

(A)  
THINGS ARRIVE  
TOGETHER AS SUFFUSED  
AND INSEPARABLE

Jareh Das, Carolyn Lazard,  
and Robert Leckie in conversation



(B)  
LOOKING FOR ELDORADO:  
DONALD RODNEY'S  
EARLY SKETCHBOOKS

by Janice Cheddie

DONALD RODNEY



(A)

Things Arrive Together as Suffused and Inseparable

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Donald Rodney (1961–1998) was a pivotal figure in the BLK Art Group, a collective of black artists that emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. He developed a diverse practice that eschewed the mainstream art-world norms of the period by addressing issues related to race, representation, and identity politics through an engagement with Caribbean diasporic experiences in Thatcher’s Britain, cultural histories, as well as physicality and subjectivity. Throughout his life, Rodney grappled with challenges posed by sickle-cell anemia, a genetic disorder that mainly affects people of African, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Indian descent. This condition significantly impacted his work and became a recurring theme in his art, which engaged with the intricate relationship between the body, medical science, and the societal and racial implications of illness. In the following discussion, Jareh Das, Carolyn Lazard, and Robert Leckie consider Rodney’s artistic explorations against broader conversations about the politics of sickness and racialized individuals; complex interconnections between care and constraint; Rodney’s ability to merge personal stories with wider sociopolitical themes, which resulted in work both deeply intimate and universally relevant; and how Rodney’s contributions and legacy may reverberate among younger generations of artists.

JAREH DAS		I grew up in Nigeria, and so black British artists of the 1980s and 1990s didn’t enter into my consciousness until later. In the case of Donald Rodney, I discovered the work in 2009 as an MA student. I am very familiar with the illness he had, sickle-cell anemia, as it has affected a sibling of mine. I began asking myself, what happens when illness is entwined in a conversation about contemporary art? This influences the artists, the kinds of work they’re making, the spaces in which they make work, some of the strategies of resistance that come into the work at the intersection of art and illness, the duality of being an artist and being a patient, and how certain spaces are reconfigured as creative spaces. Then also, thinking within the histories of black British art: Who’s more prominent, and who don’t we hear about? Rodney was extremely prolific—he was exhibiting, writing, doing so many different things during his short life span, and I’ve interrogated the systems of support and the network that fostered that.	
CAROLYN LAZARD	JAREH	I first encountered Rodney’s art in a 2019 London group exhibition in which my work was also included. Like you, Jareh, not working in a British context, it took longer for me to come to it. <i>Psalms</i> (1997) is the only work by Rodney I’ve ever seen in person, so almost my entire understanding of his oeuvre has been from a distance.	
ROBERT LECKIE	ROBERT	There’s a generation of people in the United Kingdom who will have seen many of Rodney’s works in the flesh thanks to his solo exhibitions <i>9 Night in Eldorado</i> at South London Gallery in 1997, and <i>In Retrospect</i> at iniva, London, in 2008. But a lot of people of my generation haven’t, and for them Rodney occupies this semi-mythical status—he’s someone they’ve read about, and whose work they’ve seen in books or on the internet but not in real life. It’s so different when you experience it in person. Recently, one of my favorite works, <i>Visceral Canker</i> (1990), was installed in the Tate Britain collection rehang <i>No Such Things as Society: 1980–1990</i> . It’s so much bigger than it looks on the page, and you appreciate the materiality and ingenuity more when you see it in the flesh.	
CAROLYN	CAROLYN	Indeed, an integral part of the work is about being at a remove from what we assume to be the site of art, how art is usually encountered. It’s noteworthy that in this moment, with changes in technology, there’s a continuation of this relationship of distance, separation, and absence that he was intimate with. For me, Rodney’s work is very much about his positionality as an artist in regard to art making and production, and his relationship to spaces of art. Yet those are critical things that tend to be left out in conversations around him.	
ROBERT		In my own research on Rodney’s work and legacy, it’s been curious to encounter many	

different, passionate perspectives that often don’t align. But in talking to Diane Symons, Rodney’s widow (and tireless advocate), it’s become clear to me that this multiplicity of opinions is not necessarily about disagreement; it’s more a demonstration of people’s willingness to engage with the work from different perspectives at once. According to Diane, it’s just a continuation of what it was like when his friends were all gathered around his hospital bed. There was always an active, dynamic conversation happening, and of course people didn’t always agree.

The question of what point we enter or engage with the work is challenging to grapple with. On the one hand, a lot of artists today are interested in and inspired by Rodney’s practice, but not necessarily for the same reasons that have been discussed up until now by the people who were closest to him. What happens when the work comes to occupy a fixed historical position? Surely we need to take account of the kinds of conversations that have happened over the past twenty-five years, since his death.

Different people come to the work and take up aspects of a line they want to follow, whether it’s illness, or race, or identity politics, or black masculinity and ideas around representation. There is also a technological element in his work that was way ahead of its time and was speaking, especially in the later works, to the language and the equipment around him.

To me, the work alternately resists and anticipates the future. One concrete example of its tendency to resist the future is the series *Britannia Hospital* (1988), which is made up of grids of oil pastel paintings on X-rays—apparently a conservator’s worst nightmare. I understand Rodney was told that it was a bad idea because the work would so easily erode over time, but there’s something wonderful about the fact that he just went ahead and did it anyway. Then you have more future-oriented works like *Psalms* and *Autoicon* (1997–2000). *Psalms*, a motorized wheelchair fitted with proximity detectors, was made for Rodney’s South London Gallery show, to represent him when he couldn’t be there physically. *Autoicon*, on the other hand, engages users in a digital, text-based “chat” with Rodney. It embeds him in the future through technology, and was completed by a close-knit group of friends after his death.

I see *Psalms* as a critique of the positionality of the artist, the preconceived conditions of being an artist and art making. I don’t read the conditions of his life as a constraint, but rather, that he pulled the art context to himself, to his situation, to reframe art and art production. Some people talk about his illness, or how he used his experiences of medicalization as a metaphor for racial violence. I have a hard time with that. Would we look at some other artist who is multiply marginalized and say, for instance, “Oh, that person was engaging their gender as a metaphor for their queerness”?



In the case of <i>Britannia Hospital</i> , the very materiality of the work prevents such a reading. The X-rays are the surface and the foundation of these scenes of medical and racial violence. Here we might invoke Hortense Spillers’s conception of “flesh” in Rodney’s collapsing of the figure and ground of racial violence. In his work, those things arrive together as suffused and inseparable.				actually happening in the work and the way the work is being talked about. It is more about a discursive constraint than an actual constraint in the life of Donald Rodney. Which is not to undermine the challenges of living with sickle-cell anemia.	
JAREH	Rodney was the son of immigrants who came to the United Kingdom and discovered that things weren’t quite as “promised land” as they’d expected, and so he spent time thinking about his own biography. But this can also be removed from the personal, and broadened to speak to the oppression of black people around the globe, particularly in South Africa under apartheid, and showing solidarity with that. My understanding was that he was very interested, especially in the early work, in global struggles of black people and the ways in which that impacted representations of the black body—the black male body and black masculinity in particular. I believe he used illness as an expression of autobiographical struggle that in turn spoke to, became a metaphor for, universal struggles.	ROBERT	And he was in a shared hospital room, with other patients. So the binary of public and private is further complicated by the fact that there were strangers present. It’s fascinating to imagine what they must have made of all his friends coming and going, the conversations they were having. Toward the end of Rodney’s life, this group of friends formed a loose collective, or support network, which came to be known as “Donald Rodney PLC.” Though this was tongue-in-cheek, they took an active role in the work being made, constructed, produced, and installed. That carries through in <i>Autoicon</i> , which was finalized after Rodney passed away.	ROBERT	It’s pretty clear from this conversation that these things—meaning the materiality of the work, its pithiness and formal complexity, the conditions in which it was made, the broader social and political struggles with which Rodney sought to express his solidarity, etc.—needn’t be mutually exclusive. Indeed, it seems vitally important to consider them together. It’s not that Rodney was only making work about or because of his illness, or that he was only making work about the social and political conditions of his day. He was doing both in compelling and complex ways—this is what keeps the work as interesting and fascinating to people today as it was when it was made.
CAROLYN	All of those things certainly occur at the same time in the work; Rodney’s conception of himself was intimately connected with history and ongoing struggles. One particular piece that comes to mind is <i>Flesh of My Flesh</i> (1996), in which his experience of medical racism is an extension of a global struggle against anti-blackness. I also keep wanting to do a more materialist reading of the work because Rodney was so interested in the ephemera related to medicalization. Medicalization is an intensely private experience, and by turning the hospital into a studio, bringing people in socially, professionally, he broke that open. He was an artist, so he immediately took up these very specific practices of visibility from within the field of medicine. As an artist, he couldn’t <i>not</i> think about the fact that his body was constantly being imaged. So he brought those images into the work, thinking about the relationship between race and visibility, the limitations of visibility, the fact that so much of our understandings of difference are indexed through sight. The way imaging reveals something and nothing simultaneously comes through in his work <i>a lot</i> .	CAROLYN	Sickle-cell anemia is a black illness. Where race and biology are uneasily brought together as fact. That goes against everything we’ve been taught through changes in civil rights discourse—blackness as not a biological fact but something constructed through discourse, through the social, the conceptual, the material, the economic, etc. It generates, to my mind, a productive kind of anxiety, or ambiguity. I’m also thinking about the impossibility of being a medicalized black subject who speaks. We’re talking about the social field that Rodney created in the hospital, and how radical it was to create artworks that were essentially a mode through which he spoke alongside the medical data that was produced about him and his body. <i>Autoicon</i> does that through a digital montage—the medical data is shown alongside footage of the work, images of friends. In the medical context, there’s no subject but an anonymous, numbered collection of symptoms, body parts, compartmentalized discourses. Things that don’t really add up to a person. Medical subjects don’t speak, they are spoken for. For me, the social field alongside the work is doing that, but it’s hard to talk about this because I don’t want to put words in his mouth. There’s something in his practice that is metaphorical, and there’s also something in his practice about being a self. How a self is constituted, and how a self might speak back to its external constitution—not reject it but incorporate it, pull it in, recontextualize it.	Yes, I am fascinated by the documentation I’ve seen of <i>Care and Control</i> , and I would love to be able to re-create it for the survey show I’m working on at Spike Island, but it’s not possible, sadly. There are several archival images of the installation in the <i>Doublethink</i> book. <sup>1</sup> In the preface, Stuart Hall describes constraint as one of the defining factors of Rodney’s life and work. But Carolyn said something really interesting just now about <i>not</i> thinking about it as constraint per se, but more about productivity in relation to care. Rodney was cared for regularly and intensively: by Diane, by the people working in the hospital, by his friends. It was part of what enabled him to be so prolific. At the same time, his desire to overcome constraint is evident in how he creatively thought around certain physical challenges he faced, for example by collaging together lots of different smaller sheets of paper or X-rays in order to amplify the scale of his work, since he couldn’t easily work on large canvases or rolls of paper.	I’d like to pick up on something you said, Carolyn, namely the idea that, at least in the UK right now, many institutions are looking back and taking renewed interest in artists who have been “overlooked,” especially those associated with the British Black Arts movement. It can be difficult to find interpretations that permit these artists to be artists and just that. More often than not, they’re treated somewhat one-dimensionally as artists who are overdetermined by their identity, only making social or political work in opposition to a white establishment mainstream. I think there is something profoundly radical in insisting on Rodney as an artist who made great art.
				CAROLYN	I agree entirely, and I think the context within which work circulates is so important. The deeply anti-black context of art makes it impossible for artists to be artists making art, and also be black.
				JAREH	Whenever I write about—or speak about, or frame, or contextualize—Rodney, it’s always a conscious struggle between critical distance and personal experience. As you emphasized, Carolyn, sickle-cell anemia affects people of color. It goes beyond the usual conversation around race and medicine because it operates in a space of biological fact. So we have an artist, a black artist, who’s dealing with this illness and moving between these medical, racial, social, political realms. But then the work still gets rooted right back into the medical.
JAREH	Yes, there is a negation of the boundaries between public and private space, also public and private property in relation to the medicalization of the body, reclaiming the body in a direct and confrontational way. Even when the hospital becomes your studio, you still have to deal with the parameters of being in a hospital—you have to take your medications at certain times, eat at certain times, receive visitors at certain	JAREH	Do you know <i>Care and Control</i> , which happened at Hackney Hospital in 1995? I thought it was interesting that the hospital in this case was a site not only for artistic practice, but also for exhibition making. The year-long exhibition was organized by Rear Window, an independent London-based art organization, and took place at Hackney Hospital, a ten-acre abandoned Victorian site that was later demolished. It brought together an archive celebrating 270 years of local service on the site, including art by service users and artists such as Jordan Baseman, Jason Coburn, Smadar Dreyfus, Lyn French, Derek Jarman, Michael Lewis,	I have some thoughts about the notion of care and constraint around Donald Rodney PLC. His work was made with others when he was alive, and also after he passed. This dependency was a critical part of the work. The work in some ways destabilizes questions around the singularity of his authorship. The conditions of his life allowed that to be troubled in an interesting way. My understanding of care is complex, as it’s a beautiful thing but oftentimes arrives with abuse. You see that in his work, and you see it in terms of his experiences with medical malpractice. The people who loved him and were in his life took care of him, stewarded his work, coproduced the work, and also provided its framing. But there’s also a little bit of violence to that, which is hard to speak to, although we should. A lot of the framing of his work, even by those who loved him, has been conditioned by cultural, social, societal understandings of illness and disability that are deeply embedded in ableism. We can look at the work and understand it according to its context, also understanding that that context is infused with certain beliefs. So our challenge, you might say, involves contextualizing the contextualization of his work. To say that this artist worked in this way <i>despite</i> his condition, even though the work says absolutely the opposite of that, is necessary because of the discourse insisting that the work was operating in spite of something. Looking at it retrospectively, we can ask what it means that in order to occupy the subject position of an artist, Rodney had to operate <i>against</i> his illness. In other words, there’s a mismatch between what’s	I think about Rodney’s investment in unpacking black masculinity, and how that’s largely seen as separate from other concerns in his practice. From my perspective, the experience of illness itself queers gender, and so Rodney’s incisive critiques of black masculinity, which were arrived at through a particular perspective, cannot be conceived as separate. All the threads inform one another in substantive ways. So much of medicine as a practice was developed in and through and on black bodies. Black bodies were basically the testing ground for modern medicine. The work helps us think about the deep entanglement between racial violence and modern medicine.



