

Spike Island

PRESS RELEASE
DONALD RODNEY
VISCERAL CANKER

Saturday 25 May to Sunday 8 September 2024



Spike Island presents a major survey exhibition of late British artist Donald Rodney (b. 1961, West Bromwich; d. 1998, London).

Rodney worked across sculpture, installation, drawing, painting, and digital media, experimenting with new materials and technologies throughout his life. His work is known for being incisive, acerbic, and evocative in its analysis of the prejudices and injustices surrounding racial identity, Black masculinity, chronic illness, and Britain's colonial past. Rodney was also co-founding member of the BLK Art Group: an association of young Black artists formed in Wolverhampton in 1982.

The exhibition at Spike Island brings together all of Rodney's surviving works. This includes large-scale oil pastels on X-rays, kinetic and animatronic sculptures, and restaged installations, as well as sketchbooks and rare archive materials, spanning 1982 to 1997. Also on display is *Autoicon* (1997–2000), an interactive digital artwork initiated by Rodney and finalised by a group of his close friends after he died from sickle cell anaemia in 1998.



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND



Spike Island Artspace Limited
Registered charity no. 1003505
Registered in England
and Wales no. 2624621
VAT no. 650 5760 40

Rodney suffered from sickle cell throughout his life. This meant persistent pain, regular invasive treatments and increasing immobility. Though these were extremely challenging experiences, Rodney often incorporated them directly into his work as metaphors for the illnesses and injustices of society at large. This is evident in works such as *Flesh of My Flesh* (1996), a photographic triptych that includes a close-up of a raised scar on Rodney's thigh; and *My Mother, My Father, My Sister, My Brother* (1997), a tiny maquette of a house made from pins and his own skin.

Visceral Canker aims to introduce a new generation of audiences to Rodney's life and work, cementing his place as a vital figure in British art. The title comes from a 1990 work by the artist, which comprises two wooden plaques displaying heraldic images, linked together by a system of medical tubes that pump theatrical blood. It exemplifies both the viscosity of Rodney's work and politics, and his persistent scrutiny of the canker, or disease, at the heart of society: in this case specifically, how the inhumanity of Britain's colonial history continues to structure life today.

The exhibition is curated by former Spike Island Director Robert Leckie and Nicole Yip, Chief Curator at Nottingham Contemporary. It is presented in partnership with Nottingham Contemporary and Whitechapel Gallery.

Image: Donald Rodney, *Britannia Hospital 3* (1988). Oil pastel on x-ray / R: Donald Rodney, *Psalms* (1997). Motorised wheelchair. Installation view, in retrospect, iniva, London. Photograph by Thierry Bal

– Ends –

For press enquiries please contact Sam Talbot at sam@sam-talbot.com or Isabel Davies at isabel@sam-talbot.com.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

DONALD RODNEY

- Donald Rodney (b. 1961, West Bromwich; d. 1998, London) was a British artist. He was born to Jamaican parents, and grew up in Smethwick, on the outskirts of Birmingham. He studied Art Foundation at Bournville School of Art, Birmingham (1980–81); BA Fine Art at Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham (1981–85); and completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Multi-Media Fine Art at Slade School of Fine Art in London (1987). Rodney first gained visibility as a member of the BLK Art Group in the early 1980s, through a series of exhibitions titled *The Pan-Afrikan Connection* (1981–84).

Rodney's solo exhibitions include *Reimagining Donald Rodney*, Vivid Projects, Birmingham (2016); *Donald Rodney – In Retrospect*, iniva, London (2008); *9 Night in Eldorado*, South London Gallery (1997); *Cataract*, Camerawork, London (1991); *Critical*, Rochdale Art Gallery (1990); *Crisis*, Chisenhale Gallery, London (1989); *The First White Christmas & Other Empire Stories*, Saltley Print and Media, Birmingham (1985); and *The Atrocity Exhibition & Other Empire Stories*, Black Art Gallery, London (1986).

Rodney's work is in the collections of Tate Gallery, London; Arts Council England; the British Council; the Government Art Collection; Museums Sheffield; the National Galleries of Wales; South London Gallery; Wolverhampton Art Gallery; and Birmingham City Art Gallery.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- The exhibition will tour at Nottingham Contemporary from 28 September 2024 to 5 January 2025 (opening on 27 September) and at Whitechapel Gallery from 12 February to 18 May 2025
- ABOUT SPIKE ISLAND
Spike Island supports, produces and presents contemporary art and culture across an 80,000 square foot former industrial building in Bristol. Its diverse artistic programme includes free major exhibitions, events and engagement activities taking place on-site and online. Championing outstanding work by emerging and underrepresented local, national and



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND



Spike Island Artspace Limited
Registered charity no. 1003505
Registered in England
and Wales no. 2624621
VAT no. 650 5760 40

international artists, the programme enhances access to contemporary art for audiences from all backgrounds.

Alongside its public offer, Spike Island directly supports artists through new commissions, over 70 subsidised studios, and sector-leading artist development opportunities that widen access to its programme and facilities. Its Exhibition Services business supports the bespoke production and installation of artists' film and video throughout the UK and internationally. Spike Island is home to a dynamic community of hundreds of artists and creative businesses, working in flexible, affordable workspaces, alongside UWE Bristol's Fine Art department, Spike Print Studio, and café bar Emmeline. www.spikeisland.org.uk

- PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

This exhibition is part of the West of England Visual Arts Alliance programme and is generously supported by the Henry Moore Foundation, the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, and the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund. It is presented in partnership with Nottingham Contemporary and Whitechapel Gallery, where it will tour during 2024-25.

