

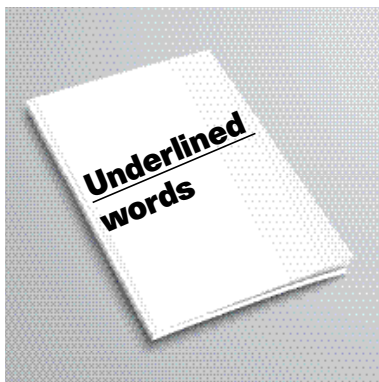
**Nottingham  
Contemporary**

**Donald Rodney:  
*Visceral Canker***

**Easy Read Guide**



# How to use this Guide



In this guide, hard to understand words are underlined. We explain what these words mean after they have been used.

This guide talks about some difficult themes including violence, racism against Black people, and slavery. These themes might upset some people who read this guide. If you need a quiet space to sit in the exhibition you can sit in Gallery Zero. You can ask a member of staff in the gallery for help if you need it.

The guide starts with an introduction about the exhibition.

After the introduction, there is a section of the guide telling you about each artwork in the exhibition.

You can use the contents page to find out which page of the guide information on each artwork is found at.

The contents page is on the next page and tells you what page number to turn to for each section.

The page numbers are written at the bottom of each page.

You don't need to read the whole guide unless you want to. You can pick a section on an artwork and read about it.



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# Introduction



**This exhibition is a display of artworks by an artist called Donald Rodney.**



**Donald was born in 1961 in West Bromwich which is a town near Birmingham in the UK.**



**Donald moved to Nottingham in 1981 to study art at a university called Trent Polytechnic. This is now called Nottingham Trent University. A university is a place where people go to learn.**



**Donald lived in an area of Nottingham called Hyson Green while he was studying at Trent Polytechnic.**



**Donald died when he was only 36 years old in 1998 due to illness. We will learn more about this later in this guide.**



**Donald made artworks in lots of different ways. He made paintings, sculptures and digital artworks. A digital artwork is an artwork you can see on at TV or computer screen.**

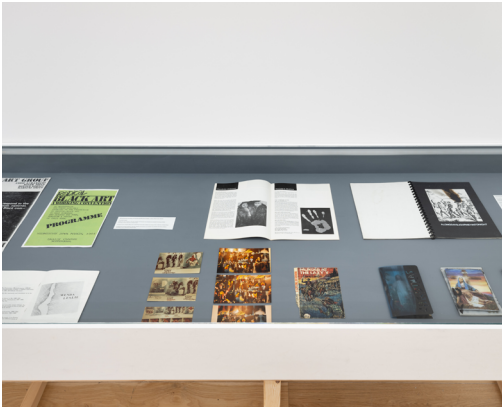


**A lot of Donald's artworks were lost or destroyed during his life.**



**This exhibition shows nearly all of Donald's artworks that didn't get lost or damaged.**





**There are also lots of photos, sketches and documents in the exhibition that show different moments in Donald's life and his career as an artist.**



**We are showing works by Donald at Nottingham Contemporary from 28 September 2024 to 5 January 2025.**

# Sickle Cell Anaemia



Donald was very ill throughout his life because he had an illness called sickle cell anaemia. This is an illness which affects a person's blood so that they don't get enough oxygen. We need oxygen to help our bodies to survive.



People with sickle cell anaemia often feel lots of pain and may be very tired a lot of the time.



People with sickle cell anaemia are more likely to become ill with other things as well.



Sickle cell anaemia affects more people with an African or Caribbean family background like Donald.



**Some of Donald's artworks were made while he was in hospital.**



**Donald found ways to make big works by sticking together smaller pieces made in his hospital bed. Sometimes Donald's friends and family helped him to make his artworks when he was ill.**



**Donald sometimes made artworks with materials found in the hospital like x-rays. X-rays are special images made in hospitals that show what people's bones look like under their skin. Someone might have an x-ray if a doctor thinks they have broken a bone. Some of the artworks you can see in this exhibition have been painted onto x-rays.**



# The Exhibition Title



This exhibition is called Visceral Canker. Visceral Canker is also the name of one of the artworks in the show.



A canker is another word for disease. A disease is when part of your body or mind doesn't work the way it should. This can make you feel sick or unwell.



Visceral means feeling something deeply in your body or your feelings.



