

## RELATED EVENTS

### I AM MAKING ART

*With Valda Jackson and*

*Rodney Harris*

Saturday 19 July, 11am–1pm

### PUBLICATION LAUNCH AND PANEL DISCUSSION

*With Robert Leckie, Hew Locke and*

*Giulia Smith*

Thursday 24 July, 6–7.30pm

### BSL TOUR

*With Martin Glover*

Saturday 26 July, 2–3pm

Visit our website for more information on the events programme

## INFORMATION

Spike Island

133 Cumberland Road

Bristol BS1 6UX

0117 929 2266

admin@spikeisland.org.uk

spikeisland.org.uk

Instagram: @Spikeland

Facebook: Spikeland

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### OPENING HOURS

Gallery: Wednesday to Sunday, 12–5pm

Café: Tuesday to Saturday, 10am–5pm

Sunday, 10am–4pm

Sensory packs including fidget toys and ear defenders are available at the reception desk.

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# Spike Island

## DONALD LOCKE

## *RESISTANT FORMS*

## 31 May to 7 September 2025



Donald Locke, *Black Box with Green Surface - Blackbirds* (1974). Photograph by Michael Brzezinski. Image courtesy the Estate of Donald Locke and Alison Jacques

*Resistant Forms* is the first major survey exhibition of Guyanese British artist Donald Locke (1930–2010) in Europe. It charts the development of Locke's work across Guyana, the UK and the US over five decades, from the mid-1960s to the late 2000s. It features over eighty works, from early ceramics that evoke human and natural forms to works on paper made in the last decade of his life. Also on display are 1970s mixed-media sculptures, paintings from the 1990s incorporating found objects and images, and rare archive materials being presented for the first time.

Locke was always experimenting, but his exploration of history, identity and subjugation was a constant. Above all, he wanted to give form and visibility to what he described as 'the unique and hybrid contributions of Black culture to modernity'. This intention is clearest in how many different ideas, materials and stylistic approaches converge and coalesce in his work and thinking, which never stopped evolving.

An accompanying publication will be released in July to coincide with the exhibition. Pre-orders are now available through our website and at the reception desk.



Camden Art Centre  
Arkwright Road  
London NW3

## IKON



ALISON JACQUES

IN CONVERSATION

Robert Leckie (RL): Donald was a prolific artist, as well as a writer, critic and poet. He seems to have been somewhat restless and very detail-oriented, constantly re-working drafts. Could you talk about his process? Did he ever stop working?

Brenda Locke (BL): As far as I know, he never stopped working. I think that was part of his process. It was a way to try out different ideas, a process of clarifying ideas. When he had to, he liked to organise things in a certain way, within a framework of disorganisation. So that's how you get the detail orientation.

RL: Artist and curator Carl E. Hazlewood has described Donald's practice as 'omnivorous'. Despite this and the different forms it took over the years, it still feels remarkably consistent. What do you think were Donald's most persistent themes and preoccupations?

BL: I don't see the term 'omnivorous' as meaning multi-channelled. To me, this describes an approach that was about absorbing everything.

Donald was concerned with a formal, textured type of information, and then played with bringing in layers of his diasporic background. He took a very formal approach to form until his time in London in the early 1970s; in the later years his work became less formal. The biomorphic form came out of the tradition of Henry Moore and Bernard Meadows, who was a student of Moore's and a tutor of Donald's at Bath Academy of Art in the mid-1950s. When it comes to the way Donald interpreted this tradition, he made it more organic than figurative.

RL: Donald also talked about resisting and transforming the sculptural traditions that were impressed on him in Bath, and the influence of artists like Peter Voulkos, who were associated with the California Clay Movement.

BL: That is a contrast that reflects what was happening in the sculptural field at the time. When he returned to the UK for his scholarship at Edinburgh University in 1969, he couldn't get over how the ceramics department had changed. It had these huge kilns and a great big pile of ceramics, which was a very non-European way of working.

RL: Art historian and curator, Grace Aneiza Ali, talks about Donald's resourcefulness and engineer-like ingenuity. He often used and reused materials in unusual ways with an economy of means and a sculptor's sensibility. Do you think this stems from his early life in Guyana, his formative experiences as a ceramicist in the UK, or something else?

BL: I think Ali was referring to his collage work. In a very general sense, I think collage is a way for artists in the diaspora community to ground themselves, to piece together this constant moving, to remind them of the layers of their existence.

Donald had drawers of different materials, each meticulously labelled, and he would constantly collect imagery. That wealth of information was always there for him to draw on. How final decisions were made about the way things were put together, I'm not sure we're going

to know. It was all deliberate, and it's up to us to decode what he's coded.

He often went back and painted over works, though this was deliberately not made obvious. I don't think that was a matter of his changing mind. It was just that he didn't want to give you the whole story.

RL: One thing that captured my attention is how Donald quotes his own sculptural work by incorporating reproductions in his paintings, alongside found images from flea markets and elsewhere. He writes about this being a way to 'observe himself interacting with the other agencies also active within the occurrence'. How important do you think the specificity of these objects and characters was to Donald?

