

Anticolonial hero statue to occupy Trafalgar Square fourth plinth from September

Antelope by Samson Kambalu depicts John Chilembwe wearing hat in defiance of colonial rule in Nyasaland, now Malawi



Samson Kambalu with his plinth design, Antelope. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

A sculpture of a preacher who was killed in an anticolonialist uprising in what is now [Malawi](#) will be unveiled in September on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square.

Antelope by [Samson Kambalu](#) is the 14th contemporary artwork to be commissioned for [public display in the historic central London square](#).

The sculpture restages a 1914 photograph of John Chilembwe, a Baptist preacher and pan-Africanist, and John Chorley, a European missionary, taken at the opening of Chilembwe's new church in Nyasaland, now Malawi.

Chilembwe is wearing a hat in defiance of a colonial rule forbidding Africans from wearing hats in front of white people. The following year, he led an uprising against colonial rule. Chilembwe was killed and his church, which had taken years to build, was destroyed by the colonial police.

In Kambalu's sculpture, Chilembwe is almost twice the size of Chorley, as a way of elevating his story and highlighting the distortions in conventional narratives of the [British empire](#).

Kambalu said: "Antelope on the fourth plinth was ever going to be a litmus test for how much I belong to British society as an African and a cosmopolitan." The commission had filled him with "excitement and joy", he added.

He had proposed the sculpture for the fourth plinth before the Black Lives Matter movement took off in the UK, he [told the BBC](#) last month.

"I thought I was just going to be like the underdog, because I had made up my mind that I was going to propose something meaningful to me as an African. But we have to start putting detail to the black experience, we have to start putting detail to the African experience, to the postcolonial experience."

Justine Simons, London's deputy mayor for culture and the creative industries, said Kambalu's work "shines a light on a hidden narrative of the British empire and will reveal how a simple hat became a symbol for the fight for equality".

Kambalu, born in Malawi in 1975, is an associate professor of fine art at Magdalen College, Oxford.

Next month, an updated paperback version of his memoir, *The Jive Talker: Or, How to Get a British Passport*, will be released. In it, Kambalu describes how a boy obsessed with fashion, football, Nietzsche and Michael Jackson won a free education at the prestigious Kamuzu academy and embarked on a journey to become an international artistic and academic success.

The fourth plinth currently hosts [The End by Heather Phillipson](#), a sculpture of a giant swirl of whipped cream, with a cherry, a fly and a drone transmitting a live feed. The programme is funded by the mayor of London with support from Arts Council England, and the commissions are chosen by a panel.

Among earlier artworks were Marc Quinn's sculpture [Alison Lapper Pregnant](#) and Yinka Shonibare's scaled-down replica of HMS Victory, contained in a glass bottle.