So a visceral canker is an illness that is felt very deeply in the body.





**Donald thought about disease in two ways:**

**- Sickle cell anaemia was a disease affecting his body**



**- Donald also thought the bad bits of how people behave in the UK are like diseases. Donald thought about things like racism as a disease. Racism is when people are treated unfairly because of their skin colour or background.**

# BLK Art Group



**Donald was one of the artists who set up an art group called the BLK art group.**



**All the people in this group grew up in the West Midlands.**



**All the members of the BLK art group were children of people who had moved to England from the Caribbean.**



**They made artworks which thought about racism and the experiences of Black British people.**

# Donald's Parents and the Windrush Generation



Donald's parents moved to England from Jamaica in the 1950s.



They were part of a group of Caribbean people known as the Windrush Generation. These were people who moved from the Caribbean to Britain between 1948 and 1971.



The group is named after a ship called the Windrush which brought the first Caribbean migrants to the UK in 1948. Migrants are people who move country to live in a new place.





**Countries in the Caribbean like Jamaica were still part of the British Empire in 1948. The British Empire means all the places around the world that were once ruled by Britain.**



**The people in charge in the UK invited people from the Caribbean to move here after World War Two ended because Britain needed to repair roads and buildings which had been damaged in the war and there were lots of jobs that needed workers.**



**Caribbean migrants came to work in lots of places in the UK doing jobs like nurses, drivers and cleaners.**



**Sadly, lots of people from the Windrush Generation and their children experienced racism from people in the UK.**



# The Artworks in Gallery One

## *How the West Was Won*



This is a painting made in 1982.



The artwork is named after a cowboy film from 1962.



The painting shows a white man pointing a gun at a Native American. Native Americans are people whose family were the first people to live in America.



**Hollywood films about “cowboys and Indians” often showed cowboys as good guys and Native Americans as bad guys.**



**Donald Rodney wanted to show that this is wrong and that cowboys were violent to Native Americans. Cowboys were a type of people called colonisers. Colonisers are people who move to another place and try to take control from the people who already live there.**

# ***Untitled Drawing (Cowboy and Indian, after David Hockney's We Two Boys Together Clinging, 1961)***



**This artwork was made in 1989.**



**The artwork is a big pencil drawing that shows a cowboy and a Native American. Native Americans are people whose family were the first people to live in America.**



**Donald's artwork is based on a painting by an artist called David Hockney that was made in 1961.**



**David Hockney's painting shows two boys hugging each other. In David Hockney's painting, the boys are connected by love.**



**In Donald Rodney's drawing, the cowboy and the Native American are connected by danger and anger. This is like how the cowboy and Native American in the painting How The West Was Won are in a violent situation.**



# ***Britannia Hospital 3***



**This is a painting made in 1988.**



**The painting was made using oil pastels on x-rays.**



**The painting shows Donald in a hospital bed with a nurse next to him.**



**The painting also shows a police officer from a part of the police called the Special Patrol Group who were known for being very violent.**



**The fourth person is Frida Kahlo. Frida was a Mexican painter who lived from 1907 to 1954. The image of Frida in Donald's painting is based on a painting Frida painted of herself in 1944 called The Broken Column.**



**Donald was inspired by Frida's artwork because she was an artist who made work from her bed when she was ill, like Donald did.**

# ***The House That Jack Built***



**This artwork was made in 1987.**

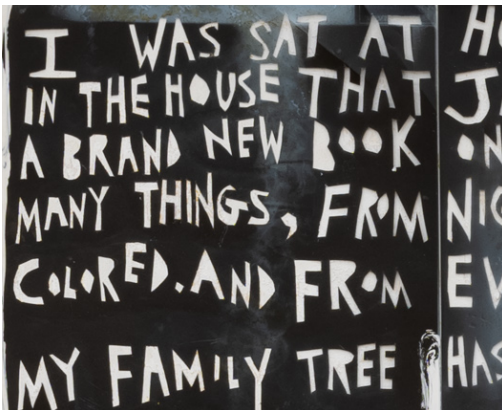


**This piece is like a self-portrait. It has a person sitting in front of a house made from x-rays of Donald's own chest.**



**The x-rays in this piece are painted and have cut out sections. They have writing and images of hands and scissors on them.**





The writing on the x-rays is about the effects of colonialism and the slavery. Colonialism is when a group of people move to another place and try to take control from the people who already live there. Slavery was when people from Africa were taken from their homes and forced to work for no money in bad conditions.



