

University of Louisville

ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

5-2010

Difference as identity in "The other story" and the 1993 Whitney biennial.

Vanessa Faye Johnson
University of Louisville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Johnson, Vanessa Faye, "Difference as identity in "The other story" and the 1993 Whitney biennial." (2010). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 697.
<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/697>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. This title appears here courtesy of the author, who has retained all other copyrights. For more information, please contact thinkir@louisville.edu.

DIFFERENCE AS IDENTITY IN “THE OTHER STORY” AND THE 1993 WHITNEY
BIENNIAL

By

Vanessa Faye Johnson
B.A., University of Kentucky, 2005

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Art History
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

April 2010

DIFFERENCE AS IDENTITY IN “THE OTHER STORY” AND THE 1993 WHITNEY
BIENNIAL

By

Vanessa Faye Johnson
B.A., University of Kentucky, 2005

A Thesis Approved on

April 23, 2010

By the following Thesis Committee:

Dr. Susan Jarosi

Thesis Director

Dr. Karen Britt

Dr. Kaila Story

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my late mother

Andrea P. Mattingly

who shared my dreams with me and

without whose love and support I would not be where I am.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Susan Jarosi, for her guidance and feedback throughout the process of writing this thesis. Her help in clarifying and articulating my ideas has been invaluable, as was her encouragement and support. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Karen Britt and Dr. Kaila Story, for taking the time to read my thesis and participate in my defense. I would also like to thank my family who has been instrumental in supporting me throughout my education.

ABSTRACT

DIFFERENCE AS IDENTITY IN “THE OTHER STORY” AND THE 1993 WHITNEY BIENNIAL

Vanessa Johnson

April 20, 2010

This paper explores issues of identity and difference in art and its institutions through a historiographic study of two landmark exhibitions, “The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain” (1989) and the 1993 Whitney Biennial. These exhibits intended to bring recognition to a marginalized group of artists, but were largely seen in critical literature to have perpetuated the binary distinctions and terms of difference that originated and maintained that marginalization. In order to fully understand the historical significance of these two exhibitions, in terms of their critical aims and reception, this thesis examines the specific social contexts in which they took place. By examining contemporary critical responses to each exhibition, it also highlights common issues that prevented these exhibitions from being viewed as successes at the time they were staged. The limitations and contradictions inherent in art institutions will be explored in depth, since they appeared in the terms, narratives, and criteria that were used to frame and organize both exhibitions. In exposing them, this thesis claims that the framing conditions of the exhibitions – the necessary terms, narratives, and organizing principles used by

institutions – prevented them from achieving their stated aims. Particular attention will also be paid to the problematic articulation of difference that manifested itself as a fetishization of difference or a “burden of representation” in “The Other Story” and the 1993 Biennial. Kobena Mercer used the term “burden of representation” in 1990 to refer to the expectation placed on black artists, and exhibitions about black artists, to stand as representative of a cultural group or its contributions. In “The Other Story” and the 1993 Biennial, this burden is placed on the exhibitions as a whole and the artists featured, not only to represent black art, but the art of other marginalized groups as well, and this burden leads to the reification and fetishization of external difference. These two products of the articulation of difference are related and, in these exhibitions, serve to perpetuate binary distinctions, limit interpretations of artworks, reduce complex social problems, and affect the understanding of the exhibitions and the artists they feature. Finally, this thesis explores the historical legacy of these two exhibitions and relates the questions of identity and difference they illuminate to broader struggles for cultural pluralism at the end of the twentieth century.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: RACE AT THE END OF A CENTURY: THE CULTURAL CONTEXTS OF THE EXHIBITIONS.....	9
CHAPTER 2: A TALE OF TWO EXHIBITIONS: THE CRITICAL RESPONSE.....	22
CHAPTER 3: CAUGHT IN A DOUBLE BIND: INSTITUTIONAL LIMITATIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS.....	47
CHAPTER 4: ARTICULATING DIFFERENCE: THE BURDENS OF REPRESENTATION.....	66
CONCLUSION.....	85
FIGURES.....	96
REFERENCES.....	135
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	140

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE

1. Gary Hill, *Tall Ships*, 1992
2. Charles Ray, *Family Romance*, 1993
3. Kiki Smith, *Mother*, 1992-93 (installation)
4. Janine Antoni, *Lard Gnaw*, 1992
5. Rasheed Araeen, *8bS*, 1970
6. Rasheed Araeen, *Green Paintings*, 1985-86
7. Andres Serrano, *Piss Christ*, 1987
8. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Man in Polyester Suit*, 1980
9. Guerrilla Girls, *Traditional Values and Quality Return to the Whitey Museum*, 1995
10. Aubrey Williams, *Olmec-Maya: Hymn to the Sun*, 1984
11. Ahmed Parvez, *Composition*, 1975
12. Balraj Khanna, *Festival*, 1970
13. Francis Newton Souza, *Black Nude*, 1961
14. Renee Green, *Import/Export Funk*, 1992 (installation)
15. George Holliday, *George Holliday's Videotape of the Rodney King Beating*, 1991
16. Bruce Yonemoto, Norman Yonemoto and Timothy Martin, *Land of Projection*, 1992 (detail)
17. Shu Lea Cheang, *Those Fluttering Objects of Desire*, 1992 (installation)
18. Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 7*, 1993 (installation)
19. Ida Applebroog, *Jack F.*, 1992
20. Peter Cain, *EP 110*, 1992
21. Sue Williams, *It's A New Age*, 1992
22. Sue Williams, *Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn?*, 1992
23. Bill Viola, *The Passing*, 1991
24. Pat Ward Williams, *What You Lookn At?*, 1992
25. Glenn Ligon, *Notes on the Margin of The Black Book*, 1991-3 (installation)
26. Daniel Martinez, *Museum Tags: Second Movement (Overture) or Overture con Claque-Overture with Hired Audeience Members*, 1993
27. Karen Kilimnik, *Fur Coat & Blue Jeans*, 1991
28. Mike Kelley, *Untitled (Chokwe Lumumba)*, 1992
29. Byron Kim, *Synecdoche*, 1991-present

30. Pepón Osorio, *Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime?)*, 1993 (installation)
31. Maureen Connor, *Ensemble for Three Female Voices*, 1991 (installation)
32. Simon Leung, *Marine Lovers*, 1992 (detail)
33. Keith Piper, *Go West Young Man*, 1988
34. Avinash Chandra, *Hills of Gold*, 1964
35. Jimmie Durham, *I Forgot What I Was Going to Say*, 1992 (detail)
36. Byron Kim, *Belly Paintings*, 1992
37. Lorna Simpson, *Hypothetical?*, 1992 (detail)
38. Lorna Simpson, *Hypothetical?*, 1992 (detail)
39. Hillary Leone & Jennifer Macdonald, *Untitled (Maze)*, 1993 (installation)

INTRODUCTION

“The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain” opened in London’s Hayward Gallery in London on November 29, 1989. It subsequently traveled to two other sites in the UK: the Wolverhampton Art Gallery from March 10 to April 22, 1990 and the Manchester City Art Gallery and Cornerhouse from May 5 to June 10, 1990. “The Other Story” was curated by Rasheed Araeen, an artist from Pakistan who spent eleven years trying to get the exhibition staged and whose work was also featured in the exhibition. Joanna Drew, the Director of the Hayward Gallery, Andrew Dempsey, the Assistant Director at the Hayward, and an advisory committee consisting of Richard Cork, Balraj Khanna, David Thompson, and Aubrey Williams also participated in the project. The exhibition catalogue consisted of six chapters by Araeen, telling the “Other Story,” and included essays by artists Balraj Khanna, Guy Brett, David Medalla, Mel Gooding, and Gavin Jantjes. The catalogue concluded with a chronology of black arts in England and brief biographies of the featured artists.

In his introduction to the catalogue, Araeen acknowledged the personal nature of the exhibition and the role that his own struggles as a non-white artist in Britain played in causing him to see the importance of such a project. He cited Edward Said when he gave his purpose for wanting to tell this Other Story – the story of artists from Africa, Asia,

and the Caribbean and their place in Western art: “I believe it is crucial, in our attempt to recover our place in history, ‘to tell other stories than the official sequential or ideological ones produced by institutions of power.’”¹ He stated that his curatorial aim was “exploratory rather than critical, insofar as they are separable” and based his selection of the featured artists, of which there were twenty-four, on several factors.² These factors included historical, ideological, aesthetic, and personal considerations, with his main concern consisting of an artistic engagement with the idea of modernity, “its historical formation as well as its socio-cultural constraints and contradictions.”³ He grouped the artists into four categories, which also corresponded to chapters in the catalogue: “In the Citadel of Modernism,” “Taking the Bull by the Horns,” “Confronting the System,” and “Recovering Cultural Metaphors.”

The chapter titled “In the Citadel of Modernism” included the artists Ronald Moody, born in Jamaica; Ivan Peries, a Sri Lankan; Francis Newton Souza and Avinash Chandra, both born in India; Balraj Khanna and Avtarjeet Dhanjal, who were Punjabi; Aubrey Williams and Frank Bowling, from Guyana; and Ahmed Parvez, who was Pakistani. The criteria for inclusion in this chapter were an early engagement with Modernism and an attempt by the artists to break-in to Western art institutions in the immediate post-war years. The next chapter, “Taking the Bull by the Horns,” featured artists who sought to break the prevailing traditions of the West and modernism, not simply to join them. The artists in this chapter were Iqbal Geoffrey, from Pakistan; David Medalla, from the Phillipines; Li Yuan Chia, a Chinese artist; and Araeen, also

¹ Rasheed Araeen, ed., *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, exh. cat. (London: South Bank Centre, 1989), 9.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 105.

from Pakistan. In “Confronting the System,” Araeen highlights artists who “were subjected in their early development to the intense experiences of loss and displacement,” whose work “attempts to come to terms with these experiences.”⁴ Gavin Jantjes, from South Africa; Mona Hatoum, a Palestinian woman; and Eddie Chambers, Keith Piper, and Lubaina Himid, black artists born in London, were included in this chapter. The final chapter, “Recovering Cultural Metaphors,” featured Anwar Jalal Shemza and Saleem Arif, from India; Uzo Egonu, born in Nigeria; Donald Locke, a Guyanese artist; Kumiko Shimizu, from Japan; and Sonia Boyce, a black artist born in London. These artists made work that Araeen saw as responding “to the desire of the dominant culture for cultural difference but also to the re-articulation of the prevailing forms and values” of the differences among cultures.⁵ Araeen acknowledged that some of the artists fit into more than one category and that his assignments were not exclusive, but that grouping them in this manner helped to focus on “central aspects of their work” and to recognize that the art in “The Other Story” was part of socio-historical changes of the past century.⁶

The 1993 Whitney Biennial was the 67th in the series of annual and biannual surveys of art at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. It was held from February to June of 1993 and sponsored by a grant from Emily Fisher Landau, a contemporary art collector and member of the Whitney’s Board of Trustees. The performance section of the exhibition was funded by Philip Morris Companies Inc. Elizabeth Sussman was head curator of the 1993 Biennial and worked with Whitney curators Thelma Golden, John G. Hanhardt, and Lisa Phillips. The selection of artworks was determined by this group of curators, led by Sussman, rather than a consensus vote

⁴ Ibid., 64.

⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁶ Ibid., 105.

among a curatorial team, as in previous biennials. An advisory committee consisted of independent curators Loris Bradley, Coco Fusco, Mary Jane Jacob, and Lawrence Rinder, professors Chon Noriega and Eugenie Tsai, and cultural critic B. Ruby Rich. Essays from the exhibition catalogue were written by each of the four curators plus four independent writers, professors Homi K. Bhabha and Avital Ronell and Coco Fusco and B. Ruby Rich, who also served on the advisory committee. Eighty-two American artists were featured in the exhibition, and the catalogue provided for each artist a list of group and solo exhibitions, as well as a bibliography.⁷

In his preface to the exhibition catalogue, then-director David A. Ross claimed that the 1993 Biennial “comes at a moment when problems of identity and the representation of community extend well beyond the art world.”⁸ Issues of nationalism, ethnic essentialism, politics of identity, and cultural diversity became significantly impressed upon the curators as they were preparing for this exhibition, and it was these issues which the museum sought to “question as we celebrate, to provoke as well as conciliate.”⁹ Ross stated that the function of the museum was to serve both as a sanctuary for “a war-weary world” and “as a site for the contest of values and ideas essential to a peaceful society; to serve as common ground for many intersecting communities.”¹⁰ The biennial, to Ross, fulfilled the Whitney’s responsibility “to engage deeply the art of our times and to demonstrate the Museum’s continuing commitment to American artists and the American art community.”¹¹

⁷ *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 108-109.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

In her catalogue contribution, lead-curator Sussman explained that the exhibition attempted to present “a refigured but fragmented collectivity that has been lacking in current art production.”¹² It was this fragmented identity that she saw as definitive of the culture and art of the early 1990s, represented in sexual, gendered, and ethnic subjects. She laid out both the criteria used in selecting works for the 1993 Biennial and the criteria under which it should be viewed. Sussman asserted that art that foregrounds ideas is not necessarily lacking in aesthetic qualities; that works about cultural positions are not static; and that art should be redefined “in more realistic terms – not as a seamless, homogenous entity but as a collectivity of cultures involved in a process of exchange and difference.”¹³ She made two additional generalizations about the artists featured in the exhibition: their ideas ranged from direct to more conceptual engagements with a material thing or situation “through replica, history, memory, and technology,” and a major point of interest and collective subject was the body, whether individual or communal, physical or social.¹⁴ Sussman used the artists Gary Hill and Charles Ray as examples of those who “involve the technological and the replica in their representation of the body.”¹⁵ In his video *Tall Ships* (Fig. 1), Sussman believed that Hill created a “cybernetic representation of community in 1993”¹⁶ by his use of perspectival space to orient the viewer in relation to the figures in the video. Ray plays with scale and space as well in his *Family Romance* (Fig. 2), which magnifies “the uncanniness we experience in the contrast between the real thing – person or object – and its replica.”¹⁷ Sussman cites

¹² Ibid., 14.

¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷ Ibid., 15,

other works in the Biennial that engaged more directly with the physical body, such as Kiki Smith's *Mother* (Fig. 3), which focused on the social, political and biological spheres of the woman's body, and Janine Antoni's *Lard Gnaw* (Fig. 4) which related the body and the substances that sustain it in a visceral way.

In examining these two exhibitions that sought to foreground previously marginalized groups of artists, critical responses are predominantly negative. While the efforts and intentions of the curators were often merited, these exhibitions were seen to further problematize issues of race, ethnicity, and gender by means of the exhibitions' organization, titles, selection processes, and scope. These exhibits were, in large part, viewed as failures in their attempts to represent marginalized groups in a meaningful way due to their reinscription of binary distinctions and racial difference, which pigeon-holed the artists and foreclosed meaningful, constructive discussions of race and other aspects of identity. Through a historiographic study of "The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain" (1989) and the 1993 Whitney Biennial, this thesis will explore problems of exhibiting racial and gender identity in art and the art institution. By examining both exhibitions comparatively – their respective catalogues, featured artists, organizing principles, curatorial aims, and critical responses, I will draw conclusions about the inherent problems with such exhibitions. I will argue that the limitations and contradictions of the institution, which manifest themselves in the framing mechanisms of the exhibitions including the terms, narrative, and selection criteria used, inevitably prevented these exhibitions from being viewed as successes at the time they were staged. As a result of such limitations, the articulation of difference, which was a guiding principle in each exhibition, became problematic. These articulations of difference either

appeared as the fetishization of difference, where difference is reified and magnified to the ultimate criterion for value, or the burden of representation, a term used by Kobena Mercer to explain what happens when an artist or exhibition is expected to represent an entire cultural groups' interests or contributions. These issues are related and work together to create an exhibition that is seen to simplify complex social issues and reduce artists to essentialist constructions of identity.

While these two exhibitions differ in their venues, artists, and goals, looking at contemporary critiques of them brings up similar issues of how race, gender, and identity politics are explored within the framework of art and the institution. In order to fully understand the context in which each exhibition was theorized and staged, the second chapter will give a brief political, social, and historical background to each. I will explore the contemporary issues of race and identity in both Britain and the United States that culminated in the need for such exhibitions. By foregrounding the exhibitions in their unique contexts, I will show that what was at stake for the curators and the artists mirrored contemporary social and historical events and was an attempt at cultural pluralism and equity in a changing, globalized world. In chapter three, I will examine a wide array of reviews and critiques of each exhibition, which will illuminate the common issues that arose; specifically, the manifestation of institutional limitations in the terms, narrative, and selection criteria and the problematic articulation of difference which simplified complex social issues and objectified difference. While not exhaustive, this chapter will provide insight into how the exhibitions were perceived among a varied contingency of writers. Chapters four and five will delve deeper into the two prominent issues that emerged from the previously examined critiques-the limitations and

contradictions inherent within institutions and the problematic articulation of difference. In examining institutional limitations I will explore the historical implications of the institutions of the museum and the discourse of modernism, how curatorial choice and voice affects the exhibition, and the simplification of complex issues within this framework. Chapter five will examine the articulation of difference within each exhibition and how it can become problematic in the forms of the fetishization of difference or the burden of representation. I will show how and why this articulation becomes troublesome, what this means to the artists and the exhibitions, and how it affects our understanding and perception of both. Finally, I will conclude by looking at how despite the largely negative contemporary responses to these exhibitions, they have come to be viewed as watersheds in the examination of race and difference within the art institution. By looking at responses from the curators themselves and the legacy each has left, I will frame their importance within the larger discourses of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism and relate how they can be seen as both indicative of their time and informative to later generations engaged in broader discussions of identity and difference in a global world.

CHAPTER 1

Race at the End of the Century: The Cultural Context of the Exhibitions

Before examining critical responses to the 1993 Whitney Biennial or “The Other Story,” it is useful to consider them within the particular social, historical, and political climates in which they were held. In doing so, important connections between art and politics are revealed, as these exhibitions respond quite directly to the respective political environments of the U.S. and Britain. Having this contextual background also provides a clear picture of how race and identity are related and how they correlate to social and political issues. This broader, contextual vantage helps to illuminate the aims of the curators, the exhibitions’ success or failure, and the exhibitions’ place within art history. Art and its exhibitions do not exist within a vacuum – both are affected by current events and situations that create a perceived need or climate for certain works to be made or shown. In times of cultural conflict in both countries, each of these exhibitions attempted to function as a response and a remedy. Grappling with the complex issues of race and identity in the midst of social upheaval was seen as an important way for the institution to play a role in the current battles for the equality of marginalized groups. A consideration of the cultural and historical context also helps to reveal why these exhibitions were

received and interpreted as negatively as they were. While the context for each exhibition differs, as do their specific details and facts, they share common concerns about identity and difference in their response to current social realities.

“The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain” featured twenty-four artists, all but two of whom were, or were descended from, residents of previous British colonies. The nations which were previously colonized make up the British Commonwealth, an intergovernmental group of independent states that are seen as equal in status and share common goals and values. As colonized nations became independent of British rule, most joined the Commonwealth and remain part of it to the present. After World War II, through the initiative of the Fifth Pan African Congress in Manchester in 1945, the decolonization of Britain’s Empire was relatively swift, with little more than thirty years separating the independence of the first colonial sites of India and Pakistan in 1947, to the last, Zimbabwe and Vanuatu, in 1980.¹ As a result, a wave of residents of former colonies immigrated to Britain during this period. This influx of immigrants brought issues of racism and prejudice to the forefront of British society.

Post-war immigrants came to England often in search of a more promising future than the one that could be found in their country of birth. The immigrants were seen as a reminder of the nation’s colonial history and often faced discrimination and prejudice in their adopted homeland. In Britain, blacks were associated with criminality, and as such, were considered distinctly non-British. Even before the post-war wave of black immigration, criminals were “identified as a ‘race’ apart” and such biases were

¹ W. David McIntyre, *British Decolonization, 1946-1997* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 11.

instrumental in immigration policies.² Post-war images of sexuality and miscegenation became the forms in which concern about the criminal behavior of blacks were manifested.³ In 1968, in response to proposed race relations laws, Enoch Powell, a popular British politician, railed against the danger that blacks posed to Britain in a speech in which he recounted a metaphor of Britannia as the old, white woman whose house is destroyed by blacks.⁴ While immigration had been welcomed immediately after the war because of the need for cheap labor to rebuild destroyed cities, as that need diminished, immigration “became a threat to the English national character.”⁵ Immigration policies and policing in the 1960s and 70s depended on the “commonsense” narrative of national crisis, where “the cause of the crisis was constructed through ideas about externality and criminality which supported a view of blacks as an ‘outside’ force, an alien malaise afflicting British society.”⁶ As Stuart Hall wrote in 1978, “blacks become the bearers, the signifiers of the crisis of British society in the 1970s.”⁷ Blacks were, in this case, blamed for the decline of the British Empire and the power of Britain as the United States usurped their global dominance.

The 1980s brought about collectivist activities formed around the theme of black representation, including a “growing awareness of the work of artists from a plurality of cultures and cultural backgrounds.”⁸ Setting the stage for the need for these

² Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 78.

³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 85-87.

⁵ Jenny Sharpe, “Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race,” in *Postcolonial America*, ed. C. Richard King (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 113.

⁶ Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ Malik Rohini and Gilane Tawadros, “(Mis)Representations: The curator, the gallery & the artwork,” in *Critical Studies and Modern Art*, ed. by Toby Jackson, Liz Dawtrey, Mary Masterton, and Pam Meecham (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 115.

“interventions of black cultural practitioners” were the Brixton uprisings of 1981. In January of that year, thirteen black youths were killed in an attack on a party in New Cross.⁹ The lack of response, and failure of the police to capture those responsible, led to protests and run-ins between demonstrators and police. These “riots” were blown into a “full-scale moral panic in which lawlessness and looting came to symbolize... the perceived threat of social decay and disorder sedimented in the symbolic association of ‘race’ and crime.”¹⁰ Kobena Mercer, speaking of the 1980s, argues that the creation of new identities and cultures as “*the* democratic task of our time” was a result of the Reagan/Thatcher decade, in which “deepening social inequalities and the resurgence of racism” and “global forces of dislocation” had brought the nation to the point in which there was both a necessity and a possibility for such a task. Black communities of resistance were formed in response to such events and a black political discourse was developed. Immigrants of Asian, Indian, and African descent organized around the concept of “Black Britain,” a term “that both disrupted the nation’s presumed whiteness and declared solidarity between people of African and Asian descent.”¹¹ Mercer described these times as open to “a veritable ‘renaissance’ in all spheres of expression.”¹² Stuart Hall also discussed this political movement, calling it

The moment when the term “black” was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and... to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities, with in fact, very different histories, traditions, and ethnic identities.¹³

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 6.

¹¹ Sharpe, “Is the United States Postcolonial?,” 113.

¹² Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 9.

¹³ Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, edited by Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 163.

In the art world, black artists often adopted the role of writer or curator to bring attention to work that had been largely ignored by the established art world, including work from artists of varying ethnicities in accordance with current political trends of solidarity.¹⁴ This was the precise strategy Rasheed Araeen pursued when he curated “The Other Story.” Araeen was an artist who had come to London, through Paris, from Pakistan in 1964 (Figure 5). His work in the late 1960s was inspired by the Minimalist sculptures of Tony Caro, but during the 1970s, “explicit political material, particularly that concerned with racism and imperialism, began to enter his conceptual framework.”¹⁵ Araeen’s *Green Painting* (Figure 6) encapsulates this shift in his work, juxtaposing staid fields of green paint with images of violence, bloodshed, and Arabic text. The nature of Araeen’s political engagement went beyond art-making, however, exemplified in his founding of *Third Text*, a journal on visual culture from a third-world viewpoint. Araeen also participated in conferences and worked to change the content of teaching in British schools.¹⁶ Araeen’s voice was widely heard in the discourse of race and post-colonialism in Britain in the eighties and “The Other Story” complements the wider array of activities in which he participated. This exhibition was a project he had striven to see come to fruition for eleven years, a result of the fact that he was unable to receive adequate support or funding from the governing bodies until 1989. His exhibit responded to and functioned within the cultural climate in Britain during the late 1980s, both in conception and execution. Araeen aimed to draw attention to an older generation of non-white artists whom he felt had not been properly recognized for their contribution to British art, as

¹⁴ Rohini and Tawadros, “(Mis)representations: The curator, the gallery & the artwork,” 115.

¹⁵ Rasheed Araeen, ed. *The Other Story: Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain*, exh. cat. (London: South Bank Centre, 1989), 60-62.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

well as a younger generation of Afro-Asian artists whose work was not being sufficiently exhibited elsewhere.¹⁷ Araeen capitalized on the solidarity of African and Asian Britons in the 1970s and 80s in his selection of the artists from various ethnic backgrounds for his exhibition. The place of origin for the show was the Hayward Gallery in London's Southbank Centre. Opened in 1968 by Her Majesty the Queen, the Hayward is a gallery for major temporary exhibitions, but does not have a permanent collection of its own. It is publicly funded and managed by the Arts Council and the Greater London Council.¹⁸ "The Other Story" was one of many exhibitions initially staged at the Hayward that traveled to other galleries in other parts of England.¹⁹

The Whitney Museum of American Art was founded in 1930 by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who focused on the uncommon practice, at that time, of collecting art from living artists.²⁰ In accordance with this mission of collecting work from contemporary American artists, the Whitney Biennial was instituted in 1932 as an invitational show of the best work from the preceding two years. It is the only series of exhibitions in America that has continuously shown the most recent developments in art of this country.²¹ In 1977 the format and objectives of the Biennial were modified to highlight the following aims: to show "multiple examples of work made during the previous two years by artists chosen collectively by the curators as the most representative of the best American art"; "to make qualitative judgments at a moment of

¹⁷ Ibid., 115-116.

