

Putting on a Bold-Face

How Renee Cox and Sonia Boyce Pull Ethnographic Art Apart

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In his seminal text *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, literary theorist Robert Young examines the connection between the development of racial theories of white superiority and the project of European colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. When asserting race as a cultural construct, Young deems that ‘the link between culture and race theory in the nineteenth century involved sexuality as its third mediating term’.¹ This connection illuminates the hierarchies of power embedded in colonial society in which black women were rendered a social and cultural threat, while their sexuality was pathologized. Given the way in which identity was envisaged in the nineteenth century, whereby one’s exterior appearance was imagined to reflect an interior essence, black women’s bodies were visually rendered as having particular surface signs that warranted constant regulation.² Subjugated as objects of fascination, their bodies were captured in art, and later photography, as a means to develop racist taxonomies that benefited the colonialist enterprise.³

This article will examine how artists Renee Cox (1960–) and Sonia Boyce (1962–) are visually problematizing notions of civilized society by re-presenting eighteenth- and nineteenth-century black women as the unorthodox, unusual and, thus, transgressive embodiment of modernity. In the *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* (2004) series and *From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born ‘Native’ Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction* (1989), Cox and Boyce, respectively, re-present these black women, creating images of them that reflect a multivalenced black female subjectivity. These artworks challenge the incessant need to study and contain the black masses, and particularly black women, which was so characteristic of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This desire to constantly survey black people fuelled the efforts of colonial social reformers and

1. Robert J C Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995, p 97
2. Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1999, p 4
3. Eleanor M Hight and Gary Sampson, eds, ‘Introduction: Photography, “Race”, and Post-colonial Theory’, in *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*, Routledge, London, 2002, p 8

peripheral nationalist thinkers who wanted to document black people and their cultural elements, which they believed hindered modernization and civilizational progress.⁴

Photography has always been considered a way to record history, a valuable means of documenting the past. However, in the colonial encounter, non-Western peoples would often be cast as stock figures in a reconstructed colonized landscape so that a particular representation that perpetuated myths of ‘other’ races could be produced.⁵ And, with the advent of photography, technological reproduction made it possible for these sites and bodies of constructed imaginings to be in constant circulation. Colonial photography thus produced a visibility that, according to literary scholar Zahid R Chaudhary, ‘legitimate[d] and record[ed] the “value” of the colonial effort in the same frame as it measures the colonial subject’.⁶ But, just as visual culture was utilized in developing racist classification, it is imperative that it be used for the project of racial reinscription so that a reconstructed racial knowledge is accomplished.⁷ Renee Cox’s *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* (2004) series and Sonia Boyce’s *From Tarzan to Rambo* (1989) challenge negative representations of African-descended peoples, ‘race pseudo-sciences’ and racist taxonomies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, by incorporating themselves into the works, both artists aim to personify dignified subjecthoods and offer, as Tina Campt asserts, ‘counterimages’ of who these people were and how they aspired to be represented as they embarked on their own social and cultural formation.⁸

My aim is to demonstrate how Cox’s visual representations of Queen Nanny in her series *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* (2004) epitomize a modern blackness that is unnuanced and tangible in its conveyance. Cox’s work rewrites the conventional understanding of nineteenth-century civilized society in the Caribbean with a black, feminized and ‘folk’ particularity. Similarly, in *From Tarzan to Rambo*, Boyce juxtaposes a black woman’s self-image with popular stereotypical imagery that came to be associated with black people, in an effort to undermine these stereotypes that constructed it. *From Tarzan to Rambo* turns on its head the practice of critically surveying black Atlantic women of the nineteenth century, which was part of a larger practice of creating racialized class differentiations throughout the European continent and their colonies using the science of physiognomy.⁹

Nineteenth-century Cuba serves as one apt example in this regard. There, artist Victor Patricio de Landaluze (1830–1889) created genre depictions in his *Costumbres y Tipos Populares* (*Popular Customs and Types*), which featured caricatured representations of Afro-Cubans as cultural characters, in dances and in popular Carnival costumes. Most notable are his interpretations of types of Cuban women in the series of *Muestras de Azúcar* (*Sugar Samples*) drawings. Given the centrality of this type of imagery and its role in providing visual counterparts to pseudo-scientific theories around race, it is important to consider images such as this in relation to the works I will be exploring by Cox and Boyce.

