

## Colonial Trash to Island Treasure: The Chaney of St. Croix

Author(s):

Jessica Priebe

URL:

<https://britishartstudies-21.netlify.app/colonial-trash-to-island-treasure/>

Citation (Chicago):

Priebe, Jessica. "Colonial Trash to Island Treasure: The Chaney of St. Croix." In *British Art Studies: Redefining the British Decorative Arts* (Edited by Iris Moon). London and New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and Yale Center for British Art, 2021.

<https://britishartstudies-21.netlify.app/colonial-trash-to-island-treasure/>.

Citation (MLA):

Priebe, Jessica. "Colonial Trash to Island Treasure: The Chaney of St. Croix." *British Art Studies: Redefining the British Decorative Arts* (Edited by Iris Moon), Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and Yale Center for British Art, 2021, [https://britishartstudies-](https://britishartstudies-21.netlify.app/colonial-trash-to-island-treasure/)

[21.netlify.app/colonial-trash-to-island-treasure/](https://britishartstudies-21.netlify.app/colonial-trash-to-island-treasure/).

---

© 2015–2022 Yale University

The text of this work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). Unless otherwise indicated, all illustrations are excluded from the CC BY-NC 4.0 license. To view a copy of this license visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

## The Chelsea Porcelain Case, British Galleries, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Author(s):

Iris Moon

URL:

<https://britishartstudies-21.netlify.app/chelsea-porcelain-case/>

Citation (Chicago):

Moon, Iris. "The Chelsea Porcelain Case, British Galleries, The Metropolitan Museum of Art." In *British Art Studies: Redefining the British Decorative Arts* (Edited by Iris Moon). London and New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and Yale Center for British Art, 2021.

<https://britishartstudies-21.netlify.app/chelsea-porcelain-case/>.

Citation (MLA):

Moon, Iris. "The Chelsea Porcelain Case, British Galleries, The Metropolitan Museum of Art." *British Art Studies: Redefining the British Decorative Arts* (Edited by Iris Moon), Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and Yale Center for British Art, 2021,

<https://britishartstudies-21.netlify.app/chelsea-porcelain-case/>.

---

© 2015–2022 Yale University

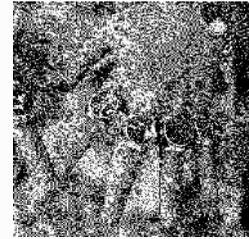
The text of this work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). Unless otherwise indicated, all illustrations are excluded from the CC BY-NC 4.0 license. To view a copy of this license visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.



# Colonial Trash to Island Treasure: The Chaney of St. Croix

Article by **Jessica Priebe**

WORD COUNT:8,615



## Abstract

Chaney is the name given to the porcelain shards found in the soil and washed up on the beaches of St. Croix, US Virgin Islands. A hybrid of the words for “china” and “money”, chaney refers to fragments of European ceramics brought to St. Croix by the island’s former colonisers: England, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark. Cast out as plantation garbage and broken in symbolic acts of destruction, chaney is a symbol of colonial entanglement, intercultural exchange, and resistance. Drawing on postcolonial critiques of colonial settlement and slavery, this article considers the distribution, circulation, and archival memory of chaney in the context of Atlantic slavery, especially as it relates to the consumption of European ceramics by enslaved individuals. This article also investigates the afterlife of chaney, which is collected by local artisans who repurpose the shards into jewellery. The recuperation of chaney shows how the remnants of prior contact and exchange with foreigners are being reworked by the people of St. Croix to create their own forms of cultural production that offer a symbolic resistance to the hierarchies of European luxury design. This paper concludes by examining the work of St. Croix-based artist La Vaughn Belle, whose Chaney paintings and porcelain designs for Royal Copenhagen move chaney beyond the limits of its materiality to explore the politics of resistance, identity, and colonial responsibility. To this end, I argue that the transformation of chaney from island debris into artworks and decorative objects can be viewed in the wider context of artists using broken or discarded former items of distinction to address the legacies of slavery and colonialism.

## Introduction

Buried in the soil and sand of St. Croix, US Virgin Islands is an abundant supply of “chaney”, the shards of imported ceramics that tell the story of St. Croix’s colonial history along with the reality of its fragmented present (fig. 1). Taking its name from the words for “china” and “money”, chaney refers to the remnants of European ceramic ware brought to St. Croix by the island’s former colonisers: England, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark. Thrown overboard by sailors to avoid port taxes, broken by settlers in celebration of European customs, cast out as plantation garbage, and ground into the earth during labour riots in the nineteenth century, chaney is a symbol of colonial entanglement, possession, and containment. While these terms are

rightly suggestive of the legacy of colonialism and slavery, recent visual and material responses to chaney have sought to restage the historical narrative of these fragments by incorporating them into new works of art that create material value and produce a meaningful dialogue about present-day Caribbean societies.



Figure 1

Denise Fashaw and Elizabeth Smith, *Chaney, St. Croix*, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Chaney Chicks & Island Gifts (all rights reserved).

This paper examines the aesthetic, social, ethical, and economic history of chaney. It begins by uncovering chaney's early colonial past and its role in the plantation economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Drawing on first-hand accounts, archaeological surveys of Caribbean sites, and Crucian oral histories, I consider the distribution, circulation, and archival memory of chaney among European plantation owners and enslaved African populations, especially as it relates to the postcolonial theory of mimicry and the Danish model of slavery.<sup>1</sup> This essay also investigates the visual and haptic engagement with these fragments, which have been transformed over hundreds of years on St. Croix in ways that have both preserved and eroded their ceramic forms. Often unearthed after heavy rain, chaney is hunted by local artisans who repurpose the shards into high-end jewellery (fig. 2). This process has contributed to a reassessment of chaney's material status as items of memory and identity. While these fragments still stand as evidence of their colonial context, their transformation from imported ceramic ware to locally produced jewellery crafted from found objects is seen by both makers and consumers of these wares as a symbol of contemporary resistance that speaks to an alternative narrative of the island's history of colonisation and slavery.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 2

Nicole Canegata, *Chaney Jewellery by ib Designs, St. Croix*, 2014. Digital image courtesy of Nicole Canegata (all rights reserved).

Finally, this essay considers the work of contemporary artist La Vaughn Belle, whose paintings on wood weave together different chaney motifs as part of her project to map and restore identity for Caribbean populations (fig. 3). Belle's appropriation of chaney is deeply ingrained in decolonial aesthetics in its ability to both invoke and move beyond the colonial context for these fragments and their afterlife on St. Croix.<sup>3</sup> The essay concludes with an analysis of Belle's design for a line of twelve porcelain dinner plates inspired by her *Chaney* paintings and produced in partnership with the luxury brand Royal Copenhagen (fig. 4). By inscribing the plates with chaney motifs and patterns, Belle's ceramic series pushes beyond the limits of materiality to reframe the shared histories of St. Croix and its European colonisers.



Figure 3

*La Vaughn Belle and the Chaney (We Live in the Fragments)*, exhibition at Brookfield Place, NYC, 2020, oil on wood, 152.4 × 121.9 cm. Digital image courtesy of Brookfield Properties / Photo: Jakob Dahlin (all rights reserved).



Figure 4

*La Vaughn Belle, Chaney (Plate Series)*, twelve porcelain plates produced by Royal Copenhagen, 2017. Digital image courtesy of La Vaughn Belle (all rights reserved).

## A Fragmented Past

Before chaney became the coveted debris of St. Croix, it belonged to an entirely different artefact class. These fragments were once ceramic objects brought to St. Croix during the second millennium by Europeans in search of territorial expansion and imperial conquest. While the chaney discussed in this essay is primarily concerned with the household ceramic wares used by the plantation populations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is worth noting that European ceramics had been objects of trade since Christopher Columbus first set foot on St. Croix in 1493.<sup>4</sup> Olive jars and majolicas were among the most commonly exchanged objects throughout the region.<sup>5</sup> However, given the Spanish never colonised St. Croix, it is unlikely these objects circulated in large numbers. The wares that did arrive were probably destroyed during the repeated violent clashes with the Kalingo, an Indigenous Carib population of the Lesser Antilles, whose annihilation at the hands of the Spanish left the island virtually uninhabited by the end of the sixteenth century.

A limited number of ceramics accompanied the English, who were the first to colonise St. Croix in 1631 with plantations of tobacco, maize, sweet potatoes, and watermelons.<sup>6</sup> The English colony was short lived. Four months after it began, the colony fell to Spanish invaders, who burned crops, destroyed household property, and expelled the English. The French followed in 1634 only to suffer the same fate as the English.<sup>7</sup> Over the next seven years, England made several attempts to establish a colony on St. Croix. However, it was not until the Dutch fortified the island in 1642 and subsequently adopted the remaining English and French settlers that the Europeans established a more consistent presence on the island.<sup>8</sup> The population grew

significantly under the Dutch, whose mandate for settlement required a minimum of twenty households with at least three members in each.<sup>9</sup> It stands to reason that Dutch delFTWARE was among the items shipped by the monopolistic Dutch West India Company, who were responsible for supplying approximately three hundred Dutch, French, and English settlers living on the island.

St. Croix changed hands twice more in the seventeenth century. English settlers took control from the Dutch in 1645, followed five years later by the French, who evacuated the island in 1696 as they battled the English and Dutch in the War of the Great Alliance. St. Croix remained mostly uninhabited until 1733, when Frederik Moth, the Danish Governor of St. Thomas, convinced the directors of the Danish West India Company to purchase the island from the French.<sup>10</sup> Moth's attempts to entice Danes to immigrate to St. Croix proved initially difficult. To fill the void, he gave land to fifty English families, which soon led to the increased arrival of other English, Irish, and Scottish settlers.<sup>11</sup> As Neville Hall has shown, by 1741, English settlers outnumbered the Danes five to one, with the largest landholders (three hundred acres or more) belonging to people from the British Isles.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, English was widely spoken throughout the colony and formed the unofficial language of the island's first newspaper *The Royal Danish American Gazette*.<sup>13</sup> While English-speaking settlers maintained cultural hegemony through language, the Danish governed St. Croix for 184 years except for two brief interludes in 1801–1802 and 1807–1815, when Britain occupied St. Croix during the Napoleonic Wars (fig. 5).



Figure 5

Paul Kuffner, *Danish Map of St. Croix*, 1767, etching. Collection of the National Museum of Denmark. Digital image courtesy of National Museum of Denmark (all rights reserved).

European colonial rule ended in 1917 when Denmark sold St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas (Danish West Indies) to the United States for \$25,000,000 million in gold coins.<sup>14</sup> Upon transfer, the island's records were divided between the former and new owners, effectively stripping St. Croix of its archive.<sup>15</sup> While much of the Danish West Indian archive was digitised by the Danish National Archives in 2017, the centennial year of the sale, significant barriers to access remain for the predominantly English- and Creole-speaking residents of St. Croix. Consequently, they rely on alternative knowledge systems such as oral histories and artefacts to serve as evidence of the island's fragmented past.<sup>16</sup> To this end, Chaney presents a reliable diagnostic tool that reveals valuable information about the location and date of the manufacturer, as well as the cultural traditions it produced and the impact of its afterlife on St. Croix.