This makes me think about Rodney’s lightbox works like *John Barnes* (1991), which features an image of the British footballer back-heeling a banana off a football pitch in 1988. Or the installation *Cataract* (1991), where he combined anthropological illustrations, medical photographs, and self-portraits to explore the public image of black males. Although images of athletic black male bodies or photos that highlight prejudiced public perceptions of black men as a threat are somewhat at odds with Rodney’s experiences as a patient, you can nevertheless draw a straight line from these racist media representations to the medical violations that he was subjected to, as is documented so viscerally in *Flesh of My Flesh*.

I’m so curious as to the ways in which younger generations will engage with Rodney’s practice and legacy. Will the next wave of scholarship focus just as much on the materiality of his practice? It’s probably about time for a shift in direction.

Jareh, thank you for bringing that up, because I’m trying to relate to his work as a kind of lineage. It’s especially important for a contemporary generation of artists who share some formal and topical interests with Rodney. It is hard because of this question of who is an artist and who can make work and how that has conditioned the kinds of practices that have been highlighted, supported, and so on. I’m also curious to see new contextualizations. I think it’s beautiful that a lot of artists around the world regard his work as a critical, important historical precedent. There’s also something beautiful about the way his work resists that. We’ve spent this whole time talking about our feelings about it, what people have said, and also this weird thing about the work being made by him with others, which allows for a messy fluidity around the interpretation that might speak to an intentional opacity on his part.

*Autoicon* is an encounter with the artist post-mortem, but in all the descriptions I’ve read, it seems to arrive in this very diffuse way. Perhaps some of its strength is the fact that it’s simultaneously incredibly particular and also opaque. It seems he was resisting the reading of the work, and resisting the reading of him. It’s fascinating that we don’t know his feelings about the work, directly. That’s somewhat rare for an artist of his generation. I’m starting to suspect that he might have been insisting on opacity as his right as an artist. A kind of recuperation around the meaning of the work that has to do with maintaining its meaning as radically unstable, unpinnable, unknowable, which encourages us to still be here having these conversations.

1 *Doublethink*, ed. Richard Hylton, (London: Autograph, 2003).

JAREH DAS is an independent curator, writer, and researcher who lives and works between West Africa and the United Kingdom. She holds a PhD in curating art and science from Royal Holloway, University of London. Das’s academic and curatorial practice is informed by an interest in global modern and contemporary art with a specific focus on performance art. In 2022, Das curated *Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, Ceramics and Contemporary Art* at Two Temple Place, London, and York Art Gallery, an exhibition that spanned seventy years of ceramics and explored how clay has been disrupted, questioned, and reimagined by black women artists. Das was awarded a two-year early career fellowship from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art as part of its New Narratives awards. Since 2011, she has held curatorial and editorial positions with Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art; Etemad Gallery, Dubai; Arts Catalyst, London; MVRDV, Rotterdam; and Camden Art Centre, London, and has contributed to a number of publications, including *Ocula*, *frieze*, *Hyperallergic*, *BOMB*, *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art*, and *The Art Newspaper*.

CAROLYN LAZARD is a multidisciplinary artist based in New York and Philadelphia. Their work has been shown in several institutions, including Museum fur Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna; KW, Berlin; and Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include *Long Take*, a co-commission between the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Nottingham Contemporary, England; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. Their work was included in the 2019 Whitney Biennial and the 2022 Venice Biennale. Lazard is a 2020 Disability Futures Fellow and a 2021 United States Artists Fellow. They hold a BA from Bard College and an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania.

ROBERT LECKIE is the director of Spike Island in Bristol, where he has worked since 2018. He was previously curator and head of programs at Gasworks, London, from 2011 to 2018. Over the past decade, he has (co-)curated major solo exhibitions by artists including Pacita Abad, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Peggy Ahwesh, Monira Al Qadiri, Sidsel Meineche Hansen, Candice Lin, Rosemary Mayer, and Tanoa Sasraku. He lectures at the Royal College of Art, Goldsmiths, and the University of the Arts in London, and was a jury member for the 2022 Turner Prize. Leckie is currently working with Nicole Yip on a Donald Rodney survey show, which opens at Spike Island in May 2024, and will then travel to Nottingham Contemporary and Whitechapel Gallery in London in 2024–25.







(B)  
Looking for Eldorado: Donald Rodney's Early Sketchbooks  
by Janice Cheddie

"Donald critiqued history, art history, but he also demanded his place in it. . . . So having these sketchbooks in the Tate, having them online, is more demanding of his place in art history."  
—Diane Symons<sup>1</sup>

Donald Rodney's forty-eight sketchbooks, made from age twenty-two (in 1982) until his death (in 1998), are the most comprehensive known resource regarding the development of a Black British artist's working practices. Tate acquired them after Rodney died, and they were eventually digitized and made publicly available on the museum's website; until recently they were also available for viewing on a large digital screen in the public gallery dedicated to the Tate Archive. The early sketchbooks trace how Rodney began his journey of appropriating, critiquing, and transforming British art through complex collages of art history, historical sources, music, and 1980s popular culture. Yet despite recent widespread interest in Rodney's art and the work of the widely influential BLK Art Group (of which he was a core member; the sketchbooks amply document his membership), the sketchbooks have largely been left out of critical analysis and are seldom referred to specifically in relation to the production of the works regarded as finished.<sup>2</sup> This oversight reflects wider theoretical concerns. How are artists' sketchbooks positioned within examinations of their oeuvres? How much can we read into them regarding an artist's creative development and the process by which they carry out their work?<sup>3</sup> And what is the sketchbook's relation to the archive? Is it to be considered as a Derridean "supplement" that adds to the work but also signals an absence?<sup>4</sup> Or would we more fruitfully consider the sketchbook as part of the artist's biography or autobiography?<sup>5</sup>



Throughout his life, Donald Rodney suffered from sickle-cell anemia, resulting in frequent hospitalizations. Despite this, he was able to establish a creative practice that, when it could not take place in his private workspace, moved to the public hospital ward. In 1997, Rodney’s friend and creative collaborator Virginia Nimarkoh documented the artistic, cultural, social, and technical materials that surrounded his hospital bed, which reflected his socially engaged practice. Nimarkoh’s inventory, which appeared in the publication accompanying Rodney’s final exhibition during his lifetime, *9 Night in Eldorado*, illustrates how the artist’s surroundings, wherever they happened to be, became his studio.<sup>6</sup> Nimarkoh and Diane Symons, Rodney’s often-uncredited collaborator, both state that Rodney’s sketchbooks were key to conversations around the realization of his work. Rodney’s nontraditional practice explored many visual, textual, and political themes, making the sketchbooks a rich resource for discussions on the development of inclusive and participatory art-making practices among the BLK Art Group and beyond.

