

## DONALD LOCKE *RESISTANT FORMS*

1 OCTOBER 2025 – 22 FEBRUARY 2026



Donald Locke, *Twin Form (black interior)* (1978). Ceramic, 42 x 27 x 28 cm.

Courtesy Estate of Donald Locke and Alison Jacques, London. © Estate of Donald Locke. Photo: Michael Brzezinski.

Ikon presents the first major survey exhibition of Guyanese-British artist Donald Locke (1930–2010). Locke was born and raised in Guyana and first moved to the UK in the 1950s to study at Bath Academy of Art and Edinburgh School of Art. He then lived between London and Georgetown for the next twenty years, before settling in the United States in the late 1970s.

The exhibition at Ikon Gallery explores the development of his work across Guyana, the UK and the United States over five decades, from the late 1960s to the early 2000s. It features over eighty works, from early ceramics that evoke human and natural forms to mixed-media sculptures and monochromatic black paintings from the 1970s. Also included are several large-scale paintings from the 1990s that incorporate found images along with ceramic, metal and wood elements. These materials reflect Locke's evolving approach to the use of different media, his formal ingenuity and the growing influence of African American vernacular art and iconography, following his relocation to the United States.

Though Locke lived and worked in many places during his life, his exploration of issues of history, identity and subjugation was a constant. This is evident in his use of forms and symbols that 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, which is evident in the broad range of materials and stylistic approaches that he adopted throughout his career.

Works presented at Ikon Gallery include 'twin forms' from the 1960s and 1970s, followed by *Plantation Series* (1970s) which were described by Locke as "sculptural metaphors where forms are held in strict lines, connected together as if with chains held within a system of metal bars or metal grids, analogous to the system whereby one group of people were kept in economic and political subjugation by another group." Large mixed-media paintings, *Southern Mansions* (1996) and *The Mark of Brer Nancy* (1995), distinct for their burning red excavated from beneath thick layers of black paint like fresh wounds, are displayed alongside *Trophies of Empire #2* (2006–08), a later iteration of Locke's earlier *Trophies of Empire* (1972–74) in which 'bullet' forms are transformed into wooden creatures, many placed on found trinkets and adorned with human hair.

At Ikon Gallery, the commitment to Locke's work is in keeping with the gallery's longstanding engagement with artists from diverse, international backgrounds pursuing comparable endeavours such as Rasheed Araeen, who had a retrospective at Ikon Gallery in 1987 and included Locke in *The Other Story* at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1989. Traces of the rich materialism in Locke's work are also found in the layered practice of his son, Hew Locke OBE RA, whose work formed the subject of a major exhibition, *Here's the Thing*, at Ikon Gallery in 2019 and a public commission in 2022, *Foreign Exchange*, for which he reimagined Birmingham's Queen Victoria statue, drawing attention to the symbolic power of the British Empire.

Donald Locke: *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. The exhibition is generously supported by The Ampersand Foundation, Henry Moore Foundation, Alison Jacques Gallery and the Estate of Donald Locke.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated monographic publication designed by London-based design studio, Wolfe Hall. The publication features newly commissioned essays by Guyanese-born curator Grace Aneiza Ali; art historian, curator and artist Eddie Chambers; art historian and scholar Giulia Smith; and curator Gina Buenfeld-Murley, alongside an introduction by Robert Leckie. The publication has been made possible with the support of the Paul Mellon Centre, Alison Jacques Gallery and the Estate of Donald Locke.

**For more information, press appointments, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small by email [r.small@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:r.small@ikon-gallery.org) or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.**

Social Media: @ikongallery #IkonGallery @ace\_national @aceagrams @ace\_midlands

## Notes to Editors:

1. **Donald Locke** 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. Solo exhibitions include: Atlanta Contemporary Art Center (2024–25); High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2016–17); New Art Exchange, Nottingham (2009); Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, Newark (2004); City Hall Gallery East, Atlanta (2003) and the Commonwealth Institute, London (1975). Group exhibitions include: *Black Atlantic: People, Power, Resistance*, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (2023); *Life Between Islands*, Tate Britain, London (2021); *Back to Black: Art, Cinema and the Racial*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2005); *The Other Story*, Hayward Gallery, London (1989); FESTAC '77, Lagos (1977); and the 12th São Paulo Biennial (1971).
2. **Ikon** is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art gallery, situated in Birmingham's city centre. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024. It is an educational charity with free entry for all, and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features international and local artists working in a variety of media, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Ikon aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)
3. **Ikon** is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm. Free entry, donations welcome. Ikon is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.
4. **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. 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. [spikeisland.org.uk](http://spikeisland.org.uk)
5. **Camden Art Centre** is a charity committed to world-class contemporary art exhibitions and education, based in London. CAC's bold artistic programme is recognised as one of the most influential in the UK, providing emerging and under-recognised artists the platforms their practices deserve and accelerating recognition of their work, recently exemplified by exhibitions of Lonnie Holley, Nicola L. and Tenant of Culture. [camdenartcentre.org](http://camdenartcentre.org)
6. **The Ampersand Foundation** is a UK grant-awarding charity dedicated exclusively to supporting the visual arts. It funds high-quality exhibitions and visual arts projects, provided they are free to the

public at least one day per week. Additionally, the Foundation supports the expansion of public collections, collection care, artists' residencies, and fellowships, with a primary focus on organisations and projects within the UK. [theampersandfoundation.com](http://theampersandfoundation.com)

7. **Henry Moore Foundation** was founded by the sculptor Henry Moore and his family in 1977 to encourage public appreciation of the visual arts. Today the Foundation supports innovative sculpture projects through its grants programme, devises an imaginative programme of exhibitions and research worldwide, and preserves the legacy of Moore himself: one of the great sculptors of the 20th century, who did so much to bring the art form to a wider audience. [henry-moore.org](http://henry-moore.org)
8. **Paul Mellon Centre (PMC)** is an educational charity and research institute that champions new ways of understanding British art and architecture. The PMC publishes, teaches and carries out research, both at the Centre in London and through online platforms. The PMC's archives, library and lively events programme are open to researchers, students and the public whilst the funding programme supports organisations and individuals with research projects, publications, exhibitions and events. The Centre was founded in 1970 by the art collector and philanthropist Paul Mellon. It is part of Yale University and a partner to the Yale Center for British Art. [paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk](http://paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk)
9. **Alison Jacques** is a contemporary art gallery in London, established in 2004 by Alison Jacques, with an international programme of estates and contemporary artists. [alisonjacques.com](http://alisonjacques.com)
10. **Arts Council England** is the national development agency for creativity and culture. ACE have set out their strategic vision in *Let's Create* that by 2030 they want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 ACE will invest over £467 million of public money from Government and an estimated £250 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. [artscouncil.org.uk](http://artscouncil.org.uk)



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