¹⁸ Brandon Taylor, *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public, 1747-2001* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 203.

¹⁹ "The Other Story" was held at the Hayward Gallery from November 29, 1989 to February 4, 1990; at the Wolverhampton Art Gallery from March 10 to April 22, 1990; and at the Manchester City Art Gallery and Cornerhouse from May 5 to June, 10, 1990.

²⁰ Patterson Sims, *Selections from the Permanent Collection* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1985), 11.

²¹ <http://whitney.org/About/History>

multiple critical standards”; and “to assemble an overview of current art activity as possible.”²²

The 1993 Biennial came at a critical time in the American political landscape. Since the 1960s, America had witnessed a sustained struggle over culture and politics. In his book, *War Without End*, Robert Shogan explains the impetus of the American Culture Wars by saying that in order to win votes, politicians sought constituents through cultural concerns as way to stir emotion when they could not gain support, or make good on promises, regarding substantive issues.²³ He argues that the supposed distinction between politics and culture is difficult to maintain during times of change and stress in a nation with millions of people who have “competing needs and concerns.”²⁴ The beginnings of the complex relationship between politics and culture did indeed explode in a time of great change in America, as divisive issues such as civil and women’s rights came to the fore in the 1960s, pitting “a resentful and raucous younger generation against a grimly determined middle class.”²⁵ In this climate, religion became a key aspect of American politics, used particularly by Republicans to create a strong voter bloc.²⁶ The Culture Wars concerned a variety of domestic issues, including race, immigration, religious freedom, gender politics, homosexuality, abortion, and stem cell research. These wars were waged in the media and in the classroom, on campaign trails and the courts, in the home and in the arts.

In 1980, Republican Ronald Reagan was elected president, largely as a result of the rise of the New Right. The New Right, which had first battled against the ratification

²² Lisa Liebmann, “Almost Home,” *ArtForum* (Summer 1985): 57.

²³ Robert Shogan, *War Without End* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁶ Michael McGough, *A Field Guide to the Culture Wars* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009), vii.

of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, was a group of conservative and evangelical Christians, formed against the New Left “as a rubric for an amalgam of religious and political forces drawn together by cultural issues.”²⁷ Reagan established himself as the “hero of the Christian right,” with support of leaders in the Christian community. Coinciding with his election, Republicans also gained a majority in the Senate for the first time in thirty years.²⁸ During Reagan’s first term, attempts were made to reverse the “inundation of permissiveness” that conservatives saw as having swept the nation, and measures to ban abortion, nullify court-ordered desegregation, and restrict the power of the federal courts were proposed.²⁹ In 1988, largely due to the economic prosperity of the previous eight years, George W. Bush, Reagan’s Vice President, was elected in a landslide victory,³⁰ but he, like Reagan, did little to advance the cultural agenda of the Christian Right in any practical ways.³¹ The bust of the economic boom and the lack of action on the part of Bush led to dissatisfaction among many in America. For one, the economic comfort enjoyed by some was greatly disproportionate. Jack Kemp, Bush’s secretary of Housing and Urban Development, had urged Bush to take advantage of his Gulf War status in the polls in order to “broaden the Republicans appeal” and wage “an audacious, aggressive kind of dramatic war on poverty.”³² But Bush’s lack of action led those people who had been struggling with poverty, racism, homelessness, and AIDS, who had been largely ignored for the past twelve years, ready and willing to seek a change in the political landscape of America. It was in this climate that Democrat Bill

²⁷ Shogan, *War Without End*, 166.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 175, 182.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁰ Lisa Phillips, ed., *The American Century*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), 325.

³¹ Shogan, *War Without End*, 214.

³² *Ibid.*, 215.

Clinton was elected president in 1992, and he “rode to victory on a centrist platform of fiscal conservatism tempered with a progressive social agenda,” bringing hope to disenfranchised groups of the American population.³³

The ramifications of this period in American political and cultural history for the art world are crucial to understanding the role and stance of the 1993 Whitney Biennial. As the AIDS crisis particularly affected the art community, many were making work in response to the epidemic and raising millions of dollars in support of research.³⁴ And, just as in the 1970s, when feminists and artists of color created art that spoke to and about their unique political struggles, artists in the 1980s did too. In opposition to these artistic trends, conservative anger was directed towards any art that brought to light government inaction over AIDS, celebrated gay or black sexuality, or was overtly political.³⁵ Republicans launched a campaign against cultural institutions, artists, and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Claiming obscenity in works like Andres Serrano’s 1987 *Piss Christ* (Figure 7) and Robert Mapplethorpe’s controversial photography exhibition of 1988 (Figure 8), among others, as an excuse to cut government funding to the arts, Republicans effectively “weakened the NEA and its credibility and existence.”³⁶ Other artists, particularly those who were gay, lesbian, Hispanic, and black, were targeted in “this crusade against culture,” and as a result, “vanguard artists found themselves not only embattled by reactionary forces but deprived of support from collectors and museums.”³⁷

³³ Phillips, ed. *The American Century*, exh. cat., 335.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 329.

³⁵ Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16.

³⁶ Phillips, ed. *The American Century*, exh. cat., 332.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 332-33.

American art of the early 1990s was largely explicitly political as art-making and politics focused on the struggle to identify oneself and others.³⁸ This was due to several factors, including a reaction against the “market-friendly art of the 1980s... beached and stranded by the recession,” anticipation for a liberal turn in politics under Clinton, and “a reconfiguration of US art in the face of a newly globalized art world... which required an abandonment of universality in favor of an exploration of diversity, difference, and hybridity” based on the idea that the United States could not dominate this “new world” until it had confronted its own prejudices and exclusions.³⁹ The 1993 Biennial at the Whitney sought to highlight this political emphasis in art-making in the first two years of the 1990s by staging a show that was the most thematically focused in its history. In response to the heated culture wars, the Whitney’s response was to stage a show that, in its clear focus, could choose a side and fight in the battle. The curators saw this Biennial as a way in which they could respond to contemporary issues with contemporary art. Just six years earlier, the Guerilla Girls had exposed the Whitney for its exclusionary practices, citing the vastly unequal representation of female and non-white artists versus white, male artists in earlier biennials (Figure 9). In the 1993 Biennial, the majority of the eighty-seven artists who were selected to participate were members of groups that had previously been underrepresented – non-whites, women, gays, and lesbians. In her assessment of the Biennial in the May 1993 issue of *Art in America*, Eleanor Heartney comments that the show was purposefully made to look “like Clinton’s cabinet... more like America.”⁴⁰

³⁸ David Joselit, *American Art Since 1945*. (New York and London: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2003), 222.

³⁹ Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*, 19-20.

⁴⁰ Eleanor Heartney, “Identity Politics at the Whitney,” *Art in America* 81 (1993): 43.

The curators of the 1993 Biennial were extremely purposeful in responding to the cultural and political events of the early 1990s with this exhibition. However, instead of choosing work through consensus among a group of curators, the work in this Biennial was ultimately chosen by one, Elizabeth Sussman, chief curator and protégé of the then new director of the Whitney, David Ross.⁴¹ Sussman's fellow curators were Thelma Golden, John Hanhardt, and Lisa Phillips, each a curator on staff at the Whitney. The type of art shown also reflected trends in the art world, including a large proportion of video and performance work and little painting. New technologies and materials were being used at this time to make work about political issues central to media artists' lives, and one of the curators of the 1993 Biennial saw the variety of production methods in video and media art as matching the various critical and cultural issues facing artists and Americans at that time.⁴² Another dominant quality of the art found in the 1993 Biennial was what another curator cited as "slacker art" and "pathetic aesthetic" – art that is no longer concerned with "originality, integrity of materials, coherence of form," but is instead concerned with the abject and the demeaned in "reaction to the feeling of inadequacy engendered by repressive social structures mirrored in the media."⁴³ The subject matter of politics and identity, coupled with new media forms and crude aesthetics, of most of the work shown in the 1993 Biennial responded in a timely fashion to cultural and artistic issues of the early 1990s.

The events leading to the perceived need for such exhibitions as "The Other Story" and the 1993 Whitney Biennial were very different in the United States and

⁴¹ Jeff Rian, "The 1993 Whitney Biennial: Everyone Loves a Fire," *Flash Art* 170 (May/June 1993): 78.

⁴² John G. Hanhardt, "Media Art Worlds: New Expressions in Film and Video, 1991-1993," in *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 45, 50.

⁴³ Lisa Phillips, "No Man's Land: At the Threshold of a Millennium," in *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat., 53-54.

Britain and, as such, there are marked differences between them. The works in “The Other Story” were chosen solely based upon the identity of the artists who made them, while the works in the Whitney Biennial were chosen based upon both the identity of the artists as well as the themes they addressed. Araeen was attempting not only to address current cultural conditions in the British art world, but also to rewrite its history. By contrast, the curators at the Whitney were singly focused on the most contemporary American work. Because of this difference in historical focus, the types of work shown in each exhibit varied. “The Other Story” primarily showed paintings, while the Biennial exhibited virtually no painting (instead focusing heavily on installation, video, and performance works). The work in the Biennial was illustrative of the trend in the United States in the early 1990s to make overtly political art, while the work in “The Other Story” was only loosely thematically linked.

While the surface differences are readily observed in these exhibitions, there are deeper common themes and issues that arise, despite the unique contexts. Both exhibitions existed because of past prejudice towards and marginalization of minority groups within the political and social structures of their respective societies. The aim of both exhibitions was to showcase work that had not been properly appreciated, by artists who were excluded from mainstream art-historical discourses because of some aspect of their identity. In this way, the exhibits attempted to participate in larger current discourses on issues of race and cultural identity taking place in each respective nation at the time in which they were held. Both exhibitions also dealt explicitly with issues of race and the racism experienced in each nation. Though four years apart, the timing of these two exhibitions was significant: the world was becoming a smaller place in the

1980s due to developments in media and technology, and concerns about globalization affected and informed both of these exhibitions; in a rapidly changing and contracting world, “discovering, possessing and then taking pride in an exclusive identity seems to afford a means to acquire certainty about who one is and where one fits.”⁴⁴ And, as I will explore in the next section, the critical response to both exhibits was largely negative and brings to light the inherent challenges that exhibitions face when attempting to respond to such complex and problematic issues as identity and difference.

⁴⁴ Paul Gilroy, “Diaspora and the Detours of Identity,” in *Identity and Difference*, ed. by Kathryn Woodward (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 312.

CHAPTER 2

A Tale of Two Exhibitions: The Critical Response

Contemporary critical responses and reviews of both “The Other Story” and the Whitney Biennial were numerous. The majority of reactions to both were largely disparaging, with few wholly positive responses in the mix. A summary of the responses to each exhibition will point to common problems that were perceived in a variety of areas. Some of the common aspects of the exhibitions that caused concern for critics included the narrative and terminology used in both the catalogues and wall text, the selection and interpretation of artists and works, the initial aims and purposes of the curators, and the institutional limitations of the Hayward and the Whitney. While the compilation of responses here is not exhaustive, I have attempted to assemble as comprehensive a summary as I could in order to draw conclusions about how and why these criticisms came to be. Looking at contemporary responses to the exhibitions tells us both about the social climate in which they were held and points to how common concerns can arise from very seemingly different projects.

As we have seen, “The Other Story” was staged at a time in Britain’s history in which ethnic minorities were joining together to take control of their own representations and coming to a shared understanding of what it meant to be both non-white and British.

In this light, there are positive aspects to Rasheed Araeen's exhibition, which a few reviewers recognized, some without reserve and others with it. A brief opinion piece in *Arts Review (London)* from 1990 criticized those who dismissed the exhibition and praised Araeen for his perseverance in waiting eleven years to stage this show. Jane Bryce, the review's author, compared the show to a "jazz improvisation, a daring synthesis of the familiar and strange...paying homage to the ancestors, while being fully conscious of its part in contemporary artistic practices."¹ She took issue with, and quoted extensively, a negative review from *The Sunday Times*, which I will examine later, that called the work in "The Other Story" derivative and unoriginal. In response, Bryce praised the way in which the show focused on synthesis, in opposition to the "thesis and antithesis of western art historical discourse," questioning the dichotomous values of western culture.² A brief review in *Apollo* also offered a whole-heartedly positive review of "The Other Story," calling it a "turning-point in appreciation of the non-European cultures and the exhibiting of their powerful contribution," which was "long overdue."³ This reviewer also acknowledged the criticism of the exhibition, but turned his piece into a praise of several of the artists including Aubrey Williams (Figure 10), Ahmed Parvez (Figure 11), and Balraj Khanna (Figure 12), among others. The author ended his review by saying that in the future, these artists should not be seen in isolation, but within the proper context of the larger art world. This observation will be revisited in some of the less positive reviews of "The Other Story."

In direct contrast to these positive reviews, there were some scathingly negative ones that were published at the time of the exhibit. One, from critic Brian Sewell,

¹ Jane Bryce, "Opinion," *Arts Review (London, England)* 42 (January 1990): 10.

² *Ibid.*

³ James Burr, "A Cultural Injection," *Apollo* 131, no. 2 (February 1990): 126.

completely dismissed the entire exhibition based on the fact that none of the art in the show was good, claiming that the artists represented “borrow all and contribute nothing.”⁴ In response to Araeen’s claim that one of the artists featured in the show, Francis Souza (Figure 13), lost favor in the London art world because of his race, Sewell countered that it was because his work was not good enough “to attract and hold serious critical acclaim.”⁵ He argued that if non-white artists are not successful they fall back on claims of “conscious and deliberate exclusion” due to their skin color and that, therefore, Araeen’s exhibit was based on reverse discrimination and a “demand for patronising patronage.”⁶ Finally, Sewell revealed what may be his own personal racism when he ended his review by writing that the Afro-Asian artist must choose between clinging to

a native tradition that is either imaginary, long moribund, or from which he is parted by generations and geography, or to throw in his lot with an ancient tradition of white western art, from which he borrows, but with which he has scant intellectual or emotional knowledge.⁷

For Sewell, the non-white artist should not expect praise for either choice, as his/her work is “no more than a curiosity, not yet worth even a footnote in any history of 20th-century Western art.”⁸

Another derisive review came from the late editor of *Modern Painter*, Peter Fuller, in the *Sunday Telegraph* from December 10, 1989. He too blamed the lack of attention received by many of the artists of “The Other Story” on the works’ aesthetic qualities and the tastes of the London art world, comparing the fate of Souza to that of other white artists of the period who were pushed out of favor by the emergence of Pop

⁴ Brian Sewell, “Pride or Prejudice,” *Sunday Times*, November 26, 1989, p.8, reprinted in *Art and its Histories: A Reader*, ed. Steve Edwards (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999):266.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 267.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Art.⁹ Fuller then took a more direct aim at Araeen personally, citing examples of his “following” of trends in the 1960s and 70s and saying that the only reason this exhibition was staged was because Araeen “bullied and cajoled” the Arts Council and the Hayward. He claimed that Araeen’s motivation was simply funding, which directs all his work, and that the real question that needed to be asked is why, with what Fuller sees as a plethora of opportunities, black artists are still so mediocre.¹⁰ Another critic who took issue with Araeen personally wrote a review of sorts before the exhibition even opened. Writing in the summer of 1988 in *Modern Painter*, Peter Dormer called Araeen a representation of “white guilt,” whom arts administrators cannot refuse because “in rejecting him they are rejecting blacks” as a whole. Dormer argued that in the exhibits Araeen stages the “quality of the art is not the issue, it is race.”¹¹ He wrote of the “moral tone” of the exhibit that was signaled in the catalogue with the word “redemption,” and called Araeen more interesting as a polemicist than an artist. Dormer took issue with what he called Araeen’s “elegantly double sided” strategy – that a black artist should not receive funding on the basis of skin color alone, but that if a black artist (like himself) is not successful in the art world it is solely *because* of his skin color. This strategy is made more confusing, according to Dormer, by the fact that Araeen was in fact in the middle of the discourse on art and race, not marginalized outside of it. In closing, Dormer stated that while many will view Araeen’s project of “The Other Story” as helping black artists, it would have been more effective if he had not included his own work in it.¹²

⁹ Peter Fuller, “Black Artists: Don’t Forget Europe,” *Sunday Telegraph*, December 10, 1989, p. 10, reprinted in *Art and Its Histories: A Reader*, 268.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹¹ Peter Dormer, “Voice of Redemption: Mr. Rasheed Araeen and Race,” *Modern Painter* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 60.

¹² *Ibid.*

In between these polarizing reviews of “The Other Story” were some reviews and responses that sought to find the positive in the intentions of the exhibit, while offering critical questions and reflections on why it may not have been as successful as Araeen intended and opinions on how it could have been better. These kinds of responses provide the most useful grounds for further discussion of the exhibit because rather than being based on a personal dislike for Araeen or poorly concealed racism, these critiques were based on thoughtful, informed analyses of the issues and questions raised by such an exhibition. One such response came from Homi Bhabha, one of the contributors to the exhibition catalogue. He decried the dismissive response of many critics as failing to ask any major or meaningful questions about it, instead fanning the controversy which surrounded it. He defended Araeen but did not attempt to say that the exhibition was perfect; instead Bhabha stated that its importance lay in

our being able to acknowledge the presence of both artists in a city, and a country, whose vision of itself must change with the emergent, hybrid cultures of its people.¹³

In the second half of the same article, Sutapa Biswas recognized that this kind of major exhibition, involving both a younger and an older generation of Afro-Asian artists was overdue, but “misleadingly implies a collective authority of narrative.”¹⁴ Biswas criticized Araeen for the lack of representation of women artists in the show (only four were featured) and called his argument about modernism “a shaky premise” with sexist limitations.¹⁵ She also questioned some of Araeen’s language in decoding paintings and his choice of artists, remarking on the irony of some who were absent as representative of

¹³ Homi Bhabha and Sutapa Biswas, “The Wrong Story,” *New Statesman*, December 15, 1989, p. 40-2, reprinted in *Art and Its Histories: A Reader*, 272.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Araeen's own biases. Her main point was that this show should have been called "Rasheed Araeen's Other Story," because of the singularity of his choices and his perspective.¹⁶

Another critic, Rita Keegan, also took issue with the lack of female artists. Writing in February of 1990, she approached "The Other Story" from a feminist perspective, equating the experiences and treatment of non-white artists with those of women. Her criticisms of the reviews that were dismissive and negative was that they revealed more about the critics themselves, rather than having offered any constructive criticism.¹⁷ However, Keegan was critical of the homogeneity of media found in the show, remarking that craft-based works and photography were "sadly overlooked."¹⁸ Her main problem with the exhibition was the lack of female artists, because, in her opinion, much of the strongest work of the last ten years had been done by black women; nevertheless, she was quick to praise the women who were chosen and recognized both Araeen's struggle in putting on this show and its importance. Her exhortation was that this not be the "only story," as it reflected the choices of just one man, but that other exhibitions of this kind would follow.¹⁹ A third feminist critique was issued by Carole Enahord, who also praised Araeen's effort and enthusiasm, but took issue with the fact that the exhibit seemed to claim, or assumed, that women had not been making significant artistic contributions prior to the last few decades. She also criticized the exhibition for its endorsement of "an elitist view of art practice," leaving out any art that would be considered indigenous or craft, which may have also in turn kept women out of

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Rita Keegan, "The Story So Far," *Spare Rib*, February 1990, p. 36, reprinted in *Art and Its Histories: A Reader*, 273.

¹⁸ Ibid., 274.

¹⁹ Ibid., 276.

the show as the “notion of ‘professionalism’ might have had to undergo reconsideration.”²⁰ In each of these feminist critiques of “The Other Story” the main issue at hand is the curatorial voice and choice of Araeen. While each of these female critics recognized the significance of the exhibition and Araeen’s determination in seeing it come to fruition, their critiques point to a central aspect of the institution in both “The Other Story” and the Whitney Biennial, that of the curator and his/her subjectivity.

Turning from the issue of the under-representation of women, one critic approached “The Other Story” with serious questions about where society goes after such an exhibition. Writing in the *Oxford Art Journal* in 1990, Lola Young questioned the assumptions on which the exhibition was based in an attempt to create a space for productive discussion. She acknowledged the need for such a show, while admitting that her “deep reservations about the conceptual framework of [it], its content and the process which informs its construction.”²¹ While she stated her belief in the need for increased recognition of African and Asian artists, she also stated that the disappointment in “The Other Story” was bound to happen because one show could not possibly summarize the whole of creativity from non-white artists in post-war Britain. Her positive responses to the exhibition were that it was a “potentially inspirational moment,” significant in what it could offer as an educational tool, and that it gave recognition to artists who many still saw as outside of mainstream cultural activity in Britain.²² It was, as she saw it, “another marker on that road to self-determination and a rejection of the subordinate status

²⁰ Carole Enahord, “The Other Story-Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain,” *Women Artists Slide Library Journal* (1990): 27.

²¹ Lola Young, “Where Do We Go From Here? Musings on ‘The Other Story’,” *Oxford Art Journal* 13, no.2 (1990): 51.

²² *Ibid.*, 51-52.

assigned to” blacks.²³ Young also sought to view the exhibit in its particular context, amidst current Eurocentrism and racism. One of her critiques, however, was in the language used in the very title. For Young, using the word “other” signified an “entrapment in the language of supremacist discourse of ‘race’ and by colluding with it, we contribute to our linguistic subordination.”²⁴ She also decried the “nonsensical hybridity of a term such as ‘Afro-Asian,’” because it belied any cultural differences among the artists represented who did in fact have unique ethnicities.²⁵ One of the other problems she saw with the use of such terms is that they affect the allocation of resources and are used by funding bodies to dole out what they see as appropriate funds to minority groups. Such terms also played a role in “the way in which Black arts are allowed to operate,” causing black artists to have to make work that is seen as black enough by someone else’s (a funder, a curator, a critic) standards.²⁶ Young ended her article acknowledging the “constraints of the institutional requirements” and their effect on this exhibition, including the venue itself.²⁷ Several critical issues arise from Young’s piece that will surface again in discussions of the Biennial. In addition to the issue of curatorial voice and choice, issues arose concerning the intrinsic limitations of institutions and the problematic concerns of both the terms and language used in such exhibitions, as well as the use of artists as representatives of larger groups based on aspects of their identity and the affect this has on interpretations of their work.

There were also critical responses to “The Other Story” from two leading writers on black cultural studies in Britain. Both Kobena Mercer and Paul Gilroy wrote articles,

²³ Ibid.,54.

²⁴ Ibid., 53.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

which in part responded to “The Other Story” in Araeen’s own publication *Third Text*. Mercer’s piece delved more deeply in to one of the problems that Young identified, the expectation placed upon an exhibition of this nature and the inevitable disappointment that comes with such a “burden of representation.”²⁸ He dismissed many of the critiques as disregarding the actual work and focusing instead on issues of race and racism in “reductive ways that ignored the structural and institutional context in which the exhibition took place.”²⁹ He acknowledged that an attempt to show all the significant black art of the last forty-five years was an impossible task, which resulted in an

over-crowded and chaotic narrative that tries to tell the whole story all in one go and which inevitably simplifies what it seeks to describe and explain because it is impossible to condense and contain such a rich and complex history in one brief burst of discourse.³⁰

Mercer compared the burden this exhibition bore to the current situation of black art in general, where a sense of urgency and a need for representation was as a result of the lack of exposure they received. In other words, if exhibits like this were common, or if black artists were more widely recognized, there would not be such high expectations placed on those that were staged or known. Mercer also touched on the matter of simplification of complex ideas, which we will see again, that can occur when the entirety of the history or contribution of marginalized groups is attempted to be told in one exhibition.

Paul Gilroy credited “The Other Story” with “flushing out the ethnocentric attitudes of a number of critics who have secreted the discourse of white supremacy in their commentaries on the show.”³¹ He did not dismiss the motivation of Araeen, to re-

²⁸ Kobena Mercer, “Black Art and the Burden of Representation,” *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (1990): 61–78.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

³¹ Paul Gilroy, “Art of Darkness: Black Art and The Problem of Belonging to England,” *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (1990): 46.

write the history of modern art “through a tried and tested Anti-racist approach” of a “corrective reconstruction of the western canon,” but insisted that a revision of art history without “a debate over who did what first,” requires facing and addressing some problems.³² One such issue is to generate new terms and perspectives through a non-narrative retelling of art history. Gilroy believed that “The Other Story” contributed to this task, but felt that Araeen did not adequately challenge dominant notions of art and artistic creativity. He also believed that Araeen tried too hard to force “a wide range of post-colonial non-European art practice into the rigid sequence that leads from modernism to postmodernism,” which he sees as neither true nor necessarily desirable.³³ Another problem he found in the exhibition was that it was too insular to the art world, that it saw race as something that just entered into the British art world after World War II and not part of the culture in a wider sense. Gilroy stated his belief that black artists have more to do than “simply filling in the spaces that racism has left blank in the history of art.”³⁴ He felt that the task of black artists is to try to incorporate all the parts of their hybrid identity more effectively, recognizing the danger that arises from binary terms of black and white, as “two mutually opposed definitions of cultural nationalism,” neither of which “offers anything constructive for the future.”³⁵ Here another aspect of institutional limitations is brought to light; the institution in question being that of the Western discourse of art history and modernism, which Araeen used the framework for “The Other Story.” Gilroy questioned Araeen’s lack of critical analysis in his employment of this institution as the exhibition’s guiding principle.

³² Ibid., 48.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 52.

