

Oil Spill: How Fossil Fuel Funding Corrupts British Cultural Institutions

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THESIS

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Dedicated to Sarah Rae Grossman

*“Go spill your beauty on the laughing faces
Of happy flowers that bloom a thousand hues,
Waiting on tiptoe in the wilding spaces,
To drink your wine mixed with sweet drafts of dews.”*
Claude McKay, “Song of the Moon”, 1922

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations	iv
Summary	v
Introduction	1
Methodology	6
Literature Review	7
Chapter 1: The Decline of Public Funding for the Arts and Turn to Corporate Support	11
Funding From the State	11
The Benefits of Corporate Sponsorship	15
Chapter 2: Greenwashing and the Consequences of Corporate Influence in the Arts	19
What is Greenwashing?	19
Manipulation of Staffers, Exhibition Material, and Public Programs.....	23
Chapter 3: The Fossil Fueled Climate Crisis	30
The Climate Crisis	30
Environmental Disasters	33
Environmental Racism	36
The Convolutioned Process to Avoid Paying Taxes	39
Chapter 4: The Work of Activist Groups and Changes Brought to Museums	43
Selected Activist Groups	43
Protest at Galleries and Changes Brought	47
Moving Forward	51
Conclusion	55
Cited Literature	58
Vita	65

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BP – British Petroleum

UK – United Kingdom

NPG – National Portrait Gallery

BM – British Museum

V&A – Victoria and Albert Museum

APOC- Anglo-Persian Oil Company

ANO – Art Not Oil

AIOC – Anglo-Iranian Oil Company

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

FOI – Freedom of Information

ABSA - Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts

NDGB – Non-departmental Government Bodies

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

ASA – Advertising Standards Authority

FTC – Federal Trade Commission

HMRC – Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs Department

RSC – Royal Shakespeare Company

SUMMARY

This thesis served as a research paper to understanding the relationship between oil company sponsorships and British cultural institutions. Research was conducted through gathering secondary published materials either scholarly, or in public media. Primary information was gathered through the websites of various activist groups, museums, and oil companies. Once the reasoning for why these institutions accepted oil company funding was established, then research into how activist groups counteract these measures was discussed, finished with a discussion on the relationship between decolonization and the termination of oil company funding in cultural centers.

Introduction

British cultural institutions have benefited from the colonial plunders of the Crown and Parliament, particularly through the success and exploits of the oil and gas industry. I had been influenced to research this relationship after my first visit to the British Museum in December 2019 and was struck by the frequency of BP's logo throughout the institution. I was also influenced by an indigenous activist group *Honor the Earth* and their efforts to stop a oil pipeline that will be running through their reservation. This thesis will primarily focus on the relationships that BP has cultivated with the British heritage sector, given its storied relationship with Parliament and philanthropy across the United Kingdom. For the sake of scope, I will focus on the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Museum, and the National Portrait Gallery, which are three of the many institutions that continue to receive or are open to funding from BP despite calls from activist groups for decades to terminate these relationships. Ultimately, this thesis will seek to answer the following question: Why do renowned cultural institutions in Britain continue to accept oil company funding in a time of climate crisis, racial and social unrest, and calls for decolonizing museums from workers and activists across the world?

Publicly funded museums in the U.K., like those that will be discussed in this paper, are intended to serve the public, recognizing that art and culture should be a service given to the people. The British Museum (BM) serves as an encyclopedic museum, containing a little bit of everything from everywhere through the colonial exploits of previous centuries. The Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A), an art and design museum, and the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), home to portraits of famous and important British people, are also intended to serve the public, which is why one-third of their yearly endowment comes from the British taxpayers. These bodies and like institutions have received public funding since the early 20th century.

However, in more recent decades, these museums have been advertising to their constituents that they need corporate sponsorships in order to keep the lights on, citing reduced funding from the government since the 1980's. Therefore, bank and oil company logos, among other corporate sponsorships, decorating signage and exhibition material in the museum. Some museums claim that this funding is so necessary to support their free admission. In fact, while it is true that public funding for the arts has declined since the 1980's beginning with Prime Minister Thatcher's government, in reality this has only affected smaller museums and galleries nationally, and has left the larger institutions such as the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and National Portrait Gallery, in the same comfortable positions they started out in. So why do these institutions insist they need corporate sponsorship, specifically from the oil companies that are the focus of this thesis?

In order to answer this question, it is important to understand the colonial origins of the oil and gas industry. British Petroleum is a case in point. In 1908, after a seven-year search for oil in Persia, the Australian-British mining magnate William Knox D'Arcy finally found what he was looking for. With this discovery, D'Arcy founded the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). By 1914 the first world war on the horizon and D'Arcy—who had no resources to distribute the oil—was desperate to make a profit. He lobbied successfully to Winston Churchill, Chief of the British Navy, to switch from coal to oil-burning fuel, with the promise that Persia was a bottomless resource. This led the British government to invest two-million pounds into the company. By the end of World War I, it was clear that the oil source D'Arcy had found in Persia would revolutionize industries across all sectors, as the narrative now goes from BP's own website on their history, “war without oil would be unimaginable.”¹

¹ “Early History – 1909-1924: Who We Are: Home,” bp global, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/who-we-are/our-history/early-history.html>.

In 1935, D'Arcy's company received a facelift and was rebranded as the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), as new leadership in Tehran sought to escape the nation's "archaic" Persian past.² As demand grew and the company expanded its hiring, Iran provided a steady supply of laborers. Profitable as the company was, conditions for their men on the ground were difficult. Segregation was rampant on the worksites as Iranian workers were housed in slums, one known as Kaghazabad, or "Paper City," while British officials lived in air-conditioned offices and villas with water fountains marked "Not for Iranians."³ With continued British presence and unequal distribution of resources and exploitation of Iranian workers, tensions grew high throughout the country. In 1951, Mohammed Mossadegh was democratically elected as Prime Minister of Iran and nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's holdings.⁴ While the United States claimed to fear Soviet influence in Iran and the British wanted to regain control over "their" oil, this prompted the joint CIA and British Intelligence coup of 1953 called "Operation Ajax."⁵ The country was then placed in the hands of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a pro-Western Shah. The following year, in 1954, the company was rebranded as the British Petroleum Company. The British company and government were able to maintain control over Iran for two decades until the Iranian Revolution of 1979 finally put an end to British control of the state's oil.

I begin with this brief introduction on the origins of the oil company now commonly called BP because it is important to understand the colonial origins and consequences of this company and the lasting colonial impact it has had over the last couple of centuries in British and

² Ishaan Tharoor, "A Brief History of BP," Time (Time Inc., June 2, 2010), <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1993882,00.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid; "Post-War – 1946-1970: Who We Are: Home," bp global, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/who-we-are/our-history/post-war.html>.

⁵ Tharoor, 2010.

global economic spheres. Addressing the colonial origins of BP –now rebranded as “Beyond Petroleum”--is only part of why their funding in museums is unethical and unnecessary. The fossil fuel industry’s role in climate change has become undeniable over the past few decades, even if the science was available as early as the 1970’s. Since then, the fossil fuel industry has had a head start in reputation washing their companies and the use of oil in our daily lives. As I will discuss later in this paper, the same colonial enterprises that allowed for British control over oil in their colonies also allowed for artefacts to be funneled into state museums back to the British Isles.

The first chapter will discuss the public funding for the arts in the mid-twentieth century and then the beginning of its decline beginning in the 1980’s, and how this led to museums and other cultural institutions to turn to corporate relationships to fund their practices. The lack of transparency these companies give museums remains unclear, and whether or not these institutions *need* the funding like they say they do will also be contested. If museums are supposed to be democratic spaces of learning and discussion, then why is their funding from private sectors wrapped in ambiguity? Additionally, it becomes clear that although these museums would have you think they turn to corporations to make up for this shortfall in public funding, rather we see that these art institutions are functioning as an extension of the government.

The second chapter will discuss what greenwashing is and how it impacts the museums in focus, from the exhibitions they produce, to the award shows they hold year after year. An explanation of greenwashing and applying it to a museum setting will be useful for consumers moving forward, since it is not often applied to the arts and how we interact with them rather than in a traditional greenwashing example of household cleaning products with dubious claims.

I will provide many examples and cases in which productions at the museum have had a superficial agenda, while underneath it only served the interests of their fossil fuel sponsor, in addition to how staffers themselves are influenced and answer to these same companies.

The third chapter in this thesis will discuss the tax avoidance schemes conducted by oil companies such as BP and Shell, their contributions to our current climate crisis in addition to multiple environmental disasters over the past hundred years, and these companies' roles in continuing colonial practices contributing to the exploitation of indigenous peoples. It is necessary to understand that BP not only exploits the citizens of the countries they drill in abroad, but they also fail to pay the appropriate taxes on their projects back to the British government and instead receive millions of pounds in subsidies.

The fourth and final chapter will focus on the work of different activist groups based in the UK and abroad, and how their successes and failures in removing oil company funding from various cultural institutions. In this chapter, I will also expand on the term decolonization and its application to the removal of oil company funding from museums, ensuring that decolonial action will be taken rather than just used as a metaphor.

Methodology

In order to answer my research question, I aimed to gather my qualitative and quantitative data through secondary sources varying from scholarly articles published in an academic setting, to research publications from non-profits. I also aimed to gather primary source information, mostly about the museums, oil companies, and activist groups through their websites. While academic articles were helpful, there were also few of them related to this topic, so I had to pull a lot from website articles while checking the author's journalistic integrity. By collecting a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data, I was able to create a larger framework to understand the way in which these institutions were funded as well as how this would affect the content produced. When collecting data from online articles, I restrict myself by reading to reputable news sources. When applicable I also focused on the more recently published article for the most up-to-date information on certain subjects, but it was also useful to use older resources as well. I was limited by time and resources as well, in another case I would have liked to have filed for documents under the Freedom of Information Act in the U.K. but the time constraints of this project did not allow me to do so, so I had to go off of the already published documents. Ultimately, I aimed to collect this information and put them in conversation with each other.

Literature Review

Beginning my research, I sought out journal articles and books that have already discussed the relationship between oil funding and museums and how this relationship came to be. To my surprise, there was not much out there. While online articles from media publications were plentiful, scholarship was not. I also wanted to find a discussion of the possibility for decolonial action in removing oil funding from museums due to the destructive and extractive nature of oil companies on indigenous land globally; I thought of the protests led by group *Decolonize This Place* and how they effectively removed Warren Kanders from the Whitney and assumed that there would have been similar measures taken against oil executives on museum boards too. Again, there was not much published about this specific relationship. But in this search I found two pieces of scholarship that helped me establish a foundation of oil and arts, and how funding had evolved since the 1980's in order to address my research question.

