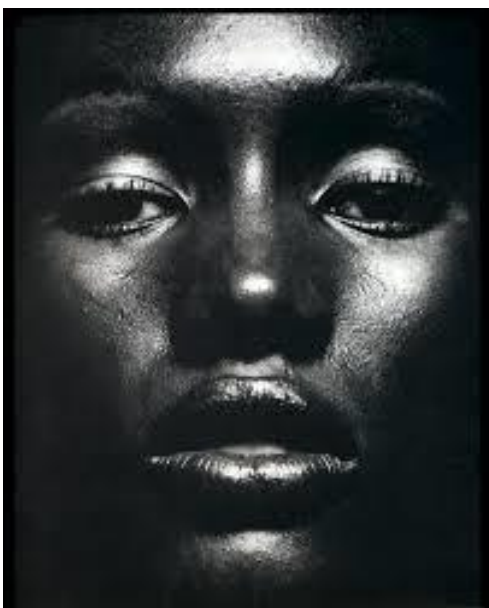


Grace Before Jones: Camera, Disco, Studio Jimmy Robert: Akimbo

26 September 2020 – 24 May 2021

<https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/record/vr-exhibitions-grace-before-jones-and-jim-r-robert-akimbo/>

Introduction to the exhibitions



Nottingham Contemporary presented two exhibitions that explore how performance and art can be used to disrupt and complicate ideas and assumptions about identities, particularly in relation to gender and race. Image-making and performance with the body is used to ask questions about representation, appropriation and resistance.

In Galleries 1 & 2 the life and work of the performer and icon Grace Jones is explored through artworks, film, fashion, design and music, by bringing together more than 100 works by 50 artists. The exhibition presents a multifaceted portrait of the Jamaican singer, song writer, record producer, model and actor.

Her career from the 1970s up to the current day has been remarkable for her collaborations with artists, musicians, photographers and fashion designers. Including, Azzedine Alaïa, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Robert Mapplethorpe and Andy Warhol.

The largest-ever UK exhibition by Guadeloupe-born French artist Jimmy Robert is in Galleries 3, 4 & 5. Performance gesture, intimacy and touch lie at the heart of Jimmy's work, which engages with questions about visibility and invisibility. *Akimbo* draws together sculpture, installation, film, video, text and works on paper from the past 20 years.

Our exhibitions can be used to spark imaginations and debates, build confidences and support core skills for learning. This exhibition can connect to the following subject areas: Art and Design, Photography and Film, Fashion, Music, Performing Arts, Design and Technology, Literacy, Politics, Sociology, Citizenship.

Grace Before Jones: Camera, Disco, Studio

The exhibition in two parts; one in each gallery. Each part divided into chapters.

Gallery 1 - 'RIGHT LIGHT'

This gallery presents the singer's rise to fame and looks behind-the-scenes at the construction of her image-making and music.

ARTISTS' ENTRANCE This chapter refers to Grace's origins in Jamaica and includes a photo of her taken by an anonymous photographer in 1970, a very different image of her to later publicity shots and portraits.



AN UNRULY CHRONOLOGY OF THE ULTRABLACK IN GRACE When Grace Jones first started modelling in New York, she was told that she didn't share the features of "black beauty" standards - "Your face doesn't fit. You are really black and your lips are big but your nose is too thin and your eyes are too slanty". This Chapter shows images over the past 50 years of Grace and by other artists that play with different skin tones. Grace said " I wanted to be invisible, unmarked, too elusive to be domesticated. Oddly enough, I did this by standing out, often by accentuating details about myself that were down to the colour of my skin."

INTERVIEWS Alongside magazine covers are two art video interviews of Grace Jones. One shows Grace talking to her hairdresser in French, as she gets ready for a performance. The second comes from Andy Warhol's MTV talk show Fifteen Minutes (the title from his famous line: "In the future everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes") which embodies much of Warhol's philosophy of blending of art and pop culture.