The figure in the middle of the artwork looks like a scarecrow and has a tree coming out of the top of its neck. A scarecrow is something that looks like a human which farmers put into fields to scare birds away so they don't eat the vegetables they are growing.



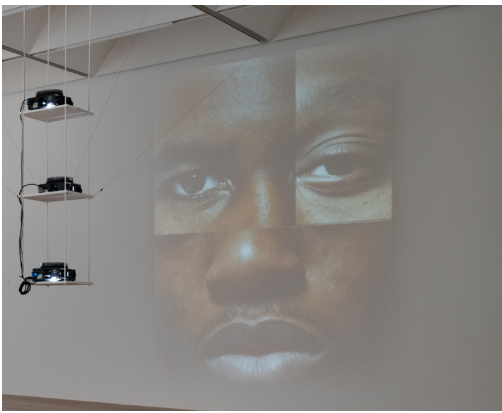
Donald used the scarecrow figure because it reminded him of lynching. Lynching is when a group of people kill someone by hanging them. They do this to punish someone or to scare other people. Racist people did this to Black people in the past.



This artwork was also inspired by an artwork called *The Broken Column* by an artist called Frida Kahlo. This is the same artwork which inspired one of the paintings we've already seen in Gallery One.

# The Artworks in Gallery Two

## *Cataract*



**This artwork was made in 1991.**

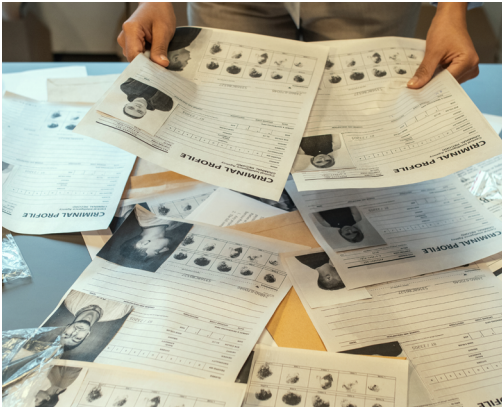


**The artwork uses a slide projector to show pictures on a wall. A slide projector is a machine that shines light through a small picture printed on glass to make a big image appear on a surface like a wall.**



**The artwork uses three different projectors to show pictures of four different Black men's faces. One of the men is Donald.**





**The pictures don't line up perfectly, so they overlap and create a mixed-up image. This looks a bit like the sketches police use to identify people.**



**Donald was interested in how Black people are often shown in the same way. Donald thinks a lot of people see Black people as being all the same as each other just because they have the same skin colour or come from the same place.**



**Donald was trying to make a picture of himself which is called a self-portrait. He wanted to show how hard it is to make your own self-portrait when other people have already decided they know what he was like just because he was Black.**

# ***Mandingo and Black Sapphire***



**These artworks were made in 1990.**

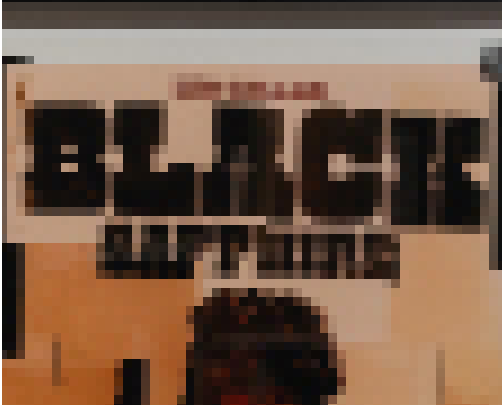


**The artworks are based on collages that Donald made while he was in hospital. Collages are artworks made by sticking different materials together on a surface. These materials can include paper, fabric, photographs, or other items.**



**Donald cut up and rearranged book covers from stories set during plantation slavery.**

**This was where people from Africa were forced to work on large farms to grow plants like sugar, cotton, or tobacco. These people had no freedom and were treated very badly. They were forced to work long hours in difficult conditions.**



**The titles of these two artworks come from the titles of books which mix real history with made up stories about slavery. The books were written for white people and they are racist towards Black people.**

