

Medium  
Date  
Event  
Web address

Web  
September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
'Bits, Boobs and Bullets': Donald Locke and Anderson  
Borba  
<https://artreview.com/donald-locke-anderson-borba-bodily-forms/>

Publication  
Author  
Artist

ArtReview  
Oliver Basciano  
Anderson Borba

## 'Bits, Boobs and Bullets': Donald Locke and Anderson Borba

Oliver Basciano   Reviews   17 September 2025   ArtReview



Donald Locke, *Plain Tales of Raj #2*, 1990. Photo: Rob Harris. Courtesy the Estate of Donald Locke and Alison Jacques, London

### Working generations apart, both artists use the bodily form as a vehicle for self-expression and preservation

Blackness, nothingness, the void: this is the ur-state of every origin story from Genesis to the Big Bang. Three black paintings hung side-by-side open Donald Locke's retrospective, and depending on your mood or point of view, these are either funereal or mark a moment of life's inception. *Barracoon I* (1978) is a monochrome onto which the late Guyanese artist tacked 53 canvas squares, likewise painted black, shaped to represent the entrance of a tunnel. This sense of a Malevichian abyss continues in *63 Black Squares* (1978–79), a patchwork grid of black canvas squares, and

Medium  
Date  
Event  
Web address

Web  
September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
'Bits, Boobs and Bullets': Donald Locke and Anderson  
Borba  
<https://artreview.com/donald-locke-anderson-borba-bodily-forms/>

Publication  
Author  
Artist

ArtReview  
Oliver Basciano  
Anderson Borba

more grimly in *The Cage* (1976–79), another black patchwork grid, this time the canvas interrupted by cagelike metal grilles, painted black, which frame a square of black fur stitched behind it. From Locke's use of black, which continued throughout his 50-year career, form emerges: the retrospective quickly establishes the artist's work beyond the canvas through a series of biomorphic pots, spanning the 1960s to the 1980s, collected on a multilevel stage. Bodily bits, boobs and bottoms bulge forth, smoothly rounded into near abstraction; their blackness reflective, their obvious tactility seductive, the shininess of the black glaze giving the barely practical receptacles a fetishistic feel.

Locke's most famous work, *Trophies of Empire* (1972–74), looks over this scene. The sculpture became something of a cause célèbre when shown in 1989 as part of *The Other Story*, the landmark Rasheed Araeen-curated exhibition of Black and Asian postwar British art at the

Hayward Gallery in London. The work's sense of violence and violation still shocks. A black wood shelving unit with a series of compartments hosts a series of found candlesticks, trophies and other knickknacky receptacles sourced from antiques markets. These ornaments each hold unevenly thick, cylindrical black ceramic forms that Locke described as 'bullets' but that he also, clearly, intended to have phallic connotations. Lead or cock, the idea of the body entered, possibly violated, is entrenched. Two of the girthiest of these bullets appear in old leather shackles, connotations again of fetishism, but also, given the title, of African enslavement.

From here *Resistant Forms* becomes messier in form and even more political in tone. Locke developed his bricolage painting further, canvases pasted with colonial-era photographs of Africa, *National Geographic*-style reportage of Guyana, press shots of the British royals and documentation of his own sculptural works. Invariably these images are partially obscured by great grimy impasto strokes, wide and rough, of black paint. In *Plain Tales of Raj #2* (1990), documentation of a graceful blue sculpture Locke created of Sarah Baartman, a Khoekhoe woman (from South Africa) exhibited in freakshows under the moniker the 'Hottentot Venus', is shown alongside portraits of Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, and a wildlife shot of a roaring lion. Locke's original sculpture of Baartman, bold and beautiful, her posterior held proudly (and not as the 'curiosity' that once made it a carnival attraction), stands on a plinth nearby.

