

CfP "Critical Interventions": Revisiting Global Appropriations of Black Cultures

Discussion published by Karina Simonson on Tuesday, May 19, 2020

We would like to direct your attention to the following CfP for the guest-edited issue of the journal

"Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture" titled

Revisiting Global Appropriations of Black Cultures

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The proposed issue of *Critical Interventions* addresses appropriations of black cultural aesthetics in regions that historically lack significant and visible Black communities, such as Asia and/or Eastern Europe. Our objective is to use such instances to mount a critique of Eurocentric perspectives on Eastern European and Asian art and cultural practices, and also to deconstruct scholarly binaries that read these areas only in relation to their engagements with the West.

Black writers and artists since the Harlem Renaissance voiced concerns about distorted representations of African Diaspora/ Black aesthetics in art and popular culture, even as these continue to define the cutting edge of cultural production. The recent trend of white female performers appropriating black cultural aesthetics by adopting a look perceived to be black or mixed-race – braided hair, darkened skin, full lips and large thighs—has thus been likened to blackface.

The appropriation of black cultural aesthetics is therefore closely connected to the global perception of race and colonial history. Nonetheless, regions that don't have definable historical connections with black cultures can still have a deep-rooted tradition of cultural appropriation. Lithuania and Japan are good examples of such instances due to their complicated and multilayered history of cultural appropriations.

Race is not a common or urgent issue in Lithuania: the country is nearly racially homogenous and encounters with people of color are not part of everyday life. Even

though political awareness of the history of racial oppression is increasingly part of popular culture originating from the West, Lithuania keeps producing racist ads and music videos using tropes that are long unimaginable in the West, borrowing them from “older days” and claiming innocence. Western influence and Soviet legacies exist side by side, often a click apart and violently resisting each other. Lithuanian Youth culture is heavily influenced by various aspects of black cultural aesthetics – from a ghetto-styled elevation of violence to street dance and twerking – but rarely considers the mechanism of cultural appropriation, its histories and implications. Graffiti appears overnight on a wall in Vilnius Old Town stating “real niggas never die” – but which ones, how, and why.

Japanese culture has always been appropriated globally but Japanese people themselves are not averse to consuming other cultures. Japan is the most homogeneous society in the world with very low awareness of racism. As a result, the Japanese can be cruelly insensitive to racial issues. There is widespread ignorance about African American culture and racially objectionable forms of visual culture abound, for example, among Japanese comedians who use blackface and the public dissemination of an extremely racist “Obama monkey” television advert by Japanese mobile phone firm eMobile. “Ganguro” make-up (dark tan and contrasting make-up) was a big fashion trend among young women starting in the 1990s. By the early 2000s, hip-hop fashion, considered a “bad-boy” style, became popular. Japanese people, in general, have limited opportunities to learn deeply about Black cultures most being unable to read English language sources, and therefore rarely have an adequate critical awareness of the problems inherent in such acts of cultural appropriation.

This issue of *Critical Interventions* welcomes analysis of appropriation of black cultural aesthetics on a global scale, with a specific focus on regions usually less represented in academic discussions, such as Asia, Eastern Europe and Australia. We also welcome articles addressing how negative representations of Black cultures, such as the use of blackface, made their way to Africa, and those that reexamine African American appropriations of African cultural aesthetics, whether as heritage or contemporary practice.

Interested contributors should submit **previously unpublished articles ranging from 5000 to 12000 words** with no more than ten copyright-cleared illustrations, formatted according to the CI house style (see *Critical Interventions* “Instruction for Authors” at

<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?show=instructions&journalCode=rcin20>).

The deadline for submission is **October 31, 2020**. Authors of accepted articles will be required to register on the CI Editorial Manager, for all subsequent communications.

We are looking forward to hearing from you!