# Visceral Canker



**This artwork was made in 1990.**



**The artwork has two pieces of wood with paintings of coats of arms on them. Coats of arms are special images that represent important people or families.**



**One coat of arms in the artwork belongs to a man named John Hawkins, who was involved in the slave trade in the 1500s. This was where people from Africa were taken from their homes, sold, and forced to work for no money in terrible conditions.**



**The other coat of arms in the artwork belongs to Queen Elizabeth I, who was the queen of England a long time ago.**





**Queen Elizabeth let John Hawkins use one of her ships to take people as slaves.**



**In the artwork, the two coats of arms are joined together by tubes filled with fake blood.**



**Donald wanted the blood in the artwork to show the connection between John Hawkins and Queen Elizabeth I. Donald wanted the fake blood to make people think about the people who were harmed by the slave trade.**



**Donald wanted to use his own real blood to show how he feels connected to the people who suffered in the slave trade, but he had to use fake blood instead.**

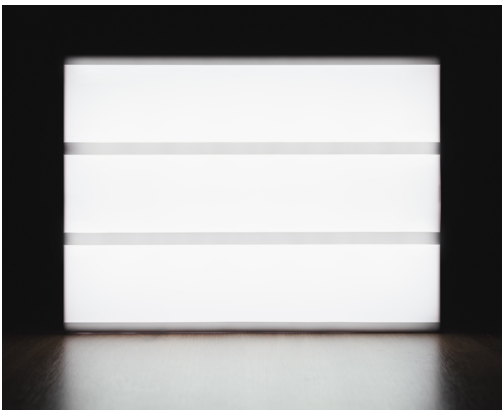


**This artwork is important because it shows how the terrible things from history, like the slave trade, still affect our world today. Donald wants us to think about how the past is still a part of our lives.**

# ***Self-Portrait: Black Men Public Enemy***



**This artwork was made in 1990.**



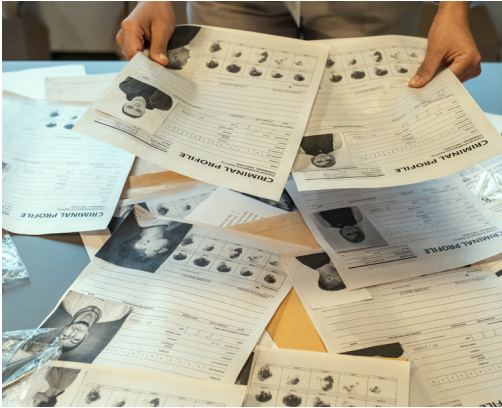
**It is made up of five lightboxes. A lightbox is like a picture in a frame that has a light behind it, so when you look at the pictures inside, they are brightly lit and easy to see.**



**The lightboxes in this artwork show pictures of Black men. These pictures were found in newspapers and a book about blood diseases.**



**In four of the pictures, there are black strips covering the men's eyes so you can't tell who they are.**



**The fifth picture looks like a police sketch.**



**Even though the artwork is called Self Portrait, none of the pictures are of Donald Rodney himself. A self-portrait usually means an artwork or a photograph that shows the person who made it.**



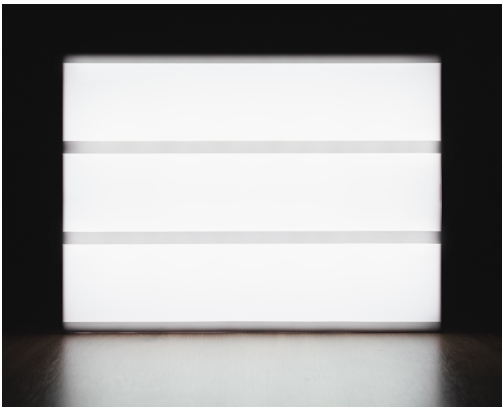
**Donald was a Black man. He used the pictures in the artwork to think about how Black men are shown in the news and are often seen as threatening.**



# ***John Barnes and Mexico Olympics***



**These two artworks were made in 1991.**



**The artworks are lightboxes. A lightbox is like a picture in a frame that has a light behind it, so when you look at the pictures inside, they are brightly lit and easy to see.**



**Both of the lightboxes show photos from newspapers.**



The photos show times where racism was seen in sport. Racism is when people are treated unfairly because of the colour of their skin or where they come from.



