

There Is a Woman in Every Color Black Women in Art

The Philosophy & Sociology of Race

Subjects: African and African Diaspora Studies; Art History; English; Philosophy; Sociology

Activity

1. In the exhibition gallery: Students will view the art in *There Is a Woman in Every Color: Black Women in Art*. The class will discuss what the exhibition communicates about the nature of race and how our beliefs about it impact the way American society functions.
2. Outside of class: Students will select a work in the exhibition. Drawing from the gallery discussion, the work's visual information and interpretive text, content they have learned in class, and additional research, they will write a short paper discussing what their object communicates about the philosophical and sociological dimensions of race/racism.

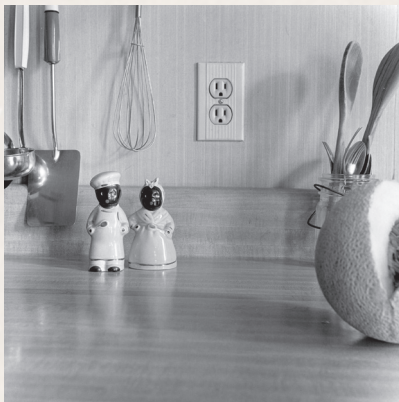
Ways to Adapt

-The paper could be converted to individual or group presentations. Students could present their research accompanied by either PowerPoint slides or a poster. The Mulvane can help supply space and materials for poster-making if desired.

For assistance with facilitating or adapting this activity, contact:

Sara Stepp
Academic Curator, Mulvane Art Museum
sara.stepp@washburn.edu
385-670-2422

Selected examples of works *with excerpts from interpretive texts*



Carrie Mae Weems
American Icons: Untitled (Salt and Pepper Shakers), 1988–89
silver gelatin print
Bowdoin College Museum of Art

The “icons” in this otherwise mundane, domestic tableau are a pair of salt-and-pepper shakers, a functional object one might see in any American kitchen. Except in this image, the salt-and-pepper shakers are figured as Mamma and Sambo, respectively. These wide-grinning, subservient figures exemplify American society’s view of enslaved African women and men during the 19th and into the 20th century. We may like to imagine that the American culture that created, marketed, and purchased these racist items is a thing of the past, but, as the picture shows, it has not disappeared.

Unidentified photographer
Portrait of a Biracial Woman, ca. 1855–60
quarter-plate ambrotype
Bowdoin College Museum of Art

This quarter-plate ambrotype shows a woman of distinction dressed for a seated portrait. An unidentified biracial woman, her pose suggests someone taking control of her representation, putting forth an effort to appear confident, sharply dressed, and sophisticated, a form of self-assertion made possible by the emergence of photography. This modest-sized ambrotype allowed this woman to capture and preserve her sense of self for generations, a testament to the role photography played in recording more realistic likenesses of Black women during the antebellum period.



Whitfield Lovell
Kin XLVI (Follie), 2011
conté crayon drawing, shooting gallery target
Bowdoin College Museum of Art

Whitfield Lovell combines conté crayon drawings and found objects to revitalize lost histories in his *Kin* series. In *Kin XLVI*, Lovell pairs an object used for target practice with a drawing of a Black woman in profile. This juxtaposition suggests a narrative about the anonymous sitter, drawing inspiration from images Lovell collected from the period between the Emancipation Proclamation and the civil rights movement. The woman’s profile is paired with a shooting gallery target, prompting one to consider the history of violence on the Black body.