



Hyundai Commission: Kara Walker, *Fons Americanus* (detail), 2019, installation view; photograph © Ben Fisher, courtesy of Tate

Young British Artist's (YBAs) to showcase work and, in turn, power the invisible cogs of regeneration and, ultimately, gentrification. The Irish artist, Michael Craig-Martin – pivotal in the formation of that generation, which included artists like Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Sarah Morris and Liam Gillick – served as a key advisor on the board. Tate Modern eventually opened to the public on 12 May 2000.

The iconic, albeit intimidating, Turbine Hall is 35 metres high and 152 metres long, with the boiler house alongside and a single central chimney, just a few metres lower than the steeple of St Paul's Cathedral. The Turbine Hall became the epicentre of Relational Aesthetics practices, showcasing everything from Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project* (2003) for the Unilever Series, to Tania Bruguera's 2019 Hyundai Commission, *10,148,451*, which saw the Boiler House renamed as the Natalie Bell Building, to honour a local activist who works with Syrian refugees. In the past two decades, Tate Modern has hosted some of the most important international exhibitions and installations, welcoming the work of artists such as Anni Albers, Dora Marr, Marlene Dumas, Pablo Picasso, Tino Sehgal, Sonia Delaunay and Steve McQueen, to name but a few.

At the time of writing, dust gathers on the silent objects that fill galleries the world over. Tate Modern remains closed to the public for the foreseeable future, just as the museum should have been celebrating its 20th birthday with an expansive programme of exhibitions and events. Kara Walker's Turbine Hall commission, *Fons Americanus* (2019), still stands. Walker's piece is a sculptural subversion of the Victorian monument, adjacent to Buckingham Palace, which until recently invited large audiences to critically engage with the British Empire's violent history and its enduring legacy in contemporary British politics and society.

Ireland and Tate Modern

As a BA Fine Art student at NCAD in 2007, I recall being awestruck during one of Declan Long's lectures, by images depicting the scale of making and engineering that went into Doris Salcedo's 2007 installation, *Shibboleth*. Little did I know, sitting in those formative visual culture classes, that much of my 20s would be spent delivering lectures, workshops and tours in that very building, for thousands of visitors and students. Undoubtedly, Tate has played an important role in how visitors from around the world have come to experience contemporary art. Tate Modern holds an important place in the hearts of Irish visitors to London and has served as a pivotal and important space for Irish artists, researchers, educators and curators to develop new and important work, pedagogies and connections with international practitioners and audiences.

Tate Modern employs an array of Irish talent behind the scenes, including art writer and curator, Dr Judith Wilkinson,

Assistant Curator, Daniel Bermingham, and Assistant Curator of Photography, Sarah Allen, to name but a few. Allen curated a staggering exhibition of Nan Goldin's work last year, which received international acclaim. In that exhibition, I distinctly recall a striking colour photograph of Irish artist, Vivienne Dick, that Goldin had taken. I remember looking at that photograph in the silent gallery one morning, before visitors had entered the building, and being struck by the peculiarity of seeing a portrait of an Irish artist in the museum. Dick stands in a green dress next to a partially opened window, staring directly at the camera positioned below her. Outside it is night. A small, blue, portable radio sits on the windowsill next to her. A dark blue glass vase holds an arrangement of dried, red leaves, which resonate with the red lipstick worn by Dick and the intensely red plastic bangle she wears on her wrist. I almost remember the sound of the song playing on the radio, so perfect is the image.

There are some Irish artists in the Tate collection, including the recent acquisition of a heavily-polished geometric sculpture by Eva Rothschild, which is hung in 'Media Networks' – one of the museum's many themed galleries. More broadly, however, Tate has a poor history of showcasing Irish artists, which could and should be remedied in the coming years. I long to turn a corner in the museum and be pleasantly surprised by one of Vivienne Dick's films, or perhaps a work by James Coleman – another Irish artist of international influence, still grossly underrepresented in major collections.

Working at Tate, there have been many memorable moments over the years. Reassuring David Bowie that no one would recognise him, as I walked around the galleries with him disguised, a folded newspaper in hand, was a high point – albeit lucid and surreal! But perhaps the most meaningful encounter happened last year, when I bumped into a student who had previously attended a workshop I delivered with British-Ghanaian artist, Larry Achiampong. He told me that since the workshop, he had visited the gallery every month and subsequently made the decision to go to art school. He is now in his first year of the Fine Art course at Goldsmiths. More than anything, this illustrates the important function of free galleries – and in particular, the role of museums like Tate – in the formative development of younger artists, as well as the real and lasting impact of opening up art to wider audiences.

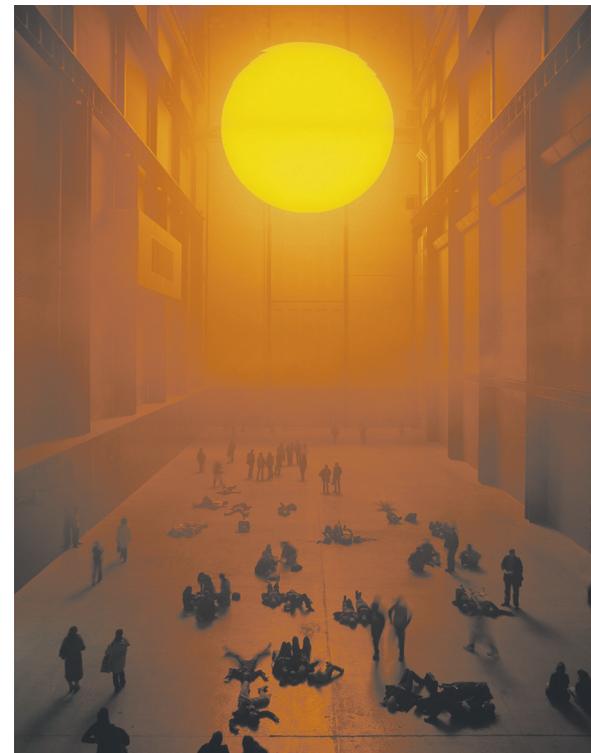
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Notes

¹As a serving board member of Tate in 1977, Henry Moore had humbly suggested that one third of the gallery space be dedicated to his work.



Hyundai Commission: *Superflex, One, Two, Three, Swing!*, 2017, installation view; photograph © and courtesy of Tate



The Unilever Series: Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*, 2003, installation view; photograph © and courtesy of Tate



Lee Mingwei, *Our Labyrinth*, 2015 – present, installation view at 11th Shanghai Biennale, Power Station of Art, Shanghai, 2016; photograph by Jay Yuan, courtesy of Tate.