

Share

What's good for General Motors is good for the country.

Attributed to General Motors President Charles Wilson, US Secretary of Defence, 1953

The syndicate benefits when I benefit...because everybody has a share.

Lieutenant Milo Minderbender, Catch-22, Joseph Heller, 1961

As Hew Locke tells the story, the genesis of his engagement with old share certificates was lunch with an economist friend. There were friendly warnings and encouragement to take personal action during this period of financial flux. Though the conversation ranged over the pros and cons of pensions, cash, property and savings, the artist's thoughts crystallised around what poetically appropriate action he could take; diversifying into a new product, widening his customer base, and building up his own portfolio. It was a wry acknowledgement of the commodity value of contemporary art: now you too can purchase a share in Hew's future performance...

Share certificates are a window into the history and movement of money, power and ownership...

Though expressed in the European style, the patriotic eagle, snake and cactus, and frieze of Aztec figures around *Banco Central Mexicano* speak of a pride in the local. A native maiden perches on the national treasure known as the Sun Stone. Though this carved calendar was deemed a suitable symbol for a bank at the time, unfortunately, for the maiden, archaeologists now believe its primary use was for human sacrifice. Cochimetzl, the Aztec god of commerce bursts through, as Locke points up the continuity of the ancient trading centre of Tenochtitlan with the modern Mexico City...

His re-workings obscure or highlight information ('rubber' morphs into 'robber') and whets our appetite to discover more about each company. Though often searching for a specific company share, the serendipitous find of an evocative name or vignette is enough to attract Locke's attention, as was the case in the *Steel Corporation of Bengal Ltd* (top right). Subsequent research revealed this was set up by British interests with the specific aim of rivalling the local Tata Iron and Steel Company. The family firm of Jamsetji Tata was financed by many aristocratic Indians to support the movement for self-sufficiency. Over the last five years, Tata Steel has bought Corus (formerly British Steel), Jaguar and Land Rover, and launched their much-publicised Nano car...

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