## **The China of the Plantation Economy**

European intervention in the Caribbean resulted in the dispersal of ceramics fragments throughout the region. However, the chaney of St. Croix is unique in that it has a Crucian name to describe it.<sup>17</sup> A Creolism that merges the words for “china” and “money”, the name chaney invokes its colonial function as imported ceramics, along with its afterlife as island refuse.<sup>18</sup> The term “money” relates to chaney’s historic use by children on St. Croix, who after finding fragments rounded the edges on large rocks and the sidewalk to use as coins to trade and play with in games (see fig. 1).<sup>19</sup> By contrast, the word “china” refers to the caseloads of ceramic plates, teacups, saucers, urns, platters, and chamber pots brought to St. Croix during the European colonial era. These wares are distinct from the pottery made by Indigenous populations of the pre-colonial era.<sup>20</sup> They also exclude Afro-Cruzan ceramics, the low-fired hand-built, unglazed earthenware produced by individuals of African ancestry who were transported to St. Croix as part of the forced migration of tens of thousands of enslaved Africans to the Danish West Indies from the seventeenth century.<sup>21</sup>

The prevalence of chaney means that fragments are often sourced for aesthetic purposes and without regard for a shard’s provenance or archaeological status. For this reason, a definition of chaney must include all imported ceramic material that surfaces on the island. However, the large volume and variety of shards unearthed are generally associated with the Danish occupation (1733–1917). From the 1740s, Danish investment in the large-scale production of sugarcane created a thriving plantation economy on St. Croix built by its enslaved African population (fig. 6). The wealth of sugar, which drove consumer markets in the Caribbean, America, and Europe, created an affluent planter class on St. Croix.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 6

Frederick von Scholten, *Sugar Plantation, St. Croix, Danish West Indies*, in *The Slave Ship Fredensborg*, ed. Leif Svalesen (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000), 203 (original in the M/S Maritime Museum of Denmark), 1833, watercolour. *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora*, 18, 2021. Digital image courtesy of *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora*, 18, 2021 (CC BY-NC 4.0).

While the plantations produced a system for wealth to be extracted locally and exported globally, these communities were far from being self-sufficient. They required massive amounts of imports to sustain their life, including household wares, food stores, and farm equipment. Restrictive trading policies between Denmark and St. Croix demanded that all European goods were sent on Danish ships manned by Danish crews (fig. 7).<sup>23</sup> Any foreign items that competed with Danish commodities were taxed heavily before leaving Copenhagen.<sup>24</sup> However, these mercantilist policies did little to hamper international trade in the Danish West Indies. The establishment of a free port at Charlotte Amalie (St. Thomas) in 1764, combined with the lucrative, but not always legal, inter-island market, provided opportunities to trade with many different nationalities. It was standard practice for settlers to order large shipments of luxury and material goods for personal use and to sell at local markets. Trading locally and with partners throughout the region was a way for planters to supplement their farming income and to ensure that a portion of the wealth remained in the colony. English ceramics and Chinese porcelain were among the items distributed throughout the Danish West Indies through flexible trading arrangements. According to Desmond Nicholson, the stockpile of Chinese porcelain on St. Croix was sufficient, so that by the 1780s merchants began exporting these luxury wares to the American colonies.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 7

Henrik Gottfred Beenfeldt, *Christiansted Wharf*, circa 1788–1794, watercolour, 32.47 × 18.95 cm. Collection of M/S Maritime Museum of Denmark (1943:0036). Digital image courtesy of M/S Maritime Museum of Denmark (CC-BY-NC-SA).

Visitors to the Danish colony on St. Croix testify to the role imported ceramics played in the operation of the great houses (fig. 8).<sup>26</sup> Writing about his “sybaritic life” on St. Croix during the 1840s, Hans Dahlerup, an Admiral in the Danish navy and outspoken critic of slavery, spoke of elegant parties and lavish balls.<sup>27</sup> He recalled eating:

*at the polished mahogany table without a tablecloth, but covered with the most expensive cut crystal, porcelain, and silverware and laden with the most beautiful fruits of all kinds, cakes, jellies, and blancmanges.*<sup>28</sup>

According to Dahlerup, almost all of the planters on St. Croix “belonged to old and distinguished families”, and led a life of luxury, “which in elegance and taste did not lag behind the richest nobility in Europe”.<sup>29</sup> While Dahlerup did not specify the type of porcelain on display, he noted that dining etiquette followed the English manner.<sup>30</sup> This is a testament to the English hegemony within these blended communities and the Eurocentric cosmopolitanism of the Danish colony on St. Croix.



Figure 8

Henrik Gottfred Beenfeldt, *Dinner Party at Inspector Claus Schonning in Hospitalsgade 10 in Christiansted*, 1794, watercolour, 32 × 17.2 cm. Collection of the National Museum of Denmark (F.1658). Digital image courtesy of National Museum of Denmark / Photo: Roberto Fortuna (all rights reserved).

## Producing Luxury and the Cult of Blue Willow

Chaney connects St. Croix to the global cultures and economies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The fragments also reveal the changing tastes for ceramics during this period. The popularity of Chinese porcelain in Europe saw rapid technological advancements in the production of earthenware and porcelain. The introduction of English enamel-glazed creamware and pearlware in the eighteenth century superseded tin-glazed earthenware like delft. Savvy marketing by Josiah Wedgwood and his partner Thomas Bentley elevated enamelled earthenware to a level where it competed with Chinese and European porcelain. Cheaper to produce and seemingly comparable in quality, creamware and pearlware—the latter with its signature bluish appearance known as “china glaze”—proved popular at this time in Europe and throughout the colonies.

Reduced trade barriers for entry combined with demand from English planters led to an influx of English earthenware on St. Croix, including the famous willow pattern (fig. 9). Consequently, a common type of chaney found on the island is blue willow (fig. 10).<sup>31</sup> First developed by Josiah Spode in the 1780s, this imitation Chinese design falsely claimed to copy ancient Chinese porcelain. Catering to British tastes for exotic household wares, the willow pattern presents a fantasy landscape of China. Widely copied, the pattern’s authenticity lies in its insistence upon the precise replication of its motifs, including a bridge with three figures, a willow tree in the centre, a boat, birds, a fence, and an orange tree blooming behind a teahouse.<sup>32</sup> The cost of production was significantly cheapened after the invention of transfer earthenware in the 1780s, which allowed the pattern to be transferred directly onto the ceramic body before glazing. Its mass production saw it widely distributed in upper- and middle-class homes in Britain and throughout the colonies. The popularity of blue willow lasted well into the nineteenth century, gaining a cult following in Victorian Britain.<sup>33</sup> The pattern inspired poems and plays such as *The Mandarin’s Daughter*, first performed at the Playhouse and Strand Theatre in 1851. However, the argument in favour of blue willow’s importance to British society goes beyond the economic and aesthetic. As Elizabeth Chang notes “the willow pattern came to be this national touchstone because it was always present as a point of reference, whether in imagination or in point of fact”.<sup>34</sup> For British settlers living in the colonies, including St. Croix, blue willow transferware with its invented Chinese design, could be understood as a form of nostalgia that spoke of technological advancements in ceramic production, domesticity, and the logic of empire. While these ideas have become tied to the narrative of chaney, blue willow’s history of appropriation and transference provides a metanarrative consideration of the postcolonial discourse of cultural hierarchy and colonial responsibility.



Figure 9

*Blue Willow Plate, Blue Willow Chaney, Blue Willow Pendant*, 2020. Digital image courtesy of Crucian Gold, St. Croix (all rights reserved).



Figure 10

Nicole Canegata, *Blue Willow Chaney excavated from Hospital Street Estate, Christiansted, St. Croix*, 2021. Digital image courtesy of Nicole Canegata (all rights reserved).

Other commonly found chaney fragments include English pearlware and whiteware featuring the mocha pattern, known for its distinctive fernlike motif; Wedgwood flown blue, with its flowing blue glaze appearance; and Wedgwood shell-edged wares with a cockled rim painted in either blue, green, or red (fig. 11). The prevalence of these types of chaney signals the dominance of English potters and the sustained interest in Chinese designs. The developments in England also influenced potters in Denmark, who made faience and creamware in the English manner.<sup>35</sup> Chaney refers to these Danish wares and the later blue and white porcelain tableware produced in Denmark following the establishment of Royal Copenhagen in 1775. Common fragments recovered include blue fluted, also known in Danish as “musselmalet”, the company’s first dinner service (fig. 12). The hand-painted design, which is still produced today, features a stylised Chinese chrysanthemum motif interwoven with a Danish cinquefoil.<sup>36</sup> The combination of these two flowers represents a symbolic gesture that signals the influence of Chinese porcelain on European ceramics.



Figure 11

Nicole Canegata, *Chaney Jewellery Fragments by ib Designs, St. Croix, 2021*. Digital image courtesy of Chaney Chicks & Island Gifts (all rights reserved).



Figure 12

Arnold Krog, *Royal Copenhagen plate with blue fluted design*, produced 1960s, 19cm diameter. Digital image courtesy of Royal Design Group Ltd (all rights reserved).

## Slavery and Consumption

Blue and white china can be seen in the Great House at Estate Whim (fig. 13). Built in the 1760s, this grand coral walled structure is now home to a museum. The estate presents a living history of colonialism, showcasing the museum's collection of antique furniture, china, silver, and art. The recreation of plantation life reveals the contrast between the serving ware and luxury objects in the Great House and the rustic kitchen equipment and farm machinery operated by its formerly enslaved labourers. While the museum holds contemporary exhibitions and events, its legacy is rooted in colonial discourse.<sup>37</sup> This is evident in the display of furniture and objects in the Great House. For instance, the placement of blue and white china on the table shows how imported ceramics operated within a strategy of power and control among the planter class. These instruments of empire functioned as symbols of wealth and taste. Inside the Great House, the proper handling of ceramics required knowledge of European customs of display and table etiquette. The fragility of ceramics meant frequent breakages by settlers and their servants, as satirised in prints from the period (fig. 14). The constant threat of breakage spawned an industry of repairers in England and America, while those in colonial outposts opted to either replace or mend using homemade glue recipes published in magazines aimed at housewives.<sup>38</sup>



Figure 13

*The Great House at Estate Whim, St. Croix, 30*  
January 2012. Digital image courtesy of Sipa USA /  
Alamy Stock Photo (all rights reserved).



Figure 14

J. Baldrey, *Dinner Just Over, or The Consequences of a Toe Tripping at the Top of a Stair Case* (Cambridge: J. Baldrey, 20 July 1799), 1799, black-and-white etching with period hand colour, 17.1 × 20.3 cm. Collection of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Museum Purchase (1957-30). Digital image courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (all rights reserved).

