.

Public access to rare and interesting material culture that documents the human condition, often originated with a private collection, for example, Sir Hans Sloane's collection is now in the British Museum.[11] The craftsperson/artist (who is often anonymous), the collector and the viewer interplay in a three-way connection around the object. Each has its own perspective, unique to that object and the relations that form around it. For example, circa 1792, Isaac Alves Rebello found three Taino objects and took them to the British Museum.[12] Jewellery, headpieces and implements were often the first things traded colonially and museum practices now allow us to observe many of these things which may otherwise have been lost. While I acknowledge that the manner through which these objects were acquired is often questionable; it is these three objects that have become the basis of my project. Through their existence, examining these objects has allowed me to have a haptic experience in the same way that these histories were kept through oral and haptic forms of teaching before colonial forms of knowledge and their history museums operated. This is a different form of 'presencing'.

Art historian and curator, Liesbeth den Besten, has explained:

> The connection between jewellery and mankind has always been strong and intense. Jewellery identifies humankind: the finding of prehistoric shells with traces of threading and wearing identifies the site as human, identifies the shells as culture. Jewellery is part of our daily rituals, social, religious and political life; jewellery is object of theft, and counterfeiting; while discoveries, colonialism, slavery and wars all add to the history of jewellery. There are many stories to be told, but in the museum jewellery is mostly observed as small works of art. Left alone in a showcase, a distance is created.[13]

My interest in 'the obscured' (that is, suppressed art heritage), stems from my cultural background. I am Black-British, a term described by Chambers as '"Black" but with an upper-case B, to refer to individuals and communities of African, African-Caribbean

[11] Hans Sloane was the founder of the British Museum. For a critique of him, see M. Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: from Arawaks to Zombies*, USA and Canada, Routledge, 2003, p. 16.
[12] J. Ostapkowicz, et al., 'Birdmen, cemís and duhos: material studies and AMS 14C dating of Pre-Hispanic Caribbean wood sculptures in the British Museum', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 40 (12), 2013, p. 4676. Available from: Elsevier (accessed 22 February 2015).
[13] L. den Besten, Lecture by Liesbeth den Besten + Handshake, Konstfack University College of Arts, *Crafts and Design,* [website], 2016, https://www.konstfack.se/en/News/Calendar/2016/Lecture-by-Liesbeth-den-Besten--Handshake/ (accessed 20 September 2016).

and South Asian background'.[14] He also noted a 'generational shift saw the introduction of the term "Afro-Caribbean" which in turn gave way to "Black", and "African-Caribbean"'.[15] British-born of Jamaican parents, I was educated in a post-colonial environment in London and later attended university in Australia. Therefore, I directly experienced the invisibility and lack of display representation of Jamaican Taino art within the institutions of both British and Australian society. In response to invisibilities brought about by the continuance of hegemony, my jewellery-object making must be understood not just with respect to its own visibility, but also to the haptic bodily sense of 'touch' that it always engenders. My jewellery functions as a way of 'reaching out' in order to give meaning, tangibility and depth to my heritage, one that has been kept in obscurity until now.

**Antony Gormley**

British sculptor and ex-trustee of the British Museum, Antony Gormley, sees art as an inward experience going within one's mind, a space of infinity and endless possibilities. As he clearly explained in a TED Talk in 2012, this fascination developed initially in his childhood when he was required to take afternoon naps such that:

> There I was, lying there in this tiny space, hot, dark, claustrophobic, matchbox-sized, behind my eyes, but it was really weird, like, after this went on for days, weeks, months, that space would get bigger and darker and cooler until I really looked forward to that half an hour of enforced immobility and rest, and I really looked forward to going to that place of darkness.[16]

For Gormley, this space, 'of the darkness of the body', he has come to see 'as the place of imagination, of potential … It is objectless. There are no things in it. It is dimensionless. It is limitless. It is endless.'[17]

This has affected his perception of art as he has explained:

> If minds live in bodies, if bodies live in clothes, and then in rooms, and then in buildings, and then in cities, do they also have a final skin, and is that skin perceptual? The horizon. And is art about trying to imagine what lies beyond the horizon?[18]

Thus, he has concluded:

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[14] Chambers, Black Artists in British Art, p. viii.
[15] ibid, p. ix.
[16] Antony Gormley 'Sculpted Space, Within and Without' [online video], 2012, *TED Talk*, https://www.ted.com/talks/antony_gormley_sculpted_space_within_and_without/up-next (accessed 22 October 2017).
[17] ibid.
[18] ibid.

> For me, art is not about objects of high monetary exchange. It's about reasserting our first-hand experience in present time. As John Cage said, 'We are not moving towards some kind of goal. We are at the goal, and it is changing with us. If art has any purpose, it is to open our eyes to that fact.'[19]

Interestingly, apart from his renowned work on bodily figures being placed at outdoor locations around Britain with all day access (such as the 100 figures placed in the sea and shoreline in Liverpool,[20] or the lonely figure in the seas at Margate that can only be seen as low-tide approaches[21]), Gormley has also become an advocate for 'minority exposure'. As he explained during an interview on BBC Radio 4 in 2016, 6.7 million people visited the British Museum in 2015, however, the works from the Caribbean and other minorities are under-represented. He noted that tribal objects should talk to the living, and temporary exhibitions are not adequate so there is a need for dedicated galleries to display other cultures.[22]

Of the various artists I have considered for my exegesis, the views of Gormley have resonated with my practice on two levels. First, his view about the body. In particular, he conceptualises theories questioning the perception of our skin as more than a mediator and not just about the eyes looking outwards. His concept alludes to the infinity of our minds and the skin transcending forms in relation to the world in which we live. It is also about inner-feelings and how touch can transform us. On a second level, Gormley has struck a chord when highlighting the fact of the under representation of non-European cultures in museums. Hence, my work with the Taino is about interpreting new ways of relaying history through the body and attempting to bring to the fore works that have been obscured from public view.

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[19] ibid. Gormley, in his TED talk, was paraphrasing Cage who said 'I found through Oriental philosophy, my work with Suzuki, that what we are doing is living, and that we are not moving toward a goal but are, so to speak, at the goal constantly and changing with it, and that art, if it is going to do anything useful, should open our eyes to this fact.' See Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 2nd edn, Routledge, New York & London, 2003, pp. 106-107.

[20] A. Gormley, 'Another Place, Crosby Beach, Merseyside, England, 2005 – 2006', *Antony Gormley*, [website], 2006, http://www.antonygormley.com/show/item-view/id/2286/type/solo#p0 (accessed 22 October 2017).

[21] 'Another Time for Margate', *Turner Contemporary,* [website], 2017, https://www.turnercontemporary.org/exhibitions/another-time-for-margate-folkestone (accessed 22 October 2017)

[22] A. Gormley, 'Antony Gormley: Missing Continents at the British Museum', *Seriously*, BBC Radio 4, 8 September 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07tc1rc (accessed 10 September 2016).

**Simryn Gill**

Where Gormley conceptualised in scale, using the human form through multiple sculptures of the male body and in relation to space and the environment, by contrast Gill collects found small objects, both natural and manmade, to conceptualise how we are perceived in the world. Through that collecting and assemblage of found objects there is a notion of transforming the object's original story, making it an empty vessel, until we project our story onto it. The remnants of other people's lives are renewed by another's handling, and this becomes a haptic and tactile process that transforms both the object and the salvager. Gill also examines her perception of relationships to the everyday object and states:

> If you think of yourself as not being substantial, then you will understand yourself and the world at large, through the things around you, by comparing, by holding them next to each other and yourself, above and below, besides, together, arranged and jumbled . . . If you are empty, nothing, you only exist through the things around you, and if these things shift in their qualities and values, in relation to you, each other and other things, then the sense of self is always moving too. And the other way around: when I am the vector that is moving, then the things around me change, and my relationship to them too, how I do or don't connect, comprehend, sympathise. These are the un-static beacons we use to navigate through daily being.[23]

Gill reminds us of how fragile or inconsequential we are as beings, indicating we should let go of our egos. We are somewhat insignificant but for the objects and things that shape our daily lives, and equally we impact on those things. Interestingly, as I absorb what is being stated, it has a 'quietening' effect on me. Her words seem to free my mind in a sudden realisation like an epiphany. As I look up, around my desk beyond the computer strewn with a paraphernalia of domestic things: pencils, books, tea cups, plate, printer, stapler, headphones, table lamp, tissues, spectacles; the chair, the blanket that covers my legs to keep me warm whilst writing in the cold studio. These things were all invisible until I make contact and realise that they are telling a story; they are making a statement of my temporal life during the writing of this chapter of my exegesis.

In referencing her jewellery making, Gill annotates domesticity. The repetition of women's monotonous daily lives coincides with the repetition of stringing pearls. She

[23]C. de Zegher., *Here art grows on trees: Simryn Gill*, Australia council for the Arts in Association with, Mer Paper Kunsthalle, Gent, 2013, p. 36.

states, ‘the stringing of pearls is much like the daily succession of household events: when you make up the bed to find some clothes on the floor, which you hang in the dresser’.[24] Her commentary reads as performance art, as it poetically discusses the making of pearls from torn strips of pages rolled into beads from a book, just as we perform art in the ‘everyday’. The pedestrian rituals that we endeavour are comparable to Mah Rana's ‘Toknot’ where as noted earlier, she describes 'tying a knot would seal “actual experience”’.[25]

Both Gill and Rana, work with repetition and multiples to not only create forms, but to also embed meaning for themselves through the specifics of their materials. For me, this process has been a meditative one. By closely punching repeated fine points on flat sheets of metal and marking paper, I conceptually evoke the notion of a lost community. What evolves from the metal process is a textured surface, fine burrs that act as friction against the skin. Indeed, this process of ‘presencing’ has been observed by Heidegger as ‘bringing-forth’,[26] a theory I discuss in Chapter 2. The completed performance of making results in an iridescent visual effect, as well as a physical reminder of touch to the subject when the object is worn.

**Julie Gough**

Arguably, parts of Australian heritage have a strong visual presence through their Indigenous art and practices. But globally, distantly far from each other, the lack of Indigenous voices is still problematic, aligning with the fate bestowed on the Caribbean during colonial invasion. One question that needs to be asked, however, is how do smaller populations of minority cultures foster visibility and engagement with a ‘past’ history from an art perspective? For example, in critiquing historical relationships within museums, Tasmanian artist, writer and curator, Julie Gough, notes:

> Museums and Tasmanian Aboriginal people are entangled in a big knot, often of contention. Our objects have been held away from us, without the air from our lungs, the touch of our skin, to keep them real. They have been borne, across

[24] ibid, p. 43.
[25] Rana, p. 29.
[26] M. Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, in D. Krell (ed.), *Martin Heidegger Basic writings: from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964) (His works)*: London, Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008, pp. 311-341. For a discussion of ‘presencing’ see p. 316 and ‘bringing-forth’ see p. 318. Krell provides a precis of the chapter at pp. 307-310 and refers to ‘presencing’ at p. 309.

> the seas and straits, to museums of disquiet to perform functions unintended by their makers.[27]

Gough's quote not only sums up the present-day complex relations between museums and the withholding of traditional cultural objects but also the physical and psychological problems generated by detachment. Responding to some of these issues through her art practice she uses the provenance of materials from Tasmania. With her chosen materials, she describes a haptic relationship that codifies and directs her sculptural jewellery: 'Like many objects of memory this necklace is not quite that – it is performing out of place, out of size, bereft of a body to carry it'.[28] As a necklace, made up of a large chain of coal, the literal components reflect and are emblematic of her present-day existence. Through touching she describes her experiences and these narratives play a role; an episode revealing the controversy in her history:

> The feel of coal in my hands is compelling. Somehow familiar, I feel the pull to collect, sort, drill and thread these giant necklaces. The blackness of the coal dust is somehow disconcerting given it is not the warm charcoal of a fireplace but the darkest coldest blackness of our ancient island's core. The weight of a coal necklace becomes more than the personal, it seems to be the shared load of our history, I walk with each one around my shoulders once it is made, before it is consigned to a crate.[29]

Whilst the familiarity of a chain suggests the embodiment of a space on the body, the works leave a defining effect on both the maker during the making as well as on the viewer while encountering its presence in an open gallery. Gaining access to material objects through our senses makes us aware of the world, and helps to make sense of our world. In return, the objects speak to us. As reaffirmed by Gough, 'visual art can successfully present and transmit complex historical events in another medium than the usual western text based format at a site far-distant from the sites of the original events depicted.[30]

### 1.3 The Method

Skin, as the largest organ on the body, can act as a receptor, receiving and giving signals. Touching another being or an object such as the sculptures in the museum is a

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[27] J. Gough, 'Being collected and keeping it real', in Amanda Jane Reynolds (ed.), *Keeping Culture: Aboriginal Tasmania,* National Museum of Australia Press, Canberra, 2006, p. 10.
[28] J. Gough, 'Bind', 'About', 'Collection', *Art Gallery of NSW,* [website], https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/349.2008.a-c/, 2008 (accessed 18 November 2017).
[29] ibid.
[30] J. Gough, Dark Valley, Van Diemen's Land, 'Abstract', *James Cook University,* [website], https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/19931/, 2015 (accessed 16 November 2017).

codified way of communicating without speaking, hearing or seeing. Using my body as a medium, to receive and give messages, I can add to my personal history whilst drawing upon these unique objects. Jan Svankmajer describes it thus: 'While touching, we project a sensation outwardly, outside of us; at the same time we perceive it subjectively, on our skin. It means that touch can play an important role in overcoming the opposition of Object-Subject.'[31]

As I progress through this exegesis to encounter the Taino sculptures which are steeped in both Caribbean and European history, my personal narrative of connecting through touch to my obscure heritage unfolds from object to subject in a form of autoethnography. According to Ellis and Bochner:

> Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.[32]

Ellis and Bochner note that autoethnography is 'usually written in first-person voice . . . appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought and language'.[33] In my research, touch is central to my autoethnographic approach. As Svankmajer has explained, touch 'retained primarily a certain "primitive" connection with the world' and that 'the instinctive experiences of tactile perception will always throw us back to the deepest layers of our unconscious'.[34] He concludes with a position that is closely aligned to my practice, noting that 'touch could well be the very sense most suitable for the functions of modern art'.[35]

This exegesis is constructed through theoretical and practiced-based research, examining innovative ways of documenting new relationships between obscured historical objects and corporeal experiences. By incorporating autoethnography as part

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[31] J. Svankmajer, *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art*, London & New York, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014, p. 2.
[32] C. Ellis and A.P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity' in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds), Sage Publications, London, 2000, p. 739.
[33] ibid, p. 739.
[34] Svankmajer, p. 2.
[35] ibid.

of my creative process, I can act upon intuitive methods, emotions and processes.[36] I can evaluate my personal history and lived experiences, connecting these with aspects of theoretical research. As my body is used for direct experiences, when combined with art practice research, it provides the conceptual framework for this discourse.

Unless they are discussed in public domains such as local schools and/or brought to esteemed attention in certain institutions, these rare Taino objects are not accessible to wider audiences, including audiences of Jamaican descent. Such objects play a crucial role in demonstrating a former period in which Jamaica was free from colonial servitude. More importantly, they connect with me as a contemporary artist who belongs to the history from which these objects come. My direct haptic experience with these objects displays the physical manifestations of a cultural identity in visual and material form for contemporary audiences as well as myself. My jewellery, objects and practice aim to speak on their behalf.

As a Black-British resident in Australia, representation and identity have become recurring themes within my jewellery making practice. Dispersed family and heritage have featured prominently in my work as design concepts, which function to narrate the invisibility and inaccessibility of my heritage and identity due to distance, time and space. Arguably, the process of making, and the movement of bricolage[37] within that process, brings me closer to family. A combination of emotion, intuition, practice and design processes helps to formulate my ideas around the subtext of distance and longing.

In my practice, I use both traditional and non-traditional materials metaphorically, such as the use of red textiles to infer blood ties, and repetitive symbols to indicate the continuity of family and relationships. The jewellery itself is a metaphor for relationships, being worn around the neck to emphasise the connection of mind and body. Body movements cause the sound of metals tingling against each other, thus evoking both memory and presence.

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[36] Ellis and Bochner, p. 737.

[37] According to Carole Gray and Julian Malins, '[bricolage] does not mean that the researcher is in any way an amateur, haphazard or is any less rigorous than a counterpart undertaking quantitative study', but that the researcher 'produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation'. C. Gray and J. Malins, *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, England, 2004, p. 74.

Similarly, my work demonstrates a haptic tactility with the form. The process of manually centre-punching hard surfaces of base metals – bronze, copper, nickel and silver – galvanises the haptic tactility during construction through to the final work, which refers to the many faces of family.

To develop this topic and understand the use of jewellery methods within this context of diaspora and heritage, the scope of my research begins its focus on three carved Taino wooden idols from Jamaica (Figure 1). These objects, although 'revered', praised for their craftsmanship and exhibited overseas, are not part of the British museum's permanent display collection; rather, they are in an off-site storage house near Haggerston station in the East End of London.

During my research, I have come across multiple spellings but with similar definitions for objects akin to the featured Taino idols. As spiritual, wooden ceremonial objects, they are collectively classified under the umbrella term as Zemis [38] [39] or Cemi.[40] Online, in their catalogue collection, The British Museum describe the objects respectively as 'Male figure', 'Carved figure of bird-man spirit' and 'Carved canopied cohoba stand in the form of a figure', as noted in captions above.[41] However, Ostapkowicz who has researched and written extensively, documents the three objects in an abbreviated form, naming them as 'Birdman', 'Anthropomorph' and 'Canopied Cemi'.[42]

From a visual perspective, I found that these given names aptly characterise the nature of the sculptures. For the purposes of this research, therefore, I will continue to use the same names as Ostapkowicz. When I discuss the carved sculptures collectively as a group, throughout this project I will refer to them as the 'Jamaican Cemis'.