The black female subjects represented by both artists are undoubtedly characterized by their fearlessness, and they possess unwaveringly bold faces. A term often used in Anglo-Caribbean parlance, bold-face is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the quality of a person

4. Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar’s Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1993, p 19
5. Hight and Sampson, op cit, p 4
6. Zahid R Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2012, pp 27–28
7. Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2004, p 3
8. Tina Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2012, pp 5–14
9. Robert J C Young, *Colonial Desire*, op cit, p 95

who is stout-hearted, courageous and daring. In the context of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Caribbean, bold-face encapsulates the essence of those black women who, as Carolyn Cooper proclaims, were transgressive as they went ‘beyond the enslaving boundaries that ... [delimited their] person and place. Transgression thus becomes the acknowledgement of a rehumanized identity.’¹⁰ It is during this traumatic period of slavery that the black populace nonetheless aspired to reclaim their humanity, engendering that ‘folk’ particularity. The esteemed literary scholar Edward Kamau Brathwaite aptly describes this process of identity re-formation among the enslaved Africans and Maroons (escaped enslaved Africans):

It was during this period that we can see how the African ... went about establishing himself in a new environment, using the available tools and memories of his traditional heritage to set going something new, something Caribbean, but something nevertheless recognizably African.¹¹

While Brathwaite’s articulation of folk is unapologetically Africanist, it does reveal a conceptualization of folk that, although very much connected to the predicament of chattel slavery, is the foundation of a fresh sensibility that is as much modern as it is Caribbean.

Since I have chosen to examine works that pertain to the Caribbean, or at least works with a Caribbean context, it seems apt to focus on art by Renee Cox and Sonia Boyce, who both have Caribbean parentage. Given that Cox was born in Jamaica and grew up in Queens, New York, while Boyce was born to Barbadian parents in London, England, and still lives and works there, one can deduce that they both were raised in transmigrant communities. In these communities, immigrants often develop and maintain multiple relationships that span borders, thereby participating in transnational processes of forging and sustaining social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.¹² Yet, as emerging artists who are first- and second-generation American and British citizens, Cox and Boyce were faced with being separated from their homelands by migration as well as experiencing immense alienation through racism, which prevented a sense of belonging to American and British societies. These conditions often encourage identity formations that are diasporic in dimension, with marginalized enclaves constantly trying to challenge the hegemonic order that the power centres define. The aesthetic trajectories that artists develop from these social, political and cultural predicaments are often black nationalist in orientation.¹³

This was certainly the case for Cox and Boyce. Sonia Boyce, as a member of the Black Arts Movement in the United Kingdom of the 1980s, created art that spoke to the experience of those categorized under the single, collective signifier *black* in the UK – a composite political identity that avoided any distinctions between Afro-Caribbeans, Asians and Africans. Her art, nonetheless, reflected an emphasis on blackness as a positive identity category that was Afro-centred in orientation, as well as an affirmation of womanhood.¹⁴ Although she was born in the Caribbean, of African descent, and was reared in New York, Renee Cox’s unique transnational identity could have been rendered invisible within the context of the American social sphere. Yet, like her Caribbean-born counterparts, her experiences led her to emphasize her racial, rather

10. Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the ‘Vulgar’ Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1995, p 29

11. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica*, New Beacon, London, 1970, pp 4–5

12. Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, Gordon & Breach, New York, 1994, p 7