My research began with the discovery of the book *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts* written by British artist and activist Mel Evans. This book was the jumping point for my thesis and is one of the only comprehensive pieces of literature on the subject of Big Oil spending in museums. Evans discusses how tobacco companies and arms manufacturers were the precursors to oil funding in the arts, the entanglement between the UK government and the oil company BP specifically, how this oil money ultimately influences the exhibitions produced in a negative way, and finally highlighting the performance protests in galleries all over the world. Since publishing in 2015, Evans' work with activist group *Liberate Tate* has proved successful since Tate ended its 26 year relationship with BP. *Artwash* does not engage with the term decolonial or decolonization movements within museums. Evans also engages heavily with how oil sponsorship in museums is about the sprucing up of the company's reputation and image; this is

not something I will dwell too much on, as I believe it will be more impactful to focus on the destruction these companies bring, rather than their efforts to tidy up their logo.

The second book that also proved to be useful for my project is *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980's* by Chin-tao Wu. Like Evans book, Wu's is a rare but important find, only in this case it is a comprehensive collection of information on the change of funding norms in museums from the 1980's to present-day (published in 2002). Wu focuses on the United States and Britain and their changes in public arts funding, the changing role of the government, and the turn towards corporate sponsorship and awards. Wu details how the Regan and Thatcher conservative, neoliberal governments of the 1980's brought this change into museums; as government funding was withdrawn from the arts, corporations of all kinds stepped in to fund museums and other cultural institutions. There are many concepts in this book that have been useful while creating the framework for my paper and on what levels I intend to critique museums on, such as cultural hegemony and imperialism, the obstructive results of late-capitalism. While this book was originally published in 2002 it still serves as a thorough contribution to funding in the arts and how corporations have embedded themselves in the arts. These two books have helped me lay the foundation of my thesis in order to critique the contribution of oil funding in British museums as well as approach it from a decolonial stance and agenda, without having to do the research or investigation on "how we got here" in regards to the funding changes and discrepancies from the mid-20th century to present day.

Additionally, my approach to this paper from an analytical perspective was informed by scholars from the environmental anthropology field. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, edited by Jason Moore has largely influenced my approach to the relationship between oil company sponsorship, cultural institutions, and the climate crisis.

Moore discusses the term *capitalocene* in comparison to the Anthropocene, posing it as a term that answers questions the Anthropocene cannot; he states that the capitalocene signifies how capitalism organizes nature as a whole, nature being multi-speciated and cheapened, meaning that everything a part of nature is cheap and ready for extraction. By approaching (neo)colonialism and how both oil companies and British cultural institutions have and continue to benefit from the empire, it has helped me understand and explain why in terms of environmental racism and impact on (neo)colonial nations. Similar to Moore's book, I utilized Kathryn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes*, which also describes the manner in which black and brown bodies are in closer proximity to sites of extraction given their entanglement with nature.

Naomi Klein's 1999 *No Logo* was also informative about capitalism and brand relations to the public. In this book, Klein addresses the real violence that is felt in the so-called Third World, and the nations and people that live there exist only for the comfort of the First World; for example: the hanging of Nigerian anti-Shell activist Ken Saro-Wiwa.⁶ Klein's book is situated on the hypothesis that if more people know of the dark secrets that the global brands hold, a new political movement would be sparked. Even if written 22 years ago from the moment I am writing this, I believe in the same sentiment and that if we work to illuminate the exploitative practices of corporations, people would want to hold them accountable because human and nature relations does not bring destruction (as the Anthropocene suggest) rather, capitalists accumulating resources brings destruction. *No Logo* focuses on the rise of brands and their relation to the public, which falls in line with Moore's concept of the capitalocene and the relationship between oil companies and museums.

⁶ Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 14-15.

Ultimately, as I aim to illustrate throughout this paper that museums do not need funding from oil companies and rather their relationship proves to be more sinister. The relationship between companies like BP and British cultural institutions is one that prioritizes capital accumulation at the expense of consumers in the arts, the public, and those working and inhabiting in the Global South that either work for oil companies or live near the negative impacts of the oil and gas industry; here we will see how both humans and nature are resources to be extracted from, just as Moore describes as capitalocene. Additionally, the oil companies continue to benefit from their relationship with museums and cultural centers because it helps clean up their reputation and readjust consumers priorities, shifting the blame from “potential” environmental destruction, to the benefits of accessible art institutions, accessibility that they can only claim to provide but never prove. I will discuss how this reputation-washing negatively impacts the content produced by the museums these companies inhabit, again at the expense of the museum visitor, all so that these corporations can continue to make a ridiculous profit overseas. Breaking from my peers before me, I want to highlight how redistribution of colonial funds is not decolonial action, nor does it liberate our art institutions; I am to contribute to the necessity of financial transparency in art institutions and how decolonial action also extends to removing unethical funding in these spaces.

Chapter 1: The Decline of Public Funding for the Arts and Turn to Corporate Support

Funding from the State

The Arts Council of Great Britain was founded in 1946 by the labour government under Clement Attlee (1945-1951) with the purpose of distributing state funds.⁷ Because the Arts Council is the body that then gives British museums their funding from the British taxpayers; these cultural institutions and the British government can claim that they are operating on an “arm’s-length principle,” meaning that they don’t answer directly to Parliament and would thus flourish without Parliament’s direct meddling.⁸ Based on the detailing of Tate’s income from 1938-1953, and then 1953-2014 from Mel Evans in *Artwash*, we can infer similar funding figures for the other large London institutions. From 1938-1953, annual reports at the Tate showed that the galleries' entire income came from gifts, legacies and publications until the first grant-in-aid funding from the state came in 1946 at £2,000; this funding increased by £1,200 until 1953 and then increased by £6,250 from that year onward.⁹

Traditionally, donations to the art institutions in the UK, which are largely registered and are still registered as charities, are made through the British Deed of Covenant. The Deed of Covenant, introduced by the 1922 Finance Act, provided the first legal agreement in which donations could be made to charities.¹⁰ This contract was made distinctive because of its long-term agreement; a seven-year annual donation organized which provided many arts organizations with assured charitable income.¹¹ This system also provided a great amount of transparency in where and how these donations were funded from the Deed of Covenant to the Inland Revenue

⁷ Mel Evans, *Artwash - Big Oil and the Arts* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 42.

⁸ Evans, 42; Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (London: Verso, 2003), 21.

⁹ Evans, 50.

¹⁰ Wu, 60.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 60.

Department. Essentially, the donor makes a payment to a charity of their choice net of the basic-rate income tax and the tax is paid to the Inland Revenue, which is then reclaimed by the charity.¹² While this process is not entirely clear to me, it isn't too important to understand the intricacies of this process as it is eventually changed under Prime Minister Thatcher in the 1980's and it's more important to understand that this process was more transparent than the policies that followed.

The funding relationship between Parliament and British museums changed once Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher came into office in 1979. The aim of Thatcher's government was to take the "arm's-length principle" a few steps further by reducing the funding given to art institutions and encouraging corporate relationships in its place. At this point, the British government had been providing for the arts, a public service and therefore a right to every citizen, for over 20 years, but Thatcher wanted art institutions to join the competitive spirit of free enterprise.¹³ In order to encourage businesses to invest in the arts, an aggressive campaign was launched with the aid of Norman St John-Stevs, the first Arts Minister under Thatcher.¹⁴ A part of this campaign included the launch of the special grant of £25,000 pounds to the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA), as well as, in 1980, producing 25,000 copies of a booklet entitled *The Arts Are Your Business* which advertised the benefits of business sponsorship in the arts; the booklet also detailed tax reliefs for businesses that came with supporting the arts.¹⁵ A copy of this booklet is extremely difficult to come by and I wasn't able to get my hands on a digital copy for this paper. The end goal of this introductory campaign was to double the figure the arts received from businesses from around £4 to £5 million in 1979, to

¹² Ibid, 60-61.

¹³ Ibid, 47.

¹⁴ Ibid, 54.

¹⁵ Ibid, 54-55.

£8 to £10 million by 1980.¹⁶ By 1987, Thatcher and Conservative minister Norman Tebbit made a 50% cut in the number of funded organizations nationally, which disproportionately impacted the smaller regional cultural institutions than the larger ones in London such as Tate, the National Gallery, and the BM.¹⁷

Furthermore, the format of the British Deed of Covenant also changed under Thatcher's government. In 1980, the first Finance Act was introduced and shortened the minimum covenant period from a 7 year to a 3 year commitment; this made it more attractive to potential donors given the volatility of the free market, long-term charitable investments were no longer desirable.¹⁸ Then in 1986 in line with a more American style system of contributions, the Finance Act allowed companies to deduct charitable contributions up to a limit of 3% of dividends paid. Further diversifying and Americanizing how companies and individuals could give to charity, the Payroll Giving Scheme was introduced in 1987 which allowed employees to deduct donations from their income to the charity of their choice by the employers.¹⁹ Both of these measures not only Americanized how companies and individuals could donate to charities and art institutions, it provided an easier alternative to the contractual obligations that the Deeds of Covenant created.

Overall, the Thatcher's government in the 1980's had a long-lasting impact on funding in the arts sector and corporate funding still makes up a large proportion of the total funding these large museums operate off of. Yet, the amount of grant-in-aid these large London museums receive still grows every year, pushing into a range of around 40% of funding total.²⁰ For

¹⁶ Ibid, 55.

¹⁷ Evans, 43.

¹⁸ Wu, 61.

¹⁹ Ibid, 62.

²⁰ Evans, 55.

example, the British Museums grant-in-aid was £13.1 million in 2018/2019 and rose to £32.5 million for the 2019/2020 year.²¹ The continued trend of slashing for funding to cultural institutions largely supported by the Arts Council of England are the ones that truly suffer from these price slashes and the pressure to turn to corporate sponsorship.

²¹ The British Museum, 2020.

