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Title

New—Now—Next: A Survey of Rising Talent.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0sn8m88w>

Journal

International Review of African American Art, 18(4)

ISSN

1045-0920

Author

Cooks, BR

Publication Date

2002-06-01

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NEW · NOW · NEXT A SURVEY OF RISING TALENT

By Bridget R. Cooks

IONA ROZEAL BROWN – EAST IS WEST



Self portrait: the artist presents herself without a full face.

Whoever said “never the twain shall meet,” obviously could not begin to imagine the East and West of the late 20th and early 21st century world. Over the past 20 years, a whole generation of African Americans has grown up consuming “Voltron,” “Speed Racers,” “Star Blazers” and other Japanese animation on TV, in Japanese comic books and games like “Pokemon,” and on the big screen, Bruce Lee b-flicks, “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” and everything Asian in between. And when they opened the pages of *Vibe* magazine, they found Japanese anime-styled, soft drink ads starring old school rappers in robot suits.

But the global creative influence goes both ways and black hip-hop is big in Japanese youth culture. Iona Rozeal Brown is particularly intrigued by the Japanese cosmetic and fashion trend “Ganguro” in which young Japanese women dress in funky bright clothing, “tan” their skin, and often perm their hair to achieve a kinkier texture to demonstrate their love for hip-hop culture. Brown addresses this trend as one example of how cross-cultural influences configure individual and community identity.

Visually, Brown articulates the relationship between hip-hop culture and Ganguro through the style of Japanese Ukiyo-e woodblock prints from the Edo period (late seventeenth to early 18th century). Brown explains, “I represent these prints to represent the present while maintaining connections with the past.” Traditionally, these prints depict portraits of notable actors, Japanese landscapes, and genre scenes. In Brown’s painting series “A³...Black on Both Sides” (A³ stands for Afro-Asiatic Allegory), traditional Ukiyo-e aesthetics are mixed with signifiers of hip-hop culture to reflect this multicultural synergy.

In *Blackface* #19, a young Japanese woman sits in the luxurious folds of a silk kimono. The pattern on the white fabric is echoed in the elaborate hairstyle worn boldly on her head. Her snake-like cornrows weave her hair away from her face and release into a thick black afro. On her left side, three braids hang down weighted by red beads on the tips. Emerging from the woman’s kimono are her oversized black jeans with blue cuffs rolled up exposing her white Adidas shoes with fat black laces. Although her hands and face are brown, the scalp showing between her cornrows is stark

white. Historically, white powder is used to cover Japanese women’s faces as an indication of their womanhood and beauty. Brown appropriates this feminine convention and covers it with the brown pigmentation of black skin. This woman displays the attributes of two cultures, traditional Japanese and hip-hop. Brown plays with the notion of the mask through the woman’s brown on white make up and as a metaphor for the complexity of identity.

In *Ukiyo-e*, the subject matter is depicted flatly, framed in thin black line. The tension between the daring cross-cultural style of the woman and the delicate antiquated style in which she is depicted is captivating. Ironically, the young woman sits quietly unaware, lost in thought, as she fondles a thick gold chain around her neck. She appears like a surreal tribute to Run DMC.

Originally from Washington, D.C., Brown holds a B.F.A. in painting from the San Francisco Art Institute and an M.F.A. in painting from Yale University. In 2002, Brown exhibited her first New York solo show at Caren Golden Fine Art. She also enjoyed a solo exhibition at Sandroni Rey Gallery in Venice, California. In 2003, her work will be seen in the Canadian traveling exhibition, *Mass Appeal: The Art Object and Hip Hop Culture*.



BEVERLY McIVER – FORBIDDEN FACE

Whether disguised as a white face clown or a blackface minstrel, Beverly McIver’s sensually painted self-portraits serve a bitter slice of race relations and self-reflection. McIver’s paintings are both captivating and repulsive. Her dramatic closely cropped compositions mimic the technique of film directors. The images look as if they could be film stills from a lost production about the secret world of a mammy. Viewers peer into this private world as if through a hidden camera. Ironically, McIver’s character knows where the camera is and looks directly into it to make sure that she is being seen.

By taking private family stories, fantasy, and American racial politics as her subject, McIver weaves a disturbing tale through distorted portraits of longing, contempt, pleasure, and alienation.