PROTO-DISCO This Chapter shows archives from Sigma Studios where Grace recorded her first disco albums in the late 1970s.

GRACE & THE MACHINE In 1979, Grace Jones had her face moulded to produce multiple ultra-realist masks. Her voice is quite machine-like and she is pictured here with cars and other machines, becoming almost a 'cyborg', part woman, part machine.



GOOD GRACE GOUDE JONES In the late 1970s, Grace Jones developed a harder-edged image, and her music began to blend dub, rock and electro. The way her records were sampled could be compared to the way in which Jean-Paul Goude manipulated her image for the famous *Island Life* album cover. This work gives us a fresh view of the image that became central to the myth of Grace Jones. It can be used to explore how images are constructed and presented and to reflect on how black female bodies can be viewed and fetishised.

GRACE REVISED AND UPDATED, Jean-Paul Goude 1978

REHEARSALS FOR... This chapter displays rehearsal and backstage situations; in particular Tseng Kwong Chi's photographs of Grace being painted by Keith Haring and a moving portrait of Grace as a ballerina by photographer Ming Smith.

Gallery 2 - 'NIGHT SITE'

The second part of the show shows Grace Jones centre-stage of the glamorous yet turbulent worlds of fashion and nightclubs. The Chapters for this gallery are:

...A DANCEFLOOR. In the 1980s and 90s plenty of art could be found in New York's clubs, including works by graffiti artist turned painter, Jean-Michel Basquiat, who became friends with Andy Warhol. This section has a club atmosphere, with dramatic lighting programmed around a playlist of all of Grace Jones's 83 songs. A different track was played each day of the exhibition and the list is shown on the door.

PODIUMS The central section of the gallery is a cross between a catwalk, a dancefloor and a stage. It looks into the relationships between performance, fashion and club culture. Fashion designers Azzedine Alaïa, Patrick Kelly and Issey Miyake have been instrumental in devising with Grace her image at various moments of her career. In the mid-1980s, she featured in movies such



Installation shot of Nottingham Contemporary, 2020

as Conan the Destroyer (1984) and the James Bond film A View to a Kill (1985), for which Alaia created her outfits.

There are also artworks by contemporary artists who use fashion as inspiration. A series of photos by Robert Mapplethorpe and commissioned by Andy Warhol, show Grace with her body painted by street artist and painter Keith Haring. This collaboration between world-renown artists shows how Grace was part of the New York community of artists who embraced alternative lifestyles.



'Grace Jones', Robert Mapplethorpe 1984

Copyright Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, used by permission

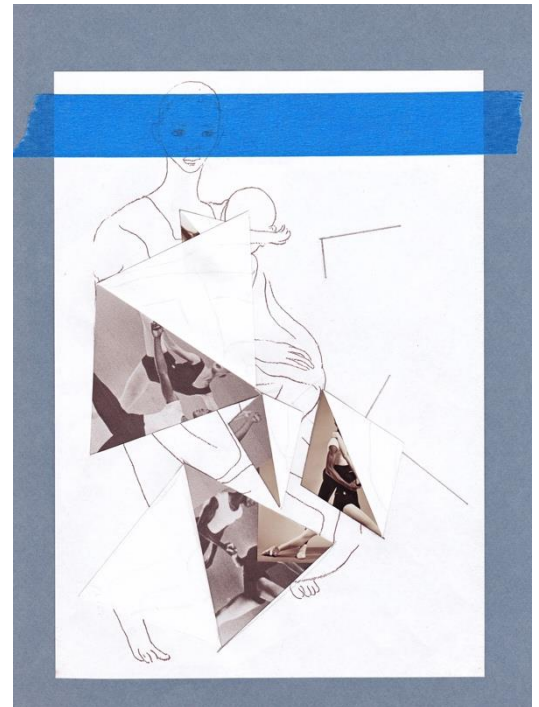
CURTAIN CALL The death of many of Grace's collaborators in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s marks a clear shift in her career. Keith Haring, Robert Mapplethorpe, Antonio Lopez, Richard Bernstein, Patrick Kelly, Larry Levan, David Spada, Tseng Kwong Chi, Willi Smith--all died of AIDS-related complications. This final section is a space of mourning and melancholy, but also a space that still wants the party to continue.