The responses to the Whitney Biennial follow much the same pattern as those of “The Other Story”-positive reviews, negative and dismissive reviews, and thoughtful analysis. There are, however, no reviews that I have found that wholeheartedly praised the Biennial. As with the reviews and commentary on “The Other Story,” the thoughtful analyses prove to be most useful for further discussion. One of the positive reviews of the 1993 Biennial was from a debate piece by Laura Cottingham and Hilton Als in *Frieze*, from May 1993. The first part of the article defended what many other critics reviled about the show – the lack of aesthetic quality of the works shown – as being part of the tradition that “situates art away from the easy chair, the quotidian details of comfort” in order to bring politics into the artwork and to encourage the viewer to think rather than take a passive role of enjoyment.³⁶ The authors said that the critics were being dishonest in saying that bad art was their enemy, rather than good politics. They went on to praise the choices of the curators, calling those choices thoughtful and inspired, only regretting the exclusion of artists who might have also been included.³⁷ Als and Cottingham discussed specific works in the Biennial and believe that most of them are multi-layered, requiring “viewer collaboration and time,” against “the conventional aesthetic dictum... that art should present the viewer with a unified, full frontal, visual-centered experience.”³⁸ To illustrate this point, the authors used Renee Green’s installation *Import/Export Funk Office* (Figure 14), a piece that the exhibition catalog described as using hip-hop music “as a location to discuss cross-cultural and theoretical issues” by showing the interpretations, and misinterpretations, of this music as it becomes

³⁶ Laura Cottingham and Hilton Als, “The Pleasure Principled,” *Frieze* 10 (May 1993).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

translated in Germany.³⁹ The first part of this essay ended with a defense of the inclusion of a video of the Rodney King beating by George Holliday (Figure 15); Holliday is not an artist, but the authors argued that the video helped to demonstrate “that the social realities of racism and sexism not only define art and cultural production, but are in turn defined by it.”⁴⁰ The second part of this essay functioned as a debate against the first. Through the telling of a story of two people’s reactions to the Biennial, the premise of “otherness as thesis” is pronounced dead and the recognition of the “disenfranchised as a whole rather than individually” is criticized because “the artist is able to avoid responsibility for what he/she is saying/doing as opposed to making them part of a movement.”⁴¹ This statement again brings up the issue of the artist as representative of a group, rather than recognizing them as an individual and hints at one of the problems that arises from doing this; that the artist does in fact become part of a “movement,” whether they choose to or not. If otherness is the thesis of the Biennial, this also creates an artistic environment where artists may *have* to choose to become part of a movement based on some aspect of their identity in order to be recognized.

Another, more hesitantly positive review appeared in *Flash Art*; the May/June 1993 issue. Author Jeff Rian praised the Biennial for being more thematically focused and the curators for choosing young, unknown artists over those that previously dominated such exhibitions, market-successful white male artists. Rian felt that the curators were able to convey the political message they intended “without hammering us

³⁹ Thelma Golden, “What’s White... ?,” in *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 34.

⁴⁰ Cottingham and Als, “The Pleasure Principled.”

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

with agendas most of us already accept and agree with.”⁴² He specifically lauded works in the exhibition but acknowledges that in some, like Bruce and Norman Yanamoto’s 16-foot-tall Easter Island figure (Figure 16), part of their multimedia piece *Land of Projection*, “production outscales artistic merit.”⁴³ Citing Green’s *Import/Export Funk Office* (Figure 14) and Shu Lea Cheang’s *Those Fluttering Objects of Desire* (Figure 17), an installation that evokes 900 number interactions where viewers may dial a number and hear female performance artists talk about sexuality, Rian felt that the whole effect turned the museum into “an exposition of social discontent.”⁴⁴ Ultimately, he felt that the show’s strength was also its weakness, that in illustrating the “youthful politics and fashion” of the times, there was little passion for the art itself.⁴⁵ He stated his belief in the fact that while it is valuable to see an institution such as the Whitney broaden its scope, the ephemeral nature of much of the work created questions about which artists would last and who would “create works that can celebrate and reveal as well as bark and enflame.”⁴⁶

Largely dismissive, and even aggressive, reviews of the Biennial abounded, coming from critics on both the left and right, in major mainstream publications. In *The New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik wrote that the Whitney “has reached a nadir of sanctimonious, self-congratulatory sloganeering” with its show of “political” art.⁴⁷ He dismissed the work as either being “grindingly obvious” or “else bafflingly oblique,” combining “the excitement of a seminar at the New School with the charm of a

⁴² Jeff Rian, “The 1993 Whitney Biennial: Everyone Loves a Fire,” *Flash Art* 170 (May/June 1993): 78.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁷ Adam Gopnik, “The Art World,” *The New Yorker*, March 22, 1993, p.100.

reeducation camp.”⁴⁸ To him, all the work was propaganda and therefore unreal in its nature, and he saw this kind of politicization of art as “a sign of the sterile disengagement of art from society, rather than its opposite.”⁴⁹ That same week Robert Hughes, writing for *Time*, called the show “a saturnalia of political correctness, a long-winded immersion course in marginality” where the “aesthetic quality is for the most part feeble,” but “the level of grievance and moral rhetoric, however, is stridently high.”⁵⁰ He labeled Holliday’s video the key to a show of “Artist as Victim, or as Victim’s Representative,” and says that only a few “genuine works of art... manage to survive” in this “fiesta of whining.” He wrote that the majority of the work in the Biennial dealt with largely agreed upon propositions, such as “Racism is wrong,” in such an oblique way, that once the viewer figured it out they somehow felt newly included in a discourse they were already proponents of. Hughes stated his preference for works that dealt with such issues not only by rhetoric, but with imagination, and criticized the catalog with its essays “of such jargon-filled obscurantism that they go beyond parody.”⁵¹ He summed up the Biennial as follows:

It’s glum, preachy, sophomoric and aesthetically aimless. Indifferent to pleasure, it becomes college-level art for college-level thinking about civic virtue. Part of the trouble is that the Whitney... still clings to the romantic avant-garde idea that visual artists get to sense things before anyone else, that they are uniquely equipped with antennae that tell us what’s wrong with the world before other folk can cotton on to it.⁵²

In U.S News and World Report, John Leo defined the Biennial as “yet another politically correct art show meant to frighten the white folks (and of course, the male

⁴⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Robert Hughes, “Art: The Whitney Biennial: A Fiesta of Whining,” *Time*, March 22, 1993, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,978001,00.html>

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

folks and the straight folks).”⁵³ He called the work agitprop, saying that low expectations are reasonable to have for this show in which “almost any angry sentiment seems to qualify as art.”⁵⁴ He bashed the Biennial for being too didactic, where both the artists and the guides lecture, and where the world is divided into good and bad – the good consisting of women, nonwhites, and homosexuals, the bad consisting of America, straight white males, religion, and family. Leo concluded his article with a rhetorical question to “the dunderheads at the Whitney”: why would they, as an institution at the center, “join the crusade to do themselves in” with a show that seeks destabilize the very center they are apart of?⁵⁵ While these critiques, as some of those of “The Other Story,” may reveal in their vitriol the personal prejudices of the critics themselves, they also bring up an important issue that we will see again in other, less dismissive, reviews of the Biennial. This issue is that of the didacticism of the exhibition, which comes in part as a result of the simplification of complex issues of identity and politics within the institution.

Reviews of the Biennial were also featured in many art publications. For the most part these reviews were not quite as vehemently opposed to the exhibition, but they were not wholly in praise of it either. In *ARTNews*, Steven Madoff dubbed the biennial “the Whitney’s PC Theme Park,” where PC stood for not only politically correct, but predictably correct or chic as well.⁵⁶ His suggested title for the show was “The Biennial of *Their* Discontent,” as the audience that saw the show was largely white, straight, and middle-class, in opposition to the marginalized groups represented by the artists. He

⁵³ John Leo, “Cultural War at the Whitney,” *U.S. New and World Report*, March 14, 1993, www.usnews.com/usnews/opinion/articles/930322/archive_014839

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Steven Madoff, “Whitney Biennial: Apocalypse Now?,” *ARTNews* 92 (April 1993): 129.

criticized the installations themselves as diminishing the rawness of the work, which, along with the “essays filled with the latest jargon,” only reiterated the structures that many would argue have “built this white world of domination” and only sufficed to speak to those who are “already converted.”⁵⁷ While he saw the concept of the show as laudable, his ultimate appraisal was that the show, “caught up in buzzwords and radical chic,” was blank, hollow, and hopeless, offering no suggestions for real reform or even a truly representative group of art and artists.⁵⁸

In the *New Art Examiner*, Terry Myers bemoaned the didactic nature of the show and asked whether this attempt to give us multiculturalism was an actual reflection of the way in which it functions in everyday life or was merely a “heavily curatorially controlled version of the seemingly well-intentioned but insidious lip service that still plagues the art world.”⁵⁹ He saw the exhibition as finger-pointing, with blame placed for the sake of attention, rather than as a constructive challenge to the status quo. Another problem he had with the Biennial was the fact that the audio guide, i.e., the curators, tell the listener what they are seeing and how they should react, which he saw as defeating the whole concept of multiculturalism, where different people find different meanings in the same things.⁶⁰ He took issue with the curators in other points as well, including their audacity in the determination of who is an artist (George Holliday) and the inclusion of Matthew Barney, who Myers believes has been forced curatorially into a problematic position within the exhibition. To Myers, Barney’s use of the image of the satyr in his *Drawing Restraint 7* (Figure 18), loaded in its relationship to male homosexuality,

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Terry R. Myers, “Never yell “fire!” in a crowded Whitney Biennial,” *New Art Examiner* 20 (May 1993): 21.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.

coupled with Barney's own heterosexuality, proves that he is here and "bankable" because he is not actually gay.⁶¹ The only thing he found successful about the Biennial was the articulation of feminism, but his hope is that in the future, artists of all genders, races, and sexual orientations can be shown together making work from a wider variety of media and on a wider variety of topics. He believes that an exhibition becomes truly multicultural "not when the "boys" [white, straight men] are excluded, but rather when they join the dialogue as participants who are no more important than any others."⁶²

The May 1993 issue of *ArtForum* included eleven short pieces on the Biennial, some more enthusiastic than others. I will focus on those that bring up similar issues to those we have seen in other reviews of the Biennial and "The Other Story" in order to further illustrate the common concerns that arise from such exhibits. Hilton Als called the Biennial "a novelty act worth a couple of laughs, if you can find them" and dismissed looking to museums "for a discourse of disenfranchisement that speaks for" him because of the unmindful, presumptuous stance of such institutions of culture to their own agendas "based on themes such as "otherness," disenfranchisement, of "Why not more for me?"⁶³ Bruce Ferguson cited the context of the show, acknowledging that the curators of the Biennial were attempting to navigate a landscape where terms like "race," "sex," and "gender" have become "neutral, even stylish terms for real conditions... that threaten the fabric of urban democracy" in an arena where resistance may still be possible, but that because of the choices of some of the work, which he calls "silly and adolescent" their argument was opened to debate.⁶⁴ The lack of painting, and what he

⁶¹ Ibid., 23.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Hilton Als, "You Better Work," *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 7.

⁶⁴ Bruce W. Ferguson, "Reading Rights and Writing Wrongs," *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 9.

called bad examples of it, put the viewer back in the position of privileging that medium, which is why it's not represented in the first place.⁶⁵ Ferguson does not elaborate on this use of the term "bad examples," but due to the lack of paintings present in the show one can assume that to Ferguson, Ida Applebroog (Figure 19) and Peter Cain (Figure 20) fit in this category.

Dan Cameron, an artist, saw the show creating a new false dichotomy in art world lingo by placing politics and beauty at odds with one another. He accused the curators Sussman and Golden of sharing "a personal hatred for anything that might provoke an outbreak of guilt-free pleasure," and claimed that the show asked viewers and artists to "declare that any overt preoccupations with esthetic principles represent an evasion of the artist's social contract."⁶⁶ One example of an artist whose work is overtly political, but lacking in traditional aesthetic qualities is Sue Williams. Her *It's A New Age* (Figure 21) and *Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn?* (Figure 22), do not appear as polished, finished paintings, but instead use text and cartoon-like drawing to discuss political issues. While he expressed pleasure with many of the changes represented in this Biennial, he stated that "substituting feel-good liberalism for big-gallery clout is not going to satisfy anyone's craving for cultural diversity" for very long.⁶⁷ Two other *ArtForum* pieces are worth examining for their relevance to previously illustrated issues. One, by Thomas McEvelley, acknowledged that this Biennial was more "post-modern and more ideologically self-conscious" than others like it in the past, but he criticized the Puritanism of the show, the singular voice the viewer hears. He found irony in the fact that in an exhibition that is supposedly about difference, no difference is found at all, the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁶ Dan Cameron, "Backlash," *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 12.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

same rhetoric is merely repeated and there is no room for real dialogue. For him, the Biennial merely seemed to “preach to the converted, and runs the risk of provoking the unconverted to renewed hostility rather than attempting to sway them through argument and dialogue.”⁶⁸ Another essay that criticized the rather limited voice of the exhibition is by Liz Kotz. She took issue with the New York-centric curating and believed that there was only a superficial engagement with the works of video installations because of this. She felt that the choice of art is “familiar and relatively unchallenging work by midcareer artists whose relevance to the present moment seems slight,” and that the Whitney really just continued to show the same video artists over and over again at the expense of others. She used Gary Hill (Figure 1), who has been in six Biennials in a row, and Bill Viola (Figure 23), who has been in eight since the inclusion of video in 1973, as examples of Biennial darlings.⁶⁹ Her piece concluded with what she saw as the real problem – that while curatorial essays quoted theorists involved in critiquing essentialist ideas about identity, the actual curatorial practices “adhere to their most problematic assumptions.”⁷⁰ Each of these essays in *ArtForum* brings up critical issues of curatorial choice, institutional culpability, and the use of problematic terms and narrative within the Biennial.

In *Art in America*, Eleanor Heartney gave one of the more thoughtful reviews of the show. She credited Sussman’s attempt to open the Whitney to artists whose voices have not been heard there and praised the Biennial for its “drive for social veracity” both in media and content.⁷¹ What she did take issue with, as other critics have, was the

⁶⁸ Thomas McEvelley, “Same Difference,” *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 14.

⁶⁹ Liz Kotz, “Video Drone,” *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

strident tone the show articulates, where many artists “simply target the white male power elite as the source of all evil.”⁷² She elaborated on this by explaining that many of the works take a simplistic view of identity as only externally imposed, ignoring the complex political, social, historical, and economic forces that also play a role in identity formation. One specific example she used is Pat Ward-Williams’ “What You Look At?,” (Figure 24) a piece in which the faces of black youth stare out with the above words written in graffiti. For Heartney, this work reduced racism to a set of relationships that is “best countered by the tactic of... intimidation.”⁷³ Heartney described much of the work as espousing a simplistic view of diversity, taking the “tone of hectoring schoolmarms,” or a return to the theme of artist-child, what she sees as an avoidance of complexity.⁷⁴ She praised some of the work in the Biennial, particularly those pieces that are provocative rather than polemical, those which invite more than one reading. Two examples she gave of such “complex and powerful” works are Glenn Ligon’s *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* (Figure 25), a reconsideration of Robert Mapplethorpe’s *Black Book*, and Charles Ray’s *Family Romance* (Figure 2), a sculptural family of equal proportions which offers multiple readings on issues of childhood fantasy and the “suppressed sexuality of the family unit.”⁷⁵ Ultimately she saw the 1993 Biennial as noteworthy, not for the quality of the art but for the way “it mirrors certain disturbing trends within and outside the art world.”⁷⁶ She did feel, however, that the Whitney trivialized political art, reducing the work to the role of therapy or social work in its

⁷² Eleanor Heartney, “Report from New York: Identity Politics at the Whitney,” *Art in America* 81 (May 1993): 44.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

didacticism. She criticized the tendency to “reduce complex social issues to a politics of identity” and felt that the show gave little credence to real social problems by “focusing on the psychology of hatred and oppression.”⁷⁷ In closing, her opinion was that while some critics used the Biennial to prove that political art fails, to her there were very little substantive politics behind this show in the first place.

In addition to these reviews of the show there were some more lengthy analyses and discussions about the larger issues surrounding the Biennial. One such attempt appeared in *Afterimage* in September 1993. In this article, Charles Wright, Jr., sought to go deeper than most of the reviews, to question “the underlying institutional impetus for the topical focus of the show” and “foreground the implications of the museum’s relationship to the ideas and concerns it professed to ‘celebrate.’”⁷⁸ He drew attention to curatorial practices, the constructedness inherent in them, the role of exclusion and inclusion (of artists), and the influence such practices have on the careers of artists. He criticized the Whitney for its failure to address what he sees as a fundamental question, “What is ‘American’ in American art?”⁷⁹ He also felt that the curators neglected to address the identity and role of the Whitney in the “legacy of cultural indifference,” assuming an unproblematic relationship between the institution and ideas of Americanness and community.⁸⁰ In doing this, the museum failed to see itself as an agent of control, part of the establishment that the artists in the Biennial were making work against. Wright too took issue with the simplification he saw at work, stating that

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Charles A. Wright, Jr., “The Mythology of Difference: Vulgar Identity Politics at the Whitney Biennial,” in *Theory and Contemporary Art*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 188.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 189.

belated inclusion was not enough to remedy neglect and that questions must be asked about the complex forces which are to blame for that neglect.

Wright also faulted the Whitney for making artists representative of cultural interests and believes that in doing so they put themselves in “a double bind” by articulating difference and limiting any possibilities for real “exchange among its various agents.”⁸¹ This “divisive pigeon-holing” did not take into account any of the complexities with which artists may have identified themselves and relegated them to “cultural worker/warrior.”⁸² In this, coupled with its refusal to acknowledge its “culpability as a bastion of internalized conservative values,” Wright said, “we may not accuse the Whitney of mere tokenism, but of an orchestrated conceptual obfuscation of an ingrained exclusionary history.”⁸³ For him, the Biennial merely reinscribed the binary framing of issues because it set an emphasis on aspects of identity like race, gender, and sexuality in opposition to “whiteness,” supposing conflict with its “dialectical form of address.”⁸⁴ There was no recognition of the interdependence of subjects or of any fluidity or hybridity within and among identities. In the end, Wright felt that this exhibition may demonstrate “that the realities of cultural identity and community are too complex to be adequately articulated in the convenient terms that the museum chose to present them in” and that identity politics to the Whitney was “an intangible homogenizing force [whiteness] to which exposure would consume all ‘others.’”⁸⁵

In response to the criticism and controversy surrounding the Biennial, and for the purpose of exploring the problems that they saw as confronting art, theory, and politics at

⁸¹ Ibid., 192.

⁸² Ibid., 193.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 199.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 200-01.

the time, *October* magazine featured a roundtable conversation with several of its editors and contributors in the fall of 1993. The roundtable featured Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kolbowski, Miwon Kwon, and Benjamin Buchloh. Foster began the conversation by stating a trend he saw in much contemporary art, that the art either turns to theoretical content or it makes a political position its content.⁸⁶ Much of the work in the Whitney Biennial fell into the latter category, and Krauss saw this as the reason why critics were talking less about the art itself and more about the ideas that the art invoked, making readings of the work single-layered and succinct. She found limiting a work's meaning to one thing, given to the viewer by a curator or artist, "profoundly unpolitical."⁸⁷ This singular reading of the work was strategic, according to Kwon. The artists in the Biennial were, to her, "foregoing the responsibility of how the work is made, how it might be read, in order to consolidate politically," making the show "univocal" and providing a flat reading from the institution.⁸⁸ Kwon went on to talk about how, in this environment, artists are assumed to be political because of their gender, sexual orientation, or skin color and that their work gets "assimilated into this pluralistic, multiculturalist project" where it cannot be about anything other than oppression or marginalization.⁸⁹ Kwon also recognized the dilemma that artists of color face when it is assumed that just because they are not white, they will make something "unfamiliar, challenging, and different," and that in this case, "signs of difference alone then become the criteria" by which the art is valued.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kolbowski, Miwon Kwon, and Benjamin Buchloh. "The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial," *October* 66 (Autumn, 1993): 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

The roundtable went on to discuss the limitations of institutions and the reductionism often required in the demand for representation of marginalized groups. To them, Critical theory was introduced to challenge such reductive patterns “of making and viewing, and now in the name of that same theory formalist and iconographic modes are smuggled back in.”⁹¹ This has created an environment where art is made in imitation of discourse, where those delimitations are an essential part of the work. The politicization of art, for Buchloh, presents a problem because the work eliminates any historical dimensions or meaningful reflections on the complexities of such issues. The writers also discussed the dichotomy between activist art and aesthetics, recognizing the difficulty that these two terms have had coexisting; when critiqued, art must either be pretty or political, but is rarely seen to be capable of being both.⁹² The conversation ended with a discussion about the dangers in representing “exclusion in essentialist terms” – to believe that certain people have more real experiences because of their identities “is a potentially racist position to take.”⁹³ Ultimately, it is the idea that there can be “no mediation or multiple positionings” that concerns these writers.⁹⁴

In looking at the contemporary reviews and critiques of “The Other Story” and the 1993 Whitney Biennial, similar issues are raised even though the exhibits themselves are very different. One such issue is the simplification, or reductionism, of complex issues of identity. This is related to the limitations of the institutions, which is another issue touched on by many critics. There are certain restraints within which museums and exhibits function, and these limitations must be addressed and pointed out up front, rather

⁹¹ Ibid., 22.

⁹² Ibid., 25.

⁹³ Ibid., 26-27.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 27.

than elided or ignored. Institutions and curators must also recognize the role such spaces and structures have played in the marginalization of artists. Singular reading of works and univocal interpretations are symptomatic of these limitations and are seen in both exhibitions. Other common themes among critics are the way difference itself becomes a marker of quality and the use of artists as representative of entire populations of marginalized peoples. This is problematic in many ways, as it limits the kinds of works artists can make and how that work is perceived. The issue of aesthetic quality of the art shown, versus the political statement it makes or the curatorial point it proves, is another common theme. This argument sets up yet another dichotomy in place of those that each of these exhibits seeks to dispel. In an attempt to bring marginalized groups into the center, the institution often replaces one set of binaries with other sets. There is also the issue of curatorial choice and voice, including the inclusion/exclusion of certain artists and works and the interpretation of those works. These issues function as a telling point of both curatorial power and intention, as well as the inherent limitations of the institutional framework within which they work. By taking a closer look at some of the criticisms and issues surrounding “The Other Story” and the 1993 Whitney Biennial, I am now able to see the common problems which accompany exhibits with such complex and lofty goals. In the following chapters I will focus specifically on the distinct, but related issues of institutional limitations and contradictions and the problematic aspects of the articulation of difference, describing and analyzing some of the reasons why such issues are perpetuated, how they affect the exhibitions and the artists, and what they mean as we look at these exhibitions in a larger sense, both past and present and within and outside the art world.

CHAPTER 3

Caught in a Bind: Institutional Limitations and Contradictions

One of the common issues that arose out of the critical reviews of “The Other Story” and the Whitney Biennial, and one of the primary reasons that these exhibitions were not seen as unequivocal triumphs at the time, was the limitations inherent in the institutions that supported them. Here, I am referring to the structural and ideological limitations inherent in major museums and galleries, as well as Western art historical discourse, which prevent or inhibit the possibility of adequately addressing complex issues of identity and difference. This chapter examines three ways in which institutional limitations presented themselves as they relate to the two exhibitions and the criticisms leveled at them. First, it considers the role the institutions and discourses played in creating the need for such exhibitions; second, it examines the function of the curators and the implications and contradictions of their curatorial choices; third, it discusses the inevitable simplification of the complexity of race and identity that occurs through the process of classification and explanation of works that accompanies exhibitions. The issue of institutional limitations is particularly salient in light of the fact that attempts to rewrite and redress a history of exclusion based on aspects of identity are enacted in and use some of the very structures that facilitated and promoted that exclusion.

The Whitney and the Hayward are not institutional spaces that exist in a vacuum; they are included in larger structures of power and information-sharing in the United States and Britain. As such, they are implicit in the marginalization of the groups of artists featured in both “The Other Story” and the Biennial. Historically, museums have served the ideological role of supporting dominant power structures and perpetuating the status quo of hegemonic societies.¹ They are founded and funded by someone or some body and as such, are not neutral spaces. In addition, specific exhibitions are also often funded with expectations or limitations based on sponsorship, support, or tradition. While neither Araeen nor the curators of the Whitney attempted to elide this fact, they did not explicitly address it either. In exhibitions that seek to bring marginalized groups of artists into mainstream visibility, an acknowledgement of the institution’s role (be it the specific museum or the broader concept of the museum as institution) in the complex historical and political issues that contributed to that marginalization is vital in addressing the conditions that caused the need for such an exhibit in the first place. Because neither of these exhibits explicitly addressed this role of the exhibiting space or the framework within which the exhibition was staged, they did not truly seek to explain how and why these groups of artists had been marginalized, in turn obfuscating the ways in which museums have been implicated in that very marginalization. The exhibits therefore became simply an addition to or revision of existing art historical narratives and did not offer any critical perspectives on how such narratives got to the point of needing said addition or revision.

¹ Mark O’Neill, “Essentialism, adaptation and justice: Towards a new epistemology of museums,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21, no. 2 (2006): 97.

This was precisely one of the main criticisms that Charles Wright, Jr. had of the Whitney Biennial in his article from *Afterimage*. In reference to one of then-director David Ross's statements in the introduction to the catalogue that part of the Whitney's role as an American art museum is to question "the nature of control,"² Wright stated, "It is apparent that Ross does not recognize the museum's own role as such an agent and presumes it to be neutral."³ He decried the "historical amnesia" that he believed the Whitney feigned in an attempt to elide its own "legacy of cultural indifference" and saw the exhibit as "a conciliatory rehearsal" of a twenty-year cycle, where the Whitney must respond to the times (as it did in 1973 with a similarly "diverse" Biennial) and produce a show in "the guise of cultural inclusion cum identity politics."⁴ In staging a show of artists concerned with identity, the Whitney did not attempt to question its own institutional identity or even answer a basic question about its very name and existence, namely "what is 'American' in American Art?"⁵ The result of this refusal to question and acknowledge its own limitations and role in structures of power was that while this Biennial did bring artists into the Whitney that had previously been excluded, the museum's *relationships* with those under recognized groups did not, according to Wright, undergo any significant change in a larger sense.⁶ This lack of changed relationships can also be seen in the Guerrilla Girls 1995 poster (Figure 9) which illustrates the return to "business as usual" for the Whitney and the Biennial just two years later. For Wright,

² *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 9.