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[38] N. Saunders and Gray, D. 'Zemís, trees, and symbolic landscapes: Three Taíno carvings from Jamaica.' *Antiquity*, 70 (270), 1996, pg.801-812. doi:10.1017/S0003598X00084076

[39] S. Lovén, 'XII. Religion' in L. Antonio Curet (ed.), *Origins of the Tainan Culture, West Indies*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2014, pp.578-579. Available from: ProQuest E-book Central (accessed 19 October 2016)

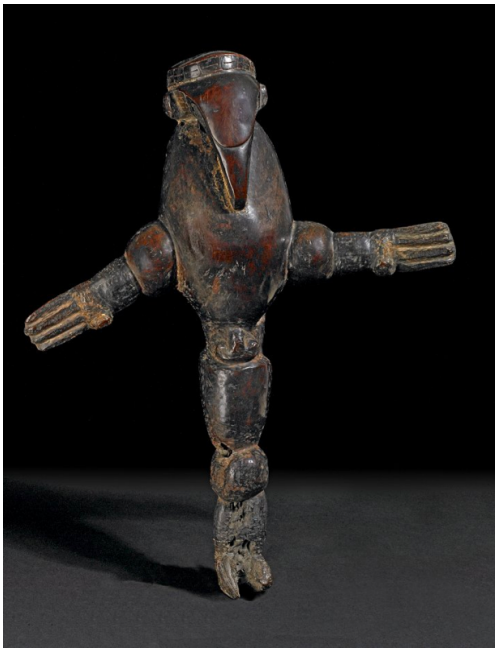
[40] B.W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 44-45.

[41] The British Museum, 'Isaac Alves Rebello', Collection online.

[42] J. Ostapkowicz, 'The Sculptural Legacy of the Jamaican Taíno: Part 1: The Carpenter's Mountain Carvings', *Jamaica Journal*, 35 (3), 2015, pp. 57-59. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280155657_The_Sculptural_Legacy_of_the_Jamaican_Taino_Part_1_The_Carpenter%27s_Mountain_Carvings DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2613.6162 2015-07-20 T 14:43:10 UTC (accessed 9 July 2016).

Carved canopied cohoba stand in the form of a figure. (Height 39cm, Width 17cm, Depth 17cm)

Male figure. (Height 104cm, Width 52cm, Depth 15cm)



Carved figure of a bird-man spirit. (Height 87cm, Width 70cm, Depth 22cm)

Figure 1: Jamaican Taino Wooden Deities. Collective date range: 800-1500? The British Museum.[43]

[43] The British Museum, 'Isaac Alves Rebello', Collection online, *The British Museum,* [website], http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx?people=36193&peoA=36193-3-18, British Museum, 2017 (accessed 22 July 2014 – 1 January 2018). See Ostapkowicz, et al., 2013, for a more detailed analysis of the dimensions and dates of these Taino objects.

## 1.4 The Outcome

Throughout practice as a 'designer maker', one does not just enter a studio and commence constructing an object. Obviously, there must be influences and concepts that guide a designer. This research is heavily embedded in the story of the Taino, drawing upon both historical and archaeological works, as well as my own fieldwork examining three objects in the British Museum.

The western institution of museums had not been established during Pre-Columbian history, so the intention of the Taino designers of such objects was never for them to be held on display behind glass.[44] Therefore, it is my intention as a jewellery/object designer that such objects are brought to life through contemporary reinterpretation such that their visual language continues into the twenty-first century.

My hope is that the outcome of my research will also assist in a re-evaluation and celebration of Jamaican heritage and culture. My contemporary interpretations and connections with the Taino objects will be expressed through the context of jewellery and an installation of multiple objects that speak of connections with obscured histories. I am interested in realising a continued haptic tactility of Jamaican history, celebrating the Jamaican Taino in an exhibition incorporating opportunities for public participation – a connection through the experience of sight and touch. The body, not just the eyes alone, will be in contact with the exhibits to establish a notion of genuine connection in a physical space.

[44] 'Increasingly there are artists whose jewellery does not take the fixed form of an object, but who use the languages of jewellery to pass comment or critique. . . . However, the customary environments where cultural knowledge is generated, galleries and museums (of history and of contemporary art), rarely present a forum to accommodate these objects.' K. Findeis, 'Locating Author Jewellery: A Taxonomy of Contemporary Objects', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2008, pp. 4-5. It is through these means that I see the jeweller–as–author recounting culture through the objects they produce.

## CHAPTER 2 - CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

### 2.1 Taino Culture

Jamaica's contribution to music, sport, performing arts and cuisine is widely appreciated, but its innovations in the field of art and design have received little attention. While there has been a recent revival of interest in the heritage of the Jamaican Tainos who inhabited the island pre-slavery, a re-evaluation of Jamaican heritage and its place and influence on local, international and global design is still lacking. In some ways, the popularisation of Jamaican culture in the form of reggae music and the canonical status of Bob Marley has, arguably, monopolised the scope of the arts for the Caribbean.

This project attempts to not only address this general lack of awareness of Jamaican art, but also to research how the phenomenology of contemporary jewellery can assist to transcend this lack of awareness. As a jewellery and object maker inspired by history, I am concerned that in an increasingly globalised environment, the pre-western documented history of minority groups is being lost to present-day generations. The identity of where one's culture fits into a global history can go far to support minority representation within the arts.

This chapter will function as a contextual review in which I draw attention to recently 'discovered' objects and symbols created by the Jamaican Taino people; key figures of Jamaican history. The Jamaican Cemis crafted from wood many centuries ago, are remarkable objects known as deities that represent gods or ancestors 'associated with natural forces'.[45] They have survived through repeated European conquests and environmental degradation.[46] A wide range of issues that directly affect individuals and communities, often becomes the context of an artist's motivation. To make sense of the political, sociological or cultural world we inhabit, concerns within these contexts are explored by artists using theoretical frameworks as a means to make comment from and within their art.

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[45] F. Bercht, et al., *Taino: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, The Monacelli Press, New York, 1997, p. 23.

[46] O. Evelyn and R. Camirand, 'Forest cover and deforestation in Jamaica: An analysis of forest cover estimates over time', *The International Forestry Review*, 5 (4), 2003, p. 354. Available from: JSTOR (accessed 26 November 2017).

With the need to connect to and make visible my obscured Caribbean heritage, the 'haptic experience' becomes a conceptual framework for imparting knowledge, and is integral to my project. This framework is explored in The British Museum, which, as its Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-17 notes:

> The British Museum was founded in 1753. Its aim is to hold for the benefit and education of humanity a collection representative of world cultures ('the collection'), and ensure that the collection is housed in safety, conserved, curated, researched and exhibited.[47]

The British Museum has various roles, however, for the purpose of this project and its relation to the Jamaican Cemis, the museum can be defined as a space that creates an 'in-between'. That is, the object's origin is one country, but the object permanently resides in another country. Whilst the museum facilitates the body of an object, arguably, the object's essence oscillates between its place of creation (Jamaica) and a different place (Britain), where it has been transported in order to reside in a museum. It is as though the objects are not quite fixed to their foreign abode but suspended in between. Within this space, I encounter the complexities of the disconnect between what is known, conserved and accessible, and what is unknown and inaccessible through our historical colonial legacies, ancient histories and the present.

In noting recommendations for preserving and translating Indigenous cultures from the past, Andrea Richards states 'governments of many developing countries, is [sic] more concerned about managing unemployment, crime and other challenges of a growing population than about understanding the Jamaican Tainos and their role in our history. Culture, at times, is perceived as expendable in the context of development'.[48] This important observation highlights a common thread in many economically struggling post-colonial countries.

Additionally, Richards views the general public's involvement as vital to overcoming this problem, believing that an educated public constitutes possibly the largest body of

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[47] The British Museum, 'The British Museum, Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2017', *The British Museum*, p. 3, http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/BM-report-and-accounts-2016-2017.pdf (accessed 4 January 2018). Additionally, the footnote to this statement explains: 'This statement represents a modern expression of the objectives of the BM set out in the British Museum Act 1753.'

[48] A. Richards, 'The Impact of Land–Based Development on Taino Archaeology in Jamaica', in Lesley-Gail Atkinson (ed.), *The Earliest Inhabitants: The Dynamics of the Jamaican Taino*, University of the West Indies Press, Kingston, 2006, p. 85.

potential preservationists.[49] With this in mind she argues that 'until individuals are properly educated about the Tainos, their culture (and its contribution to the Jamaican culture) and the importance of the Taino legacy, the significance of the loss of Taino sites will not be understood'.[50]

My project argues for the potential of a counter-hegemonic approach to this history of Indigenous dispossession, a complex conversation relevant to such countries as Australia, Latin America and the Caribbean. As a practising artist, I am neither an anthropologist nor an archaeologist. Nevertheless, I have to use anthropological and historical material as a pathway to acknowledging and translating the past. Through these fields of enquiry, I am able to create a pathway into this material for other visual artists.

### 2.1.1 Taino relationship with haptic materials

When examining two of the three Jamaican Cemis I have termed 'Anthropomorph' and 'Birdman' (see Chapter 1), in addition to their wooden bodies, I noted each had various materials embedded into them. These additional materials included 'teeth' made of carved inlaid shell in the mouth areas of both figures. These are described in more detail in Chapter Three. Other carved out areas on the bodies of the figures included eyes and cheek areas, however, these did not contain similar embedded materials. In Ostapkowicz's findings, she has noted that 'the figure's cheek grooves still feature a resinous substance in the furrows, presumably used to adhere a colorant, or shell, or perhaps gold inlays'.[51] If such materials were there at some stage, they are no longer present today.

I can only envision the Anthropomorph had gold inlay set within its eyes or embedded in both cheeks stream-lined on either side of the head. If such was the case, then the combined contrast of all three materials, shell for teeth and gold streaming from the eyes set into a dark wood body, may have mesmerised its audience. The whole figure 'coming to life' as the gold metal reflected its patina, presumably animating the mythical. According to Newman, the Caribbean Taino's local term for the gold metal

[49] ibid, p. 86.
[50] ibid.
[51] Ostapkowicz, 2015, p. 57.

alloy was 'guanín gold' (Figure 2) and was used as an integral part of their social engagement.[52]

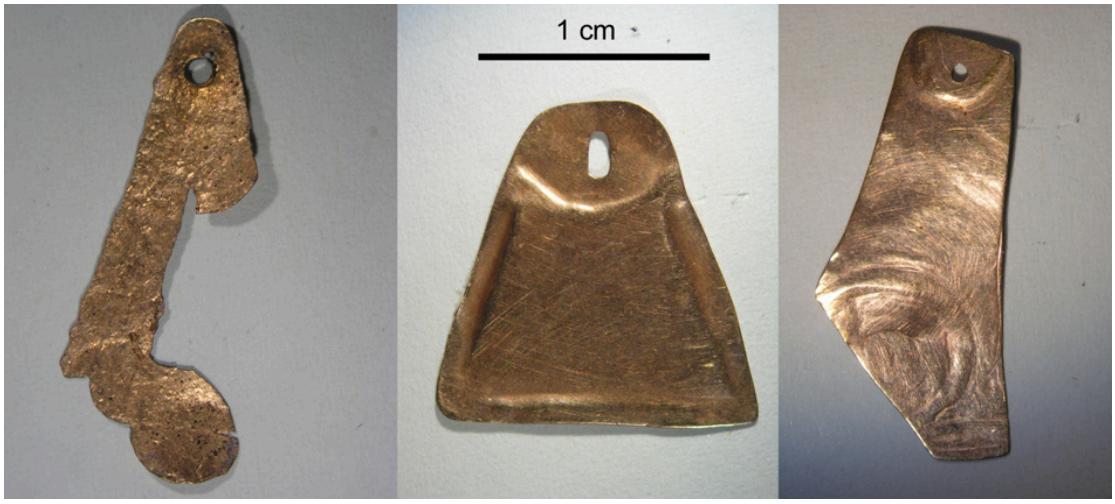


Figure 2: Examples of Guanín metal as sourced from Cuba.[53]

As a process of their man-made practices, there are some similar outcomes in Western art, that is, what Tuchman has termed as 'Spiritual in Art'[54] in the development of abstract painting and sculpture from the 18th century. This is where artists explored mysticism, developing and moving away from describing the reality of objects and their representational content. The outcomes involve a belief in what cannot be seen without an intervening medium. It is variations of mixed materials composing art that makes up the medium, coming together as a composition to engage our emotions. As an alloy, guanín shares these characteristics. McEwan describes the guanín, metal alloy as tactile 'an assault on the senses' and explained it thus:

> The chain of metaphors associated with things imbued with guanín (not just the metal alloy) all suggest that its referent objects are meant to stage a veritable assault on the neural senses of the ordinary Taino: it is viewed with awe, smelled pungently, tasted strongly and distinctively, and touched in order to be able to grasp and sense the power and knowledge that comes from what is esoteric and

[52] 'tumbaga: An alloy of gold and copper . . . made and used by the Indians of the Andes, Central America, and Mexico for many articles of pre-columbian jewelry. . . . Local terms for the metal were 'guanín gold', 'caricoli', and 'karakoli'. H. Newman, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Jewelry*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1981, p. 313.

[53] M. Martinón-Torres, et al., 'Metallic encounters in Cuba: The technology, exchange and meaning of metals before and after Columbus', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 31 (4), 2012, p. 446. Available from Elsevier (accessed 4 November 2017).

[54] 'Visual artists working in the past one hundred years have been involved with these ideas and belief systems, and their art reflects a desire to express spiritual, utopian, or metaphysical ideas that cannot be expressed in traditional pictorial terms.' M. Tuchman, 'Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art', cited in E. Weisberger, *The Spirit in Art Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, California, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1987, p.17.

> remote. And it 'talks' or, better, 'speaks' of sacred power. This assault on the senses is meant to overwhelm and overtake, just as power does.[55]

Citing this passage is important to me as it imaginatively describes an image of traditional practices. It describes the materials as strong symbols of communication, bringing them to
life by overtaking all bodily senses, so that one cannot help but engage. It is also relevant to my own creative process, as it demonstrates that a haptic and tactile encounter imparts a degree of certainty, that something out of the ordinary really exists. Guanín's inherent material qualities communicate specific values, making the senses critical for a response. As Gallace and Spence note, 'the existence of such objects might suggest, then, that the sense of touch played an important role in artistic expression and appreciation (and, more generally, in life) of some of the earliest human cultures'.[56]

Touching, using my senses to embrace objects of culture could, in turn, be understood as an acceptance of who I am in relation to the objects. In some ways, the object gives me significance; it is reciprocal, in that its material has value which projects back to me. For example, my silver jewellery created for this project is heavily dented with fine, raised burrs as texture. Visually the surface looks iridescent, which, when I engage with it, takes my thoughts somewhere else. But on running fingertips or nails over the texture (see Chapter 4), it creates a bodily sensation through haptic tactility between person and jewellery.

In relation to the three Jamaican Cemis that are the focus of my study, the material used in them highlights the differences between the Taino and Western cultures, in particular, how each society has perceived precious metals. Both societies attribute to such metals a particular status, arguably one in more economic terms and the other perceiving them as sanctified, revered and mystical objects as 'essential symbols of authority'.[57] In both cultures, the object being corporeal, visual and textural, instils qualities that we absorb,

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[55] C. McEwan, *PreColumbian Gold: technology, style and iconography*, London, British Museum Press, 2000, p. 214.
[56] A. Gallace and C. Spence, 'The neglected power of touch: what the cognitive neurosciences can tell us about the importance of touch in artistic communication', in P. Dent (ed.), *Sculpture and Touch*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Surrey, 2014, p. 109.
[57] J. Ostapkowicz, 'Taino Wooden Sculpture: Duhos, Rulership and the Visual Arts in the 12th-16th Century Caribbean', PhD Thesis, University of East Anglia, 1998, p. 535.

experiencing its nuances with our bodily senses. This is interesting for my practice, as I hope to emulate my experiences with the Jamaican Cemis in the British Museum into a space where my interpretations, mounted in an installation, can be physically encountered. It would be productive at some point to note any public interactions. This would perhaps be useful for a future project, in particular, for those that want to relate to their heritage through such objects.

Concerned with the object and its relationship to tactile haptic connections, I am aware that aspects of my work reflect the term 'relational aesthetics', an 'expression advocated by influential French critic Nicolas Bourriaud in the mid-1990s'.[58] Since that time Bourriaud's theory has evolved. As Nadja Rottner has explained, 'Bourriaud adopted the term … in the mid-1990s to refer to the work of a selected group of artists, and what he considers their novel approach to a socially-conscious art of participation: an art that takes as its content the human relations elicited by the artwork'.[59] Bourriaud defined relational art as 'a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.'[60] Some of what Bourriaud has described, is, in part, what I am trying to express with objects that have a legacy concerning heritage. My practice argues that just as there is performative power in person to person human relations, there is also power in the object through direct touch.

Indeed, as Fiona Candlin, a lecturer in museum studies, has argued in her work on sculpture and touch in 2014, 'at no point does Bourriaud discuss the detail of these tactile encounters or countenance the possibility that tactual encounters may be inequitable, oppressive or alienating'.[61] I can add to Candlin's concerns in that the act of touch can be seen as an over-simplified response to a complex issue when using the body to interrogate relationships. I also note the complexity touch engenders, for example, 'How is the object being touched?'[62] However, these complexities suggest that there are much broader issues to consider, many of which are outside the scope of this

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[58] C. McDaniel., and J. Robertson, *Themes of Contemporary Art*, 3rd Edn, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012, p. 32.
[59] N. Rottner, 'Relational aesthetics', *Grove Art Online*, [Online], Oxford University Press, 2 June 2011, https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T2093934 (accessed 30 December 2017).
[60] N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses Du Reel, France, 2002, p.113.
[61] F. Candlin, 'Embracing stone, holding brushes: differentiating touch in the Unit One photographs', in P. Dent (ed.), *Sculpture and Touch*, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014, p. 181.
[62] ibid, p.181.

project. Rather, my practice is concerned with why and who does the touching, and what is being touched, and how this serves to foster a post-colonial dialogue.

