



Artist Lorraine O’Grady’s Both/And Philosophy Rings True

by **Julia Lasker**
1 YEAR AGO

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2 years ago today, Lorraine O’Grady’s *Both/And* exhibition opened at the Brooklyn Museum. A retrospective of twelve major projects from Lorraine’s career, the exhibition highlighted the incredible achievements of Lorraine’s lifetime and celebrated her radical both/and philosophy.

Lorraine’s artistic career began with a persona: Mlle Bourgeoise Noire (translated to “Miss Black Middle Class”). Under this persona in the early eighties, Lorraine protested the racial injustice she saw in the art world. She would show up at art openings wearing a gown made of white gloves and beat herself with a white studded whip.



She would also shout poems that protested the exclusion of Black artists from mainstream art. “Mlle Bourgeoise Noire” also curated exhibitions, for example *The Black and White Show*, which showcased 30 Black artists and 30 white artists, again in protest of segregation in art.

In 1983, Lorraine’s last appearance as Mlle Bourgeoise Noire was on a float in the African American Day Parade in Harlem. Her float, which she designed, was called *Art Is...* and featured Lorraine as Mlle Bourgeoise Noire and a group of fifteen Black and hispanic performers carrying large, empty Gold frames. The float was meant to draw attention to the important contributions of Black artists who had been excluded from the art world, as well as to encourage Black individuals to look upon themselves as art.

Following her time as Mlle Bourgeoise Noire, Lorraine began to delve into the “both/and” philosophy with her artwork. The both/and philosophy protests divisive, exclusionary thinking which tends to categorize identities and other facets of life into an “either/or” binary.

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For example, the idea that only one type of person can be a successful artist, while another cannot. This type of thinking, which Lorraine pins as specifically Western, results in racial injustices and misogyny, especially as she’s observed in the art world.

Lorraine’s primary medium is the diptych, or a piece which is made of two parts (in her case this is usually photographs), parallel to each other and separated by a line down the middle. To Lorraine, the diptych embodies her both/and philosophy because it contains two different images and therefore two different ideas together in harmony, rather than set apart.

In 2021, Lorraine’s *Both/And* exhibition opened at the Brooklyn Museum, showcasing her diptychs, her earlier work as Mlle Bourgeoise Noire, and more, and bringing together a lifetime of work which embodies her intersection feminism and both/and philosophy.

From her protests to her conceptual art pieces, Lorraine O’Grady is one of the most influential creators and one of the most powerful thinkers of our time.

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Read [Jessica Bond’s review of Lorraine O’Grady’s Both/And exhibition](#) here.

Explore [Lorraine O’Grady’s work](#) further here.

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by **Julia Lasker**
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As an associate for FF2 Media, Julia writes reviews and features for films made by women. She is currently a senior at Barnard College studying Psychology. Outside of FF2, her interests include acting, creative writing, thrift shopping, crafting, and making and eating baked goods. Julia has been at FF2 for almost 4 years, and loves the company and its mission dearly.

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