13. Basch et al, *Nations Unbound*, op cit, pp 16–27; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993, pp 1–40

14. Stuart Hall, ‘Assembling the 1980s: The Deluge – and After’, in David A Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce, eds, *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Artists in 1980s Britain*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina; Institute of International Visual Arts, London, 2005, pp 10–13

than a national, identity.¹⁵ Her work thus celebrates a black Atlantic female subjectivity while simultaneously challenging disparaged representations of racialized and gendered bodies. Both artists offer, with postcolonial rigour, counter-histories of those who came before them, confronting the way in which colonial authorities of the Americas viewed black women of the nineteenth century: as the antithesis of civilized society. Given the fundamental role representation plays in the construction of history and identity, Cox's and Boyce's enthralling images not only challenge the legacy of pseudo-scientific theories on race, they also echo the warning by visual studies scholar Shawn Michelle Smith: '[I]f one cannot or does not produce an archive, others will dictate the terms by which one will be represented and remembered.'¹⁶

Renee Cox's *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* series comprises portraits of the artist as the legendary Granny Nanny, who was instrumental in leading the Maroon (escaped slaves who formed independent settlements) rebellion against the English colonialists in eighteenth-century Jamaica. According to popular tradition, Queen Nanny was born in the late seventeenth century in present-day Ghana and transported to Jamaica as a free person with slaves of her own. During the early eighteenth century, she emerged as a key military, cultural and religious leader among the Maroons in the Windward part of the island, when increasing resistance against the British became crucial. Once the British infiltrated the Maroons' power structure and prompted the signing of the 1739 Peace Treaty, Queen Nanny's power diminished. Nonetheless, Granny Nanny, as she is sometimes referred to, remains an important figure in Jamaican history.¹⁷

Set in rural Jamaica, many of the images in Renee Cox's series portray Queen Nanny in assertive postures ready for combat, or immersed in religious ritual. Others depict her in the contemporary moment, engaged in everyday activities as a mother and teacher; the roles are numerous, since, for Cox, the question '[i]f Granny Nanny were around today, who would she be?' was paramount.¹⁸ In *River Queen* the artist appears as Queen Nanny, perched upright on a large rock in the middle of a river wearing attire typical of the period. Her head is slightly turned to the left as she glares boldly at the camera, and her legs are spread wide apart causing her skirt to cover most of the rock. These elements, along with a stunning backdrop provided by the lush vegetation and the streaming river of rural Jamaica, help conjure a representation of Queen Nanny that is regal and effervescent. While an environment like this could provide fodder for the nineteenth-century phrenologist, the timeless quality of the background defies any attempt to limit this black female subjectivity to a regressive state.

One of the outstanding qualities of Cox's *Queen Nanny* series that deserves further examination is how it dismantles the Enlightenment-based claim that black women's bodies were the site of racial difference, therefore providing the fodder for an established hierarchy of cultural and social progress. While black women epitomized degeneration, white women and, in the case of the Caribbean, mulatto women, represented civility. Enlightenment ideas developed within the rubric of social philosophy linked the condition of women to social evolution, the key determinants being their treatment by men and the type of work they performed. While women of European descent embodied the sophistication often associated with refined culture in Europe, the European colonies in the

15. Nancy Foner, 'West Indians in New York City and London: A Comparative Analysis', in Constance Sutton and Elsa Chaney, eds, *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions*, Center for Migration Studies in New York, New York, 1987, p 126

16. Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, op cit, p 9

17. Karla Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All: A History of Queen Nanny Leader of the Windward Jamaican Maroons*, Africa World Press, Irenton, New Jersey, 2000, pp xv-xvii

