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Brianna McCarthy After Colour: Stripping the female form of its tonal color conventions

By Candice Sobers Friday, April 20th, 2012 Categories: [Features](#), [Reports](#), [Updates](#)

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As the onlooker enters McCarthy's '*After Colour*' a visual language of inclusiveness confronts them; interrupting the White/Black centeredness that people of the Caribbean recognize as self-representation. McCarthy is a self taught artist who has turned what once was her hobby; into her livelihood, at an opportunity costs which she admits is well worth it both professionally and personally. Descriptions of the female subject based on the artist's position on the grey scale has been challenged as 'the' identifying stamp. Once those conventions are stripped away the onlooker has to devise a new set of ideals for creating meaning and interpreting difference.



The figures bare arbitrary skin tones, with arbitrary features printed, sewn, pasted and woven to create an aesthetic expression through a 'united sense of humanity'. "Color, value and beauty must not mean anything. Neutral bodies without hair texture or skin color and considered grotesque for that matter, jumping out of themselves" says McCarthy was a circumstance which evolved.



McCarthy painstakingly hand sewed a collage of carefully chosen, washed, and frayed textiles, and glued acid free papers to create symbolic value. '*After Colour*', her first solo exhibition was provoked, by a pamphlet which came in the mail last year for Ashe' skin Whitening Crème which promised, "new hopes, new dreams and a beautiful new you with an added bonus of twenty four carat gold being used in the product". McCarthy was appalled into action by the mere suggestion that an approximation to whiteness was associated with value. She felt like such messages were dangerous and derogatory originating from distorted lenses. She admitted that her research began with young people and social media, especially sites such as tumblr where there are all these culled beautiful portraits. There was one photograph in particular which stood out to her, with a light skinned black child with green eyes and a remark left which stated "Who do I have to sleep with to get a child like this?"



McCarthy has spent years sketching, drawing, and collaging women bearing a stylized African-ness in feature and fashion; representing them with a pride to overshadow the self-aversion that women of color impose on themselves. Once she became sensitized to these racial messages she noticed them everywhere in subtle and obvious ways. As she created these black women, she posted them on her blog spot which would spark the attention of varied audiences including, black women, natural hair professionals etc., who were keeping track and expressing appreciation for her works. McCarthy often confesses 'boredom' as her catalyst for continuing to push her to make bold statements about ethnicity, self-esteem and canons of beauty.



In 2009 she embarked on a joint project with [Rodell Warner](#) for [Erotic Art Week](#), which consisted of real examples from the personal sections of the Sunday classified ads. Blown up, colorful signs were also displayed at Medulla Art Gallery with no words omitted or paraphrased. The audiences at the exhibition were shocked to notice that men and women communicate by mentioning skin color preferences on these ads which read for example, “Single fair female looking for Caucasian male” and “Brighten your skin before or after Carnival”. She has participated in joint exhibitions at the Soft Box Studio, Show&Tell and at MoCADA: Museum for Contemporary African Diasporic Art in Brooklyn, New York. When asked what she plans on working on next she promised to continue to allow the direction of her research and her materials to guild her in unadulterated

ways.



Candice Sobers

Candice Sobers is a conceptual artist with an emphasis on contemporary Art practice. She currently holds a BA in Visual Arts with first class honors, and she is currently completing an Mphil in Cultural Studies at the University of the West Indies. Her work has been exhibited in joint exhibitions at the National Museum, Rainy days Ellersie Plaza, In2Art and at the Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago. She currently is conducting a practice based research thesis on “Techniques of resourcefulness and Survival Among working class Trinidadians”. This research is being formulated as a series including paintings, drawings and a handbook of mixed methods.

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