The early sketchbooks are text-heavy, the topics ranging from discussions of slum housing, racism, and education to personal notes. They manifest a deep concern with language and the spatial placement of text on the page, and contain abundant experiments with different pens, inks, and stencils.<sup>7</sup> This emphasis on the written word directly mirrors Rodney’s early finished works. Rodney’s interest in developing a new theory of knowledge through text and image is evident for instance in *Lexicon of Liberation* (1984), which features colored photocopied tiles on a red background that imitate the tiles often used for teaching children the letters of the alphabet. The repetition of the tiles, in varying angles, creates a defined and familiar structure to highlight the systematically Eurocentric nature of British education and language systems.

Rodney was born in Birmingham in 1961, at a time when Black people in the UK were described as Negro or Coloured; by the end of the 1960s, informed by US civil rights struggles and the Black Power movement, the term “Black” had come into widespread use. Rodney’s childhood home was on Marshall Street in Smethwick, an emerging multiracial neighborhood. In 1964, Peter Griffiths was elected a Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) for Smethwick, having campaigned on the slogan “If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour.” Shortly before his death in 1965, Malcolm X visited Marshall Street as part of his evolving solidarity with people of color across the globe to support antiracist organizing.<sup>8</sup> Rodney’s lived experiences were thus markedly different from the previous generations of Black and brown artists—artists such as Aubrey Williams, Frank Bowling, F. N. Souza, and Rasheed Araeen—who arrived in Britain in and around 1948, a moment of mass Commonwealth immigration into the UK.

The sketchbooks provide valuable insights into this context and its impact on Rodney’s visual practice. The artist’s exploration of shifting linguistic definitions of race can be seen in *Brown Coloured Black* (1983), which started as a series of text-based experiments in black ink and stencils in Sketchbook No. 5: “I was brown, I was coloured, I am black.”<sup>9</sup> Each of the three panels in the completed work features the same childhood photograph of Rodney. The piece is a meditation on how any particular racial term

classifies and surveils the Black body. The shifting terminology and the artist’s visual layering point clearly to how labeling can make us lose sight of the individual humanity of the Black child.

The year Rodney made *Brown Coloured Black*, he was living with fellow BLK Art Group member and Trent Polytechnic<sup>10</sup> student Keith Piper at 3 Lindsay Walk, Hyson Green, Nottingham, which doubled as the headquarters of BLK Art Group. It was a multiracial working-class public housing estate that in 1981 had been the epicenter of riots against police harassment and brutality. This address features on the inside cover of Rodney’s early sketchbooks and also appeared on the poster for 1982’s First National Black Art Convention, a historically significant gathering of politically Black (African, Caribbean, Asian) visual art students from across the UK, often cited as the birth of the British Black Arts movement. Rodney’s sketchbooks provide documentary evidence of the profound impact of his friendship and collaboration with Piper (as in *The Next Turn of the Screw* [1987]) and how this relationship impacted the development of his radical artistic voice.

#### HOW WE GONNA MAKE THE BLACK NATION RISE?

“Suddenly I became aware of what I wanted to say and who I wanted to say it to. I no longer had to use the language given to me by Western art traditions.”  
—Donald Rodney, “Identity, Culture and Power,” 1987<sup>11</sup>

The BLK Art Group, which also included Marlene Smith, Claudette Johnson, and Eddie Chambers, was founded in 1979 and initiated conceptual, artistic, cultural, and political interventions that critiqued Britain’s colonial legacies. Seeking to widen curatorial and artistic practices and modes of creative working, it advocated for socially engaged practices and protested the exclusion of nonwhite artists from Western art historical narratives—important developments that laid the groundwork for the establishment of our current global art scene. All members of the BLK Art Group became influential figures in contemporary British art. Rodney’s self-proclaimed radicalization has often been read in relation to the racialization of the Black body, and British society and art history’s historical amnesia around legacies of slavery, empire, and colonialism. While these social and historical areas no doubt informed his work, my reading of Rodney’s assertion of radicalization is that it was also about reimagining what a socially engaged Black art practice could be.<sup>12</sup>

Rodney’s first explorations in this vein began with the iconography of Rastafarianism, “a compelling countercultural expression”<sup>13</sup> for young Black British people in the 1970s and 1980s. In Sketchbook No. 2, an image of a dreadlocked Rastafarian man accompanies a text by Rodney reiterating the Rastafarian belief that an artist is not only an image maker, but a cultural leader spreading knowledge about Black history and culture for Black people.<sup>14</sup> Rodney’s experimentation with the colors of pan-Africanism and Rastafarianism quickly moved into wider studies of visual language and typography. For instance his reference in Sketchbook No. 3 to “How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise?,” the popular 1982 hip-hop song by Brother D and Collective Effort, signals the displacement of reggae

for hip-hop as the dominant countercultural narrative for young Black people in the early 1980s.<sup>15</sup> This shift in the early sketchbooks from the Rastafarian pastoral tones of an imagined precolonial Africa to more industrial, urban visual aesthetics—the cut-and-mix styles of early hip-hop music, street art, and graffiti art—presaged the predominance of black ink in Rodney’s later sketchbooks and increasingly monotonal final works.

Within Rastafarian philosophy, the Black experience is a fluid space of becoming. It traces a narrative that begins with precolonial Africa, to the current situation of formerly enslaved Black people trapped in the West/Babylon, removed from their history and culture, to Black people being physically and spiritually reconnected with a mythical Africa. Black identities operating in these imagined spaces are spoken of as simultaneously individual and collective. The British Jamaican sociologist Stuart Hall later theorized a concept of blackness and race as historical states of emergence rather than fixed biological categories. These ideas likely played a role in opening up a conceptual space for Rodney to develop a critical distance between his individual identity and such social and historical constructions of the Black male figure.

A critical dialogue between individual and collective experience is explored in Rodney’s reimagining of Ford Madox Brown’s *The Last of England* (1855) in Sketchbook No. 1. This book dates from 1983, when Rodney was twenty-two, making this among his earliest disruptions to privileged British historical and art historical narratives. The work in question by Brown is Pre-Raphaelite in style, and is a sympathetic portrayal of a white middle-class couple leaving England in a time of economic crisis; the title refers to their final mournful look back at the iconic White Cliffs of Dover. It is often read as autobiographical, reflecting Brown’s own circumstances.<sup>16</sup> The title Rodney gave his sketch changes the “last” in the title to “first,” and the drawing, as we glean from the caption (“My mother and father standing together on the wet and lonely deck of the sailing ship the Empire Windrush”), shows his parents’ arrival in England via the HMT Empire Windrush.<sup>17</sup> Although *First of England* was never translated directly into a completed artwork, it manifests key visual and narrative concerns that Rodney did develop in later finished works—namely questions of migration, (auto)biography, history, and visual language.

Rodney’s title signifies not simply a shift of perspective, or of geographical direction; it is a bold insertion of his parents into England’s history by positioning them as British citizens arriving on England’s shores. His adoption of Brown’s circular framing, usually interpreted as sentimental, stresses the couple’s unity and invites the viewer’s empathy for these people who have sacrificed so much to make their journey, only (as we now know) to face a cold and unwelcoming Britain. Through the replacement of a white couple with a Black one, Rodney counters Brown’s classist and gendered assumptions about the human capacity for loss and longing. And, significantly, he changes the name of the ship from Eldorado<sup>18</sup> to Empire Windrush, one of the first vessels to bring Caribbean migrants to postwar Britain. But this romantic autobiography is completely fabricated. His parents did not sail on the Empire Windrush, nor did they even travel together. Like many Black working-class Caribbean migrants, they came to the UK separately.

Travel of this kind was prohibitively expensive in the 1950s, and it was typical for families to send one person ahead, who, once established with a job, would send money overseas via remittances to pay the travel costs for the rest, one by one. Knowing that *First of England* is more metaphor than autobiography, then, we can infer that Rodney was seeking less to document his family’s story than to insert into the tradition of British narrative painting the collective histories of the first generation of postwar Caribbean migrants.

A central framing of the Black subject combines with subjective text in *The Lords of Humankind (Part One)* (1986), *Self Portrait: Black Men Public Enemy* (1990), and *Self Portrait as Clinton McCurbin* (1988). These three works operate as visual acts of remembrance and recognition, exploring the hypervisibility of the Black male within the public realm. Moving between individual and collective Black identities, Rodney’s use of the self-portrait is not a substitution for, but a recognition of, shared experience. It positions the Black artist as a critical, but not objective, observer who reinserts into collective cultural memory the precarity of Black lives in a racist society. Clinton McCurbin was a Black man who died, aged twenty-three, after contact with the police. In *Self Portrait as Clinton McCurbin*, Rodney carefully reproduces a smiling family photograph of McCurbin, subverting the police photographs that circulated. Rodney’s centering of McCurbin’s face and its evident fragility constitute a public act of mourning and memorialization.

The pages of Sketchbook No. 1 manifest a rapid working-through of ideas and materials. Just a few pages after Empire Windrush sketch, we see Rodney reiterating Brown’s name and artwork title above a reference to Conceptual artist Sue Atkinson,<sup>19</sup> thereby bringing critical material and conceptual investigations by contemporary artists together with British art history. Atkinson’s mixed-media work is notable for its use of diverse materials, including crayons, washing powder, icing sugar, and glue, challenging the boundaries between the political, domestic, and artistic spheres. There is a clear affinity between Atkinson’s and Rodney’s work given the latter’s use of nontraditional and/or domestic materials—glue, hospital bed sheets, bleach, wallpaper, wax crayons, mirror, matches, spray paint, photocopies, X-rays, milk—in later works. Indeed, Rodney’s sketchbooks reference a wide range of works by other artists, reflecting his development and mobilization of visual tools within his critical investigations into constructions of Black histories.