BL: There's been a lot of discussion about the figures that appear in the photographs as a result of the recent exhibition *Nexus* at Atlanta Contemporary (2024–25), curated by Grace Aneiza Ali. Ali selected paintings that included sculptures of female forms, which Donald often juxtaposed with other magazine-type figures, often white figures. Marilyn Monroe is in one of them, Brigitte Bardot is in another. I think it was a way for Donald to explore how different his take on the female form was. He was not afraid to not follow that norm.

RL: And what about his use of images of Confederate and Union soldiers, which carries a different historical depth and power?

BL: I think living in Atlanta, he felt compelled to include these. Most of us assumed that they are only Confederate soldiers, but they aren't – they are both Confederate and Union.

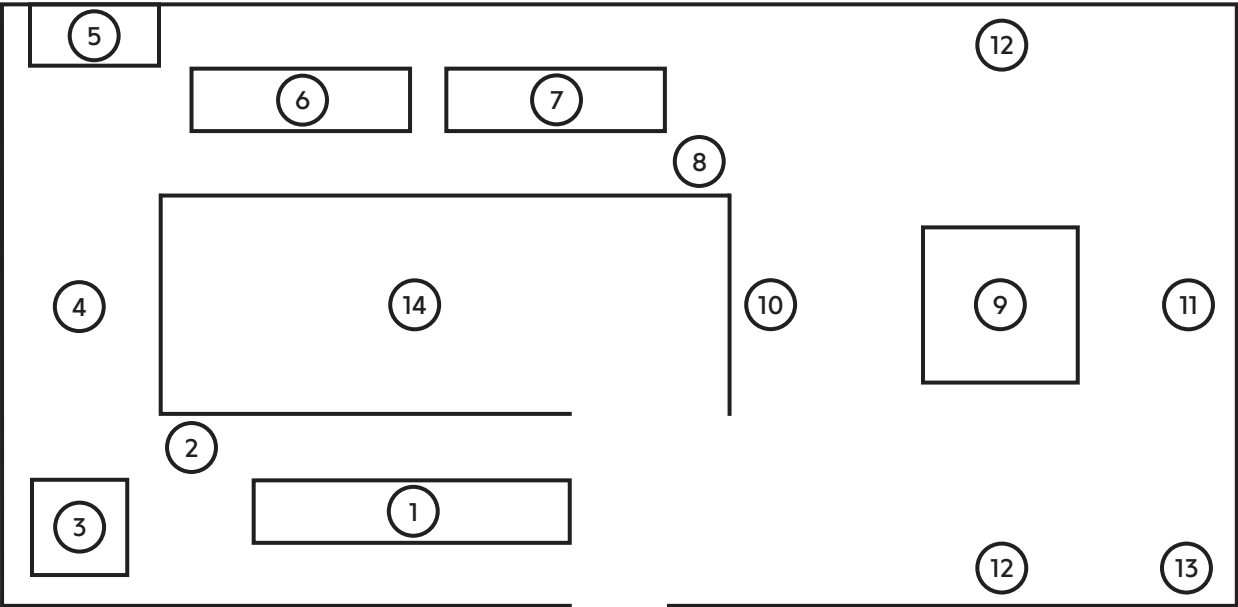
RL: It's clear from spending time in the archive that Donald was always in dialogue with and actively supporting other artists.

BL: He has always supported other artists – he was a natural teacher. And he's always written. He's written art criticism, but also novels. I don't know what his influences were in terms of his writing. If you talk about Caribbean influences, it would be people like A.J. Seymour and Wilson Harris.

RL: Could you talk about the main challenges you've faced in preserving the Estate and Donald's legacy?

BL: First of all, it's important to keep it safe. That's the main thing. The challenges are in dealing with the multiplicity of it. There's not just one draft of a poem; there are hundreds. And, there's the complexity of inventorying everything: Donald was very good with dates and titles of artworks, but on notebooks, poetry and novels, there's not a single date in sight! Then there's working on exhibitions such as this, which is one of the most rewarding challenges, as it will now form an important part of his legacy.

FLOORPLAN



LIST OF WORKS

1 Archival Materials	5 <i>Trophies of Empire</i> (1972–74)	9 Early and Late Vessels and Biomorphic Forms, 1970s–2000s	12 Works on Paper, 1980s–1990s
2 Black Paintings, 1970s	6 Arizona Sculptures, 1980s		
3 Twin Forms and Biomorphic Sculptures, 1960s–1980s	7 Archival Materials	10 <i>Southern Mansions</i> (1996) and <i>The Mark of Brer Nancy</i> (1995)	13 Late Ceramics and Works on Paper, 2000s
4 Mixed-media Sculptures, 1970s–1980s	8 Environmental Works, 1970s and 1980s	11 <i>Trophies of Empire #2</i> (2006–08)	14 Atlanta Paintings, 1990s

CREDITS

*Resistant Forms* is organised by Spike Island, Bristol; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; and Camden Art Centre, London, with support from the Estate of Donald Locke. The exhibitions at Spike Island and Ikon Gallery are curated by Robert Leckie, Director of Gasworks, London (and former Director of Spike Island). The exhibition at Camden Art Centre is curated by Martin Clark and Gina Buenfeld-Murley, in collaboration with Robert Leckie.

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