One of the photos is of two American sportsmen called Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the Olympics in Mexico in 1968. The Olympics are a big sports event. In the photo, Tommie and John are doing a Black Power salute. This is when people raise their fist in the air to show that they are standing up to racism.



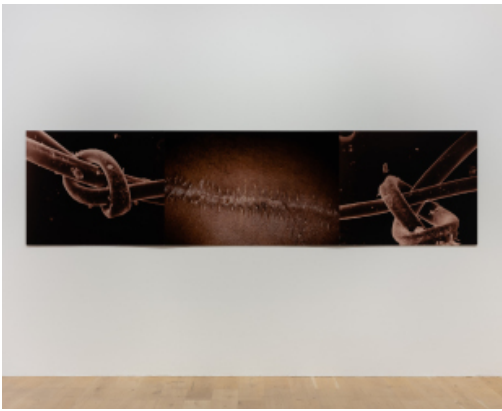
The other photo shows a British footballer called John Barnes kicking away a banana that racist fans threw at him during a match.



**In both the artworks, parts of the photos are hidden by the lightbox frames. This shows the gaps in how Black sportsmen are shown in the news. News reports often don't show how bad racism is, and don't tell the whole story.**

# The Artworks in Gallery Three

## *Flesh of My Flesh*



**This artwork was made in 1996.**



**The artwork is a large photograph printed on metal.**



**During the mid-1990s, Donald was often sick in bed. During this time, he worked on art projects that looked at things in science.**





Donald talked with doctors and used medical imaging to explore issues related to sickle cell anaemia and racial differences. Medical imaging is when doctors take pictures of the inside of your body to see what's happening. These pictures help doctors find out if something is wrong, like a broken bone or an illness. X-rays are a type of medical imaging.



Part of the artwork shows a picture of a big scar on Donald's leg from when he had surgery on his hip. Surgery is when doctors use special tools to fix something inside your body. This is done to help you feel better. A scar is a mark on your skin that happens after you get hurt or have surgery. It's the way your skin heals after an injury. Scars are often a different colour or texture compared to the rest of your skin.



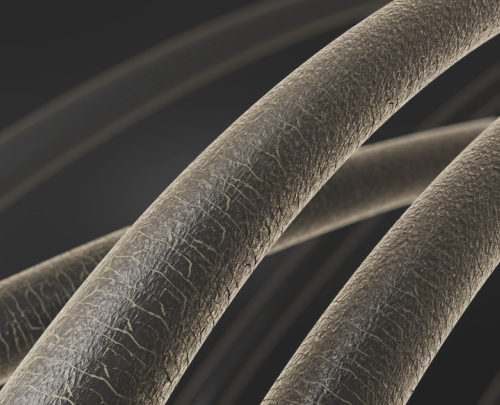
Donald's scar shows the racism and bad care he experienced in hospital. The doctor who did Donald's surgery thought Black skin was tougher than white skin and needed more stitching to sew it back together, which was not true. Donald's scar shows that the doctor stitched more than he should have done.



**On each side of the image, there are photos of pieces of hair. One of the hair pieces is from Donald and the other one is from a white artist called Rose Finn-Kelcey.**



**The photos were taken with a powerful microscope. A microscope is a tool that helps you see very small things that you can't see with just your eyes. It makes tiny objects, like tiny parts of plants and animals, look much bigger so you can see more details.**



**The microscope images in this artwork show that the hair from a Black man and a White woman looks almost the same. Donald wanted to show that white people and Black people aren't really different when you look at science.**

# Black Audio Film Collective -

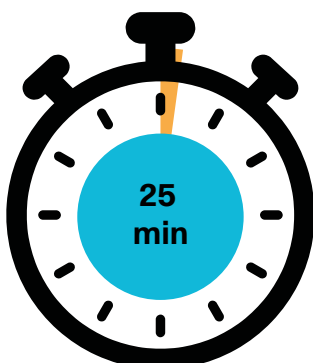
## *Three Songs on Pain, Time and Light*



This artwork was made in 1995 by a group of artists called the Black Audio Film Collective.



The Black Audio Film Collective was a group of seven artists and filmmakers who made films together between 1982 and 1998. They created films and videos about Black culture, race, and life in Britain.



This artwork is a 25 minute long video.