18. Nicole Blades, 'Talkin' Bout Yo Mama', *American Legacy Magazine* #85, spring 2004, p 23

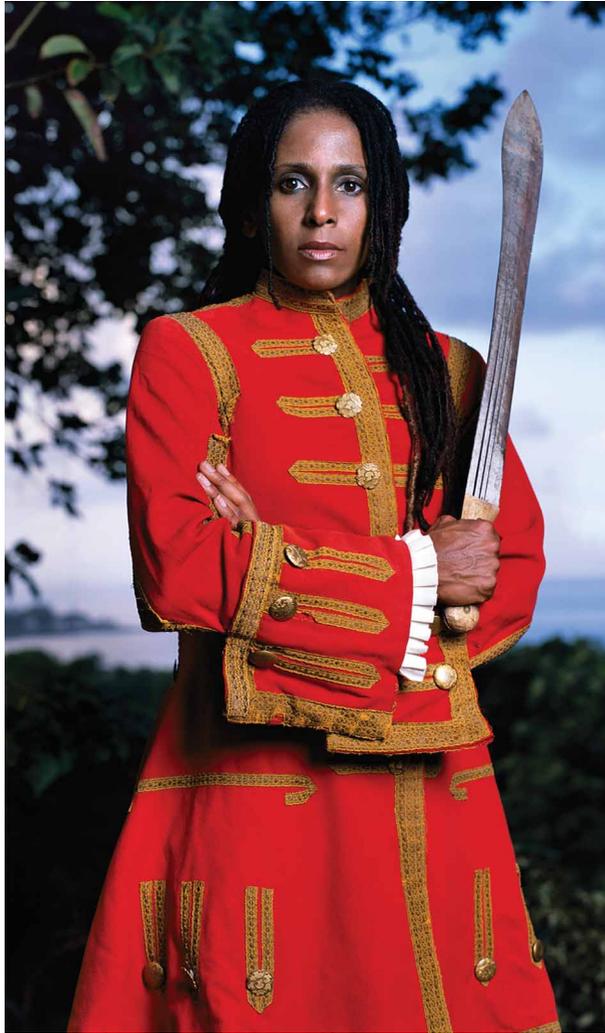


Renee Cox, *River Queen*, from the *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* series, 2004, courtesy the artist

Caribbean habitually looked to the mulatto woman as not only being representative of that region, but also of the area's burgeoning civilized society. The mulatto woman and the Caribbean both symbolized liminality, an in-betweenness that linked civilized Europe and savage Africa.¹⁹ Yet in *River Queen* Queen Nanny is not defined by the descriptor 'enslaved African woman', whose body is fit only for labouring in the sugar-cane fields on the plantation. Here, she is the epitome of modernity, a black modernity that is unnuanced and corporeal, and that rewrites the conventional understanding of civilized society in the colonial Caribbean with a black, feminized and 'folk' particularity.

Queen Nanny's attire seems also to work in tandem with this *folkness*. Dressed in a long-sleeved dress with a full-length skirt and attached apron,

19. Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700–1840*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 2008, pp 44–46



Renee Cox, *Red Coat*, from the *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* series, 2004, courtesy the artist

along with a headscarf, Cox incarnates a Queen Nanny whose attire reflected the slave society whence she came. More than any other item of clothing, the headscarf was a significant marker of black and mixed-raced women in New World slave societies. It could hint to one's condition of servitude, and even to one's positioning in the social strata. As Richard J Powell asserts, the head, whether cloth-wrapped or uncovered, 'communicated black women's social status, cultural identity, and, perhaps, their soul'. Considered legitimate interpreters of humankind, authorities on the study of faces and heads, such as physiognomists, could also read the soul via choices in head garb and other attire.²⁰ Yet Queen Nanny does not appear as a woman relegated to such surveying, given her emphatic stance. Cox's long dreadlocks, which gather at the nape of her neck and elegantly fall over her left shoulder, add to the emboldened quality of the photograph. This hairstyle, although it is often associated with the

20. Richard J Powell, *Cutting A Figure: Refashioning Black Portraiture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 2008, pp 44–48

political-religious Rastafarian movement of twentieth-century Jamaica, seems apt for this eighteenth-century-themed photograph, given its Black Nationalist and anti-establishment symbolism.