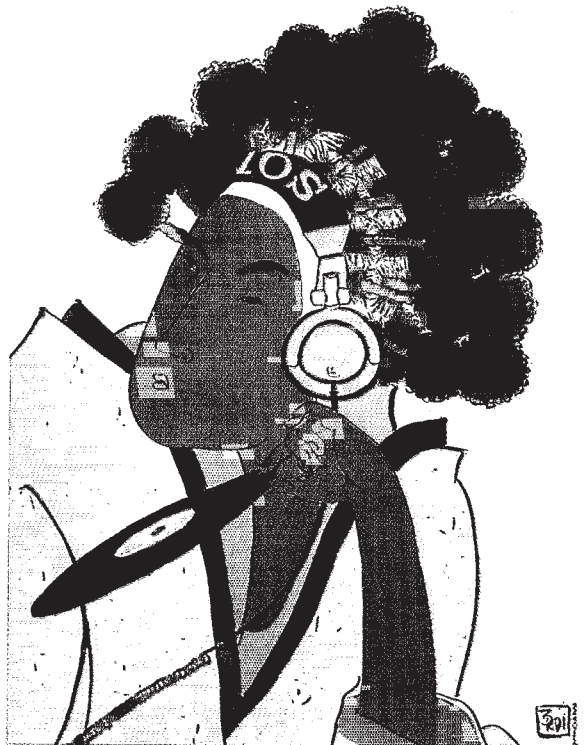
Mammy (2001) depicts McIver’s character in blackface with white paint around the mouth and eyes to give a



Iona Rozeal Brown
A³ Blackface #7
2002
acrylic on paper
44" x 30"



Iona Rozeal Brown
A³ Blackface #19
2002
acrylic on paper
30" x 22"

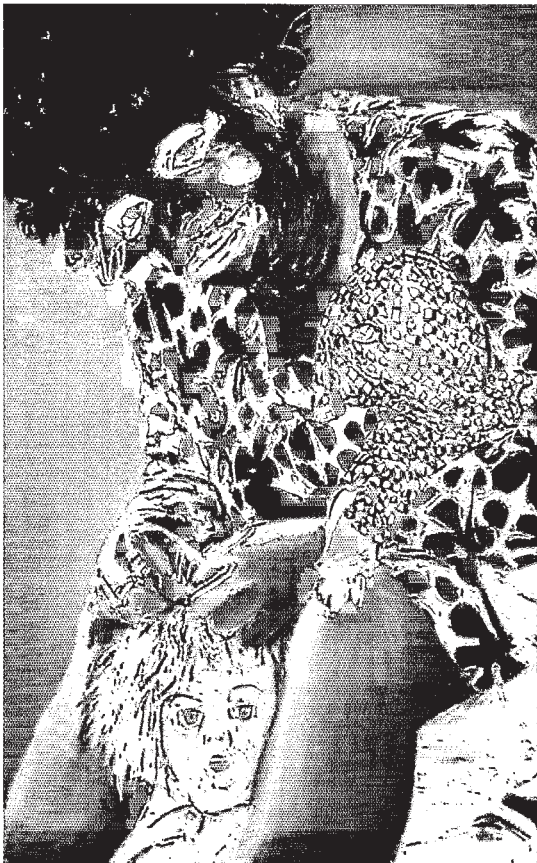


Iona Rozeal Brown
A³ Blackface #21
2002
acrylic on paper
30" x 22"

Photos courtesy
Caren Golden Fine Art



Beverly McIver
Holding My Baby
2002
oil on paper
29 1/2" x 42"



Beverly McIver
Molly with Her Favorite Mammy
1998
oil on canvas
48" x 36"

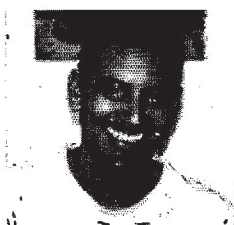


Beverly McIver
Mammy
2001

widening effect. Beneath the happy animated face paint is an undeniable expression of sadness. With her hair tied back flat by a blue scarf, she looks out at the viewer with a distinctive pout. The plain black background deepens a sense of isolation and poverty. Although appearing trapped in the tightly framed composition, the vibrant red fabric of her clothing and the glimmer from her small gold hoop earring imply the potential for future liveliness, freedom, and self worth. The thick tactile texture of McIver's beautifully worked surfaces lures viewers into the painting. The gaze that calls to them from the painting immobilizes McIver's viewers. Perhaps momentarily the viewers' own expressions mirror that of the mammy figure who fearlessly stares back.