**The video shows how Donald coped with life as an artist while living with his illness. It also looks at how having medical treatments for his illness influenced his art.**



# ***My Mother, My Father, My Sister, My Brother***



**This artwork was made in 1997.  
The artwork is a small house  
made from Donald's own skin  
and is held together with pins.**



**The skin was taken from Donald's  
body during surgery. Surgery is  
when doctors use special tools to  
fix something inside your body.  
This is done to help you feel  
better.**



**The small house represents home and  
how families protect each other, like  
how skin protects our bodies.**

# ***In the House of My Father***



**This artwork was made in 1997.**

**It is a photograph of the sculpture *My Mother, My Father, My Sister, My Brother*, held in Donald's hand.**



**Donald had planned to create another photo like this one which would show the sculpture balanced on his tongue.**



**This would have connected to the Christian ritual of communion, where people eat small circles of bread which represent the body of Jesus Christ. Christians are a group of religious people. Jesus is an important man in their religion.**



**Instead of the communion bread, this photograph shows a tiny house made from Donald's own skin, representing family and home.**



**The title of the artwork thinks about ideas about family and Christianity. Christianity is a religion which often calls God our father.**

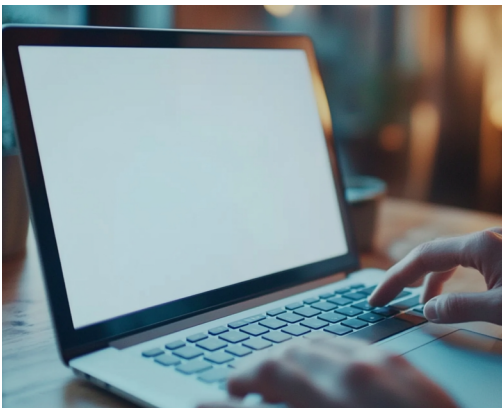
# Sketchbooks



**There are 10 of Donald's sketchbooks that he drew in on display in Gallery Three.**



**These sketchbooks show how important drawing and writing were for Donald's art and ideas. They include sketches for new artworks, notes about past exhibitions, and ideas for new artworks.**



**We can only show a few pages in the exhibition, but you can see the full collection of sketchbooks on the Tate website at [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk).**



# **Preparatory drawings for *Soweto/Guernica* and *The Watchtower*, *Citizens Stand in* *British Standard Time*, *An X-ray History*, *Monitor and X- ray* *Analysis***



**These drawings were made in 1988.**



**The drawings were made by Donald to plan two big artworks. One of the big artworks was called Soweto/Guernica.**



In Soweto/Guernica, Donald recreated a famous painting by the artist Picasso, which shows a violent event from the Spanish Civil War. Donald's version shows the Soweto Uprising, a violent event that happened in South Africa in 1976.



In the Soweto Uprising, Black South Africans protested against Apartheid. A protest is when people get together to say they disagree with something or to ask to be treated equally. Apartheid was a system in South Africa where people were treated differently based on their skin colour. White people had more rights and better living conditions, while Black people and others had fewer rights and were forced to live in poorer conditions.



Donald's artwork combines Picasso's painting with a famous photo of Hector Pieterse, a young boy who was killed during the protests in Soweto.

# ***Autoicon***



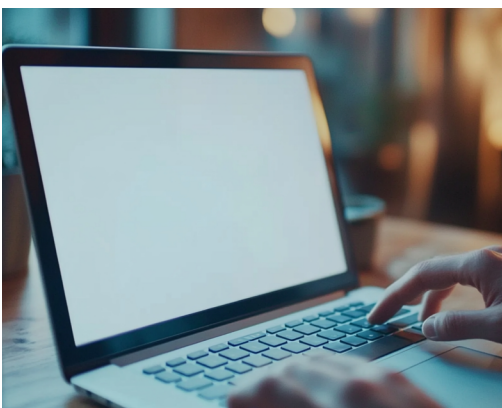
**This artwork was made in 2000.**



**The artwork was made after Donald died by an Donald's friend who was an artist called Mike Philips. Other important people in Donald's life helped. They were called Gary Stewart, Keith Piper, and Diane Symons.**