Medium  
Date  
Event  
Web address

Web  
September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
'Bits, Boobs and Bullets': Donald Locke and Anderson  
Borba  
<https://artreview.com/donald-locke-anderson-borba-bodily-forms/>

Publication  
Author  
Artist

ArtReview  
Oliver Basciano  
Anderson Borba



Anderson Borba, *Grace*, 2025, wood, fabric, oil paint, pigment, oil pastel and shellac, 183 x 25 x 33 cm. Photo: Michal Brzezinski. Courtesy the artist; The Approach, London; and Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo

Locke's project was one of abused and resilient bodies. At The Approach, in London, Anderson Borba has also created a collection of ten figures: roughly hewn wooden totems, lanky and around human-height, are installed across the gallery like distressed Giacomettis.

Each artist anthropomorphises their materials, playing with them to suggest emotional or historical resonances that are at times embossed with cruelty, while at others celebratory. Borba's sculptures are layered in paper or have been blasted with a blowtorch, giving the London-based Brazilian's work a palette similar to Locke's in its darkness. *Line Body* (all works 2025) features a block of charred wood chipped into a spindly upright figure, the crevice marks inherent in its making highlighted in an array of muted and smudged specks of pink, blue and auburn pigments. At the

Medium  
Date  
Event  
Web address

Web  
September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
'Bits, Boobs and Bullets': Donald Locke and Anderson  
Borba  
<https://artreview.com/donald-locke-anderson-borba-bodily-forms/>

Publication  
Author  
Artist

ArtReview  
Oliver Basciano  
Anderson Borba

bottom a wooden block acts as ballast to this precarious figure. Much of the wood of *Black Halo* is left raw, and only the upper half, including the wooden sphere that heads it, has been subject to fire. Two holes have been hollowed out in the main body of the sculpture, reminiscent of a pair of highly abstracted arms placed on hips. A tasselled band of leather has been threaded through one of these appendages, but where the material felt weighted with trauma in Locke's *Trophies of Empire*, Borba is using it as a particularly sassy accessory.

Despite such levity, Borba, two generations younger, conjures his own intensity through a quiet disorientation. His sculptures share the kaleidoscopic quality Locke parlays but take it up a notch. His figures have been hewn down to their most abstract silhouette, but are rich in bewildering detail the closer you stare. In *Analog Ghost* a headlike oval of wood rests on a bodily totem, but a section cut out, like a face appearing through a ski mask, reveals a bricolage of paper, stones and plaster. Strips ripped from glossy magazines or printed from the internet are layered on this surface, details of flowers and pixelated fleshy tones conjuring different levels of legibility. Collaging appears too in a series of wall-based tablets: ticker-tape paper featuring food products, faces and more merge together like a murky Anselm Kiefer or Gerhard Richter in the diptych *Fluke*; another, *For Luck*, owes a debt to the modernism of Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth in its combination of four organic parts (one the shape of an eye, another an ear, the final two unclassifiable), covered in paper scraps of crowd scenes and natural-history details that have mostly been further obliterated by paint. Yet from within these Eurocentric references Blackness remains the leitmotif, each work either predominant in dark pigment or charred with a blowtorch, with allusions to race made by formal resonance rather than rhetoric. *Hanging* is a burned rectangular wall-hung block of wood, violently bisected in the middle; *Grace* is a more whimsical work but no less powerful in its poise, the floor-standing totem flat-topped, reminiscent of Grace Jones's iconic haircut. In both

Medium	Web	Publication	ArtReview
Date	September 17 <sup>th</sup> , 2025	Author	Oliver Basciano
Event	'Bits, Boobs and Bullets': Donald Locke and Anderson Borba	Artist	Anderson Borba
Web address	<a href="https://artreview.com/donald-locke-anderson-borba-bodily-forms/">https://artreview.com/donald-locke-anderson-borba-bodily-forms/</a>		

Borba's and Locke's work, blackness both formal and symbolic becomes a story of trauma and creation, but one expressed in the confluence of each artist's times. Locke used a powerful mode of directness as his weapon, but in Borba's hands the politics is subtler, though no less striking for it: an identity expressed through self-reflection and an emotional tactility.

**Donald Locke – Resistant Forms at Spike Island, Bristol, 31 May – 7 September;**  
**Anderson Borba – Secret Ceremony at The Approach, London, 5 June – 26 July**

*From the September 2025 issue of ArtReview – [get your copy](#).*

**Oliver Basciano**   Reviews   17 September 2025   ArtReview