³ Charles A. Wright, Jr., "The Mythology of Difference: Vulgar Identity Politics at the Whitney Biennial," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 189.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

this refusal meant that “we may not accuse the Whitney of mere tokenism, but of an orchestrated conceptual obfuscation of an ingrained exclusionary history.”⁷

In the case of “The Other Story,” the institution that remained unquestioned is to a greater extent the Western narrative of art history than the physical location of the Hayward and the implications associated with that space’s history. The Hayward, however, does, by its very nature as a publicly funded institution, represent the interests of the British government to some extent. “The Other Story” was also funded by the Arts Council, which is a government entity and had, for eleven years, previously denied Araeen support for this project. Araeen does not discuss the significance of the space in which he exhibits, nor does he address the possible implications of the timing of his government support. In his framing of the exhibition, Araeen employed the discourse of modernism, which played a role in the exclusion of non-white artists in the post-war British art world, to reintroduce their stories into the master narrative of art history that they have been largely left out of. For Paul Gilroy, this approach has limitations because it “leaves dominant notions of art and artistic creativity entirely unscathed” and does not create any new concepts or perspectives with which to view the history of art.⁸ He also felt that in “the necessary but insufficient tactic of corrective inclusion,” Araeen attempted to force a wide range of work into “the rigid sequence that leads from modernism to post-modernism” that is “not always possible let alone desirable.”⁹ In using a dominant, Western discourse to organize his show, Araeen excluded artists and works that did not fit within “parameters defined by the West” and only superficially

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Paul Gilroy, “Art of Darkness: Black Art and the Problem of Belonging to England,” *Third Text* 4, no.10 (1990): 48.

⁹ Ibid.

explored the wide differences within non-white art practices.¹⁰ By treating modernism and post-modernism as universals, Araeen did not question the system which defines the criteria of value in art and implicitly, by exclusion, held up the elitist views that kept any kind of craft or indigenous art from being a part of this show.¹¹

While the Whitney failed to investigate its own culpability in the creation of a need for a show with the theme of the 1993 Biennial, “The Other Story” framed a revision of Western narratives in the very terms that facilitated and perpetuated the “Other’s” exclusion. In each instance, the exhibition was criticized because of the failure to fully explore and question the complexities of the history they were seeking to revise. As Wright stated in his *Afterimage* critique of the Biennial,

It is not enough today to claim inclusion as an unqualified remedy to simple neglect. Rather, one must question the how and why of that inclusion and distinguish it from other unsustainable efforts to accomplish parity.¹²

Wright highlights a central issue of exhibitions that deal with identity and difference: in refusing or failing to fully examine the specific and complex circumstances that brought about the need for these shows, the exhibitions were simply seen as good intentions that lacked sustained effort to make any real, lasting changes in the exhibition, reception, or writing of art and its history.

Another of the criticisms of “The Other Story” was that it was in reality only the story of the curator, Rasheed Araeen. In the instance of the 1993 Biennial, rather than choosing the work through a consensus of curators, Elisabeth Sussman had the final say

¹⁰ Carole Enahord, “The Other Story-Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain,” *Women Artists Slide Library Journal* (1990): 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Wright, “The Mythology of Difference,” 190.

in whose work was shown and how. There was a committee of curators who worked with her, but ultimately, Sussman could decide what was included and what was not. While Sussman only contributed one essay in the exhibition catalogue, Araeen wrote most of the catalogue for ‘The Other Story,’ even including a third-person description of his own work. In almost all museum or gallery exhibitions, there is a curator or group of curators, whose choices and vision form the exhibit and its catalogue and, because of this, an exhibition can never truly be an objective account of any history or theme. Curatorial function is also often restricted by the “interests of more powerful groups and constituencies,” as curators are the intermediary between professional networks, artists, and audiences and to pretend that any course of action on the part of the curators “exists outside the web of market or institutionally dominated interests is a fallacy.”¹³ This accepted fact about the nature of exhibits becomes more evident however, in exhibitions that deal with issues of identity because one curator (or a very small group of curators) is attempting a virtually impossible task, to tell the story of an entire group, or groups, of marginalized people. In this, a danger lies in the retelling becoming just as restrictive and limited as the forces which caused marginalization in the first place. Instead of arbiters of taste or artistic quality, curators become cultural mediators or brokers, charged with the task “to uncover and explicate how the artistic practices of traditionally subordinate or peripheral groups... convey notions of identity.”¹⁴ This places the curator, as cultural broker, “at the very core of a contradiction” where on one hand they are seen as tearing

¹³ Mari Carmen Ramirez, “Brokering Identities: art curators and the politics of cultural representation,” in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

down “artworld hierarchies” and at the same time “framing and packing... images of the collective self” which can result in a “highly delusionary enterprise.”¹⁵

There are other limitations associated with the curatorial voice and choice within institutions. First, it is impossible to for any person to create an exhibit that is completely objective. Just as the institution is not an objective entity free from cultural restraints, curators work within their own set of experiences, identities, and biases. Secondly, there must always be choice, exclusion and inclusion, involved in the act of curating. The choices made by curators affect the exhibits and how they are received and interpreted, whether intended by the curator or not. Curatorial choices do not simply consist of deciding which works are shown, but also how those works are displayed and interpreted and what texts are included, both in wall panels and exhibition catalogues. Museum practitioners “are centrally invested in the activity of making the visible legible... personifying objects as the representations of their makers” and defining relationships in their framing of exhibitions.¹⁶ As Donald Preziosi points out in his introduction to *Grasping the World*, the origins and development of museums and art history go hand in hand and as such, the task of curators – labeling, classifying, and explaining – though taken for granted, can become problematic.¹⁷ He states that because museums are informal educational sites, they often perpetuate “racial/ethnic/national/gender stereotypes” because visitors are not prepared to “analyze both the framework and its contents.”¹⁸ These aspects of institutional practice relate to the third aspect mentioned in the introduction to this chapter: in framing a story, theme, or show with a necessarily

¹⁵ Ibid., 23-24.

¹⁶ Donald Preziosi, “What are Museums For?,” in *Grasping the World*, edited by Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

limited, subjective voice, it often becomes inevitable that complexities will be reduced and shows will be framed within the very same binaries they were attempting to dispel.

Araeen acknowledged in his Prologue to the catalogue for “The Other Story” that there will inevitably be artists who did not come to my attention or whose work I did not understand, and who have thus been excluded; it was necessary to make a tight selection, given the limited resources and the specific objective of this project.¹⁹

He can also be credited with explaining why he made the choices he did and how he chose to categorize the works, even acknowledging his regret that more than four women artists were not included. He attributed this to “socio-historical factors, rather than... a repeated rhetoric of mythical ‘blackwomen artists’ who have been ignored.”²⁰ Araeen also acceded to what he knew would be other criticisms of the exhibit, defending his choices by saying that while some would claim he had “fallen into the trap of ‘white’ culture” or that he is an elitist regarding quality, he was in fact attempting to show that “prevailing artistic criteria... must be challenged and changed.”²¹ He too understood that some artists, who declined participation in this exhibit, saw it as essentialist, as it was based solely on racial or ethnic identity. This refusal of some artists to participate also affected his choices, and he regretted specifically the refusal of Kim Lim because he saw her as “both an important modern sculptor in the 60s and after, a *woman* artist who has not received due recognition.”²² His choices for the show were based both on his personal decisions and circumstances that may have forced him to choose artists as a result of others declining inclusion.

¹⁹ Rasheed Araeen, ed. *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in post-war Britain*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989), 105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

²² *Ibid.*, 106.

I would like to posit that what Araeen said he was doing and what he actually does with and in this exhibition, do not in fact align on every account. I find contradictions in much of this catalog, as well as with other writing that Araeen has published. He says that there is “no single monolithic standard of quality within the dominant discourse” and that “changes are taking place all the time,” but he refuses in his catalogue to ever attribute the waning success, or lack of success, of any of the artists he exhibits could possibly be due in part to those changes, it is always singularly based on their race, their Otherness.²³ He believes that one of the only reasons these non-white artists experienced success was due to the marginality of London’s art scene and the city’s desire to “develop into an international cultural centre” that created a “euphoric spirit among a section of British society that welcomed the arrival in England of artists from abroad.”²⁴ Their success, however, was only based on their Otherness, as a constant part of the discussion and recognition of their work. Araeen uses a few examples of headlines describing such work like “Oriental Week” and “Indian Vision,” as symptomatic of this trend. Ironically, however, Araeen never acknowledges the problematic title of his own show. In using the word “Other,” which is arguably less specific than descriptors like Oriental and Indian, he not only continues to use the kind of language he seems here to despise as a marker of these artists’ identity, but he also lumps a diverse group of artists into one vaguely defined category. Also, in his explanation for the rise and fall of the successful careers of a Francis Newton Souza and Avinash Chandra, he reduces it to their Otherness; they were successful because they were Indian, but their success did not last also because they were Indian. Araeen even said in the

²³ Ibid., 105.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

catalog's introduction that "one is amazed by the kind of support and response which Afro-Asian artists received during their successful period."²⁵ It is not clear why one should be so amazed, nor that race or ethnicity did not play a large role in the fates of Souza, Chandra, or any of the other artists in "The Other Story," but to my mind, Araeen greatly simplifies cause and effect and uses the exact same terms and assumptions that he criticizes in his explanations of what he's attempting to revise.

Araeen defines the fate of post-war Afro-Asian artists in conspiratorial terms, saying that "it is no coincidence that the British art world became completely white by the end of the 60s," due to the influence of American cultural imperialism.²⁶ I do not disagree with the fact that American cultural imperialism did much to suppress other cultural expressions aside from its own, but Araeen does not attempt to fully explore the complexities of this aspect of post-war history. Rather, he notes

Since the details are so complicated I have to generalize and simplify the whole thing in order just to explain its relationship with the emergence of a new situation in Britain.²⁷

Araeen faced a great difficulty, a basic institutional limitation, in the project of writing this exhibition catalogue because it would be impossible to explain every factor contributing to the marginalization of Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain within the limited space he had. In addition, this was not his ultimate goal; rather he was trying to show how Afro-Asian artists had contributed to British art and he was doing so in a manner that allowed him to capitalize on the political solidarity of non-white British citizens of the 1980s. However, the catalogue consistently simplified and reduced all the artworks to the subjects of race, which was precisely what Araeen said he wished to

²⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷ Ibid.

avoid. For instance, he makes no connection to the lack of success of the work in the exhibit, which was almost exclusively painting, to post-war art world trends in new media. Instead, the discussion of works was dominated by the artists' struggle as defined by their race.

In an essay from 1991 in which Araeen responds to criticisms of "The Other Story," he admits (in a footnote) that his own preference

would have been to curate an exhibition of postwar British art which would include both white and black artists, and showed their comparison, but I *doubt* if I would have received support or funding for such a project.²⁸

In the 1980s, minority groups or "causes" were only beginning to receive their perceived "share of the multicultural funding pie," as Araeen's difficulties in obtaining funding attest.²⁹ On the other hand, Araeen might have drawn attention to this hypothetical conceptual frame for "The Other Story" in order to avoid being criticized for a racially exclusive show. Nevertheless, because it was his aim to tell the story of artists who have been left out of art history, it begs the question as to why he felt the need to defend a racially exclusive show (since, as he reminds us, the majority of shows before this consisted solely of white artists). These contradictory aspects of "The Other Story" arise out of Araeen having to work within existing binaries, and his choice of artists and language belie the fact that no exhibition of Afro-Asian artists, as he admits, can be or tell the whole story. His personal struggle as an artist, as well as his thwarted efforts to put on this show and the possibly unspecified external criteria he was working under to receive the funding for the show, compounds the institutional limitations and adds

²⁸ Rasheed Araeen, "The Other Immigrant: The Experiences and Achievements of Afro-Asian Artists in the Metropolis," *Third Text* 15, 1991: 27. (emphasis my own)

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

another layer of complexities to the critique and analysis of this exhibition. As one writer says, because this exhibit was one of the first forays into “breaking the institutional white monopoly in London,” it was “necessarily partial.”³⁰ This partiality, however, was bound to affect the interpretations and criticisms of the exhibition.

In the case of the 1993 Whitney Biennial, the personal struggles and experiences of the curators did not play the same role in the creation and execution of the exhibition as in “The Other Story.” The Biennial had been established by the founder of the museum, Gertrude Whitney, six decades earlier, so these curators were creating an exhibition within a tradition of shows that were meant to illustrate the trends in American art over the preceding two years. Previously the Biennials’ catalogues had been organized by media and curatorial essays had been minimal. The art featured in the Biennials came from artists who had come to prominence in the previous two years or from mid-career artists, but were not chosen based on a shared thematic engagement. Because of the political and social climate of the early 1990s, the current trends, as seen by the curators of the ’93 Biennial, centered on art that dealt with issues of identity and politics. Based on the prevalent issues of the day, they proceeded to choose artists whose work fit within that framework and they sought to include artists from a variety of ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual identities so as to properly represent the groups of people who were seen to be closest to the issues at hand in the American cultural landscape at the time. These choices included one that many critics blasted, the inclusion of the video by George Holliday (Figure 15), who was not, in any sense, an artist. David Ross was the new director at the Whitney in 1993 and had brought Elizabeth Sussman with him from his previous institution, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. She, along with

³⁰ Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11-12.

John Hanhardt, curator of media arts, Lisa Phillips, and Thelma Golden curated the show and wrote essays for the exhibition catalog.³¹

In her introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue, Sussman provided three criteria by which the work in the Biennial should be judged. The criteria were: art that is about ideas is not lacking in aesthetic qualities, works about cultural positions are not static when we avoid essentialist definitions, and art should be redefined as a process of exchange rather than a “seamless, homogenous entity.”³² However, some of the statements by the other curators in the catalog seem to contradict these statements, as does the exhibition itself. For example, in Thelma Golden’s essay, “What’s White...?,” she simultaneously praises artists who are challenging the hegemony of whiteness, while basing her argument on essentialist notions of skin color. One work she uses as an example is *Museum Tags: Second Movement (Overture) or Overture con Claque-Overture with Hired Audience Members* (Figure 24), by Daniel Martinez, where he created buttons that were given to museum visitors with parts or the whole of the phrase, “I can’t imagine ever wanting to be white” printed on them. She lauds this work for attempting to reverse “decades of negativism about all things not white” and to cause visitors to “acknowledge the level of control inherent in museum practice and presentation and absolve themselves of some of the privilege of cultural imperialism.”³³ Does including this work absolve too the Whitney? Golden briefly acknowledged the control inherent in museum practice but did not seemingly apply that awareness specifically to the Whitney. Her continued use of binaries like white and non-white

³¹ Elizabeth Sussman, “Then and Now: Whitney Biennial 1993,” *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 75.

³² Elizabeth Sussman, “Coming Together in Parts: Positive Power in the Art of the Nineties,” *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat., (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 14.

³³ Thelma Golden, “What’s White...?,” *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 34-35.

(negative and positive in this case) failed to offer any alternative to essentialist notions or static practices as Sussman claims the work here does. This perpetuation of binary descriptors is indicative of the way that race, and discussions of race, are often framed, particularly in the United States, where there is rarely a space for any multiplicity of identity.

In her essay, “No Man’s Land: At the Threshold of the Millennium,” Lisa Phillips contradicts the claim that Sussman makes that art about ideas is still concerned with aesthetics. Phillips cites many examples of work that are “handmade, deliberately crude, tawdry, casual, and lacks finish,”³⁴ which she identified as “pathetic aesthetic” and “slacker art” created in “reaction to the feeling of inadequacy engendered by repressive social structures mirrored in the media.”³⁵ Phillips cites the work of Sue Williams (Figures 21 and 22) and Karen Kilimnik (Figure 27) as examples of this trend. This is in direct contradiction to Sussman’s claim that “despite a widespread belief to the contrary, art committed to ideas is not lacking in what are thought of as the traditional aesthetic qualities”³⁶ and it seems that, as Wright claimed, “a careful reading of the catalog reveals not one, but three shows” where each of “the curatorial texts... constructs views on the machinations of identity politics from disparate perspectives.”³⁷ The claim that things had changed in this Biennial and one curator had the ultimate say was clouded by the voices of the other curators, which seemed to confuse the issues at stake. In addition, the artists chosen for the exhibition itself contradicted the third of Sussman’s claims, that art should be a process of exchange. There was, as criticisms of the exhibition pointed out,

³⁴ Lisa Phillips, “No Man’s Land: At the Threshold of the Millennium,” *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat., 53.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁶ Sussman, “Coming Together in Parts,” *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat, 14.

³⁷ Wright, “The Mythology of Difference,” 195.

very little real exchange that occurred. Because artists who were considered to represent the dominant, repressive, white, heterosexual male constituency were largely denied access to this Biennial, the possibility of real or meaningful dialogue between those who have been oppressed and those who are the agents of that oppression was wholly unavailable.

Because of this lack of exchange and dialogue, the simplification of complex issues in the Biennial, as evidenced by many of the critiques of the show, took the form of didacticism and victimization. Mike Kelley's banners, represented by one image here (Figure 28), provided what was seen as a simplistic view of diversity. These mock campus banners were meant to represent a variety of organizations that might draw different groups of college students, illustrating the obvious fact that people have divergent interests and belong to a variety of social groups. Byron Kim's *Syndecdoche* (Figure 29) pointed out the "rather unremarkable fact that people come in different colors" through a grid of monochrome canvases meant to represent shades of flesh.³⁸ Pepón Osorio's *Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime?)* (Figure 30) was seen to emblemize the victimization of Latinos. This installation consisted of a scene of a Latino woman's murder, the room featuring cassette tapes with English and Spanish quotations indicating the ways in which Latinos are "depicted and misrepresented in film."³⁹ The room, which was cordoned off with police tape, also featured gaudy trinkets, red walls, and wallpaper referring to a Spanish television station, further illustrating the ways in which whites stereotype Latinos. Through the work that was included, which was sometimes seen as

³⁸ Eleanor Heartney, "Report from New York: Identity Politics at the Whitney," *Art in America* 81 (May 1993): 46.

³⁹ Terry R. Myers, "Never yell 'fire!' in a crowded Whitney Biennial," *New Art Examiner* 20 (May 1993): 21.

confrontational and even hostile, the complexities of the struggles of minority groups in America were interpreted as being reduced to blame-laying and finger-pointing. One example of this hostility, as seen in Eleanor Heartney's reviews, was Pat Ward Williams' *What You Lookn At?* (Figure 22). The installation featured larger than life-size black youth whose direct gaze challenged white viewers and those who passed by on the street. As critics pointed out time and again, singular readings of the works on display encouraged by wall texts and curatorially narrated audio guides reduced the works to interpretations based *only* on issues of identity politics, denying the complexities of the lived experiences of the artists themselves and the groups they represented. (This problematic aspect of the artist as representative will be discussed in the next chapter). Such simplification of complex social issues and experiences "ignores economic and social determinants like class, religion, and nationality, offering instead a reductive model of society as a battle between victims and oppressors."⁴⁰ In the case of the Biennial, this battle could not be properly visually enacted without representatives from both sides present and vocal, and as Eleanor Heartney succinctly stated,

In the most simpleminded examples on view at the Whitney, racism, sexism and homophobia are presented as voluntary prejudices which can be eradicated by proper reeducation.⁴¹

Much like the earlier statement from Charles Wright concerning inclusion as an unqualified remedy to neglect, here again the limitations of the institution and its discursive choices (catalog essays, wall texts, and audio guides), caused the simplification of complex social issues through contradiction and forced readings of work.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The audience for these two exhibitions also played a significant role in their critical reception. The people who attended them were often already sympathetic to the ideas expressed therein and, as research has shown, visitors to cultural institutions like museums and galleries are from the more affluent and educated sectors of society, and are therefore, more often than not, people who hold more liberal views.⁴² As such, the power of such exhibitions and their perceived ability to make lasting changes outside of the art world are limited, because they can be seen to be “preaching to the choir” rather than seeking to educate a larger public on the issues at hand. One reviewer wrote of the Biennial,

Though the curators were surely aware of this, there was still the obvious problem that they were driving the point into the consciousness of generally liberal viewers already sympathetic to the cause.⁴³

If the curators’ aims were to show the public art by and about issues important to marginalized groups, having an audience that already supports inclusion and social justice can be seen as weakening the effectiveness of such an exhibition’s ability to enact change outside the art world. This also led to the perception, in the case of the Biennial, that the work was didactic and finger-pointing in that the audience of the Whitney was mostly white, straight, and middle-class. Because of this, the viewer becomes the target of the “collective rage on view,”⁴⁴ while also already aware of the need for such rage, as Biennials are aimed more toward the art world’s elite, rather than local populations.⁴⁵ In the case of “The Other Story,” the audience’s role was not so much a factor in its interpretation and reception, as the demographic of the viewers was probably more

⁴² O’Neill, “Essentialism, adaptation and justice,” 99.

⁴³ Steven Henry Madoff, “Whitney Biennial: Apocalypse Now?,” *ARTNews* 92 (April 1993): 129.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Stallabrass, *Art Inc.*, 41.

varied. However, people usually attend exhibits in which they already have some interest. Research has shown that visiting museums and galleries is not “a generic discretionary expense or activity” but rather, a selection of “specific narratives being communicated by the museum.”⁴⁶ In the case of these two exhibitions, the controversy surrounding them may also have increased visitor numbers or encouraged a visit from people who wouldn’t have initially chosen to go. Further complicating the critiques that reeducation and inclusion have the ability to erase generations of oppression or adequately explain the reasons for that oppression is that fact that those who are supposedly being reeducated are already, more likely than not, sympathetic to the cause and not necessarily the ones in need of such reeducation. In addition, it is disingenuous for an institution or curator, who fails to question their culpability in the need for such reeducation, to stake a claim as the proper body through which the public should learn.

The problems associated with institutional limitations and contradictions played a large role in criticisms of “The Other Story” and the 1993 Whitney Biennial. The institutions themselves, the curators’ selection of artists and discursive themes, and the simplification of complex issues were the products of those limitations and contradictions. It is not within the scope of this paper, nor my expertise, to list the ways in which such issues could have been avoided, rather my goal here is to examine the reasons why such criticisms were leveled at each exhibition and to think about the problems inherent in exhibitions that seek to explore such important and complex issues and the ways in which they manifested themselves in these particular cases. In the next

⁴⁶ Kevin Coffee, “Cultural inclusion, exclusion and the formative roles of museums,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23, no. 3 (2008): 268.

section, I will discuss in depth the ways in which the fetishization of difference and the artists as representative illustrate most problematically institutional limitations.

CHAPTER 4

Articulating Difference: the Burdens of Representation

In addition to the various aspects of institutional limitations discussed in the previous chapter, another prominent issue that came to the fore in “The Other Story” and the Whitney Biennial was the problematic articulation of difference. This issue took two main forms: the fetishization of difference, where the idea of difference is imbued with power and therefore becomes the most important characteristic of a work of art or criteria of its value, and the burden of representation, whereby an artist is used (or seen) to speak for an entire community differentiated by some aspect of identity. Lola Young describes fetishization as “the appropriation and commodification of difference for its own sake,”¹ while Homi Bhabha relates it to the way we view certain ethnic groups in stereotypical ways.² Kobena Mercer defined the burden of representation as the problematic whereby artists positioned in the margins of the institutional spaces of cultural production are burdened with the impossible role of speaking as

¹ Lola Young, “Where Do We Go From Here? Musings on ‘The Other Story’,” *Oxford Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (1990): 52.

² Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism” in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. by Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 97. For further discussions on fetishism, especially as related to race and psychoanalysis, see entire essay. Also see Kobena Mercer, “Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe,” in *Welcome to the Jungle*, edited by Kobena Mercer, 171-220. London: Routledge, 1994.

‘representatives’ in the sense that they are expected to ‘speak for’ ... communities from which they come.³

The burden of representation is “also integral to the iron law of the stereotype that reinforces the view from the majority culture that every minority subject is, essentially the same.”⁴ In this chapter I explore the dominant ways in which efforts to articulate difference occurred in “The Other Story” and the Biennial, what the processes of fetishization and representation meant for both artists and institutions, and how they affected the understanding and perceptions of the exhibitions and the ideas they espoused.