The narrative of consumption, ruin, and repair remains an important fixture for thinking about how imported china came to symbolise the ideology of colonial possession over bodies, both ceramic and human. However, it does not consider the use of European ceramics by enslaved populations, who were active participants in the consumer revolution of the modern Atlantic world. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, enslaved people played a crucial role in supporting the Caribbean economy.<sup>39</sup> Their labour powered the plantations that drove global markets, while their spending contributed to the success of local markets. From the establishment of the Danish African Company in 1659 to its official termination in 1802, an estimated 75,000 enslaved people were sent to the Danish West Indies.<sup>40</sup> Those that survived the treacherous journey were transported to slave villages on the island's estates. By 1751, enslaved people accounted for sixty per-cent of the population of the main towns of Christiansted and Frederiksted.<sup>41</sup> Despite a formal end to the Danish slave trade in 1803, illegal slave trading and poor working conditions continued well into the nineteenth century. Subsequent legislation failed to meet the demands of enslaved communities and other groups, such as tenant farmers and freed slaves. The tension and civil unrest in the colony resulted in a series of uprisings culminating with the 1848 revolt that led to an emancipation proclamation and the 1878 labour riot known as Fireburn, which abolished unfair labour laws and promised a more stable pathway towards equality (fig. 15).<sup>42</sup>

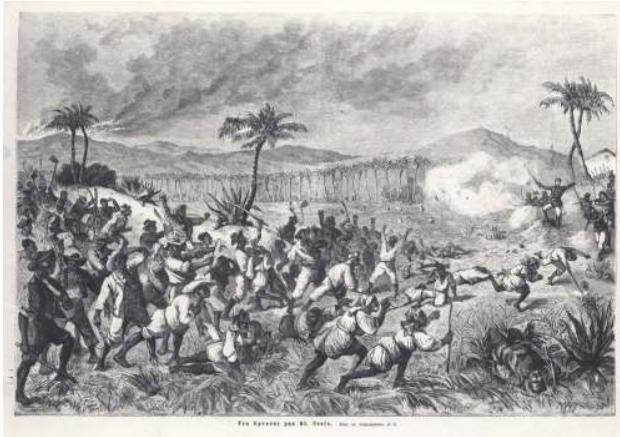


Figure 15

*From the Rebellion on St. Croix, in Tidende*  
(November 1878), engraving, 288.8 × 206.8 cm.  
Collection of the Danish Royal Library. Digital image  
courtesy of Danish Royal Library (public domain).

The devastating impact of the slave trade has generated interest across multiple scholarly disciplines, including archaeology. Since the 1970s, archaeologists have excavated slave villages on plantations throughout the Caribbean. Material removed from these sites has revealed that enslaved people were consumers of European ceramics.<sup>43</sup> Recent excavation of the slave village at Governor Moth's former Estate Little Princess by the Society of Black Archaeologists found blue and white transferware dated to the 1780s (fig. 16).<sup>44</sup> In addition to the ceramic material, the team found the remnants of a silver pewter spoon and several bone buttons, but no flat bone pieces, indicating that the buttons were finished rather than carved by enslaved people (fig. 17). The material properties of these items raise questions about how enslaved individuals on St. Croix encountered luxury imports. A common misconception is that household wares, including European ceramics, were passed down from the great house to the slave village as off-casts. Such acts of paternalism are evident in the American colonies where the distribution of possessions to enslaved peoples operated as an act of dominance and control.<sup>45</sup> By contrast, this system is largely absent in the Caribbean, where enslaved populations were given little in the way of material possessions. Instead, enslaved labourers throughout the region purchased and bartered wares at local markets using the money they made from selling provisions (fig. 18).<sup>46</sup>



Figure 16

*Excavation of Estate Little Princess on St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands, 2020.* Digital image courtesy of Archaeology in the Community (all rights reserved).



Figure 17

*Excavation of Estate Little Princess on St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands, 2020.* Digital image courtesy of M. CANTWELL/SCIENCE (all rights reserved).



Figure 18

Agostino Brunias, *Linen Day, Roseau, Dominica—A Market Scene*, circa 1780, oil on canvas, 49.8 × 68.6 cm. Collection of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1981.25.76). Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (public domain).

## Slave Planters

The success of the island markets reflects the laissez-faire pan-Caribbean attitude to provisioning enslaved people. Despite this, purchasing power varied depending on the wealth of the colony and its system of governance. As the Danish were relatively late to operating plantations in the Caribbean, they benefited greatly from adopting various policies and practices from their more established neighbours. This resulted in a composite approach that allowed for some degree of negotiation between enslaved and planter communities.<sup>47</sup> Under the Danish system, labourers were given a choice to reduce their already meagre rations in return for small plots of land to farm on the outskirts of the estates.<sup>48</sup> Many chose to farm these plots to avoid starvation by supplementing their food rations and selling crops and other provisions at the island markets.<sup>49</sup> When presented with this option, raising subsistence crops and rearing livestock represented a natural extension of their enforced daily farming practices on the plantations. The island markets were an opportunity for enslaved people to extract money from this process and exercise a degree of consumer choice in the objects they purchased for their households.

The extent to which conspicuous consumption was employed as a mode of self-expression by enslaved people on St. Croix requires further consideration. Multiple period references attest to enslaved individuals wearing expensive European clothing on their free days (Sunday and holidays), dressed up to such extent “that a stranger would not think that they were slaves”.<sup>50</sup> Such comments could be understood as an attempt by the enslaved to demonstrate their aspirations beyond the reality of their position by seeking out the same objects appreciated by their enslavers. However, rather than suggest that enslaved individuals came to share the tastes of their European colonisers, a more inclusive approach is to show how the Danish model of slavery contributed to a form of consumerism that positioned the colonised subject as a necessarily imperfect imitation of the coloniser. This can be understood in relation to Homi Bhabha’s well-rehearsed concept of mimicry, which argues that the coloniser aimed to produce compliant subjects that mimic their customs, dress, and activities.<sup>51</sup> In the case of the enslaved population on St. Croix, this imposed mimeticism took the form of a slave planter, whose self-

provisioning created limited social and economic freedoms that absolved plantation owners from their obligations without threatening their authority. As illustrated in Agostino Brunias's idealised painting of a Dominican linen market from circa 1780, the provisioning of enslaved people was an inherently gendered process whereby men assumed responsibility for the farming of crops, while the women handled the market trade, including the purchase of wares for domestic use and decoration (see fig. 18).

The gendered nature of the consumption of European ceramics by women of different status on St. Croix creates further space for thinking about Bhabha's theory of mimicry and how this definition can be broadened along the lines of gender as well as race. The items of chinaware from which Chaney derives were produced largely for domestic use by women in the home. The gendered aspect of this Chaney shows how the consumption of European china by women in the Danish West Indies extends the life of Bhabha's theory of mimicry to include a model for the female slave planter.

The similarities in the consumption of china by women throughout the Caribbean colonies highlight the need for postcolonial theories of economic and socially modelled behaviour to be expanded to include gendered practices. Yet it must also take into consideration the differences in the levels of consumer choice that arise in these contact zones.<sup>52</sup> Analysis of the ceramics recovered from plantation estates across the US Virgin Islands has revealed discrepancies in the style of decoration between the great houses and slave villages. For instance, women in the great houses preferred to collect sets of blue and white patterned china, whereas those in the slave cabins seem to have favoured polychrome wares (fig. 19).<sup>53</sup> These variations can be attributed, at least in part, to the planters' access to shipments, purchasing power, and taste for Georgian order versus the gradual accumulation of European ceramics by enslaved people at the island markets. Reflecting on such issues in her study of the Clifton Plantation in the Bahamas, Laurie Wilkie has suggested that a "creolization model" should be adopted to recognise how enslaved communities used and perceived European commodities in ways that were unique to their African heritage.<sup>54</sup> Establishing an "African-based identity" to the consumption of European ceramics in Atlantic colonies will help determine how the selection of certain forms and decorations was shaped by cultural differences and identity politics.<sup>55</sup>



Figure 19

*Two Black Women Outside a Cabin in a Former Slave Village on St. Croix, after 1848, photograph. Collection of the National Museum of Denmark (Inventory number 6030 DVI). Digital image courtesy of National Museum of Denmark (all rights reserved).*

## **Symbolic Acts of Destruction**

The consumption of imported ceramics by enslaved individuals on St. Croix reflects the Danish system of colonial power relations. However, it also reveals an alternative narrative, which in the context of finding and reusing choney has become a symbol of Crucian resistance. Next to glassware, imported broken ceramic wares are among the most frequently cited items listed in the household inventories compiled in the wake of the labour riots in the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup>

While the scale of destruction accounts for some of the choney recovered on St. Croix, archaeological surveys have uncovered a link between the labour revolts of the nineteenth century and the ceramic refuse disposed of in the aftermath. The charred remains of European ceramics were among the items excavated by the Office of Archaeological Research at the University of Alabama from deep within the strata of the Frederiksted Landfill site. The area has been identified as the town's historic landfill site, with deposits dating as far back as the eighteenth century. As Brooke Persons argues, the burned choney found at this site suggests that it belongs to the debris collected in the clean up after the Emancipation and Fireburn revolts, the latter resulting in most of Frederiksted being set alight along with fifty-three estates across the island.<sup>57</sup> The scale of destruction and the unrest that followed in the days after these riots required swift and efficient disposal of debris, making it likely that the Frederiksted Landfill site includes broken ceramics from both the great houses and the slave villages.

The fragility of ceramic ware almost certainly ensures its destruction during any large-scale violent uprising. However, the contradictions arising from the enslaved communities' consumption of European ceramics can be weighed against these assumed expectations. Far from producing a facsimile of the coloniser, mimicry, according to Bhabha, produces "ambivalent" subjects who oscillate between "attraction" and "repulsion".<sup>58</sup> For enslaved individuals participating in the local markets on St. Croix, the desire to possess imported ceramics may have been simultaneously met with contempt for the same objects that symbolised their possession by

a colonial power. The destruction of these wares during the labour riots, which Hall suggests went well beyond collateral damage, points to the justifiable rage and frustration from enduring more than a century of oppression on St. Croix.<sup>59</sup> The deliberate breaking of ceramics during the labour uprisings suggests a mockery and rejection of European colonial life.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the destruction of both settler- and slave-owned ceramics has emerged as a symbol of resistance in the storied history of emancipation.

These destructive acts of resistance and anger can be compared to another form of symbolic destruction that also accounts for a large volume of chaney on St. Croix. At the beginning of each year, kitchen middens and the Frederiksted Landfill received an unusually large number of fragments following the Danish custom of smashing chipped or broken plates against the doors of neighbours in a gesture of good luck.<sup>61</sup> In the case of St. Croix, the protracted rule by the Danish saw this tradition enacted once a year for nearly two hundred years.

As the Danish New Year ritual and other symbolically weighted acts of destruction reveal, the social action around the breaking of ceramics on St. Croix suggests the need to give attention to disposal as much as consumption and use. To this end, the work of Kevin Hetherington has made significant progress in his call for waste to be considered part of the narrative of consumption, which, unlike rubbish, has been the focus of extensive sociological research.<sup>62</sup> Hetherington's argument that the act of "disposal is never final as is implied by the notion of rubbish", sees him adapt Robert Hertz's two-phase system of human burials to the discarding of non-living objects.<sup>63</sup> For Hetherington, the first stage of burial is inside the house, where objects are removed from their intended function and left in a state of limbo "while their uncertain value is addressed".<sup>64</sup> The second burial exists beyond the "representational" door, where they are dumped or incinerated, an act that divests objects of their value to the owner. The saving of broken dishes from the start of the new year, for example, shows how the materiality of things impacts on the shifting meanings behind the organisation and categorising of disposed objects, which in this case is classed as a special kind of clutter that will be broken again in further symbolic action.

