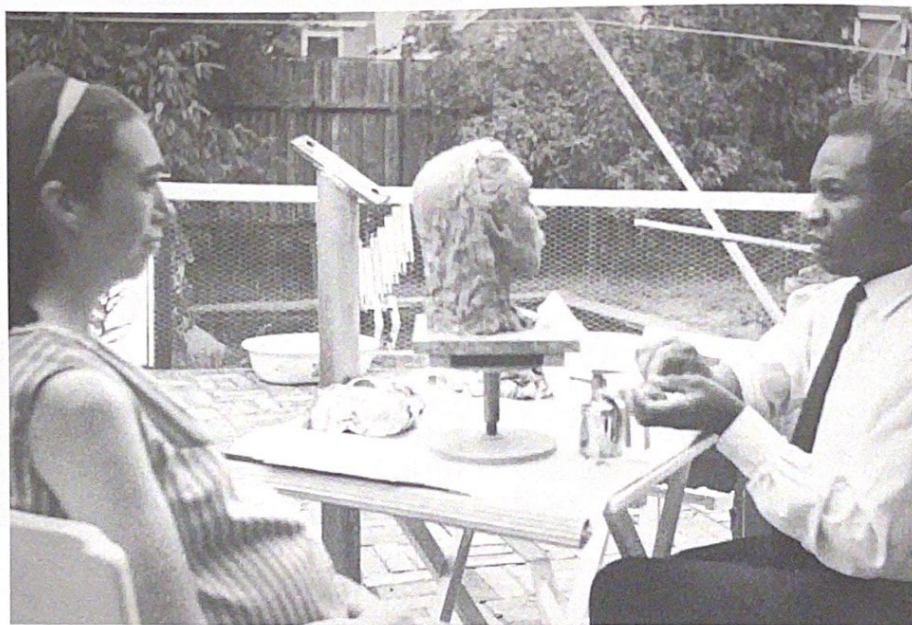


## From the Mould

HELEN CAMMOCK on the obstacles faced by her father,  
a self-taught ceramicist in postwar Britain



Patricia and George, 1968. Courtesy: Helen Cammock

**A CERAMIC PAINTING HANGS ON MY LIVING ROOM WALL** – ethereal yet earthy, in my mind it has always been an abstract landscape, textured with the deep colour palette of the late 1960s. Our home was full of my father's ceramic works – displayed and used because my father wanted to see them and for them to be seen, but for him, there was seemingly nowhere else for this to happen. So, an Okapi pair was the centrepiece on a chest of drawers on our landing, his ceramic pots appeared in every room as plant holders, pen pots, pieces of art and wastepaper bins. They were multi-functional in our lives, but always bold, with a wondrous slippage in colour and glaze-cover and form. We drank from mugs he'd made for us and had tiles he'd designed next to our beds to hold glasses of night-time water. In the mid-1960s, my father had wooed my mother with small ceramic animals and other pieces that he brought to her each time her library van returned to the secondary modern school where he taught. In other words, we all *lived* my father's ceramics.

*We all lived my  
father's ceramics.*

Helen Cammock

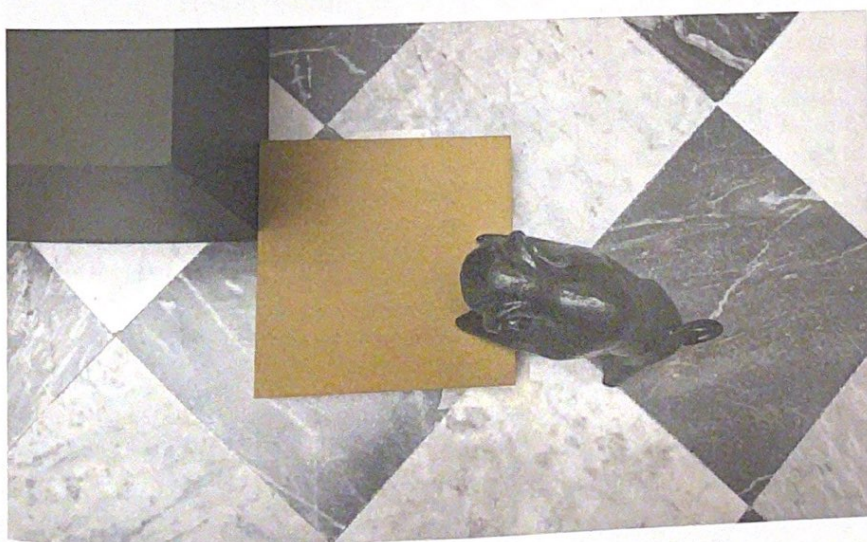


My father was 'voluntarily conscripted' into World War II, aged 18, only to be returned to Jamaica after the war, having been given a very short teacher training course. It was only after my father died, as I went through his house, that I found a letter he'd kept along with others of significance from his life, in which one course tutor had clearly written: *George Cammock is a very talented artist and I strongly recommend he be found a place at an art school.* This of course never happened because my father was repatriated to Jamaica with other servicemen, forced to leave behind his wife and small child. It took him a year of letters to the Home Office and working many different jobs to afford the passage back to the UK to be with his family. But then he had to work (not imagine art school) so he became a teacher – an art teacher. And this is where he honed his skills. Materials and kilns. Evenings at the wheel. Books he got from the library or bought. He experimented, I now know, with glazing and different ways of working the clay.

I found his moulds – still intact – in his damp garage. With the support of the team at the art school in Wolverhampton, the town in which he taught art for a decade, I have re-worked them, in order that they have a new face, a new conversation with a film I made in 2014: an imagined conversation with and around him – as father and as ceramicist. This is part of my offer for the touring British Art Show 9. The film, *Changing Room*, has his ceramic pieces as characters ghosting the screen and somehow engendering this conversation. When shown in an exhibition curated by Lubaina Himid at Hollybush Gardens in 2016, a ceramic Okapi formed part of an installation and sat in the gallery office for some time, before and after the show. It was a talking piece of the office, for curators and collectors alike, who appreciated something in his work that he knew was there all along. In these moments, he crossed from amateur to professional without even knowing – perhaps because of context, perhaps a re-configured gaze. But *he* always knew what he could do: his greatest sadness was feeling that others didn't ●



**This page**  
Helen Cammock,  
*Changing Room*, 2014,  
film stills. Courtesy:  
© Helen Cammock  
and LUX



**Helen Cammock** is an artist. She was the joint recipient of the 2019 Turner Prize. Her solo exhibition at STUK, Leuven, Belgium, runs until 14 November and her new film, *Concrete Feather and Porcelain Tacks*, co-commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella, The Photographers' Gallery and Contemporary Art Society, is on view at The Photographers' Gallery, London, UK, and Touchstones Rochdale, UK, until February 2022. Her work is also included in the British Art Show 9, which tours various venues across the UK until 4 September 2022. She lives in London and Brighton, UK.