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Creating Their Own Image: The History Of African-American Women Artists



Synopsis

Creating Their Own Image marks the first comprehensive history of African-American women artists, from slavery to the present day. Using an analysis of stereotypes of Africans and African-Americans in western art and culture as a springboard, Lisa E. Farrington here richly details hundreds of important works--many of which deliberately challenge these same identity myths, of the carnal Jezebel, the asexual Mammy, the imperious Matriarch--in crafting a portrait of artistic creativity unprecedented in its scope and ambition. In these lavishly illustrated pages, some of which feature images never before published, we learn of the efforts of Elizabeth Keckley, fashion designer to Mary Todd Lincoln; the acclaimed sculptor Edmonia Lewis, internationally renowned for her neoclassical works in marble; and the artist Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and her innovative teaching techniques. We meet Laura Wheeler Waring who portrayed women of color as members of a socially elite class in stark contrast to the prevalent images of compliant maids, impoverished malcontents, and exotics "others" that proliferated in the inter-war period. We read of the painter Barbara Jones-Hogu's collaboration on the famed Wall of Respect, even as we view a rare photograph of Hogu in the process of painting the mural. Farrington expertly guides us through the fertile period of the Harlem Renaissance and the "New Negro Movement," which produced an entirely new crop of artists who consciously imbued their work with a social and political agenda, and through the tumultuous, explosive years of the civil rights movement. Drawing on revealing interviews with numerous contemporary artists, such as Betye Saar, Faith Ringgold, Nanette Carter, Camille Billops, Xenobia Bailey, and many others, the second half of Creating Their Own Image probes more recent stylistic developments, such as abstraction, conceptualism, and post-modernism, never losing sight of the struggles and challenges that have consistently influenced this body of work. Weaving together an expansive collection of artists, styles, and periods, Farrington argues that for centuries African-American women artists have created an alternative vision of how women of color can, are, and might be represented in American culture. From utilitarian objects such as quilts and baskets to a wide array of fine arts, Creating Their Own Image serves up compelling evidence of the fundamental human need to convey one's life, one's emotions, one's experiences, on a canvas of one's own making.

Book Information

Hardcover: 368 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (December 30, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 019516721X

ISBN-13: 978-0195167214

Product Dimensions: 11.3 x 1.1 x 8.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

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Customer Reviews

Although it arrives at the 1960s only a third of the way in, this first textbook on African-American women artists is brimming with discoveries. Farrington, who teaches a course (from which this book takes its name) at New York's Parsons School of Design, proceeds roughly chronologically, beginning with Reconstruction-era weaving and quilt work by artists like Kentucky's Louiza Francis Combs and with the marble sculpture of Edmonia Lewis. Few of the names are familiar, and few of the works in conventional media arresting, until Farrington reaches contemporary pieces and artists. Farrington is the author of two monographs on painter Faith Ringgold, and her appreciation for and mastery of recent work comes through on every page. Most of the 150 color and 100 b&w reproductions, generally placed at the margins of the text but sized generously, are from this period, from Carol Ann Carter's installations to Laylah Ali's colorful and disturbing graphic work. The result makes for a terrific introduction to contemporary art by African-American women as informed by a legacy that is just beginning to be pieced together and understood. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The story of African American women artists is the story of overcoming racism and sexism and responding to black female stereotypes. In *Creating Their Own Image*, the first book-length history of African American women artists, Farrington begins with the days of enslavement and moves through the nineteenth century to the Harlem Renaissance, the civil rights era, and the present, profiling individual artists and chronicling their part in the long battle black women artists continue to fight to reclaim their own image and secure equality in the art world. A richly detailed yet fluent work of trailblazing research, fresh interpretations, and cogent argument, Farrington's treatise discusses vital aesthetic as well as social and cultural issues and creates a vibrant context for such seminal artists as Augusta Savage, Faith Ringgold, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Kara Walker, and many more.

Truly enlightening and engaging. A major slice of art history knowledge.

Excellent resource on this specific topic. The span and perspective rank above similar books.

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