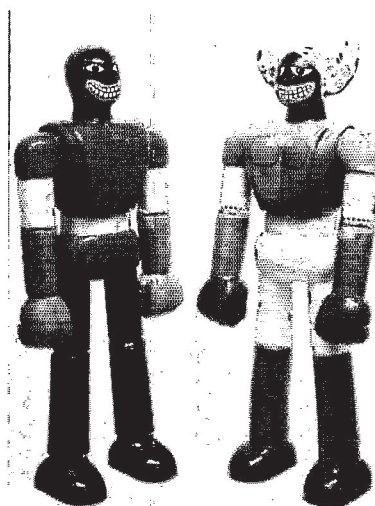
In *Molly with her Favorite Mammy* (1998), McIver depicts her character in a graphic black and white print dress in action as a domestic servant. In a quiet moment, the mammy sits with her dress hiked above her knees to accommodate a young white girl sitting between her legs on the floor. The mammy leans over, backed hunched, to braid the little girl's blonde straw-like hair. In the crook of her arm, the mammy holds a sagging ragdoll in a red gingham outfit. The doll's face is hidden in the mammy's ample bosom. The placement of the doll alludes to the traditional duty for a mammy to serve as a wet nurse for her young masters. The mammy and the young girl look directly at the viewer with completely different facial expressions. Caught in a moment of pleasure, the little girl appears surprised with a theatrical expression of shock on her face. In contrast, the mammy gives a powerful look that speaks endlessly about how tired, lonely, and miserable she is. Cut off from a community of others like her, McIver's character is a complex psychological portrait of desire and abjection.

Beverly McIver was born and raised in Greensboro, North Carolina. She earned her B.A. in Painting and Drawing from North Carolina Central University and her MFA from Pennsylvania State University, University Park. McIver has exhibited widely across the U.S. in solo and group exhibitions including *Ten Years of Painting* at the Marshall Arts Gallery, Scottsdale Arizona; *Loving in Black and White* at the Green Hill Center for the Arts, Greensboro, North Carolina; and *Looking Forward, Looking Black* traveling nationally since 1999. McIver has received several grants and fellowships including the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship (2001) and the Anonymous Was a Woman Grant (2000). This year she received the prestigious Radcliffe Fellowship from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. Currently she is Associate Professor of painting at Arizona State University.



DAVID HUFFMAN — COSMIC JUSTICE

Confronting images of racist stereotypes is not easy. There is pain in looking at misrepresentations of



David Huffman
Luxor DX and Trauma
Eve 1 Figurines
1999
ceramic
24" H

African American people. The broad, bared-teeth smile of derogatory caricatures such as the sambo and mammy suggest a false reality of happiness and mindless contentment. Painter David Huffman addresses the grand illusion of minstrel characters with a creative sense of vengeance and healing. Huffman is fascinated by what is behind the smile. His narrative paintings depict the inner struggles beyond the grinning expression giving these mythical creatures both humanity and superpowers. His paintings are as much about the psychosis of racism and African American perseverance as they are about the art of painting and abstraction.

Huffman has been politically active since he was a child growing up in the Berkeley/Oakland area. An avid reader of African American history and philosophy, Huffman enjoys finding artistic strategies to express rarely explored dimensions of African American culture through his work. By combining his love of African American history with his passion for Japanese anime, Huffman's eclectic paintings offer a cosmic alternative to represent the inner and outer space of Black pain and joy. "They are exploring outer space," Huffman says, "and have come to the edge of the universe where they find inner space."

Huffman creates new empowered characters called "trauma smiles" that build powerful robots such as Trauma Eve 1 and Luxor DX. Huffman's characters display attributes of debased nineteenth century stereotypes of African Americans such as the handkerchief head and the wide smile. Subversively, they betray the image of the happy submissive minstrel by using it as armor. In these minstrel robot bodies, the invincible characters stand ready to defend themselves. Their grimacing exteriors hide the vulnerable humans inside allowing them to protect and explore their humanity in this new universe.

Like Japanese anime narratives, the story is never ending. As Huffman explains, "The narrative is the place where I try to develop something new out of the historical role of the minstrel. I chose images which speak of trauma in a variety of forms. To me, it was very difficult to create characters

with painted smiles. The smile was false, not a simple expression of joy or happiness, but a disguise that covered an internal anguish — pain was subverted through that smiling face.” * Huffman’s characters must always work to survive their trauma. Through the isolation of an outer space environment, they experience spiritual transformations that allow them opportunities to heal from the pain of years of horrific abuse.

