



LUISA ASCENDING

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Information on the exhibition, researched and written with
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Luisa Ascending is a Passiontide exhibition by Felisha Maria Carenage that is an exploration of the abolitionist narrative surrounding Luisa Calderón, tracing suffering, pathos and identity in a decolonial context.



In the early 19th century, widespread images of the tortured 14-year-old Luisa Calderón, like this one, caused a stir in Britain: they showed the violence, previously hidden to Europeans, that was part of everyday life in colonised places. Calderón's story still raises questions today about how this violence is connected to our reality in the here-and-now.

Using tools of visual communication which refer to the most famous drawings of Calderón's case as well as other visual phenomena of colonial imagery, the colonial history of Flensburg is addressed in a program of events around the exhibition.

The focus is not only on the economic traces of the colonial era, but also on the work of German Christian missionaries and their connections to colonial rule.

About Luisa Calderòn

Finding a language for Luisa Calderòn's story is not easy. Her story is often told in ways that use and strengthen sexist and racist imaginaries. Can we break that up?

Luisa lived in early 19th-Century Trinidad, which had been conquered by the British from Spain in 1797. She was a free "person of color", of "mixed-race" descent from Venezuela. She worked as a live-in-housemaid for the rich merchant Pedro Ruiz from the age of 11/12/13 years. His house, where she worked and lived, was located very close to the governor's house.

~~Luisa was Ruiz's mistress. Luisa seduced her master, who was much older than her. The mother had given Luisa to Pedro Ruiz as a maid and mistress. He had promised her marriage.~~

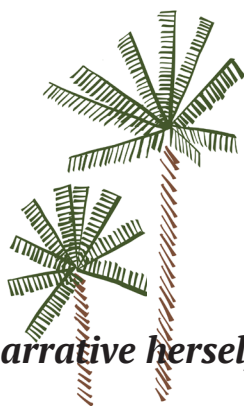


Pedro Ruiz took advantage of his housemaid and coerced her into sexual relations with him. Can we say: Pedro Ruiz sexually assaulted Luisa Calderòn and assisted in the systemic break-down of her character in the inquiry against her.

After she had run away from his household, Pedro Ruiz accused her of stealing money from him, together with an accomplice. She was captured and the governor of Trinidad at the time, Thomas Picton, authorized her to be tortured to get a confession. She was incarcerated "in irons" for eight months.

Governor Thomas Picton supported slavery and led an authoritarian and brutal government. He had also been a supporter of the development of slave plantations in Trinidad and had made part of his fortune through speculating in slaves. Abolitionists, who wanted to end slavery, looked for reasons to contest him politically. They saw that the charge of illegally authorising inhumane torture on a very young girl could ruin Picton.

Picton's main opponent, William Fullarton and Fullarton's wife brought Luisa Calderón to Britain in 1803. They supported her there in the years until she gave evidence at Picton's trial in 1806. Picton was first found guilty, but was eventually acquitted in 1808 after a retrial. After that, Luisa returned to Trinidad and not much is known of her afterwards. She left no narrative herself. Her broken story speaks to a deeper sense of loss of the archive, loss of stories and an erasure of ancestral lineage.



She left no narrative herself.

Flensburg's colonial entanglements

Flensburg was part of Danish Colonialism, enabling trading-company profits.

Flensburg was part of the Danish Kingdom for a long time (from the 15th century up until 1864). From the mid-17th century, Royal Danish Companies (Guinea Trading Company, Danish West India Company) started participating in European colonial practices: Building or conquering "castles" on the West coast of Africa, deporting people from West Africa to the Caribbean and enslaving them, as well as colonizing lands in the Caribbean.

Denmark appropriated St Thomas, St John and St. Croix between the late 17th century and early 18th century. The colonies were established as plantation economies heavily relying on enslaved labor. Denmark imported Sugar, Rum and other goods from the so-called "Danish West-Indian Islands". Danish ships participated in the enslavement of Africans up until 1803, with St. Thomas being used for some time also by the Brandenburg-African Company as a Slaving port (a German-Danish cooperation).

Slavery continued in the Danish colonies until a rebellion in 1848. Afterwards, rigid labor regulations oppressed the plantation workers. Workers revolted often, with the 1878 "Fireburn" on St. Croix being one of the largest worker's uprisings in the Caribbean. In 1917, Denmark sold the "Danish West-Indian Islands" to the USA, now called the "US Virgin Islands". The people on the Islands did not have a say in this. The Islands continue to be a "non-self-governing territory" under US government. The harbour of St. Thomas was for a long time afterwards (until 1993) still operated by the Danish West India Company.

Between 1755 and 1864 merchants from Flensburg (as part of the kingdom of Denmark) had direct access to trade with the Danish colonies. Flensburg became a hub of sugar refinery and exported manufactured goods to the Caribbean. They directly profited from the enslaved plantation labor and built many of the city's warehouses during this period.

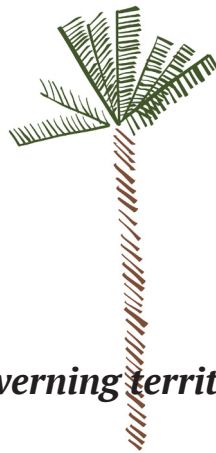
Flensburg was part of German imperialist colonialism

After 1864, Flensburg belonged to Prussia and became part of the German constitutional monarchy (1871). Thus, it became embedded in German colonialism (with important military buildings and connections). In 1918, after the First World War, Germany ceased to be a formal colonial power.

Flensburg profited from British colonialism

After 1864, Flensburg started sourcing raw rum (for the production of rum for the German market) from British colonies in the Caribbean, mainly from Jamaica. These colonies remained under British rule up until the 1960ies (as well as in the Commonwealth after that). Furthermore, Flensburg exported manufactured goods to British colonies. Thus, Flensburg profited from British Colonialism. Racist marketing campaigns for rum after the Second World War continued to (re-)enforce colonial imaginaries in Germany and Flensburg. These campaigns were so successful that they allowed for a massive increase in profits for some rum producing companies.

In Conclusion: Flensburg is (at least) entangled with three national European Colonialisms: Danish, German and British. How do we look at all this today?



‘Non-self-governing territory’

See Parliamentary History of England, 36 vols. (London, 1820), 36: May 2, 1802, cols. 864–866, for George Canning’s speech. He estimated that one million new slaves would be required in order for Trinidad to be cleared and cultivated to the same level as Jamaica.

Also see James Stephen, *The Crisis of the Sugar Colonies ... to which are subjoined Sketches of a Plan for Settling the Vacant Lands of Trinidad* (London, 1802), 151–197; Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London, 1975), 332–342; David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1987), 5, 10–11.

Luisa Ascending is installed at Flensburg's St. Nikolaikirche, and is accompanied by a program of events from April until June, 2022. With gracious support from Pastors Dr. Marcus Friedrichs and Johannes Ahrens, as well as Elisabeth Bohde and Thorsten Schütte of *Theatrewerkstatt Pillekentangafel*.

The exhibition is a part of *Heimatschutz: Colonial Continuities in Schleswig-Holstein's Harbour Cities*, Felisha Carenage's postgraduate project at the Muthesius University of Fine Art & Design, in Kiel, in cooperation with Flensburg Postkolonial and Kiel Postkolonial.

For more about Luisa and the *Heimatschutz* project:

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