The Benefits of Corporate Sponsorship - In the Words of Big Oil and the Arts

Thatcher's government sought to increase corporate relationships in the arts and she was successful to say the least. These public institutions across the United Kingdom now have exhibition banners that sport "Sponsored by BankNameHere" among others. The museums in focus in this paper either already have a contract with an oil company, or are open to oil company sponsorship, specifically from corporations like BP. While these museums will make the argument that they need funding from these corporate sponsors, it is more likely than not that outlined in each institutions sponsorship policies, it is easy to criticize and find the ground work in order to hold these museums accountable in their own words, as oil company sponsorship is unethical on multiple levels. Not only does oil company sponsorship more often than not go against their institutions sponsorship policies, museums are also lying to the public when they say that these relationships are necessary to sustain public programs, events, exhibitions, among other activities.²²

On the contrary, BP's 2016 five-year contract with the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Royal Opera House, and the Royal Shakespeare company allotted £7.5 million total among these institutions.²³ It is not disclosed how this money is divided between institutions, but if it were divided evenly, then the British Museum would only receive less than 1% of its yearly budget from BP funding. Not only is this a minute amount in the grand scheme of the museum's operations, it also does not explain why museum workers and BP keep saying that their sponsorship keeps the doors to the museum open and free. This is simply not true. The

²² Evans, 104.

²³ Kevin McGwin, "The British Museum Confirms That BP Is out as Arctic Exhibit Sponsor," ArcticToday, January 6, 2020, [https://www.arctictoday.com/the-british-museum-confirms-that-bp-is-out-as-arctic-exhibit-sponsor/#:~:text=The%20British%20Museum%20has%20received,million\)%20sponsorship%20agreement%20with%20BP.](https://www.arctictoday.com/the-british-museum-confirms-that-bp-is-out-as-arctic-exhibit-sponsor/#:~:text=The%20British%20Museum%20has%20received,million)%20sponsorship%20agreement%20with%20BP.)

British Museum has been a non-departmental government body (NDGB), which means that the 1/3 of its annual budget is given from the state with the condition that entrance remains free and open to all.²⁴ Whether BP is present or not has no effect on admission prices for any of these NDGB.

To begin with, the relationship between BP and the British Museum (BM) is one that has been two decades in the making. BP and the BM boast about the public programs that BP sponsorship has been able to produce, as well as the numbers of people whose exhibitions and programs have attracted millions of visitors. On the BM website, highlighted exhibitions and public programs include *Troy: Myth and Reality* from 2019, *I am Ashurbanipal: King of the World, King of Assyria* from 2018, the Chinese New Year event of 2008, and the Mexican Days of the Dead Festival from 2015.²⁵ Since 2000, BP increased its participation at the BM by funding the BP Lecture Theatre.²⁶ The BM has cited that the lecture theatre BP sponsorship is an invaluable resource for the museum's education and public programming, and most importantly, has helped the museum generate additional revenue.

Additionally, the National Portrait Gallery has hosted the BP Portrait Award yearly since 1990. The annual Portrait award has additional initiatives from it such as BP Next Generation, BP Young Artists' Award, and the BP Travel Award.

The total prize money increased to £74,000 in 2018. This makes the first prize worth £35,000 – one of the largest for any global arts competition. The winner also receives, at the Gallery's discretion, a commission worth £7,000 (agreed between the National

²⁴ Evans, 44.

²⁵ “BP,” The British Museum, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/support-us/supporter-case-studies/bp>.

²⁶ “Bp and the National Portrait Gallery: Community: Home,” United Kingdom, accessed November 27, 2020, https://www.bp.com/en_gb/united-kingdom/home/community/connecting-through-arts-and-culture/bp-and-the-national-portrait-gallery.html.

Portrait Gallery and the artist). The second prize winner receives £12,000 and a third prize of £10,000 is also awarded. The bp Young Artist Award, with a prize of £9,000 goes to one selected artist aged between 18 and 30. The bp Travel Award, which allows an artist to experience working in a different environment on a project related to portraiture, is £8,000. (BP Website)

For thirty years BP has been sponsoring this portraiture series which gathers millions of visitors, inspires entry from all over the UK and the world, and claims that BP's sponsorship of this event allows "more people to have access to the best of the UK's culture..." (BP website).

While the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) does not have any active corporate partnerships with BP or any other oil company, director Tristram Hunt said he is open to the opportunity to work with BP in the future. Hunt said that he believes that companies like BP, although criminal for their lobbying against climate science, are also the ones that will be a part of the solution for climate change, so oil company funding is not off the table at his museum.²⁷ The most recent interaction between the V&A and any oil company sponsorship came from the touring exhibition back in 2013, *Pearls* which was sponsored by Shell and Qatar Gas.²⁸ Out of the three museums in focus in this paper, the V&A has the 'cleanest' comparable record in regards to its relationship with oil companies.

While many museums in the U.K., including those focused on in this paper, are publicly funded by the British taxpayers, the ambiguity and lack of transparency around funding is key for all parties involved to maintain their unethical operations which will be discussed in the next

²⁷ Sutton, Benjamin. "Victoria and Albert Museum Director Defends Sponsorship from Fossil Fuel Companies." Artsy, September 6, 2019. <https://www.artsy.net/news/artsy-editorial-victoria-albert-museums-director-defended-funding-fossil-fuel-companies>.

²⁸ "Art Not Oil Coalition," Institutions - Art Not Oil Coalition - Ending oil industry sponsorship of the arts, accessed November 12, 2020, <https://www.artnotoil.org.uk/institutions>.

chapter. It's essential that the museums and the oil companies keep how much funding is given secret so that they can continue to tell the British public that their tax dollars are not enough to support the BM, V&A or NPG, and so that Parliament can cite lack of funds as well, therefore justifying corporate sponsorship in the arts. This is a parasitic and cyclical relationship the museums, Parliament, and oil companies have successfully developed.

Chapter 2: Greenwashing and the Consequences of Corporate Influence in the Arts

What is Greenwashing?

Oil companies such as BP are using museums and other cultural institutions in order to greenwash their reputation, to renew their social license to operate, meaning they undertake efforts to ensure that their reputation is favorable in the public eye²⁹. Many corporations globally undertake corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs in order to renew their social license to operate, thus leading them to sponsor industries such as the arts.³⁰ Greenwashing, as defined by Richard Dahl in “*GREENWASHING: DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU’RE BUYING?*” is the practice of making unwarranted or overblown claims of sustainability or environmental friendliness in order to gain market share.³¹ Another source defines greenwashing as “concealing environmentally harmful actions with the rhetoric of environmental friendliness to entice and manipulate the consumer.”³² Furthermore, greenwashing and terms related to it such as “carbon-neutral,” “all-natural,” and others have become more widespread and used more frequently than government institutions such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States or the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the U.K. can keep up with. This results in what has been called the “Seven Sins of Greenwashing,” the result of unregulated green advertising. The seven sins include: a hidden trade off, no proof, vagueness, irrelevance, lesser of two evils, fibbing, and false labels.³³ But even despite the slow pace to keep up with regulating and defining green-jargon, there have been instances where corporations were held accountable. In

²⁹ Evans, 77.

³⁰ Ibid, 76.

³¹ Richard Dahl, “GREENWASHING: DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU’RE BUYING?,” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 118, no. 6 (June 2010), A 247.

³² Stephen J. Scanlan (2017): Framing fracking: scale-shifting and greenwashing risk in the oil and gas industry, *Local Environment*, DOI: 10.1080/13549839.2017.1345877, 5.

³³ Dahl, 249.

2008, the ASA rebuked oil company Shell's claim that their tar sands project in Canada were part to "secure a profitable and sustainable future" with no evidence to back up this claim.³⁴

Greenwashing and the various like terms associated with it does affect consumers and their relationship to the brand. In an Annual General Meeting in 2012, BP representatives stated that their aim in sponsoring cultural and sporting events was for "brand projection and connection with customers and society."³⁵ A market research study found that 38% of people who were exposed to BP's Olympic sponsorship in London 2012 started believing that BP was working towards a cleaner planet.³⁶ They intentionally sponsor these events in order to maintain their social license to operate. BP is projecting an image that their money is necessary to continue the existence of sports and culture sectors, while also convincing consumers that they are the only companies with the ability to technologically develop sustainable practices.³⁷

Luckily, as of November 2020, the UK Competition and Markets Authority has undertaken a new project to examine products and services that market "eco-friendly" claims and to investigate whether consumers are misled by these claims.³⁸ The CMA has indicated that the types of behavior being investigated include exaggerating the positive environmental impact of a product or service, using complex or jargon-heavy language, and implying that terms are eco-friendly through packaging and logos.³⁹

³⁴ Dahl, 248.

³⁵ "Do the Arts Need Oil Sponsorship?," BP or not BP?, October 7, 2019, <https://bp-or-not-bp.org/does-the-arts-need-oil-sponsorship/>.

³⁶ Kate Yoder, "Why Do Oil Companies Care so Much about Your Carbon Footprint?," Grist, August 27, 2020, <https://grist.org/energy/footprint-fantasy/>.

³⁷ Scanlan, 5,15.

³⁸ Christine Graham et al., "UK Competition And Markets Authority Moves To Clean Up," Welcome to Mondaq (Cooley LLP, November 8, 2020), <https://www.mondaq.com/uk/environmental-law/1002030/uk-competition-and-markets-authority-moves-to-clean-up-green-washing-marketing-claims>.

³⁹ Ibid.

BP can and have done this (the seven sins of greenwashing) all on their own, without the reputation of world class art institutions backing them up, but it doesn't hurt to lean on the BM to ensure your consumers that you are leading the fight for clean energy. BP popularized the term "carbon footprint" after they released their carbon footprint calculator in 2004.⁴⁰ This is an excellent example of greenwashing and how a giant oil company that has spilled hundreds of millions of gallons of oil into the ocean all over the world, have successfully convinced millions of individuals to instead worry about the impact of their day to day schedule. This move was nothing short of propaganda and shifted the climate change burden from governments and corporations onto individuals.⁴¹ When greenwashing is at work in the arts, it allows oil companies to subtly repair their reputations through funding the arts, and selling the lie that these institutions need their funding in order to continue operations, even giant institutions such as the BM.

Why is it a big deal if companies like BP practice greenwashing in and outside of the museum? To quote *A Planet to Win*, "capitalists invest in projects to make money and consolidate their power, not to make the world a better place."⁴² The oil and gas industry, through greenwashing and other PR measures, has successfully convinced us that they are part of the solution to our climate crisis, that they are the ones with the technology to innovate sustainable practices.⁴³ The risks come not to these capitalists, but rather to those that are exploited by these practices. We need to care about their greenwashing tactics and influences in

⁴⁰ Mark Kaufman, "The Carbon Footprint Sham," Mashable, July 13, 2020, <https://mashable.com/feature/carbon-footprint-pr-campaign-sham/?europa=true>.