Tangible objects, such as the wooden Jamaican Cemis and their embedded elements of gold and shell 'establish links between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and connect with the supernatural beings who occupied the spirit world'.[63] Using scale, colour and movement, these objects were supported by oral stories contextualised by the mythical 'Guahayona', the Taino cultural hero.[64] I imagine after attentively listening, viewing and/or watching to instinctively want to touch and engage with these objects, a natural response in order to grasp the reality of what was being conveyed in the context of their environment.

Whilst writing and considering these object encounters, I come back to considering three random objects sitting on my desk (Figure 3). I ponder about what distracts and compels me to reach for a specific object, opposed to others in similar shape and size. There is an eraser and a wooden bead sitting next to a clay ball (which really isn't a ball as it takes the conical shape of my cupped palms).[65] I am surprised, constantly drawn to the clay, rather than the other objects residing on my desk. The clay is cool in my hand but so is the wood which has less weight. Texturally the eraser feels more pleasing than all the other objects but does not have the same 'pull' as the clay object. My wooden bead has been shaped from raw timber so that I have invested time in its finish. But I also remember when machine-sanding the timber, for health and safety reasons I had to wear a great deal of protective gear, so that perhaps I feel removed from it due to the process through which I made it.

At my desk, I repeatedly pick up the clay ball, balancing the points between thumb and forefinger. Then I set it back down to watch it wobble, following the contours of its shape, until it quickly stills. This wobble happens when I accidentally knock it, as if its reminding me of its presence, unlike the other objects. Maybe the attraction to the clay ball is because I created it from its raw form, but I suspect it has more to do with the playful response I get when it wobbles. Thus, like a flickering shadow, the glint off

[63] Higman, p. 43.
[64] Bercht, et al., p. 78.
[65] I had made a studio sample from hand-rolling clay and remember enjoying the pliability of its raw form. From this connection to material, I intimately know its make-up, the dry smoothness of material, its colour, unique shape and weight.

shiny metal or an animated moving object, although small, inclines me to think that a physical object vies for attention, leading me to reach out to engage with it.

It is arguable, therefore, that an object that contains more information within it to attract each of our bodily senses is more likely to become engaged with those senses, possibly ending with a physical touch.

Figure 3: Marcia Swaby. Random table objects, 2017. Photograph: M. Swaby.

### 2.1.2 Taino Historical Background

The historian, Barry W. Higman, gives an account of Jamaican history between 7200 BCE and CE 1492 and states that the Tainos populated the island of Jamaica from 600 CE; yet the Taino were decimated in the space of about one hundred years from the arrival of Columbus in 1492 to the beginning of the seventeenth century, when they were replaced by slaves of African descent and later indentured labourers from India. [66] So production of original Taino art works of all kinds virtually stopped by the late 1600s, leaving a void in art history that produced the opportunity for me to question what it means to make Taino art today. Therefore, the three Jamaican Cemis used in

[66] Higman, p. 97.

this study provide a tenuous yet tangible link to the Taino identity, and my connection to my heritage.

What has been emerging over the last fifteen to twenty years is that Taino ancestry has not been 'wiped out'.[67] Indeed, this is primarily due to the assistance of DNA testing 'is shedding new light on the controversy', such as the 2002 work of University of Puerto Rico biologist Dr. Juan C. Martinez Cruzado, whose island-wide DNA tests of 800 people 'found that 61% had mitochondrial DNA of the original indigenous population'.[68] This is not to say that there are not opposing views.[69]

Thus, in particular parts of the Caribbean, there is a high recognition of Indigenous ancestry, so Jamaicans have been slowly rediscovering their history.[70] Apart from the surviving people with 'Taino' heritage in their DNA, there is also a growing recognition within Jamaica of Taino artefacts. I intend for this project to create objects that celebrate that early heritage. As Higman has noted:

> Equally important the Caribbean witnessed wonderful examples of the resilience of the human spirit, in direct opposition to the harshness of the exploitative regimes put in place by imperialism and representing positive responses to the opportunities that even the most brutal systems permit the creative.[71]

By way of background, the next section will give a brief history of colonisation of Jamaica, so that the depth and duration of colonising practices, and their effect on the Taino, can be more broadly understood.

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[67] *The Smithsonian Consortia*, 'Reclaiming Identity: Are the Taino, the first Native people to make contact with Christopher Columbus in 1492, really extinct?', *The Smithsonian Consortia,* n.d., citing Ranald Woodaman, Exhibitions and Public Programs Director at the Smithsonian Latino Center, http://consortia.si.edu/story/feature-story/reclaiming-identity (accessed 4 January 2018); Woodaman states 'Native peoples have a long history in the Caribbean that continues to the present … They were not entirely wiped out within the first 100 years of Spanish colonization …'.

[68] ibid, citing J.C. Martinez Cruzado, 'The Use of Mitochondrial DNA to Discover Pre-Columbian Migrations to the Caribbean: Results for Puerto Rico and Expectations for the Dominican Republic', *KACIKE*: *The Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology*, Special Issue, Lynne Guitar (ed.), 2002, pp. 1-2, https://consortia.si.edu/sites/default/files/MartinezCruzado2002_0.pdf (accessed 4 January 2018).

[69] See, for example, G. Haslip-Viera, 'The Myth of Indigenous Caribbean Extinction: Continuity and Reclamation in Borikén (Puerto Rico)', *Centro Journal*, 24 (1), 2012, pp. 192-199. Review of book of same name by Tony Castanha, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011.

[70] R.M. Poole, 'What became of the Taíno?', *Smithsonian Magazine* (online), October 2011, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/what-became-of-the-taino-73824867/ (accessed 4 July 2014).

[71] Higman, p. 8.

### 2.1.3 Timelines

Noting a more detailed timeline can be found in the Appendices, the changing human occupation of Jamaica, according to archaeological and historical studies, covers four main periods:

1. The population of Jamaica by the Taino from approximately 600AD/CE (Anno Domini/Common Era) until their decimation in the sixteenth century;[72]
2. The arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean in 1492 and Jamaica in 1494, followed by the occupation and settlement by the Spanish imperialists and the destruction of the Taino culture and annihilation of most the people in the early decades of the sixteenth century;[73]
3. The British conquest over the Spanish in the seventeenth century and the subsequent re-population of the island with the British plantocracy using slaves from Africa and later indentured labourers from both 'British' India and China, as well as free settlers from Britain and other countries;[74] and
4. The rise of the Jamaican people in the twentieth century (and reflected in the work of such leading artists as Edna Manley), culminating in Jamaican independence from Britain in the 1962.[75]

The fourth era was followed by a decade of both celebration and upheaval as Jamaicans strove to establish their true identity. Assisted by the work of archaeologists, Jamaicans rediscovered their Taino heritage. This ancestry is reflected in the art and exhibitions in the later decades of the twentieth century, particularly in the 1990s and later.[76]

### 2.1.4 Revival of Taino Culture

I was excited to note that these recent exhibitions of art, sculpture and jewellery pieces gave emphasis to my sense of haptic tactility. It was possible for viewers to not only look, but also touch some of the more robust pieces. In addition, apart from people being prepared to declare their Taino ancestry in more recent times,[77] new genetic linkages have been discovered across Caribbean islands, celebrating that the lineage of the Taino exists today throughout the region.[78]

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[72] I. Rouse, *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*, Yale University Press, New York, 1991, pp. 52-53.
[73] V. Poupeye-Rammelaere, 'Chronology', in P. Archer-Straw, *New World Imagery: Contemporary Jamaican Art*, National Touring Exhibitions (Hayward Gallery), South Bank Centre, London, 1995, pp. 10-14.
[74] K.W. Wesler, 'Jamaica', in Keegan, et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Caribbean Archaeology*, pp. 252-254.
[75] Poupeye-Rammelaere, pp. 11-14.
[76] ibid, pp. 13-14.
[77] P. H. Williams, '"I Am Not Extinct"- Jamaican Taino Proudly Declares Ancestry', *Jamaica Gleaner* (online), 5 July 2014, http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20140705/lead/lead5.html (accessed 22 May 2017).
[78] G. Sheppes, S. Scheibe, G. Suri, & J. Gross, 'Emotion-Regulation Choice', 2011. *Psychological Science*, 22(11), pp. 1391-1396.

According to art historian, Veerle Poupeye-Rammelaere 'the quincentennial celebrations of Columbus's arrival' in the Americas were, 'ignored in Jamaica'; however, the country did participate 'in several overseas art exhibitions organised to mark the occasion',[79] such as the *First Biennial of Painting of the Caribbean and Latin America* exhibition staged by the Museum of Modern Art, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in 1992.[80] Caribbean art historian and curator, Dr Petrine Archer-Straw, noted that 'Jamaica experienced a revival in Taino culture in the wake of' such celebrations; two years later, in 1994, 'in keeping with the notion of recovery', a major exhibition *Arawak Vibrations: Homage to the Jamaican Taino* was held by the National Gallery of Jamaica.[81] According to Archer-Straw, this celebrated the country's first Indigenous people and was also 'the occasion for the first showing of recently excavated Taino artefacts including four striking Arawak Zemis'.[82] As explained in Chapter 1, for the purpose of this project, the term 'Zemis' have been renamed 'Jamaican Cemis'.

As the curator, David Boxer, noted in the exhibition catalogue, the exhibition included 'photographs documenting the five works in the British Museum' (three of which are the subject of this thesis), 'the magnificent work in the Metropolitan Museum in New York', together with 'the three works recently recovered at Aboukir by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust'.[83] A detailed critique of the exhibition was published eight years later in 2002 by Sharon Chacko, an artist and 'a former Fulbright Hayes senior research scholar', reviewing 'the permanent display at the White Marl Arawak Museum … promoted in the news media'; she termed *Arawak Vibrations* 'the premier event of this Taino season'.[84] That the *Arawak Vibrations* exhibition had to rely upon five photographs, while the White Marl Arawak Museum in Spanish Town, Jamaica, displayed two replicas from the British Museum rather than the original carvings, raises

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[79] Poupeye-Rammelaere, pp. 13-14.
[80] ibid., p. 13; and P. Archer-Straw, 'Many Rivers Crossed', in Archer-Straw, 1995, p. 40, endnote 7.
[81] Archer-Straw, 1995, p. 24. Note also that Higman clarifies the term 'Arawak' to refer to a people, not a language: 'The people . . . did speak languages derived from a single language family, Arawakan, and this became attached in the form Arawak, meaning the people rather than the language.' Higman, p. 24.
[82] Archer-Straw, 1995, p. 24.
[83] D. Boxer, *Arawak Vibrations: Homage to the Jamaican Taino*, The National Gallery of Jamaica, Jamaican National Heritage Trust, 1994, p. 4.
[84] S. Chacko, 'Museum Representation of the Taino and Cultural Power in the Columbian Quincentenary', in K.E.A. Monteith and G. Richards (eds), *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom: History, Heritage and Culture*, University of the West Indies Press, Jamaica, 2002, p. 194.

issues of dislocation and ownership noted more generally by Chacko.[85] That is, 'the pre-Columbian heritage remained buried in the scholar's past and secluded in the aesthete's present'.[86]

In reference to the absence of the original carvings of the Jamaican Cemis from the 1994 *Arawak Vibrations* exhibition as well as from the White Marl Arawak Museum, Ostapkowicz explains:

> Plaster casts were made and presented to the Institute of Jamaica in 1939. George A. Aarons suggests that this was in response to a repatriation request from the Jamaican government, although Wayne Modest notes that 'no formal request has ever been made by, or on behalf of the Jamaican people, for [their] restitution'. The casts were on display in the White Marl Arawak Museum from 1965 until its closure, and most recently appeared in the Xaymaca exhibit at the Institute of Jamaica. In 1994, the National Gallery of Jamaica requested the loan of the originals from the British Museum for the exhibit *Arawak Vibrations: Homage to the Jamaican Taíno*, but the stipulated conditions were too prohibitive to proceed. The presence of such historically important carvings in foreign institutions remains a source of controversy on the island. But despite their absence from the island for over two hundred years, they have become icons for Jamaica's indigenous history, providing a frequent point of reference for artistic expression and national identity. [87]

Unsurprisingly, as the original Jamaican Cemis had not been in Jamaica for over two-hundred years, the display of the three 'Aboukir' works from St Ann became a central part of the *Arawak Vibrations* exhibition, as Archer-Straw highlighted: 'Their timely discovery, combined with the celebrations, evinced a wave of nostalgia for the lost peoples, not least within the artistic community'.[88] Indeed, a component of the exhibition that was entitled 'The Modern Response', artists were invited to show works which, according to David Boxer, had been 'inspired or influenced by the "memory" of the lost Taino'.[89] According to Archer-Straw:

> For the most part, the works of the nineteen artists who participated [in The Modern Response] were arcadian, ritualistic and idealised, attempting to reconstruct this community from the fragments of history and imagination, which remained. Such nostalgia suggested a way of circumventing the harsher realities of slavery and colonial rule by harking back to the 'golden age' of Jamaica's indigenous people.[90]

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[85] ibid, pp. 215-216.
[86] ibid, p. 216.
[87] Ostapkowicz, 2015, p. 54.
[88] Archer-Straw, 1995, p. 24.
[89] Boxer, p. 7.
[90] Archer-Straw, 1995, p. 24.

The following year, in 1995, an exhibition titled, *New World Imagery: Contemporary Jamaican Art*, was curated by Archer-Straw.[91] Archer-Straw, herself of Jamaican heritage, selected the works, which were to tour five major centres in England: Bristol, Southampton, London (Hayward Gallery), Birmingham and Nottingham.[92]

It appears to me that during these Jamaican museum exhibitions of the mid-1990s, there was fragmented scholarship of the Indigenous Taino and their exhibited objects. Archer-Straw's critique of 'The Modern Response' exhibition component suggests that the topic in question was new for those artists involved. Hence a literal (and possibly Western influenced) sense of the works became the focus. At the time of the exhibition, staged in Jamaica, noting the dearth of history, my position is that the artists would have had a somewhat Eurocentric viewpoint on the history of Indigenous Jamaica, which could have had an impact on the outcome of works. Also, Jamaica was developing in a post-colonial era where their artistic language at the time was still bounded to colonial antecedents. This is especially so for those older artists whose work from the twentieth century was prior to, and just post-independence. For example, as Boxer stated in the the *Arawak Vibrations* exhibition catalogue that 'an early woodcut by Albert Huie entitled *Discovery* [was] done when Jamaicans hardly questioned what we were taught in the "History Books"'.[93] Such wording in the catalogue text suggests that a colonial authority with a Western gaze was still common at this time.

Today, with greater access to information, technology and scholarship in art practice our discourse has widened to support a counter-argument to enable a re-positioning of our cultural heritage. From my perspective, what is important is not to lose sight of the fact that the exhibition was ground-breaking for Jamaica in that it opened public discussion and other pivotal exhibitions followed. As Archer-Straw noted:

> In the thirty-three years since Independence, Jamaican artists have been slowly orienting themselves away from Eurocentric concerns – and visual imagery that mimicked dominant Western styles – towards a sense of identity more rooted in the Caribbean experience. What unites the artists, despite their obvious differences, is their desire to search out a new visual language which better accords with that experience. . . . Sources such as Africa and Rastafari now vie

[91] ibid, p. 40, endnote 8.
[92] ibid, p. 2.
[93] Boxer, p. 7, noting that on p. 20 Huie's work is cited as circa 1945.

> with dance hall culture, cable television, island politics and a new wave of interest in the Caribbean and the Americas as 'home'.[94]

Archer-Straw concluded her exhibition essay by noting:

> What these eight artists suggest about life in Jamaica and the Caribbean is that 'being' there is not like being anywhere else. . . . These artists are bridging, negotiating, speaking in tongues, in order to communicate with the self as well as with others . . .
>
> Identity is constantly in the making, always in the choosing, rooted in the past but nevertheless forward-looking. Ours is a brave new world born out of trauma. Being here is as much about geography as it is about people. Based on lava, it slips it slides, you shift to accommodate, make space. Stand firm, but not so rigid that you crack when the earth shakes.[95]

Just as Jamaica, and indeed the entire Caribbean, began reassessing its Indigenous past in the 1960s and 1970s, reaching a crescendo in the 1990s, arguably, a similar experience occurred in Australia. Of particular focus was the meaning of land. In 1972, 'the Whitlam Labor Government was elected … having promised land rights for indigenous Australians' and in 1975 'the first successful land rights claim based on traditional title' occurred when 'Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in a symbolic gesture transferred a flow of dry earth from his hand to the hand of a Gurindji elder, Vincent Lingiari'.[96] It was in this environment that Ross Mellick and Nick Waterlow staged the exhibition *Spirit + Place: Art in Australia 1861 – 1996* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, from November 1996 until March 1997.[97]

Sharing colonised commonalities by way of their Indigenous communities that were devastated, in contrast to Jamaica, Australia appeared to enable more awareness of its Indigenous heritage. According to Mellick and Waterlow, between 1984 and 1996 there were 'five major exhibitions which sought to engage aspects of the spiritual in art and which attracted international comment' of which *Spirit + Place* 'was the most recent'.[98] Alluding to Indigenous belief systems and traditional practices they noted that the title of their exhibition, *Spirit + Place*, 'emphasised the curators' intention to join the exhibition firmly to a sense of place, to the material world, and to affirm the notion that

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[94] Archer-Straw, 1995, p. 15.
[95] ibid, p. 39.
[96] Sean Flood, '"The Spirit of Mabo": The Land needs the laughter of children', in R. Mellick and N. Waterlow, *Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1996, p. 105.
[97] R. Mellick, and N. Waterlow, 'The spiritual, the rational and the material: Spirit + Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996', *Artlink*, 18 (1), 1998, pp. 33-37 (accessed 6 April 2014).
[98] ibid, p. 33.

nature and the human are permeated by a spiritual dimension'.[99] Waterlow and Mellick's definition of the 'spiritual' covered themes around theosophy, a philosophy founded on the knowledge of God which originated from a Western context. In the exhibition space of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, it was important to contextualise non-western art with its own social context, so that the gaze for non-western art was not filtered, allowing the art work to be perceived in its true form.