Jimmy Robert: Akimbo

Gallery 3, 4 & 5

The French artist Jimmy Robert was born in Guadeloupe (Caribbean Islands still part of French territories today in 1975, grew up in Paris and now lives in Berlin, Germany. Jimmy's artwork crosses between performance and visual art. He uses his body in filmed performances, photographs and other mixed media artworks. He explores ideas about visibility and invisibility for black and LGBTQ people and how what you do with your body can become a political act. The title *Akimbo*, meaning 'with hands on hips', refers to a posture with a certain defiance, or attitude of resistance.

Robert uses simple materials such as paper and tape in his wall-based collages, showing the delicate traces of the artist's movements and gestures. He uses folding, cutting, layering and erasing to explore both the possibilities of the material and the ideas and themes within his work. He makes prints of drawings of bodies onto silk, some of which are suspended in Gallery 3.



'Untitled (Agon)', Jimmy Robert, 2015



Untitled (Ompdrailles), Jimmy Robert 2013
Courtesy of FRAC Grand Large, Dunkerque

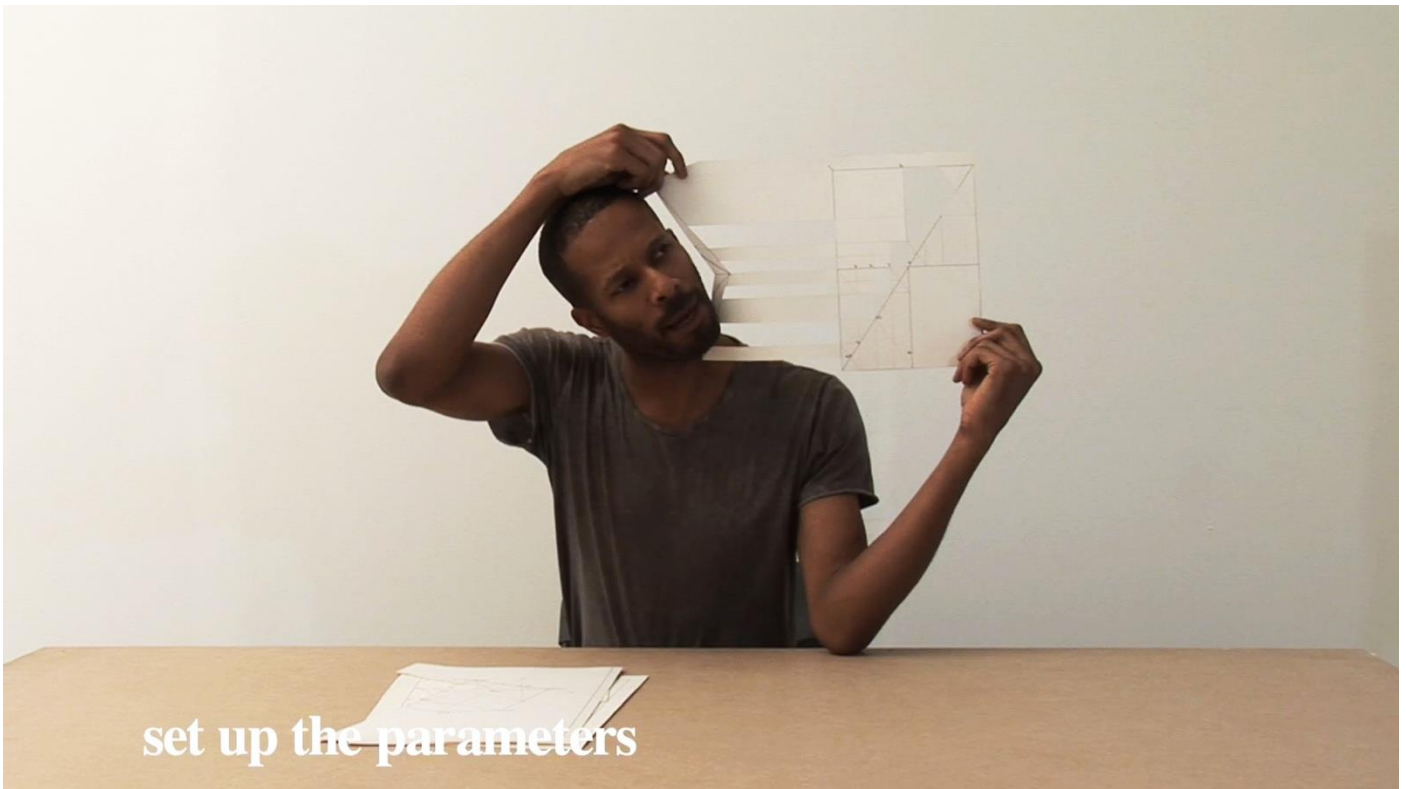
'Untitled (Ompdrailles)', also in Gallery 3 is a large black and white photo hanging from a wooden beam fixed at right angles to the wall. The photo shows a monument in Brussels showing a scene from French author Leon Cladel's novel, *Ompdrailles, le tombeau des lutteurs (The Tomb of the Wrestlers)*. Cladel tells the story of Albe Ompdrailles, a famous and handsome wrestler of who falls in love with an unattainable woman. In the sculpture Ompdrailles' trainer (and admirer) carries away his dead body after a match.

