

# LOOK



The fly nun: detail from Cox's *Seven Minutes in Heaven*, 1999.

RENÉE COX

## SHUTTERBUG SAINT

Whatever their sincerity, black artistic commentaries on Christianity haven't fared well with New York City's Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Two years ago, Giuliani made national headlines condemning the Brooklyn Museum of Art and British painter Chris Ofili's "The Holy Virgin Mary," primarily due to the artist's ongoing use of elephant dung as a native motif. Recently, the mayor assailed sight unseen photographer **Renée Cox's** "Yo Mama's Last Supper" at the museum's "Committed to the Image" exhibit as sensationalistic Catholic-bashing. "Last Supper" is a five-panel tableau featuring a fully nude Cox as Christ surrounded by mostly African- and Portuguese-American apostles.

Cox says, "I have a right to critique Catholicism because I was *baptized* Catholic. I'm not coming from the outside." She remembers how the piece hung in an Ital-

ian church during the 1999 Venice Biennial. "And there was no hoopla," she adds ruefully. Moreover, "Last Supper" is one piece in her "Yo Mama" series, which critiques prefeminist theory icons, "basically taking these classical images that I had rammed down my throat studying art history in Florence, Italy...which was fine and dandy, but I never noticed anybody in those images that resembled me."

In her early 40s, the Jamaican-born, married mother of two feels her work is part of a desperately needed process to school America in black history. Following Mayor Giuliani's public condemnation, Cox says, "I got a letter from somebody saying *there were no blacks* at the time of Christ." Her look of astonishment as she says this is one Cox has yet to capture on film. *Robert Morales*

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