Foregrounding and aligning Indigenous with Australian art works made for a social statement, a dialogue between cultures which was inclusive through working with Indigenous curators. The very act of the exhibition attempted to counter-argue the hegemonic gaze. It encountered everyday themes that could relate to all, individually and collectively. With artworks spanning over a century the exhibition showed how differing cultures defined their identity through shared concepts of artistry and sociological ideas.[100] Ancient and modern themes were combined so that the traditional and avant-garde had equal status. The exhibition was accompanied by a comprehensive publication which featured artists' statements, and became a story-telling visual time-line; the Preface noted the challenges:

> There is also a nagging problem of defining and limiting a subject that has so many and various manifestations – from work involving an overt application of theories of states of being, to underlying sub-themes in work that has quite opposite primary concerns. This publication and the exhibition it accompanies, seek to address some of the diverse facets of this complex subject.[101]

The exhibition appeared radical at this time in Australia, acknowledging the limitations of defining complex subject matters of the differing works. But ultimately, it wanted to change attitudes towards Indigenous people. By bringing artworks to the fore in revealing identities, the collaboration and deconstruction of Indigenous art alongside Western art was an attempt to subvert racism and as a consequence, value Indigenous culture. There were similar underlying approaches to the Jamaican exhibitions that explored identity, each addressing the scale, depth of knowledge of the nuances of respective histories and cultures. In both cases, the engagement of Indigenous curators with resources had an impact in both Jamaica and Australia.

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[99] ibid.
[100] R. Mellick, and N. Waterlow, 'Spirit + Place Revisited', *Artlink*, 22 (2), 2002, p. 58-59 (accessed 2 December 2017).
[101] B. Murphy and P. Paroissien, 'Preface', in R. Mellick and N. Waterlow, *Spirit + Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996*, p. 6.

Similarly, although the intent was to counter Eurocentrism, the 1989 Pompidou Centre exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* was seen to have flaws. Dubious curatorial practices were evidenced, where a group of artists was given a set of rules. Greenberg notes:

> If the case studies point to the difficulties of negotiating change, they also assess how specific exhibition practices can disrupt or self-reflexively comment. . . . For example, the relationships of processes of selection to curatorial theses and their repercussions are raised in each essay. Johanne Lamoureux's analysis of the inconsistency with which two sets of selection criteria were applied, one for Western artists and another for non-Western artists . . . introduces a set of considerations about the resulting unconscious, counter-differentiated, or further-differentiated narratives that can emerge.[102]

What has emerged in identity exhibitions are practices both administrative and curatorial, with displays that persist in a one-sided view. This has a detrimental impact on the visitor. But what has been identified as a strategy that supports the work was 'the inclusion of a reading room with books on cultural theory and politics . . . for it modelled the need to read and think in relation to art, before and after looking'.[103] Strategies of providing background reading, attention to installation, thinking of the viewer and engagement with the space through movement and seating, all support a focus on the work. These are immersive and cognitive encounters, using all senses to include mind and body, so that the patron is fully immersed. To conclude with a strong point and a global view, 'the majority of practitioners, participants, and visitors to exhibitions are "of the West," and it is to them that most of these gestures are oriented.'[104] This curatorial critique is useful because I am ultimately responding to the presence of the Jamaican Cemis within a collection, and hence enacting a form of curation in a very similar way through the staging of my own exhibition.

Returning to my own work with knowledge of these exhibitions, I am more prepared for the challenges of presenting my work and its connection to the Taino, to Indigeneity, to heritage, and to post-colonial and de-colonising practices. In contrast to the museum, I am not exhibiting physical works that belong to authors that are no longer present or attempt to give new meaning or purpose to their ancient works. Galleries and museums

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[102] R. Greenberg, 'Identity Exhibitions: From Magiciens de la terre to Documenta II', *Art Journal*, 64 (1), 2005, p.90 (accessed 5 April accessed).
[103] ibid, p. 91.
[104] I. Rogoff, 'Hit and Run – Museums and Cultural Difference', *Art Journal*, 61 (3), 2002, p. 72.

govern from their own agendas, and this may sometimes be to the detriment of the artist. By contrast, as the contemporary maker and curator installing and directing my own works, I have the power of authorship and the responsibility of knowledge to make current and offer comment to an awareness of the past.

## 2.2 Haptic Visuality

Media theorist and curator Laura Marks has noted that she 'propose[s] that the proximal senses, touch, taste and smell, are not only hedonic but may also be senses of knowledge (epistemology), vehicles of beauty (aesthetics), and even media of ethics.'[105] As human beings participating in a tactile world we can't help but be haptic. The body as a medium is cyclic in that it constantly filters in and gives out information, our primal way of knowing. The air that we breathe, the food that we eat, the beauty and the ugliness in our world, the sights, sounds, smells and touches are all external fodder that make contact with our skin and bodies.

In addition to Marks, Paterson and Dodge have noted, 'touch is integral to every aspect of social action and its symbols and meanings deeply infuse all cultures. It is the most intimate spatial relationship between people, and a vital and subtle communicative practice.'[106] It is our complex shell that protects, carries and navigates us through the world. On a daily basis, we absorb so much that sometimes we are unaware of how it affects us, and equally the signals we give out.

As science, new technology and theory evolve, artists are consistently commentating on the body, finding new ways of reinterpreting how we perceive ourselves in the world. The body is a recipient of, and contributor to, our world; there is so much we can say about our bodies. For example, recently exploring specific parts of the body, Marks uses the term 'haptic visuality' to describe how the eyes function like touch.[107] From a more holistic perspective of the body, archaeologist Christopher Tilley believes one needs to

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[105] L. Marks, 'Thinking Multisensory Culture', *Paragraph*, 31 (2), 2008, p. 125.
[106] M. Paterson and M. Dodge, *Touching Space, Placing Touch*, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2012, p. 7. Available from: ProQuest EBook Central (accessed 24 November 2017) http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unsw/detail.action?docID=1019383.
[107] Marks, 2002, p. xiii.

engage all bodily senses to fully understand our relation to place and artefacts.[108] These two theorists' beliefs build upon the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenologist who wrote at length about visibility and invisibility.[109] In essence, placing of the body is a phenomenon I explore throughout my creative practice, using my hands in relation to the perception of touch. When responding to Merleau-Ponty's question 'what is phenomenology?' Professor Baldwin summarises:

> Phenomenology is to be, first of all, an attempt to 'reawaken' the basic experience of that world which precedes science and cannot be supplanted by science since it is this pre-scientific world that science seeks to rationalise and explain. Because the emphasis here is on the object of this basic experience, the pre-scientific world, phenomenology is not an idealist return to consciousness of our familiar world.[110]

Like excavating with my bare hands as a basic experience, this summary of phenomenology predicates my practice in the search for cultural identity through the means of haptic and tactile processes. Marks, Tilley and Merleau-Ponty, each theorise and practise using the ever-increasing importance of how we use our bodies, with or without technology, as a mediator to understand the world we live in. Accordingly, different parts of the body have differing values. The human body navigates everyday experiences. What is interesting is how artists have compartmentalised various parts, e.g., fingers, eyes, ears, and the specific interactions of these parts with the physical world. The body encounters and decides interpretations by absorbing information through its disparate senses. In the jewellery studio, I naturally work predominantly with my hands and my eyes. What becomes between my body and my materials are my tools. And although it is my hands that takes the balancing weight, the striking-grip and pressure of the tools, it is the eyes working in unison with the hand. The two elements of anatomy and their inherent senses enable each other.

To clarify my position with the need to encounter my history through empowering the sense of touch, Marks states that 'The neglect of touch, smell and taste (and to some extent, hearing) in visual culture descends particularly, of course, from art history, and

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[108] C. Tilley and W. Bennett, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*, Berg, New York, 2004, p. 221.
[109] M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Invisible and the Visible: Followed by Working Notes*, ed. C. Lefort, trans. A. Lingis, North Western University Press, Evanston, 1968.
[110] T. Baldwin (ed.), *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, Routledge, Oxon, 2004, p. 63.

generally, from the tendency to dismiss the proximal senses as inferior that underpins Western thought.'[111] In a book on jewellery, Oppi Untracht notes:

> In the practice of the arts however, we recognize that it is not dextrous manipulative skills alone that produce masterpieces that move our spirit; only by the joint alchemy of mind, imagination, and skill do materials become transmuted into significant works. Without adequate skill, the realization of fantasy is not possible. Through mastery of the operation of tools, and of the techniques their use allows, the craftsperson 'speaks' to materials, and through his or her creation, communicates to others.[112]

I find when specifically working in the jewellery studio, it is the eyes functioning as the hands, and hands functioning as the eyes, but these readily available tools do not work alone. In my quest to communicate with an obscured ancient history, my emphasis is on a process of haptic tactility. I decided for this study that awareness of these historical Jamaican Cemis must be reinterpreted through visual and three-dimensional art, by creating a range of objects and jewellery explored with differing materials. The work has resulted in a combination of post-colonial Western contemporary interpretations and a new dialogue about Taino artefacts.

## 2.3 Heidegger on Technology

The idea of using the whole body, moving beyond the traditional looking, using all senses combined to develop an augmented relationship during the creative process, is also discussed by artist and lecturer in the visual arts, Barbara Bolt, a key thinker who has written extensively and introduces Heidegger's theory into the artist studio. She states 'in the struggle to negotiate the everyday "business of art", many contemporary artists forget that art is a *poietic* (creative production) revealing, not just a means to an end.'[113] Through this revealing, Bolt invites us to look into the nuances of things that we take for granted. Our daily lives can be mechanistic through the routine of everyday where we never stop to 'marvel' and give a thought to the 'thing' in being that is being used. 'The thing in use becomes inconspicuous.'[114] She notes art as a practice gives us an agency, and that 'the privileged place of art arises from its capacity to create a

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[111] Marks, 2008, p. 123.
[112] O. Untracht, *Jewelry: Concepts and technology*, New York, Doubleday, 1985, p. 26.
[113] B. Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 2004, p. 9.
[114] 'Martin Heidegger by Barbara Bolt, Part Two', *Key Thinkers Seminar Series 2009*, SlowTV, University of Melbourne [online video], 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aIqHEtOSZI (accessed 13 October 2017)

clearing, a space where we once again notice what entities are in themselves'.[115] For me in the studio this thought process is a form of restitution, a restoration of something lost or obscured, reconciled by rethinking my materials and the basic use of my hands through touching.

Bolt argues that 'through creative practice, a dynamic material exchange can occur between objects, bodies and images. In the dynamic productivity of material practice, reality can get into images. Imaging, in turn, can produce real material effects in the world'.[116] I can reimagine past events through material effects, appreciating base materials that support my cognitive recollection. My body and hands that kept moving in the museum as I handled the Taino objects can transcend into another being. Those precious moments that culminated into movements can be transformed into something new and tangible, such as Taino inspired jewellery and objects.

Due to the context and the sensitive nature of my project, I want to note that I have been uncomfortable acknowledging and citing Heidegger due to his association with the Nazi regime during the 1930s. However, due to his philosophy and the current discourse on a critical theory of technology, it has been necessary to discuss how his theories relate to my creative art practice. To gain a better understanding of Heidegger's essay on 'The Question Concerning Technology' on human existence and the search for authenticity, I have also referred to Waddington, who concedes that 'reading Heidegger is a lot like trying to navigate a ship through a dense fog.'[117] Nevertheless, Heidegger's twentieth-century writings, revived in a twenty-first-century collection of essays on the essence of things and the use of technology, asks us to *rethink* our role as the hierarchical craftsperson behind technology in the process of making.[118]

As a minority artist exploring obscure objects that are unknown, unlikely or rarely seen in public view, I have used my crafting material as a way of disclosing what is invisible, taking the Jamaican Cemis out of obscurity. Unlike using a sitter for a portrait painting where the subject is alive and real, the challenge is for me to interpret obscure objects,

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[115] ibid.
[116] Bolt, 2004, p. 8.
[117] D. Waddington, 'A Field Guide to Heidegger: Understanding 'The Question Concerning Technology'' *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 37 (4), 2005, pp. 567
[118] ibid, p. 568

imbue them with their true essence and give them presence. One approach is gaining access, being in the presence of and sensing the object, that is, haptic tactility or sculpting through touch as a way of knowing. When this contact occurs, two things happen for me: firstly, the object becomes visible; and secondly, my Western gaze becomes un-masked. This pure sense of knowing carries through into the process of making and choosing the essence of new materials. Additionally, as Heidegger noted, 'according to ancient doctrine, the essence of a thing is considered to be *what* the thing is.'[119] That is how I define Taino ancestry with jewellery and objects, thereby making theory tangible and haptic. Technology is a human activity as a means to my end; for example, in the part of my practice where tools are used, the centre punch and hammer bring reality to the theory through working with base materials such as copper and clay.

Heidegger discusses four 'causes'; everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner:[120]

1. The *causa materialis*, the material, the matter out of which, for example, a sliver chalice is made;
2. the *causa formalis*, the form, the shape into which the material enters;
3. the *causa finalis,* the end, for example, the sacrificial rite in relation to which the chalice required is determined as to its form and matter;
4. the *causa efficiens,* which brings about the effect that is the finished, actual chalice, in this instance, the silversmith.[121]

By using technology in Heidegger's proper manner, I am able to imbue objects with their true essence. In discussing how to defend Heidegger's theory above as a way of thinking behind technology, where the craftsperson takes co-responsibility for presencing something, namely 'bringing-forth'[122] something that was concealed, Waddington claims that 'these tools are useful: indeed, used properly, they might serve to repair the damaged relationship between human beings and the world.'[123] In my first chapter, I noted what I am trying to achieve through my creative practice, what I am trying to 'bring forth'.

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[119] Heidegger in Krell, p. 288.
[120] ibid, p. 289.
[121] ibid, pp. 289-290.
[122] 'Bringing-forth brings out of concealment into un-concealment. Bringing-forth comes to pass only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment. This coming rests and moves freely within what we call revealing [das Entbergen]', ibid., pp. 293-294.
[123] D. Waddington, p. 579.

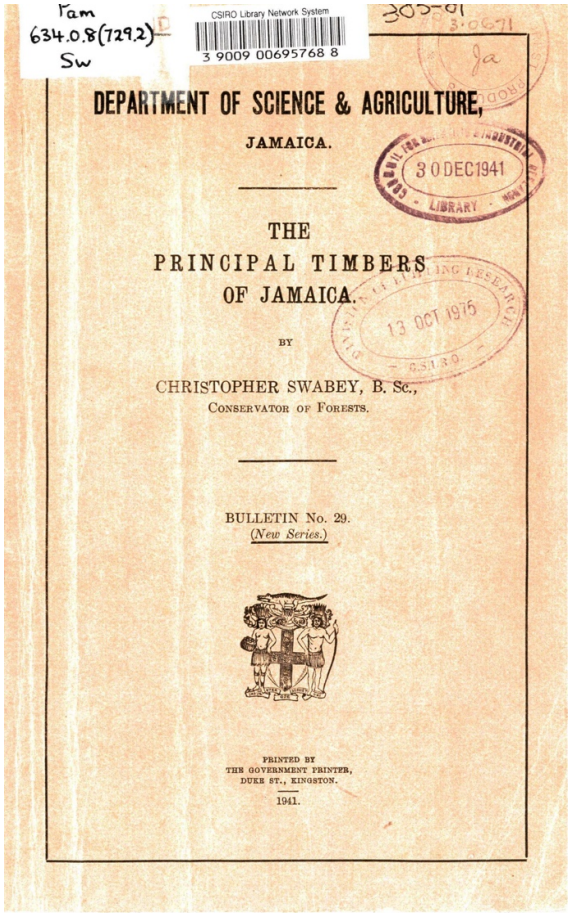
Perhaps I can employ Heidegger's concepts by engaging a purpose, essence manifestation, and tangible outcome through a haptic experience. Hence, I can link ancestral beliefs with haptic outcomes via Heidegger's causes and argument for technology. In other words, the technology becomes the medium between the artist and the outcome. 'The four ways of being responsible bring something into appearance. They let it come forth into presencing *[Anwesen]*. They set it free to that place and so start it on its way, namely, into its complete arrival.'[124]

Having achieved direct contact and time for contemplation with the objects, I began to study the aesthetics of the material. In the studio, responding to this enquiry, my focus transferred to the corporeal elements of the material beyond the historical functions of the object. Previously as an artist, I had had few opportunities of working with wood, but now that I had the experience of bearing witness to the existence of Taino cultural practices, I wanted to set up a practice with this distinguished, organic material. I envisioned my hands 'entangled' within the fibres of the wood noting that it was once a breathing organism with needs like humans, sustained by air and water. Similarly, like existing trees, I have experienced rain, walking out into unusually heavy showers, standing purposely without shelter to feel the effects of the natural environment. This is a way of nature revealing itself to me as I experienced its sensations, as though I had been repeatedly patted by an unknown force. Within the force of nature, could we apply Heidegger's theory in that we are co-responsible for the happenings of the weather or how our bodies react in certain situations? Exhilarated, during the allotted museum visits, I experienced the same feelings without being saturated but noting my inclination to heavily perspire. These unexpected outcomes from a prescribed event involving the senses, could be understood as a response to being in the world or as a form of presencing. My body was acknowledging the presence of these objects.

