

Press Release

Donald Locke Resistant Forms 10 April/30 August 2026

Timehri Rock #40, 2009. Mixed media, ceramic, twigs. Image courtesy of The Anthony Shaw Collection/York Museums Trust. Photo: Tom Meyer



Camden Art Centre is proud to present a comprehensive survey of Guyanese-British artist Donald Locke (b. 1930, Stewartville; d. 2010, Atlanta). Spanning five decades, from the late 1960s to the last works he made before his death in 2010, this exhibition explores the development of Locke's practice in Guyana, the UK and the United States. Despite his pivotal role in 20th century British sculpture and his significant contributions as a post-war artist of the Windrush Generation, Locke's work has been under-recognised, particularly in the UK. The exhibition includes early 'biomorphic' ceramics evocative of human and natural forms; mixed-media sculpture and paintings from the *Plantation Series* (c.1972-76); large-scale paintings that incorporate found images along with ceramic, metal and wood elements; as well as examples of his late work made in Atlanta, influenced by the assemblage traditions of the American South. Locke's practice is characterised by his evolving approach to different media, his formal ingenuity, and a consistent exploration of history, identity and subjugation.

Following presentations at Spike Island, Bristol, and Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, last year, the final iteration of *Resistant Forms* at Camden Art Centre is a homecoming of sorts. Locke moved to London in 1970 following his years in Corsham and Edinburgh. He exhibited at Camden Art Centre on two occasions: first in 1970 when, under the pseudonym Issorosano lte, a group of Locke's large, biomorphic ceramic sculptures made while he was in Edinburgh were included in a group exhibition; and again in 1975, when his work was included in *The London Group* exhibition.

Locke's 2009-10 solo exhibition *Pork Knocker Dreams* at Nottingham Art Exchange and Wolverhampton Art Gallery was curated by Indra Khanna and featured work from the 1990s and 2000s. Other key works have been shown in landmark exhibitions in London, including Rasheed Araeen's *The Other Story* at the Hayward Gallery in 1989; *Back To Black: The Black Arts Movement* at the Whitechapel in 2005; and most recently *Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art, 1950s-Now* at Tate Britain in 2021. Yet, this is the first time the full breadth of Locke's practice has been shown to audiences in the capital.

In 2024 Camden Art Centre staged an exhibition, *All Rendered Truth*, by Lonnie Holley – another artist from the American South, whom Locke wrote about and whose work had undoubtedly percolated into his thinking and making. Locke was hugely inspired by the vibrant art scene in the American South, the traditions of assemblage or bricolage that drew from African spiritual traditions and had, until recently, been appraised only under the term 'vernacular art'. His later work, made in Atlanta, became infused with a new kind of vitalism – an animistic quality in the materials themselves and histories accreted or patinated on their surfaces. A body of these later works, combining ceramic with found materials, will be a new addition to the core list of works for the London iteration of this exhibition.

Amongst the loans from York Art Gallery and The Donald Locke Estate that were not included at Spike Island or Ikon Gallery, is a group of works on paper from the 1990s combining collaged found images, gestural mark making that describes dynamic figurative motifs, and Locke's distinctive 'blue rain' motif – a cerulean colour that often featured in his painting, alluding to the Middle Passage and oceanic themes. In Locke's later years his work became charged with this dynamic, outpouring of images – a far reach from the early formalism – and he completed an epic series in charcoal on paper. Whilst those charcoal pieces were too unstable to travel to the UK, they cleave closely to the approach of these ink and collaged works on paper, driven by a sense of upheaval or overturning of matter to reveal what has been buried, either in the ground

or the subconscious. The ceramic works on loan from York Art Gallery also relate to this impulse. Made in Locke's final decade, these works are marked by a return, through affinity, to his early years in Guyana and in particular to the Timehri rock drawings that inspired not only Locke, but fellow Guyanese artist Aubrey Williams. Translating as 'hands of man', the Timehri works represent Locke's recognition of the most fundamental creative drive, one that never ceased to compel him to make such pioneering, groundbreaking and truly novel forms across a 50-year career.