**The artwork was made based on ideas Mike and Donald had talked about together before Donald died.**



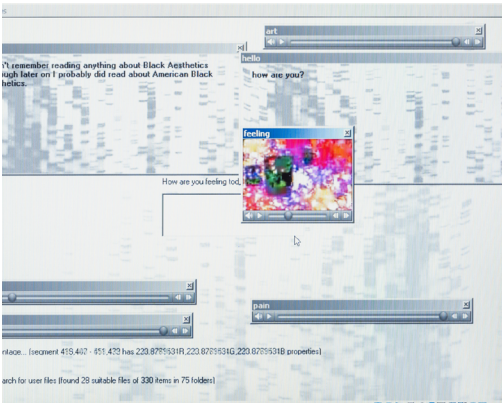
**Donald wanted to make a virtual version of himself that could continue to exist after he died. Virtual means something that is not real but can be seen or experienced through a computer or the internet.**



**The artwork recreates a virtual version of Donald's thoughts and personality through information, which includes medical information and memories.**



**The artwork exists as a website and on a CD.**



**You can ask it questions, and see a mix of images and writing from the internet. The work will also play sound recordings of Donald speaking. This is like talking to a virtual version of Donald.**



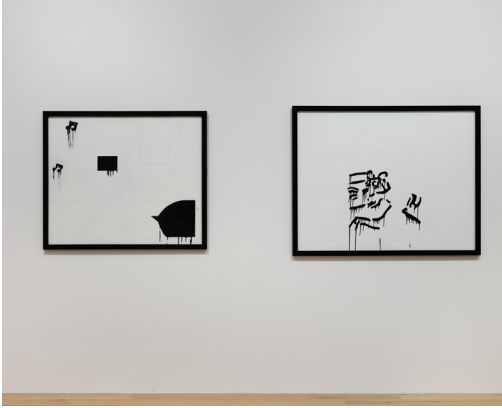
**This artwork was inspired by a piece called Auto-Icon made by a man called Jeremy Bentham who died in 1832. This piece features Jeremy Bentham's skeleton dressed in his clothes.**





**Both Donald's and Jeremy Bentham's works think about memory and what it means to be a person.**

# ***Black Comedy 1 and Black Comedy 2***



**These artworks were made in 1997.**



**These artworks are made by painting over two old artworks Donald made in 1991 called Cartoon 1 and Cartoon 2.**



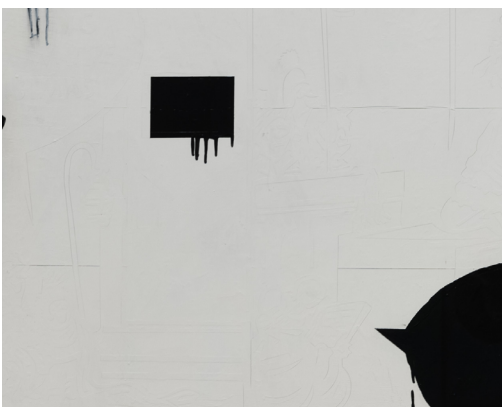
**In these old artworks, Donald used cartoon images from a newspaper which made fun of people who experience racism.**



**Cartoon 1 shows a man in a turban with his family riding a tiger through an airport in the UK. A turban is a special piece of fabric some men from the Sikh or Islamic religions wear on their head. The cartoon shows the man joking about having no problem getting through the UK border. This joke is meant to show that it's easy for anyone to move to the UK, but it's actually very hard for lots of people to move here.**



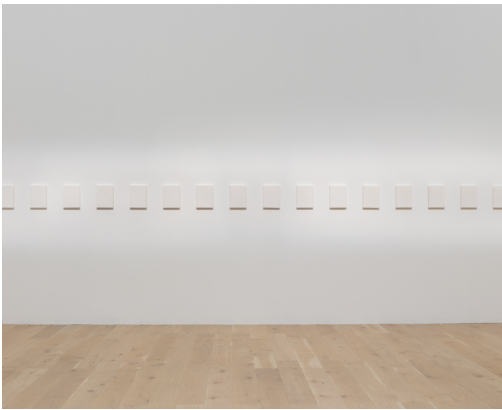
**Cartoon 2 shows a choir singing the song "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas". Next to the choir is a person saying this song is racist. This is making fun of people who point out when things are racist. The cartoon makes fun of them by suggesting some people will say anything is racist, even a song like White Christmas which is not about race but has the word white in it.**