Influenced by the skilled carving of the Jamaican Cemis, immortalised as anthropomorphic objects, it became evident that wood should be a material pursued in the studio. This was reinforced by my findings of a bulletin written by C. Swabey, Conservator of Jamaican Forests, published twenty-one years before Jamaica's independence in 1962 (Figure 4). Decades after European devastation and exploitation

[124] Heidegger in Krell, p. 292.

through deforesting, in his quest to accurately record data of the remaining native timbers, he reports 'that wood does not possess a simple uniform structure like a bar of iron or steel'; defining the individual characteristics of a tree, he states 'it is built up of a number of minute tube like units, known as cells.' To show his respect and compassion for the nature of trees Swabey goes on to list twelve properties of wood in a corporeal manner to include weight, scent, hardness, taste and texture.[125]




DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE & AGRICULTURE,

JAMAICA.

THE
PRINCIPAL TIMBERS
OF JAMAICA.

BY

CHRISTOPHER SWABEY, B. Sc.,
CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS.

BULLETIN No. 29.
(*New Series.*)

PRINTED BY
THE GOVERNMENT PRINTER,
DUKE ST., KINGSTON.
1941.

Figure 4: Christopher Swabey, *The Principal Timbers of Jamaica,* 1941.

As well as elite Taino objects made from wood such as the Jamaican Cemis featured in this project, Fatima Bercht, et al. noted:

> Shamans evince respect for nature and learn its secrets with humility. They study with natural masters and do not dominate them . . . when a Taino had a spirit encounter with a tree – consisting of the rustling of branches or the wavering of a trunk – a behique [shaman] had to be called to establish its identity and determine its willingness to be turned into a zemi, or spirit figure.

[125] Swabey, C., 'The Principal Timbers of Jamaica', Department of Science & Agriculture, Jamaica, *Bulletin*, no. 29, 1941, pp. 7-9.

> In return for the sacrifice of the tree, a house would be built for the zemi and offerings made to it. In this sense, all Taino sculpture was truly negotiated form.[126]

Today, ubiquitous in its use, universally taken for granted, wood is expendable, seen by the timber merchants as an inexhaustible resource. Jamaica still has to fight to protect its natural reserves and its identity. Private enterprise, international and local government organisations collaborate to argue the importance of conservation against the impact of wide-spread mining resulting in deforestation and global warming.[127]

In summary, Waddington noted that 'if all living things and inanimate objects have a measure of dignity, the various entities that make up the world must be accorded more respect.'[128] The dignity of the Taino objects enhanced my respect for inanimate objects, and for wood as a material with which to work.

### 2.4 The View from the Museum

The viewer can encounter objects out of physical reach, such as archaeological artefacts displayed in a museum vitrine. The view of protected objects in the museum is direct but often limited to one or two views; frontal and side on. In this environment, the capacity to fully engage with an object analytically becomes problematic, fraught with imposed ideologies. Often sited away from its original setting into a manufactured environment, the object can be read out of context to its original narrative, distanced from the viewer. This distancing between viewer and object is particularly noted with ancient artefacts sourced from another culture and not commissioned by the current displaying establishment or institution. As described in Chapter 1, the three Jamaican Cemis specific to my practice are held by the British Museum in a storage facility and are not on public display. In this scenario, the British Museum acts as a conduit by providing restricted access to objects. Therefore, it is problematic that the common patron cannot fully assess the scope and significance of these objects which have been

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[126] Bercht, et al., p. 137.
[127] 'Opposition Warns Against Mining in the Cockpit Country', *The Gleaner* [Online], http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20170925/opposition-warns-against-mining-cockpit-country, 25 September 2017, http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20170925/opposition-warns-against-mining-cockpit-country (accessed 27th September 2017)
[128] Waddington, p. 577

disconnected from their 'roots'. As a research student, I was granted access to objects in the storage facility of the British Museum, but few have such access.

In the studio, the repetitive rhythms and meditative quality that resulted from deep concentration on physical metal-working supported my focus. The process of making, particularly during hammering sessions, helped to circumvent any annoyances encountered before and during the research. In some ways, the resulting indentations on the finished metal have become an embodiment of long-held and challenging feelings of frustration in relation to my readings of the complex history of the Caribbean and its Taino Jamaicans.

The method of exploring materials as transcendental phenomenon is a timeless objective used in many different fields. This framework could also play a significant role for those communities that have lost histories or family stories, a loss carried over to subsequent generations. It is within this framework that this research aims to encounter an almost forgotten ancient culture and use an experimental means of engaging with something old in a new way. The aim is not just to commemorate the past but to also analyse jewellery and object processes that reinvent future possibilities within the field art and design. That is, employing jewellery as archaeological emblems and exploring how object design processes can remediate identities past and present.

In Tilley's book *Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* there is an inspirational theory that 'there can be no substitute for the human experience of place – of being there – and it is only after this that the various technologies of representation come into play'.[129] In relation to Tilley's statement, I have not physically visited Jamaica for this project, the place of provenance of the three revered Jamaican Cemis. Instead, I took a one-step removed approach, making pre-arranged visits to the British Museum's storage facility. Tilley notes that:

> In analytic thought the different modes of sensory perception – sight, touch, smell, hearing and taste – are usually treated separately. From a phenomenological perspective, this is misplaced. Perception involves the simultaneous use of the senses.[130]

[129] Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, p. 218.
[130] ibid, p. 14.

In discussing the fusion of the senses, Tilley provides an account of experiencing landscape, applying his theory through the practice of synaesthesia and the phenomenology of using the body and all its senses. In problem solving my lost contact with heritage, the stored artefacts replaced the subject of landscape, as the closest tangible access to the past. Having grown up in Britain, the Museum collection acted as known conduit to 'place', providing me with an actual object 'encounter', which I discuss in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3 - THE TAINO ENCOUNTER

### 3.1 Introduction to Process

> The things touch me as I touch them and touch myself: flesh of the world – distinct from my flesh: the double inscription outside and inside. The inside receives without flesh: not a 'physic state", but intra-corporeal, reverse of the outside that my body shows to the things.[131] – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1968

This chapter discusses the process by which I arrived at a method of embodying museum artefacts. My purpose was to develop ways of engaging with museum artefacts that have hidden histories – in the case of this project, Jamaican wooden idols held by the British Museum. Practice-based research was initially conducted in the studio making jewellery and objects.

My initial design process began with reading, close observation, sketching and making objects in various mediums like metal, paper and ink works, in an attempt to connect with images of shamanistic idols from pre-Columbian Jamaican culture. Following those initial practices, I made two visits to London in 2015 and 2016, to visit on three separate occasions (two in mid-2015 and one in late 2016) the British Museum's Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas stores at Haggerston in London, an off-site location storage house.

The experience of seeing, touching and smelling those sculptures that embody Pre-Columbian Jamaican culture was a profound and moving one. Object and subject simultaneously give meaning to each other. As the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty has explained: '… between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is an overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things'.[132] The visits, in contrast to the methods I used at the beginning of the design process, provided me with an in-depth and corporeal experience of the sculptures.

The purpose of my first visit was to acquaint myself with three pre-Columbian wooden sculptures of Taino provenance, the first peoples of Jamaica. Previously, I had only

[131] Merleau-Ponty, p. 261.
[132] ibid, p. 123.

seen references to Taino in books and on the website of the British Library and the British Museum. Now I could record my thoughts as a person of Jamaican-heritage coming into direct contact with my history. Due to time constraints, on my first visit (19 May 2015), I concentrated on detailing two of the three artefacts, drawing and taking notes of the fine, detailed markings on each as well as photographing both. On my second visit (27 May 2015), I specifically focused on the third artefact, again detailing the markings and taking photographs. On my third visit (30 November 2016), I had a relative accompany me to video my interactions with the three artefacts and take more photographs.

According to Fatima Bercht, et al., the Taino from the general Caribbean 'fabricated their zemis from different materials, including stone, wood, bone, shell, clay, coral and cotton'.[133] In relation to the Jamaican Taino specifically, research such as that of genealogist, Dianne Golding-Frankson, has focused on 'shellsmithing techniques' using Gastropod shells,[134] while the archaeologist, Joanna Ostapkowicz, has focused on wood sculptures used in both Jamaica and the Caribbean generally.[135]

My close observation and interaction with the artefacts in the British Museum impacted my decision-making about which materials I would use to construct jewellery and various objects. Prior to my initial visit, I worked with copper, clay, paper and textiles. Having now seen and touched the artefacts in real-life, I decided to also use wood, reflecting the core material of the three artefacts. The research aims to address how jewellery processes can, when interpreting a heritage piece, generate a new method for interpreting identity.

As for tools to make jewellery, Ostapkowicz, et al. (2011) have explained how the Taino in the wider Caribbean used hand-held stone tools as follows:

> Working such a dense wood required a versatile toolkit that demanded constant upkeep to maintain sharpness. Given the challenges of working with *Guaicaum*, and to ensure the efficiency of the stone and shell tools, it is probable that the

[133] Bercht, et al., p. 106.
[134] Dianne T. Golding-Frankson, 'Jamaican Taino "Shellsmithing" Techniques Explored: A Study in Method', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 55 (2), June 2009, p. 43.
[135] Ostapkowicz, et al., 2013, p. 4676.

> wood was carved green (fresh), when it was comparatively softer and easier to work, rather than when it dried to iron-like hardness. [136]

Not having access to *Guaicaum*, which is now a protected species of wood in the Caribbean, and rather than making my own stone and shell tools, I am making wooden beads from Australian dark hardwood, using a sanding machine. I am also indenting metals using a hand-held industrial centre punch tool and hammer to create permanent indentations, and finishing metalwork through lost wax casting.

According to Tilley, 'The body is both interpretational constraint and enabling condition for the construction of meaning.'[137] By producing tangible jewellery and objects inspired by the ancient Taino designs, my copper and silver pendants, hand pitted and elliptical, have brought the Taino objects' historical focus into reality and reconnected me with my heritage through haptic means. If the premise is that we are connected to the world through our senses, then my interpretation of the Taino sculptures can be considered an authentic representation of previously suppressed Jamaican art history, and a connection to my ancestor's place of origin.

### 3.2 The Artefacts

The focus of my research has been three artefacts currently held by the British Museum that archaeologist, Joanna Ostapkowicz, has described as 'a large free-standing anthropomorphic figure, a smaller anthropomorphic carving with a canopy, and a zoomorph with outstretched arms (now popularly known as the "Birdman")'.[138] For clarity, I have termed the large anthropomorphic figure 'Anthropomorph', the smaller anthropomorphic figure 'Canopied Cemi', and the zoomorphic figure 'Birdman'; when referring to them as a group, I will call them simply 'Cemis'.[139]

These three objects present tangible, physical evidence of the existence of the Taino. The outlines of their body shapes, together with their surface markings, have provided me with symbols which I have used to produce drawings as interpretations of what I

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[136] J. Ostapkowicz, et al., '"Treasures … of black wood, brilliantly polished": five examples of Taino sculpture from the tenth-sixteenth century Caribbean', *Antiquity*, 85 (329), Sept 2011, p. 949.
[137] Tilley, p. 221.
[138] Ostapkowicz, 2015, p. 53.
[139] I have adopted these terms based loosely upon those used in previous publications. In Bercht, et al., pp. 74-75 and 142-43, the large and small anthropomorphic figures are referred to as 'Zemi'. By contrast, Ostapkowicz, et al., 2013, p. 4676, refer to them as 'Anthropomorphic cemi' and 'Canopied/cohoba stand'.

have seen and touched. I have then translated my 2D sketches into 3D textured metal jewellery and objects that represent the three stages of my methodology: first, primary enquiry; second, three visits to the museum involving both visual and physical contact and contemplation; third, embodying the experiences of those two visits into studio-made objects.

This staged methodology resulted in a multi-disciplined approach involving the following: looking; touching; drawing; writing; experimenting with clay; crocheted textiles; etching on paper; hammering; and hydraulic pressing on metal. This exploration of using different mediums resulted in different forms of jewellery and objects incorporating the ellipses dot and lines from the original artefacts. My initial works emulated the Taino materials of fibre and clay. These crocheted and ceramic prototypes connected me to the artefacts but did not reach into their historical significance far enough. I needed to use more durable mediums like wood and base metals for a strong, tangible connection.

My thesis argues the case for a haptic connection with historical objects. It is impractical for people to handle artefacts as they can be easily damaged and are irreplaceable. Through my jewellery items, for example, Jamaicans can hold, wear and connect with their Taino links. These representations of their past serve as pointers to educate in the history of pre-Columbian Jamaica. Haptic visuality means simultaneously seeing and touching jewellery in an intimate relationship through adornment, with the result that the individual can bond to their history through jewellery.

In the next section of this chapter I will discuss how I analysed the three sculptures and how the dot and the line became metaphors in my work. As a concept the dot (metaphor of the body in space) and the line (transcendence of the body) are drawn on paper as dotted textures, providing a visual construct to oscillate between the past and the future. This methodology is explained in detail below.

### 3.3 Encountering the Artefacts

The analysis of the sculptures, references to Tilley and Marks and concluding with the British Museum storage visits are the substance of this chapter.

As explained above, I have used three objects currently held in storage in the British Museum as the basis for designing jewellery and objects embedded with texture. These items symbolise the complex relationship of invisibility and proximity (i.e., they are stored away out of sight from their original place in Jamaica, and I am living away from my original place and far away from them), but we are connecting through jewellery. Whilst they are in storage, they are not seen as revered objects and that tension of tracing two paths between here and there is created in the designs on the objects I make, designs which themselves derive from the historic objects. But I am also interested in not just the design but the haptic connection, conjoining the paths of preconception and reality which connect the wearer to the spirit of the Taino.

This takes me back to archaeologist, Christopher Tilley, and his landmark work, *The Materiality of Stone,* which, in turn, drew upon 'the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty'.[140] Tilley addresses the complexity in experiencing place, and objects:

> Ancient stones in landscapes, the subject matter of this book, cannot be known or understood simply from publications, from maps, diagrams, photographs and descriptions, because these are only representations. . . . There can be no substitute for the human experience of place – of being there – and it is only after this that the various technologies of representation come into play. This is a difference between a first-order knowledge and a second or surreptitious order of knowing.[141]

As a child, growing up in the East End of London, I was never aware that in the same city, and perhaps only a few suburbs away from where I was living, was a significant link to my heritage. It was only after coming to Australia and commencing this degree that I began a search for my 'roots'. I initially saw the three sculptures, the subject of my study, on a CD-ROM inserted in the dust jacket of a book entitled *Pre-Columbian Jamaica,* by Phillip Allsworth-Jones.[142] I was overwhelmed. This changed my view of Jamaica as dominated by conquest, decimation of the Indigenous population, slavery (both forced and indentured), colonialism and eventual liberty, represented in the music of the 1960s and 1970s. I realised that there was a whole 'other' history, mostly obscured.

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[140] Tilley, p. 218.
[141] ibid.
[142] P. Allsworth-Jones, *Pre-Columbian Jamaica*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 2008, containing examples of Jamaican Taino Artefacts from 'The Lee Collection Inventory'.

But I was not alone in recognising this obscurity. As Joanna Ostapkowicz observed in her PhD thesis in 1998, 'although some of the most famous pieces have been known since the turn of the century, analysis of pre-Hispanic Caribbean wooden "art" has remained in its infancy, with little research being carried out on this rich body of material'.[143]

From the CD-ROM, I then moved to the internet to see what digital representations were available and soon became aware that the objects were somewhere (perhaps in storage) in the British Museum. After contacting the British Museum by email, I discovered that the sculptures were not held in the main storage site in Russell Square in London, but in an off-site storage house several suburbs away in Haggerston. Now knowing that these objects existed, not in their original home, but in a foreign land, gave me more impetus to see them at first-hand to gain, as Tilley has described it, 'first-order knowledge'.[144] That is you need to fully immerse yourself to experience the object, using your bodily senses – sight, touch, sense and smell, as no image or data file can allow you to fully know or understand the material from a photograph. You must be in the presence of the objects and engage all senses.[145]

In contrast to Tilley's ideas, Laura Marks believes the 'eyes' function 'like organs of touch' and uses the term 'haptic visuality' to describe this method.[146] It was critical to my research for me to have witnessed first-hand such significant ancestral Taino connections. Upon engaging with the artefacts, I noted my experience was intensified by touch; whilst running my fingers over the sculptures, the cold, dense weight was surprising. The haptic experience has initiated dialogue for new object interpretations.

I was inspired by the markings on the sculptures when I first saw them as images on the internet. I was then granted access, to experience these same objects in real life. Not only could I see them but I could hold them in my hands. I touched the marks on these Taino figures, and tracing backwards – found the gaps – and using dots, created a trail –

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[143] Ostapkowicz, 1998, p. 1.
[144] Tilley, p. 218.
[145] ibid, pp. 218-219.
[146] Marks, 2002, pp. xii-xiii; see also Melinda Barlow, 'Book Review: Laura U. Marks, "Touch: Sensory Theory and Multisensory Media"', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 12 (2), Fall 2002, pp.126-129, in particular, p. 127.

a path between what is now, and what had happened then, making that connection tangible. My pieces are embedded with the textures of closely connected dots that are like a signpost to the past.

In order to convey the powerful effect of my interaction with the three Jamaican artefacts in the British Museum's off-site storage facility in Haggertson, the next section includes parts of my notebooks (reproduced almost verbatim) recorded during the first two of my three visits.

### 3.3.1 First British Museum Visit (19 May 2015)

I woke up early where I was staying with my mother, in Leyton, in East London and walked to Stratford Station. I caught the train to Haggerston and then walked approximately five minutes to the storage site of the British Museum. As I was shown into the 'viewing room', I initially stood at the door, transfixed. I then stumbled as I crossed the threshold of the door and was surprised that I was somewhat in a state of shock – moving from viewing still 2D images to the reality of these 3D life-sized objects lying horizontal, on their backs, on a large table. I was overwhelmed. They were no longer printed-paper projections from a CD-ROM or website on a computer screen, or reproductions in a book. They were as real as me. Having contemplated the Taino culture and the meaning of these three objects for so long, I was now meeting these rare and beautiful items that are Indigenous to Jamaica and an integral part of its history. Through my touch, I could now become intimate with them.