The fetishization of difference and burden of representation were manifested in each exhibition in distinct ways. While the artists in both exhibitions were chosen because of their difference from artists at the center of the mainstream art world, those in “The Other Story” shared the difference of non-white racial identity, while those in the Biennial represented various categories of difference including race, gender, and/or sexual orientation. In the case of “The Other Story,” the exhibition itself was structured around the burden of representation, as it was meant as an attempt to show the history and contribution of non-white artists to the post-war British art world. With the Whitney Biennial, it can be argued that many of the artists were meant to stand in for an entire group of people who shared a particular aspect of difference, making their work emblematic of ethnic, racial, or gendered identity. Maureen Connor’s piece, *Ensemble for Three Female Voices* (Figure 31), consists of an installation of “three casts of a larynx

³ Kobena Mercer, “Black Art and the Burden of Representation,” *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (1990): 62.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

and tongue, made of melted and then hardened lipstick.”⁵ From each body part emanates a female voice in different stages of life, sounds like cries and laughter that are supposed to speak to shared experiences of womanhood. The piece is meant to invoke these shared experiences but assumes that any woman will be affected by the piece on the basis of her gender alone. Another example is Simon Leung, a Chinese-American gay man. The pinpricks in his *Marine Lovers* (Figure 32) are interpreted to stand as “the phallus that creates the orifice which defines the prick in its void,” and the work as a whole, as an examination of his “outsider status.”⁶ In this way, essentialist interpretations of difference assume that there are qualities inherent in certain groups of people and tend to view identity as a static essence, disregarding culturally constructed aspects of identity and the differences that exist among people of the same ethnicity, gender, race, or sexual orientation.⁷ There is an assumption, evident by the two examples above, that understanding of a work is guaranteed only if you are part of the same identity group as the artist. Critics of both exhibitions expressed dismay at the essentialism they saw as informing the choices of the curators. While some of these criticisms of “The Other Story” came from venomous critiques like those of Brian Sewell and Peter Fuller who blasted Araeen for basing the exhibition on race alone, others, like the analysis of Lola Young, saw Araeen playing into the “imposition of racially motivated essentialist criteria” being placed on non-white artists in order to confer them with authenticity and to receive funding.⁸ Of the Biennial, Charles Wright stated that designating artists as “black,

⁵ Lisa Phillips, “No Man’s Land: At the Threshold of a Millennium,” *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 60.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁷ Kathryn Woodward, “Concepts of Identity and Difference,” *Identity and Difference*, ed. Kathryn Woodward (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 11.

⁸ Lola Young, “Where Do We Go From Here?,” 52.

Chicano, gay,” created “a vulgar taxonomy of essentialized identities... far from the complex reality of lives lived within and among these parties.”⁹ The contributors to the roundtable conversation in *October* also spoke of this, discussing the problems that arise when certain social positions, or artists who are in those positions, are awarded “political truth on the basis of essentialist associations,” saying that the Biennial represents “exclusion in essentialist terms.”¹⁰

In the same way that black art and artists in general carry the burden of representing everything that has been produced historically or is being produced currently in post-war Britain by artists who are not white, so too did “The Other Story” burden its artists with this charge. The burden is symptomatic of the fact that black art and exhibitions about the contributions of black artists were not numerous or widely recognized at the time of “The Other Story.” Because of this, artists and exhibitions that were visible to the mainstream, especially an exhibition as broadly seen and written about as “The Other Story,” were expected to be representative of all Afro-Asian artists and their history. This expectation, which Mercer said “was never explicitly voiced,” was not only held by viewers and critics, but most likely by Araeen himself.¹¹ As Mercer asked,

If, after many years of struggle, you arrive at the threshold of enunciation and are ‘given’ the right-to-speak and a limited space in which to tell your story, is it not the case that there will be an overwhelming pressure to try and tell the whole story all at once? If there is only one opportunity to make your voice heard, is it not the case that there will be an intolerable imperative to try and say everything there is to be said, all in one mouthful?¹²

⁹ Charles A. Wright, Jr. “The Mythology of Difference: Vulgar Identity Politics at the Whitney,” in *Theory and Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 195.

¹⁰ Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kolbowski, Miwon Kwon, Benjamin Buchloh, “The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation,” *October* 66 (Autumn 1993): 27.

¹¹ Mercer, “Black Art and The Burden of Representation,” 62.

¹² *Ibid.*

This was the pressure that was placed, by both himself and others, on Araeen as he curated “The Other Story.” Because of his eleven-year endeavor to see this project come to fruition, his personal struggle for recognition in the British art world, and his observation of the lack of success of other non-white artists, along with larger issues of racism and oppression, this project was given a sense of urgency and an impossible task to fulfill.

To Mercer, this sense of urgency also arose “because a certain racism depends on the regulation of the visibility of the black presence in the public sphere.”¹³ This added another dimension of pressure on expectations for “The Other Story,” because if racism is in part fueled by the under-representation of minority groups in the public (white) eye, then this project also carried the burden of being part of the unraveling of long-held racist ideals and a corrective to prevailing cultural ideologies and histories. In his catalogue introduction, Araeen touched on this “regulation of visibility” by stating that “the Other is part of [the West’s] history as long as it stays outside the master narrative.”¹⁴ He also spoke about the under-representation of Afro-Asian artists within dominant narratives of art history, including the lack of non-white artistic representation in an internationally published art book, *Art Since 1945*.¹⁵ The burden of representation was also evident in the analysis and judgment of individual works of black artists. This burden, of both speaking for and being accountable to a community, forms the point at which the fetishization of difference comes into play: difference becomes the primary signifier of the work and clouds any other possible interpretations. If it is assumed that a black artist

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Rasheed Araeen, ed. *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989), 9.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

is supposed to speak for an entire community of black people, then the work is often interpreted and valued as such a representation, and *only* as such. What this means is that, on the one hand, any other understanding of a work of art that is not based on the race of the artist becomes virtually impossible, yet on the other hand, if the work is not seen as black enough, the artist then loses credibility and authenticity. Mercer explained how this dilemma often plays out:

black artists who choose to work in vernacular or popular forms, and who address their work to a black working class audience, are the only artists who produce anything worth talking about. Black artists whose work is taken up by white audiences on the other hand have no basis in ‘the black community’ and hence their work is not worth talking about because it originates from middle class aspirants who do not really ‘belong’ in the community anyway.¹⁶

Consequently, artists were forced into the position of either embracing or rejecting this burden, and examples of both choices were seen in “The Other Story.” Keith Piper is one artist featured in the exhibition who embraced the burden; as he explained, he does not intend his work for white audiences:

the task of radicalization within any particular community demands measures specific to the needs of that community, and it is members of that community who are best equipped to judge and furnish those needs.¹⁷

Piper’s work often deals overtly with issues of his own experienced prejudice and racism and the particular history of black people in Britain. In *Go West Young Man* (Figure 33), Piper juxtaposed images of black stereotypes and slavery with text that explicitly related to the lived experiences of racism and prejudice that blacks encounter. Araeen asked, “How can the pain and suffering of particular people, resulting from their particular

¹⁶ Ibid, 67.

¹⁷ Araeen, *The Other Story*, 77.

historical experience, be shared by everybody?”¹⁸ Piper’s work carried the burden of representation willingly, as it used the pain and suffering of his racial group as the material for its creation; this kind of work was therefore judged as authentic, because it addressed concerns particular to people of Piper’s race. Other artists in the exhibition, especially those whose work was more abstract like that of Avinash Chandra (Figure 34) and Aubrey Williams (Figure 10), did not explicitly reference racial experiences or seek to communicate with a specific community as Piper did. Rather, these artists attempted to break into the mainstream, white-dominated art world of the post-war decades and did not seek to communicate solely with one group of people. Their work, however, as Araeen lamented, was often still interpreted in light of, or merited based on, their race or ethnicity. In this way, the fetishization of difference ensures that the “difference” of the artist takes precedence over any aesthetic qualities of his/her work and becomes the driving force behind success or failure, reception, and interpretation. Difference is then reified and in many cases its expression becomes as important as any other qualities of the work itself. In this regard, difference as the subject of a work or difference as a marker of the artist overshadows any other interpretation of the work, and both can become problematic. This reification of difference formed the very basis of “The Other Story,” despite the fact that Araeen claimed to want to overcome such distinctions.

In the Whitney Biennial, the burden of representation and fetishization of difference fell on artists that were chosen not only for their racial identity, but for their gender, sexual orientation, and politics as well. Rather than attempt to rewrite a history of art, the Biennial’s inclusion of marginalized artists was meant to showcase current trends in American art, which were largely based upon a response to current political and

¹⁸ Ibid.

social circumstances in which these same marginalized groups were seen to have something at stake. The guiding principle here seemed to be that the curators identified a current issue and then sought out an artist, whose work was referencing that issue, taking into account that the work would be most meaningful if that artist had a direct connection to the issue based on some aspect of his/her identity. For example, Jimmie Durham, a Cherokee artist, was the representative of Native American identity, and his work was described by Thelma Golden as subverting the canon and revealing “the absurdity of national history or cultural identity as universals.”¹⁹ His piece *I Forgot What I Was Going to Say* (Figure 35) is a hybrid creation of a gun and a tomahawk, with a white flag featuring the words “I forgot what I was going to say.” This work articulates the complex heritage of Native Americans by illustrating the Western influences that make up that heritage and pointing out the role of white settlers on the suppression of their culture. Durham was able to perform this role because he is part of a nation of people who are in large part outside the construct of American national identity.

The contributors to *October's* roundtable discussed the presence of artists' statements that accompanied much of the work in the Biennial. These statements, which they see as testimonial in nature, supported the idea that an artist's biography is intrinsically relevant to interpretations of work that is supposed to deal with issues of identity and difference and that without them viewer engagement is difficult, if not impossible.²⁰ While the statements that accompanied specific works were not reproduced in the catalogue, and therefore cannot be accurately described or attributed, there are various places within the text where one of the curators, in describing an artist's work,

¹⁹ Thelma Golden, “What's White...?,” *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 21.

²⁰ Foster, Krauss, Kolbowski, Kwon, and Buchloh, “The Politics of the Signifier,”:7.

makes sure to mention some biographical aspect of the artist's identity, seemingly to justify or explain the work. Sussman made sure to mention that Durham "is a Cherokee," that Nan Goldin has a personal connection to the story she preserves in her photographs, and that Shu Lea Cheang "is herself a member of the community she portrays."²¹ In his essay, John G. Hanhardt often mentioned the ethnicity of the artists he discussed, to bolster the fact that their work is autobiographical. In each of the video works he described, Hanhardt emphasizes that the political issues explored are close to the artists because of their ethnic or sexual identity.²² Lisa Phillips also points out aspects of the artists' identity, particularly sexual orientation, as a marker of the work she described in her essay.²³ While the social and political positions of artists can naturally be expected to inform their work, the emphasis on these aspects of identity in descriptions of the works implies that one must know this information about the artist in order to understand their work and that in order for the work to be seen as authentic, and therefore fitting in this Biennial as a representative of contemporary issues, it must address concerns that are specific to some aspect of the artists' identity. The problematic aspect of this is made more evident in looking at the catalogues for the previous two biennials, in which virtually no explanatory text was provided.²⁴

The articulation of difference was central to both "The Other Story" and the Whitney Biennial, and it had problematic effects on both how the artists and the exhibitions were understood and interpreted. In "The Other Story," Araeen created an

²¹ Elisabeth Sussman, "Coming Together in Parts: Positive Power in the Art of the Nineties," *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 18-21.

²² John G. Hanhardt, "Media Art Worlds: New Expressions in Film and Video, 1991-1993," *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat., 36-51.

²³ Phillips, "No Man's Land," 52-61.

²⁴ See *1991 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1991 and *1989 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989.

exhibition that in its very title and aims magnified the importance of these artists' difference from the white, mainstream art world and therefore inevitably took on a monumental burden of representation. Throughout his catalog essays, Araeen condemned institutions and the art world for ignoring these artists based on their race or ethnicity, but his use of those very aspects of the artists' identity as a basis for his show caused problems for many critics. He made difference *the* criterion for inclusion in the show, which became the reason why some artists refused to participate. The artists that Araeen had hoped would participate, but who declined, were Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary, Dhruva Mistry, Kim Lim, and Veronica Ryan.²⁵ They recognized a danger in aligning themselves with a project that essentialized identity based on race or ethnicity and lumped artists of various backgrounds into one, homogenous "Other." An example of one of Araeen's choices that seems particularly problematic was the inclusion of Kumiko Shimizu, a Japanese artist. She was one of only two artists in the exhibition who was not from, or descended from someone who was from, a former colony of Britain or other European imperial site. In this, she seemed to stand in as the obligatory "Asian woman artist" – a substitute for Kim Lim (who was from Singapore, formerly occupied by the British), an Asian woman artist who, Araeen regretted, did not want to be a part of the show. I am not making any value judgments on Shimizu's work or her recognition as an artist, but her nationality differentiated her from the other artists in the exhibition and Araeen made no mention of that. It seems in this case that the fact that she was not white was enough to include her. This example illustrates the problem in inclusion and exclusion that can arise when the criteria for each is based exclusively upon identity.

While Araeen never stated in his catalog that being from a formerly colonized nation was

²⁵ Araeen, *The Other Story*, 106.

a prerequisite for inclusion in “The Other Story,” the fact that she did not experience many of the struggles that Araeen emphasized in the discussion of the other artists because she was *not* a from a former British colony points to the fact that Araeen may have been fetishizing racial difference just as he denounced this practice in the institutions who rejected these non-white artists.

The selection of artists to be representative of a group of marginalized people or a marginalized cultural position contributed to an over-simplification of the complexities involved in the political and societal concerns addressed by the Biennial. Both Charles Wright and the participants in the roundtable discussion of the Biennial published in *October* magazine addressed this issue in some detail, exploring its detrimental impact on exhibitions and artists alike. For example, Miwon Kwon, a female Asian art historian, expressed frustration with the fact that when she is invited to speak at conferences or museums, her “agenda is usually prefigured,” meaning that if she speaks on a topic that others perceive to be unrelated to her personal experiences as an Asian woman, for example Jimmie Durham’s art, she is told that she does not have that right.²⁶ Kwon also talked about this dilemma in relation to artists of color and artists who engage with issues of sexuality. She said,

In order to become visible they are under pressure to play along with rules of a game not of their own making. Many of them have been tagged – they have to fulfill a kind of implicit performance contract if they’re going to get some time on stage.²⁷

In this case, the criteria by which a work of art is judged are signs of difference alone, and it is assumed that if artists are not white male heterosexuals, “they will naturally

²⁶ Ibid., 18.

²⁷ Ibid.

produce something unfamiliar, challenging, and different.”²⁸ Kwon cited as an example Byron Kim, an Asian-American artist who she felt would not have been selected for the Biennial if he were not dealing with the issue of skin color in his work. As Golden wrote in her contribution to the catalog, Kim explores the “formal and political meanings of color” in works like *Synecdoche* (Figure 29) and the *Belly Painting* series (Figure 36).²⁹ In *Synecdoche*, Kim uses 8 x 10 panels as portraits of individual skin colors; each panel named for the person whose skin is represented by the shade of paint. The *Belly Painting* series takes its colors from the Crayola Multicultural set of crayons, meant to provide the skin colors that can be found in our multicultural society.³⁰ Kwon believes that if Kim were merely exploring abstract properties of a grid, like seriality or repetition, his work would not have provided “an Oriental content to Minimalism” and therefore would not be playing the “game.”³¹ In this case, it can be argued that the necessity for artists who belong to minority groups to make work that directly addresses some externally defined aspect of their particular identity – whether that be their specific cultural or national identity – limits the types of artwork they can create if they want to be successful in the art world. This merely reverses the distinctions that caused marginalization in the first place: instead of deeming works of art or artists insufficiently white or male or straight to fit into the mainstream art world, it must be demonstrated that they are sufficiently *not* white, male, or straight to create artwork that is “different” and therefore marketable. This is a variation on the burden of representation and the idea of authenticity that Mercer alluded to when he described the conundrum of the limitations in which black artists have

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ Thelma Golden, “What’s White...?,” *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 28.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Foster, Krauss, Kolbowski, et al., “The Politics of the Signifier,” 16.

to situate their work: some artists will be “worth talking about” and others will not based upon whether their work adequately addresses issues of identity at stake among the black community.

Wright also recognized the problem in identifying a single artist to represent cultural interests or groups and discussed the implications this had for the Biennial as a whole. He wrote,

The conceptual thrust of the entire show relegates artists to cultural essences: regardless of the overall concerns specific to the production of any single artist exhibited, there is no acknowledgement of the actual possibility that one could be black, gay, and female for example.³²

The artist as representative essentializes identities and does not leave room for exploration of the unique, complex social positions that an artist may in reality occupy. For Wright, this “divisive pigeon-holing diminishes the forcefulness of individuating discourses,” and “the show’s overdetermined emphasis on articulating difference in fact limits the possibility of exchange among its various agents.”³³ The consequence of this tactic “proffers singularly forced readings” of the works, as other critics also deplored.³⁴ Rosalind Krauss gave two examples of works from the Biennial whose possible meanings were discounted by the curators. The first was Lorna Simpson’s installation *Hypothetical?* (Figures 37 and 38), which Golden interpreted in her catalog essay as being solely about the anger of black people; Golden explained that Simpson’s work “embodies a multitude of readings” and “encourages the viewer to interrogate,” but she nevertheless interprets *Hypothetical?* within the context of an essay that focuses on

³² Charles A. Wright, Jr. “The Mythology of Difference”, 192.

³³ Ibid., 192-193.

³⁴ Ibid., 192.

artworks that attend to issues of whiteness/non-whiteness as being about black rage.³⁵ Krauss advocated that, on the contrary, Simpson's installation was multivalent: "it is partly about black rage, but it is partly how she made it, the fact that she is invoking the grid and many other formal devices."³⁶ While Krauss acknowledged that particular aspects of the installation, such as the inclusion of a quote from the mayor of Los Angeles in which his response to the question of would he be afraid to be a black man in L.A. if he wasn't the mayor was "No, I would not be afraid, I would be angry," (Figure 37), situated it within the context of the city's race riots and racial prosecution, she felt that there was more to it than the structure of the exhibition and interpretation of the curators allowed. Another work that Krauss thought fell into this category was *Untitled (Maze)* (Figure 38) by Hillary Leone and Jennifer Macdonald, where the artists employed the Gregg stenography system to create terms that referred to sexuality and then made those terms into branding irons. The irons were hung from the ceiling in a gallery and also burned onto canvas. Krauss believed that the beauty of its visual aspects mattered, but that it was "unbelievably reduced by the wall plaque stating its political agenda."³⁷ To Krauss, Leone and Macdonald's installation "was not there only to serve the text" but situating it as such erased a space for the multiplicity of readings that she advocated.³⁸

In Krauss's arguments we see a crucial consequence of what can happen to art and its interpretation when it is employed in the service of identity politics. The content often takes precedence over the formal qualities of the work, and this is precisely what led to criticisms about the lack of aesthetics that some critics saw in both the Biennial and

³⁵ Golden, "What's White...?", 30-31.

³⁶ Foster, Krauss, Kolbowski, et al., "The Politics of the Signifier," 6.

³⁷ Ibid., 16.

³⁸ Ibid.

“The Other Story.” In these cases, the works were considered to lack aesthetic quality, because they were framed in such a way as to emphasize a concern for timely issues or proving a political point. The emphasis on content in the Whitney Biennial left little room for any analysis of the works based on formal or aesthetic considerations, and the members of the *October* roundtable saw this as strategic on the part of the Whitney and some of the artists themselves. As Kwon observed,

My disappointment about the show comes from the institutional apparatus that reads this work in the flattest way possible. It also comes from the artists themselves being negligent in what they are making. A lot of the artists take too many shortcuts, foregoing the responsibility of how the work is made, how it might be read, in order to consolidate politically. That is what they think they must do: to put up the most univocal image.³⁹

In the Biennial, then, the artists themselves may have been just as guilty of reifying and fetishizing difference as the curators and the institution, because in order to fit within the criteria of this exhibition, and therefore garner critical attention or possible marketability, they had to play the same game.

It is worth noting that this construct holds the potential to undermine the very premise of the exhibition itself. The 1993 Biennial was grounded upon the intent to display art from outside the center that addressed topical cultural issues but it took the form of an overly staged and contrived project that served to add new constraints to contemporary art production. It also raises serious questions about how art, and by extension institutions, can effectively attempt to undo and redefine stereotypes and classifications if artists are forced to play a new game, within institutional limitations, to fit in and be included. Hal Foster called this process of manipulation “conscription,” saying that he sensed “an implicit interpellation – in the work and in such shows – that

³⁹ Ibid., 10.

you are this identity and this only, and that all else that follows: what art you make, what politics you support, and so on” is delimited from the outset.⁴⁰ In addition, if those new rules consist of making work that explores identity in ways that only create new binaries of white/non-white, straight/homosexual, male/female, etc. then there is no space created for constructive discussion of the complex realities of lived experience in a globalized, post-colonial world. It is true that artists, like activists, are forced to “traffic in the very stereotypes they wish to break down” when they are involved in making art that claims “a political platform on the basis of a particular ‘lifestyle,’” but those stereotypes must not simply be performed over and over again in simplistic ways.⁴¹ The art that best breaks down stereotypes is multi-layered and focused on intersections of identity and culture, blurring, rather than reiterating, binary distinctions of difference.

In “The Other Story,” the issue of singular readings of works and artists as representative of various marginalized groups was not, perhaps surprisingly, given its emphasis on racial identity, as evident as in the 1993 Whitney Biennial. However, in the inclusion of only non-white artists, Araeen too denied a space for the work of these artists to truly compliment, critique, and fill in the lapses of Western discourse of modernism – the exhibition still set its artists as “Other,” as outside of the center. Some of the artists in “The Other Story” were no longer living or working, so the effect that the structure of the exhibit had on the reception and interpretation of their work was different from the effect felt by artists in the Biennial. The work of Ronald Moody, for instance, who died in 1984, would not be expected to fulfill any contemporary ideas about what black art should look like in order to be considered authentic or to receive funding; pressure that

⁴⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁴¹ David Joselit, *American Art since 1945* (New York and London: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2003), 228.

some of the younger artists in the exhibition may feel. However, in placing Moody's work in this exhibition as a precursor to the later work, it may be wrongly assumed that the work of living black artists should somehow resemble that of his and other deceased artists. These deceased artists' historical significance could also have been better articulated by situating their work within a broader context that was not solely based on racial and ethnic identities. By organizing the catalog according to artists that fit within particular categories – “In the Citadel of Modernism,” “Taking the Bull by the Horns,” “Confronting the System,” and “Recovering Cultural Metaphor” – Araeen too could be criticized for forcing limited interpretations on their work. Despite his intentions, this exhibition achieved what Annie Coombes warned against in her essay “Inventing the ‘Postcolonial:’ Hybridity and Constituency in Contemporary Curating.” She argued,

While the celebration of cultural diversity may well produce worthwhile reassessments of certain racial and cultural stereotypes, the use of ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ as analytical devices for the dissipation of grand narratives can ultimately produce a homogenizing and leveling effect.⁴²

Araeen uses the difference (from the white majority) of the artists in “The Other Story” in an attempt to dissipate the grand narrative of Western modernism, or at least to alter it. However, when the difference of artists is the main criteria for inclusion in an exhibition, as it is here, there is a danger in “concealing distances between cultures while affirming that all are equal.”⁴³ This occurred in “The Other Story,” where a heterogeneous group of non-white artists whose work was equally varied was forced into an overarching (and

⁴² Annie E. Coombes, “Inventing the ‘Postcolonial:’ Hybridity and Constituency in Contemporary Curating,” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 488-89.

⁴³ Coombes, “Inventing the ‘Post-colonial’,”: 496.

imperfect) attempt of “atoning for absences and replacing voids.”⁴⁴ In this way, Araeen subscribed to the idea that “putting a black artist in a white institution is readily accepted as doing some critical and political damage to the ideology of the institution.”⁴⁵ This ideology, along with Araeen’s refusal, in the opinion of Paul Gilroy, to properly dismantle the dominant discourse of art and artistic creativity, led to the simplification of multifarious aspects that created a need for this exhibit in the first place.

The notion that simply “atoning for absences and replacing voids” was enough to create a space for critical discussion of complex problems of lived identities was a central problem in both exhibitions that led to criticisms that neither exhibition properly explored how and why such marginalization existed. A resistance to dominant oppressive histories and discourses is “only truly effective when it creates rather than simply defends.”⁴⁶ If that resistance is simply oppositionary, it becomes locked in “the very binary which Europe established to define its others.”⁴⁷ The term “Europe” stands likewise for the dominant cultural group in America, whose “others” were on display in the 1993 Whitney Biennial. The problematic articulations of difference in the Biennial and “The Other Story,” which took the form of fetishization and a burden of representation for both artists and exhibitions and in both subject matter and artists’ identity, point to problems inherent within art history and its institutions. As I will explore in the conclusion that follows, despite the issues that arose out of the two exhibitions and their negative receptions, “The Other Story” and the Whitney Biennial have nevertheless come to be seen in the critical literature as landmark projects in the exploration of identity. Their

⁴⁴ Irit Rogoff, “Hit and Run-Museums and Cultural Difference,” *Art Journal* 61, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 64.

⁴⁵ Foster, Krauss, Kolbowski, et al., “The Politics of the Signifier,” 14.

⁴⁶ Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

historic and critical legacies are implicative of larger developments in the discourses on multiculturalism and cultural pluralism.

CONCLUSION

Having examined the unique social contexts and the contemporary critical responses to “The Other Story” and the 1993 Biennial, we see the common issues that arose and why and how they occurred. Each exhibition was staged in a social and historical context that affected both the goals of the curators and the reception by critics and viewers. In the 1980s, Britain saw the emergence of black cultural forces that sought to bring to light the contributions of non-whites in many aspects of society during the post-war years. In the United States, the early 1990s brought a backlash against the conservatism of the previous decade, and minority groups began to demand equal representation and rights. In both cases, the desire for representation and recognition of artists outside the mainstream white culture provided the impetus for the exhibitions. And in both cases, there were heated reactions to their discursive frameworks and aims. By examining the critical literature in depth, common issues that led to such dismissals were revealed.

