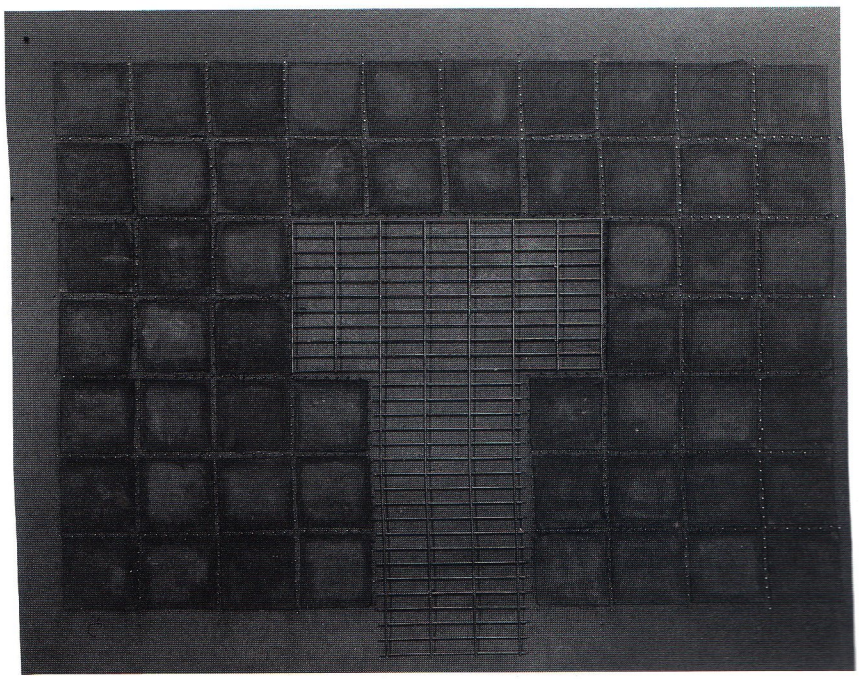
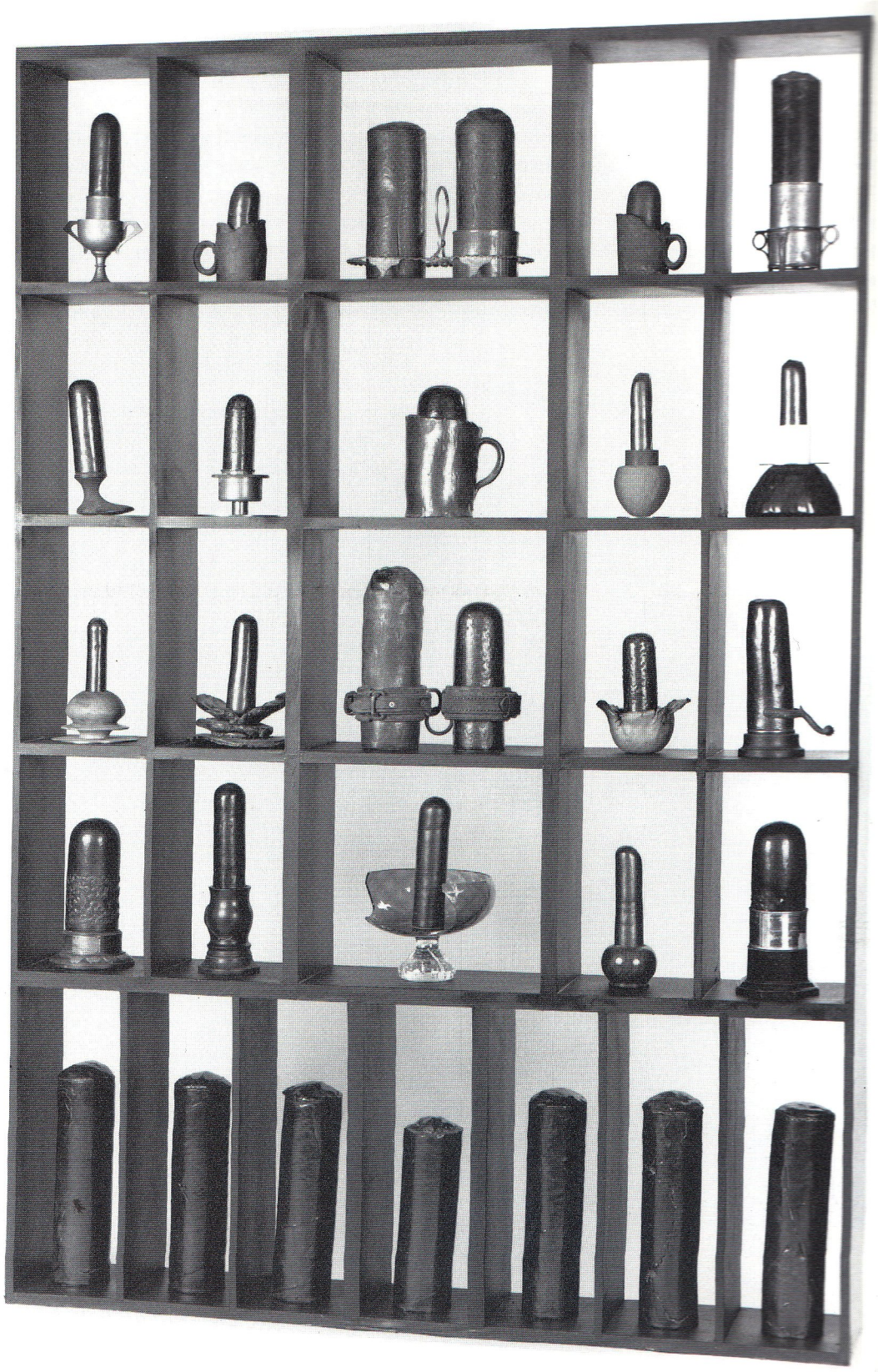
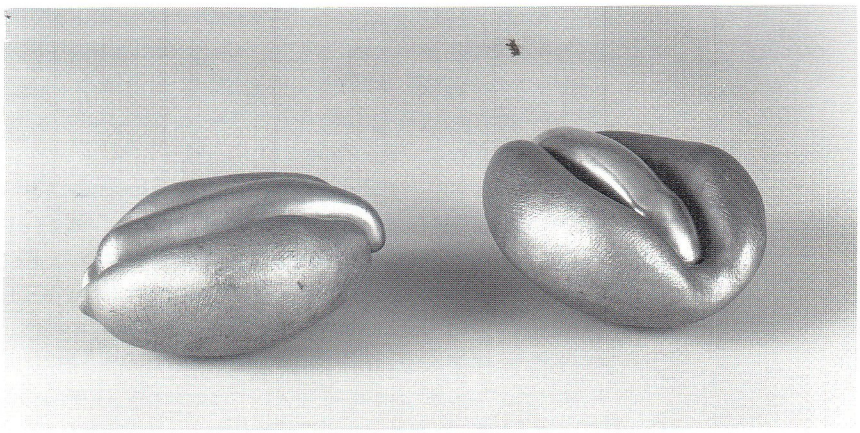
**Donald Locke** believes in Postmodernism because he likes to borrow from numerous sources; and borrowing he does unashamedly: 'I now use any material at hand, and without the old inhibitions which still operate with deadening effect in many of the studios in Britain.'[15] He infuses a new meaning into the 'borrowed' objects by turning their original meaning or *raison d'être* upside-down. Brancusi's *Bird in Flight* thus becomes an opened up space or empty vessel.