After a quick overview, I moved between the tables where the wooden objects lay. Hesitating, at a glance gauged their size, feeling their presence in the room – felt how cold they were – observing the details of the cracks in the wood. All three objects were horizontal on their side or back, outstretched like corpses, imbuing the scene with poignancy. Some of the wood detailing had cracks that resembled scars – remembering that these artefacts have been estimated to be over seven hundred years old.[147] I wanted to comfort them with hugs. The setting was not unlike an open morgue but the 'Birdman' had his wings/arms outstretched, symbolic and comparable to Jesus on the

[147] According to Ostapkowicz, et al., 2013, p. 4675, the three have been dated to have been 'carved by AD[CE] 1300'.

cross. I felt humbled. That morning, with limited time for observation, I chose to first examine the smaller anthropomorphic figure that I have termed 'Canopied Cemi'.

#### 3.3.1.1 Canopied Cemi

The Canopied Cemi is a softer, less imposing structure, smaller than the other two specimens, that is, the larger anthropomorphic man-like figure, 'Anthropomorph' and the zoomorphic 'Birdman'. Up to this moment, I had been making jewellery pieces that focused on the largest of three pieces (Anthropomorph) but then I noticed that 'Canopied Cemi' (Figure 5) has features that resemble 'Anthropomorph'.

Figure 5: Taino Canopied Cemi, 19 May 2015. British Museum, Franks House (storage facility), East London. Photograph: M. Swaby.

I had brought with me my journal in which I had pasted images that I previously downloaded from the British Museum website. I was now able to note intricate details and made sketches (Figure 6) that was not possible from secondary-sourced, two-dimensional photographs. The details of the 'Canopied Cemi' I noted as follows: The shape of the ear piece leading to the carved circled lobes and the indents running from the eyes depicting 'Boinayel the Rain God'.[148] [149]

The fine hair line markings on the surface of the head and body seem to soften the appearance of the wood. Short angled lines indented around the forehead contrast sharply against the smooth, polished body. These patterns are concisely detailed and resemble triangles. I ponder the type of tools used and the range of skills needed to make an object of this quality. It was beautifully detailed.

[148] Bercht, et al., p. 73.
[149] Allsworth-Jones, p. 8.

With the object lying on its right side, its chin smooth and small – I wondered if this was fashioned after a small child or a young version of a shaman. A navel button was centred prominently above the genitalia. The figure was depicted as anthropomorphic, with limbs, shoulders and arms complete with inscribed lines as digits for the fingers, positioned to point directly to the male genitalia, with two circles as testicles.

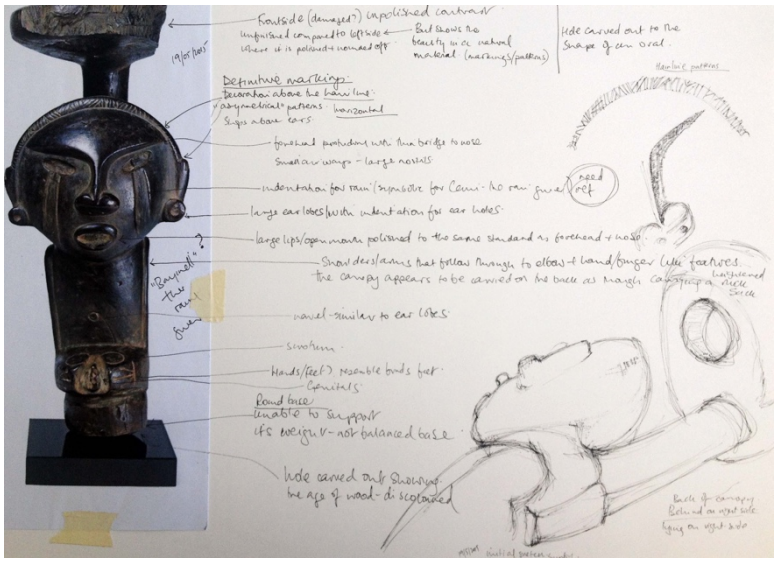


Figure 6: Marcia Swaby, Taino Canopied Cemi, 19 May 2015. Image downloaded from the British Museum website, with working notes and drawings. Photograph: M. Swaby.

It was a sumptuous piece, in that it was richly covered in stylised finishing. The proportion of the chin, in relation to the symmetry of the face and body features, was appealing. In my opinion, the artist who made this was not a novice. This was a labour of love, a considered piece and a demonstration of visual drama.

Handling the sculpture lightly, through rubber gloves (decreasing the risk of material damage whilst at the same time acting as yet another imposed barrier), I was surprised at how starkly cold the wood felt. Unsure of its weight, this was a solid and heavy item made of *Guaicaum,* a wood native to the Caribbean. I likened a large, smooth, oval knothole in the Canopied Cemi to a viewing window, where possibly, the thoughts of the shaman could ascend. However, further research of the Canopied Cemi proved it was used to grind cohoba seeds before they were snuffed for hallucinatory effects. From a design point of view, it is possible that a vessel could have also fitted into this space too – to hold an object – but there is no empirical evidence of this assumption.

Markings on each side of the Canopied Cemi varied greatly from hairline cracks on the face of the object. The Canopy's left side edges appeared unfinished or broken to the left, exposing the internal material of wood. The right side had been smoothed off and polished in line with the rest of the body, but the unpolished left side still conveyed a rugged beauty revealing the inner structure details of the wood.

Torso

When this structure is upright (vertical) the shoulders are visibly not symmetrical. The left shoulder has more volume than the right. The head appears to be positioned more on the right. A thick neck supports the head followed by narrow shoulders. The body has a short torso, with the navel centred above the genitalia and between the two circles denoting the scrotum. On either side of the scrotum are inscribed strokes like digits for fingers. There are lots of soft curves, that make up this object, from the ears to the mouth to the base of the object and back up to the chin.

Inverting the object exposed the base with a hole where you can evidence more of the internal structure and see that the original colour of the wood had not been changed by the environment.

Hair Line Patterns

Graphic representations are inscribed by short-hatched lines to delineate the hairline on these figures, similar to other ethnic African depictions in art. This pattern starts from the top of the ears creating a band on the crown of the head, thereby accentuating the carved forehead and arched eyebrows. Continuing to the thin bridge of the nose, these short-hatched lines are followed by wide side walls with small indentations for the nostrils. The patina and satin polish of the thick-lipped open mouth is reproduced on the nose. In contrast to the Anthropomorph and Birdman figures, the Canopy's mouth has no added material or visual description for teeth. Nevertheless, the open mouth prompts the observer to expect some sort of communication, and through my own imagination I hear soft words spoken but of a language I do not understand.

Whilst I explore the body of work, the solemn appearance of this idol's expression makes me feel like a humble student. It is a figure of immense symbolism. I could

forgive the description ‘Canopy’ and instead, from a western view reference the Canopied Cemi as a halo, the figure of an angel depicted in truth through its nakedness. Its deeply set eyes can see further than the human eye. Canopied Cemi is not afraid of the present. This crafted object voyages beyond time and natural concerns whilst all the time, resting in the confines of a storage institution.

#### 3.3.1.2 Birdman

Christ’s crucifixion was the first thing that came to my mind upon seeing the Birdman for the first time (Figure 7). Combined with features of a bird and man, I believe this sculpture would not look strange in a place of Christian worship. Arms (instead of wings) splayed, with its beak and shell teeth looking straight ahead, this figure’s expression is calm and heroic. The dark wooden figure of Birdman gave a much stronger musky scent than did Canopy. Birdman also felt less starkly cold compared with Canopy. Again, I made sketches (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Taino Birdman, 19 May 2015. British Museum, East London.
Photograph: M. Swaby.

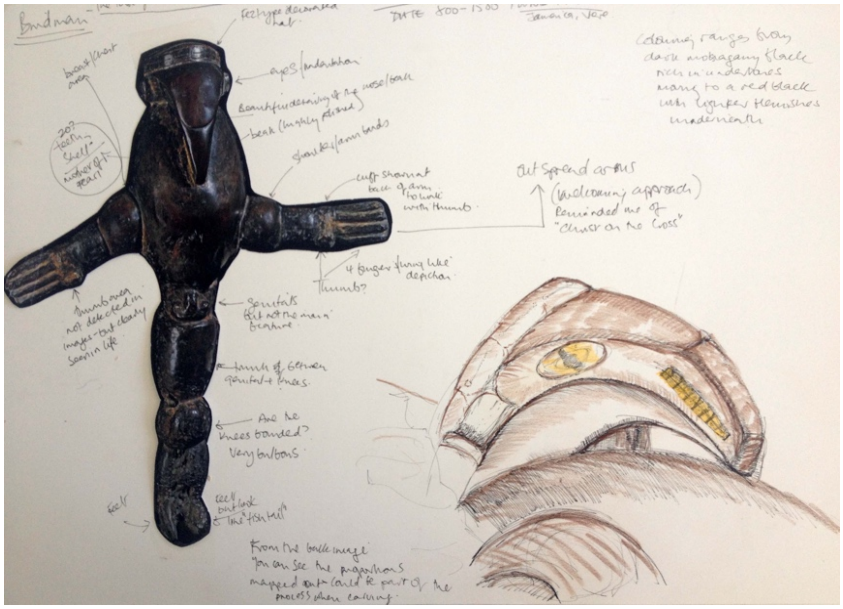


Figure 8: Marcia Swaby, Taino Birdman, 19 May 2015. Image downloaded from the British Museum website. Photograph: M. Swaby.

Chest Area

There are numerous indentations and pitted, fragile markings on this piece. The body/chest area is bulbous – puffed out as if on show, as if Birdman were proving his prowess. The figure is approachable, inviting contact through its open arms. There are signs of decay in the wooden figure under the arms, neck and knee area.

Mouth

What is most striking is the contrast of materials used in the mouth. The craftsperson has inlaid shell into the wood to create twenty-two individual teeth. Unfortunately, the inlaid shell has only survived on the right side of the mouth and the left side has no inlays. There are parts of the sculpture where it has aged near the foot base, reminding me of copper ageing, patterned with hammering. The pitted markings could be interpreted as pores, evoking a sense that this object has 'skin'. The colouring of the wood is not monotone – the beak area and chest are highly polished graduating down to the feet that (to me) look more like a double fish-tail. At the base, the polishing is less obvious or possibly the larger indentations of the carvings were not polished. The longer I spent with the piece, the stronger the scent of the past became evident. There is evidence that the piece is also hollow from the knee down – a large hole on the left side leaving unanswered questions about its purpose.

Arms/Wings

The carving of the arm to hand area is curious. Firstly, when analysing the Birdman shoulder area in comparison to the shoulders of the 'Canopied Cemi' and 'Anthropomorph', they are much bulkier. It's almost as if the statue is flexing its biceps. But moving down to the hands, I felt four fingers and a thumb carved out yet the 3D definition of the hands was not detectable in the 2D image I had viewed initially. These hands relay a human quality. I want to hug it. If it could speak, I would want to hear what it had to say. These three objects I see as a community. Again, the genitalia are revealed, but I sense that they are on show as symbolic features rather than mere sexual organs. The hands/wings are prominent as are its beak and eyes. It is possible it has much to say and more to see!

Cap

The other interesting feature is the shape of head and its accompanying decoration. In contrast to the other two anthropomorphic carvings where there is a clear demarcation for hairline, particularly in the Canopied Cemi carving, this zoomorphic Birdman carving appears to be wearing a decorated, brimless, short, flat cap. A series of horizontal rectangles follow in a pattern around the body of the cap. Within each rectangle lies a centred single horizontal line punctuated with circles at each end. On either side of the head, two slightly longer squares of this simple patterning continue on top of each other between the eye and ear. I question whether these repeated patterns go beyond decoration to embody any significant meaning or symbol. Their actual meaning remains unknown but these same patterns have provided me with jewellery inspirations.

Process

Similar to the Anthropomorph there was a continuing theme of carved impressions of fingers, including thumbs. On examining the back of the Birdman, it was apparent that the carving had evolved from one solid piece of wood. From this perspective, it is evident that there are six sections, starting from the head down to the feet. These sections are not so apparent from a frontal view, but I attempted to photograph them from the back (Figure 9). Without any additional documentation, the sections indicate how the design and carving of the idol was planned and executed.

Figure 9: Taino Birdman (back, showing sections), 19 May 2015. British Museum, East London. Photograph: M. Swaby.

I wondered how long it would be before this particular carved sculpture deteriorated beyond recognition, as there was evident ageing process in action. About to run out of time, I took photographs (including of Anthropomorph, Figure 10) and arranged to return in a week.


Figure 10: Taino Anthropomorph, 19 May 2015. British Museum, East London. Photograph: M. Swaby.

### 3.3.2 My Second Visit (27 May 2015)

Eight days after my first visit, I returned to the storage facility and below is a summary of my notes.

### 3.3.2.1 Anthropomorph

Even though I am excited to be finally looking at the largest sculpture in detail, I feel familiarity has made me much more lucid and relaxed about what I am about to discover. I see the face of this body like a landscape with raised and indented or embedded rooms within hills and gullies, each carrying their own significance in relation to each other. Again, I take photographs, notes and make drawings (Figure 11).

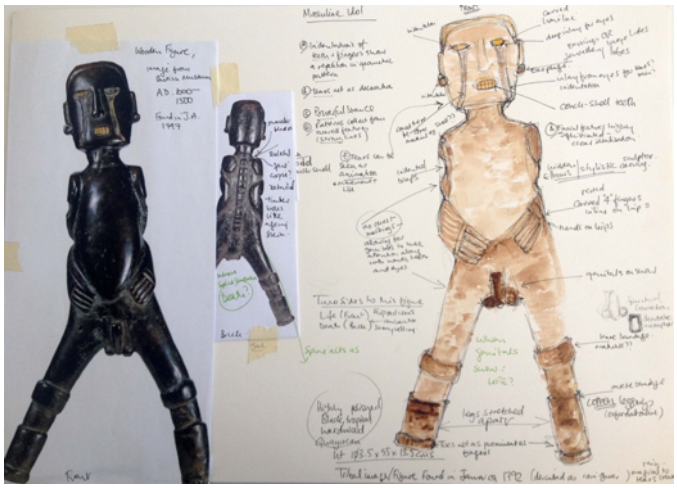

Figure 11: Marcia Swaby, Taino Anthropomorph, 2015. Image downloaded from the British Museum website, together with working notes and drawings. Photograph: M. Swaby.

Teeth

As a jewellery artist, I am immediately drawn to observe any contrast in materials used within a piece. I particularly noted the facial features, where seashell had been used to replicate teeth (Figure 12). The teeth glaringly protrude from the mouth; they do not sit flush within the setting of the lined mouth. Fourteen indentations make a full set, outlined by an oval-shaped mouth, with the shell teeth being the most prominent as an added material of difference. This creates symmetry and balance in line with the carved nose set in between the gouged-out lines that flow from the eyes to the chin.


Figure 12: Taino Anthropomorph (teeth), 27 May 2015. British Museum, East London. Photograph: M. Swaby.

Eyes

The eyes are horizontal ovals and are set within a gouged oblong frame that flows from the forehead to the chin area, similar to the Canopied Cemi carving. This unexpected feature makes a profound impact on the face, which begs questions from the observer. What does the oblong frame from the eyes to the chin symbolise? Again, what significance does it have on the user and its audience? The eyes are not just indentations. They are raised rims accentuating the eye socket area.

Hairline

There are no embellishments on top of the Anthropomorph's head. The hairline has been subtlety carved out in relation to the eye area, which has deeper lines. The composition accentuates the flat, wide forehead, carrying the line to the top of the ears.

Ears

The most prominent feature of the handle shaped ear is the oversized circle, indented earlobe. On the sides of the earlobes there are three horizontal carved lines (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Taino Anthropomorph (ear), 27 May 2015. British Museum, East London. Photograph: M. Swaby.

Nose

The nose bridge is narrow with sidewalls that are flat, leading to nostrils. The head sits on a thick neck and I can see the polishing has horizontal strokes as opposed to the face, where the strokes are vertical.

Torso

Following on from the neck, the chest area appears to be expanded; puffed out with the carved shoulders sharply defined. The arms rest on the flank of the body below the stomach, with four fingers sitting on the front of the hips pointing towards the groin area. There are two horizontal lines below the fingers in the knuckle area that follow the width of the hand.

Genitalia

The hands point downwards on the groin, which guides my eyes to the carved out erect penis and scrotum area.

Limbs

The legs have fine hairline cracks and various markings with a combination of pitting and ageing. The knee and calf area down to the feet are emphasised by a voluminous amount of wood as if to protect those joint areas. The left leg is slightly shorter than the right leg, giving the appearance that there is a slight lean on an angle as if 'swaying' or rocking from side to side.

Back of Anthropomorph

We turned the sculpture over onto its front so I could observe the detail of its back. This is a very heavy piece and assistance was needed to turn it over. The back of the head, the neck and shoulders are flat and smooth apart from some faint crosshatch markings (Figure 14). It is unclear as to whether they are deliberate or the results of the ravages of time. The exposed spinal column is characterised by eleven raised notches and centres the carved-out shoulder blades and elbows. The spine continues to flat, smoothed buttocks revealing the scrotum.

Figure 14: Taino Anthropomorph (back), 27 May 2015. British Museum, East London. Photograph: M. Swaby.

The multiple strokes created around the area of the spine are soft wide verticals, crossing over one another and conveying the idea of wrinkled skin. This continues from the neck throughout the torso to the calves on the legs. These strokes are in stark contrast to the front side of the body, where it is smooth and highly polished with erect genitals, and bared teeth; it is alive! Clearly, both sides are animating different information; the back hints to us of death whilst the front pulses with life. I make sketches from several angles (Figure 15).