Amid the many locations Locke lived and worked, his deep investment in and exploration of history, identity, and subjugation remained consistent. The forms and symbols that materialise in his works echo the legacies of colonialism in his native Guyana and the racial politics of the American Civil War, from sculptures exploring plantation architecture to paintings that incorporate found photographs of Confederate and Union soldiers. Above all, however, Locke wanted to give form and visibility to the unique and hybrid contributions of Black culture to modernity, evident in the range of materials and stylistic approaches that he adopted throughout his life.

A new essay by Hattie Spires is published in the latest edition of Camden Art Centre's long-running File Note series. Produced for every exhibition, the series is an important strand of the organisation's programme, providing a newly commissioned piece of long-form writing on the exhibiting artist accompanied by reading, listening, and watching lists. The File Notes are an accessible resource, available in print from Camden Art Centre's onsite and online shop (£2), and for free online on Camden Art Centre's website.

The exhibition is also accompanied by a fully illustrated monographic publication with an extended introduction by Robert Leckie and newly commissioned essays by curator Grace Aneiza Ali, curator Gina Buenfeld-Murley, art historian, curator and artist Eddie Chambers and art historian Giulia Smith.

Donald Locke: Resistant Forms is organised by Spike Island, Bristol; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; and Camden Art Centre, London; with support from the Donald Locke Estate. The exhibitions at Spike Island and Ikon Gallery were 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. *Resistant Forms* is generously supported by Alison Jacques, the Ampersand Foundation, the Estate of Donald Locke, Henry Moore Foundation and Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. The exhibition at Camden Art Centre has been generously supported by Cockayne Grants for the Arts, a Donor Advised Fund, held at the Prism Charitable Trust.

Notes to editors

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Camden Art Centre

Since 1965 Camden Art Centre has been a place for art and the people that make it. Rooted in our local community and internationally acclaimed, we foster a sense of belonging and a deeper relationship to art. We aim to push boundaries and connect people to their own creativity through our exhibitions, residencies, events and learning programmes. Originally built as a public library, the building now combines historic architecture with open, modern spaces and a secluded garden with free entry for all. Camden Art Centre has always led the way supporting artists and audiences to create and engage with the most vital and inspiring contemporary art and culture today.

Donald Locke Biography

Donald Locke (b.1930, Stewartville, Guyana; d. 2010 Atlanta, Georgia, USA) was a Guyanese painter, sculptor, and ceramicist, whose career was marked by its ambitious, interdisciplinary nature.

He grew up in Guyana and attended the Working People's Art Class (WPAC) taught in Georgetown by Guyanese artist Edward Rupert Burrowes in 1947. He was awarded scholarships to study at Bath Academy of Art at Corsham from 1954–57 and Edinburgh School of Art from 1959–64, where he obtained an MA in Fine Art. Locke returned to Guyana in 1964 to become Art Master at Queen's College in Georgetown, where he taught until 1969. He then received a bursary to return to Edinburgh School of Art to study ceramics, after which he moved to London, where he lived from 1970–78. In 1979, Locke was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in Sculpture at Arizona State University. He lived in Phoenix, Arizona until 1990 and then moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where he lived until his death in 2010.

Prior UK solo exhibitions include: *Pork Knocker Dreams*, Nottingham Art Exchange and Wolverhampton Art Gallery (2009–2010) curated by Indra Khanna; and Commonwealth Institute, London (1975). Other solo exhibitions include: Atlanta Contemporary Art Center (2024–25); High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2016–17); Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, Newark (2004); and City Hall Gallery East, Atlanta (2003). Group exhibitions include: *Black Atlantic: People, Power, Resistance*, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (2023); *Life Between Islands*, Tate Britain, London (2021) and Art Gallery of Ontario (2023); *Back to Black: Art, Cinema and the Racial Imaginary*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2005); *The Other Story*, Hayward Gallery, London (1989); *FESTAC '77*, Lagos (1977); and the 12th São Paulo Biennial (1971). Locke's works have been acquired by institutions including Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Virginia Fine Art Museum, Virginia; and High Museum of Art, Atlanta.