Redcoat, from the same series, offers a similar way of being, with Cox as Queen Nanny wearing an elaborate red military coat and holding a machete with her arms crossed. Such an authoritative stance speaks to the important role Granny Nanny played in the Maroon community, an independent state in its own right. The masculine character of her stance is further echoed in the phallic positioning of the machete. The red coat, itself indicative of masculinity, bespeaks the European cultural and political hegemony that the Maroon community incessantly resisted. Yet the existence of this power dynamic in colonial Jamaica is emblematic of Creolization, and the subsequent cultural forms to which both the Africans and the Europeans contributed. The fact that a black woman is wearing the coat complicates our reading of the image even further, especially when thinking of the role of the image of the black person in the development of ideas about European aesthetic judgements and cultural relativism, not to mention Enlightenment philosophies of national and racial particularity.²¹ As a woman, Queen Nanny is defying the association of rationality and ability to rule with men, and, as a person of African descent, she defies Enlightenment beliefs that black people did not possess the capabilities needed to create and sustain nationhood.²² *Redcoat* is thus a visual rebuttal of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notion that the black woman is the ultimate other of the white man, who is born with rights and civil liberties. It transgresses past attempts to masculinize representations of women, which aimed to contest black female subjectivity by conflating it with an underlying masculinity. In chattel slavery, after all, plantation owners never perceived enslaved African men and women as different, since they were both tangible property.²³

This tendency to masculinize black women is evident in a lithograph by Cuban artist Victor Patricio de Landaluze. Landaluze created a series of lithographs titled *Muestras de Azucar*, which translates as *Sugar Samples*, in 1881. Each lithograph features a woman depicted from the shoulders up either in profile, full-face or three-quarter view. They vary in skin colour, facial features, hair texture and self-fashioning. Depending on their ethnic composition, the women are classified using technical terms associated with the different grades of refined sugar. The lithograph entitled *Cucurucho* (which translates roughly into English as a tight, kinky roll or twist) features a woman of African descent with very kinky hair accented with a headband, who wears a revealing chemise and beaded necklace. But it can also connote a hovel or shack, similar to the one depicted in the upper-right corner of the border, thereby referring to the lowest stage of refinement in the production of sugar.

What is most apparent about Landaluze's treatment of *Cucurucho*'s portrayal is the rough execution of black lines to the contours of the face. The resultant contrast injects a certain 'roughness' to *Cucurucho*'s overall appearance, and alludes to Darwinian-derived theories of the nineteenth century that labelled black women as sexually ambiguous, given their 'sexual excess', supposedly indicated by large buttocks and labia minora. This 'excess' insinuated a wavering masculinity that many scientists believed black women possessed, a quality that Landaluze

21. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, London, 1993, p 8

22. Maroon settlements maintained sovereignty, although this was eventually dismantled by the British colonizers. See Edward Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean*, Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1985, p 31.

23. I gleaned this idea from Powell, *Cutting a Figure*, op cit, pp 46–49. See these pages for a rich and provocative discussion of how Sojourner Truth challenged such representations of herself in this regard.

may have wanted the *Cucurucho* type to emit. The contouring black lines of Cucurucho's portrait place her beyond the margins of 'normal' femininity, and into the domain of an uncontrollable, sexually available and, therefore, dangerous femininity. As the lowest stage of refinement in the production of sugar, Landaluze's *Cucurucho* type epitomizes scientific hypotheses developed within the Darwinian model, claiming that more evolved societies showed greater signs of sexual differentiation.²⁴

Although Landaluze's depiction of an Afro-Cuban woman adheres to the pseudo-scientific notion that women of African descent are not fully evolved as a gender, both intellectually and physiologically Cox's representation of Queen Nanny seems to tackle this problematic idea with brazen revelry. Cox corporeally articulates this political and cultural leader as one who straddles masculinity and femininity, projecting the persona of a woman who is in control of her own gender and racial identity construction.