Since 1993, Huffman has been exhibiting his work in California and New York. Most recently Huffman’s work has been on view at the Institute of Contemporary Art, San José, the San José Museum of Art, New Langton Arts, San Francisco, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Santa Monica Museum of Art. In 2001, Huffman presented the critically acclaimed solo exhibition *Trauma Smiles* at the Patricia Sweetow Gallery in San Francisco. Since *Trauma Smiles*, Huffman has been working on a new body of work that continues the adventures of Trauma Eve 1, Luxor DX, and others. Huffman is excited about the possible manufacturing of 3-D figures of his characters. He is currently lecturer of painting and drawing at Santa Clara University and the California College of Arts and Crafts.

FRAN WARREN – RITES OF PASSAGE



Fan Warren lives beneath a storefront church in Oakland, California. On Sundays, her immaculate studio echoes with the sound of stomping feet and church hymns. Although the sound may be invasive to some, Warren doesn't

mind. African American cultural and religious traditions are important elements in her paintings and sculptures. Her task as an artist is to compose works that speak about the historic and future lives of African American peoples. In the process, Warren has amassed an impressive collection of found objects, ranging from remnants of buildings, picture frames, images cut from magazines, pop culture memorabilia, and nineteenth century photographs of black nursemaids and their white charges. These object inspire her to make her multiple layered two- and three- dimensional compositions. The end results are works of art that present the viewer with thoughtful and often whimsical combinations of elements from the past and reflections of today.

Since 1986, Fan Warren has been working on her large format mixed media on paper series *Middle Passage*. Her use of recognizable historic and pop culture symbols asks viewers to investigate where we have been, where we are going, and to contemplate the difference. Warren makes it plain, “Working on paper allowed me to experiment with the idea of making my own historical documents or handbills; for example, utilizing the flat, bold layout of the slave ship as a background for the superimposed images of a colonial house and/or a table and most recently the servant figure perched

on the spiral of life. I want to compose a historical relationship between the images of slavery and the reality of black peoples’ lives in contemporary American society.”

Indeed, Warren’s works are conduits for conversation between yesterday and today. Her juxtapositions present the anachronistic complexity of African American culture. Warren uses several recurring images to tell stories about colonization, power, and spirituality. In *Haunted by Our Fathers* (2002), an antebellum planter’s house, a Chippendale table, and a swirl of concentric circles create an ominous tower. The house is a foundational image visually and metaphorically in Warren’s series. Appearing sometimes as a church, a shotgun house, or a slave house, this structure serves as a symbol of home, safety, and domestic labor. Reduced in proportion to stand on a Chippendale table, the symbolic power of the architectural structure creates tension that bursts from its two dimensional flatness.

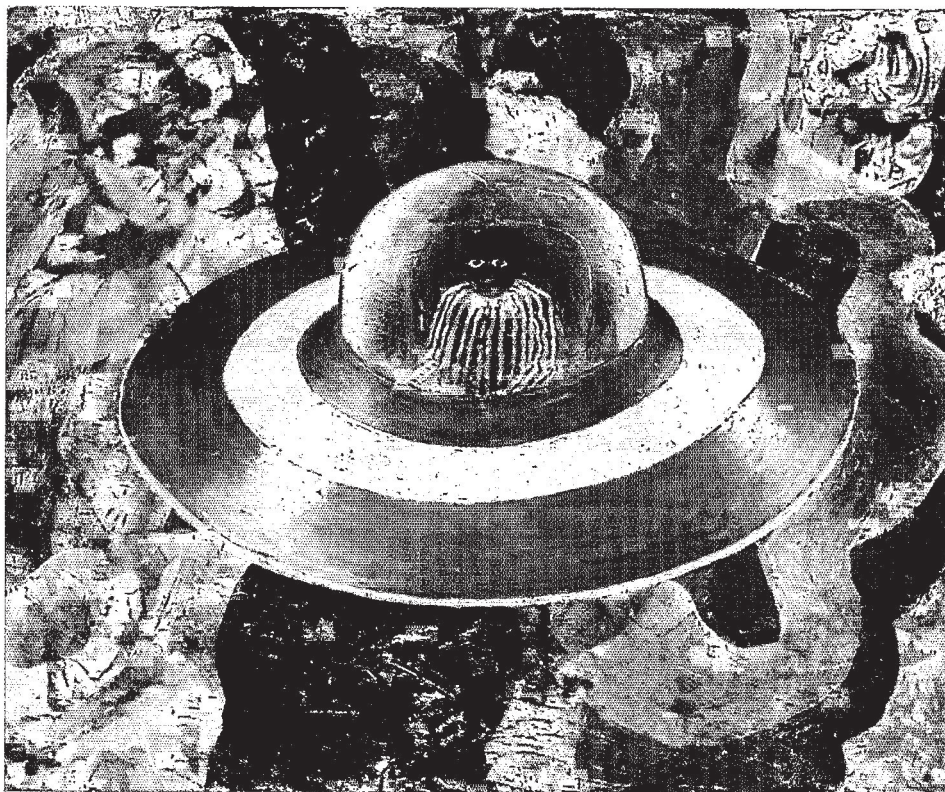
In *Black Codes* (1996-1999), the well-crafted colonial Chippendale table starkly contrasts with the weathered slave cabin hanging precariously above it. The circles beneath the table appear to be at once a rug and a spinning vortex able to transport these culturally loaded objects through time and space. Beneath this scene is an abstracted illustration of Africans packed as cargo on a slave ship. Spiraling down from the top of the painting are fragmented images of Sioux chief Big Foot, four young black men hanged from a tree, and Muhammad Ali floating in the boxing ring. Together these images question the role of imperialism, and cultural and physical violence in black life. Warren’s carefully aged paper adds to the historic allusion of her paintings and the seemingly divergent connections with modern life. As Warren puts it, “I’m really working on making a language, making things simple, bringing things together and seeing how they relate to each other.”