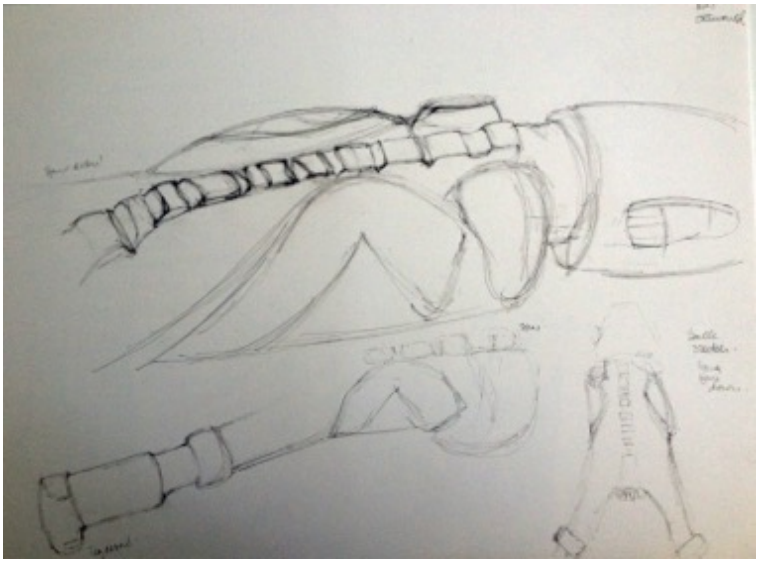

Figure 15: Marcia Swaby, Anthropomorph, 27 May 2015. Ink pen drawing.
Photograph: M. Swaby.

Anthropomorph Summary

Overall, this is a deliberately complex and polished piece. It is stylised, with lots of imbedded symbolism. Despite its facial features, Anthropomorph does not appear to me as threatening (not because of the carved-out area that could be mistaken for tears) because it has a strong visual appeal. The mouth is open, baring its teeth, but not in an unfriendly way. Anthropomorph communicates with hands on hips and legs wide open, with commanding authority. Anthropomorph is almost suggestive but definitely not vulnerable, even though he is naked. The penis is upright, a mark of strength and virility giving this body life.

This sculpture is impressive because of its age, engaging details, craftsmanship and the story telling it wants to imbue. I touch it again looking for that extra meaning but the response is cold and still. After a lengthy period of gazing at Anthropomorph without touching him, he appeared to me to be breathing! My thoughts return to Anthropomorph's reported original setting in Jamaica, where the scents, sounds, temperature and environment are completely unimaginable to the now alien, cold, unnaturally lit clinical room surrounded by metal filing cabinets where Anthropomorph now lies suppressed, isolated and anonymous.

### 3.4 Reflection on Encountering the Taino Objects

Like the barrier (or bridge) of a hand tool that is fixed between maker and material, the gloves on my hands came between myself and the objects at the museum. However, the protective barrier permitted and encouraged extensive tactile investigations of the object's characteristics. Repetitive walking around the table; lowering my stoop and stopping to momentarily gaze from different angles; standing then sitting, with head resting on my hands to focus and concentrate. My whole body was actively tense, engaged, both at a distance and intimately within the close proximity of the objects, expending more energy than when looking at a computer screen or a page within a book. My hands at times, simultaneously played as both eyes and feelers.

During intervals, as the objects were manoeuvred for in-depth examination, my energy exerted to counter-balance the force of the object's weight. This was another procedure of experiencing the objects. Although my hands were concealed by the thin layer of rubber gloves, from the object's solidity, I was acutely aware of the depressions that momentarily impressed my palms, fingers and forearms as I turned the object around.

These sculptures were originally part of the life force of a living tree. After being cut down and cut out of the trunk, sculptures were fashioned by an artisan and given new life. The examination was strictly directed by and/or supported with the attendant, as the object was carefully reversed to its opposite side. Through these experienced moments, the memories of these visits were indelibly etched in my mind.

## CHAPTER 4 - THE PRACTICE

> Artists and designers love physical objects, especially if they have had a hand in making them. When people experience an art object tactilely, actually hold it in their hand, they understand something of what the artist was thinking when they created it.[150] – R Munoz, 2001

### 4.1 Visible Meditations – Introduction to the Practice

The notion of repetition has been an underlying theme throughout my practice. It is as though the echoes of the past have now become embodied in my creations. Like the rhythmic patterns of heart beats, we cannot live without reiterations, we take solace in the comfort and certainty of the multiple to make a whole. The essence of my practice-based research has been to replenish the paucity of connections by haptically embracing my heritage. Like Gormley's *Field* installations where he 'uses the human form to explore man's existence in relation to the world',[151] the multiple can speak of solidarity in both the art works as well the engaged community.[152]

I have considered how the narrative of touch defined within my practice as haptic tactility can inform my visualisation of historic objects stored (and arguably invisible) in the British Museum. The making of material things directed by my body, made for the body, relates to both the body and the mind; yet, the flesh of my hands, with all its nerve endings is visually external to my mind, but has the advantage of physical touch. There are two outcomes to note: the immediate personal experience of the object and the historical traces of the encounter. In the brief moments of touch, there occurs a physical and mental exchange that forms individual and collective memory for spiritual or functional applications. The simultaneous transfer of both my and the object's physical and invisible interactions, leaves behind traces of the encounter that cannot be seen by the naked eye for future historical reference.

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[150] R. Munoz, 'Foreword', in R. Street and F. Lewis (eds), *Touch Graphics: The power of tactile design*, hardback edn 2001, Rockport Publishers, Gloucester, paperback edn 2003, p. 9.
[151] 'Antony Gormley: Field', Tate Liverpool Exhibition, 10 April – 22 August 2004 *Tate Gallery Website*, http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/antony-gormley-field (accessed 3 December 2017).
[152] 'His work incorporated thirty-five thousand figures ranged in size from 8-26cms tall and were made using twenty-five tonnes of clay', 'Field', *Antony Gormley*, [website], 2003, http://www.antonygormley.com/sculpture/item-view/id/245#p0, (accessed 3 December 2017).

The Jamaican Cemis were developed to be seen as a significant, communicative medium to reveal the mysteries of the world. The objects, as part of the Taino culture, went beyond words and silence. Acknowledging and encountering these objects, disbelieving that these objects existed, until I could actually hold, smell and see the Taino objects' details, these objects were not as 'real' as they then became after my haptic, epiphanic experience, after which I was then truly connected to my heritage.

The physical handling of raw clay (a material linked to the earth) and the making of the ceramic iterations returned me to the important and fundamental use of touch and its corporeal sensibilities, particularly when recalling the first time I had permission to lay my gloved hands on such revered wooden objects. Likewise, when fabricating metal jewellery and objects using silver and copper, through to the manipulation of wood, my body is involved in each piece. But with the use of tools to help manipulate these materials into forms, my presence is not always so obvious. As an extension of my hand, the tool is a technological advancement, but ultimately it erases traces of the maker, creating a barrier between myself and the material produced.

Depending on the size and type of tool, a certain amount of distance is kept between myself and the material until the fabrication is finalised and the piece can be worn or held; skin to jewellery. Throughout fabrication, the relationship between hand tool and maker is close. The visibility of the maker in hand made work is arguably more recognisable than an artist who predominately uses more technological tools in the creation of their work.

### 4.2 Communicating with Dots

To bridge the gap of knowledge about these revered objects in the studio, I focus on the objects' realistic aspects rather than their mythical side. I draw the outline of the three sculptural forms with the aim of initiating a physical relationship. Using our bodies through human physical contact is fundamental to establishing relationships. I use the dot as a metaphor to represent both a single body and a community, constructing a texture to stimulate touch. An illustration of ink dots creates a fabric within the form of the Cemis (Figure 16 and Figure 17). Historically, in art these dots that appear in space are called pointillism, where steady, focused hands make precise markings on paper.

The attention to the drawing takes many hours to complete and moves me into a meditative state. There is a deep consciousness to join or link the dots between myself and this new discovery that can act as an avenue in reclaiming heritage.

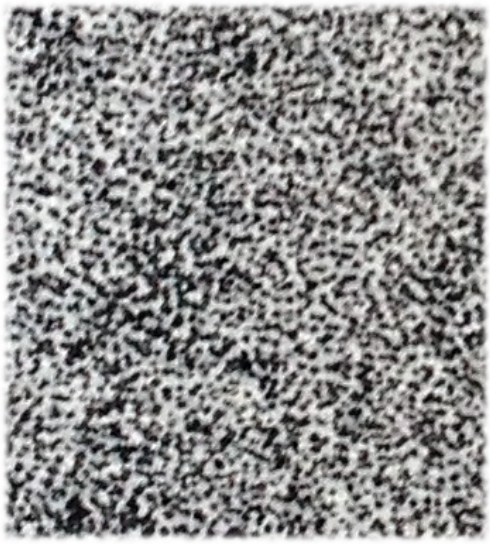

Figure 16: Marcia Swaby, Dot drawing (detail), 2014. Paper, black ink.
Photograph: M. Swaby.

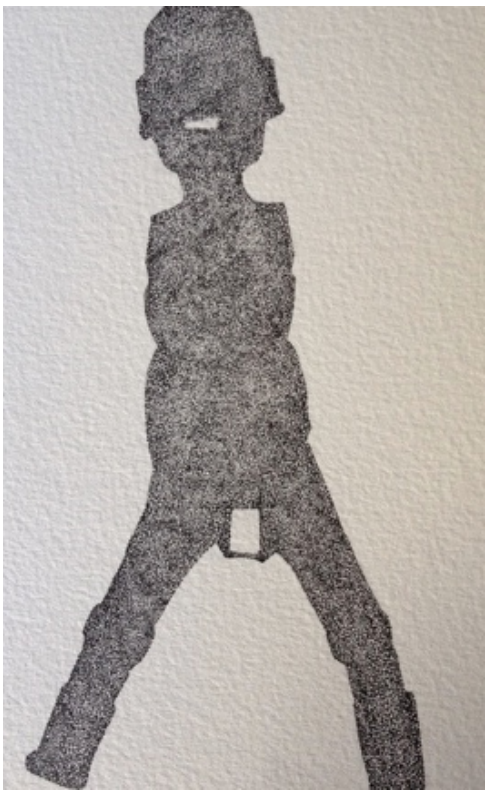

Figure 17: Marcia Swaby, Dot drawing (Cemi form), 2014. Paper, black ink.
Photograph: M. Swaby.

In the studio, I lightly hammer into the 1mm thick copper etched face. I detect the

subtle reactions when the punch hits the metal – there is a slight bounce and it feels much softer than bronze metal, but pewter metal is the softest of them all. The copper, bronze and pewter display their individual metallic characteristics. Each metal has its own identity. The 1/16" centre punch is used on all metals but leaves a slightly different appearance on each one. The action of the centre punch boring into the metal is a not unlike a mini-drill, digging deeper with each knock of the hammer. They all make a clean execution so that from a distance they look like tiny specks of shiny beads imparting a jewel-like finish. The different behaviours of the metals can be seen by the depth of the hole made with three single short taps of the jobbing hammer.

The fine indentations made with steel tools to create multiple depressions on exposed areas of material is akin to 'pressing the flesh' to establish a connection with Taino images. From the slightly rough texture, the collection of indentations was developed with the Taino community in mind, as though engaging a dialogue on the skin. When worn, the ring feels 'porous' and coarse against the skin to create friction (Figure 18). Similarly, Emma Fielden creates textured objects and jewellery with hand engraving tools.[153]

Figure 18: Marcia Swaby, Ring initiated from dot drawing, 2015. Silver.
Photograph: M. Swaby

[153] See for example Emma Fielden, Iron Ring Rust. Hand engraved iron, 18 carat yellow gold, *Courtesy of the Artist,* [website], https://courtesyoftheartist.com.au/products/ironringrust (accessed 26 December 2017).

Using touch as a way of reconciling people is not a new phenomenon in jewellery. What I want to explore is how a tactile quality, or the psychological need to touch, can connect a person with a lost history or the identity of a culture, doing so through jewellery processes and materials.

### 4.3 Wax Making Master

In a third attempt to make a master mould of the Anthropomorph's head, I am pleased with the outcome of a blue wax block (Figure 19). As I relax and sand-paper the back of the face, I think about the craftsperson who created the wooden piece, wondering what their thoughts were on the day of crafting the sculptures. I wonder how long it took to complete their sculpture; over weeks or months, and whether it was a lone or collaborative project. I wonder if the sculpture was executed from a plan that included drawings like I have done, to equate my proportions onto wax to create the face of the Anthropomorph – carefully, trying to not waste materials. Or maybe the creation of the sculptures was borne out of intuition alone, with no set plan in place.

As the Anthropomorph is a large sculpture, I would hypothesise that its construction was a collaborative project, covering the collection of materials and of wood, shells and tools, to the discussions of the best pebbles to choose that would permit a resin polish to complete the work. Through a collaborative effort, the Anthropomorph would be imbued with oral tradition, culture and mystical belief. Working on my own in the studio, I ignore my physical isolation and commune with my heritage through my Taino-inspired jewellery. I feel a strong sense of identity without any words being spoken.

Figure 19: Marcia Swaby, Wax carving, 2014. Jewellery wax.
Photograph: M. Swaby.

My idea is not borne from spiritual motivation or a concept of healing. Rather, my energies are concentrated on making a connection with my history, following on from the images and the field research in the British Museum through the handling of these rare objects. I do feel that there is a connection and that a sense of intimacy has now been created. As I carefully clean the crevices of the wax after scribing indented lines, I think of the Jamaicans who have never left their island and wonder if they are aware of this revered Taino culture.

As I work, I consider how the pieces could be worn. Around the stomach and in line with the genitals as a signal towards rebirth is one idea. Around the neck, in line with the chest and heart area as a signal towards emotions and bloodline is another idea. Around the head and on the forehead, in-between the eyes as a signal of mind body connection, is yet another idea. The main construct is that the pieces lie directly on the wearer's skin, so that both haptic and mythical connections are made. Thus, the wearer has a renewed sense of identity.

### 4.4 Copper Celestial Bowl

Initiated from a series of ink dot drawings, I transferred a type of dry-etching processes from the jewellery studio to the printmaking studio. The idea first came about from fabricating silver and copper-bonded-silver to make jewellery. I was interested to reference the cultural habits of the Taino people who ingested hallucinogenic stimulants during rituals (Figure 20). To ascertain an authentic visual description, the dried foliage and seeds images are taken from the historical collections library of Kew Gardens,

London (Figure 21). They have been used to complete imagery of hammered dot etchings on a large copper plate, fashioned as a subtly curved celestial bowl (Figure 22 and Figure 23).[154]

Whilst hammering textures into metals over long periods of time, I fall into a meditative state through repetitious actions. I liken my meditative state to the Taino, who communicated with celestial beings during euphoric states achieved as an outcome of cohoba seed rituals. The intense concentration of my hand and eye movements whilst my body is still makes me oblivious to any other activities in the studio while I am working. This was particularly so while hammering intuitively for the depiction of the three Cemis. A 1/16th inch centre punch tool and a 4oz hammer were repeatedly tapped directly onto a copper sheet to outline the suggestion of shaped leaves and seeds.


Figure 20: Anadenanthera peregrina plant[155]

[154] 'Taino worldview was based on a concentric model of the universe, with three distinct layers representing various planes of reality. The earthly plane, in the middle, was surrounded by a celestial vault above and subterranean waters below . . . with all three connected by sacred caves'. Bercht, et al., p. 108.

[155] A. Hofmann and Richard E. Schultes, *The Plants of the Gods: origins of hallucinogenic use,* New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1979, p. 34 and p. 116.


Figure 21: Cohoba Plant, 1850.[156]

Figure 22: Marcia Swaby, Celestial Bowl (detail before domed into form), 2016-2017. Copper, printing ink. 250mm dia. Photograph: M. Swaby.

What I have discovered throughout the development of the dotted textures on the surface of the metal, is that this technique creates a lasting warmth in the metal.

[156] Kew Garden dried specimen, 'Anadenanthera peregrina' [Cohoba Plant], 1850, Kew Herbarium Catalogue, Historical Collections. Photograph, *Kew Royal Botanic Gardens,* [website], http://apps.kew.org/herbcat/getImage.do?imageBarcode=K000849469 (accessed January 2017).

Combustion occurs during interaction and hammering in comparison to the untouched, smooth areas that remain cool.

Figure 23: Marcia Swaby, Celestial Bowl, 2016-2017). Copper, printing ink. 250mm dia. Photograph: M. Swaby.

## 4.5 Metal Faces, Clay Faces

Hammering with the centre punch feels like completing a 'tattoo' exercise, permanently marking-in a coded fabric of information that can never be permanently removed. The metal faces were created from a wax carving made whilst in London. While researching there, I found limited images or paintings in text books that depicted the Jamaican Taino people. By creating a wax model of the Anthropomorph, I could then cast and recreate some of its features in to metals such as bronze and silver, materials that would reflect differing yet similar views and haptic experiences (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Marcia Swaby, Metal faces, 2016-2017. Copper, bronze, pewter, silver. 40x32 mm. Photograph: M. Swaby.

I had previously experimented with ceramics before creating the hand-rolled clay balls. The process was technically more involved in that the practice included press moulding from a centre-punched metal pendant. This meant the textured indentations and inscribed reversed outlines made a more prominent visual. I wanted to reproduce the Anthropomorph facial features in a material that was more fragile than the metals I had used in the jewellery studio, which spoke about the nature of Taino history in a different way. The lightness of the porcelain faces and how one would negotiate their fragility, knowing that if mishandled they could easily break, was a creative challenge. The results of this experiment had promising outcomes since the bisque clay, finished with a glazed surface, produced a visually haptic aesthetic (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Marcia Swaby, Multiple hand moulded Cemi faces, 2017. Ceramic. Photograph: M. Swaby.

