

“Shit-Starter”
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Ajamu, pronounced ‘ah-JAH-moo’ is a self-claimed ‘phonographer’ based in London and Amsterdam. His images have the now-you-see-it-now-you-don’t, push and pull effect of iridescent cloth seen from alternating angles and in varying light. We may love the blue sheen but are repelled by the violet counterpoint that is just as crucial to the cloth’s personality as the blue we so love. We are at once attracted and repelled. His creations present dichotomies that wiggle inside the psyche. They jostle in the head, in the soul, and in the hearts like magnets or wrestlers struggling, each, to be on top. They simply fuck with you.

Outspoken would be an understatement in describing the ideas and philosophy of Ajamu. He describes his work as “challenging and innovative works that cuts through the bullshit surrounding the way those of us with culturally –forbidden lifestyles and desires are represented (or hidden) by Western Society.” A mouthful. Indeed, a state Ajamu would not deny enjoying.

One has to be on point when exchanging words with this brother, as his sharp mind will seize any opening to infuse his favourite subject-Sex. Sex, freaky and without apology. But it is not sex for sex sake; it is sex with a mission. A mission which for Ajamu is sometimes about getting a nut, but more about extracting and challenging the politicization of who we choose to share our genitals with, and in what acts.

Take for instance an Ajamu image now infamous. It pictures an incredible hard, beautiful, veiny, black dick, jutting out from its owner like a horizontal flagpole. It is gripped by a man’s hand sheathed in a black Chantilly lace glove. When one looks at the photograph, there is that push and pull. One is taken by what is obviously a pretty dick, but that experience of lust is contradicted by the delicateness of the lace. A visceral sensation is layered on top of both of these as one imagines the friction and abrasion that would be felt by masturbating thusly. And so, the lace takes on a kind of sandpaper effect. Ajamu describes the image as “...a subversion, or play off of the iconic black power image of the sixties.” Indeed the phallic image of the clenched fists thrust defiantly in the air may be THE most enduring icon of the era, with perfectly –patted and Afro- Sheened Afros coming in a close second. He goes on to explain that by replacing the leather glove with a lace one, and juxtaposing it with the hardness of the penis, he is contrasting the feminine with the masculine, and thereby questing narrow definitions of black masculinity. “One a personal level, nothing beats seeing a beautiful, black, erect cock”

A shallow assessment of Ajamu’s work might make it appear that he is living for the punch –line, merely to get a rise (pun intended) from the viewer. Nay. While his work is by design (partly) created to get a response, there is an

undeniable artistry and conceptual forethought, an inherent integrity, which never compromises craft and rarely misses the bull's eye. " My role is not to create "pretty images"

Indeed, his images unsettle and challenge us not to only see differently, but actively. A visit to a website that features his most recent work, shows sepia – toned photographs shot in an almost anthropological style. One gets a feeling that one is looking as a circus freak show. A black man with a tale. A black man, half man, half woman. A black man who is just a torso on a wrought – iron pedestal. These images rock one's sensibilities with their weight and masterful execution. One almost things that they are pulled from some musty museum attic. Ajamu is drawing on the rich, if warped, mythology of racism and sexism. His images never say one thing, but are layered dissertations. " I like pushing buttons'

I showed a friend the website. He was repelled by Ajamu's work saying that there was " no beauty'. Ajamu posits that culture has been tied up with a narrow definition of beauty. " Since the ancient Greeks [sic]." He offers the proof that the male nudes by queer photographers. " The are still obsessed by the Greco-Roman tradition. White and black photographers have not really moved on from the 1960's physique magazines.

His work is memorable and always original, stalking the viewer like kitschy pictures of Jesus. You know the ones with the eyes that seem to follow one around the room. His work has a way of working itself into the psyche, taking up residence like a squatter. " I want people to think" If a picture is worth a thousand words, one of Ajamu's is worth ten thousand.

" My goal is not only to leave a legacy, but to leave a stain within British culture" The school that he comes from includes Essex Hemphill, Colin Robinson, Cary Alan Johnson, Alan Bell, Gregory Victorienne and the list goes on. " I have no fear. I do what I do because it's the cultural baton that was passed on"

Yes, his work takes one out of the comfort zone. It may even fuck with your day; by making you think about shit you'd rather forget. It's nothing personal. He intends to fuck with everybody.