In Sketchbook No. 3, Rodney does some more rethinking of art historical references by compiling a list of important paintings in the European avant-garde, then using them to construct his own art canon based on references to Black history.<sup>20</sup> “A Nigger Splash” is an appropriation of the title of David Hockney’s 1967 painting *A Bigger Splash* that seeks to highlight the history of slavery. (Bigger is also the main character in Richard Wright’s seminal 1940 novel on Black alienation, *Native Son*). “Splash” here refers not to a swim in a pleasant suburban backyard pool, but to the Transatlantic slave trade practice of drowning enslaved Africans by throwing them overboard during an unprofitable sea voyage. To their enslavers, they were worth more as insurance claims than as human beings to be sold.<sup>21</sup> Later in the sketchbook, the references are further fleshed out.<sup>22</sup>



As Rodney’s visual style developed, his focus shifted from his parents’ imagined joint journey to his father’s actual lone voyage.<sup>23</sup> And in 1997, nearly twenty years after his first encounter with Brown’s *The Last of England*, Brown was still being referenced, albeit indirectly, through Rodney’s use of “Eldorado” as a metaphor to explore the losses, betrayals, and rejections faced by his father’s generation in the title of his final exhibition, *9 Night in Eldorado*. The exhibition publication does not specifically invoke Brown, but focuses on the 1849 poem “Eldorado” by Edgar Allen Poe, which is about unfulfilled searches for happiness and success. This extended engagement with Eldorado as a visual and textual trope is just one example of how Rodney’s early sketchbooks provide a rich resource for exploring his visual experimentation, engagement with the history of British art, and navigations of migration, loss, and longing.

The author thanks Diane Symons for her assistance in the development of this text.

1 Diane Symons, “Donald Rodney: A Practice Unfolding | Animating the Archives,” Tate, March 1, 2017, 9:04 min., available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTY-hxcl9bI>.

2 “[Rodney’s] sketchbooks played an integral role in his art and contain a mixture of preliminary studies for new artworks, records of past exhibitions and various writings. His drawings and writings bring together diverse personal, cultural, social and political influences.” Tate Archive, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/tga-200321/forty-eight-notebooks-and-sketchbooks-written-and-created-by-donald-rodney-and-the>. Tate produced a video with Rodney’s partner, Diane Symons, and Keith Piper, a fellow artist and member of the BLK Art Group, discussing Rodney’s work and life, October 13, 2021, 9:04 min., available at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2082308111927980>.

3 “Often times viewed as part of a single artist’s body of work—supplementary scraps of material preceding finished pieces—sketchbooks are rarely accorded critical scholarly attention despite their essential role in one’s creative process and stylistic development.” Eleonor (Ellie) Botoman, “Building Community through Brooklyn Art Library’s Sketchbook Archive,” *Public Services Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (May 2022): 56.

4 Here I refer to Jacques Derrida, “. . . That Dangerous Supplement . . .,” in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1967; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 141–43.

5 See Martha Barratt, “Autobiography, Time, and Documentation in the Performances and Auto-Archives of Carolee Schneemann,” *Visual Resources* 32, nos. 3/4 (October 1, 2016): 282–305.

6 Virginia Nimarkoh in *9 Night in Eldorado* exhibition brochure (London: South London Gallery, 1997), n.p.

7 See for instance Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 5, 1983–84, p. 81. See image 1.

8 Stuart Jeffries, “Britain’s Most Racist Election: The Story of Smethwick, 50 Years On,” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/15/britains-most-racist-election-smethwick-50-years-on>; Perry Blankson, “When Malcolm X Came to the West Midlands,” *Tribune*, March 10, 2022, <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2022/03/malcolm-x-smethwick-peter-griffiths-racism-1965>. Footage of Malcolm X visiting Marshall Street appears in John Akomfrah’s documentary *Handsworth Songs* (1986). In a 1994 interview with Ruth Kelly, conducted as part of the research degree “The BLK Art Group in Historical and Cultural Context,” Open University, Rodney stated that he had no recollections of his family experiencing racial harassment. But it’s very likely that Rodney, the youngest member of the family, was shielded from discussions around racism.

9 Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 5, 1983–84, p. 83, <https://www.tate.org>.

[uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-5/rodney-sketchbook-number-5/83](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-5/rodney-sketchbook-number-5/83).

10 Now Nottingham Trent University.

11 Donald Rodney, “Identity, Culture and Power,” in *State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s*, ed. Sandy Nairne (London: Chatto & Windus in collaboration with Channel 4 Television, 1987), 235.

12 See Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 2, 1982–85, p. 9. See image 5.

13 Eddie Chambers, *World Is Africa: Writings on Diaspora Art* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), xxvi.

14 Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 2, 1982–85, p. 9. See image 5.

15 Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 3, 1983–84, p. 19, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-3/rodney-sketchbook-number-3/19>. This is considered by some cultural commentators the first openly political hip-hop song. It is interesting to note that one line in the lyrics uses the Rastafarian “I&I.”

16 Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon, 1999), 356. Rodney was born and raised in Birmingham, and it is highly likely that he saw the painting at the Birmingham Art Gallery.

17 See Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 1, 1983, p. 15. See image 3.

18 In *The Last of England*, the ship’s name, Eldorado, is clearly visible.

19 Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 1, 1983, p. 23, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-1/rodney-sketchbook-number-1/23>.

20 Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 3, 1983–84, p. 103, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-3/rodney-sketchbook-number-3/103>.

21 This practice is depicted in J. M. W. Turner’s *The Slave Ship* (1840).

22 Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 3, 1983–84, p. 105, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-3/rodney-sketchbook-number-3/105>.

23 Donald Rodney, Sketchbook No. 2, 1982–85, p. 55, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-2/rodney-sketchbook-number-2/55>.



Donald Rodney at his home during preparation for *Crisis* at Chisenhale Gallery, London, 1989. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney. Photo: Diane Symons

DONALD RODNEY

was born in 1961 in West Bromwich, England, to Jamaican parents, and grew up in Smethwick, on the outskirts of Birmingham. He earned his bachelor’s degree with honors at Bourneville School of Art, Birmingham, received a fine art degree at Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham (1985), and completed a postgraduate diploma in multimedia fine art at Slade School of Fine Art in London (1987). Rodney initially achieved visibility as part of the BLK Art Group in the early 1980s through a series of exhibitions titled *The Pan-Afrikan Connection* (1981–84). His first solo exhibition, *The First White Christmas & Other Empire Stories*, Saltley Print and Media, Birmingham (1985), was followed by *The Atrocity Exhibition & Other Empire Stories*, Black Art Gallery, London (1986). The year 1986 also saw his inclusion in *State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, and his participation in the growing community of young black artists involved with Lubaina Himid’s Elbow Room. Rodney suffered from sickle-cell anemia all his life, and the 1990s saw increased periods of prolonged hospitalization, as the damaging effects of the disease became ever more impactful. Determined to continue his practice as an artist, Rodney began to extend and develop the complex and collaborative relationships that would come to characterize his practice. Often responding to exhibition opportunities that explored the overlap between creative practice and discussions around science and medicine, Rodney conceived and produced a range of works in which the traces of trauma around his own body were used in a multilayered set of strategies to comment on wider societal issues. Rodney worked across a range of mediums, including painting, drawing, installation, robotics, film, and audio. His ideas—which often examined images from art history, mass media, and popular culture—were intricately researched and developed in a series of sketchbooks that are now part of the Tate collection. From 1990 to 1993 he completed the Arts Council Traineeship in Exhibition Programming at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, and in 1992 he curated the project *White Noise, Artists Working with Sound* at Ikon Gallery. In 1996 he was awarded the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Sculpture and Installation. 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, Rochdale (1990); and *Crisis*, Chisenhale Gallery, London (1989). Rodney’s work is in collections of Tate Gallery, London; Arts Council Collection, England; the British Council; the Government Art Collection, England; Museums Sheffield, Sheffield; the National Galleries of Wales; South London Gallery; Wolverhampton Art Gallery, England; and Birmingham City Art Gallery. Rodney died in 1998, aged thirty-six.

JANICE CHEDDIE

PhD, is a London-based writer. She was born in St. Lucia, West Indies, and has published widely on issues of visual culture, cultural difference, cultural democracy, and cultural participation. From the mid-1990s until its transfer to the Tate Library in 2015, she and the artist and curator Shaheen Merali were custodians of the Panchayat Collection. Her essay “Justice and the Archive” (2023) on the Panchayat Collection was published by Tate. Between 2020 and 2023 she was a research consultant for the London-based AFFORD-UK, Return of the Icons initiative, funded by the Open Society Foundation, advocating for the restitution of looted African artifacts and human remains held in UK museums and heritage institutions to their communities of origin. Seeking to develop an equitable knowledge exchange between Africa-based heritage professionals, artists, communities, and the UK heritage sector, Cheddie is a founding trustee of the Rita Keegan Archive Project, and a board member for the estate of the artist Maud Sulter (1960–2008).



BLACK  
AND  
WHITE  
memories

1

brown coloured  
black

2



3

Last of England  
Ford Madox Brown Pre-Raphaelites

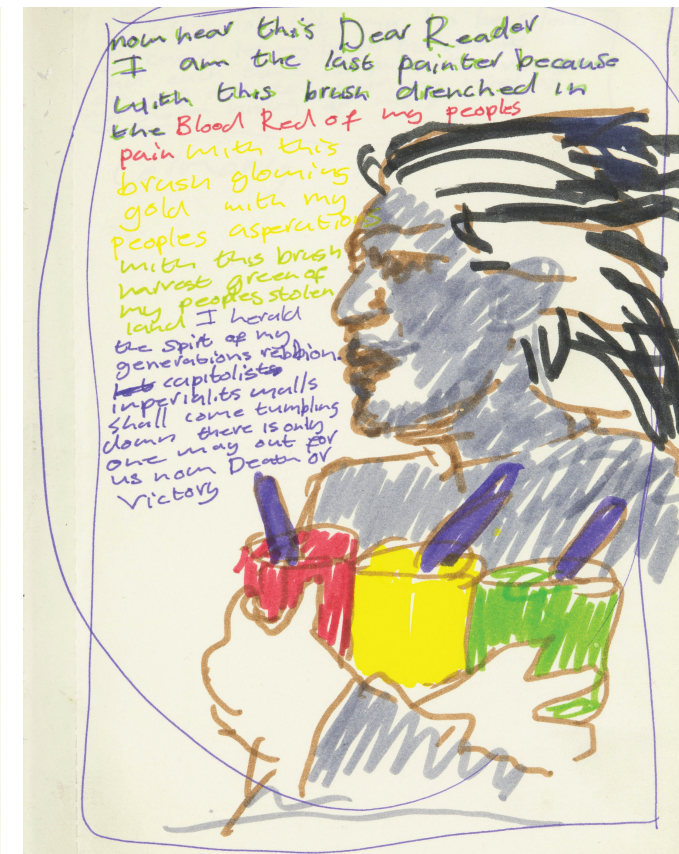


First of England  
my mother and father standing  
on the wet and lonely deck  
of the sailing ship the Empire  
Windrush