**Donald Locke**
*Dageraad from the Air*
1978



**Donald Locke**
*Trophies of Empire*
c.1975



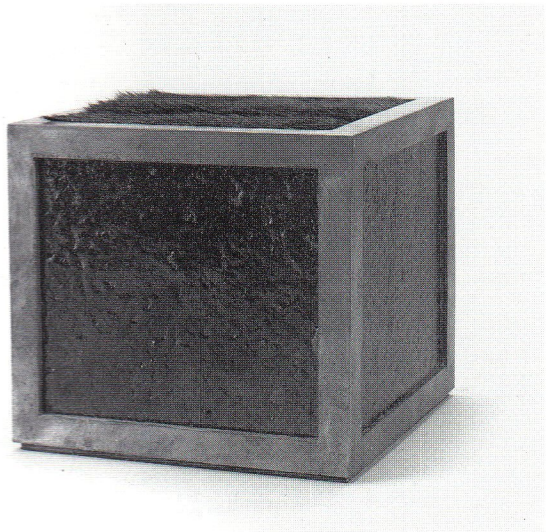
**Donald Locke**
*Two sculptures from A Ritual Fertility Suite*
1970-2

Locke was born in 1930 in Guyana, formerly a British colony, in a village between two plantations. It seems that the memory of his childhood experiences, the historical associations evoked by plantations, have remained part of Locke's perception of the world, which he expresses in his work with baffling complexity.

