





Larry Achiampong

'PAN AFRICAN FLAG FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS' ALLIANCE (UNION)' 2022,
Westminster Underground station

Art on the Underground present a permanent commission by British-Ghanaian artist Larry Achiampong, which re-imagines the London Underground roundel logo at the main entrance to Westminster station.

In place of the traditional red and blue design, Achiampong's version of the roundel features Pan African colours that speak symbolically to African diasporic identities and acknowledge their contributions and presence in London. The green, black, and red colours reflect the land, the people and the struggles the continent has endured, while yellow-gold signifies a new day and prosperity. 54 stars arranged around the edge of the roundel represent each of the countries of the African continent joined in union.

In developing his project, Achiampong was inspired by Adinkra, a Ghanaian system of symbols used in textile design, pottery, architecture and elsewhere to convey short concepts that relate to everyday life and the environment. Achiampong explains that his artwork is intended to 'explore imagination and a sense of connectedness between the African diaspora, and to reconsider their often forgotten or erased contributions to the city.'

Left: Larry Achiampong, Design for 'PAN AFRICAN FLAG FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS' ALLIANCE (UNION)', 2022. The completed artwork is installed above the entrance to Westminster Underground station.



Larry Achiampong with 'PAN AFRICAN FLAGS FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS' ALLIANCE', temporary commission for Westminster Underground station, 2019

Interview

Larry Achiampong speaks with Ekow Oliver, Programme Assistant at Art on the Underground, about his temporary intervention across Westminster Underground station's roundel logos, culminating in a permanent commission for the main station entrance in 2022.

EKOW OLIVER

It's great to be able to have this conversation with you Larry to learn more about your work at Westminster station and what you find important as an artist. I'd like to start by asking about your interest in gaming. Has this found a way into this commission?

LARRY ACHIAMPONG

Yes, subconsciously, in terms of working with symbols or insignia. I'm very much into action and role playing games. Within some games, there's a lot of research done around various types of cultures, identities and aspects of heritage.

E.O.

You've also talked about Adinkra with this artwork – a Ghanaian system of symbols used in fabrics, logos and pottery to represent concepts or aphorisms. How do those two ideas link up, London Underground and Adinkra?

L.A.

Within Adinkra, I've been thinking a lot about what the concept Sankofa means to me – more specifically, a terminology that I've coined myself, 'Sanko-time' – the idea of thinking about the past in order to understand the present and future. It's a kind of time travel – visiting and revisiting aspects of the past, both known and unknown.



Larry Achiampong, 'PAN AFRICAN FLAGS FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS' ALLIANCE', temporary artwork for Westminster Underground station, 2019

E.O.

For most people, any travel is transient. How do you connect the ideas of Sankofa and legacies of the past with the commuter?

L.A.

Whenever I'm building a new work or body of work, I feel like I'm telling a story. There are always certain things that drive me - whether that's heritage, history, telling stories, retelling them, representing them. But I also try to leave space for the person that is experiencing the work. The idea for the first Pan African flag I produced was simply to create a beacon, a beacon that, if I'm honest, as a young black person, I felt I'd never really seen before. And so, part of the hope was to ignite a space, not simply of belonging, but also connection.

E.O.

The location of the work at Westminster is not just iconic, it's literally the seat of government and is at the centre of British colonial history. Would I be right in assuming that because you've rooted this in Pan African symbolism, anticolonial politics are infused in the work?

L.A.

Yes, I'd say not simply that, but also, as far as I'm concerned the work recognises everything that has followed colonialism. London or the United Kingdom doesn't exist without the people of the African continent and its diasporic communities. So, placing a Pan African symbol in this location really has a weird kind of science fiction edge to it. I think it's quite important to say that change hasn't happened, historically, simply by people just sitting there. It's happened through action and movements and so on. And so, I do think artists can also try to create a space where these conversations can exist.

E.O.

You've said you're very much an East London boy but we're also in an international city. How would you like your work for London Underground to be talked about in relation to your East London-ness or your Britishness or your Pan African-ness?



In Spring 2022, Achiampong created the 35th artwork for cover for the pocket Tube map, titled 'What I Hear I Keep'.

L.A.

So for me, London is a very particular place. Having had the opportunity over the years to travel with my work to various parts of the planet, I realise how incredible London is. This city is a cultural melting pot unlike any other that I've been to, and that is one of the biggest things that inspires aspects of my process. The other thing I have to say is that gentrification has been quite a big deal, wherever I lived. As a result of my experiences and coming from a lower working-class background to begin

with, I was priced out of central London. So part of the way I think about time in my broader work is in relation to memory - being able to tell the stories that need to be told, because otherwise they get erased.

E.O.

I'd love to get into that idea of memory with you, especially because we are a similar age and have seen London go through that change. Like you said, aside from stories and people's oral recollections - which feels very African in itself - there's very few physical things that say who the people were that were here before and what a place looked like. So, I'm interested that you have previously talked about creating images and symbols that can anchor us in time.

L.A.

Yes, I guess I'm interested in using memory as a vehicle to create conversation. Unashamedly, I feel that this work at Westminster centres itself as a place of representation, so that young black kids who pass the work by chance can see it as a kind of a lifting point. I didn't see many things in public spaces growing that were saying this is part of you or you can connect to this; this belongs to you. It's about the importance of having a connection to and a stake in a place.

Staff Reflections

In 2019, Larry Achiampong made a temporary version of his artwork for Westminster station. He created eight new versions of the London Underground roundel logo, installed across the platforms, ticket hall and station entrance. The artworks were experienced by millions of people as they passed through the station, including London Underground staff who share

To see my Black African heritage represented in one of the most iconic logos around the world evokes a feeling of true belonging and recognition of our input as a community to this great city. We are surrounded by statues and buildings built by the profits of colonialism so to have Larry Achiampong create this permanent piece of art is progress and has changed the landscape of London.

**Sherelle Cadogan, Instructor Operator,
ASLEF LU/TfL Black, Asian & Ethnic
Minority Representative**

Red. Green. Black. (Yellow). I know those colours I thought. They are significant. Very significant. They represent the African diaspora. I feel proud that Larry Achiampong's work is being recognised permanently because it represents me and many others on the network. Also, I understand the significance of its placement in the heart of British politics – Westminster. I view it as a poignant declaration of belonging.

Khadija Mcbain
Customer Service Assistant



Larry Achiampong with Mohammed Bouhmidi,
LU Customer Service Supervisor, in 2019

The first time I saw Larry's Pan African colours on the London Underground roundels at Westminster where I work, I felt a strong connection with it. Larry's amazing work touched my sense of identity, the green and red in the logo reminds me of the Moroccan flag, the country where I was born, the country that I've left in the 80's for the UK.

Mohammed Bouhmidi
Customer Service Supervisor

art.tfl.gov.uk

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Courtesy of the artist and Copperfield, London

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