Cox's aspiration to personify Queen Nanny in the everyday, both during her lifetime in the eighteenth century and in the contemporary moment, warrants discussion. Queen Nanny only emerged as a heroic symbol in Jamaican nationalism in the 1970s. She is the only recognized national heroine, as the bodies of black *men*, such as Morant Bay rebellion leader Paul Bogle, have always been used as signifiers of the Jamaican nationalist project. In fact, there are hardly any representations of Queen Nanny in Jamaican art and visual culture. This could be due to an accepted understanding that Nanny may have been a composite of many female Maroon leaders whose stories were passed on over time through oral history.²⁵ However, the findings of some scholars have proven that Queen Nanny was not a fabricated persona but rather a real religious leader and key strategist for Windward Maroon battles.²⁶ These schisms within Jamaican historical knowledge production certainly make Cox's representations of Queen Nanny all the more compelling. Due to the survival of stories about Queen Nanny in Jamaican oral

24. In the late nineteenth century, anatomists and other scientists traced racial difference in the sexual traits of the female body. For a detailed examination and analysis of this development in the USA, see chapter one of Siobhan B Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2000.

25. Petrina Dacres, "But Bogle Was a Bold Man": Vision, History, and Power for a New Jamaica', *Small Axe*, vol 13, no 1, March 2009, pp 122–123

26. See Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, op cit, pp 23–29. Also see Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Wars of Respect: Nanny and Sam Sharpe*, Agency for Public Information, National Heritage Week Committee, Kingston, 1977.



Victor Patricio de Landaluze, *Muestras de Azúcar, Cucurucho* (Samples of Sugar, Cucurucho), 1881, lithograph, collection of the Biblioteca Nacional Jose Martí, Havana, Cuba



Sonia Boyce, *From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born 'Native' Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction*, 1987, black-and-white photographs on paper, photocopies on paper, acrylic paint, ballpoint pen, crayon and felt-tip pen, 1240 x 3590 mm, © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London

history over time, she continues to be an indelible figure as she remains in the collective unconscious of the Maroon community. The curiosity regarding her likeness is hardly surprising, given the lack of any visual rendering of her. Yet this interest also leaves room for envisioning what a contemporary personification of Queen Nanny might look like. Cox's *Queen Nanny of the Maroon* series fulfils these needs in an imaginative and provocative way.

Sonia Boyce's *From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born 'Native' Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction* offers another effort to incorporate subjectivity and agency in the representation of black women. Boyce, a British-born artist of Caribbean parentage, achieves this through an excavation of imagery that has contributed to a disparaging representation of black people. The work features twelve photo-booth portraits of the artist divided into groups of six by a narrow strip of photocopied African cloth. Serial images of gollywogs, leaves, pencil drawings of 'natives' in a jungle setting, and a crimson-patterned border at the bottom complete the work. While the three portraits on the top right corner are tinted brown, each photograph is distinct due to differences in facial expressions, shading and erasure. Through the appropriation of various forms of media such as photography, graphic arts, film and even caricature, Boyce explores the process through which identities and stereotypes are socially and culturally constructed in an effort to transform them.²⁷

The construction of the photographs in *From Tarzan to Rambo* seems to reference nineteenth-century ethnographic photography, given the frontal positioning of Boyce, the illumination of the surface of her face and neck, not to mention the brown tinting of some of the photographs. As a branch of Natural History, ethnographic photography of the nineteenth century sought to scrutinize non-Western people's biology and sexuality by scrupulously capturing as many details of the sitter's facial features, cranium, skin surface and hair texture, among other characteristics. The meticulous nature of this scientific discourse is also suggested in the title of the work, which establishes links to this history of image-making and its productive role in ideas of race. Unlike ethnographic

27. Tate Gallery: *Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions 1986–88*, Tate Gallery, London, 1996

paintings, which required a highly trained artist to convey a likeness of the non-Western subject on canvas, it was believed that the precision offered by the new technology of photography could convey the sitter as objectively as possible. In fact many photographers utilized the artistic technique of vignetting a portrait so as to home in on the humanness of the subject, without any of the distractions of cultural context.²⁸ It was thus possible for a certain level of intersubjective exchange to occur between viewer and sitter, and one can certainly sense this happening in *From Tarzan to Rambo*. Nonetheless, the serial alignment of the photographs objectifies the sitter and serves as a means of reinforcement.