The Danish New Year custom of breaking damaged china on St. Croix tests the limits of Hetherington's theory. Even when the damaged china goes beyond the owner's door to be rebroken in a gesture of good luck, the piles of broken shards have not yet exhausted their value. As the Danish custom dictates, the bigger the pile of smashed china the more friends you are perceived to have. While the pile of broken china contains links to its former owners, suggesting that it falls within Hetherington's first burial, the inability to identify the shards positions this pile of rubbish as a new state that lies between the first and second burials. It is only when swept into the estate middens and landfill at Frederiksted that this waste divests itself of its owners and the social and political activities that dictated its end.<sup>65</sup>

## **The Return of the Disposed**

At 11km wide and 35km in length, St. Croix is the largest island in the US Virgin Islands. Prone to strong tropical storms and Category 5 hurricanes, the island was devastated in 2017 when hurricanes Irma and Maria hit within two weeks of each other with wind speeds of up to 157 mph. Natural disasters are part of chaney's journey from its historic breakage to its contemporary recovery. For instance, the destruction of the 1772 hurricane, which famously inspired a young Alexander Hamilton to write a vivid account of the storm, caused significant property damage.<sup>66</sup> While chaney surfaces in the wake of natural disasters, it is in abundant supply throughout the year. Often unearthed after heavy rain, chaney is found in garden beds, gutters, on the beaches,

and in the water.<sup>67</sup> For this reason, it is divided into two categories: “ocean chaney” and “land chaney”.<sup>68</sup>

Ocean chaney, as the name suggests, is found in the water and on the beach having been carried in by the changing tides (fig. 20). Most of this china never made it to shore, ending up in the water as refuse. Any china broken during rough seas was thrown overboard. Likewise, bags of ceramic wasters obtained from European potteries were sometimes used as the ship’s ballast, only to be dumped at Caribbean ports to avoid paying cargo taxes (fig. 21).<sup>69</sup> Emptying the ballast before port made economic sense as the ship’s hull could be filled with caseloads of sugar, rum, cotton, and other lucrative exports extracted from the island plantations. Shipwrecks also played a role in the accumulation of ocean chaney on the island. Between 1523–1917, there were 114 shipwrecks recorded at St. Croix, many of which were English ships.<sup>70</sup> For instance, of the nine shipwrecks that occurred between 1769 and 1803, six were English flagged including the *Mary* in 1797 and the *General Abercrombie* in 1803, both of which were carrying enslaved people deported from Africa.<sup>71</sup> While most of the enslaved people escaped death, only the cargo on board the *General Abercrombie* was saved. Conversely, the cargo belonging to the remaining six English ships was either partly or completely lost in the water.<sup>72</sup>



Figure 20

Denise Fashaw and Elizabeth Smith, *Ocean Chaney, St. Croix*, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Chaney Chicks & Island Gifts (all rights reserved).



Figure 12

*Wasters*, 1650–1670, tin-glazed earthenware with fragments of fire-resistant clay (Delft), 50 × 42 × 35 cm. Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (circa 10-2005). Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum, London (all rights reserved).

Ocean chaney has evolved over the years, changed by the composition and motion of the water. While the lustre of the glazes has dulled, the edges of ocean chaney have been smoothed by the sand and grit, leaving them soft to the touch. By contrast, land chaney relates to the fragments found in the soil and other types of catchments such as gutters (fig. 22). These pieces are sometimes referred to as “plantation chaney” due to the historical connection with the estates.

The term plantation chaney invokes both the colonial function of these fragments as ceramic ware and their afterlife as estate garbage. Land or plantation chaney is distinct from ocean chaney on account of its method of disposal and the aesthetic effects accrued during its afterlife. The more stable elements of the soil, as opposed to ocean water, protect the land chaney, leaving the original glazes and rough edges intact. Unlike iron that rusts away, or glass, which splinters and devitrifies, land chaney withstands the ravages of time. While both types of chaney reveal a connection to the colonial history of St. Croix, the preserved fragments of land chaney ensure the most direct experience of colonial ceramics, whereas ocean chaney bears the visible marks of its marine adventure.



Figure 22

Nicole Canegata, *Land Chaney Excavated from the Hospital Street Estate, Christiansted, St. Croix*, 2021. Digital image courtesy of Nicole Canegata (all rights reserved).

The return of ceramic material emphasises the alchemy of nature and recalls the long-standing analogy between shells and porcelain. Up until the middle of the seventeenth century, it was still widely believed that Chinese porcelain comprised pulverised shells ground down into a paste and returned to the earth for up to one hundred years to mature under nature's supervision.<sup>73</sup> While such transformations belong to the realm of myth, there is nonetheless a certain reverence attached to the rebirth of chaney. Being of ceramic material, chaney forms a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment. Entombed in the landscape the fragments lie in wait, ready to resurface by an act of nature or human extraction. Through this process of rebirth, chaney adopts a new life as the island treasure of St. Croix. Nature's seemingly endless return of disposed fragments reinforces the idea that chaney is native to St. Croix. Tourist blogs and lifestyle television programmes promote the finding of chaney as a locally sourced artefact.<sup>74</sup> As these sources suggest, its special appeal lies in the unique character of the fragments. While some shards derive from the same factory or even the same ceramic body, the broken edges and the effects produced by its interaction with nature ensure that no two pieces of chaney are alike.

## Counternarratives: Chaney as Jewellery

The recovery of chaney marks a new stage in its biography that not only extends its life but also leads to a reassessment of its aesthetic, economic, and cultural value. The idea that objects maintain “social lives” as they shift contexts and undergo reassessments in their material status and value has been well documented.<sup>75</sup> Such arguments have stated that an object enjoys a similar life to that of a person, often inhabiting multiple locations and positions of value that fluctuate according to different economic or cultural systems.<sup>76</sup> The ebb and flow of chaney’s shifting biography are marked by its many afterlives, stretching from its historic use by Crucian children to objects of upcycled design in St. Croix’s flourishing jewellery scene (fig. 23).<sup>77</sup>



Figure 23

Nathan Bishop, *Chaney Jewellery*, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Crucian Gold, St. Croix (all rights reserved).

The repurposing of fragments into coins marks chaney’s earliest known transformation into a local commodity. Nathan Bishop, the owner of Crucian Gold, one of the first chaney jewellery stores on the island, explains that the tokens were used as currency by children who traded them as items of value as well as playing with them in games.<sup>78</sup> Bishop’s father, Brian, knew of these stories and began handcrafting pieces of chaney jewellery in the 1970s to keep the rich history of the island alive. Born and raised on St. Croix, Bishop Sr. worked as a commercial diver specialising in hazardous search and recovery missions, welding, and tugboat inspection. According to his son, Bishop made chaney jewellery in his spare time as a creative outlet, proudly displaying “his art” in a mahogany box that he carried everywhere with him on the island (fig. 24). His designs “were inspired by his knot tying and blue-collar family background” and a desire for “elevating common materials and motifs to fine jewellery”. Nearly fifty years later, Brian Bishop’s passion for chaney has evolved into a thriving jewellery business in Christiansted, where his family continue to create handcrafted pieces from chaney for both men and women (fig. 25). The making and wearing of jewellery—typically understood as feminine—by men and women, shows how chaney is being used to problematise social and gendered hierarchies that are traditionally associated with the consumption of European ceramics on St. Croix. Indeed, the reuse of colonial-era china as jewellery demonstrates the potential for chaney, as a statement of aesthetic and luxury perfection, to move beyond the realm of the domestic to become an expression of ornamental selfhood that is neither uniquely feminine nor European.



Figure 24

Nathan Bishop, *Brian Bishop's Jewellery Case*, 2016. Digital image courtesy of Crucian Gold, St. Croix (all rights reserved).



Figure 25

Nathan Bishop, *Wondrous Willow Cufflinks*, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Crucian Gold, St. Croix (all rights reserved).

Today more businesses advertise the sale of chaney jewellery including ib Designs and the aptly named Chaney Chicks & Island Gifts. Filed, polished, and set in 14-karat gold, silver, or wrapped in wire, chaney is transformed by these artisans into high-end bracelets, pendants, earrings, rings, cuffs, cufflinks, and money clips (see fig. 2). All of the jewellers contacted for this article stated that they prefer working with land chaney as the glazes are still intact, protecting both the colour and the integrity of the ceramic material.<sup>79</sup> By comparison, ocean chaney is more brittle and the lack of glazing makes it susceptible to staining when it comes into contact with the skin's natural oils.<sup>80</sup>

Chaney jewellers acquire the fragments through different means. While the owners of ib Designs, Crucian Gold, and Chaney Chicks all reported finding chaney on St. Croix to transform in the studio, they noted the uptake in residents and tourists bringing fragments to sell, trade, or commission into one-of-a-kind pieces. Kris Massicott co-owner of ib Designs in Christiansted, said that she used to hunt for chaney on weekends with her son and her husband, Whealan Massicott, ib Designs' head jeweller and co-owner. Although Massicott continues to find shards on the island, she noted that chaney is also brought to the store by builders and landscapers who recover shards from construction sites across the island.<sup>81</sup>

Photographs taken by St. Croix photographer Nicole Canegata for this article show the journey of land chaney from the soil to the store (fig. 26). The chaney, which includes blue willow, was excavated in 2021 nine feet below the surface at a construction site on the grounds of a historic estate (est. 1793) in Hospital Street, Christiansted (fig. 27). The shards were taken to ib Designs where Whealan Massicott transformed the raw pieces into pendants set in silver (fig. 28). The photographs, which chart the process of chaney's recovery and reuse, attest to the jewellery's local and handcrafted material alteration. Its loose and unassuming assembly at the site and in the plastic sorting bucket in Whealan's workshop confirms chaney's middle status as island refuse

(fig. 29). The choney is given agency through Whealan's hands, which shape and sculpt the pieces into designed objects. The final image illustrates the finished pendants on display at ib Designs, where the story of the recovery of these historic shards and their use by children features in the marketing of these wares (fig. 30). The fluid nature of choney's disposal and return reveals the extent to which former objects of distinction such as patterned china can achieve a higher status of luxury by acknowledging its many afterlives.



Figure 26

Nicole Canegata, *Chaney excavated from the Hospital Street Estate, Christiansted, St. Croix*, 2021. Digital image courtesy of Nicole Canegata (all rights reserved).



Figure 27

Nicole Canegata, *Hospital Street Estate, Christiansted, St. Croix*, 2021. Digital image courtesy of Nicole Canegata (all rights reserved).



Figure 28

Nicole Canegata, *Chaney Jewellery in Production at the ib Designs Workshop, St. Croix*, 2021. Digital image courtesy of Nicole Canegata (all rights reserved).



Figure 29

Nicole Canegata, *Chaney Jewellery Fragments by ib Designs, St. Croix, 2021*. Digital image courtesy of Nicole Canegata (all rights reserved).