Warren earned her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, in 1985 and a BFA from Illinois State University in 1982. She has been exhibiting her sculptures, drawings/paintings and installations professionally for seventeen years. Her work is in several public and private collections such as the public collection of the New Harold Washington Library Center in Chicago, the Spertus Museum in Chicago and the permanent collection of the Bemis Foundation in Omaha, Nebraska. Warren’s work has been reviewed in *American Visions*, *The New Art Examiner*, *Art in America*, and *Arts & Letters*. She teaches at Laney College in Oakland, California.

Bridget Cooks is a professor of art history and ethnic studies at Santa Clara (CA) University.

* Interview with David Huffman. May 30, 1999. Interviewed by Patricia Sweetow, at the Patricia Sweetow Gallery, San Francisco, CA. Copyright 1999, Used with permission.

David Huffman
Target UFO
1997



David Huffman
Military Maneuvers
1979



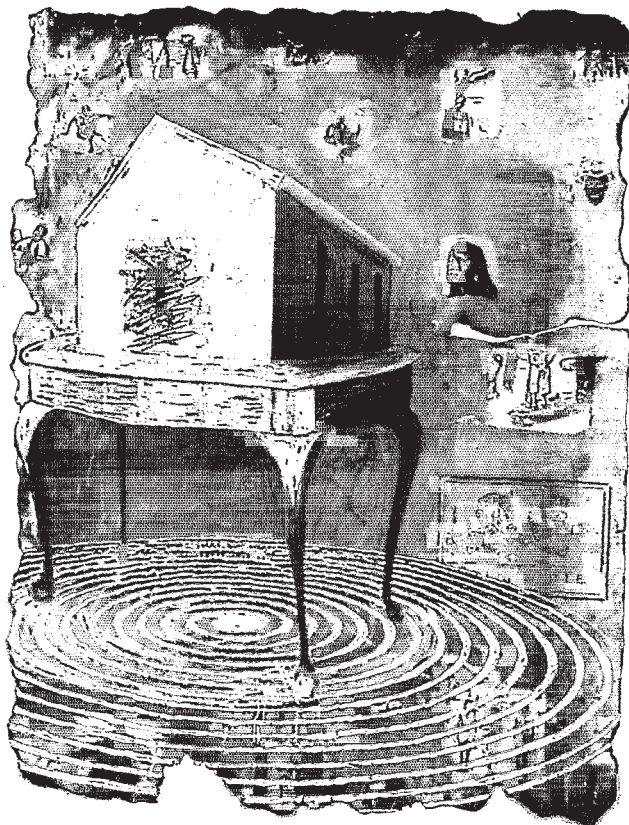
COLOR



Fan L. Warren
Mean Spirited
 1996-2000
 mixed media
 18" W x 30" L x 5" D



Fan L. Warren
Black Codes
 1996-1999
 pigment, pastel, charcoal
 4' W x 5' L



Fan L. Warren
Haunted by Our Fathers