

ADRIENNE EDWARDS

Blackness in Abstraction

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PACE

LORRAINE O'GRADY

LORRAINE O'GRADY has taken an archaeological, archival, and historicist approach to mine the past precisely by pursuing its and her own hauntings, transgressions, and becomings. This is especially evident in *Landscape (Western Hemisphere)*, a 2010–11 eighteen-minute, single-channel video in which O'Grady transforms her hair into a moving abstract landscape. As each wavy strand sways, crinkles, and rustles to the wind, a faint collage of sound from the North American hemisphere's rural and urban landscape is audible.⁷²

The term landscape has multiple nuanced and interrelated meanings: as a noun it can imply an art genre (as in landscape painting) or a topography (as in an expansive vista); and as a verb it connotes cultivation, disciplining, and contouring of the ground.⁷³ In O'Grady's video, all three definitions are interpolated. A foundational concern in her work is hybridity and the myriad ways in which it is a particularly distinguishing characteristic of the Western hemisphere.⁷⁴ O'Grady's hair testifies to the history of racial mixing and the historical, cultural, and social connotations associated with it. She addresses the implications of this history on social and economic status, the impermanence of racial boundaries, and the infelicity of racial authenticity. For O'Grady, hybridity:

is essential to understanding what is happening here. People's reluctance to acknowledge it is part of the problem....The argument for embracing the "other" is more realistic than what is usually argued for, which is an idealistic and almost romantic maintenance of difference. But I don't mean interracial sex literally. I'm really advocating for the kind of miscegenated *thinking* that's needed to deal with what we've already created here.⁷⁵

Through her hair (indeed in all of her work), O'Grady puts forth a "metaphoric system" that is neither foundational, nor symbolic, nor definitive but rather resonates liminally in the fissure of hybridity and its productive capacity. In the interstices of O'Grady's hair, we locate the remains of enslavement, the resilience and persistence of the specters—it is a testament of survival. We also find the pathways to transgressive resistance embedded in the heights, depths, and expanse of the waves of her hair. The waves are "the break" in which the hauntings of this past persist and the what-is-to-become mutually reside. This future becomes through transgressions, both a holding of the line and a crossing of it to some other plane by some other means.

INTO THE BLACK

- 1 *Minimalism and Beyond: Rasheed Araeen*, exh. brochure (London: Tate Britain, 2007), n.p.
- 2 Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 29.
- 3 Nafisa Rizvi, “To Be or Not to Be an Artist,” in *Rasheed Araeen: Homecoming*, ed. Amra Ali (Karachi: VM Art Gallery, 2014), 75.
- 4 *Minimalism and Beyond*, 2.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Raquel Arnaud interview with the author in São Paulo, Brazil, March 21, 2016.
- 7 Guy Brett and Ronaldo Brito, *Camargo Esulturas* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1994), n.p.
- 8 Mika Yoshitake, *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Blum & Poe, 2014), 99.
- 9 Motoi Masaka, *Kōji Enokura: 1969–1989*, exh. cat., trans. Stanly N. Anderson and Charles S. Worthen (Tokyo: The Loft Museum, 1989).
- 10 Yoshitake, *Requiem for the Sun*, 99.
- 11 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). See text for an explication of the distinction between “in the world” and “of the world.”
- 12 Yoshitake, *Requiem for the Sun*, 226.
- 13 Ibid., 103.
- 14 *Robert Irwin, Notes Toward a Conditional Art*, ed. Matthew Simms (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 219.
- 15 *blank projects*, gallery brochure, Armory Show, New York, 2016, n.p.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Stephanie Rosenthal, *Black Paintings: Robert Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko and Frank Stella* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 15.
- 18 Ulrike Müller, email to the author, Brooklyn, New York, March 21, 2016.
- 19 Martin Friedman, *Nevelson: Wood Sculptures* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973), 29.
- 20 Ibid, 7.
- 21 Ibid, 2.
- 22 John Gordon, *Louise Nevelson*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1967), 2.
- 23 *Louise Nevelson Atmospheres and Environments*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1975), 105.
- 24 Louise Nevelson, *Dawns + Dusks* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1976), 126.
- 25 Fred Sandback, *Here and Now: Fred Sandback*, exh. brochure (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 1999), n.p.
- 26 Kathryn Kanjo, *Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting*, exh. cat. (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2015), 29.