**In the newer artworks on display in our galleries, Donald updated these cartoons by painting some areas black, so you can't see the whole image.**

# The Artworks in Gallery Four

## *My Catechism*



**This artwork was made in 1997.**



**The artwork is copies of a set of books called the Children's Encyclopaedia Britannica. The copies have been made in a material called plaster. Plaster is a soft material that goes hard when it dries. Plaster can be used to make copies of other objects lots of times.**



**These books were very important in Donald's home when he was a child. They were bought by his dad and were meant to help Donald learn and grow up to be successful.**



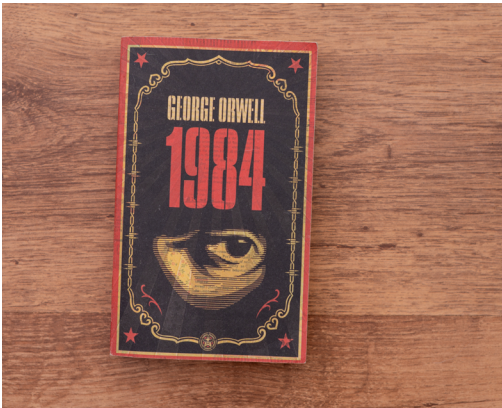


**The title of the artwork is My Catechism, which is related to books used in the Catholic Church to teach people about religion. Donald's parents were part of a church called the Jamaican Pentecostal Church, and Donald often used church themes in his art.**

# ***Doublethink***



**This artwork was made in 1992.**



**The title comes from a book called 1984 by George Orwell. The term Doublethink means believing two opposite things at the same time.**



**Donald was interested in how British people believed two things at once about Black sportsmen.**



**Black sportsmen would often be celebrated with cheers and clapping when they played sports.**



**But Black sportsmen also faced racism including horrible things being said to them.**



**The artwork is made up of 70 sports trophies in display cases.**



**Each trophy has a label with phrase that shows unfair or confusing views about Black athletes.**



**Donald heard these phrases all the time in everyday life, like in books, magazines, or on public transport. He wanted to show how Black people are treated with both respect and disrespect.**



# ***Psalms***



**This artwork was made in 1997.  
The artwork includes a wheelchair, a  
laptop, and sensors.**



**In this artwork, the wheelchair moves  
around the gallery on its own, using  
machinery called motors to move and  
sensors to stop it bumping into things.**



**The wheelchair seems to wander  
sadly, like a repeating memory of  
a journey. This artwork shows Donald's  
feelings of sadness about his father,  
who died 2 years before Donald made  
this artwork.**



**The wheelchair also represents  
Donald himself, who couldn't attend  
the exhibition this artwork was  
made for because of his illness.**



# ***Pygmalion***



**This artwork was made between 1996 and 1997.  
The artwork is a sculpture which moves.**



**The artwork is based on the “laughing policeman” which is an old amusement arcade machine found in arcades and funfairs. It’s a figure of a policeman who laughs loudly and sometimes moves. It’s meant to be funny and entertaining.**

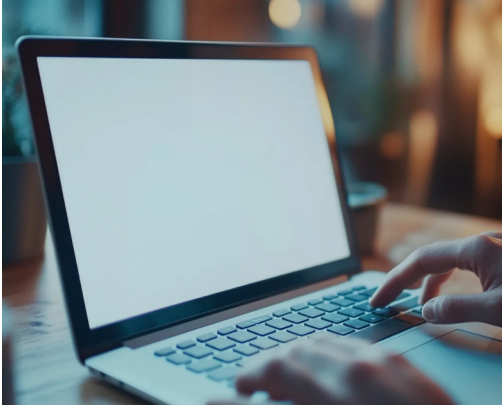


**The figure in this artwork is a puppet that looks like the pop singer Michael Jackson. The puppet has a curly wig, a gold jacket, and a silver glove like Michael Jackson.**



**Donald painted the puppet's face black, which is different from Michael Jackson's own skin which got whiter throughout his life.**

# For More Information



**You can find out more about what we do by looking at our website here:**

**[nottinghamcontemporary.org](http://nottinghamcontemporary.org)**



**If you would like to help us show more artworks in the future, please think about giving us some money.**

**We suggest £5 as a good amount.**



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