

Beatrice Glow

Once the Smoke Clears

Through her art, Beatrice Glow (born Santa Clara, CA 1986) asks: What are the social histories of plants? She addresses this question through the story of tobacco using scent, watercolor, digitally printed textiles, and objects sculpted and 3D-printed from virtual reality (VR). Glow investigates how the lucrative production of tobacco shaped global trade networks and motivated white settler colonialism, or the forced control of already occupied lands. Her artwork features opulent surfaces that reveal underlying histories of exploitation and domination.

Tobacco, a plant native to the Americas and sacred to many Indigenous cultures, was commodified by European colonizers in the 16th century and traded globally. Glow traces tobacco's journey across the world, examining its relationship to other costly goods such as silk, gold, porcelain, and spices. Through her research, the artist uncovered historical prints that depict the devastating social and environmental effects of white colonists' fascination with tobacco. Historic objects, including tobacco-related artworks from the Museum's collection, inspire her forms. She plays with the language of decadence; sumptuousness is entangled with references to the true cost of luxury items.

The artist also engages with the multisensorial aspects of tobacco smoke, constructing an experience that evokes smoke's wisps and tendrils. Even after smoke has dissipated, it leaves a scent that lingers, burrowing into the crevices of our memories. Glow invites us to consider the legacies of colonialism and capitalism embedded in the visual vocabulary of tobacco, something that is only visible once the smoke clears.

As part of the Baltimore Museum of Art's ongoing broad range of initiatives related to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion, the Museum recognizes that we occupy land that generations of Indigenous people reside upon and have stewarded. The BMA is committed to engaging with local historians, scholars, and—most importantly—Indigenous people in the coming years to reflect on our obligations to and relationship with this land, its history, and its people.

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