⁴¹ Yoder, 2020.

⁴² Kate Aronoff et al., *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal* (London: Verso Books, 2019), 25.

⁴³ Benjamin Sutton, "Victoria and Albert Museum Director Defends Sponsorship from Fossil Fuel Companies," Artsy, September 6, 2019, <https://www.artsy.net/news/artsy-editorial-victoria-albert-museums-director-defended-funding-fossil-fuel-companies>.

our cultural institutions because that's only where our issues begin with the oil and gas industry. If we allow them to continue to spread lies and goodwill about their practices, we are compliant with environmental destruction and racism and a continued neo colonial agenda.

Manipulation of Staffers, Exhibition Material, and Public Programs

Funding from BP and other corporations should ultimately not influence the museum staff, exhibitions, or public programs produced; this is in line with almost every individual museum's code of ethics. It should come as no surprise that both BP and BM representatives have gone on record stating that oil company funding comes with 'no strings attached,' meaning that there is not any responsibility BM has to fulfill in order to maintain BP funding.⁴⁴ Activist coalition group Art Not Oil (ANO) had published a report in 2016 highlighting all of the instances of BP using BM to their advantage after collecting material through the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. Through the FOI's requested by ANO, they found that BP's influence held most strength over BM, London Science Museum, and the NPG.⁴⁵

In one example pulled from an FOI document, email evidence showed how a BM staff member emailed a BP executive to run by a change to the exhibition on Indigenous Australia which was sponsored by BP. The email described how the curator of the Australia exhibit was keen to purchase a current work by the Spinifex women painters in place of commissioning another which was run by a BP executive to make sure they "had no objection to this."⁴⁶ The Spinifex people are also referred to as the Pila Nguru and are indigenous to the Western Australia.⁴⁷ In fact, BP staff were given frequent updates on the content, loans and development strategies of the Indigenous Australia exhibition while also being invited to comment on the planned public programmes.⁴⁸ Why does the curator of a BP sponsored exhibition need to run by

⁴⁴ "BP's Cultural Sponsorship: A Corrupting Influence" (Art Not Oil Coalition, 2016), 3.

⁴⁵ Dan Chivers, "How BP Messes with Our Museums," Fossil Free UK, May 3, 2016, <https://gofossilfree.org/uk/how-bp-messes-with-our-museums/>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Scott Cane, "Pila Nguru: The Spinifex People," The Sydney Morning Herald (The Sydney Morning Herald, August 3, 2002), <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/pila-nguru-the-spinifex-people-20020803-gdfibt.html>.

⁴⁸ "BP's Cultural Sponsorship: A Corrupting Influence" (Art Not Oil Coalition, 2016), 17.

a change like this with BP executives? FOI reports pulled by ANO showed that this was not a one-off event. Between 2015 and 2016, material showed that BP staff had been given opportunities to sign-off and approve decisions related to programming they sponsored, been strategic and highly selective in its financial support, and had regular interaction with senior members of gallery and museum staff.⁴⁹

Additionally, BP went so far as to hold meetings with cultural staff to coordinate security around anti-BP protests. Activist groups demonstrating their rights to protest within the museums troubled BP representatives so much so that they held a security meeting with their team and with security teams from BM, Tate, NPG, and other members from the Science Museum groups⁵⁰. This is the information that ANO was able to pull from FOI requests, but they believe that Royal Opera House, Royal Shakespeare Company and the Metropolitan Police of London were also present, although they are not subject to FOI reports or in the case of the Met, have decided to not disclose such information.⁵¹ It should be inferred that when it comes to legitimate protests at these museums, that the security staff is not in the interest of protecting the rights of protestors, rather the reputation of BP.

Coordinated efforts to stifle protests between BM and BP violates several ethical standards that BM sets for itself and that other organizations set for museums. The Museum's Association Code of Ethics states that cultural institutions should "support free speech and freedom of expression," and that museums should "build respectful and transparent relationships with partner organizations... to ensure public trust."⁵² Clearly, the BM has already lost its trust with the public given the protests at the museum due to their relationship with BP, and they

⁴⁹ Ibid, 16.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 8.

⁵¹ Ibid, 8.

⁵² Ibid, 13.

further muddy the water by coordinating with BP security teams about anti-BP protests. As an NDGB, the BM is also subject to “The Seven Principles of Public Life” published by the U.K. government in 1995.⁵³ Among these principles, it states that “holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interests,” and that holders of public office should not place themselves under financial obligations or influences from outside organizations.⁵⁴

Furthermore, BP invited the Metropolitan Police, to host a counter-terrorism training at their offices, which BP then invited their sponsored cultural institutions to attend which occurred 12 February 2015; the anti-BP protest security meeting occurred nine days prior to this.⁵⁵ Representatives from security, press and development departments of the NPG that attended this counterterrorism training said that they “found it useful.”⁵⁶ More concerning, when the Metropolitan Police were asked to provide details on what was discussed at this meeting, they were only able to confirm that the meeting had taken place.⁵⁷

It is interesting that the “Supported by BP” Exhibitions advertised on the BM website are all related to countries where BP has an oil-related relationship with, or is a country that they currently or have previously operated in. The BM blog post about *I am Ashurbanipal: King of the World, King of Assyria*, an exhibit sponsored by BP in a territory where they currently drill in, contains artwork that was produced by British artists in the 18th and 19th centuries, where Edward Said’s discussion of Orientalism can be repeated here; orientalism, a system of knowledge developed on the Orient through the lens of British and French worldviews, then

⁵³ Committee on Standards in Public Life, “The Seven Principles of Public Life,” GOV.UK (GOV.UK, May 30, 1995), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>.

⁵⁴ “BP’s Cultural Sponsorship: A Corrupting Influence” (Art Not Oil Coalition, 2016), 13.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 9.

filtered back into Western consciousness.⁵⁸ How can a “world-class” institution produce an exhibit based on the interpretations of British artists who have lived thousands of years and miles apart from the subject on display? Additionally, Assyria would presently occupy the southern region of Turkey and northern Iraq, where BP has benefited greatly off of the Iraq War, and in which subsequent drilling regions such as the Province of Basra and its inhabitants suffer the consequences of the pollution associated with extraction; could we not also echo BP’s own website that after WWI and the APOC lobbied for oil consumption by the British Navy “war without oil would be impossible.” Not to mention the artefacts acquired by the BM from their colonial past when Britain was still an empire, and this region of the middle east was still the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁹

In 2009, BP and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) were the sole winners in Iraq’s first post-war licensing round, curiously at the same time as the Chinese New Year event hosted at the BM with BP sponsorship. Not only that, but BP’s relationship with China was further solidified after 2015, around the same time as two exhibits were sponsored by BP were shown at the BM, *China: Journey to the East* and *Made in China: An Imperial Ming Vase*; that same year, BP boasted that it is one of the leading foreign investors in the Chinese oil and gas sector with an investment of around 4.5 billion US dollars.⁶⁰

Most damningly from the BM events and BP’s sponsorship comes the 2015 sponsorship of the Days of the Dead Festival. Through documents disclosed under the FOI Act, BP held a secret meeting with Mexican government officials and secured new drilling licenses in Mexican

⁵⁸ Edward W. Said, “Orientalism,” in *Orientalism* (Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, 1978), 6.

⁵⁹ James, “Iraq, BP and the British Museum – Look upon These Works and Hang Our Heads in Shame,” Platform London, March 14, 2019, <https://platformlondon.org/2019/03/14/iraq-bp-and-the-british-museum-look-upon-these-works-and-hang-our-heads-in-shame/>.

⁶⁰ “BP and China National Petroleum Corporation to Expand Global Partnership: News and Insights: Home,” bp global, October 21, 2015, <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/press-releases/bp-and-china-national-petroleum-corporation-to-expand-global-par.html>.

waters with BP controlled Pan American Energy.⁶¹ Although advertised as an event which highlighted Mexican culture in London, this event served no more than as an opportunity and a blanket for BP to secure more oil drilling sites in Mexican waters. These advantages had been made possible due to Mexican president at the time Enrique Peña Nieto's opening of Mexico's energy economy; instead of nationalized oil control through Pemex, BP could now run a monopoly through Mexican oil.⁶²

The NPG and its BP Portrait Award sponsorship have also come under scrutiny from within, a realization of what it means to be sponsored by an oil company. Artist and 2019 judge, Gary Hume told BBC Radio that he recognized that BP was a problem in the 21st century setting and called for the removal of the name on the Portrait Award, though it should be noted not the complete removal of the funding.⁶³ The NPG also reminds the public that BP's funding ensures that admission to the museum is free, which already discussed, is simply not true. Additionally, one of the members of the Board of Trustees for the NPG is a previous Member of Parliament (MP) Jacob Rees-Mogg, who has been on record favoring the continue exploitation of oil and natural gas as well as being skeptical that the current climate change conditions are in fact due to human activity.⁶⁴ We should be able to infer from current partnerships in addition to a previous government employee being openly skeptical of climate change causation, that the NPG has no intention of letting go of their BP sponsorship.

⁶¹ "Bad Company: BP, Human Rights and Corporate Crimes" (Culture Unstained, 2017), <https://cultureunstained.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/bad-company-bp-human-rights-and-corporate-crimes-culture-unstained-june-20171.pdf>, 13.

⁶² "Bad Company: BP, Human Rights and Corporate Crimes" (Culture Unstained, 2017), <https://cultureunstained.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/bad-company-bp-human-rights-and-corporate-crimes-culture-unstained-june-20171.pdf>, 12.

⁶³ "BP Sponsorship of Portrait Prize 'a Problem', Says Judge," BBC News (BBC, June 10, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-48580887>.

⁶⁴ "Carbon Emissions and Climate Change: Report of a Meeting with the Hon. Jacob Rees-Mogg, Member of Parliament for North-East Somerset" (Timsbury, United Kingdom: Timsbury Environment Group, 2012).