Figure 30

Nicole Canegata, *Chaney jewellery by ib Designs, St. Croix, 2021*. Digital image courtesy of Nicole Canegata (all rights reserved).

Through the process of design, chaney undergoes a renewed process of commodification to become a souvenir of St. Croix. However, its meaning goes far beyond its newly acquired status as an island export. The jewellery represents the convergence of chaney's past and present lives. This has the potential to be experienced by the maker and wearer as an imagined third state that challenges formulaic notions of hybridity through a conceptual re-engagement with notions of dominance, oppression, and emancipation. The jewellery also invokes the idea of displacement both as a function of colonialism and as a contemporary reference that connects the wearer to St. Croix.<sup>82</sup> If chaney represents a symbol of colonial possession and abandonment, the process of reclaiming pieces for new decorative works used in conjunction with locally smelted metals becomes a mode of artistic, economic, and cultural production for Virgin Islanders. As Nathan Bishop argues:

*Some people look at the things from the colonial period with resentment and see it as a symbol of oppression, whereas other people want to reclaim what was once lost. They want to take back the negative parts of history.*<sup>83</sup>

Reclaiming the historical narrative through making and wearing chaney jewellery demonstrates how an object's afterlife can accrue in meaning and representation through physical modification. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the performance of luxury historically associated with the consumption of colonial china, by people of both enslaved and free status, can be re-enacted through the recuperation of these fragments.

The upcycling of disposed fragments recasts chaney within a new materialist frame, not just through its emphasis on the primacy of matter but also in its de-privileging of colonial discourse and the logic of empire. Chaney is no longer just the colonial trash of St. Croix; its afterlife imbues the material fragments with a sense of agency and vitality.<sup>84</sup> The physical changes to

chaney, both in the environment and through the process of design, reinforce the connection with St. Croix and its inhabitants. In displacing its link with Europe, the recuperation of chaney overturns the linear and conclusive narratives of eighteenth-century British naturalists such as Hans Sloane travelling to the colonies to recover strange, curious, and untouched objects. Instead, the focus has shifted to consider how the remnants of prior contact and exchange with foreigners are being reworked by the residents of St. Croix to create their own forms of cultural production that are counter-archival in their resistance to the European idea of progress.<sup>85</sup>

### **Chaney and Contemporary Art: La Vaughn Belle**

Other aesthetic interpretations of chaney invoke similar decolonial practices. St. Croix-based contemporary artist La Vaughn Belle explores themes of resistance, identity, and colonial responsibility across a wide range of media including painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, photography, video, and public interventions. Belle's work with chaney, which began in a painted series in 2014 and is still ongoing, sees her weave and magnify different ceramic patterns and motifs in acrylic on wood (fig. 31). Most of the paintings are executed in blue and white, a reference to the Danish and English chaney found on St. Croix. However, Belle's *Chaney* is not concerned with recreating precise patterns or designs, but rather constitutes a visual history drawn from her memory of finding chaney on St. Croix. Familiar European ceramic motifs of flowers, boats, and trees are interwoven with expanded geometric and vegetal forms. The formal geometric patterns balance the exuberance of the vegetal ornament, evoking the lush gardens of an imaginary paradise (fig. 32). The interplay of motifs references the Eurocentric vision of the Virgin Islands as a landscape untarnished by the stain of colonialism.<sup>86</sup> The paintings respond to the Danish narrative of colonial innocence as a tonic to appease the guilt and shame attached to the country's long history of colonialism throughout the world.<sup>87</sup> As Belle has stated, her experiences in Denmark have revealed little awareness of the legacy of colonialism in contemporary Danish society, while the Danish imprint remains ever present in the minds of Virgin Islanders.<sup>88</sup>



Figure 31

La Vaughn Belle, *Chaney series (We Live in the Fragments)* shown in the St. Croix studio with *chaney*, 2015, oil on wood, 152.4 × 121.9 cm. Digital image courtesy of La Vaughn Belle (all rights reserved).



Figure 32

La Vaughn Belle, *Chaney series (We Live in the Fragments)*, 2015, oil on wood, 152.4 × 121.9 cm. Digital image courtesy of La Vaughn Belle (all rights reserved).

Belle's integration of ceramic motifs copied from her memory of finding chaney on St. Croix with imaginary forms created by her in the present comment on the nature of mimetic representation as a construct of artifice. The amplification of the details as they appear on the boards allows for close reading of the aesthetic forms. However, as Erica Johnson argues, the recreation of European motifs is often fragmented, cut off, or silhouetted, such as the ship seen floating on the water (fig. 33).<sup>89</sup> The corollary of this aesthetic dislocation is a sense of the uncanny, where the visible occupies an uncomfortable space between the familiar and unfamiliar. While it is the fragments that drive Belle's practice, her work creates room for other forms of cultural and historical recognition. Danish researcher Camilla Lund Mikkelsen recalls her mother's reaction to seeing Belle's *Chaney* for the first time at an exhibition at the Royal Copenhagen Library. Looking at the painting, Mikkelsen's mother instantly recognised the reference to Royal Copenhagen china, using the Danish word "musselmalet" to describe its blue fluted design (see fig. 12).<sup>90</sup> The incident, itself a fragment in time, reveals how Belle's visual appropriation of chaney operates as an aesthetic frisson that brings awareness to invisible histories through a dialectic of art and decoration.



Figure 33

La Vaughn Belle, *Chaney series (We Live in the Fragments)*, exhibition at Brookfield Place NYC (detail), 2020, oil on wood, 152.4 × 121.9 cm. Digital image courtesy of La Vaughn Belle (all rights reserved).

As an ongoing series, Belle's paintings respond to the material culture of chaney. Through the medium of paint on board, the *Chaney* series disrupts a linear reading of the object's biography and sequential trajectory from domestic china to luxury jewellery. In this way, the paintings bring greater complexity and plurality to the afterlife of chaney as multimedia. More poignantly though, the paintings are a conduit to process and dismantle the rhetoric of colonial mimicry by acknowledging and celebrating the incompleteness of their forms. Belle's *Chaney* imparts agency to the fragments that have broken away from their serialised bodies, just as the slave planters revolted against their European colonisers in resistance to the Danish model of slavery that positioned them as imperfect facsimiles long after slavery was abolished in the colony. Belle's paintings have been interpreted as counter-archival in their acknowledgement of the limited and one-sided nature of St. Croix's historical record.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the enduring nature of chaney is a fitting emblem for the uncertain and unseen aspects of the Danish West Indian archive. Belle's paintings, which instead rely on the interplay of artistic innovation, memory, and blended knowledge systems of chaney, unpack the historical weight of the collective archive to reveal new agencies and perspectives. While Belle has stated that she remembers chaney from her childhood in the 1980s on St. Croix, she admits that she had not seen a plate series in its entirety until a visit to the Royal Copenhagen store in Denmark in 2008.<sup>92</sup> The atemporal and unconventional nature of Belle's encounters with chaney shows how artistic reworkings of the scraps and fragments of colonial exchange offer a symbolic resistance to the process and hierarchies of European luxury design.

As the title of the series *Chaney [We Live in the Fragments]* suggests, Belle's paintings are part of her ongoing project to chart and restore identity for Caribbean populations. As she explains:

*Similar to how we have reconstructed our histories, these paintings represent a symbolic gesture of restoration, a type of map that charts both the real and the imagined. They gather and take control of the fragments and recast them as embodied wholes, making visual the process of taking control of one's narrative and being one's own possession.*<sup>93</sup>

In transposing these fragments onto canvas, Belle reorders and layers them with ethical questions surrounding the history of slavery and the collective erasure of a population sold to the USA without consultation. The sale of the Danish West Indies to America in 1917 effectively ended European colonial rule. However, it took another ten years for residents to achieve US citizenship. Belle's *Chaney* series challenges subversive notions of possession and containment through references to leftover fragments and people. As Belle concedes, the paintings are a "symbolic gesture" towards reshaping the shared Euro-Afro-Carib-US histories. Symbolism is important to Belle. Her chaney bracelet is often visible in promotional photographs of the artist, recorded interviews, and lectures. While the wearing of fragments is a way to reframe colonial discourse, Belle's *Chaney* uses the painted medium to give new context to chaney's historical narrative of possession and cultural amnesia.

In 2017, Belle's *Chaney* paintings inspired a new line of twelve blue and white hand-painted porcelain dinner plates produced in partnership with Royal Copenhagen (see fig. 4). Exhibited alongside recovered fragments at Christiansborg Palace, the plates mark a conceptual reuniting of chaney to its ceramic body (fig. 34). However, this return, which coincided with the centennial of Denmark's transfer of St. Croix to the US Virgin Islands, grounds postcolonial discourse in the language of decoration. While the floral designs and blue-and-white colour scheme are in keeping with decorative traditions of Royal Copenhagen, the plates are inscribed with the shared histories of St. Croix in ways that transcend the limits of materiality. Reinforcing this idea is Belle's hand-painted signature on the back of the plate underneath the Royal Copenhagen stamp (fig. 35). The luxury status of the plates, together with their royal display, shows how Belle's practice brings historic and present-day arguments about the commodification and consumption of European ceramics into dynamic conversation. Moreover, she proposes a new way to approach the well-rehearsed problems of colonialism and slavery.



Figure 34

La Vaughn Belle, *Chaney (Plate Series)*, twelve porcelain plates produced by Royal Copenhagen, exhibited with *chaney pieces* at Christiansborg Palace, 2017. Digital image courtesy of La Vaughn Belle (all rights reserved).



Figure 35

La Vaughn Belle, *Underside: Chaney (Plate Series)*, porcelain plate produced by Royal Copenhagen, 2017. Digital image courtesy of La Vaughn Belle (all rights reserved).

Belle's *Chaney* plates have rich parallels with British artist Lubaina Himid's overpainted series *Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service* from 2007 (fig. 36).<sup>94</sup> Originally conceived as a museum intervention to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the Act of Parliament abolishing the slave trade in Britain, *The Lancaster Dinner Service* sees Himid paint caricatures from the dining room of the British upper classes and the forgotten enslaved people that served them over eighteenth- and nineteenth-century porcelain, including the iconic willow pattern (fig. 37). Loosely drawn cartoons and scrawling text detailing stories of excessive consumption and slavery are transposed onto serialised china plates, cups, milk jugs, and soup tureens. The original ceramic pattern is still visible on each of the items. However, the overpainting disrupts a logical reading of their stately designs as the uncomfortable reality of the meaning of the words domestic service is brought into sharp focus as issues of gender, class, and race play out as an aesthetic dialectic of the old and the new.



Figure 36

Lubaina Himid, *Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service, Judges' Lodgings*, 2007, acrylic on porcelain, dimensions variable. Digital image courtesy of Lubaina Himid and Hollybush Gardens, London (all rights reserved).



Figure 37

Lubaina Himid, *Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service, Judges' Lodgings* (detail), 2007, acrylic on porcelain, dimensions variable. Digital image courtesy of Lubaina Himid and Hollybush Gardens, London (all rights reserved).