The common issues that arose as a result of “The Other Story” and the 1993 Whitney Biennial included the simplification of complex aspects of identity, the problematic articulation of difference, institutional limitations, aspects of curatorial voice, choice, and language, and the reiteration of binary distinctions as criteria for

interpretation and judgment. Further exploring the issues of institutional limitations and the problematic articulation of difference led to an understanding about how and why they occurred and what they meant to the interpretation of the art and artists in the exhibitions, as well as the larger issues with which they purported to deal. When facets of difference become the singular criteria for inclusion in an exhibition and the sole framework through which work is interpreted or judged, complex lived identities become reduced to visible signs of difference and artists are bound by these rigid distinctions. This is evident in the burden of representation and the fetishization of difference that form two of the hallmarks associated with the articulation of difference in exhibitions like these. This can create an environment wherein artists must play the game to be relevant or be seen as different enough to matter, which creates a new set of limitations that replaces those created by marginalization. Looking at institutional limitations also sheds light on both the effects that the subjectivity and choice of the curator have on exhibitions and their reception, and the need for curators and institutions to question their own subjectivity and roles in the process of creating such exhibitions. My analysis also attended to the contradictions and simplification that existed in each of these exhibits and how this played a role in the criticisms leveled at each.

In order to understand the reasons why “The Other Story” and the 1993 Whitney Biennial exhibitions are still important in discussions of identity and difference in art, despite the negative criticism and problematic issues, I would like to briefly survey some later reactions and analyses of the exhibitions from the curators involved as well as outside critics. These responses illuminate the nature of the legacy of these exhibitions and their historical significance as viewed from a distance, and illustrate their place

within a larger framework of cultural issues. This will also provide useful insights for further research into issues of identity and difference in contemporary art and its institutions.

The 1993 Whitney Biennial was not unique in its criticism among the institution's biennials. These shows are often seen as controversial, as they address "hot" topics and the latest trends in contemporary American art. Sussman called such criticism "predictable," but the 1993 Biennial was more contentious than most.¹ Perceptions of the Biennial have, however, changed over time; with some historical distance, it is discussed in a much more positive light. Today it is regarded as a "valuable record" of its time, because of it was one of the first exhibitions in America to explore issues of identity and difference in the mainstream art world.² It is now considered to have marked "a crucial node in the size, locus, and construction of large-scale shows about identity... and focused the debate about art that engages issues of difference and identity."³ It has come to be recognized as one of various "tightly curated ventures with clearly articulated positions" of the 1990s.⁴ It was also seen as proposing "new models for cultural diversity and specificity that could be at once critical and validating."⁵ For curator Norman Kleeblatt, the "contention and elasticity" of exhibitions like the 1993 Biennial actually precludes "fixed positions and superficial assumptions" about identity and difference.⁶

In a 2005 issue of *Art Journal*, Elisabeth Sussman acknowledged that at the time of the 1993 Biennial she felt lambasted by the critics. A decade later, she said, "I clearly

¹ Elisabeth Sussman, "Then and Now: Whitney Biennial 1993," *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 75.

² Arthur Lubow, "The Curse of the Whitney," *New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/11/magazine/the-curse-of-the-whitney.html?scp=1&sq=arthur+lubow&st=nyt>

³ Norman L. Kleeblatt, "Identity Roller Coaster," *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 61.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

recognize that this was a moment of confusion and change to which critics were charged to respond.”⁷ She noted that their use of the term “watershed” was unclear in 1993: it could have been interpreted as “a term of respect or repudiation.”⁸ Sussman criticized the reviewers for failing to connect what was going on inside the Whitney with the world at large and believed that the aggressive attacks came from “those witnessing a change that they didn’t want to endorse, a change they had only jargon words to describe.”⁹ Sussman also addressed some positive reviews of the Biennial, agreeing with one that said that the accusation leveled at the Whitney of political correctness failed to see that what was being labeled a social fad was really an illustration of the reexamination of American society taking place at the time. None of the deeper problematic issues of representation and the institution are addressed by Sussman in this article, but she admitted that the show was “not a triumph.”¹⁰ For her, the Biennial was “a barometer of the moment, and the extreme negativity, as well as the exhibition’s subsequent reception and deepening effects, accounts for its enduring notoriety.”¹¹ In the same issue of *Art Journal*, art-historian Reesa Greenberg discussed Sussman’s analysis, saying that “the strident rhetoric against exhibitions of difference functions... to maintain the marginalized status of difference.”¹² She flipped the accusation many critics initially leveled at the show, “strident rhetoric,” back on the critics themselves, as an example of their attempt to keep marginalized groups out of the center.¹³ To Greenberg, as to Sussman, the Biennial was an opening of the institution to a younger generation of artists

⁷ Elisabeth Sussman, “Then and Now: Whitney Biennial 1993,” *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 75.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Reesa Greenberg, “Identity Exhibitions: From *Magiciens de la terre* to Documenta II,” *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 90.

¹³ *Ibid.*

“which subsequently opened the curatorial process of the Biennial” in future exhibitions.¹⁴

Thelma Golden also discussed the Biennial in a 2001 interview with Okwui Enwezor, stating that the exhibition made her “shed some naiveté concerning the discourse of multiculturalism”: because issues of identity and difference “had only entered the consciousness of the public at a lower level,” resistance to them were widespread once they entered the mainstream (i.e., the Whitney).¹⁵ Golden acknowledged “the workings of the institution” and the debatable lumping together of artists “as identity based artists, or political artists,” however, she felt that there was a resistance in the critical community to truly engage with the work and, as a result, she no longer reads criticism of projects in which she is involved because of the negative reactions to the Biennial.¹⁶ She believed that the Biennial was of its moment and expressed doubt about its viability at the time of the 2001 interview. Golden ended her discussion of the Biennial in defense of it, stating that her curatorial philosophy at the time she was at the Whitney was about inclusion, her goal being to push the definition of American art.¹⁷

Rasheed Araeen and others also later discussed the legacy and implications of “The Other Story.” Writing in 1996, Everlyn Nicodemus called the exhibit “epoch-making” and “a water-shed... by the way it made the reality of exclusion visible.”¹⁸ She called the “aggressive condemnations” of contemporary critics a desperate defensive act, becoming “a lynching posse” rather than acquainting themselves “with the arguments in a

¹⁴ Ibid., 91.

¹⁵ Okwui Enwezor, “‘Elsewhere’: A conversation with Thelma Golden,” *Nka* 13/14 (2001): 28.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Everlyn Nicodemus, “The Mirror and the Other Story,” *Collapse* 2 (1996): 16.

cultural debate.”¹⁹ Nicodemus recognized a pioneer in Araeen, as an artist, critic, curator, and editor who has made a unique contribution to the “socially and politically radical movement which led to the Black art struggle.”²⁰ Another essay from 1996 also discussed the legacy of “The Other Story,” and praised Araeen for telling stories in his interpretations of the works that “attest to the hybridity of the post-colonial experience.”²¹ The authors situated the exhibition among other initiatives that centered on “critical debates around definitions of race, nation and representation” prevalent in 1980s Britain and used it as an example of one that tackled these issues successfully, despite criticisms directed towards it.²² Araeen’s own responses, both to the exhibition and criticisms of it, defend what he saw as a necessary project, “whatever its merit.”²³ Araeen called the arguments put forward by critics trivial and irrational, but believed that the exhibition was a success due in part to the large numbers of visitors who attended. He explained, as mentioned, that he would have preferred to stage an exhibition of black and white artists but due to insufficient funding did not find this probable. He also acknowledged that the terms he used, such as “Afro-Asian,” were meant to show the racial division that still existed, and he looked forward to a time in which “there will be no need to make distinctions between white and black artists.”²⁴ These statements represent Araeen’s recognition of some of the limitations in which he was working when

¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

²⁰ Ibid., 15-16.

²¹ Rohini Malik and Gilane Tawadros, “(Mis)Representations: the curator, the gallery and the art work,” in *Critical Studies and Modern Art*, eds. Toby Jackson, Liz Dawtrey, Mary Masterton, and Pam Meecham (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 118.

²² Ibid., 115.

²³ Rasheed Araeen, “The Other Immigrant: The Experiences and Achievements of Afro-Asian Artists in the Metropolis,” *Third Text* 5, no. 15 (1991): 22.

²⁴ Ibid., 17.

he curated “The Other Story,” while also affirming his basic belief in the merit of what he accomplished.

In 2008, in a paper delivered at the *Landmark Exhibitions* conference held at Tate Modern London, Jean Fisher said that “the somewhat ironically titled *The Other Story* was understood internationally, if not domestically, as a major breakthrough in ‘de-imperialising’ the institutional mind.”²⁵ Fisher also discussed the paradox inherent in the exhibit – Araeen sought inclusion in a “system regarded at the outset as unjust and corrupt” – and its ambivalence in “its complaint of exclusion from the institutions of national patrimony whilst conforming to their systematic rules.”²⁶ The importance of the exhibition lay in its informing the Black Arts Movement of the 1980s about its historical predecessors, its exposure of the lack of inclusion in the institutional structure in which it existed, and its exposure of “a philistine, British institutional parochialism concurrent with an experimental artistic cosmopolitanism.”²⁷ The very fact that the exhibition was discussed, twenty years later, in a conference concerned with landmark exhibitions demonstrates the extent of its legacy for black art specifically, and art in general, in Britain.

Despite the negative receptions of “The Other Story” and the 1993 Whitney Biennial, they are seen as watershed exhibitions in the realm of identity, difference, and art. Their historical significance is proven by the fact that, twenty years later, while conducting research for a study of difference and identity in art since 1980, I continually saw references to each. I believe their legacy lies not in their success or failure in dealing

²⁵ Jean Fisher, “*The Other Story* and the Past Imperfect,” paper presented at *Landmark Exhibitions* conference at Tate Modern London, October 2008 [database online]; available from <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09autumn/>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

with complex aspects of identity and difference, but in their attempt to tackle such issues, whether applauded or decried, and the insight they provide into their unique social contexts. The divergent opinions about these exhibitions led to productive discussions of the larger issues at stake, both in art and art institutions and in society at large. The limitations and problematic articulations of difference that were criticized in reviews are indicative of what is at stake in broader attempts to bring the margin to the center in art and in culture. Araeen and others drew attention to these larger issues in relation to multiculturalism, a buzzword of the 1990s and today. Slavoj Žižek defined multiculturalism as “the attitude which... treats *each* local culture the way the colonizer treats colonized people – as ‘natives’ whose mores are to be carefully studied and ‘respected.’”²⁸ For Žižek, “multiculturalism” becomes a new form of “inverted racism,” wherein the “multiculturalist respect for the Other’s specificity is the very form of asserting one’s superiority.”²⁹ Araeen warned against this kind of pluralism that in its celebration of difference “denies a historical and critical space for others” and fails to enact any radical change on institutions.³⁰ Araeen also provided a helpful distinction between multiculturalism and a culturally plural society. He defined multiculturalism as the way “dominant culture can accommodate those who have no power in such a way that the power of the dominant is preserved,” while a culturally plural society is one in which “all individuals must have the full right to decide how and where they want to

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, “Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 225 (1997): 44.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Araeen, “The Other Immigrant,” 27.

locate themselves; and the recognition of their creative ability should not be dependent on their identification with the cultures they originated from.”³¹

The relation of these exhibitions and the issues that arise in critical analysis of them is related to the ideas of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism and the problems inherent in the exhibitions are similar to those indicated in skeptical interpretations of the idea of multiculturalism. Just as multiculturalism upholds the dominance of the center in its continuation of binaries and the fetishization of difference, these exhibitions were criticized of doing the same thing. If there had been more recognition of the complexities of lived identities or a real challenge of the status quo, the exhibitions would have been seen as a tool for creating a truly culturally plural society. The heated responses to the exhibitions were also indicative of the contemporary struggles for real pluralism and change that were taking place culturally at the time they were staged. Just as Sussman and Greenberg recognized, the reactions to the Biennial were a result of a specific historical and social context in which change was threatening the mainstream. The context of “The Other Story” also sheds light on some of the more polarizing responses to it: when people fear a real or imagined challenge to what they are used to, they may react with vitriol and violence. In his book *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, George Lipsitz argues, quite rightly, that “white Americans are encouraged to invest in whiteness, to remain true to an identity that provides them with resources, power, and opportunity.”³² Extrapolating this argument beyond America and racial distinctions, it becomes clear that the majority body of any society benefit from suppressing the voice of

³¹ Rasheed Araeen, “A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics,” in *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*, ed. Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt, and Ziauddin Sardar (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 340-41.

³² George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), vii.

marginalized groups and some of the reactions to these exhibitions stem from this “possessive investment in whiteness,” itself a constructed “delusion.”³³ These reactions can also work to further marginalize artists; if an exhibit is discredited, so too can be those who participate in it.

Both short- and long-term effects of these exhibitions are important, because they provide insight into the contextual placement of the shows and of their receptions. Just as the terms that we use to talk about identity and difference change, so too does the way we use those terms. A continual recognition of the complexity and elasticity of lived identities, as indicated by the criticisms of “The Other Story” and the Biennial, is essential if constructive, production conversations are to occur around such issues. One of the negative results of exhibitions like the Biennial and “The Other Story,” as recognized by Julian Stallabrass, is that in much global art today “identities parade for the entertainment of cosmopolitan viewers.”³⁴ The result of this is

That globalization has transformed the art world along with the management of racial and cultural difference to follow the model of corporate internationalism... visibility in the realm of culture is no guarantee of political power, and the increasing privatization of cultural institutions erodes the influence that once might have flowed from that visibility.³⁵

“The Other Story” and the 1993 Whitney Biennial are both indicators of their unique contexts and informative to later generations engaged in broader discussions of difference and identity in art and society. They provide insight into both productive and contentious aspects of articulating difference and exploring identity and point to the very real complexities and shifts inherent in such

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 70.

³⁵ Ibid.

discussions. Studying such exhibitions in their historical context and using them to explore common themes and issues points to the ways in which identity and difference play such a large role in contemporary art and society and the various intricacies involved in framing such issues within the art institution. Curators must recognize that “what holds an individual or group together cannot be reduced to a particular set of traits,” nor can it be “apprehended in a single exhibition or collection.”³⁶ In the end, it is helpful to remember that,

Artists should not be construed, therefore, as the transcribers of their own identities into plastic form, as though the terms of selfhood were clear, consciously understood, and easily available to them for illustration, as though the psychic, social, and historical conditions of identity were transparent to them, or for that matter to us.³⁷

Realizing that identity is not static and that true pluralism results in equality for all without resorting to the reiteration of discernible aspects of difference is the only way that artists, institutions, and society at large can constructively discuss such polarizing and passionate issues.

³⁶ Mari Carmen Ramirez, "Brokering Identities: art curators and the politics of cultural representation," in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 34.

³⁷ Richard Meyer, "Identity," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 348.

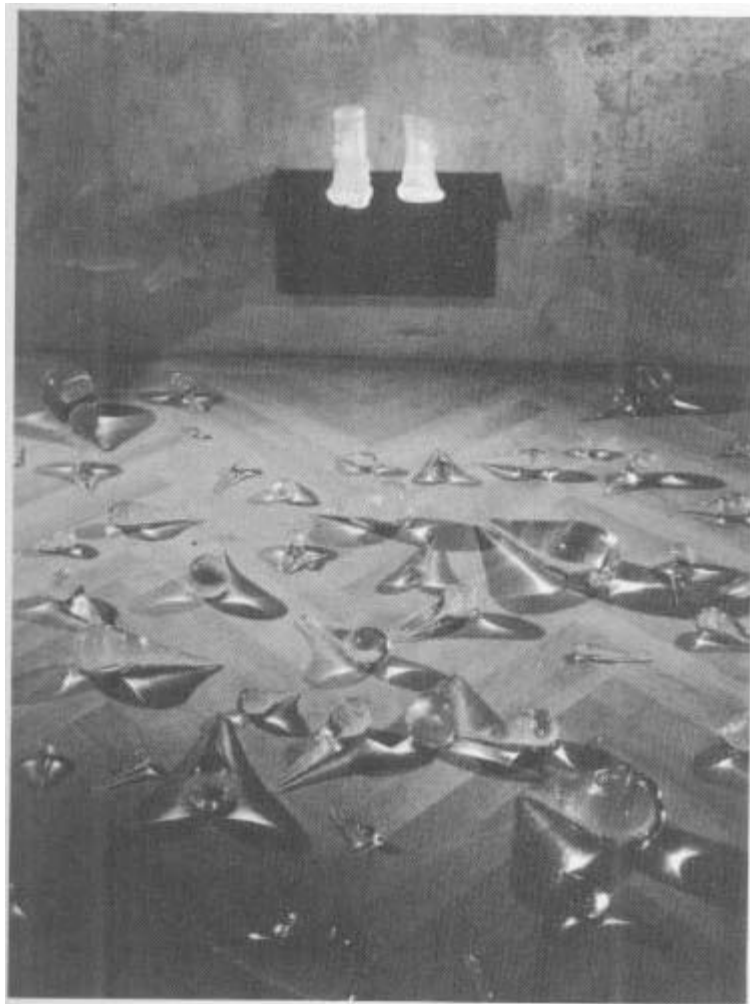
FIGURES



1. Gary Hill, *Tall Ships*, 1992



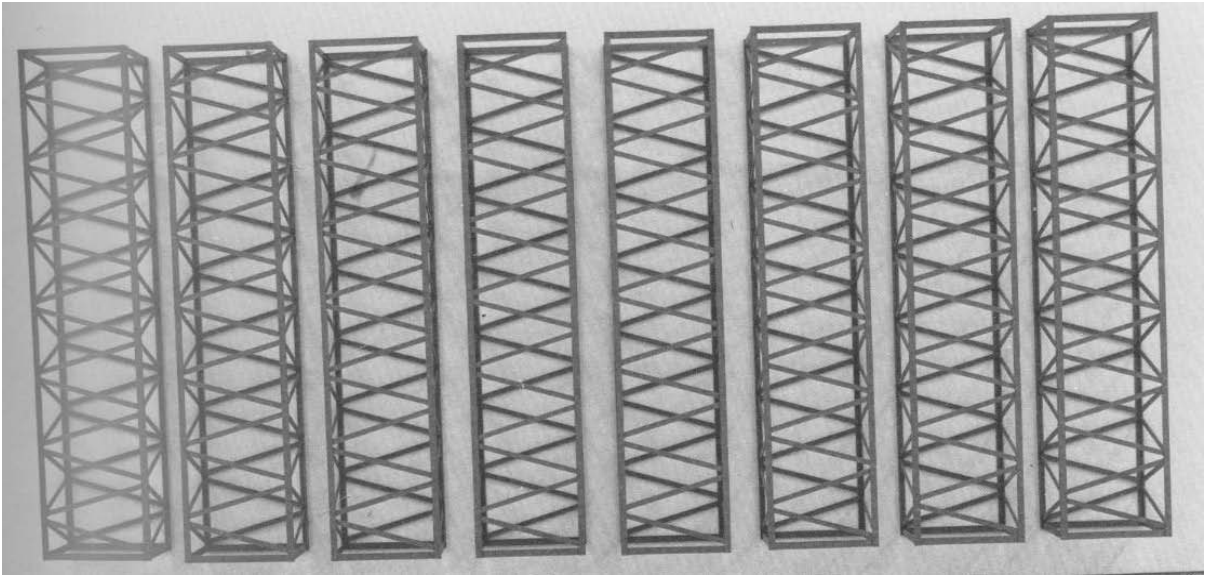
2. Charles Ray, *Family Romance*, 1993



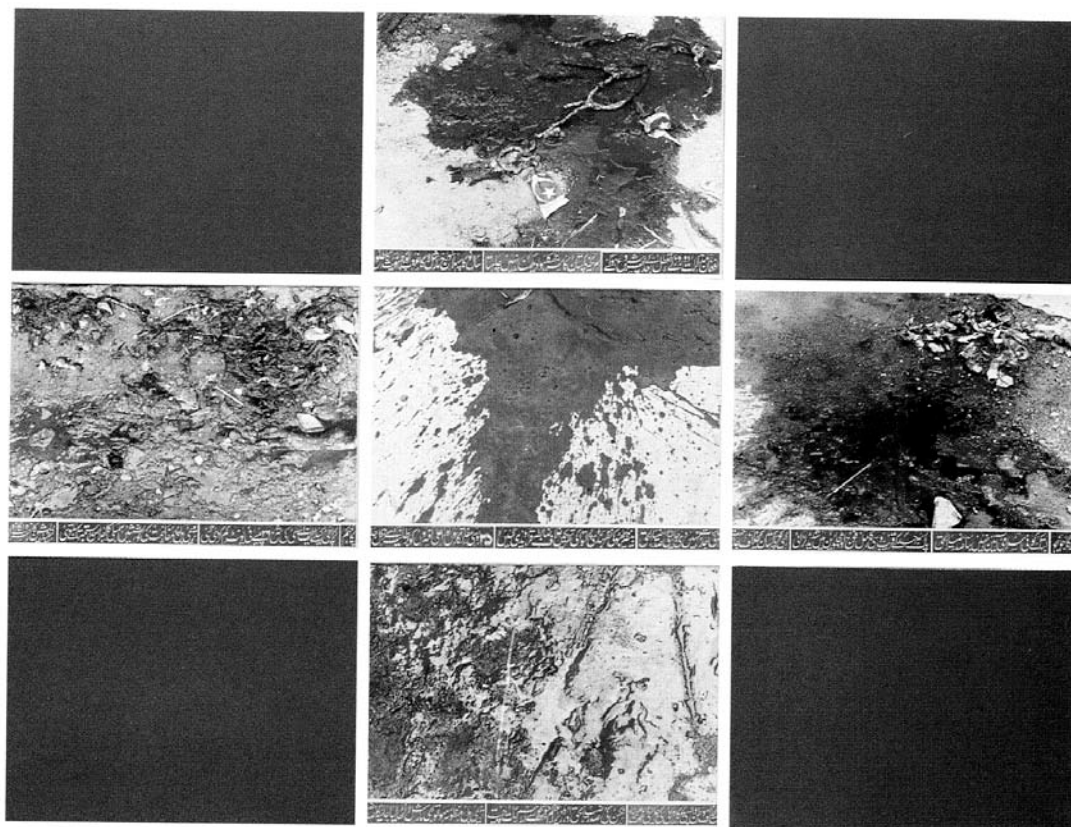
3. Kiki Smith, *Mother*, 1992-93 (installation)



4. Janine Antoni, *Lard Gnaw*, 1992



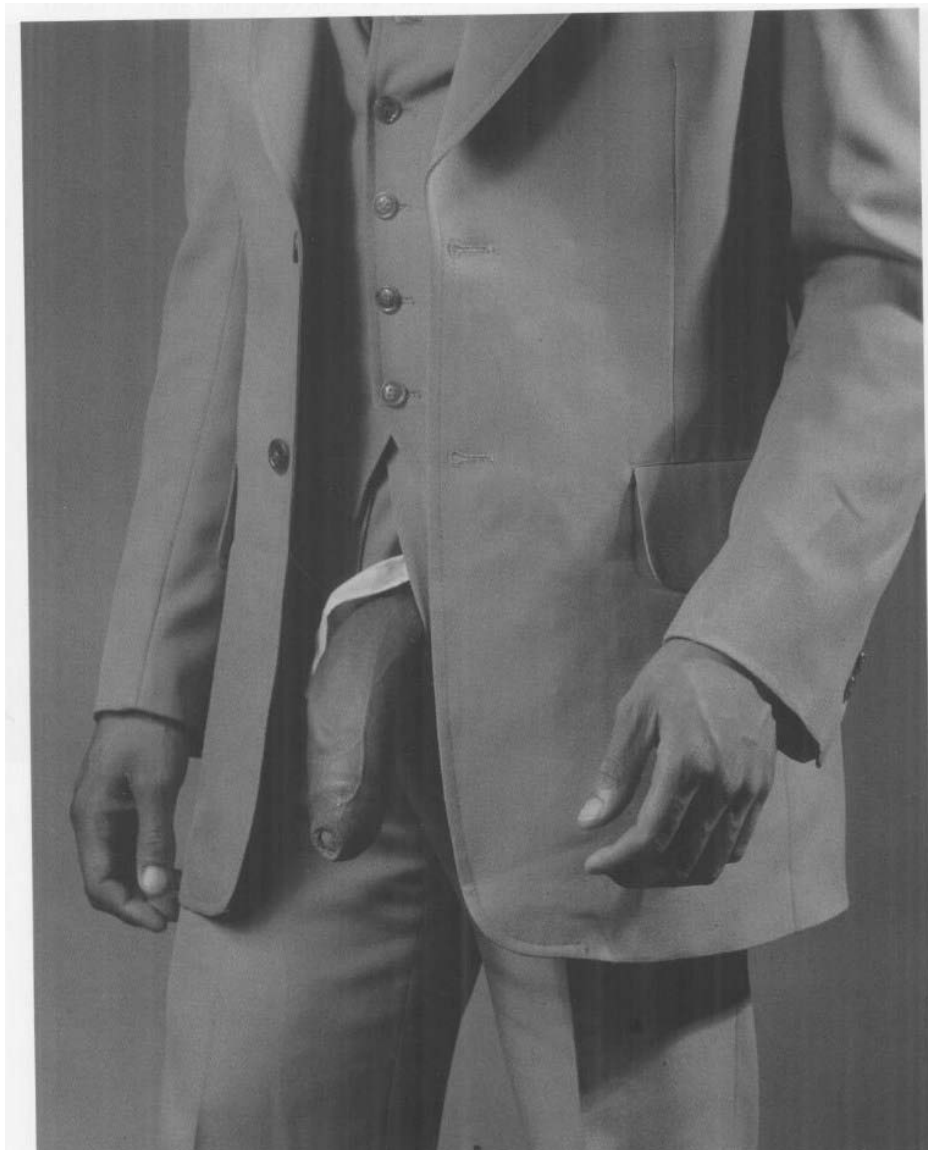
5. Rasheed Araeen, *8bS*, 1970



6. Rasheed Araeen, *Green Paintings*, 1985-86

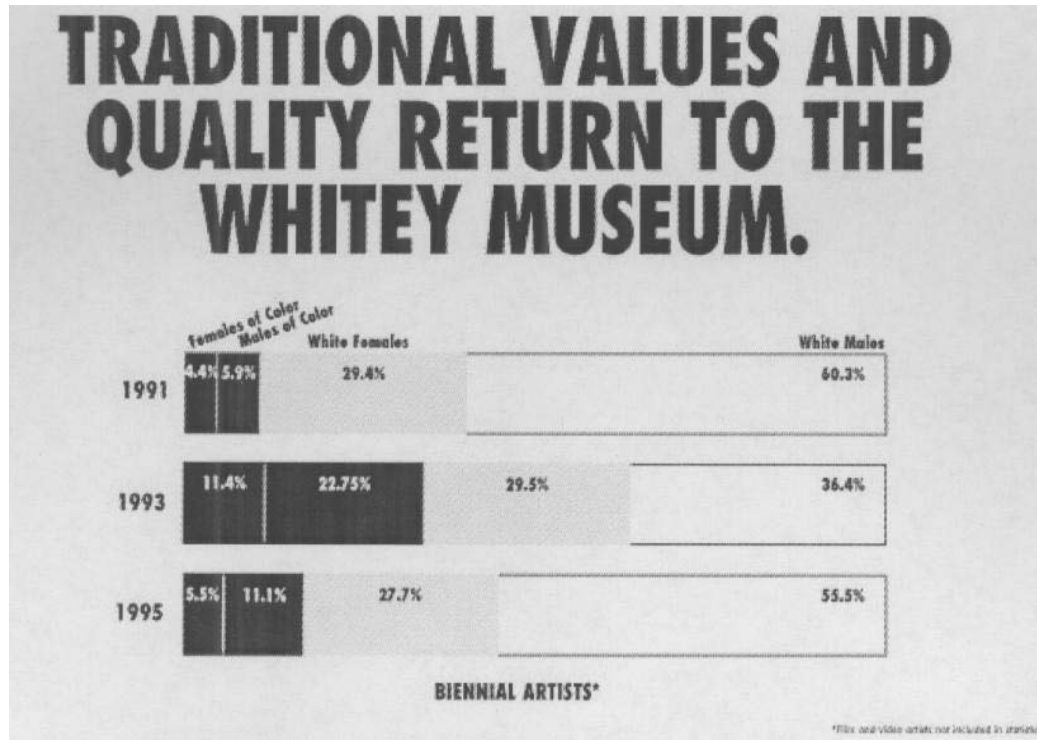


7. Andres Serrano, *Piss Christ*, 1987



8. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Man in Polyester Suit*, 1980

TRADITIONAL VALUES AND QUALITY RETURN TO THE WHITEY MUSEUM.