Of course the V&A is no stranger to receiving unethical funding. Until 2019, the V&A, among many other British museums, received funding from the Mortimer and Raymond branches of the Sackler family, owners of Purdue Pharma, the manufacturer of the opioid OxyContin.⁶⁵ Their relationship was so close with the Sackler family that not only does their name adorn a £2 million courtyard on exhibition road, but Dame Therese Sackler also sat on the Board of Trustees until 2019.⁶⁶ It should also be noted that the V&A has no shortage of funds; in 2011, their total income was £94.5 million, £37.2 million is from the state and the rest is raised by the institution itself.⁶⁷ I will also repeat from the last chapter that current V&A director Tristram Hunt has no issue with developing a relationship with BP given the current climate crisis as he is convinced they will also be a part of the solution.

These deals secured with the Chinese, Iraqi and Mexican governments always include plans to expand their drilling operations which is strange since both BP and the museums they operate in make claims to securing a sustainable and green future. For example, Edward Yang, BP China President, has stated that Chinese consumption of BP products will grow by 60% by 2035, how is this possible while BP simultaneously claims to be reducing emissions by 2050? These decisions made by BP do not just reflect on their lack of regard for environmental safety and preservation, these are also decisions that the museums they sponsor are complicit with. After describing the relationships above between the timing of certain events and exhibitions, and with the deals that BP had made to expand its drilling enterprises, we are forced to see the

⁶⁵ Mark Brown and Amy Walker, "V&A Boss Proud of Funding from US Family Linked to Opioid Crisis," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, July 10, 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jul/10/v-and-a-boss-tristram-hunt-sacklers-family-funding>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Charlotte Higgins, "Tristram Hunt: 'The V&A Feels like It Is Hurtling on All Levels'," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, June 16, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/jun/16/tristram-hunt-the-va-feels-like-it-is-hurtling-on-all-levels>.

museum for what it truly is, a political machine that continues to protect the interests of those in power.

Chapter 3: The Fossil Fueled Climate Crisis

The Climate Crisis

We are on the verge of irreversible planetary damage due to rapid global warming. The increase of CO₂ emissions in the atmosphere is largely due to the oil, coal, and natural gas industry. We have already witnessed a 1 degree Celsius change in temperatures on record from 1888 to present, with 70% of this increase occurring within the past 40 years.⁶⁸ *A Planet to Win* states that over half of the carbon pollution ever released was after 1980, and since the 1980's just 100 large companies are responsible for about 70% of these emissions.⁶⁹ In order to avoid catastrophic levels of warming, the earth cannot exceed a 2 degree Celsius change in temperature which will require about four-fifths of known fossil fuel reserves to remain in the ground.⁷⁰ But, even as efforts are made to reduce carbon emissions before the 2 degree Celsius change is met, at this 1.5 degree Celsius increase, some 350 million more people will be exposed to drought, thus pushing more than 120 million people into extreme poverty in just 10 years.⁷¹ Those that will feel the impact of this temperature change first will be those already residing in warm climates in the Global South, therefore it is essential that museums do not continue to be complicit in the destruction of the environment through their relationships with oil companies.

It is not humanity as a whole that is responsible for this gross increase in carbon emissions, rather the exploitative efforts of a few multi-billion dollar companies, such as British Petroleum. Historian and geographer Jason Moore has a term for this catastrophization, the capitalocene. In order for this rapid accumulation of resources to take place, there needs to be an

⁶⁸ Michael B. McElroy, *Energy and Climate: Vision for the Future* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 43.

⁶⁹ Aronoff et al., *A Planet to Win*, 16; Yoder, "Why Do Oil Companies Care."

⁷⁰ Aronoff et al., *A Planet to Win*, 39.

⁷¹ Charlotte Alter, Suyin Haynes, and Justin Worland, "Greta Thunberg: TIME's Person of the Year 2019," Time (Time), accessed December 10, 2020, <https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg/>.

accepted divide between nature and society. According to Moore, capitalism was built on excluding most humans from Humanity, citing the exclusion of Indigenous and African people, women, and even many people that would be deemed “white” today such as the Irish, Jews, and Slavs. While the latter comment about whiteness and exclusion can be debated, what Moore is really trying to say is that if you are not a part of the capitalist class, you are regarded as a part of Nature, as a part of the resources that needed to be extracted from and were then treated as such.⁷²

To fault humanity as a whole, which is what the concept of the Anthropocene attempts to answer as to why we are witnessing rapid climate degradation, is false. This is also a part of what the capitalocene answers that the Anthropocene cannot and why I use it here in relation to the extractive and destructive practices of oil companies. Through projects such as “personal carbon footprints” and general funding of the arts, BP and Royal Dutch Shell revitalize their reputations while passing the carbon emission blame onto consumers. Big Oil has spent decades funding campaigns to discredit climate science that links global warming to the burning of fossil fuels.⁷³ As early as 1977, oil company ExxonMobil knew of climate change, well before it was a common public issue, and then refused to publicly acknowledge it for decades, much like Big Tobacco and cancer risks with smoking cigarettes; Big Tobacco was also an early corporate funder for the arts.⁷⁴ We can also see this in Kathryn Yusoff’s text *A Billion Black Anthropocenes* and how the author describes the enmeshment of black and brown bodies with

⁷² Jason W. Moore, “Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism,” in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), pp. 78-115, 79.

⁷³ Justin Worland, “Why Fossil Fuel Companies Are Reckoning With Climate Change,” Time (Time, January 16, 2020), <https://time.com/5766188/shell-oil-companies-fossil-fuels-climate-change/>.

⁷⁴ Shannon Hall, “Exxon Knew about Climate Change Almost 40 Years Ago,” Scientific American (Scientific American, October 26, 2015), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/exxon-knew-about-climate-change-almost-40-years-ago/>.; Evans, *Artwash*, 19.

nature and are therefore closer to sites of extraction where detrimental health risks are prominent.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

Environmental Disasters

Big Oil would also like us to forgive and forget about the various catastrophic oil spills over the past few decades. Independent environmental organization, Greenpeace, reminds us that once oil is spilled into marine environments, it is exceptionally rare to recover *more than* 20% of the oil. I will quickly remind us of some of the most detrimental oil spills in the past 50 years.

The Deep Water Horizon oil spill is probably the most infamous in recent memory. The BP owned and operated oil rig exploded in 2010 which killed 11 workers and subsequently spilled oil into the Gulf of Mexico for 87 days; 206 million gallons of oil were released into the marine environment.⁷⁶ While BP estimated to the public that only 1,000 barrels of oil a day was being released, United States government officials had estimated it was at 60,000 barrels a day.⁷⁷ Not only did this spill leave more than 1,000 miles of shoreline polluted, but studies found in 2014 that 12% of brown pelicans and 30% of laughing gulls in the Barataria Bay, Louisiana had been wiped out; oil spill contaminants had also been found as far north as Iowa and Illinois from migrating white pelicans according to a 2012 study and it is estimated that up to 65,000 turtles has died alone in 2010.⁷⁸

The Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska's Prince William Sound is also quite infamous in recent memory. In March of 1989 an oil tanker struck a reef, tearing open the single hull and spilling 11 million gallons of oil into the ocean, spreading some 1,300 miles.⁷⁹ While no crew

⁷⁶ Edward Helmore, "Deepwater Horizon Disaster Had Much Worse Impact than Believed, Study Finds," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, February 13, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/13/deepwater-horizon-disaster-oil-worse-impact-study-finds>.

⁷⁷ Richard Pallardy, "Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., November 2, 2020), <https://www.britannica.com/event/Deepwater-Horizon-oil-spill>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Alan Taylor, "Remembering the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, March 24, 2014), <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/03/remembering-the-exxon-valdez-oil-spill/100703/>; Stephen Leahy, "Exxon Valdez Changed the Oil Industry Forever-but New Threats Emerge," Environment (National Geographic, March 22, 2019), <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/oil-spills-30-years-after-exxon-valdez#close>.

members were killed in this accident, local Alaskan fishermen did go bankrupt from the impact this spill had in their waters; the final animal death toll rested at 250,000 sea birds, 3,000 otters, 200 harbor seals, 250 bald eagles, 22 killer whales, and billions of salmon eggs.⁸⁰ Another spill in the United States occurred in Santa Barbara County California. An oil pipeline this time ruptured and although on land it eventually emptied into the ocean before it could be shut off in time, at which point oil had been spilling in the ocean for three hours.⁸¹ Californian officials have estimated that over 140,000 gallons of oil had been spilled during this accident.

The final climate disaster I will mention is the Gulf War oil spill of 1991 when Iraqi forces had opened oil valves of the Sea Island pipeline. Over 240 million gallons of crude oil had been spilled into the Persian Gulf in an attempt to stop U.S. troops from attempting beach landings.⁸² There were no shoreline cleanup efforts so 12 years after the spill, there was still over a million cubic meters of oil sediment that remained.⁸³ BP was correct to state that war without oil was unimaginable, but I doubt that even they thought of something like this.

These are only a small fraction of the various global oil spills recorded that I have shared in order to demonstrate that these are always possibilities. The worst case scenario has already occurred 100 times over, in addition to approaching the 2 degree Celsius limit of global warming. Whether it's an oil rig explosion in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico, a pipeline in a southern California county, or a tanker crashing into a reef or other tanker, the consequences are disastrous. Even in ideal clean up environments, only 8% of the Exxon Valdez oil was recovered,

⁸⁰ Leahy, "Exxon Valdez."

⁸¹ Preeti Desai, "Will THIS Spill Change Anything?," Greenpeace USA, May 5, 2017, <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/will-this-spill-change-anything/>.

⁸² Michael Castellani, "The Gulf War Oil Spill: A Man-Made Disaster," The Gulf War Oil Spill: A Man-made Disaster | Environment & Society Portal, January 1991, <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/tools/keywords/gulf-war-oil-spill-man-made-disaster>.

⁸³ Marco Werman, "Lessons Learned from the Gulf War Oil Spill," The World (Public Radio International , 2010), <https://www.pri.org/node/11782/popout>.

and only 3% of the Deepwater Horizon. Where does this oil go? It does not simply dissipate into the ocean as reported in the Tobago oil spill, it seeps into the soil and the rocks, or is consumed by marine animals. To this day oil is still shown seeping into the beaches in Alaska from a spill over 31 years ago. Even if we cut all carbon emissions to zero today, and kept all of our known oil reserves in the ground and extracted no more, there is still millions of gallons of oil left unaccounted for, seeped into our marine and terrestrial environments.