By contrast, Belle's *Chaney* plates are more subtle agents of disruption. The series invokes the aesthetic perfection of Royal Copenhagen's luxury brand but layers it with references to the broken and disposed. Its latent histories of colonialism, slavery, and gender hierarchies are preserved for posterity, protected by the glaze and the wholeness of its material form. The epistemological messages contained within the plates serve up a new narrative of luxury consumption that looks to the broader practices of global decorative arts. The *Chaney* plates, which are not currently being mass produced by Royal Copenhagen, despite generating serious interest from many parties including Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, sit somewhere between artistic series and commodified design.<sup>95</sup> The tangential status of the plates reads as a cypher for much of Belle's work, which deals with the politics of resistance, gender, and identity.<sup>96</sup> With their references to the broken, Belle's porcelain plates challenge existing and past traditions of European decorative arts by offering a mode of decolonial aesthetics that brings fragmented bodies—both ceramic and human—together as a lesson for a different future.

### **Conclusion: The Rhetoric of Trash**

The transformation of chaney from island debris into artworks and decorative objects can be viewed in the wider context of other Caribbean artists using trash in addressing the legacies of slavery and colonialism. The Haitian collective Atis Rezistans, a Creole term for “artist resistance”, upcycles rubbish into mixed-media sculpture with strong cyberpunk and voodoo themes (fig. 38). The loud, brash street gallery of the Atis Rezistans offers an alternative to the comparatively sterile, quiet, and conservative gallery experience. Although aesthetically different, there are ideological similarities between the transformation of foreign junk into art and the repurposing of chaney into mixed media. To this end, the recuperation of chaney can be understood as a response to a broader aesthetic of contemporary art that deals with the politics of resistance and identity. There is still much to be learned from chaney and its reuse in

contemporary art and design. The fact that Belle's plates were produced in partnership with Royal Copenhagen in their studios in Denmark presents an exciting opportunity for other well-known porcelain brands to revisit historic patterns, such as blue willow, to incorporate micro-art histories that ask big questions about the role of empire in art and culture.



Figure 38

Philipp Lichterbeck, *Atis Rezistans, Haiti*, 2011. Digital image courtesy of Philipp Lichterbeck (all rights reserved).

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many people on St. Croix who shared their knowledge and experiences of chaney, including Nathan Bishop, La Vaughn Belle, Nicole Canegata, Denise Fashaw, Kris and Whealan Maisscott, and Elizabeth Smith. I am also grateful to photographer Jakob Dahlin and Brookfield Properties for kindly granting permission to use their images. My sincere thanks go to Gitte Backhausen for her help with translations and for sharing her knowledge of Danish customs. Likewise, I thank my colleagues Molly Duggins and Priya Vaughan at the National Art School for their support and feedback on this project. This article has been vastly improved by the talented people at *British Art Studies*. I especially thank Baillie Card, Sria Chatterjee, Maisoon Rehani, guest editor Iris Moon, and the anonymous reviewers for their insights and assistance. The photo shoot by Nicole Canegata in conjunction with ib Designs and the owner of the Hospital Street property was generously supported by *British Art Studies*.

## About the author

Jessica Priebe is a lecturer in art history at the National Art School in Sydney. She is a former research fellow in Enlightenment Studies with the Sydney Intellectual History Network. A specialist in eighteenth-century visual and material culture, her research interests include collecting, museum studies, and Caribbean decorative arts. She is the author of *François Boucher and the Art of Collecting in Eighteenth-Century France* (Routledge, 2021). Her essays appear in *Un Abrégé du Monde: Savoirs et Collections autour de Dezallier d'Argenville* (Fage éditions, 2012), *The Journal of the History of Collections* (2016), *PMC Notes* (2021), and *Making Ideas*

*Visible in the Eighteenth Century* (University of Delaware Press, forthcoming 2021), *Sea Currents: Art, Science and the Commodification of the Ocean World in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

## Footnotes

1. Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 125–133.
2. On the wearing of Chaney jewellery as a symbol of cultural resistance, see the 2017 exhibition, *Museum Exhibits: Chaney-Stories from Migrant Fragments*, organised by Gitte Petersen-Westergaard and La Vaughan Belle, National Parks Service, Christiansted, Virgin Islands, <<https://www.nps.gov/chri/learn/photosmultimedia/museum-exhibits.htm>; La Vaughan Belle, “Friends Lecture: CHANEY: Stories from Migrant Fragments”, YouTube, 16 May 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQN4cXMN\\_d8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQN4cXMN_d8); and Helle Stenum’s documentary, “We Carry It Within Us—Fragments of a Shared Colonial Past”, Vimeo, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/wecarryitwithinus>.
3. The decolonial aspects of Belle’s work are discussed in Tami Navarro, “Beyond the Fragments of Global Wealth”, *Social Text*, 7 June 2018, [https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/beyond-the-fragments-of-global-wealth/](https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/beyond-the-fragments-of-global-wealth/).
4. The Spanish arrival on St. Croix in 1493 was part of Columbus’s four voyages between 1492 and 1502. These voyages mark the commencement of the transatlantic trading system.
5. On the circulation of Spanish ceramics in the Caribbean, see Marlieke Ernst and Corinne Hofman, “Breaking and Making Identities: Transformations of Ceramic Repertoires in Early Colonial Hispaniola”, in *Material Encounters and Indigenous Transformations in the Early Colonial Americas: Archaeological Case Studies*, ed. Floris W.M. Keehnen, Corinne L. Hofman, and Andrzej T. Antczak (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 124–145.
6. See Alfredo E. Figueredo, “The Early Colonization of St. Croix (1621–1642)”, *Journal of the Virgin Islands Archaeological Society* 6 (1978): 59–64.
7. Figueredo, “The Early Colonization of St. Croix (1621–1642)”, 61.
8. By 1686, the Spanish had lost interest in destroying the European colonies on St. Croix. Figueredo, “The Early Colonization of St. Croix (1621–1642)”, 63.
9. Figueredo, “The Early Colonization of St. Croix (1621–1642)”, 62–63.
10. A formal transfer of power to the Crown took place in 1754, with the kingdom of Denmark-Norway assuming responsibility for the governance of the Danish West Indies. On the early years of the Danish colony, see Neville Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix* (Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 1992), 11–17.
11. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 11. By the 1760s, the Irish accounted for around 30 per-cent of Danish sugar exports from St. Croix. See Orla Power, “Beyond Kinship: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century Irish Community at Saint Croix, Danish West Indies”, *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 5, no. 3 (2007), <https://www.irlandeses.org/0711power3.htm>.
12. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 13 and 15.
13. Published regularly between 1770 and 1802, most of the paper’s content, including the masthead, was printed in English. Government business appeared in both English and Danish, with occasional announcements in French and Spanish. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 15.

14. “Purchase of the United States Virgin Islands, 1917”, U.S. Department of State Archive, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/wwi/107293.htm>.
15. As discussed in Stenum, “We Carry It Within Us—Fragments of a Shared Colonial Past”.
16. On the complexities surrounding the digitisation of the Danish West Indian archive, see Erica L. Johnson, “Comparative Counter-Archival Creativity: M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* and La Vaughn Belle’s *Chaney*”, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 13, no. 1 (July 2021): 4–5; and Daniela Agostinho, “Archival Encounters: Rethinking Access and Care in Digital Colonial Archives”, *Archival Science* 19 (2019): 141–165.
17. While the term chaney is known and used widely on St. Croix, Caroline Frank has shown that the word “chaney” also appears in English and American inventories during the eighteenth century, where it refers to unbroken pieces of porcelain. More research is needed on the connection between the two. Caroline Frank, *Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 104, 117, and 144.
18. Chaney is sometimes spelt cheney, see *Crucian Dictionary*: <https://cruciandictionary.com/cruzandictionary/c.html>.
19. Nathan Bishop, email communication with author, 13 September 2021. I am grateful to Liz Smith and Denise Fashaw for sharing the photo of coins found on the island.
20. Although significant to St. Croix’s history, Igneri, Taíno, or Kalinago pottery lie outside the scope of this article as they pre-date colonisation.
21. Gartley was the first to identify these wares, which he described as “fired in open hearths”. See Richard T. Gartley, “Afro-Cruzan Pottery: A New Style of Colonial Earthenware from St. Croix”, *Journal of the Virgin Islands Archaeological Society* 8 (1979): 47–61, esp. 47. Other scholars working on enslaved populations throughout the Caribbean have discussed these wares, see Mark W. Hauser and Christopher R. DeCorse, “Low-Fired Earthenwares in the African Diaspora: Problems and Prospects”, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 7, no. 1 (2003): 67–98; and Douglas V. Armstrong, *The Old Village and the Great House: An Archaeological and Historical Examination of Drax Hall Plantation, St. Ann’s Bay, Jamaica* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009).
22. By agricultural standards, St. Croix is considered the most successful island in the Danish West Indies.
23. On Danish trading policies, see Orla Power, “Irish Planters, Atlantic Merchants: The Development of St. Croix, Danish West Indies, 1750–1766”, unpublished PhD thesis, NUI Galway (2011), 91.
24. Power, “Irish Planters, Atlantic Merchants”, 91.
25. Desmond Nicholson, “The Dating of West Indian Historic Sites by the Analysis of Ceramic Sherds”, *VIAS* 7 (1979), 70. While Nicholson suggests that the Dutch and Spanish may have traded Chinese porcelain with the Danish on St. Croix, Rikke Søndergaard Kristensen has shown the consumption of Chinese porcelain in Danish households was widespread by the middle of the eighteenth century, making it more likely to be imported to St. Croix in large volumes. Rikke Søndergaard Kristensen, “Made in China: Import, Distribution and Consumption of Chinese Porcelain in Copenhagen c.1600–1760”, *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 48, no. 1 (2014): 151–181.
26. The name given to the owner’s residence on the estate.
27. “det var et sybaritisk liv”. Hans Birch Dahlerup, *Mit Livs Begivenheder 1815–1848* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske, 1909), 2: 33.