Jimmy Robert can also be seen in this photo, lying on the plinth on which the monument stands. This intervention with a public monument seems very relevant today because of current conversations about how history is sometimes misrepresented through statues.

Robert makes props for his performances which are then shown in the gallery as artworks in their own right. Descendances Du Nu (Velvet)' in Gallery 4 is a curtain from a performance of the same name.

In his films, such as the Super-8 film *Brown Leatherette* (2002) in Gallery 4 and the video *Paramètres* (Parameters, 2012) in Gallery 5 he challenges the barriers put up to prevent people like him having power in society by using his body to show his presence and his resistance.

The way Robert's own subjectivity as a queer black person shapes his work reveals how gender and race affect how we understand and connect to art and history.



Paramètres, Jimmy Robert 2012
Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin

Exhibition Content/Assessing Risks

We advise you to complete your own risk assessment. The following page sets out details you may wish to consider in your risk assessment prior to virtually visiting our exhibition through our website.

Please note, the exhibition contains film with flashing effects and images of mild nudity. The team are more than happy to advise and support you to plan your visit.

Grace Before Jones: Camera, Disco, Studio

Gallery 1: The space is populated with images of Grace Jones defining notions of black beauty, reflecting the imagery and attitudes of its time. One of the first images is of a very young Grace Jones wearing a necklace that almost resembles a collar.

In another image of Grace Jones performing at the Palladium, her face is painted white. There is a film of Grace Jones' body being painted by the artist Keith Haring with white patterns reminiscent of African tribal patterns. There is a section of the exhibition exploring Grace's relationship with machines, including images of her advertisements with the car manufacturers Citroën and how Grace embodies aspects of the cyborg.

Gallery 2: As you move around the space the lighting changes to a deep purple and blue. There is a wooden panel structure with large drawings of pills and drug references on it.

There is a film on a low TV monitor as shown in the image, called 'How to operate your brain' It contains flashing images and drug and violence references.



Along a back corridor there are some nude images of Grace Jones in water in which you can see some parts of her upper body. Against the back wall there are 3 large photos of Grace Jones painted in white tribal patterns, similar to the film of her being painted in Gallery 1