

## Δ 2 WRITING

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'The Exhibitionist' (aka historian, curator, tour guide and author Alice Procter) uses a variety of curatorial practices to highlight hidden colonialism. Here are a few examples and the positions that they enact.

'Uncomfortable Art Tours' were unofficial, guerrilla-style guided tours in major British museums and galleries including the British Museum, National Gallery, Tate Britain and the Victoria and Albert Museum. They exposed how institutions' histories, collections, displays and funding are shaped by colonialism and empire. Procter led small groups through the collections to expose how these issues underpin many of these institutions' exhibited objects. During the tours, she discussed how artifacts were acquired, who funded the collection(s) and how displays were sanitized of innate colonialism. Bringing attention to specific objects like Benin bronzes and classical portraits, helped them become entry points for discourse on institutional complicity. Participants were encouraged to question authority and neutrality in an effort to see colonialism hidden behind culture and education.

**"To be clear, I see my work as running alongside the institutions' stories, to contextualise and expand on it, not as a substitute or rival. I want museums to be better, and more representative of the public they're supposed to serve. I can share a story that they aren't acknowledging – I hope one day it won't be necessary for outsiders to take all this work on."**

(Doing History in Public, 2025)

'Display it like you stole it' is a set of stickers and badges that provoke a rethink of museum display. As you can see in the image on the right, tight crops of museum pieces are used as backgrounds and slogans set in prominent, contrasting sans serif type sit upon them. The contrast of these elements, displayed itself as a badge on a person, is a small act of activism within a space like a museum. It's a material way to speak back, challenging the hierarchy where museums speak and visitors listen.

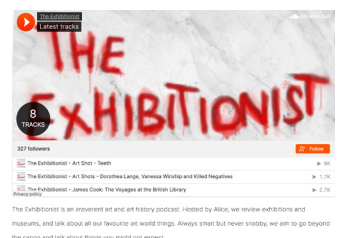
**"Who is the authorial voice here, and what is considered worthy of inclusion? It's well past time for museums to be honest about their acquisitions history and how objects arrive in their collections in the first place."**

(The Exhibitionist, 2025.)

'Dear Art Gallery/Museum' is an A6 postcard made for visitors to use in museums or galleries. It's a tool for visitors who, instead of being passive audience members, can provide feedback to exhibitors in an act of subtle activism. Instead of coming, viewing and leaving, the visitor becomes an active participant in the discourse about how museums and art galleries represent.



|                                                  |                      |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| DEAR ART GALLERY/MUSEUM...                       |                      |
| Your label for _____ needs improvement.          |                      |
| Currently, it is:                                |                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Racist                  | ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Colonialist/Imperialist |                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classist                |                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homophobic              |                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexist                  |                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trans-Erasing           |                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gender Essentialist     |                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Totally Impenetrable    |                      |
| I'm sure you didn't think this through.          |                      |



The general practice of The Exhibitionist *exposes* colonialism from within objects and the spaces they inhabit, via tours, writing, badges, postcards and podcasts. My passport, an object that also embodies hidden colonialism. Its royal crest, internal imagery and deep blue color evoke imperial power, global reach and a legacy of control over borders and mobility. My subversion of it has *exposed* the colonialism within that was obscure to me before.

Proctor's printed material, specifically the 'Display It Like You Stole It' badges and 'Dear Art Gallery/Museum' visitors' A6 postcard, appropriate imagery and a method of visitor feedback to subvert an institution's power using its own language. Yet, this is not done in an adversarial fashion. Her tours, writing, podcasts and printed ephemera don't insult, they encourage acknowledgment. It is a soft, human kind of activism.

**"The reason that my tours are called "Uncomfortable" is because the idea is that you actually have to sit with that discomfort sometimes . . . It's not about feeling guilty, it's not about saying "I'm so sorry, I feel so guilty about the past." . . . It's about saying "Well, we've done some bad things. I know that. What is the legacy that affects me and how can I undo that? What difference can I actually make today?"**

(Renegade Inc., 2018)

Whilst my project has the appearance of a bureaucratic object that materializes Britain's colonial past (even the typography and iconography that are reminiscent of a passport quietly assert British dominance), the insides offer the same calm, soft activism as Proctor's practice. The content is shown through a warm lens of everyday family life and is not adversarial.

The mediums that are so obviously different between Proctor's practice and mine also reflect a change of meaning. The passport as an object is functional, and though I acknowledge that multiple and varied stamps and even thickness can act as a sort of status symbol (Keshavarz, p76), fundamentally it is carried to facilitate movement. In contrast, a badge is a worn item used to identify the wearer but more often to express that wearer's opinion. 'DISPLAY IT LIKE YOU STOLE IT' is definitely a quick and engaging slogan, it's language direct and simple. 'Where are the missing pieces, Daddy?' (Referring the Acropolis in Athens), amongst a paragraph describing the trip within my publication, has a lighter tone and is consumed more slowly.

On the 'Uncomfortable Art Tours' and in the interview referenced, Proctor's tone of voice is one of understanding. It's human and reflective. My publication shares this.

The tours and wearing a badge are soft activism, but they themselves are not hidden. By contrast, my publication is in disguise. With a seemingly normal cover, it opens to a large format, map-like, illustrated story in the style of a passport guilloché pattern. Is there



*Guilloché style illustration reminiscent of a passport is combined with family photographs and other items to create a narrative*

something more overt to be done with my publication, so the user can show it with pride like a badge?

Set against a widening international discussion around restitution of artifacts and acknowledgment of colonial and imperialist legacies by museums and galleries, Proctor's varied practice directly and openly challenges the status quo within the UK. They also ask the viewer to understand and acknowledge that the way our histories are shown and taught is flawed and to examine what difference the individual can make today. In the development of my practice and iterating versions of my passport, from investigating its materiality to unearthing inherent colonial legacy, I realise that my knowledge and positions in relation to my country's past are deepening.

The latest iterations of my project do not attempt to reconcile the subject of colonial legacy for the masses, instead I continue to frame it using a period of time spent living outside of my home country, and everyday family life. This connects me to the project deeply and has made me realise that in turn, my children's awareness of our country's past may also be narrow.

I speculate whether Proctor's practice also has a deep personal connection, given that she was a dual-nationality child as seen in her biography. Does a personal connection to our graphic communication design practices help, hinder or both? Does our view need to be micro as well as macro?

In the next steps of this enquiry, I would like to make conclusions based on interviewing my children on their education and time abroad, to establish what their views of our country's past are. I will ground this within current parliamentary debate on de-colonising the UK curriculum.

Therein, I will establish an appropriate response with my publication, in perhaps a more direct tone of voice using the strength of The Exhibitionists tone as a guide. With her tours in mind, is there something more performative or site-specific I can do with my document? Can I test it's efficacy on friends and family, recording their reactions?

**My current question is this:** What effect has hidden colonial legacy had on my kids? How can raise awareness of the lack of acknowledgement in UK education using my skills as a designer in a publication and/or performative act?

## REFERENCES

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