With *Tarzan and Rambo* figuring prominently in the title of the work, Boyce is clearly using this piece to consider the impact of comic strips and Hollywood films on the construction of race and identity. The *Rambo* films, for instance, revolve around a half-German, half-Native American Vietnam War veteran who lives as a recluse in the forest, and is sent to Vietnam to reclaim US soldiers still held as prisoners of war. The century-old Tarzan comic strips and films feature a white man living and reigning in the African jungle. The films respectively celebrated the notion of the white man as the noble savage, but also as the master of the African jungle and its 'native' inhabitants. In the centre of the left panel are pencilled renderings of the natives one would see in the comics of Tarzan, where they actually appear to merge with the background, in contrast to Tarzan, who conspicuously stands out. The photos of Boyce on the lower left area of the piece are also drawn with pencil, bringing to the viewer's attention a narrative that is well established in visual culture: that people of African descent are inherently primitive, degenerate individuals whose natural habitat is the jungle. This affinity to nature is made even more tangible by Boyce's superimposition of real leaves and branches onto the right plane of the work.

Even the identical images of golliwogs on the left frame seem to be in conversation with the photographs of Boyce. In addition, the juxtaposition of both has a paralleling effect, and calls into question the role of ethnographic photography in the development of racist caricature. Golliwogs emerged in British material and visual culture in the late nineteenth century and appeared in children's books and comic strips, and were even fashioned into dolls. The caricature was a product of the black-face minstrel tradition, with its jet-black skin, round white-rimmed eyes, red lips, and wild, woolly hair.²⁹ And with the golliwog caricature being in such close proximity to the pencil-drawn photographs of Boyce, these photographs are likely to be viewed as caricatures of the artist.

A caricature is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a grotesque or ludicrous representation of persons or things by exaggeration of their most characteristic or striking features. It is true that none of the renderings in Boyce's piece exaggerates particular facial features, but when one considers eighteenth-century theories that regarded caricature as the antithesis of sculpture (the artistic representative of the European ideal), these renderings explicitly read as caricatures. Johann Winckelmann, the writer of the first authoritative text in Western Art History, drew on the idea that human beings were formed mentally, socially and physically by their physical environment to justify the stance that the European or Greek ideal was the singular standard of beauty. Thus, Africans, with their 'projecting,

28. Deborah Poole, 'An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol 34, 2005, pp 159–79

29. Klaus de Albuquerque, 'On Golliwogs and Flit Pumps: How the Empire Stays With Us in Strange Remembrances', *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol 2, no 2, 1998



Claude Monet, *Black Woman Wearing a Headscarf*, 1857, charcoal and watercolour on paper, 240 x 160 mm, collection of the Musée Marmottan, Paris

30. Johann Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art*, vol I, p 197, as quoted in Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement*, op cit, pp 75–76
31. Caricatured drawings were quite typical of Monet's day and frequently appeared in French visual culture well into the twentieth century. Paul Hayes Tucker, *Claude Monet: Life and Art*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1995, p 9

swollen mouth[s]', were most bestial because of the association of hot climates with the least beautiful people.³⁰