Environmental Racism

Environmental racism is generally understood as the disproportionate distribution of environmental burdens with race being a deciding factor while also excluding people of color from environmental decision-making.⁸⁴ Oftentimes, you won't find pipelines and oil rigs in areas with zip codes in which residents are majority wealthy and white because they understand the consequences of a potential leak and also have the power to wield these routes to other locations. Again, we will see how people of color are regarded as outside of Humanity and as a part of Nature, which this Nature is already primed and ready for extraction at the hands of oil and natural gas companies. This division between who gets to be considered Human and who is a part of Nature, is continually fueled by neocolonialism. For example, since 2010 in the United States there has been more than 1,500 spills from crude oil pipelines, the worst of which occurred between Chicago and Detroit and cost around one billion dollars to clean up.

The Standing Rock Sioux tribe garnered a lot of media attention for their protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2015 and 2016. While the pipeline would pass just outside the Standing Rock reservation, it would go through the Missouri River and threaten the reservation's water supply if the pipeline bursts.⁸⁵ Why is the pipeline being routed to a location just outside an indigenous reservation? Because the white inhabitants of Bismarck, North Dakota rerouted it as so to avoid potential contamination of their drinking water supply.⁸⁶ In addition to threatening the Standing Rock reservation's drinking water supply, the pipeline also violates reserved Sioux Territory as it breaks the 1851 treaty of Fort Laramie. Article II of this treaty guarantees that this

⁸⁴ Romy Opperman, "A Permanent Struggle Against an Omnipresent Death: Revisiting Environmental Racism with Frantz Fanon," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7, no. 1 (2019): pp. 57-80, 61.

⁸⁵ "Oil, Water, and Steel: The Dakota Access Pipeline," Earthjustice, June 27, 2019, <https://earthjustice.org/features/oil-water-and-steel-the-dakota-access-pipeline>.

⁸⁶ Earthjustice, "Oil, Water, and Steel."

territory remains of “undisturbed use and occupation” although the U.S. government has never been one to honor their treaties with Native Americans.⁸⁷ So if the threats of a crude oil contamination are serious enough for the white residents in Bismarck to reroute the Dakota Access Pipeline next to a Sioux Reservation, why not call for elimination of the industry all together? After all, we see from the Deep Water Horizon spill that even catastrophes over 1,000 miles away can still have negative impacts on the Midwest due to migratory birds.

After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, foreign oil companies such as BP were pushed out and needed a new country to extract oil from. The newly independent British colony of Nigeria proved to be the perfect place. Although Nigeria supposedly nationalized its oil holdings, 18 multinational companies remain operating in Nigeria and account for 99% of the crude oil production in the entire nation. As a mono product state, the Nigerian government and economy is subject to the whims of the volatile oil market; the Nigerian National petroleum Corporation only receives 57% of the profits from Nigerian oil extracted.⁸⁸ Additionally, it's the Nigerians near the Niger Delta that suffer from medical conditions associated with crude oil extraction such as “bronchial, chest, rheumatic and eye problems.”⁸⁹ Former Libya leader Muammar Gaddafi called the opening of the oil industry and other like mono-product developments as these African nations “throwing themselves into the arms of economic colonialism.”⁹⁰ So, not only does nearly 50% of the profit made from the oil industry leave the Nigerian economy, the Nigerian people are also those most affected by the health risks associated with oil and natural gas drilling. In this

⁸⁷ “Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access Pipeline: Teacher Resource,” Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access Pipeline | Teacher Resource, accessed October 25, 2020, <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/plains-treaties/dapl>.

⁸⁸ Alexandra Wells, “Neo-Colonialism Fuels Your Car,” Brown Political Review, November 9, 2019, <https://brownpoliticalreview.org/2019/04/neo-colonialism-fueling-car/>.

⁸⁹ Wells, “Neo-Colonialism Fuels.”;

⁹⁰ Nimah Mazaheri, “Oil Wealth, Colonial Legacies, and the Challenges of Economic Liberalization,” *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2014): pp. 769-782; 771.

neo colonial era, nations like Nigeria are still subjected to economic hegemony enforced by Western powers, this time in the form of companies like BP and Royal Dutch Shell.

The Convoluted Process to Avoid Paying Taxes

The oil and natural gas industry is one that profits over hundreds of billions of dollars before tax, if it weren't so we would have already switched to more sustainable forms of energy. The profitability of the oil industry is what has made it so attractive to capitalists and why they line the pockets of politicians around the world in order to maintain seemingly exponential growth. Additionally, the figures range from \$775 billion to \$5 trillion in government subsidies that these oil companies receive, which includes the cost of environmental clean-up, which we've discussed is not as successful as they market it.⁹¹ Governments globally are somehow able to shell out millions of dollars to these destructive companies while slashing funding allocated to healthcare, education, and the arts, as is the case in the U.K.

While the profits of UK based oil companies such as Shell and BP have only risen over the last few decades, their share in taxes has changed slightly or in some cases actually decreased.⁹² For example, BP was able to increase its pre-tax profits from 13 billion in 2001 to nearly 40 billion in 2011, yet their corporate tax payment only increased by 23 million pounds, from 707 million to 720 million pounds; their fair share of tax payment should have been at 2.1 billion pounds.⁹³ Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs department (HRCM) has a 26% corporation tax, yet in this year 2011, BP only paid 2.99% on their global profits, and Shell only paid 2.28% on their global profits for the same year.⁹⁴

So how are these companies able to increase their profits by tens of billions without having to pay taxes on it? A company like BP will structure itself internationally in order to

⁹¹ Worland, "Why Fossil Fuel Companies"; "No Time to Waste: The Urgent Need for Transparency in Fossil Fuel Subsidies" (Washington, DC: Oil Change International, 2012), pp. 1-3.

⁹² Evans, et al., "Making a Killing," 3.

⁹³ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 6.

transfer money internally making it even more complicated to calculate revenues due to host governments, especially in developing nations. For example, BP Azerbaijan extracts crude oil, then BTC Co (which BP is the largest shareholder) will send the oil westward through the pipeline, then BP Europe and Africa will ship the crude, while BP shipping operates the tanker that transfers the crude, then BP Europa will refine the crude.⁹⁵ The hundreds of international subsidiaries BP operates with also allow the company to get the most out of their extractivist process. BP has nearly 1,600 international subsidiaries, some of which are located in Delaware, the Virgin Islands, or Bermuda, none of which are known to extract oil.⁹⁶ These tax haven locations as well as the ability to extract, refine and distribute internally makes for an extremely difficult and murky process of calculating just how much money is owed not only to the British government but also to the governments that they extract in.

Additionally, the UK government had actually established tax breaks for oil companies that do end up drilling in the oil rich North Sea. In 2012, George Osborne, former Chancellor of the Exchequer, allocated three billion pounds to help BP and other oil companies to drill in the waters off the north of Scotland, Shetland more specifically.⁹⁷ Only two years after the DeepWater Horizon Spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Osborne and the Conservative government still felt it necessary to provide this tax break to the multi-billion dollar oil companies, at the potential expense of the working class Scottish living in the west of the country.⁹⁸

There is a clear need for transparency in the fossil fuel industry and for the British government to properly tax these companies instead of giving them billions of pounds in

⁹⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁷ Terry Macalister, "Budget 2012: Oil and Gas Industry Gets £3bn Tax Break to Encourage Drilling," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, March 21, 2012), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/mar/21/budget-2012-oil-industry-tax>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

subsidies. It should be evident now that the government does indeed have the funding to support the arts but rather they choose to encourage corporate relationships in the arts, and while they are hesitant to put any lofty amount of funding towards renewable energy, they have no issue with continued fracking in the North Sea. While those before me have called for proper taxation of these companies and an immediate end to all fossil fuel subsidies, I do not think this would be enough to protect vulnerable people in the UK or abroad.⁹⁹ Rather, even with proper taxation to the UK government, and then removal of subsidies to drill in the North Sea, this will bring the companies' business elsewhere.

Companies like BP will only continue to exploit developing states such as Nigeria, inflicting environmental harm on Nigerians without having to “pay” the consequences literally and figuratively. Additionally, the British government already invests millions in diplomatic means to maintain good relationships with the countries that their oil companies drill in, for example, immediately recognizing Azerbaijan in 1991 in order to secure BP a drilling contract by 1994¹⁰⁰. BP and others only continued to drill in the North Sea and operate new rigs because of the subsidies provided, which in turn reduces the amount of tax they pay to the UK, because these companies have already figured out that if you don't actually do most of the work in the UK, you don't have to pay taxes on it. If BP currently only pays about 2% of the 26% they are supposed to pay, we are to suspect this will go over smoothly? Lobbyists have already argued that the “increased” tax payments in recent years were already hurting these oil companies.¹⁰¹

More concise wording on diplomatic efforts, how these companies would just accelerate their efforts abroad, and how this would do nothing in the short and long term to help the

⁹⁹ Evans, et al., “Making a Killing,” 18-19.

¹⁰⁰ Evans, et al., “Making a Killing,” 10.

¹⁰¹ Hall, “Exxon Knew.”

environment nor help us further delay the inevitable 2 degree Celsius change. While Platform London has published a concise document detailing just how these oil companies avoid paying their fair share in taxes, it calls for the immediate end to subsidies given to oil companies but there is no wording then demanding that the subsidies once given to petroleum will not go towards the renewable energy sector, which Parliament has been reluctant to do so far.¹⁰² Calling for these companies to name all the countries they work in and the financial gains made in each country also seems impossible and unlikely to produce any real change since the hundreds of secret subsidiaries will still be in operation and will likely only increase in quantity.

Oil companies are about extracting an unsustainable resource in an unsustainable way that negatively impacts the environment and the people that inhabit the area of extraction and with time (although not much time left to recover from this) the entire climate. The fossil fuel industry has sought out to protect itself from the well-known negative impacts of crude oil extraction and burning of fossil fuels for over 40 years; they have proven time and time again to prioritize their own profits over the well-being of their workers, the environment, and humanity as a whole. This is why we are not in a position to ask for the proper taxation of these companies, to ask them to just pay their fair share because we well know that they won't, and second only allows them to continue to destroy our planet.

¹⁰² Evans, et al., "Making a Killing," 17.

Chapter 4: The Work of Activists Groups and Changes Brought to Museums

Selected Activist Groups

There is a plethora of cultural and climate based activist groups in the UK and all over the world. The one's selected in this paper are all UK based and are unique in their approaches to bringing change to cultural institutions and have had their own impacts on various institutions.