28. “ved det blanktpolerede Mahognibord uden Dug, men dækket med det kostbareste slebne Chrystal, Porcellain og Sølvtoi, og belæsset med de skønneste Frugter af alle Slags, Kager, Geléer, blancmangéer”. Dahlerup, *Mit Livs Begivenheder 1815–1848*, 49.
29. “Planterne tilhørte næsten alle gamle og fornemme familier og førte et liv på deres plantager, der i elegance og smag ikke stod tilbage for den rigeste adels i Europa”. Dahlerup, *Mit Livs Begivenheder 1815–1848*, 33. I am grateful to Gitte Backhausen for her help with the translation.
30. Dahlerup, *Mit Livs Begivenheder 1815–1848*, 49. For other first-hand accounts of St. Croix during this period, see Hans West, *Accounts of St. Croix in the West Indies*, ed. Arnold R. Highfield and trans. Nina York (St. Thomas: Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 2004).
31. See “What is Chaney?” Chaney Chicks & Island Gifts, <https://www.chaneychicks.com>. Confirmed by Liz Smith and Denise Fashaw, email communication with author, 6 September 2021.
32. The willow pattern is also produced in green, pink, brown, and black.
33. See Patricia O’Hara, “‘The Willow Pattern That We Knew’: The Victorian Literature of Blue Willow”, *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 4 (1993): 421–442. See also Catherine Lanone, “‘Toujours la porcelaine’: George Meredith and the Willow Pattern”, *Miranda* 7 (2012).
34. Elizabeth Chang, *Britain’s Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 89.
35. G. Savage, “Pottery”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 18 August 2020), <https://www.britannica.com/art/pottery>.
36. On the history of Royal Copenhagen and the production of patterns, see [www.royalcopenhagen.com](http://www.royalcopenhagen.com).
37. A notable exception to this is La Vaughn Belle’s 2011 video *Somebody’s Been Sitting in My Chair, Somebody’s Been Sleeping in My Bed*, which features Belle wandering through the Great House at Estate Whim in a modern-day recreation of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”. The video explores Belle’s response to the space as an Afro-Caribbean woman. As she navigates the objects on display, she draws attention to the issues of power, possession, and agency. The video ends with Belle’s escape from the room by jumping out of a window, a symbolic reference to the role of the Great House as a locus for physical and physiological containment among enslaved individuals.
38. Angelika R. Kuettner, “Simply Riveting: Broken and Mended Ceramics”, *Ceramics in America*, ed. Robert Hunter (Milwaukee, WI: Chipstone, 2016), 122–140.
39. There is a substantial volume of literature on this topic. See, for example, Douglas V. Armstrong, *Creole Transformation from Slavery to Freedom: Historical Archaeology of the East End Community, St. John, Virgin Islands* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003); and Laurie A. Wilkie and Paul Farnsworth, *Sampling Many Pots: An Archaeology of Memory and Tradition at a Bahamian Plantation* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).
40. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 70.
41. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 87.
42. On the labour uprisings, see Neville Hall, “The Victor Vanquished: Emancipation in St. Croix; its Antecedents and Immediate Aftermath”, *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids / New West Indian Guide* 58, nos. 1–2 (1984): 3–36; Waldemar Westergaard, “Account of the Negro Rebellion on St. Croix, Danish West Indies, 1759”, *The Journal of Negro History* 11 (1926): 50–61; Arnold R. Highfield, ed., *Emancipation in the US Virgin Islands: 150 Years of Freedom* (St.

- Croix, VI: Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 1999); Arnold R. Highfield and George F. Tyson, eds., *Negotiating Enslavement: Perspectives on Slavery in the Danish West Indies* (Christiansted, VI: Antilles Press, 1999); and Isaac Dookhan, *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States* (Kingston: Canoe Press, 1994).
43. On the consumption of European ceramics by enslaved populations, see Laurie A. Wilkie, “Culture Bought: Evidence of Creolization in the Consumer Goods of an Enslaved Bahamian Family”, *Historical Archaeology* 34, no. 3 (2000): 10–26.
  44. These findings are part of the Estate Little Princess Maritime and Terrestrial Archaeology Field School. Led by Ayana Flewellen, Justin Dunnivant, William White, Alicia Odewale, and Alexandra Jones, the project trains students in archaeological practices at former slave villages on St. Croix. See Lizzie Wade, “Caribbean Excavation Offers Intimate Look at the Lives of Enslaved Africans”, *Science*, 7 November 2019, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/11/caribbean-excavation-offers-intimate-look-lives-enslaved-africans>. The transferware is discussed in Bill Kossler and Linda Morland, “Ancient Footprints—Lots of Archeology Happening on St. Croix”, *St. Thomas Source*, 22 July 2019.
  45. As noted in Robert Steven Kidd, “An Archaeological Examination of Slave Life in the Danish West Indies: Analysis of the Material Culture of a Caribbean Slave Village Illustrating Economic Provisioning and Acquisition Preferences”, unpublished master’s thesis, Department of Anthropology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, 2006, 2.
  46. For discussion of the markets in the Danish West Indies, see Karen Fog Olwig, *Cultural Adaptation and Resistance on St. John: Three Centuries of Afro-Caribbean Life* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1985), 45–46.
  47. On the Danish model of slave provisioning, see Kidd, “An Archaeological Examination of Slave Life in the Danish West Indies”, 42–45.
  48. J.L. Carstens, a planter on St. Thomas in the 1740s describes the poor conditions and the Danish solution: “plantation slaves receive nothing from their master in the way of food or clothing except only the small plot of land at the outermost extremity of his plantation land that he assigns each slave”. J.L. Carstens, *St. Thomas in Early Danish Times: A General Description of all the Danish, America or West Indian Island*, ed. and trans. Arnold R. Highfield and George F. Tyson (St. Croix, VI: Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 1994), 72. On the St. Croix plots, see Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 59.
  49. On the importance of the local markets to enslaved communities on St. Croix, see Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 114–115.
  50. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 112.
  51. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man”, 125–133. On the issue dress and the slave planter on St. Croix, see Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 112.
  52. I am drawing here on Mary Louise Pratt’s use of the term as contact zones, to describe spaces where communities, who would otherwise be separated geographically and historically, are brought together in new circumstances and forced to “meet, clash and grapple with each other”. Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone”, in *Professing in the Contact Zone*, ed. Janice M. Wolff (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2002), 34.
  53. On the consumption of European ceramics by enslaved populations, see Wilkie, “Culture Bought”, 10–26; and Kidd, “An Archaeological Examination of Slave Life in the Danish West Indies”, 84–85.
  54. Wilkie, “Culture Bought”, 23.
  55. Wilkie, “Culture Bought”, 23.

56. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 225.
57. A. Brooke Persons, "Archaeological Correlates of Emancipation on St. Croix", (2018): 1–16, [https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/06/19/61/01077/1\\_Persons.pdf](https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/06/19/61/01077/1_Persons.pdf).
58. For a summary of Bhabha's theory of ambivalence, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 1998), 10.
59. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 224.
60. Bhabha argues that all colonial relations are ambivalent and therefore end in destruction. His argument of the inevitable end of the colonial relationship has shown itself to be controversial in that it assumes no action is required on the part of the colonised. See Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 125.
61. I am grateful to Gitte Backhausen for sharing her knowledge of this Danish custom.
62. Kevin Hetherington, "Secondhandedness: Consumption, Disposal, and Absent Presence", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22, no. 1 (2004), 158. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the connection with Hetherington.
63. Hetherington, "Secondhandedness", 169.
64. Hetherington, "Secondhandedness", 169.
65. A notable exception being the burned chaney recovered from the Frederiksted Landfill in 2016 (see footnote 57).
66. Hamilton's letter is dated 6 September 1772. It was published one month later in St. Croix's newspaper, the *Royal Danish American Gazette*. The letter impressed colony leaders, who sponsored Hamilton's education in America. See "From Alexander Hamilton to The Royal Danish American Gazette, 6 September 1772", *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0042>.
67. St. Croix receives an average rainfall of 1099 mm (43.3 in.) per year.
68. This distinction is made by retailers of chaney. See, for example, Chaney Chicks & Island Gifts. "What is Chaney?".
69. On the use of porcelain as ballast, see Jan Hogendorn and Marion Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 86 and 88.
70. For current research on shipwrecks on St. Croix, see David Morgan, Jessica Keller, Jeneva Wright, Meredith Hardy, Dave Conlin, Stephen Lubkemann, Paul Gardullo, and Chris DeCorse, "Slave Wrecks Project in National Park Units of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands", presented at the conference of the Society for Historical Archaeology, Washington, DC, 6–9 January 2016, *The Digital Archaeological Record*, <https://core.tdar.org/document/435001/the-slave-wrecks-project-in-national-park-units-of-st-croix-us-virgin-islands>.
71. Edward L. Towle, *Shipwrecks of the Virgin Islands: An Inventory 1523–1825* 2nd ed. (St. Thomas, VI: Island Resources Foundation, 1976), nos. 21–22, 24, 35, 41, 44–45, and 48.
72. Towle, *Shipwrecks of the Virgin Islands*, nos. 21–22, 24, 35, 41, 44–45, and 48. For a fascinating study on the afterlife of a shipwreck and the ethical salvage of cargo, see Leonor Veiga's interview with Natali Pearson about her research on the Belitung shipwreck; "The Afterlife of a Shipwreck?", *Leiden Arts in Society*, 15 June 2018, <https://www.leidenartsinsocietyblog.nl/articles/the-afterlife-of-a-shipwreck>. Thank you to Iris Moon for suggesting this important connection.
73. On the relationship between shells and porcelain, see Jessica Priebe, *François Boucher and the Art of Collecting in Eighteenth-Century France* (London: Routledge, 2021), 189–192.
74. See, for example, the "St. Croix" episode of the Netflix series *Restaurants on the Edge*, aired 8 May 2020, [www.netflix.com](http://www.netflix.com).

75. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value", in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63; and Arjun Appadurai, "The Thing Itself", *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006), 15.
76. Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process", in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective.*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66.
77. On the upcycling of rubbish in art and culture, see Bahar Emgin, "Trashion: The Return of the Disposed", *Design Issues* 28, no. 1 (2012): 63–71.
78. Nathan Bishop, email communication with author, 13 September 2021.
79. As confirmed by: Denise Fashaw, Liz Smith, and Nathan Bishop, email communication with author, 13 September 2021; and Kris Massicott, email communication with author, 11 September 2021.
80. Nathan Bishop, email communication with author, 13 September 2021.
81. Kris Massicott, email communication with author, 11 September 2021.
82. I am expanding here on Bhabha's concept of the third space of enunciation, a hybrid space that he uses to explore the nature of colonial relations. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 55.
83. Nathan Bishop as quoted in Westergaard and Belle, "Museum Exhibits".
84. In this way, chaneý can be explored further in the context of "Thing-power", which Jane Bennett describes as a pull "toward the strange ability for ordinary man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence of aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience". Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.
85. For a revisionist account of Sloane's expeditions, see James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane* (London: Penguin, 2017). I am grateful to Iris Moon for suggesting this.
86. I am building here on Jacqueline Bishop's analysis of Belle's work as representation of an island fantasy. See Jacqueline Bishop, "La Vaughn Belle's Contemporary Art Practice of Speaking in Layers", *HuffPost*, 3 October 2014, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/la-vaughn-belles-contempo\\_b\\_5917632](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/la-vaughn-belles-contempo_b_5917632).
87. On the issue of innocent colonialism, see Astrid Nonbo Andersen, "The Repatriations Movement in the US Virgin Islands", *Journal of African American History* 103, nos. 1–2 (2018): 104–132; and Lill-Ann Körber, "Gold Coast (2015) and Danish Economies of Colonial Guilt", *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 10, no. 2 (2018): 25–37.
88. Belle's comments are discussed in Bishop, "La Vaughn Belle's Contemporary Art Practice of Speaking in Layers", n.p. The issue of cultural amnesia is addressed in Stenum, "We Carry It Within Us—Fragments of a Shared Colonial Past".
89. Johnson, "Comparative Counter-Archival Creativity", 6.
90. Johnson, "Comparative Counter-Archival Creativity", 9.
91. Johnson, "Comparative Counter-Archival Creativity", 6–8.
92. On Belle's experience at Royal Copenhagen, see Stenum, "We Carry It Within Us—Fragments of a Shared Colonial Past". Belle discusses her childhood memory of chaneý in Gudrun Marie Schmidt, "Artist from St. Croix to the Danes: I Believe Everyone Should Give an Apology", *Politiken*, 9 March 2017.