TO COME THICKLY

I express my heartfelt gratitude to Ellen Gallagher for understanding and articulating so clearly in this phrase the shift in sensibilities concerning abstraction and the color black.

- 27 Select portions of this text were previously published by the author in ed., *Prospect 3: Notes for Now*, ed. Franklin Sirmans (Munich: DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2014), 36 and <http://artforum.com/passages/id=46814>, Accessed: April 30, 2016.
- 28 An earlier version of this text was published by the author as “Babylon Brazil” in *Select Magazine, Performance* (October–November 2015), 62–67.
- 29 <http://www.mstbrazil.org/content/what-mst>. Accessed: May 1, 2016.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 <http://www.mstbrazil.org/content/history-mst>. Accessed: May 1, 2016.
- 32 Select portions of an earlier version of this text were previously published by the author in *Fore*, exh. cat. (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2012), 44–45.
- 33 “Russia discovers two secret paintings under avant-garde masterpiece,” <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/13/russia-malevich-black-square-hidden-paintings>. Accessed: May 1, 2016.
- 34 Ellen Gallagher, interview with the author, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, March 13, 2016.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Robin D.G. Kelley, “Confounding Myths,” in *Ellen Gallagher: AxMe*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 2013), 11.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ellen Gallagher, interview with the author, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, March 13, 2016.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Rashid Johnson, interview with the author, New York, April 28, 2016.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.

- 45 Oscar Murillo, telephone interview with the author, January 21, 2016.
- 46 Oscar Murillo, text message to the author, February 15, 2016.
- 47 Wangechi Mutu, interview with author, New York, March 5, 2013.
- 48 Wangechi Mutu, email to the author from Nairobi, Kenya, April 4, 2016.
- 49 An earlier version of this text was published by the author as “Blackness in Abstraction” in *Art in America* (January 2015).
- 50 Adam Pendleton, interview with the artist, Brooklyn, New York, April 30, 2016.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 William Pope.L, “Some Notes on the Ocean...,” in *Black People Are Cropped* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2013), 9.
- 53 William Adams, “Aesthetics: Liberating the Senses,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 246–274.
- 54 Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, 89.
- 55 Pope.L, “Some Notes on the Ocean...,” 9–16. Select aspects of this text were published by the author in *Spike Art Quarterly*, 45 (Autumn 2015).
- 56 Roni Feinstein, “The Early Work of Robert Rauschenberg: The White Paintings, The Black Paintings, and The Elemental Sculptures,” *Arts Magazine* (September 1986), 32.
- 57 Ibid., 36.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, 23–25.
- 66 Feinstein, “The Early Work of Robert Rauschenberg,” 33.
- 61 Ibid., 5.

SHOWING UP TO WITHHOLD

This header is a phrase theorist Lauren Berlant has used to describe Pope.L’s art and was the title of a 2014 exhibition and artist book/catalogue produced by the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, where he teaches.

- 62 Glenn Ligon, email to the author, January 31, 2016.
- 63 Glenn Ligon, email to the author, May 2, 2016.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Glenn Ligon, “Interview with Jason Moran,” in *Yourself in the World: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Scott Rothkopf (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 172–173.
- 66 Ibid., 173.
- 67 Ibid., 176.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid., 157.
- 72 “Lorraine O’Grady: New Worlds,” press release, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, April 11, 2012.
- 73 Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/landscape>. Accessed: May 8, 2012.
- 74 Tavia Nyong’o, *Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). See the text for an extensive and related argument that tracks the concept of racial hybridity.
- 75 Alexander Gray Associates, “Lorraine O’Grady: New Worlds.”
- 76 Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, 38, 41.
- 77 Ibid., 23.
- 78 Ibid., 36–37.
- 89 Ibid., 37.
- 80 Ibid., 38.
- 81 An earlier version of sections of this text was published by the author as “Carrie Mae Weems” in *Aperture Magazine, Performance* (Winter 2015), 102–111 and in *The Kitchen Table Series* (New York: Damiani, 2016).
- 82 Doro Globus, “Shifting Under Our Noses: Appropriation and Layering in the Art of Fred Wilson,” in *Fred Wilson*, exh. cat. (New York: Pace Gallery, 2014), 9.
- 83 Fred Wilson, interview with the author, New York, April 18, 2016.



LORRAINE O'GRADY

Landscape (Western Hemisphere)

2010–11
single channel video for projection
18 min.
Edition of 3