



### Sunil Gupta, *Ajamu*

**Standpoint** (Photography)

The trick with 'issue art' is defining where the issue ends and the art begins. An HIV-positive, gay Asian man, Sunil Gupta displays a double stigma not only to society in general, but to the two particular communities he belongs to. Yet his work has a graceful, philosophical tone, which elevates it above the specifics of his situation. The method is simple; Gupta has photographed himself going through the stations of HIV – blood tests, medication – and also just standing around naked indoors,

baring himself in all senses. Each photo is paired with an image of a south London gay club's exterior in the daytime; scruffy, foreboding facades. This linking works well. Both sides emphasise the morning-after, flipside of hedonism; the private – Gupta's condition – is made public, while the public place is closed to outsiders, perhaps also to the artist himself, its blankness underlining the current low media profile accorded to Aids/HIV. The offhand presentation helps, rather than hinders; it's as direct and unexpectedly complicated as life itself.

Showing Gupta with *Ajamu* makes obvious thematic sense; the latter is a gay,

black man. But his work is comparatively strident. Digitally-reworked archive prints of black circus freaks – bearded girls and an androgyne with one breast, coyly covering his/her genitals – are balanced by more explosive self-portraits. *Ajamu* is pictured with three legs and, memorably, with no limbs at all, displayed like the Venus de Milo. The shock value of his art tends to overshadow its engagement with notions of spectacle, exoticism and alternative histories. These photographs are certainly memorable, but perhaps for the wrong reasons.

*Martin Herbert*