4

THE  
PROBLEM OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
WERE BLACK IS NOT BLK BUT  
BLACK LEG BLACK HEART BLACK  
SINS BLACK ARTS BLACK IS  
WICKED BLACK WAS EVIL THE  
WORDS HAVE BECOME WALLPAPER  
BUT YOU CLAIM TO BE INNOCENT  
AND MY COLOR HAS BEEN COLORED  
BY YOUR LANGUAGE

5



now hear this Dear Reader  
I am the last painter because  
with this brush drenched in  
the Blood Red of my peoples  
pain with this  
brush glowing  
gold with my  
peoples aspirations  
with this brush  
my peoples stolen  
land I herald  
the spirit of my  
generations rebellion  
the capitalists  
imperialists shall  
come tumbling  
down there is only  
one way out for  
us now Death or  
Victory



6



7



8







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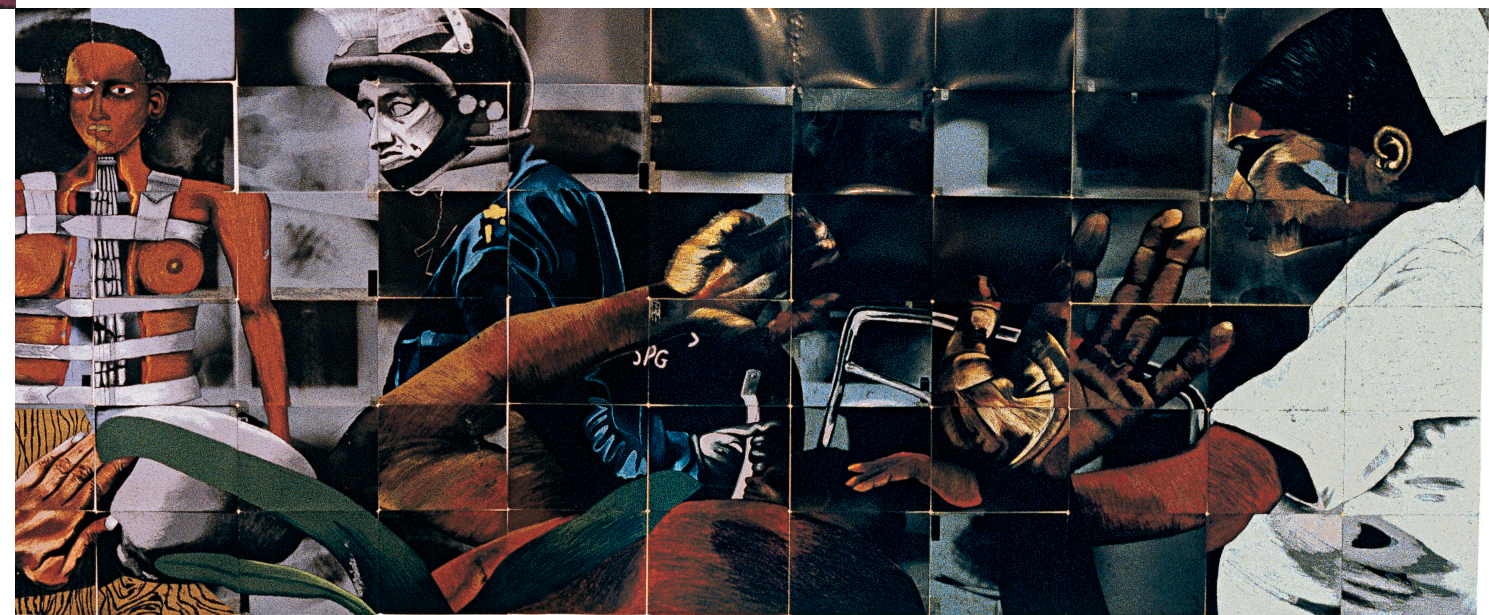


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BRITANNIA HOSPITAL 2.



BRITANNIA HOSPITAL 3.