## 4.6 Clay Works

Some of the experimental introductions to new ceramic works had positive feedback – particularly the objects that could be held comfortably in the palm of one's hand. These were especially intriguing as the dried clay had a powdery softness to it and evoked the creased markings of the hand (Figure 26). These were simple objects but powerful iterations of my relationship with the material whilst thinking of other objects, as they had real corporeal tactility to them. The print of my palms embedded in the clay relays a poetic response to the research. They are pieces that represent my thoughts through time.

Figure 26: Marcia Swaby, Kneaded clay with hand impressions, 2017. Photograph: M. Swaby.

The process of making them was profound. I could make them with my eyes closed whilst thinking, imagining the original wooden, inspirational Cemis in their original habitat. During the making, my eyes were not required to navigate external tools, only to shut out the immediate world, to deepen thoughts and let my 'inner' world direct the motion of my hands.

This was in stark contrast to my process in the jewellery studio working at the bench with metal works. At the jewellery bench I am often closed in, with my head as close to the bench as possible, approximately ten centimetres away from the punch, my sight focussed on the magnified area on the metal. There is no negotiation, but an absolute exclusion to shut out the immediate world around me so as to heighten my concentration and vision for precision work.

Keeping the indentations as close to one another as possible in order to create a community of texture that worked together as a unified mass required a different type of being, a different type of presencing for mark-making. In contrast to working at the jewellery bench, the ceramic iterations took possession of me – took possession of my palms, contained my thoughts mirroring my life lines, detaching parts of my body but making me visible in another way.

The malleable clay directly in my hand, waiting for my fingers to close-in and knead feels intuitive, the essence of haptic tactility. I knowingly squeeze to put pressure on and manipulate the smooth clay this haptic pressure also described my experience in

the museum with the Taino objects, with a loss of control of emotions which was unexpected – but the repetition in forming the clay is easy. It is a placid thing to do. No sound comes from the clay, but the tactility is amplified unlike metal work on the bench. Recapturing the sensibilities of the momentous haptic events in the museum, bonding with my new-found heritage through interpretations of my art practice, required this investigation of new materials.

Through the agency of objects and jewellery, these new interpretations would materially and conceptually contrast with my initial workings with metal, which were inspired from sketches, drawings and prints before encountering the museum objects. My interpretation of the objects shifted after my museum visits. Having only seen pictures prior to physically handling the Cemis, I can now acknowledge the differences between physical and visual interpretations, and how this can significantly alter experiences. I wanted to capture the essence of haptic authenticity through these movements of seeing and touching whilst encountering the objects.

Contemporary artists that use ceramics are wide ranging in their concepts and use of the material in relation to the body. For example, jewellery artist Manon van Kouswijk makes necklaces that references her hand making techniques,[157] and on the opposite end of the scale, Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran makes sculptures that appear monumental to the body.[158]

### 4.7 The Difference Between Ceramic and Metal

The method of working directly with unfired clay produces a markedly different result from that achieved from the fired ceramic works. Without the need for additional tools, kneading alone is a means of making the clay useable. Fingers and palms are 'impressed' and prints remain throughout the drying process, leaving delicate lines and subtle fine textures taken from the folds of my hands. The malleable, bonding characteristic properties of clay allow me to immerse myself both physically and psychologically, but more importantly, imparts a tangible trace of who I am. The creases and many fine lines that make up the patterns of my skin into its unique

[157] Le Van, M., 'In Order of Appearance', *Art Jewelry Forum,* [website], 2016, https://artjewelryforum.org/manon-van-kouswijk-in-order-of-appearance (accessed 7 October 2017).
[158] National Gallery of Australia, 'Installation Ramesh Nithiyendran: Mud men', *National Gallery of Australia,* [website], https://nga.gov.au/installations/ramesh/default.cfm (accessed 3 January 2018).

epidermis are transferred to the clay body. The same hands that had the privilege of experiencing my Taino Jamaican heritage at the British Museum are involved in the creation of my work.

Each experience of visiting and touching the Taino objects had been unexpectedly intense and overwhelming. The sight of the three objects displayed in a controlled environment resulted in emotions, including a heightened sense of liberation and a feeling of relief. It was from these visits to these rare objects, standing in their presence that my belief in their existence was fully realised. Gingerly touching the wood revealed how inanimate and quietly still they were, defined through their starkly cold, stiff but solid material. These hand movements encouraged my process in clay making to repeat the same hand gestures separately on each object that I produced. With instinctive gentle strokes, my hands and fingers moved back and forth to experience the form of its multiple crevices and textures – the essence of haptic tactility. Clay is traditionally used in sculpture, and through my process is specifically broken down into parts that expresses the hand through time and motion (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Marcia Swaby, Multiple hand rolled clay balls, 2017.
Photograph: M. Swaby.

## 4.8 Reflections on Made Objects

When investigating the Indigenous history of Jamaica, I was expecting to reinterpret representations of their ideas, their designs and objects through my practice of making jewellery and new objects. But I found that I was profoundly moved by the 'encounter' and the haptic resonance I experienced on meeting with these rare Taino objects. My belief that there were few objects of interest available heightened my awareness during the search. Once I had sourced the Jamaican Cemis and succeeded in gaining access, the concept of the project evolved to the linkage between my hands and the objects, that is, haptic tactility.

Integral to their existence was the history within the objects, a history which exists amongst all historical objects through time to the present day. I had access to witness this existence. I could see this history, analyse it for myself and touch it. From there I now feel I can discuss it and critique it from my point of view, and in relation to my peers, telling the story of connecting to history to a much wider audience through the jewellery and objects I make.

# CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

## 5.1 The Value of Connecting with History

Dancing was a big part of my culture growing up. I use the analogy of salsa dancing techniques to expedite some of my artistic processes through my practice-led research. I would be in a London dance room squashed in with a hundred people. Often fifty couples were all vying for a dancing space. We learnt that before we moved with our partner, we looked left and then right, looked forward and then looked left and right again. We took a final look before signalling to our partner to move forward. All this was about respecting yourself whilst simultaneously respecting others in a shared and lively space. All this action is done with minimal effort and very quickly, so head and eye movements are not apparent. I see those gestures as an analogy to studying and accessing my history. To move forward you have to know what is going on around you, particularly when researching ancient history and bringing that forward to keep the dialogue going. And that is what I am trying to do through my own art practice.

I am trying to keep moving, from side-to-side (encompassing new fields of study), going back to look forward and building on what is known (the familiarity of the jewellery studio), so that I can move with the other people in the room (acknowledging historical timelines and being seen as an equal) letting them understand what I am doing (through exhibiting art works), as well as trying to understand what they are doing. I am making that big connection clearer among us all because we are all intrinsically connected through our histories. So, through my art practice I am trying to talk about haptic tactility, about touching, narrowing the proximal. How do I touch that person, how do I touch that history, where is that connection? How do I communicate that connection to the people around me? What is so important about haptic tactility? Touch means that something or someone exists to me. It means that it is there, an independent identity; touch has the power of being an agent and of carrying meaning at that moment. By my making that connection through my hand, by my touch (explored through texture), through my body, through my senses beyond visual touching, I am making what or who I touch real.

Therefore, by not just the using our ears and eyes, but including touch as well, we can make a difference to experience. I am aware that people from a range of fields, who can give multiple perceptions of how we perceive societies, would need to be included in this research going forward, and their work engaged with thoughtfully. We cannot rely on one domineering perspective, particularly if that perception or past history had a complex, or conflicting historical narrative. Just like we have many senses that particularise a perception, when all senses connect together they can present a more balanced view.

Through this research project, I have come to realise the power of objects, and the power of direct contact with them. Amanda Jane Reynolds has noted:

> When I hold an object I recognise my people. I feel connected to place, continuities, responsibilities, and this is in great part due to the Old People maintaining culture, through us, in the blood. As we renew our skills to make new objects today, we are regenerating the means to make our own future in our own country. From this powerful position we can offer museums new objects, made in a fresh spirit of proper transaction. At the same time, we welcome home those repatriated and long absent.[159]

Unaware of the revered Jamaican Cemis, I felt as though I had been denied part of my history from two perspectives; one from my art education in relation to other cultures, and the other from a family perspective in that my history was portrayed as beginning from slavery and that there was not a civilisation before this. Once I had located the Jamaican Cemis, as an artist and a descendant of Jamaica, I wanted to go beyond viewing them and sought to physically touch what was part of my heritage.

## 5.2 Possible Next Steps

Having never experienced much ancient visual culture from my heritage, particularly during the impressionable years of my childhood, where instead European and African history were emphasised, it was most important for me to recognise and remedy that gap in knowledge. I am not sure how to measure the effect of one's lack of visual history, but research through sight and touch is important, particularly if it represents a part of who one is.

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[159] A.J. Reynolds, *Keeping Culture: Aboriginal Tasmania*, National Museum of Australia Press, Canberra, 2006, p. 13.

I want to continue experimenting with the agency of touch as an object through haptic materials such as clay. As a material, clay has its own history that changes with time, dependant on its environment, and that continues to speak to my research interests. One avenue to investigate further is the 'touch' sensing of objects that the Caribbean practised before colonisation. This could address how I, as a contemporary artist interpreting traditions, continue research on the practices of my heritage. Additionally, there are other documented objects left by the Taino people such as, 'stone collars', 'wooden seats (duhos)', and 'shell masks' which have a specific relationship to the body.[160] It would be interesting to analyse these, to visit them and handle them, to see if the same response is engendered as that generated by the Jamaican Taino Cemis. And in the future, I may explore further the audience relationship with touch, in museum and gallery contexts and with objects of historical significance.

I feel I have achieved my objective with this project. The Cemis are less obscured by the work of this project and have been explored by an artist through the making of art objects. I have found my heritage, a strong sense of self and a strong artistic identity based on the past yet forged in the present through haptic tactility because of Taino-inspired jewellery and objects.

[160] Keegan, W.F., 'The "Classic" Taino', in Keegan, et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Caribbean Archaeology*, p. 79.

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Hampton, K., *Karen Hampton: The Journey North*, Honolulu Museum of Art, Hawaii, attended December 2016.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

Timeline as summarised from, I. Rouse 'Chronology of the peoples and cultures in the Greater Antilles' (section on 'The Peopling of the West Indies'), Irvin Rouse, *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus,* Yale University Press, New York, 1992, pp. 52-53 & 147.

| Year | Event | Rouse citation |
|---|---|---|
| 4000BCE | Jamaica uninhabited – though other parts of the Greater Antilles inhabited (Seboruco (Central Cuba); Cabaret (Haiti);<br>Barrera-Mordan (Dominican Republic) | 52 |
| 600AD/CE (approx.) | Jamaica inhabited at Little River (Ostionan Ostionoid subseries) | 52-53 |
| 800 (approx.) | Jamaica inhabited at White Marl (Meillacan Ostionoid subseries) | 52-53 |
| 24 April 1494 | 'Columbus resumed his previous exploration of the Greater Antilles' where he was 'temporarily diverted to the northern coast of Jamaica by a report that its inhabitants had gold' and<br>'returned to the southern coast of Cuba when he was unable to find any' | 147 |

### Appendix 2

Poupeye-Rammelaere, V., 'Chronology', in P. Archer-Straw, *New World Imagery: Contemporary Jamaican Art*, National Touring Exhibitions (Hayward Gallery), South Bank Centre, London, 1995, pp. 10-14.

| Year | Event | Poupeye-Rammelaere citation |
|---|---|---|
| 600-1000 | Establishment of the ancestors of the Taino in Jamaica through migration of 1000 Arawak-speaking people from the Orinoco region. | 10 |
| 1492 | Taino had become a 'formative civilisation' (Rouse, 1992). The Taino were accomplished woodcarvers and ceramists. | 10 |
| 1494 | On second voyage, Columbus arrives in Jamaica 5th May | 10 |
| 1510 | European colonisation of Jamaica starts with settlements like Sevilla la Nueva (founded 1510, abandoned 1524) | 10 |

| Year | Event | Poupeye-Rammelaere citation |
|---|---|---|
| Before 1517 | The first African slaves are brought in to replace Taino labour. The Seville carvings, a group of architectural reliefs, are the only significant artistic relics of the period. | 10 |
| 1773 | UK artists George Robertson and Philip Wickstead visit the island to paint landscapes, genre scenes and portraits of prominent planters. The Jamaican plantocracy and colonial officials make monumental sculpture commissions. The 'Rodney' Memorial in Spanish town, sculpted by John Bacon, is the best-known example. | 10 |
| 1879 | The Institute of Jamaica is founded 'for the encouragement of Literature, Science and Art' by Governor Sir Anthony Musgrave. During the early years of its existence, the Institute of Jamaica catered for the cultural needs of the British colonial elite although significant contributions were made to the documentation of Jamaican history and natural history. | 11 |
| 1922 | London-trained sculptor Edna Manley, whose mother was Jamaican, arrives in the island with her husband Norman Manley. During the 1920s Edna Manley exhibits successfully in London but finds that there is little interest in art in Jamaica. | 11 |
| 1937 | Edna Manley's woodcarving, Negro Aroused, 1935 is acquired by public subscription and accepted by the Institute of Jamaica as the first modern Jamaican artwork to enter its collection. | 11 |
| 1964 | Eugene Hyde, Barringto Watson and Karl Parboosingh found the Contemporary Jamaican Artists Association. The 'indigenist' orientation of the older generation is questioned in favour of an internationalist approach. | 12 |
| 1972 | In spite of political turmoil, the 1970s were a period of intense cultural and ideological activity. Bob Marley and reggae music come to international attention during the same period. | 12 |
| 1975 | The artist/art historian David Boxer joins the staff of the National Gallery of Jamaica and curates Five Centuries of Art in Jamaica, the first major historical exhibition of Jamaican art. | 12 |
| 1979 | The National Gallery stages The Intuitive Eye, the first major exhibition of intuitive or primitive Jamaican art. Ras Dizzy is included. The term 'intuitive' is coined by David Boxer as an alternative to 'primitive' or 'naive'. | 12 |

| Year | Event | Poupeye-Rammelaere citation |
|---|---|---|
| 1994 | The quincentennial of Columbus' arrival in Jamaica is commemorated by, among others, the exhibition Arawak Vibrations: Homage to the Jamaican Taino at the National Gallery of Jamaica. | 14 |

**Appendix 3**

Timeline as summarised from Kit W. Wesler, 'Jamaica', (section on 'Ethnohistory: The Jamaican Taino'), in William F. Keegan, Corinne L. Hofman and Reniel Rodriguez Ramos (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Caribbean Archaeology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, pp. 252-254.

| Year | Event | Wesler citation |
|---|---|---|
| 1494 | Columbus visited Jamaican coast 'for about a week during his second voyage | 252 |
| 1495 | After Columbus's first visit, Michele de Cuneo's letter of October 28, 1495 reported 'an excellent and well populated harbour … during that time some 60,000 people came from the mountains, merely to look at us' (Morrison 1963:222). | 252 |
| 1503-1504 | 'During his fourth voyage, Columbus and his crew spent a year … at St. Ann's Bay on the north coast, living on beached ships and relying on the native people for supplies (Morison 1963).'<br><br>'… the Spanish chroniclers recorded little first-hand information about the Jamaican Taino, leaving later scholars to generalize Taino culture largely on the evidence of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico (Wilson 1990).' | 252 |
| 1509 | 60,000 Tainos survived. Jamaica's Taino populations diminished rapidly. | 253 |
| 1511 | King Ferdinand instructed Diego Columbus to 'make the Indians grow as much food as possible' (Cundall 1919:1). | 253 |
| 1513 & 1514 | 'Encomiendas' was established. (A system of legally forced labour on native land). (Cundall 1919; Wright 1921). | 253 |
| 1521 | A general pestilence … among the Indians and slaves. (An epidemic of disease). (Cundall 1919:5; Wright 1921:76-77). | 253 |
| 1528 | The authorities were complaining of the 'scarcity of labor' (Cundall 1919:5; Wright 1921:76-77). | 253 |

| Year | Event | Wesler citation |
|---|---|---|
| 1576 & 1606 | Tommaso Porcacchi's map of Jamaica state that the Jamaicans 'had the same language and customs as the people of Sagnuola [[Hispaniola]] ... they keep the same rites and ceremonies as in Cuba…' (Lee 1981:3) Description of Jamaica on a map by Gerard Mercator asserted that the "people differ in no way from the people of Hispaniola and Cuba in laws, religion and customs" (Cameron 1982:28) | 252 |
| 1597 | Sir Anthony Shirley attacked Villa de la Vega, (now Spanish Town), 'guided thereto by a native Indian', suggesting that not all native people were meekly subjugated. At the time, one of four companies of Spanish soldiers was 'made up of Indians and free mulattoes' (Cundall 1919:18-19). | 253 |
| End of 16th Century | The Spanish were discussing how to settle the surviving Tainos, without resolution (Cundall 1919; Cundall and Pietersz 1919; Woodward 2006a). | 253 |
| 1598 | Fernando Melgarrejo de Cordova wrote of the Jamaican Taino, 'Those here are few and have no town, but serve on the ranches and at the hunts for a trifling amount of wages each year' Cundall 1919:22). | 253-254 |
| 1611 | The Abbot of Jamaica's census included 74 'Indians, natives of the island' (Cundall 1919:34), but this seems to have been the last reference to a Taino population (Robertson 2005:31) | 254 |
| 1598 | Report of some 'Indians who are in the Bastidas Mountains' (the eastern end of the Blue Mountains) (Cundall 1919:24) leaves open a popular idea that a few Taino were among the founder groups who became the Maroons (Agorsah 1994, this volume; Wright 1994). | 254 |
| 17th Century | Commentator took it for fact that the Jamaican Taino were gone (Cameron 1982; Cundall 1919; de Espinosa 1968) | 254 |