

Nick Makoha

CODEX©

SAMO© first appears as a tag on a New York City wall in 1978 two blocks down from Aswad bookstore. It is a kind of CODEX© to speak the unspeakable as if it were a confession on redbrick or brownstone in the hard years. Downtown was Jean’s street studio. So were the fridge, TV, wall and floor in the apartment. He saw no division between earth and sky. To call it graffiti is to call hieroglyphics gibberish. That’s ignorant. This is Jean-Michel ordering a tequila to test his outer limits. It’s a summer night and we have rented two 35mm cameras. He’s figured out that a painting is stronger than memory, passports, planes, and nicotine. Curtains drawn. Wood scavenged. Paint and unpaid rent.

After red wine he swears he heard the wall say —*Let your wrists be free*. In the face of all this, he was kin to me. This is a photograph of Jean-Michel after the ten-minute set at the Mudd Club. He says—*It’s not me*, and shows more interest in the streetlamp above us. Look the camera is guessing. Selfhood is a controlled hallucination generated by the brain. The night is a black moon. The Empire State Building has always been a lead character in his inner movie. From the loft, it glows orange. This is Jean-Michel, and he says—*If you can’t see my three-point crown you should see a doctor*. He is divided and dying for a piss. He presents as an image of a man and as matter in motion.