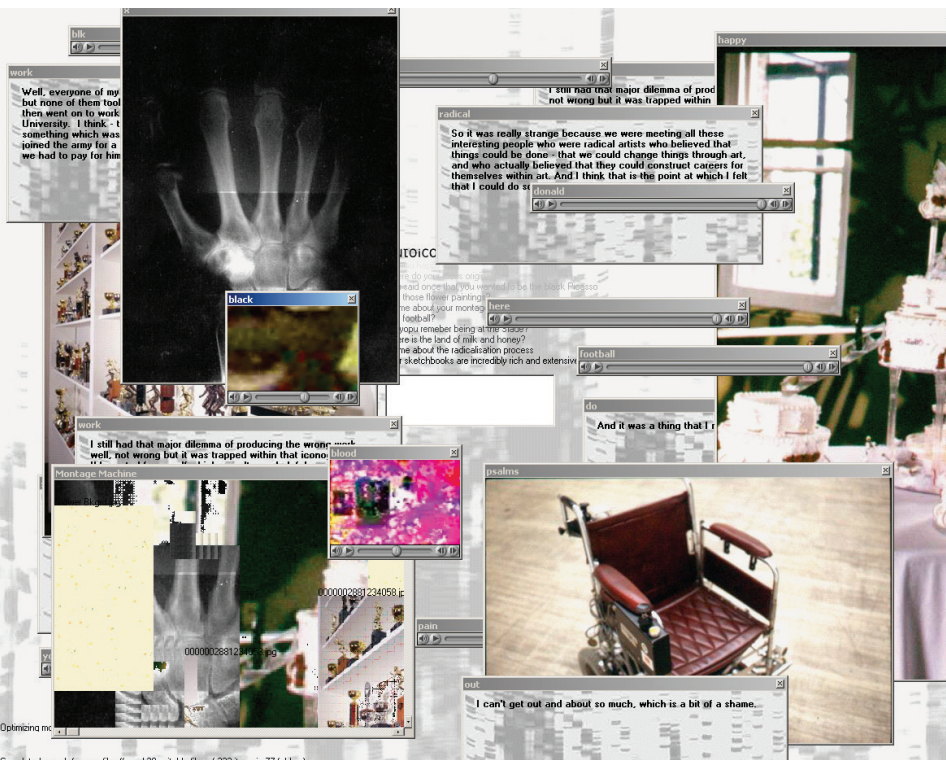
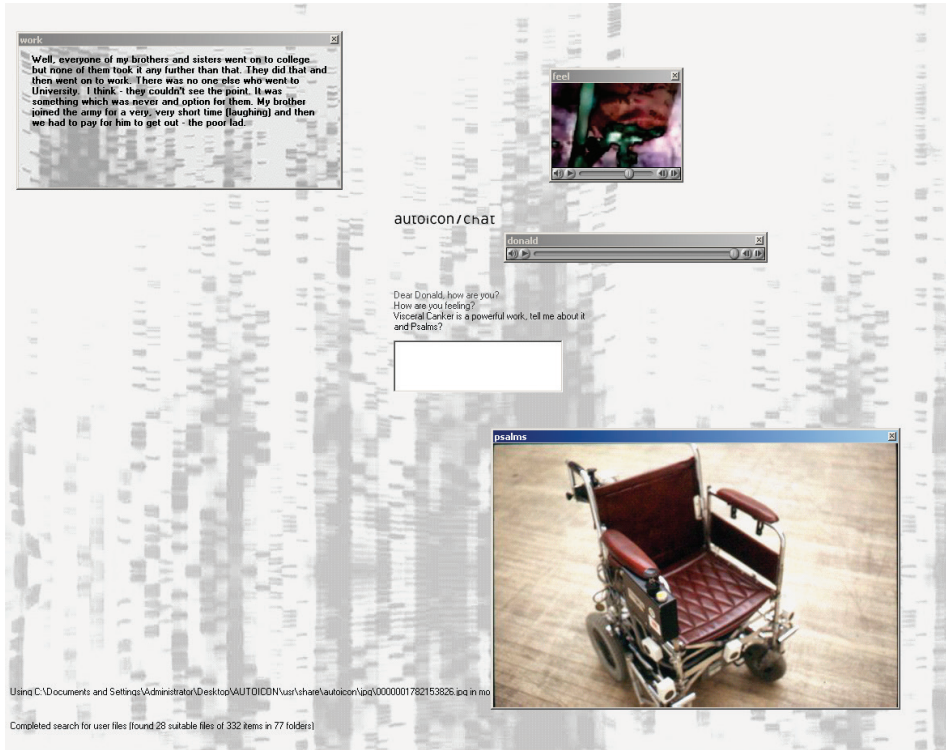
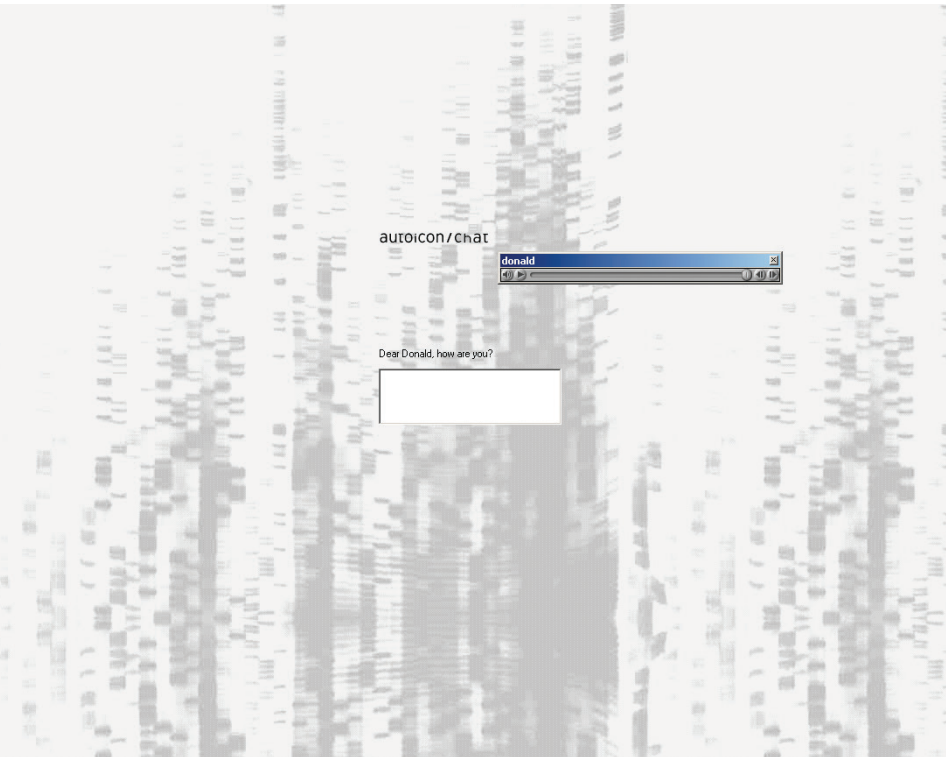
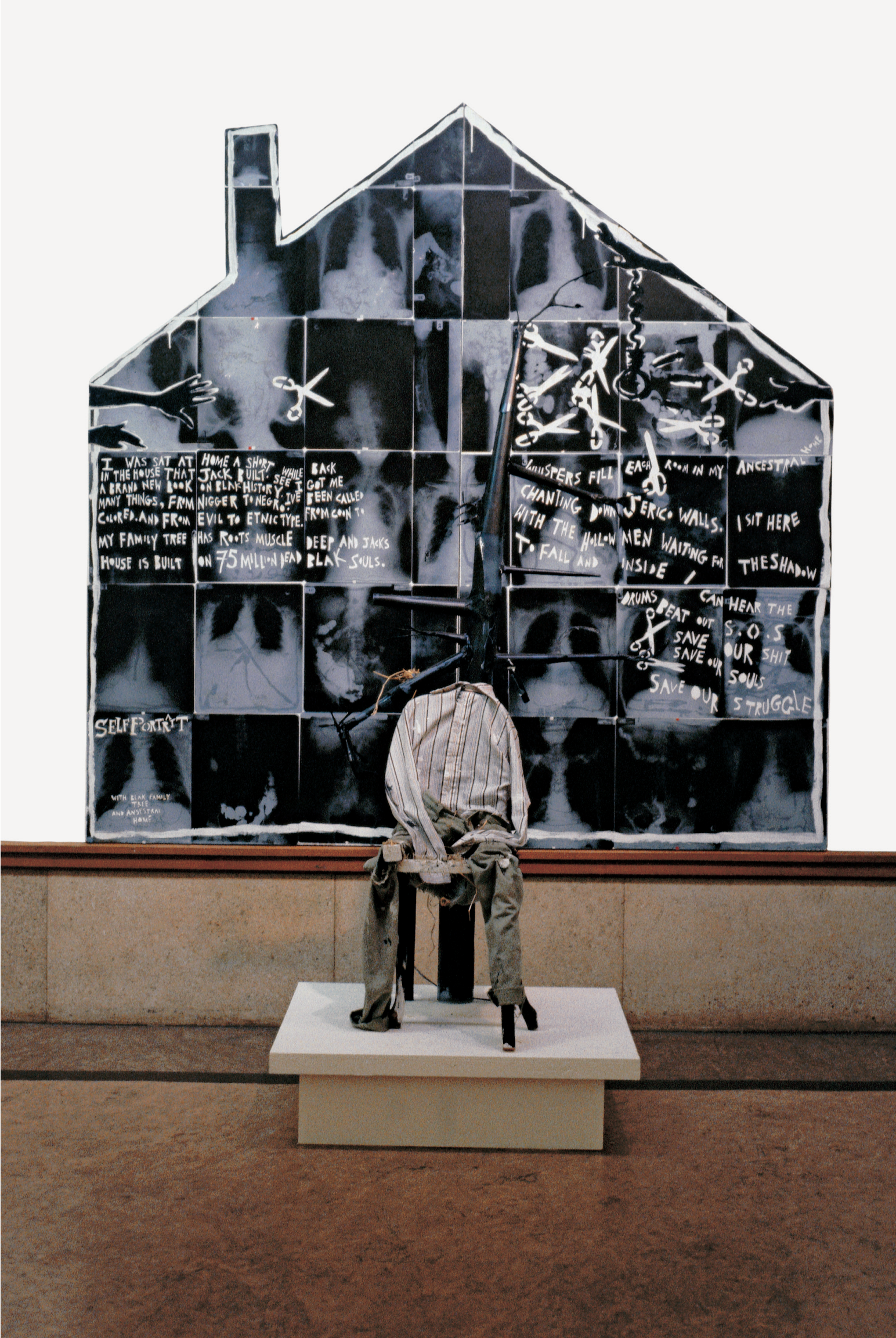
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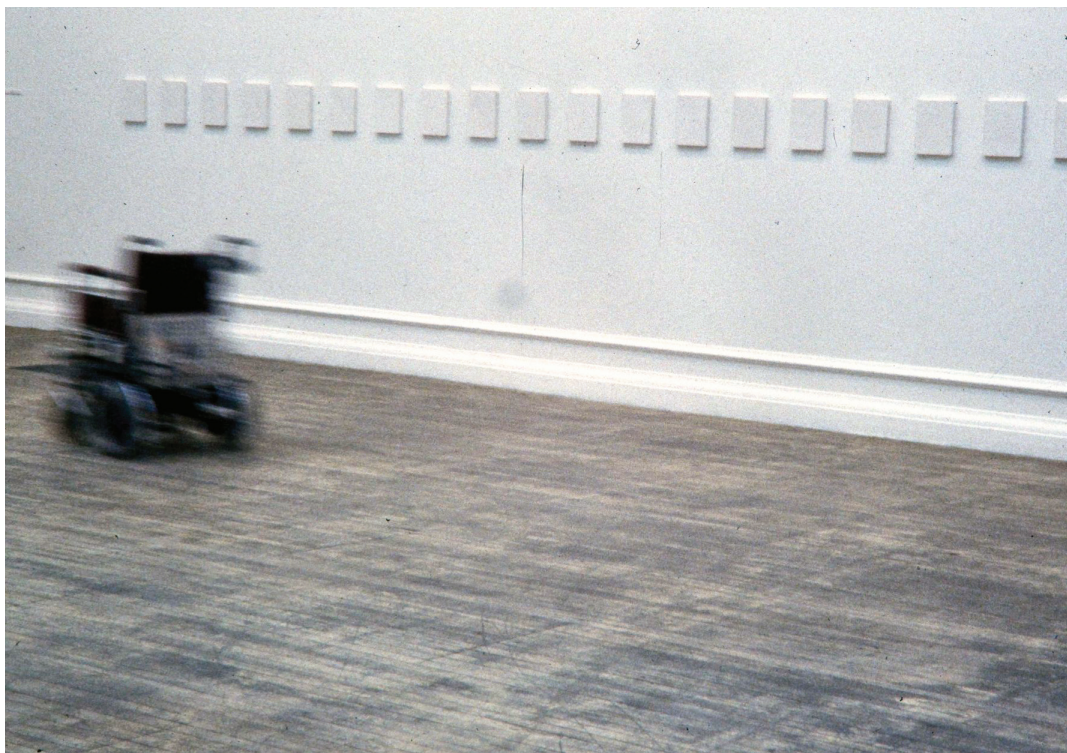
23











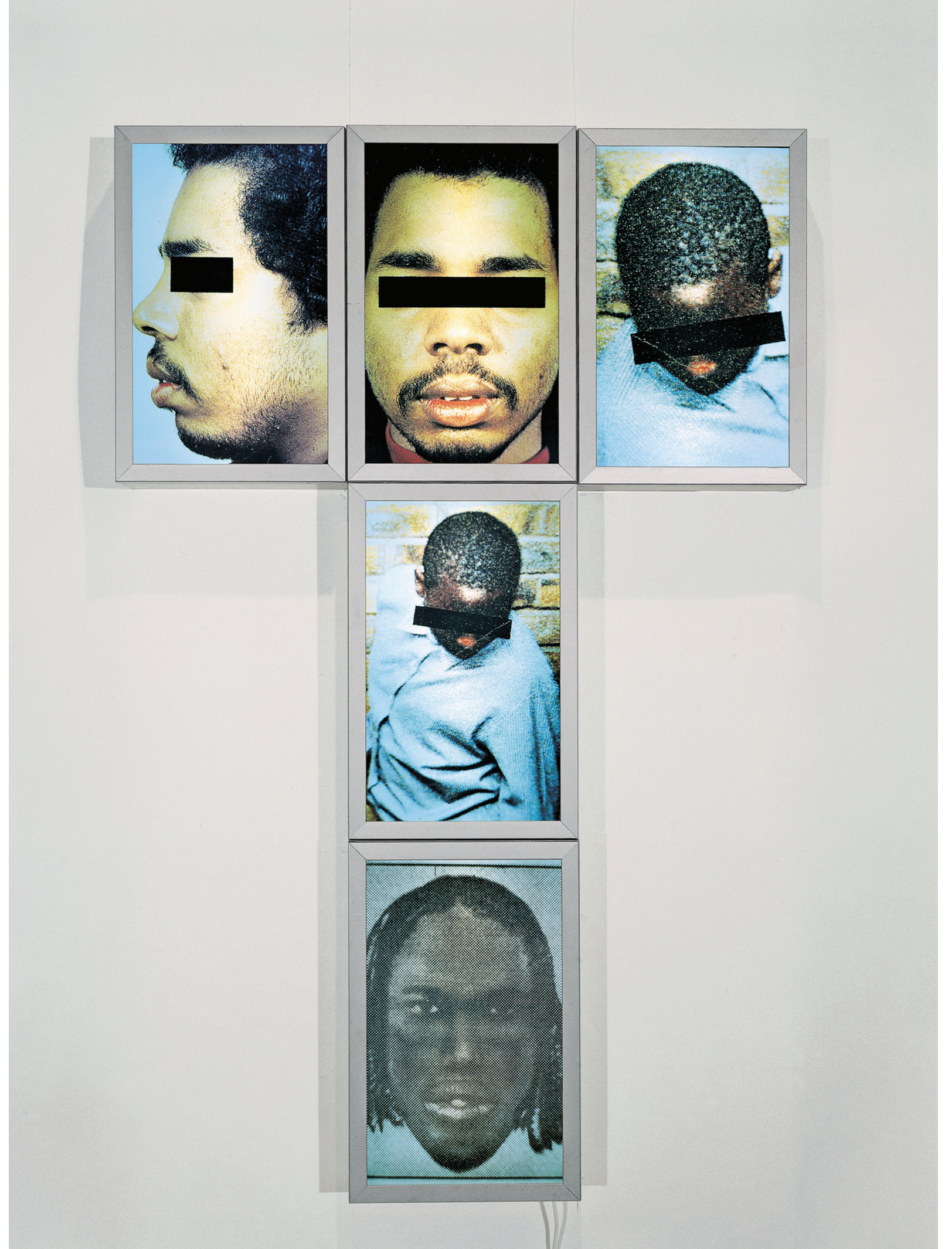
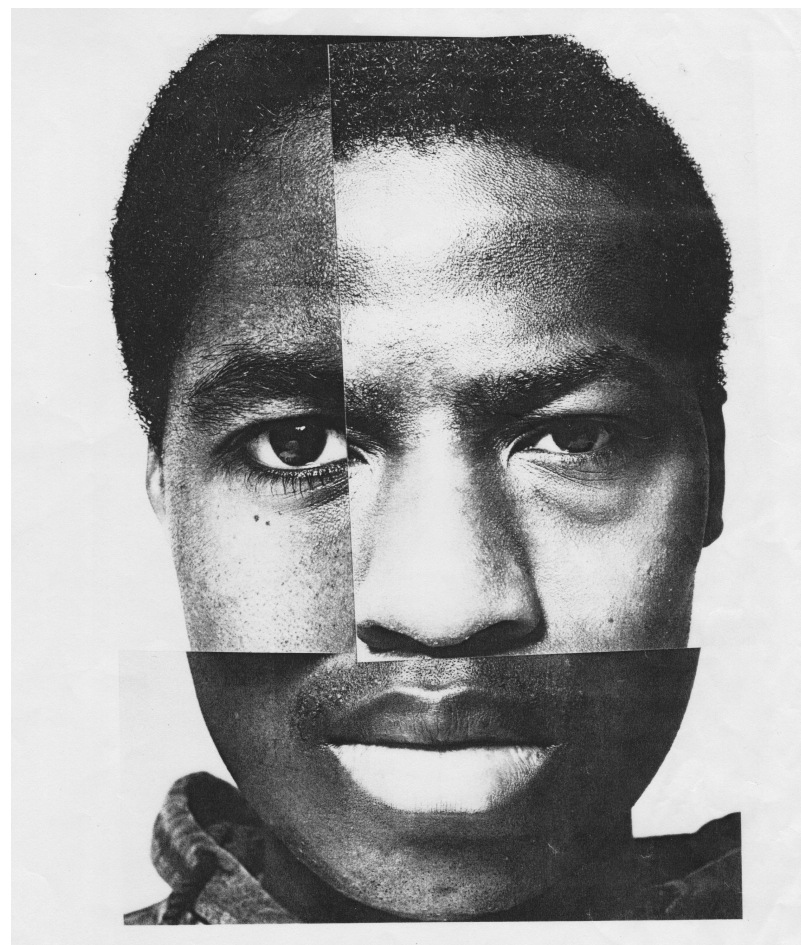
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39