93. As quoted in La Vaughn Belle, “Solo Exhibition | Peachcan Gallery | January 12–Feb 28, 2018”. *La Vaughn Belle*, 19 January 2018, <http://lavaughnbelle.blogspot.com/2018/01/>.
94. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this excellent connection.
95. La Vaughn Belle in conversation with the Queen of Denmark. Belle email communications with author, 13 and 22 September 2021.
96. The Chaney plates are linked to Belle’s series *Collectible* (2008), in which she recreates Royal Copenhagen’s commemorative plates from the early 1900s that reference the Danish West Indies in blue ink on white paper plates. See La Vaughn Belle’s works on <http://www.lavaughnbelle.com>.

## Bibliography

- Agostinho, Daniela. “Archival Encounters: Rethinking Access and Care in Digital Colonial Archives”. *Archival Science* 19 (2019): 141–165.
- Andersen, Astrid Nonbo. “The Repatriations Movement in the US Virgin Islands”. *Journal of African American History* 103, nos. 1–2 (2018): 104–132.
- Appadurai, Arjun. “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value”. In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Edited by Arjun Appadurai, 3–36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Appadurai, Arjun. “The Thing Itself”. *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006): 15–21.
- Armstrong, Douglas V. *Creole Transformation from Slavery to Freedom: Historical Archaeology of the East End Community, St. John, Virgin Islands*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003.
- Armstrong, Douglas V. *The Old Village and the Great House: An Archaeological and Historical Examination of Drax Hall Plantation, St. Ann’s Bay, Jamaica*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Belle, La Vaughn. “Friends Lecture: CHANEY: Stories from Migrant Fragments”. YouTube, 16 May 2017. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQN4cXMN\\_d8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQN4cXMN_d8).
- Belle, La Vaughn. “Solo Exhibition | Peachcan Gallery | January 12–Feb 28, 2018”. *La Vaughn Belle*, 19 January 2018. <http://lavaughnbelle.blogspot.com/2018/01/>.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Bhabha, Homi K. “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”. *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 125–133.
- Bishop, Jacqueline. “La Vaughn Belle’s Contemporary Art Practice of Speaking in Layers”. *HuffPost*, 3 October 2014. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/la-vaughn-belles-contempo\\_b\\_5917632](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/la-vaughn-belles-contempo_b_5917632).
- Carstens, J.L. *St. Thomas in Early Danish Times: A General Description of all the Danish, America or West Indian Island*. Edited and translated by Arnold R. Highfield and George F. Tyson. St. Croix, VI: Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 1994.
- Chaney Chicks & Island Gifts. “What is Chaney?” <https://www.chaneychicks.com>.
- Chang, Elizabeth. *Britain’s Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Dahlerup, Hans Birch. *Mit Livs Begivenheder 1815–1848*. 2 vols. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske, 1909.

Delbourgo, James. *Collecting the World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane*. London: Penguin, 2017.

Dookhan, Isaac. *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*. Kingston: Canoe Press, 1994.

Emgin, Bahar. “Trashion: The Return of the Disposed”. *Design Issues* 28, no. 1 (2012): 63–71.

Ernst, Marlieke, and Corinne Hofman, “Breaking and Making Identities: Transformations of Ceramic Repertoires in Early Colonial Hispaniola”. In *Material Encounters and Indigenous Transformations in the Early Colonial Americas: Archaeological Case Studies*. Edited by Floris W.M. Keehnen, Corinne L. Hofman, and Andrzej T. Antczak, 124–145. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Figueredo, Alfredo E. “The Early Colonization of St. Croix (1621–1642)”. *Journal of the Virgin Islands Archaeological Society* 6 (1978): 59–64.

Founders. “From Alexander Hamilton to The Royal Danish American Gazette, 6 September 1772”. *Founders Online*, National Archives.  
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0042>.

Frank, Caroline. *Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Gartley, Richard T. “Afro-Cruzan Pottery: A New Style of Colonial Earthenware from St. Croix”. *Journal of the Virgin Islands Archaeological Society* 8 (1979): 47–61.

Hall, Neville. *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix*. Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 1992.

Hall, Neville. “The Victor Vanquished: Emancipation in St. Croix; its Antecedents and Immediate Aftermath”. *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids / New West Indian Guide* 58, nos. 1–2 (1984): 3–36.

Hauser, Mark, and Christopher R. DeCorse, “Low-Fired Earthenwares in the African Diaspora: Problems and Prospects”. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 7, no. 1 (2003): 67–98.

Hetherington, Kevin. “Secondhandedness: Consumption, Disposal, and Absent Presence”. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22, no. 1 (2004): 157–173.

Highfield, Arnold R., ed. *Emancipation in the US Virgin Islands: 150 Years of Freedom*. St. Croix, VI: Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 1999.

Highfield, Arnold R., and George F. Tyson, eds. *Negotiating Enslavement: Perspectives on Slavery in the Danish West Indies*. Christiansted, VI: Antilles Press, 1999.

Hogendorn, Jan, and Marion Johnson. *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Johnson, Erica L. “Comparative Counter-Archival Creativity: M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* and La Vaughn Belle’s *Chaney*”. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 13, no. 1 (July 2021): 1–12.

Kidd, Robert Steven. “An Archaeological Examination of Slave Life in the Danish West Indies: Analysis of the Material Culture of a Caribbean Slave Village Illustrating Economic Provisioning and Acquisition Preferences”. Unpublished master’s thesis. Department of Anthropology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, 2006.

Kopytoff, Igor. “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process”. In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Edited by Arjun Appadurai, 64–94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Körber, Lill-Ann. “Gold Coast (2015) and Danish Economies of Colonial Guilt”. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 10, no. 2 (2018): 25–37.

Kossler, Bill, and Linda Morland. “Ancient Footprints—Lots of Archeology Happening on St. Croix”. *St. Thomas Source*, 22 July 2019.

Kristensen, Rikke Søndergaard. “Made in China: Import, Distribution and Consumption of Chinese Porcelain in Copenhagen c.1600–1760”. *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 48, no. 1 (2014): 151–181.

Kuettner, Angelika R. “Simply Riveting: Broken and Mended Ceramics”. *Ceramics in America*. Edited by Robert Hunter, 122–140. Milwaukee, WI: Chipstone, 2016.

Lanone, Catherine. “‘Toujours la porcelaine’: George Meredith and the Willow Pattern”. *Miranda* [Online], 7 (2012).

Morgan, David, et al. “Slave Wrecks Project in National Park Units of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands”. Society for Historical Archaeology, Washington, DC, 6–9 January 2016, *The Digital Archaeological Record*, <https://core.tdar.org/document/435001/the-slave-wrecks-project-in-national-park-units-of-st-croix-us-virgin-islands>.

Navarro, Tami. “Beyond the Fragments of Global Wealth”. *Social Text*, 7 June 2018. [https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/beyond-the-fragments-of-global-wealth/](https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/beyond-the-fragments-of-global-wealth/).

Nicholson, Desmond. “The Dating of West Indian Historic Sites by the Analysis of Ceramic Sherds”. *VIAS* 7 (1979): 52–74.

O’Hara, Patricia. “‘The Willow Pattern That We Knew’: The Victorian Literature of Blue Willow”. *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 4 (1993): 421–442.

Olwig, Karen Fog. *Cultural Adaptation and Resistance on St. John: Three Centuries of Afro-Caribbean Life*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1985.

Persons, A. Brooke. “Archaeological Correlates of Emancipation on St. Croix”. (2018). [https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/06/19/61/01077/1\\_Persons.pdf](https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/06/19/61/01077/1_Persons.pdf).

Petersen-Westergaard, Gitte, and La Vaughan Belle. “Museum Exhibits: Chaney-Stories from Migrant Fragments”. National Parks Service, Christiansted, Virgin Islands, 2017. <https://www.nps.gov/chri/learn/photosmultimedia/museum-exhibits.htm>.

Power, Orla. “Beyond Kinship: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century Irish Community at Saint Croix, Danish West Indies”. *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 5, no. 3 (2007). <https://www.irlandeses.org/0711power3.htm>.

Power, Orla. “Irish Planters, Atlantic Merchants: The Development of St. Croix, Danish West Indies, 1750–1766”. Unpublished PhD thesis, NUI Galway, 2011.

Pratt, Mary Louise. “Arts of the Contact Zone”. In *Professing in the Contact Zone*. Edited by Janice M. Wolff. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2002.

Priebe, Jessica. *François Boucher and the Art of Collecting in Eighteenth-Century France*. London: Routledge, 2021.

Savage, G. “Pottery”. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 18 August 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/art/pottery>.

Schmidt, Gudrun Marie. “Artist from St. Croix to the Danes: I Believe Everyone Should Give an Apology”. *Politiken*, 9 March 2017.

Stenum, Helle. “We Carry It Within Us—Fragments of a Shared Colonial Past”. Vimeo, 2017. <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/wecarryitwithinus>.

Towle, Edward L. *Shipwrecks of the Virgin Islands: An Inventory 1523–1825* 2nd ed. St. Thomas, VI: Island Resources Foundation, 1976.

U.S. Department of State. “Purchase of the United States Virgin Islands, 1917”. U.S. Department of State Archive. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/wwi/107293.htm>.

Veiga, Leonor. “The Afterlife of a Shipwreck”. *Leiden Arts in Society*, 15 June 2018. <https://www.leidenartsinsocietyblog.nl/articles/the-afterlife-of-a-shipwreck>.

Wade, Lizzie. “Caribbean Excavation Offers Intimate Look at the Lives of Enslaved Africans”. *Science*, 7 November 2019, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/11/caribbean-excavation-offers-intimate-look-lives-enslaved-africans>.

West, Hans. *Accounts of St. Croix in the West Indies*. Edited by Arnold R. Highfield and translated by Nina York. St. Thomas: Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 2004.

Westergaard, Waldemar. “Account of the Negro Rebellion on St. Croix, Danish West Indies, 1759”. *The Journal of Negro History* 11 (1926): 50–61.

Wilkie, Laurie A. “Culture Bought: Evidence of Creolization in the Consumer Goods of an Enslaved Bahamian Family”. *Historical Archaeology* 34, no. 3 (2000): 10–26.

Wilkie, Laurie A., and Paul Farnsworth. *Sampling Many Pots: An Archaeology of Memory and Tradition at a Bahamian Plantation*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005.

## Imprint

<b>Author</b>	Jessica Priebe
<b>Date</b>	30 November 2021
<b>Category</b>	<a href="#">Article</a>
<b>Review status</b>	Peer Reviewed (Double Blind)
<b>License</b>	<a href="#">Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)</a>
<b>Downloads</b>	PDF format
<b>Article DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-21/jpriebe">https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-21/jpriebe</a>
<b>Cite as</b>	Priebe, Jessica. “Colonial Trash to Island Treasure: The Chaney of St. Croix.” In <i>British Art Studies: Redefining the British Decorative Arts</i> (Edited by Iris Moon). London and New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and Yale Center for British Art, 2021. <a href="https://britishartstudies-21.netlify.app/colonial-trash-to-island-treasure/">https://britishartstudies-21.netlify.app/colonial-trash-to-island-treasure/</a> .