

FORUM

Power and Image



Photo courtesy Ric Whitney and Tina Perry-Whitney
 At right is one of the artworks in the "Do You See Me?" exhibition: Aaron Fowler, He Was, 2015, Mixed Media, 134x165x1.

Dr. James Pope
 Guest Columnist

"I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me. . . . When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination — indeed, everything and anything except me." — Ralph Ellison, 1952

 "Say it Loud!...I'm Black and I'm proud!" — James Brown, 1968

 The actual beginnings of our expression are post Western (just as they certainly are pre-western).

It is only necessary that we arm ourselves with complete self-knowledge the whole technology (which is after all just expression of whoever) will change to reflect the essence of a freed people. Freed of an oppressor, but also as Touré has

reminded we must be "free from the oppressor's spirit," as well. It is this spirit as emotional construct that can manifest as expression as art or technology or any form. — Amiri Baraka, 1970

 In order to truly be conscious of the power of imagery, one must first interrogate the strains of knowledge that inform the various inferences, interpretations, and/or beliefs that are constructed to make sense of what we "see". In doing so, it must not be lost that these constructions are a direct product of the culture within which one lives, accepts, or that is forced upon them. Therefore, those who are able to control the means of production and distribution of culture, are then able to control the formation of the identities of themselves and others. Currently, this battle, as in the past, is played out through various forms of media, where images are constructed and consumed with supposedly benign intent—hidden in the universe of creative artistic expression. Rarely are the processes of production and distribution of these images interrogated for their association with power. Rarely are they

interrogated for their (re)inscription, (re)packaging of old forms of racist, sexist, imperialist, and/or colonialist assumptions of what the Other is or is not.

We live in a (global) society where power is constantly reconfiguring itself. We live in world where identity is currency; where image(s) constantly inform our perceptions of ourselves and others. The struggle to create and own one's identity—or to a larger extent become visible, recognized, and/or valued is a place of high contestation. In our highly racialized society, the power of image is wrapped within social structures that are constructed to maintain particular forms of consciousness that are centered on tightly woven interpretations of inferiority and superiority. For the African world, the history of the struggle between power and image has always been a place of contention—internally and externally.

To be sure, for the African world this is, as it has always been, a matter of life and death!

...I can see ... John Grant, Patrice Lumumba, Steve Biko, Sandra Bland,

Michael Brown ...

Winston Salem State University's Diggs Gallery exhibition, "Do You See Me?" is a clear, intentional meditation on ways to take control, re-inscribe, and resist dominant narratives of what it means to be SEEN.

To be a black man/women/transgendered—to be what the creator created us to be! To be spiritual beings living an Earthly experience. "Do You See Me?" Dis an act of what Askia Muhammad Touré and Amiri Baraka encouraged us ALL to do ... to "be free from the oppressor's spirit." Because... "it is this spirit as emotional construct that can manifest [itself] as art..."

Dr. James Pope is Assistant Professor of Liberal Studies at Winston-Salem State University.

Winston-Salem State University
 Diggs Gallery Fall Exhibition
 "Do You See Me?"
 Opening Friday, Oct. 14
 4 to 7 p.m.

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