40

- 1 Sketchbook No. 5, 1983–84. Photo: © Tate
- 2 Sketchbook No. 1, 1983. Postcard attached to page featuring reproduction of Ford Madox Brown's *The Last of England* (1855). Postcard from Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Photo: © Tate
- 3 Sketchbook No. 1, 1983. Sketch titled *First of England*. Photo: © Tate
- 4 Sketchbook No. 3, 1983–84. Photo: © Tate
- 5 Sketchbook No. 2, 1982–85. Photo: © Tate
- 6–8 *Doublethink* (detail), 1992, *Donald Rodney In Retrospect* installation view at iniva, Rivington Place, London, 2008. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney. Photo: Thierry Bal
- 9 *Doublethink*, 1992, *Trophies of Empire* installation view at Arnolfini, Bristol, 1992. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 10–11 Donald Rodney in collaboration with Graham Plumb, *Othello*, 1995, *Care and Control* installation view at Hackney Hospital, London, 1995. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 12 *Mexico Olympics*, 1991. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The British Council Collection. Photo: The British Council
- 13 *John Barnes*, 1991. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The British Council Collection. Photo: The British Council
- 14–17 *Donald Rodney In Retrospect* installation view at iniva, Rivington Place, London, 2008. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney. Photo: Thierry Bal
- 18 *Self-Portrait: Policing the Black Community, Death in the City: Mr. Winston Rose, Mr Stephen Bogle and Mr. Clinton McCurbin – A Postmodern Postmortem*, 1988. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 19 *Britannia Hospital 2*, 1988. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: Sheffield Museums Trust
- 20 *Britannia Hospital 3*, 1988 © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: Sheffield Museums Trust
- 21 *Brown Coloured Black*, 1983. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 22 *Untitled*, 1984. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 23 *Brown Coloured Black* (detail), 1983. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 24 *The House that Jack Built*, 1987. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: Sheffield Museums Trust
- 25 *donald.rodney:autoicon v1.0* (screengrab-2) from *Autoicon*, 1997–2000. © 2000 STAR / iniva / Signwave / The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: i-DAT.org
- 26 *donald.rodney:autoicon v1.0* (screengrab-3) from *Autoicon*, 1997–2000. © 2000 STAR / iniva / Signwave / The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: i-DAT.org
- 27 *donald.rodney:autoicon v1.0* (screengrab-4) from *Autoicon*, 1997–2000. © 2000 STAR / iniva / Signwave / The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: i-DAT.org
- 28–29 *9 Night in Eldorado* installation view at South London Gallery, 1997. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: South London Gallery
- 30 *Psalms*, 1997. Tate Collection. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 31 *In The House Of My Father*, 1997. Tate Collection; Arts Council Collection; National Museum Wales Collection; Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery Collection. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 32 *Visceral Canker* (detail), 1990. Photo: © Tate

- 33 Press release of *Cataract* (detail) at Camerawork, London, 1991. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 34 *Self Portrait: Black Men Public Enemy*, 1990. Arts Council Collection. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 35 *The Lexicon of Liberation*, 1984. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 36 *Untitled*, 1990. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 37 Donald Rodney waving a flag from a series of photographs of Sonia Boyce and Donald Rodney at Slade studios, London, 1987. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 38 *The Lords of Humankind (Part One)*, 1986. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 39 Slade School of Art, London, 1986–87. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney
- 40 *How the West was Won*, 1982. Photo: © Tate



- 2023

2023

2023

2023

2023

2022

2021

2021
- *Real Families: Stories of Change*
  - *The more things change...*
  - *A Tall Order! – Rochdale Art Gallery in the 1980s*
  - *Scale: Sculpture (1945-2020)*
  - *Exposed*
  - *Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s—Today*
  - *Donald Rodney*
  - *The Soft Prison*
  - *Crip Time*
  - *A Very Special Place. Ikon in the 1990s*
  - *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum*
  - *The Human Touch*
  - *Super Black*
  - *Future History v1.0*
  - *Civic Duty*
  - *GENERATIONS: Connecting Across Time and Place*
  - *In My Shoes. Art and the Self since the 1990s* (Arts Council touring exhibition)

- 2018

2018
- *Within and Without: Body Image and the Self*
  - *The Atlantic Project*

- 2018

2017
- *Structures of Meaning / Architectures of Perception*
  - *The Place is Here*

- 2017
- *BLOOD: Life Uncut*

- 2017
- *CORPUS: The Body Unbound*

- 2017

2016

2016

2016

2016
- *The Contract*
  - *Reimaging Donald Rodney*
  - *Black Art in Focus*
  - *Flesh: Skin and Surface*
  - *At Home*

- 2014

2013
- *STATIC: Still Life Reconsidered*
  - *Keywords*

- 2013

2012

2012
- *Home*
  - *Migrations: Journeys into British Art*
  - *The Desire for Freedom, Art in Europe Since 1945*

- 2012

2011

2011

2010

2009

2009

2009

2008

2006

2006

2005

2005

2004
- *Focal Points: Art and Photography*
  - *The Blk Art Group*
  - *Becoming*
  - *The Surreal House*
  - *Niet Normaal 1 - Difference on Display*
  - *British Subjects: Identity and Self-Fashioning 1967–2009*
  - *It's Not the End of the World*
  - *Donald Rodney In Retrospect*
  - *How to Improve the World: 60 years of British Art*
  - *all our tomorrows: the culture of camouflage*
  - *Donald Rodney Sketchbook Display*
  - *State of the Art*
  - *Stranger Than Fiction*

- 2003

2003

2001

2001

2001

2000
- *Self Evident: The artist as the subject 1969–2002*
  - *A Bigger Splash: British Art from Tate 1960–2003*
  - *Century City*
  - *Refuge*
  - *Homes for the Soul: Micro-architecture in Medieval and Contemporary Art*
  - *Give and Take: Works Presented to Museums by the Contemporary Art Society*

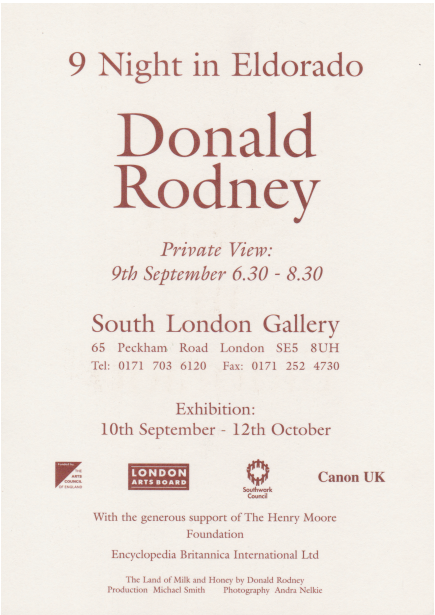
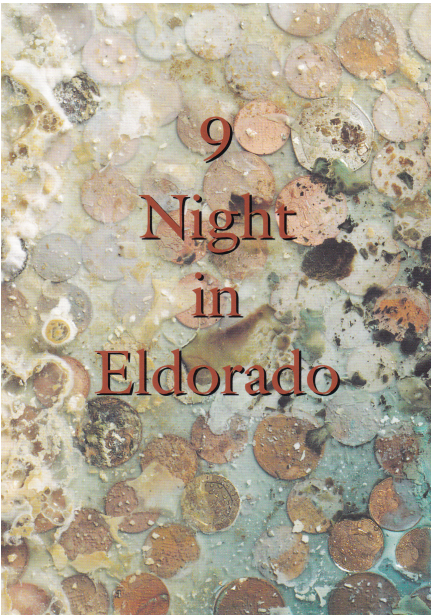
Spike Island, Bristol  
Nottingham Contemporary  
Whitechapel Gallery, London  
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge  
Wolverhampton Art Gallery  
Touchstones Rochdale  
Fundación Juan March, Madrid  
Palais de Tokyo, Paris  
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago  
Celine Gallery, Glasgow (supported by Glasgow International)  
The Museum of the Home, London (in collaboration with Artangel)  
MMK – Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt  
Ikon Gallery, Birmingham  
Tate Britain, London  
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge  
Firstsite, Colchester  
The Levinsky Gallery, University of Plymouth  
Cell Project Space, London  
Somerset House, London  
Longside Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park  
Attenborough Arts Centre, University of Leicester  
PACCAR Room, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon  
Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Aberystwyth University  
The Harley Gallery, Welbeck  
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery  
Plymouth Museums  
Plymouth University  
The Box, Plymouth  
Manarat al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi  
Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven  
Nottingham Contemporary  
South London Gallery  
Copeland Gallery, London  
Science Gallery London  
Courtauld Institute of Art, London  
Somerset House, London  
Design and Artists Copyright Society (DACS), London  
Vivid Projects, Birmingham  
Wolverhampton Art Gallery  
York Art Gallery  
Yorkshire Sculpture Park (A National Partners Programme Exhibition from the Arts Council Collection)  
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery  
iniva, London  
Tate Liverpool  
The Beany Art Museum and Library, Canterbury  
Tate Britain, London  
Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin  
Palazzo Reale, Milan  
Kumu kunstimuuseum – Eesti Kunstimuuseumi, Tallinn  
MOCaK Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej w Krakowie, Krakow  
Manchester Art Gallery  
Graves Gallery, Sheffield  
artsdepot, London  
Barbican Centre, London  
Beurs van Berlage, Amsterdam  
Neuberger Museum of Art, New York  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
iniva, Rivington Place, London  
Hayward Gallery, London  
Kunstraum der Universitaet Lueneburg  
Tate Britain, London  
Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle  
Leeds City Art Gallery  
Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle  
Aberystwyth Arts Centre  
Usher Gallery, Lincoln  
Nottingham Castle  
Brighton Museum and Art Gallery  
Tate Britain, London  
Oca, São Paulo  
Tate Modern, London  
Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden  
Henry Moore Institute, Leeds  
Harris Museum, Preston  
Jerwood Gallery, London

