

# Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons

## *The Seven Powers by the Sea*

1992-99



This installation by artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons was exhibited at Bluecoat for the first Liverpool Biennial in 1999. It addresses the theme of human displacement and refers to the slave ships that sailed from West Africa to the Americas. The images on the wooden boards leaning against the wall echo the cramped conditions on board the ships, how little space the slaves had, and how brutally they were treated.

The artist's Yoruba ancestors were shipped from Nigeria as slaves. Her grandfather was transported to Cuba to work on a sugar plantation and her family were still living and working on the plantation when she was a young child. The installation therefore also reflects a personal story.

### THINK ABOUT

- How does this artwork make you feel?

### TALK ABOUT

- Why do you think the artist has chosen to arrange the figures on the boards in this way?
- Can an artwork be both beautiful to look at and also tell a terrible story? Do you think one of these is more important?
- What do you think the artist wants you to think about when you look at this work?
- When you look at this artwork do you think about being trapped or imprisoned?
- Does this artwork tell you something about the experience of being a slave? Why is it important for us to remember this?

### **FIND OUT ABOUT**

- Can you find information about what the journey was like for enslaved people?
- What was the Transatlantic slave trade and the 'Triangular trade'? Where were people transported from and to?
- What do you think 'displacement' means?
- The artist's family were transported to a sugar plantation. Can you find any information about what life was like for people on the plantations?

### **Activity**

Look at the way people were cramped on the slave ships and how little personal space that they had.

Can you come up with five thoughts or feelings you think people might have had when they were on the slave ships? For example, anger, fear, sadness.

Working in groups, come up with some movements that represent the thought and feelings that people may have had while imprisoned on the ships – ones that could be performed in a very restricted space (for example, only an arm's length around you).

Once you have decided on your movements, work as a group to arrange yourself in a shape like those on the artwork and perform your movements in a restricted space to give an impression of what life might have been like, and how people felt, on the ships.

### **Lesson aims and outcomes**

The children will:

- learn about what life was like for people in the past
- learn about the Transatlantic slavery, and the 'Triangular trade'
- learn about how artists explore difficult topics and emotions in their art
- be challenged to portray emotions and imagine how people in the past might have felt in traumatic situations
- work as a group to create a short performance piece which reflects on the issues raised in the artwork