

Press Release

Donald Rodney, *Visceral Canker* at Nottingham Contemporary

Sat 28 September 2024 – Sun 5 January 2025



Image: Donald Rodney, *Britannia Hospital 3*, 1988, Oil pastel on x-ray. Installation view at Spike Island, Bristol 2024. Work courtesy Sheffield Museums and The Donald Rodney Estate. Photo by Lisa Whiting.

Nottingham Contemporary 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 a co-founding member of the BLK Art Group: an association of young Black artists formed in Wolverhampton in 1982.

Visceral Canker brings together almost 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 archival 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. Loans are supported by the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund, the first ever UK-wide funding scheme to enable smaller and local authority museums to borrow works of art and artefacts from national collections.

Rodney suffered from sickle cell throughout his life. This meant persistent pain, regular invasive treatments, and increasing immobility. Although 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 viscerality 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.

Nottingham was a key location in Rodney's education - he studied on the BA Fine Art course at Trent Polytechnic, now Nottingham Trent University (NTU), from 1981 – 1985. This period was especially formative, seeing a shift from an early painting practice to a more experimental approach across a range of media, becoming deeply engaged with the social and political context of the time. The exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary will be accompanied by an archival display of material from Rodney's time in Nottingham, displayed in the Bonington Vitrines at Bonington Gallery in NTU's art and design building.

The exhibition is curated by Gasworks Director Robert Leckie and Spike Island Director Nicole Yip. It is presented in partnership with Spike Island and Whitechapel Gallery.

For more information about Donald Rodney: *Visceral Canker* and other exhibitions at Nottingham Contemporary, please [visit our website](#).

Notes to Editors:

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Donald Rodney: *Visceral Canker* is presented in partnership with Spike Island and Whitechapel Gallery, where it will tour during 2024-25. The exhibition is currently on display at [Spike Island](#) from 25 May – 8 September and will tour from Nottingham Contemporary to [Whitechapel Gallery](#) from 12 February to 11 May 2025.

This exhibition is part of the West of England Visual Arts Alliance programme and is generously supported by the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund, the Henry Moore Foundation, the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the Pilgrim Trust & the Donald Rodney Exhibition Circle.

The archival display at Bonington Gallery has been researched and developed in collaboration with Bonington Gallery.

About 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.

About Nottingham Contemporary

[Nottingham Contemporary](http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org) is one of the leading and largest centres for contemporary art in Europe with a strong international, national and local profile. Since opening in 2009, we have welcomed over 2 million visitors – with free admission for all – to our highly ambitious programme that has featured hundreds of artists and cultural practitioners from across the globe.

Our artistic and learning programmes of exhibitions, events and screenings explore less-historicised art practices, cultural movements, histories and geographies to propose alternative narratives for conventional histories and stimulate important discussions about culture and society. We support artists at different stages of their careers – from first-time solo shows in the UK to surveys of renowned or overlooked figures – and regularly present significant thematic exhibitions and major artist-curated projects. Nottingham Contemporary was shortlisted for Art Fund Museum of the Year 2019. Nottingham Contemporary is supported using public funding by Arts Council England and through our partnerships with the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University.

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The National Art Pass provides free or discounted entry to over 850 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and Art Quarterly magazine.
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