- *The British Art Show 5*

- 1998
- *Here to Stay: Purchases of the 1990s* (Arts Council Touring Exhibition)

- 1998

1997
- *Inside Out*
  - *9 Night in Eldorado*



Invitation card for *9 Night in Eldorado* at South London Gallery, 1997. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney

- 1997
- *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian and Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966-1996*

- 1996

1996

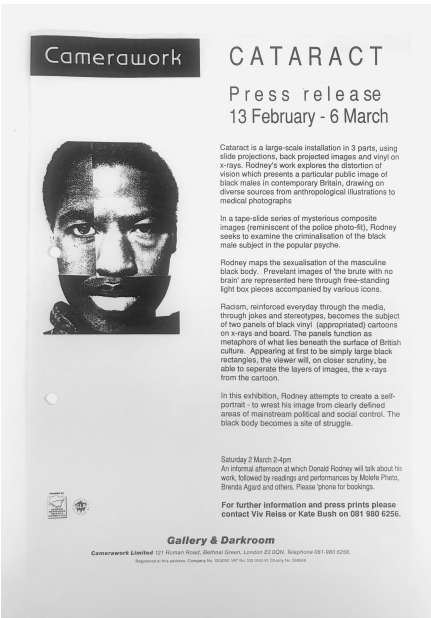
1995

1994

1992

1992
- *Body Visual*
  - *The Visible and the Invisible: Re-presenting the Body in Contemporary Art and Society*
  - *Care and Control*
  - *Truth, Dare, Double Dare*
  - *Trophies of Empire*
  - *Mis(sed) Representations*

- 1991
- *Cataract*



Press release of *Cataract* at Camerawork, London, 1991. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney

- 1991
- *Shocks to the system : social and political issues in recent British art from the Arts Council Collection*

Inverleith House, Royal Botanical Gardens, Edinburgh  
Southampton City Art Gallery  
National Museum of Wales, Cardiff  
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery  
Plymouth Arts Centre  
Aberystwyth Arts Centre  
Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle  
Turnpike, Leigh  
East London Gallery, University of London  
South London Gallery

Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York  
The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York  
Caribbean Cultural Centre, New York  
Barbican Centre, London  
The Wellcome Trust, London  
Hackney Hospital, London  
Ikon Gallery, Birmingham  
Arnolfini, Bristol  
The Cave Arts Centre, Birmingham  
Bluecoat, Liverpool  
BBK Galerie, Cologne  
Camerawork, London

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham  
Royal Festival Hall, London  
Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Sunderland  
Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne  
City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth  
Maclaurin Art Gallery, Ayr  
Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter (National touring exhibitions from the Southbank Centre)

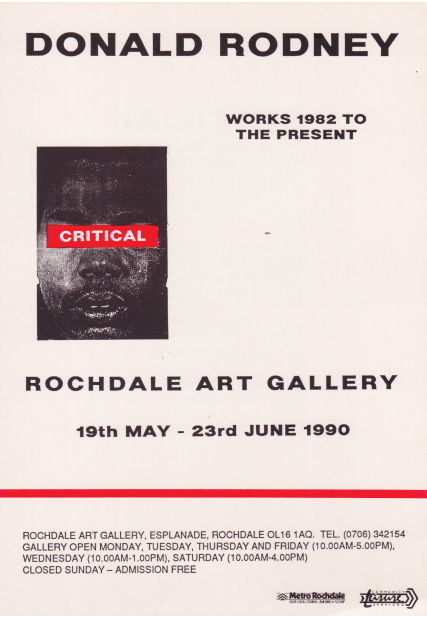


1991

- *Interrogating Identity*

1991  
1990

- *Breaths: Art, Health and Empowerment*
- *Critical*



Invitation card for *Critical* at Rochdale Art Gallery, 1990. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney

1990  
1990

- *TSWA Four Cities Project*
- *Let the Canvas Come to Life With Dark Faces*

1990

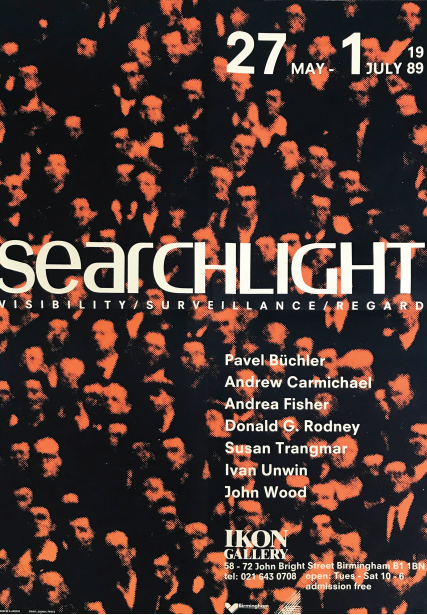
- *Black markets: images of black people in advertising and packaging 1880–1990*

1990  
1989

- *Body*
- *Crisis*

1989

- *Searchlight, Visibility/Surveillance/Regard*



Poster for *Searchlight, Visibility/Surveillance/Regard* at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1989. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney

1989

- *The Suitcase Show*

1987  
1987  
1987  
1987  
1987

- *The Devil's Feast*
- *True Colours*
- *The Image Employed*
- *Piper & Rodney*
- *Piper & Rodney—Adventures Close to Home*

Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis  
Madison Arts Center, Madison  
Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin  
Rochdale Art Gallery  
Rochdale Art Gallery

Mount Edgecumbe Park, Plymouth  
Bluecoat, Liverpool  
Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry  
South London Art Gallery  
Cartwright Hall, Bradford  
Ipswich Museum Nottingham  
Castle Museum, Nottingham  
Cornerhouse, Manchester  
Southbank Centre, London  
Coventry Art Gallery  
Arnolfini, Bristol  
Chisenhale Gallery, London  
Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield  
Ikon Gallery, Birmingham

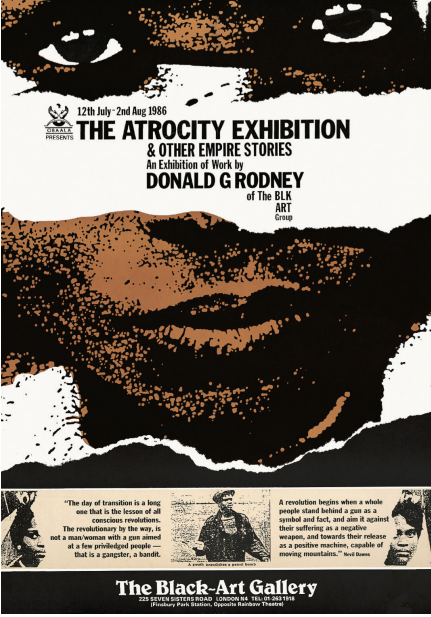
Film and Video Umbrella, London  
Harris Museum, Art Gallery & Library, Preston  
Chelsea School of Art, London  
Greenwich, London  
Cornerhouse, Manchester  
Prema Arts Centre, Gloucestershire  
Pentonville Gallery, London

1987

- *Depicting History: for Today*

1986

- *The Atrocity Exhibition & Other Empire Stories*



Poster designed by Donald Rodney for *The Atrocity Exhibition & Other Empire Stories* at The Black-Art Gallery, London, 1986. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney

1986  
1986  
1986  
1985

- *Unrecorded Truths*
- *Young, Black and Here*
- *State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s*
- *The First White Christmas & Other Empire Stories*



Poster for *The First White Christmas & Other Empire Stories* at Saltley Print & Media, Birmingham, 1985. © The Estate of Donald Rodney. Courtesy: The Estate of Donald Rodney

1985  
1984

- *Heroes and Heroines*
- *An Exhibition of Radical Black Art, The Blk Art Group*

1983

- *The Blk Art Group*

1982

- *The Pan-Afrikan Connection*

1982  
1982

- *Eddie Chamber, Keith Piper and Donald Rodney*
- *The First National Black Art Convention*

Mappin Gallery, Sheffield  
Leeds City Art Gallery  
Rochdale Art Gallery  
The Black-Art Gallery, London

The Elbow Room, London  
The People's Gallery, London  
Institute of Contemporary Art, London  
Saltley Print & Media, Birmingham

The Black-Art Gallery, London  
Battersea Arts Centre, London  
Winterbourne House, Birmingham  
Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry  
Battersea Arts Centre, London  
Africa Centre, London  
Ikon Gallery, Birmingham  
Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham  
King Street Gallery, Bristol  
Africa Centre, London  
Herbert Gallery, Coventry  
Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham  
Wolverhampton Polytechnic