The first activist group I will introduce is *BP or not BP?*, originally launched in 2012 in an effort to free the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) of BP funding; this relationship between RSC and BP finally ended in 2019. They have since moved their efforts to other cultural institutions such as the BM, the Royal Opera House, the NPG and the Science Museum, asking these institutions in their manifesto “to thine own self be true. Be nothing if not critical and forgo your damaging relationship with BP.”¹⁰³ Their website wonderfully breaks down frequently asked questions about the arts and oil sponsorship, concisely addressing what's wrong with BP as a sponsor, whether the organizations do in fact need the money, does oil company sponsorship really benefit the companies, (in their case) why pick on BP? And many other poignant questions to skeptics and nay-sayers.

The artist based activist group *Liberate Tate* was one of the first I became familiar with as it was the group Mel Evans author of *Artwash: Big Oil and the Art*, was a part of. Founded in 2010 after a Tate sponsored workshop found curators attempting to censor interventions against Tate sponsorships, *Liberate Tate* was founded.¹⁰⁴ From 2010 to 2015, *Liberate Tate* staged various performances inside and outside Tate's galleries in order to encourage the museum to end their partnership with BP. While their website does not appear to have been updated since

¹⁰³ “Our Manifesto,” BP or not BP?, October 7, 2019, <https://bp-or-not-bp.org/our-manifesto/>.

¹⁰⁴ “Where It All Began,” Liberate Tate, May 1, 2010, <http://www.liberatetate.org.uk/about/>.

the end of 2015, their Facebook and Twitter pages remain active as they share and support the work of activist groups and similar news.

Another organization is *Culture Unstained*, who's mission statement aims to use research and engagement to end fossil fuel sponsorship of culture. One of their objectives is to expose the destructive practices of the fossil fuel industry while holding space for the voices of communities impacted by this destruction.¹⁰⁵ They frequently engage with grassroots campaigns and impacted communities in order to work towards a decolonized cultural sector; I believe they are the only organization in those that will be discussed to utilize the term decolonize. In 2018, they helped launch the website behindthelogo.org, an educational website that details why oil funding should be removed from cultural institutions.¹⁰⁶

Another education and research based activist group is *Platform London*. Platform London is a research based organization that strives for ecological and social justice. Their current campaign addressed the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the global oil industry; they are committed to justice, solidarity, creativity and democracy.¹⁰⁷ Platform continues to publish education information online about issues related to the oil and gas industry around the world. The most recent publication came in april of 2020 titled "Funding Climate Chaos- How Banks are Continuing to Fund the Climate Crisis."¹⁰⁸

The climate change activist group *Extinction Rebellion*, while now a worldwide organization and effort, was founded in London on 31st October 2018. Activists gathered outside Parliament Square in London to announce a Declaration of Rebellion against the UK

¹⁰⁵ "Mission Statement," Culture Unstained, January 10, 2018, <https://cultureunstained.org/mission-statement/>.

¹⁰⁶ "Campaigns & Research." Culture Unstained, February 21, 2019. <https://cultureunstained.org/research/>.

¹⁰⁷ "Who We Are," Platform London, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://platformlondon.org/about-us/>.

¹⁰⁸ "Publications," Platform London (Platform), accessed December 10, 2020, <https://platformlondon.org/publications-and-multimedia/>.

government. Their demands are not just for the UK government but for governments across the world to tell the truth and declare a climate emergency, for governments to stop biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025, and finally that governments should create and be led by the decisions of a citizens assembly on climate and ecological justice.¹⁰⁹ The UK branch can be found at extinctionrebellion.uk and hosts similar information to the global page but offers virtual training events, a newsletter to connect you to other members in your area, and connects you to local groups and resources.

Last but not least is the organization *Art Not Oil*. Since 2004, Art Not Oil has led the mobilization against Big Oil sponsorship in the arts. In 2013, it evolved into a coalition of autonomous organizations, all aimed to end oil sponsorship in the arts. These organizations include: BP or not BP? Liberate Tate, Platform London, UK Tar Sands Network, Dharma Action Network for Climate Engagement; and the Progressive Science Institute.¹¹⁰ The coalition actively publishes reports on information they've gathered on museums through the Freedom of Information Act, seeking out information that should already be transparent between cultural consumers and institutions. Part of their joint statement reads:

Oil companies cultivate arts and culture sponsorship relationships to help create a 'social licence to operate'. This contributes to the veneer of legitimacy that enables them to keep expanding operations at a time of climate crisis and to stifle the demands for justice of those communities who live on the frontline of their destructive, polluting operations.

All of these activist organizations in one or or another have brought changes to peoples' opinions, raised awareness about the issues Big Oil brings to the cultural sphere, and even enacted changes in a few galleries and cultural centers. The ones introduced is a brief list of the

¹⁰⁹ "What Is XR," Extinction Rebellion, accessed December 12, 2020, <https://rebellion.global/about-us/>.

¹¹⁰ Art Not Oil Coalition, "BP's Cultural Sponsorship," 2.

many more that inhabit the UK alone, and their work could not be done without the hundreds of concerned citizens supporting their work and acting on their behalf whether its performance pieces or sit-ins. What these activist groups really represent is that there is strength in numbers, and the ultimate goal of removing Big Oil from the arts in a longer effort to save ourselves from climate crisis, will not occur in a vacuum, or on the work of one person alone.

Protests at the Galleries and Changes Brought

Protesting at these cultural institutions can take place in different forms. Liberate Tate was well-known for performance pieces in which an oil like substance was spilled on Tate's floors, or where artists would cover themselves in the same oil like substance. BP or Not BP? sticks to its Shakespearean roots and prefers more theatrical protesting methods, in one case, building a 4 meter wooden Trojan horse and placing it outside the BM.¹¹¹ Protests are not meant to bring sweeping change, rather they are meant to bring discomfort to the institution and the unsuspecting visitors. If the museum is not going to ask you to think critically about the content contained behind their walls, then the activist groups will.

In another example, outside the 2019 BP Portrait Award at the NPG, protestors were able to temporarily block the entrance and forced VIP guests to climb over the cement wall to enter the building, with step stools brought out to aid them.¹¹² How ridiculous a scene that these well-dressed individuals we're forced to climb their way into a renowned art institution, while protestors handed out 150 fake programs to educate passersby about BP and the NPG; it's fantastic.¹¹³ While it is only a slight and temporary discomfort, I would hope that the act of climbing over a wall to see the Big Oil sponsored and judged art event would make these wealthy attendees ask themselves "is this worth it?"

At the BM in 2019, a large 350 strong person protest occurred over their *I Am Ashurbanipal* exhibition. It was quite criminal that either the BM or BP claim that this exhibition

¹¹¹ Bpornotbp, "BREAKING: We've Snuck a Huge Trojan Horse into the British Museum!," BP or not BP?, February 7, 2020, <https://bp-or-not-bp.org/2020/02/07/breaking-weve-snuck-a-huge-trojan-horse-into-the-british-museum/>.

¹¹² Culture Unstained, "BP Dropped as Judge of Portrait Award after 23 Years," Culture Unstained, May 4, 2020, <https://cultureunstained.org/2020/05/04/bp-dropped-as-judge-of-portrait-award-it-sponsors-after-23-years/>.

¹¹³ Bpornotbp, "Guests at BP Portrait Award Forced to Climb over Wall to Enter, Thanks to Artistic Blockade," BP or not BP?, June 15, 2019, <https://bp-or-not-bp.org/2019/06/11/guests-at-bp-portrait-award-forced-to-climb-over-wall-to-enter-thanks-to-our-creative-blockade/>.

held ethical or cultural significance, given how Iraq is still reeling from BP's influence on Parliament in the Iraq war in order to gain access to their oil.¹¹⁴ Not only this, but the pollution, poverty and corruption in Iraq can find its more recent origins in these extractivist oil practices and of course, war; war without oil would be unimaginable.¹¹⁵ So, 350 people showed up to protest inside the BM chanting "no war, no warming."¹¹⁶

Sustained pressure and protests at these cultural institutions will continue to bring change. How rich that BP would sponsor an exhibition for an area that they have contributed to destroying; BM learned their lesson from this earlier 2019 protest. That same year, BM made the decision that BP would no longer be the sponsor for their upcoming exhibition *Arctic: Culture and Climate*.¹¹⁷ On the BM website, the description of this exhibition includes the adaptation of Arctic indigenous peoples in the face of rapid climate change in one lifetime.¹¹⁸ What was likely going to be a feel-good PR move on the side of BP in sponsoring this exhibition, protests earlier that same year sent BM the message that their sponsorship of content directly related to BP's exploitative practices will not go without loud criticism.

Additionally, the Royal Shakespeare Company ended their contract with BP two years early in 2016 after a seven-year sustained campaign from BP or not BP?, Culture Unstained, and theatre professionals.¹¹⁹ Transitioning to the NPG, while they still maintain ties to BP, it looks like the tides are changing in activist's favor. In 2019, artist and BP Portrait Award judge Gary

¹¹⁴ Mattha Busby, "Campaigners Protest against BP Sponsorship of British Museum," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, February 16, 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/feb/16/campaigners-protest-against-bp-sponsorship-of-british-museum>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ McGwin, "The British Museum Confirms."

¹¹⁸ "Arctic: Culture and Climate," The British Museum (The British Museum), accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/arctic-culture-and-climate>.

¹¹⁹ RSC, "We Are to Conclude Our Partnership With BP," Royal Shakespeare Company (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2019); <https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/we-are-to-conclude-our-partnership-with-bp>.

Hume, sent a letter to NPG director and spoke out against BP's sponsorship; he cited the work of Extinction Rebellion having moved him to take action against Big Oil and the arts.¹²⁰ A month after that, 77 other artists joined his call and signed a public letter asking the gallery to remove BP representatives from the judging panel.¹²¹ At the end of 2019, Scotland's National Galleries stated they would no longer host the BPG BP Portrait Award at their galleries when it traveled.¹²² To their success, in 2020, all though the BP Portrait Award took place virtually this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no BP representative on the judging panel.

The NPG is aware of the pressure to remove unethical funding from their institutions, as is the V&A. In 2019, the NPG turned down 1 million from the Sackler family citing ethical grounds and the family's link to the opioid crisis.¹²³ Just as the V&A had recently departed with Sackler funding and a member of the Sackler family on their board of trustees; the museums are able to dismiss this external funding citing ethical grounds so activist groups must continue to push them to do away with Big Oil as well. Different from his 2019 comment, Hume points out that removing the BP representative on the judging panel is not enough and is an oversight on the museums part; since they are closed for the next three years due to renovation Hume stated that they should take this as an opportunity to completely cut ties with BP.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Culture Unstained. "BP Dropped as Judge of Portrait Award after 23 Years." Culture Unstained, May 4, 2020. <https://cultureunstained.org/2020/05/04/bp-dropped-as-judge-of-portrait-award-it-sponsors-after-23-years/>; "BP Sponsorship of Portrait Prize 'a Problem', Says Judge," BBC News (BBC, June 10, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-48580887>.