He studied painting under Burrowes, and won a British Council scholarship to go to England in 1954. After studying pottery and sculpture at Bath Academy, he took a degree in Fine Art at Edinburgh University and then went back to Guyana, to teach and also to paint. Dissatisfied with his work, however, he returned to the medium of sculpture.

In 1971 he came to London to live, and set up his studio. During this time he concentrated on mixed-media sculpture and ceramics. However, I did not come across his work until 1978, during an exhibition called 'Afro-Caribbean Art'. My first impression was not very good, except for *Trophies of Empire* which somehow I did like. 'Donald Locke's other works, like *Seed Pot*, show his competence as a craftsman. One would, however, like to see him come out of the cocoon of his sexual fantasies and come to terms with the outside world as well.'[16]

**Donald Locke**
*Black Tapir Box*
c.1977



It was a rash and hard comment, and I realized this when I visited his studio a year later. Locke was not happy to see me, but I was thrilled by what I saw. Soon afterwards he left for America, never to come back. When my article was reprinted in 1984, I wrote a postscript: 'Sometime . . . after I had written this article, I had a chance to see more of Locke's work in his studio, and as a result of this, I now believe that his attitude to sexuality, or the way he deals with it, is complex and goes beyond mere fantasy. It is different from common Western perception, which is mechanical and guilt-ridden. In Locke's work, sexuality is not seen as an expression of two *different* genders in a constant struggle to assert their *own* selves, but as a whole with two equal constituents, a male-female relationship in which energy is pleasurably exchanged. It is also my view now that Donald Locke is an important contemporary artist, and it is a pity he has left this country to live in America.'[17]

One can't, of course, talk about the celebration of sexuality in abstract terms without locating it in specific cultural and historical spaces, when contradictions of gender differences begin to emerge in social relationships. Locke's work addresses these contradictions, but they are not resolved. The difficulty of resolution is to do with the historical reality they allude to, the history of colonialism and slavery.

**Donald Locke**
*Plantation Blairmont*
1974

In America he rearranged all his London work in an installation:

'Locke's room uses sculpture in a punning manner, aligning the cylinder to the sugarcane, the male lingam shields, the female back; the bird with a chest to a pot; the wall boards with those of cabin walls. But, independent of this symbolic punning, each form also enters a plastic punning rhythm by reflecting and playing against one another's shapes and echoing and balancing these in different parts of the room.'[18]

Locke knew from the very beginning that he could not deal with this reality in a significant way by deploying a narrative that would evoke simple anecdotal sequences, or by trying to salvage his identity through some cultural essentialism, invoking his blackness or ethnicity. It was not merely a question of recovering one's history but also re-inscribing it in the discourse of a dominant

culture. While trying to cope with his existential needs, he knew that he needed a camouflage, for his own self and for others. The dialectics of reconciliation demand that the perpetrator is not made to feel guilty of past misdeeds; and yet the story must be told:

'I don't see the "form" of Guyana reflected in the form of sculpture. Even if this were so, I would want to hide this connection . . . So I have to give clues and directions which lead away from the thing in my head and in my body and let viewers have an explanation and understanding of their own. This is often very difficult to achieve — one's art can be very transparent at times.'[19]

Locke's work scans his own history as well as that of Modernism, juxtaposing fragments of his own memory with the forms he 'borrows', and it is at the point of juxtaposition that both loss and desire come into significant play: 'Locke's forms in their cabinets or sections resonate as displaced elements of a hermetic historical narrative inviting us to reflect upon them again and again.'[20]

**Donald Locke**
*The Birth of Empire No. 2*
1989