9. Guerrilla Girls, *Traditional Values and Quality Return to the Whitey Museum*, 1995



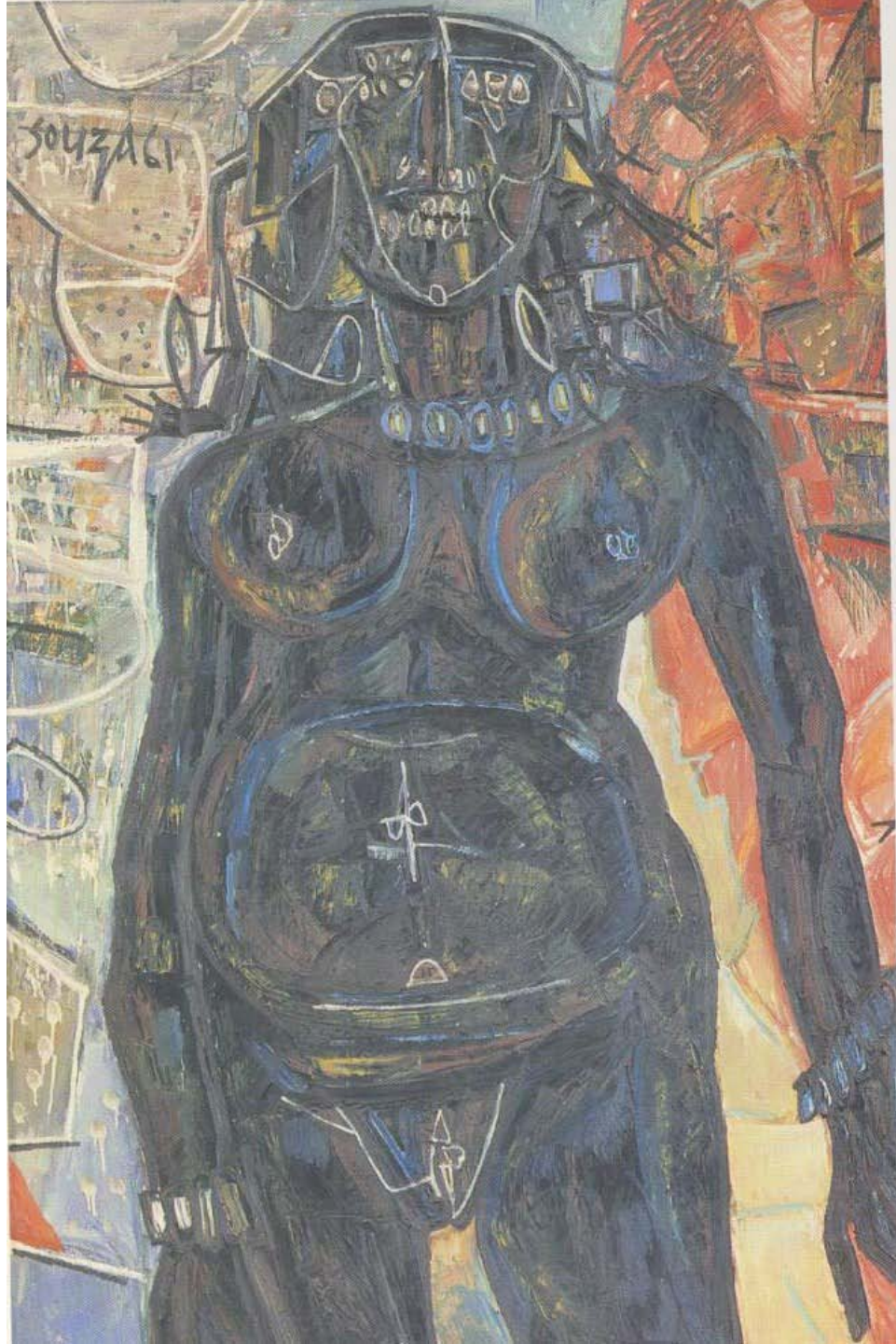
10. Aubrey Williams, *Olmec-Maya: Hymn to the Sun*, 1984



11. Ahmed Parvez, *Composition*, 1975



12. Balraj Khanna, *Festival*, 1970



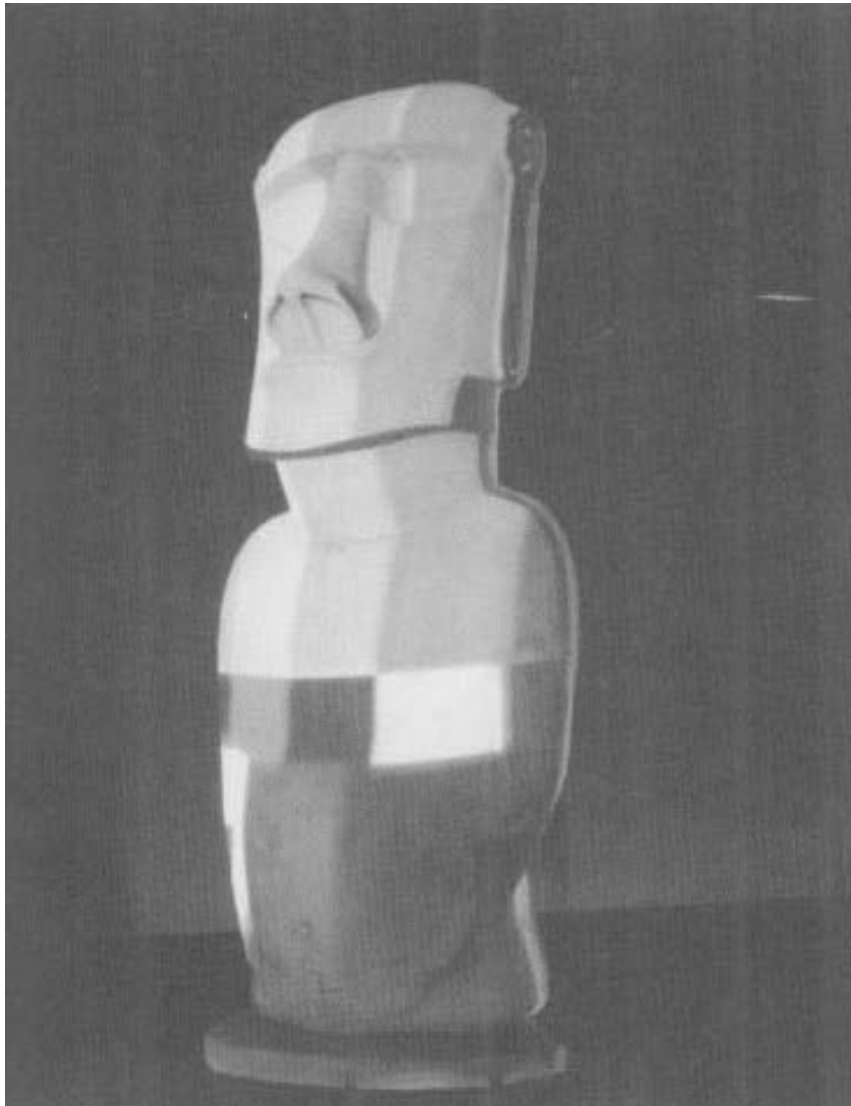
13. Francis Newton Souza, *Black Nude*, 1961



14. Renee Green, *Import/Export Funk*, 1992 (installation)



15. George Holliday, *George Holliday's Videotape of the Rodney King Beating*, 1991



16. Bruce Yonemoto, Norman Yonemoto and Timothy Martin, *Land of Projection*, 1992
(detail)



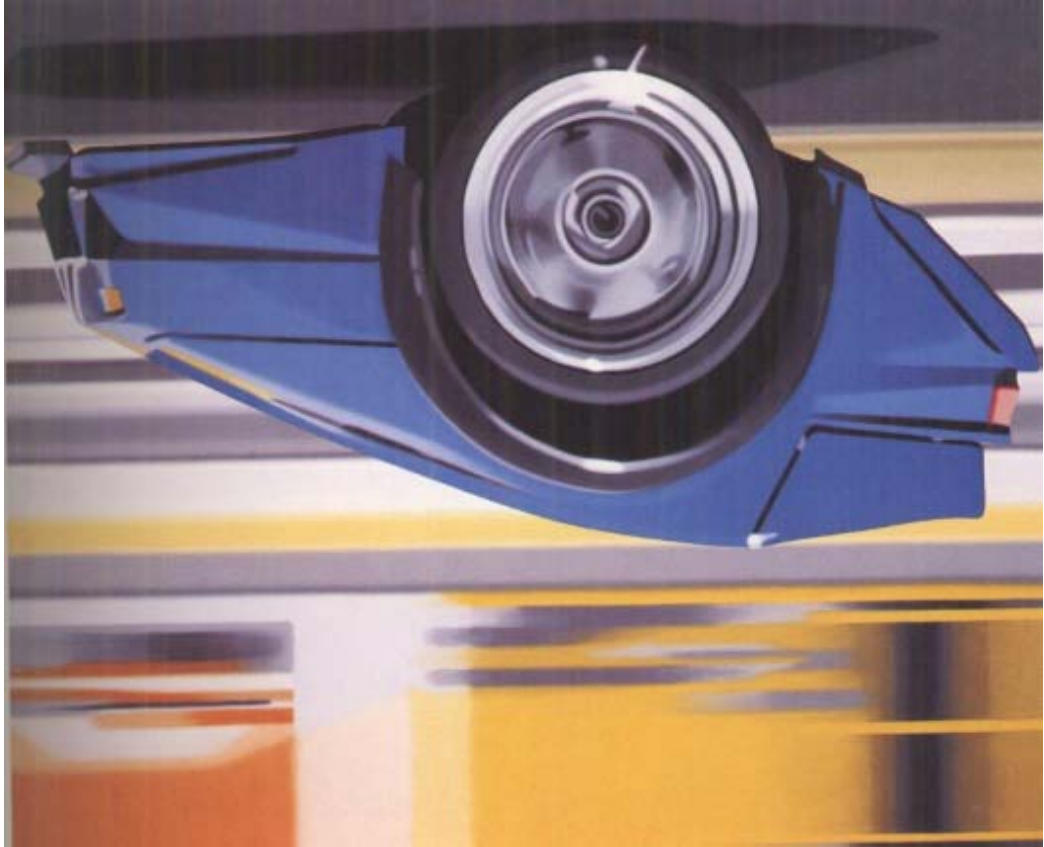
17. Shu Lea Cheang, *Those Fluttering Objects of Desire*, 1992 (installation)



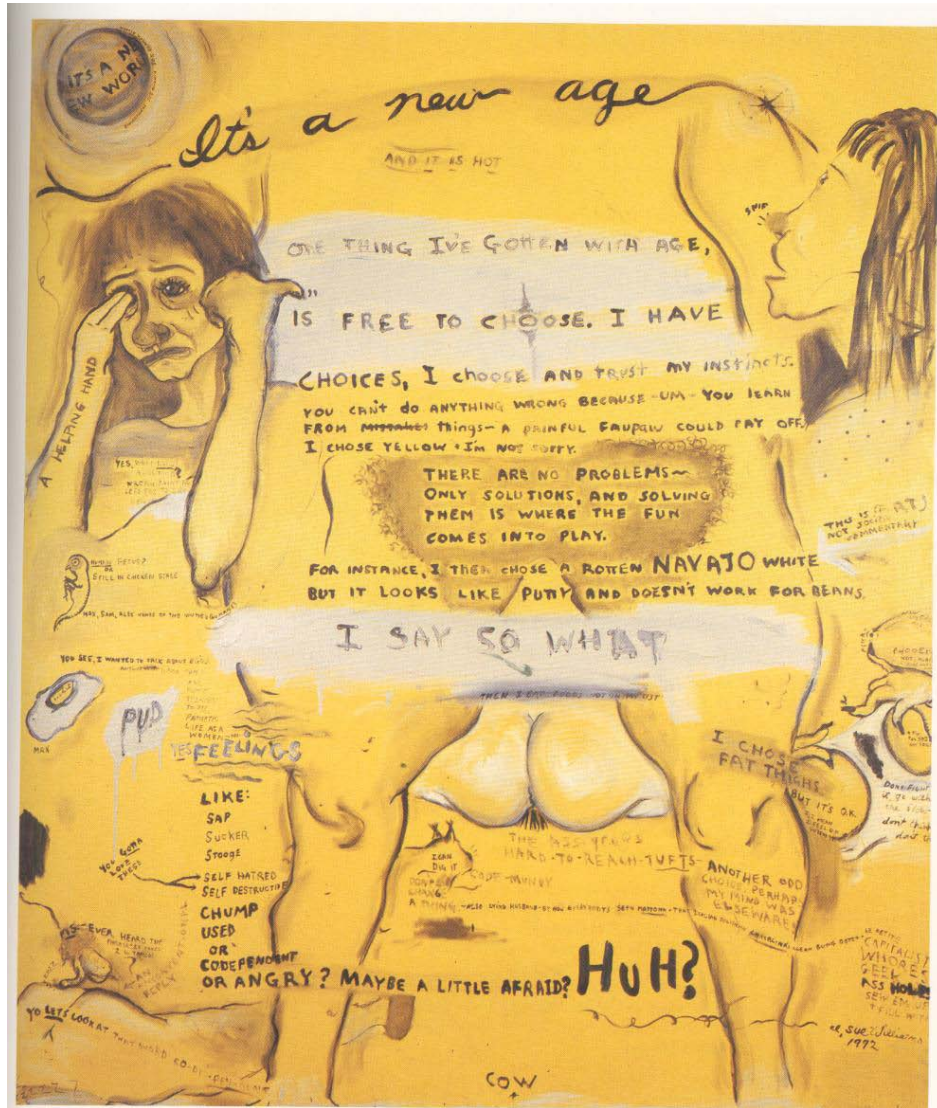
18. Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 7*, 1993 (installation)



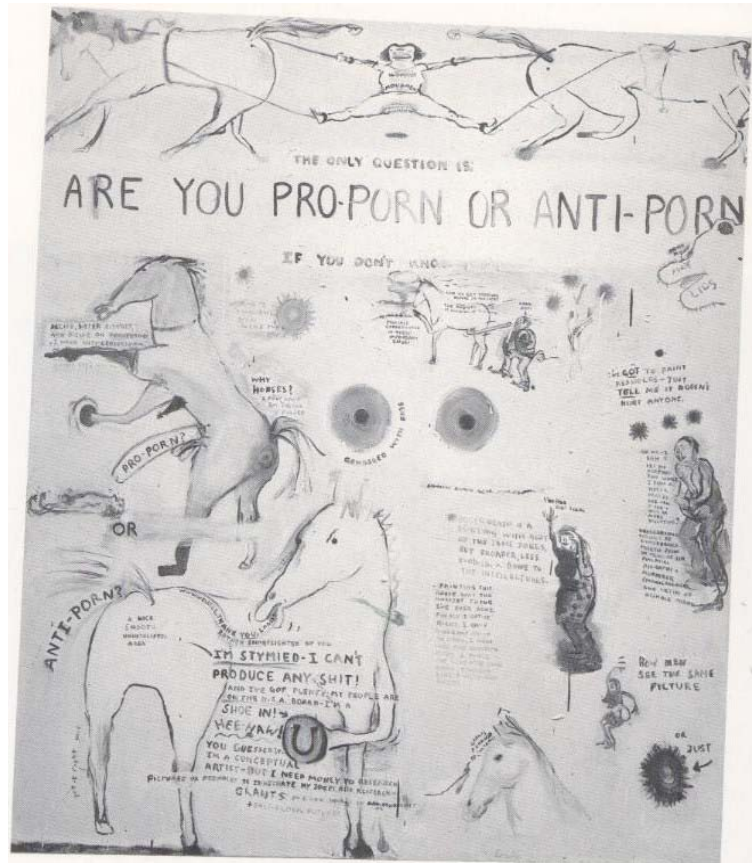
19. Ida Applebroog, *Jack F.*, 1992



20. Peter Cain, *EP 110*, 1992



21. Sue Williams, *It's A New Age*, 1992



22. Sue Williams, *Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn?*, 1992



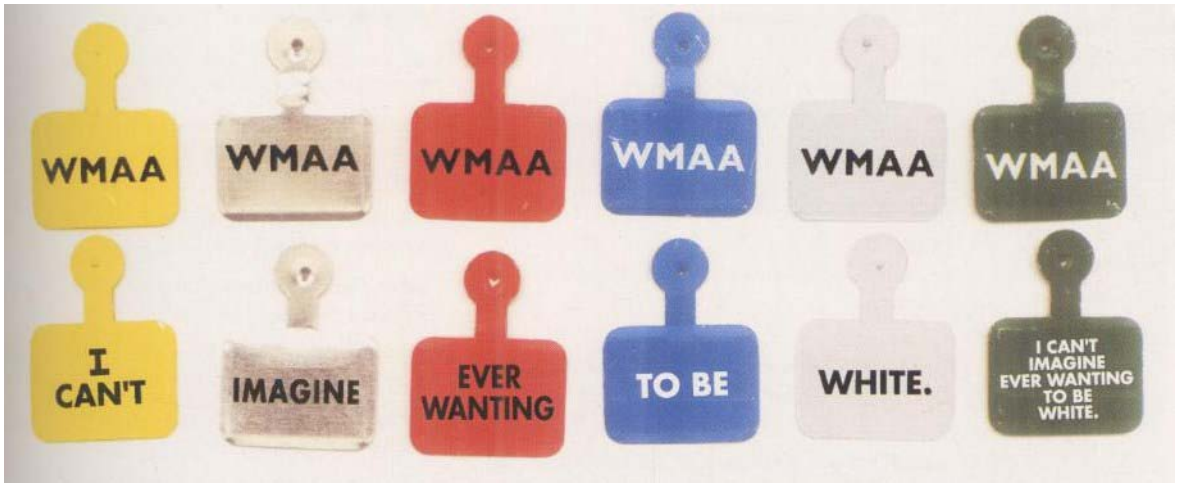
23. Bill Viola, *The Passing*, 1991



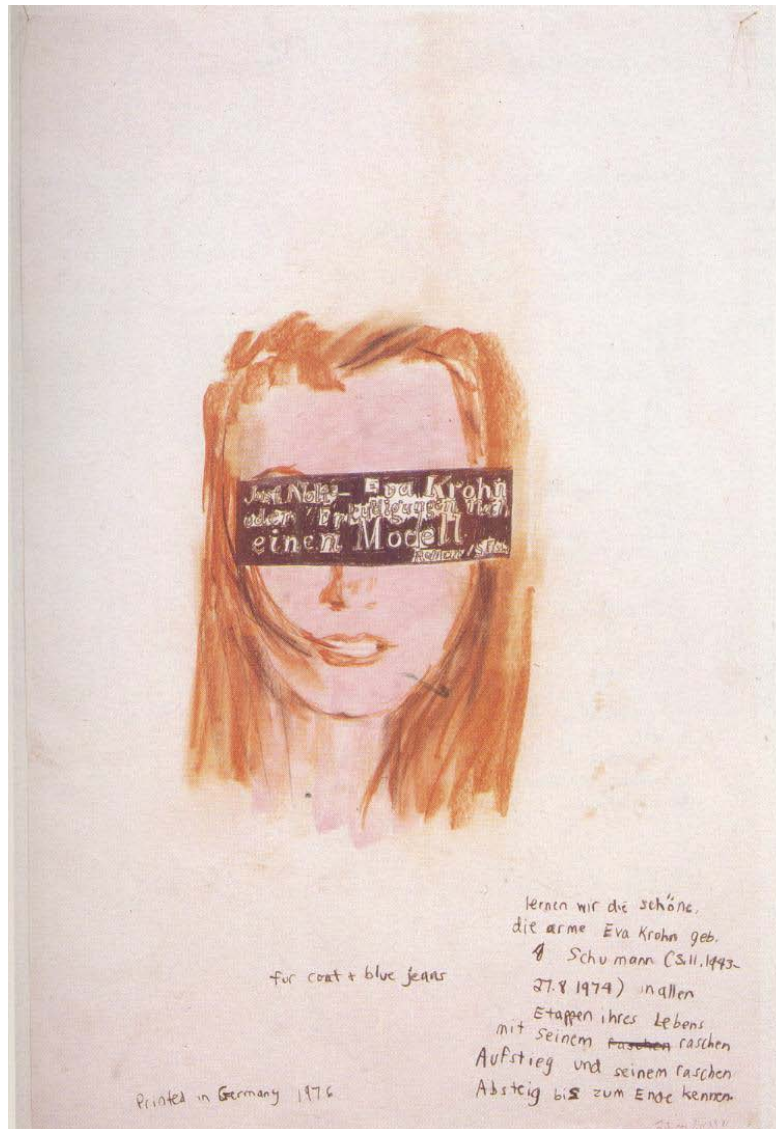
24. Pat Ward Williams, *What You Lookn At?*, 1992



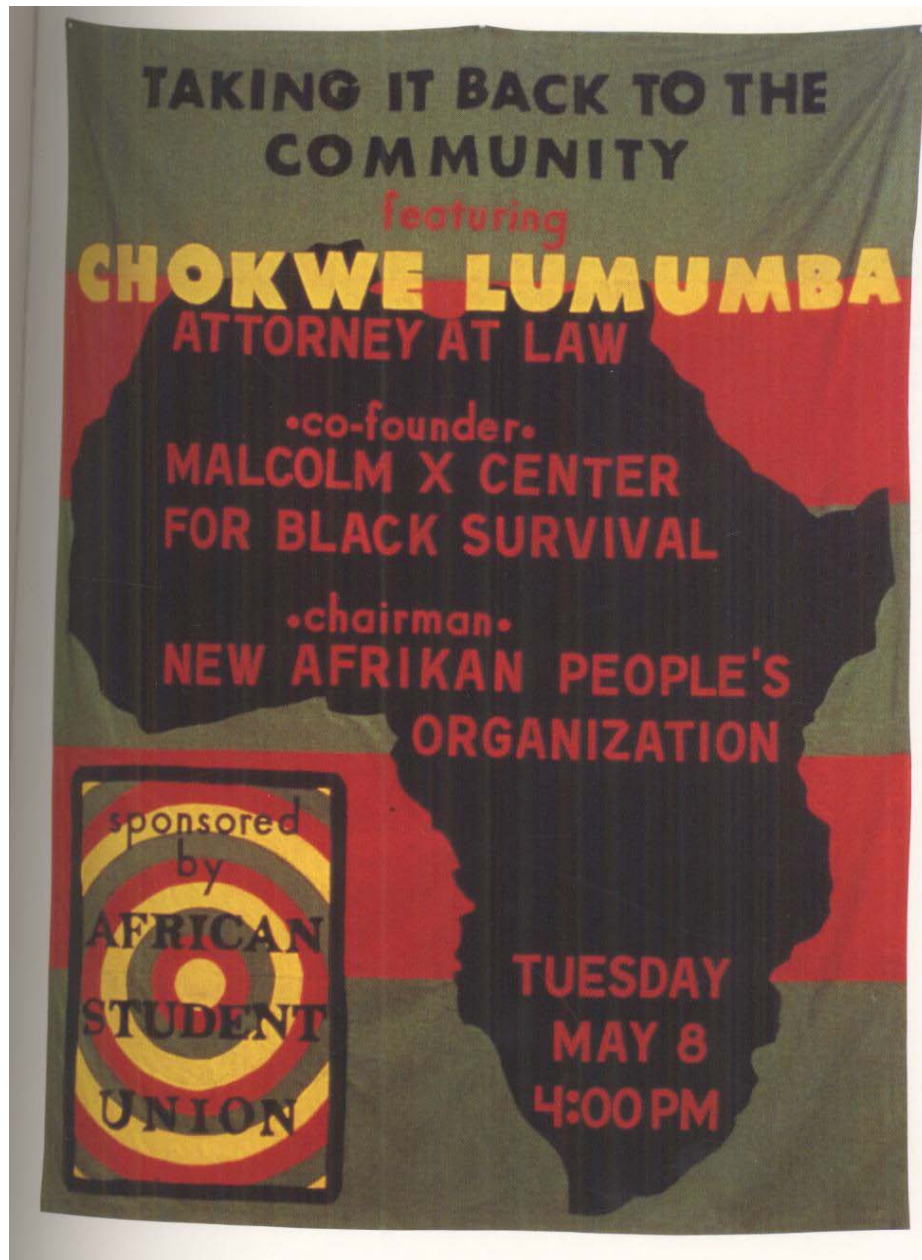
25. Glenn Ligon, *Notes on the Margin of The Black Book*, 1991-3 (installation)