¹²¹ Culture Unstained, "BP Dropped as Judge."

¹²² Gareth Harris, "National Galleries of Scotland to No Longer Host BP Portrait Award," The Art Newspaper (The Art Newspaper, November 11, 2019), <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/national-galleries-of-scotland-to-cancel-the-bp-portrait-award-show>.

¹²³ Bpornotbp, "Guests at BP Portrait Award."

¹²⁴ Harris, Gareth. "Artist Gary Hume Says National Portrait Gallery Should 'Bite the Bullet' and Cut Ties with Oil Giant BP." The Art Newspaper. The Art Newspaper, May 5, 2020. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/bp-portrait-award-winner-announced>.

Most notable of changes brought due to the work of activist groups would be at the Tate. Tate and BP ended their relationship in 2016, with BP citing an “extremely challenging business environment.”¹²⁵ While neither Tate nor BP cite the work of activist group Liberate Tate as influencing their “joint” decision, it can be inferred that after 6 years of protests their efforts proved successful. Because of their terminated relationship, the figures of how much BP gave Tate over their 17 year relationship became public information; it averaged to only 224,000 a year. In Tate’s yearly income report for 2013-14, Tate received 30 million in Grant-in-aid, 59 million from private foundations, and 24 million in trading, so 113 million total, and over this 17 year period, BP averaged 0.19% of their yearly income.¹²⁶ This transparent example should be enough to prove that cultural institutions do not need sponsorship from Big Oil.

¹²⁵ Nadia Khomami, “BP to End Tate Sponsorship after 26 Years,” The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, March 11, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/11/bp-to-end-tate-sponsorship-climate-protests#:~:text=BP%20is%20to%20end%20its,the%20sponsorship%2C%20the%20Independent%20reported.>

¹²⁶ Evans, *Artwash*, 50.

Moving Forward

One important aspect of removing fossil fuel funding from museums, which I have seen absent in the majority of these activist movements, is the potential for decolonizing cultural institutions while also recognizing the link between colonialism and proximity to climate disasters. As discussed earlier, it is often the case that the sites in which oil companies extract at, are in lower income areas or in developing countries. The ecological disasters committed in these areas often go unchecked because the power to collect capital at whatever cost remains resilient.

External colonialism has been adapted with the times; no longer are the historic commodities of opium, spices, tea, traded among the British Empire, instead we see the ‘empire’ continuing to subsist itself through oil, migrant workers, diamond mining, etc.¹²⁷ Additionally, military colonialism contributed to the success of British cultural institutions; while oil companies are able to stake their claim in war torn countries, the museums are simultaneously able to ‘happen upon’ artefacts from the same region.¹²⁸ Tuck and Yang state that in external colonialism, all things Native become recast as “natural resources” similar to Jason Moore’s concept of Cheap Nature, in which majority of humans are cast as outside of Humanity in order to be a part of the extraction process. This understanding of external colonialism and how it has only adapted to our current day, will help museums understand their own role in continuing to perpetuate this violent process.

In order to fully recognize and undertake the project of decolonizing these British cultural institutions, first decolonization must not be approached as a metaphor, and cultural institutions should take this opportunity to center and uplift indigenous voices and experiences. Places like

¹²⁷ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): pp. 1-40, 4.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

the BM who have in the past hosted Mexican cultural related events, an Indigenous Australian exhibition, and a more recent Arctic indigenous peoples exhibition, have shown that they have the resources to display renowned exhibitions about indigenous peoples, but the problem lies in how these exhibitions were funded and curated with BP and the interests of oil companies in mind. The museum can promote these narratives of indigenous resilience as their communities adapt to the effects of climate change, but who is going to take this issue seriously if the museum itself does not? Removing oil company funding is a step to repair relationships with former British colonies and with indigenous peoples globally that are impacted by oil companies and climate change.

In relation to repairing relationships with indigenous peoples globally affected by climate change and the fossil fuel industry, the museums in question can also take this as an opportunity to give a platform to indigenous grassroots movements. It's important for museums and other cultural organizations that have previously taken sponsorship from unethical sources to not only cut ties with that source, but to also take action. Cutting unethical funding from an institution is a symbolic step in the right direction, but actual reparative steps also need to be taken. In North America for example, these museums could support the work of the Stop Line 3 movement which is dedicated to stopping the construction of the Enbridge pipeline from Alberta, Canada to Superior, Wisconsin which threatens the water supply for Indigenous people living on the White Earth Reservation.¹²⁹

Likewise, by removing oil company funding from museums they also open themselves up to all British people again from a moral standpoint, especially those in a lower income bracket who will be most affected by the impending climate crisis. The turn towards corporatism and

¹²⁹ "Pipeline Maps," Stop Line 3 (Honor the Earth), accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.stopline3.org/map>.

protecting the interests of corporations in the arts has only further removed the British public from their cultural institutions. We have discussed that although many of them remain free to the public, they are moving towards protecting the egos of BP rather than allowing visitors to exercise their right to protest and use their voices. A multi-million pound endowment from the government, from the taxes paid by the British people, and yet their say in the arts has only been minimized. I initially wanted to write that this will *re-open* the museums back to the people but this is not the case; in a 2006/07 visitor report for Tate Britain, only 3% of the visitors were Black and/or ethnic. This visitor make-up does not make for a democratic cultural institution. So what does a democratic museum look like? Dr. David Fleming writes in MuseumID that a democratic museum should attract an audience representative of society at large, place emphasis on people and identity, have social goals and responsibilities due to their public funds, it involves the public not just as visitors but as consultants, that its governance is not elitist and that it is accountable to the public, and finally, the democratic museum does *not* charge any admission fee for permanent, travelling, or special exhibitions.¹³⁰

Furthermore, the proper taxation of these Big Oil companies is not a solution we should ask for moving forward. In a scenario in which these companies are taxed properly and this money is then distributed to cultural institutions via the Grant-in-Aid, they are still benefiting from the neo-colonial efforts of Big Oil and from the destruction of the environment while ignoring the impending climate crisis. Additionally, it doesn't seem likely that either Big Oil or Parliament will move to tax these companies properly; if the hundreds of millions given in subsidies would stop, which would only further incentivize these same companies to continue shuffling their money around elsewhere and hundreds of subsidiary tax havens. This is evident

¹³⁰ David Fleming, "Democratic Museums: The Importance of Broadening Audiences - Museum-ID," Museum iD, December 11, 2017, <https://museum-id.com/democratic-museum-importance-broadening-audiences-david-fleming/>.

in, as discussed earlier, tax incentives provided to these oil companies are what brought them to the North Sea to begin with; these companies are in the interest of accumulating massive capital at the cheapest cost. Additionally, if the hundreds of millions of dollars once given to Big Oil in subsidies come to an end, the money should instead be distributed to the renewable energy sector as well as to smaller cultural institutions nationally that have actually suffered due to funding cuts since Thatcher took office.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer this question: Why do renowned cultural institutions in Britain continue to accept oil company funding in a time of climate crisis, racial and social unrest, and calls for decolonizing museums from workers and activists across the world? The short answer is, that museums in focus of this paper, the BM, the V&A, and the NPG, do not need the financial backing of oil companies and the acceptance of this funding is a part of a larger neo colonial relationship between these companies, parliament, and drilling rights in developing countries, as well as giving Big Oil the opportunity to repair their reputation. Oil company funding negatively impacts the quality of work produced at these institutions as well as threatens the very democracy of these spaces as *public* spaces, as well as contributes to larger planetary issues of the impending climate crisis.

While both museums and their corporate sponsors keep their donations out of public sight, activist groups were able to find figures that illuminated just how little financial support BP gives these museums, while publicly stating that their relationship is necessary to keep these institutions afloat. In addition to the minimal financial support actually given, through the work of activist groups it was shown that BP also has a hold on the content of exhibitions at the BM and to coordinate security efforts to stifle anti-BP protests within the museum. In fact oil company funding of cultural institutions creates conditions for the consumers to forget that they, Big Oil, are the ones responsible for the impending climate crisis and continuous cycle of climate disasters. No more can we accept exhibitions related to indigenous peoples or previously colonized nations to be sponsored by BP since the interests of the oil companies prevails, or can we allow them to sponsor artistic ventures such as the NPG BP portrait award.

The climate crisis will first affect those living in developing countries and indigenous communities, which is why the removal of oil company funding from museums as decolonial action was introduced; their removal is not just something to save our environment or exhibition material. While previous scholars and activists have called for the proper taxation of these oil companies, ultimately this would not be a decolonial action as it is just re-distribution of these funds that Big Oil accumulated through destroying the environment and making indigenous lands uninhabitable. By putting previous scholars in conversation with each other, in addition to the quantitative data pulled from activist groups, the evidence shows a well-rounded image of the why and how oil companies have successfully infiltrated British museums. It is not just the rise of neoliberal policies that favor corporate enterprise in all sectors of life, or is it simply the lack of government allotted funds to the arts, it is a combination of these measures as well as the prioritization for capitalists to continue to accumulate resources at the expense of working-class Britons, developing nations and their citizens.

Finally, this work could be improved upon with more time and research related to the two other museums in question, the V&A and the NPG. Through FOIA reports that activist group ANO was able to pull information about the BM and the damning information that came with it in regards to BP and BM, I infer that similar information would be available about the other two institutions in question if FOIA reports were filed. Given the time and resource constraints I had while researching for this paper this is not something I was able to do at this time and instead had to work with what was already out in the press, which I believe was still valuable. To further support my argument in the future, there is a strong need to file FOIA reports about the museums in question. Additionally, I was limited by the pandemic and was unable to physically visit these museums and see certain exhibitions for myself to see just how the logo of oil companies and

other corporations has infiltrated the museums. In a post-pandemic world, I believe this paper would be strengthened by physical visits to the museums. And finally, while an introduction was made suggesting removal of oil company funding as decolonial action, previous examples of museums taking decolonial action and improving upon their relationships with Indigenous peoples were not provided. This should be included and worked upon in future research.

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