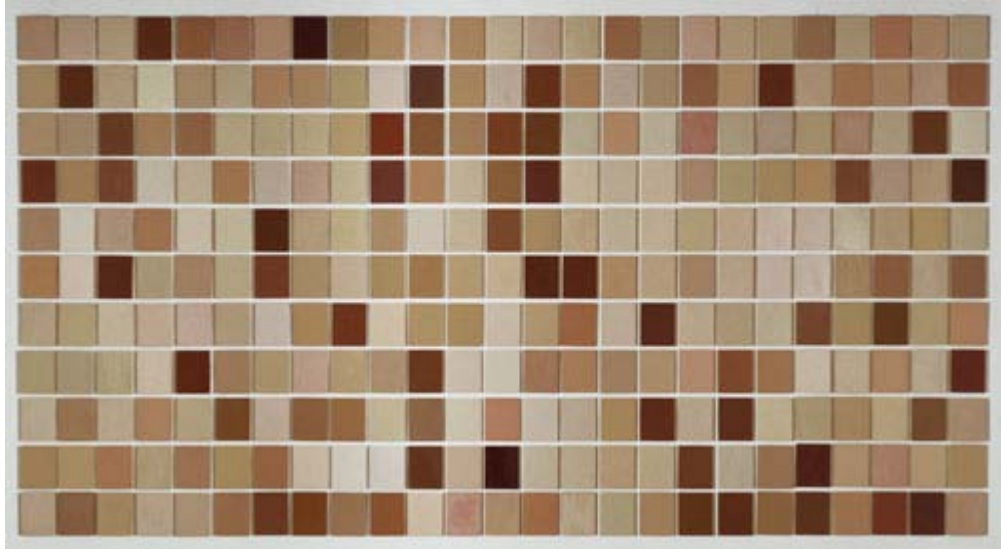
26. Daniel Martinez, *Museum Tags: Second Movement (Overture) or Overture con Claque-Overture with Hired Audience Members*, 1993



27. Karen Kilimnik, *Fur Coat & Blue Jeans*, 1991



28. Mike Kelly, *Untitled (Chokwe Lumumba)*, 1992



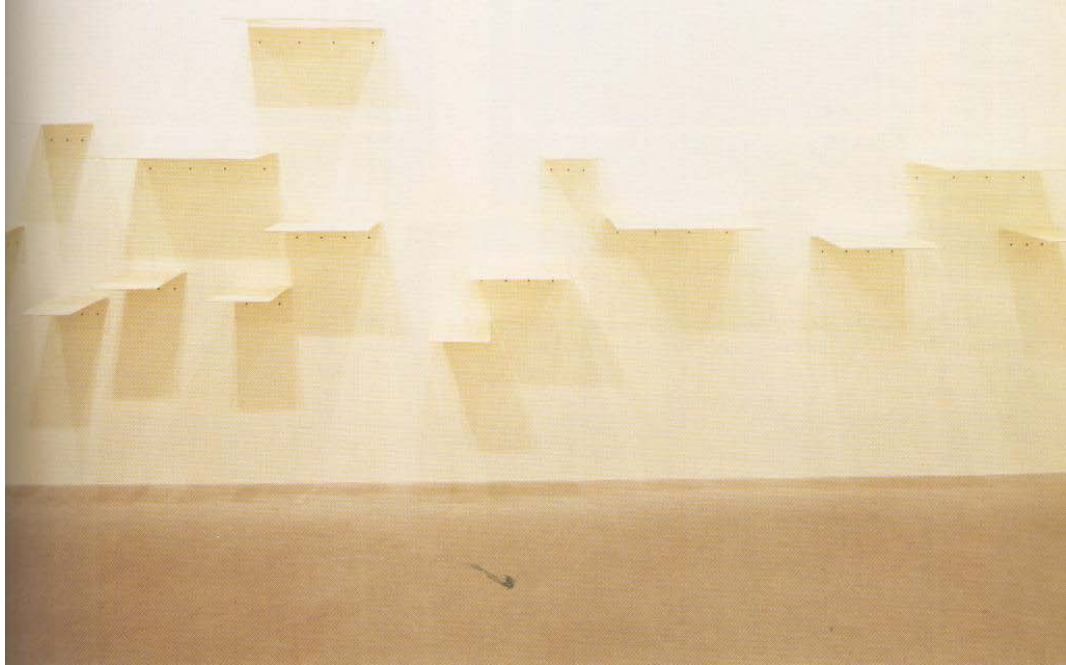
29. Byron Kim, *Synecdoche*, 1991-present



30. Pepón Osorio, *Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime?)*, 1993 (installation)



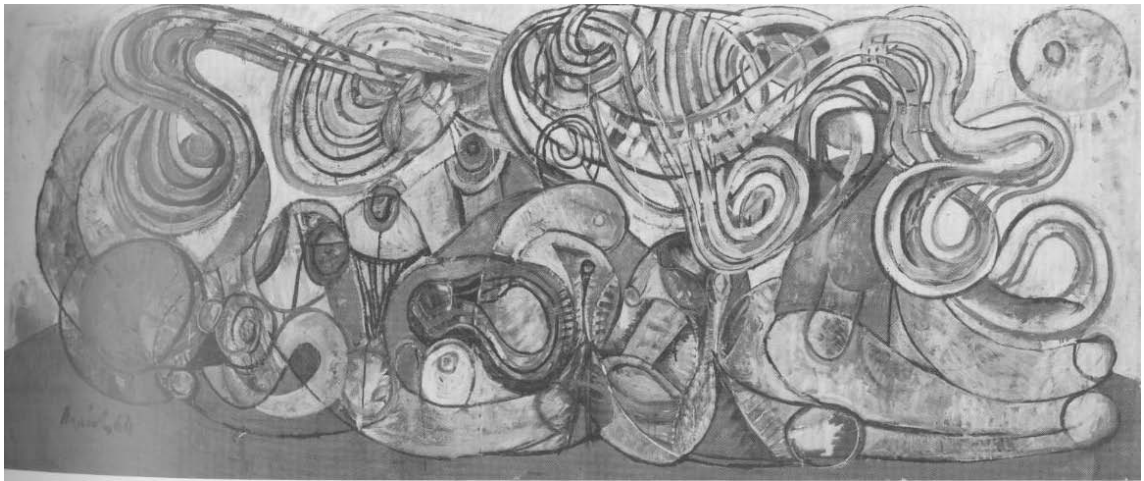
31. Maureen Connor, *Ensemble for Three Female Voices*, 1991 (installation)



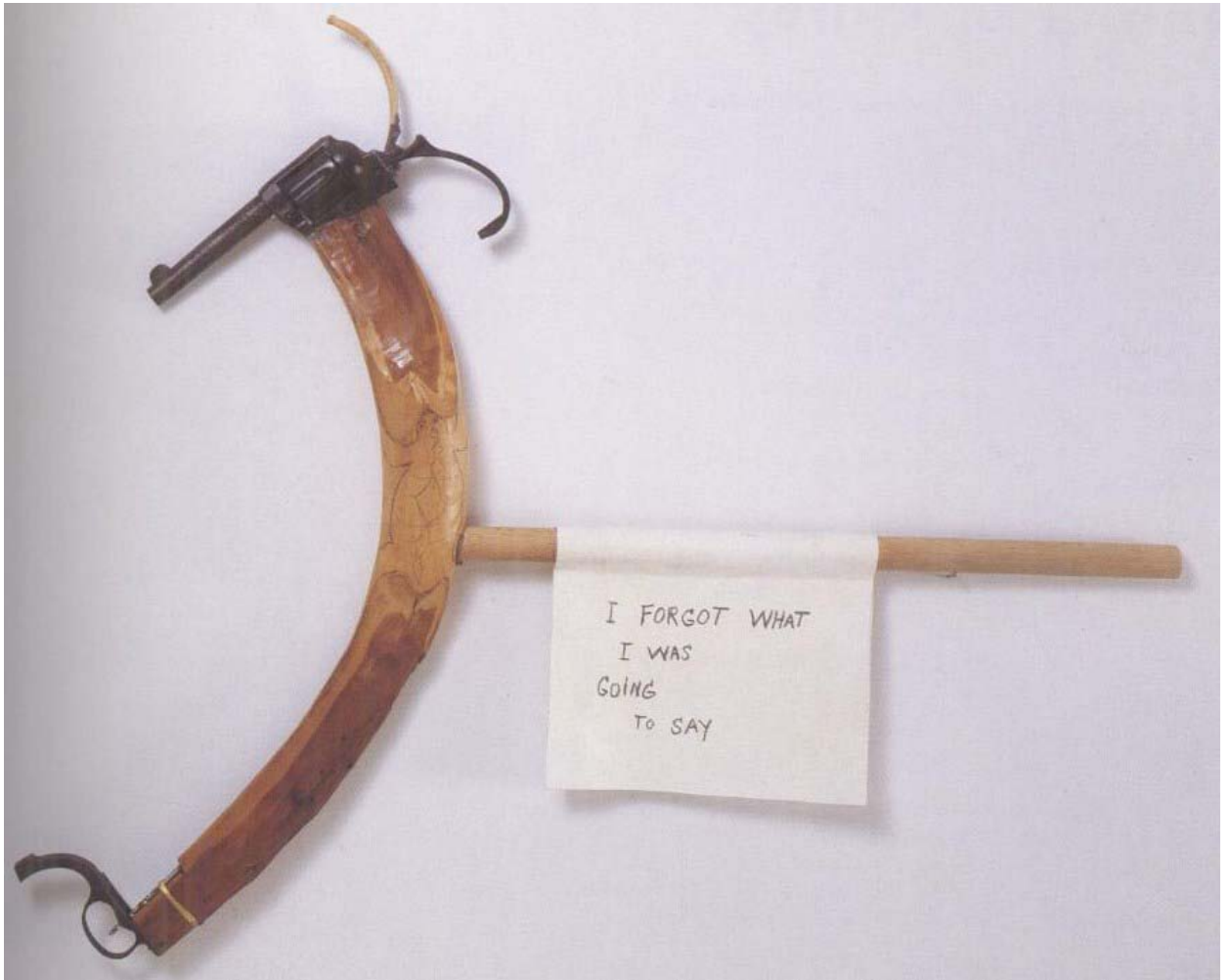
32. Simon Leung, *Marine Lovers*, 1992 (detail)



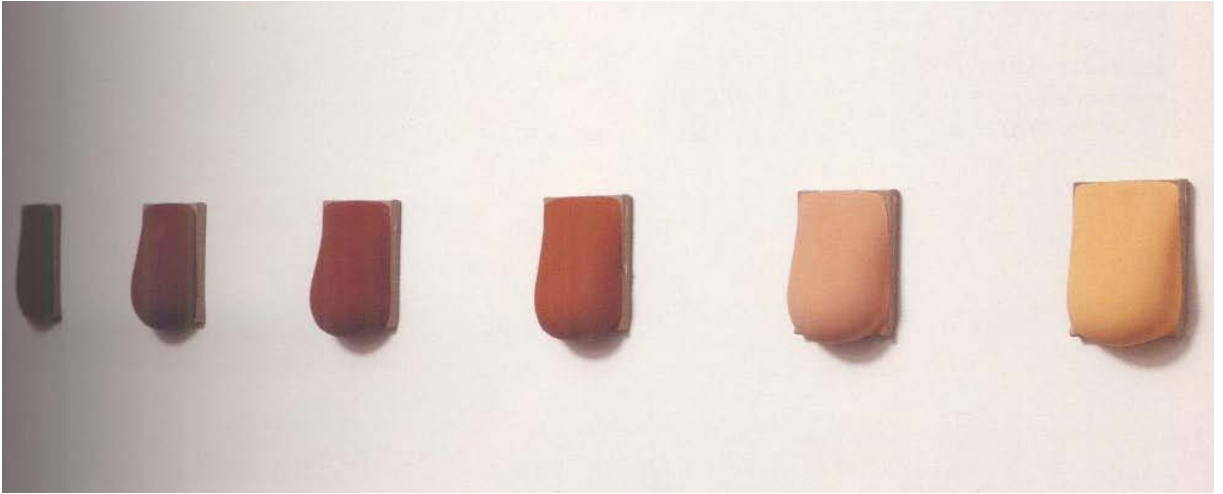
33. Keith Piper, *Go West Young Man*, 1988



34. Avinash Chandra, *Hills of Gold*, 1964



35. Jimmie Durham, *I Forgot What I Was Going to Say*, 1992 (detail)



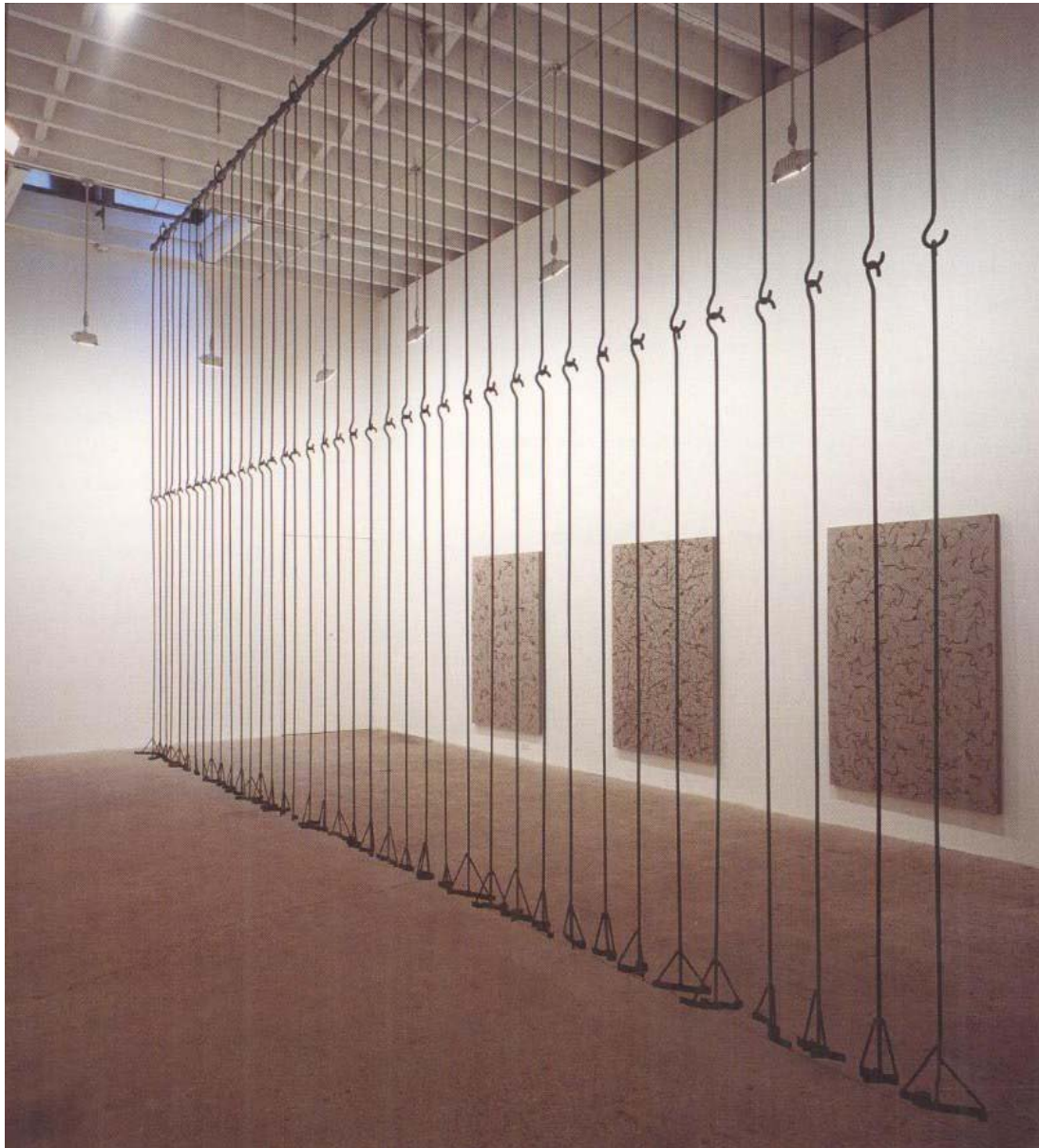
36. Byron Kim, *Belly Paintings*, 1992



37. Lorna Simpson, *Hypothetical?*, 1992 (detail)



38. Lorna Simpson, *Hypothetical?*, 1992 (detail)



39. Hillary Leone & Jennifer Macdonald, *Untitled (Maze)*, 1993 (installation)

REFERENCES

- 1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.
- Als, Hilton. "You Better Work." *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 7.
- Als, Hilton and Laura Cottingham. "The Pleasure Principled." *Frieze*, no. 10 (1993), www.frieze.com/issue/article/the_pleasure_principled.
- Araeen, Rasheed. "Modernism, History and Others: Why Are Non-European Artists Invisible in Modern Discourse or History?" *AICARC* 29-30 (1991): 43-47.
- . "A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics." In *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture, and Theory*, edited by Sean Cubitt and Ziauddin Sardar Rasheed Araeen, 334-45. London and New York: Continuum, 2002.
- . "The Other Immigrant: The Experiences and Achievements of Afro-Asian Artists in the Metropolis." *Third Text* 5, no. 15 (1991): 17-28.
- . *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, exh. cat. London: South Bank Centre, 1989.
- Ashcroft, Bill. *Post-Colonial Transformation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Bhabha, Homi K. and Sutapa Biswas. "The Wrong Story," *New Statesman*, December 15, 1989, p. 40-2. Reprinted in *Art and Its Histories*, edited by Steve Edwards, 269-73. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism." In *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, edited by Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, 86-106. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Bryce, Jane. "Opinion." *Arts Review (London, England)* 42 (January 1990): 9-10.
- Burr, James. "A Cultural Injection." *Apollo* 131, no. 2 (1990): 126-28.

- Cameron, Dan. "Backlash." *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 12.
- Coffee, Kevin. "Cultural inclusion, exclusion and the formative role of museums." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23, no. 3 (2008): 261-79.
- Coombes, Annie E. "Inventing the 'Postcolonial': Hybridity and Constituency in Contemporary Curating." In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziosi, 486-97. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Dormer, Peter. "The Voice of Redemption: Mr. Rasheed Araeen and Race." *Modern Painter* 1, no. 2 (1988): 60.
- Enahord, Carole. "The Other Story-Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain." *Women Artists Slide Library Journal* (1990): 26-27.
- Enwezor, Okwui. "'Elsewhere': A Conversation with Thelma Golden." *Nka* 13/14 (2001): 26-33.
- Ferguson, Bruce W. "Reading Rights and Writing Wrongs." *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 9-10.
- Fuller, Peter. "Black Artists: Don't Forget Europe" *Sunday Telegraph*, December 10, 1989, p. 10. Reprinted in *Art and Its Histories: A Reader*, edited by Steve Edwards, 267-68. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Gilroy, Paul. "Art of Darkness: Black Art and the Problem of Belonging to England." *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (1990): 45-52.
- . "Diaspora and the Detours of Identity." In *Identity and Difference*, edited by Kathryn Woodward, 301-40. London: SAGE Publications, 1997.
- . *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Golden, Thelma. "What's White...?" In *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat., 26-35. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.
- Gopnik, Adam. "The Art World." *The New Yorker*, March 22, 1993, 100-01.
- Greenberg, Reesa. "Identity Exhibitions: From *Magiciens De La Terre* to Documenta II." *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 90-94.
- Hanhardt, John. "Media Art Worlds: New Expressions in Film and Video, 1991-1993." In *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat., 36-51. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.
- Heartney, Eleanor. "Identity Politics at the Whitney." *Art in America* 81 (1993): 43-47.

- Hughes, Robert. "Art: The Whitney Biennial: A Fiesta of Whining." *Time*, no. March 22, 1993, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,978001,00.html.
- Joselit, David. *American Art since 1945*. New York and London: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2003.
- Keegan, Rita. "The Story So Far," *Spare Rib*, February 1990, p. 36. Reprinted in *Art and Its Histories*, edited by Steve Edwards, 273-76. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Kleeblatt, Norman. "Identity Roller Coaster." *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 61-63.
- Kotz, Liz. "Video Drone." *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 15-16.
- Leo, John. "Cultural War at the Whitney." *U.S. News & World Report* (March 14, 1993), www.usnews.com/usnews/opinion/articles/930322/archive_014839_print.htm.
- Liebmann, Lisa. "Almost Home." *ArtForum* (Summer 1985): 57-61.
- Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.
- Madoff, Steven Henry. "Whitney Biennial: Apocalypse Now?" *ARTNews* 92 (April 1993): 129.
- Malik, Rohini and Gilane Tawadros. "(Mis)Representations: The Curator, the Gallery and the Art Work." In *Critical Studies and Modern Art*, edited by Toby Jackson Liz Dawtrey, Mary Masterton, Pam Meecham., 113-21. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996.
- McEvelley, Thomas. "Same Difference." *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 14.
- McGough, Michael. *A Field Guide to the Culture Wars*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009.
- McIntyre, W. David. *British Decolonization, 1946-1997*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Mercer, Kobena. "Black Art and the Burden of Representation." *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (1990): 61-78.
- . *Welcome to the Jungle*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994.
- Meyer, Richard. "Identity." In *Critical Terms for Art History*, edited by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, 345-57. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Myers, Terry R. "Never Yell 'Fire!' In a Crowded Whitney Biennial." *New Art Examiner* 20 (May 1993): 20-23.

- O'Brien, Glenn. "Dividing the Sheep from the Goats." *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 8.
- O'Neill, Mark. "Essentialism, Adaptation and Justice: Towards a New Epistemology of Museums." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21, no. 2 (2006): 95-116.
- Phillips, Lisa, ed. *The American Century*, exh. cat. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999.
- . "No Man's Land: At the Threshold of a Millenium " In *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat., 52-61. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.
- Preziosi, Donald. "What are Museums For?" In *Grasping The World*, edited by Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago, 2-9. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004.
- Ramirez, Mari Carmen. "Brokering Identities: art curators and the politics of cultural representation." In *Thinking About Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, 22-35. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Rian, Jeff. "The 1993 Whitney Biennial: Everyone Loves a Fire." *Flash Art* 170 (May/June 1993): 78-79.
- Rimanelli, David. "All Talk No Action." *ArtForum* 31 (May 1993): 9.
- Rogoff, Irit. "Hit and Run-Museums and Cultural Difference." *Art Journal* 61, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 63-73.
- Ross, David. "Know Thy Self (Know Your Place)." In *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat., 8-11. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.
- Sewell, Brian. "Pride or Prejudice?" *Sunday Times*, November 26, 1989, p.8. Reprinted in *Art and its Histories: A Reader*, edited by Steve Edwards, 266-67. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Sharpe, Jenny. "Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race." In *Postcolonial America*, edited by C. Richard King, 103-21. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Shogan, Robert. *War without End*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2002.
- Sims, Patterson. *Selection from the Permanent Collection*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1985.
- Stallabrass, Julian. *Art Incorporated*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Sussman, Elisabeth. "Coming Together in Parts: Positive Power in the Art of the Nineties." In *1993 Whitney Biennial*, exh. cat., 12-25. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.

Sussman, Elisabeth. "Then and Now: Whitney Biennial 1993." *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 75-79.

Taylor, Brandon. *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public, 1747-2001*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999.

Woodward, Kathryn. "Concepts of Identity and Difference." In *Identity and Difference*, edited by Kathryn Woodward, 7-62. London: SAGE Publications, 1997.

Wright, Jr., Charles A. "The Mythology of Difference: Vulgar Identity Politics at the Whitney." In *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, edited by Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung, 187-203. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Young, Lola. "Where Do We Go from Here? Musings on the 'the Other Story'." *Oxford Arts Journal* 13, no. 2 (1990): 51-54.

Žižek, Slavoj. "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." *New Left Review* 225 (1997): 28-51.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Vanessa Johnson

ADDRESS: 5300 Carolina Crossings Way #201
Louisville, KY 40219

EMAIL: vanessajohnson83@gmail.com

EDUCATION: B.A., Art History
University of Kentucky
2001-2005
Summa Cum Laude

AWARDS: Cressman Scholar, 2009-10, Research Assistant for Dr. Susan Jarosi
Cressman Scholar, 2008-09, Research Assistant for Dr. Jay Kloner
1st place, Oswald Creativity Awards, Humanities, 2004
National Merit Scholar, 2000

AFFILIATIONS: Treasurer, Aegis, Fine Arts Graduate Organization, 2009-10
Fine Arts Representative to the Graduate Student Union, 2010