In the same way as Winckelmann propagated European superiority in his writings, artists from Europe were also invested in deprecating non-European peoples via caricature in an effort to maintain a certain power structure. One case in point is a caricature of a black woman by the young Claude Monet. Monet, who was born in Paris in 1840, spent most of his childhood in Normandy. At school he filled notebooks with vignettes of the countryside, as well as charcoal caricatures of local residents, rival artists and Parisian notables. He created more than sixty of these caricatures between 1856 and 1857, and locals came to know him from those he sold at a local stationery store.³¹ It was in 1857 that Monet drew *Black Woman Wearing a Headscarf*. The caricature is a

half-profile portrait of a black woman wearing a madras check headscarf and shawl. In contrast to the hurried execution of red, black and white lines that created the woman's headscarf, shawl and white chemise, Monet carefully constructed her grossly caricatured facial features. With a precision similar to that of a physiognomist's illustration, Monet sketched a face resembling that of a ferocious animal. The woman's eyes are arched by very tense brows and her small nose scrunches up to meet the centre of the converging brows, compensating for the disproportionately enormous lips that are parted as if to suggest an animalistic growl emerging from her.

Monet's demeaning representation of this woman with her protruding lower jaw protruding (prognathism) was unfortunately quite typical of depictions produced throughout France and the Continent during this period. In fact, it closely resembles a drawing of the heads of an Ibo African man with a pronounced prognathism and an orang-utan found in the *Histoire naturelle du genre humain* by Julien-Joseph Virey. This very popular text was first published in Paris in 1801 and republished three more times, the last being in 1834. It may well have still been popular and in high circulation around the time Monet created his caricature. Such an interpretation was in keeping with the views of European taxonomists who, in the eighteenth century, became fixated with anatomy and began exploring what they saw as the peculiarities of cranial formation among the human species. In 1768, Dutch anatomist Petrus Camper was the first to formulate the means for measuring facial angles, thereby determining their positions in a hierarchical order of nature. In doing so, Camper provided scientific validation for enlightenment thinkers who held that Africans were physically akin to apes.³² Furthermore, caricatures were the perfect medium for transforming specialized scientific knowledge about physiognomy and racial difference into a form of popular accepted wisdom throughout Europe and the colonies, despite attempts by many in the scientific and philosophical community to debunk it.³³

That this madras-clad woman may well have been from the Caribbean is quite striking. It is hard to discern why the seventeen-year-old Monet decided to create this caricature; he may have seen her walking on the streets of his hometown of Le Havre, a major port city where people from other countries and other parts of the Francophone world would have been fairly common. France had only abolished slavery in its Caribbean colonies in 1848, and there are a variety of reasons for the presence of former slaves in France at this time. Although this is one of many caricatures that Monet made over the course of a year or so, it is nonetheless indicative of how prevalent such racist imagery was in nineteenth-century French visual culture, and how crucial caricature was in popularizing these scientific theories of racial difference.

Caricatured depictions such as those featured in *From Tarzan to Rambo*, as well as in Landaluze's work and Monet's caricature of the French Caribbean woman, worked to propagate the perception of people of African descent as bestial. It is true that none of the renderings in Boyce's work exaggerates particular facial features. Nonetheless, Boyce's animated facial expressions, along with the variety of ways she treated each articulation of her face, allude to the very surface-oriented and objectifying representations of ethnographic drawings. By pencilling her self-image, Boyce may have chosen to evoke the ink pen of a caricatur-

32. Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol IV, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989, pp 13–18

33. Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement*, op cit, p 72



Illustration for Julien Joseph Virey, *Histoire naturelle du genre humain*, 1824: Espèces: Blanche; Nègre Eboe; Orang (Singe); etching by Mme Migneret, 126 x 80 mm, collection of the Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

ist in an effort to engage in a racist, ethnographic discourse, encouraging the viewer to read her image through this racist lens as a way to challenge it. *From Tarzan to Rambo* juxtaposes a black woman's self-image with popular stereotypical imagery as a way to refashion its terms, and in an effort to re-present the self-image from a new perspective. By this means, the work becomes an affirmation of black female subjectivity.

CONCLUSION

Renee Cox's and Sonia Boyce's visual artworks stem from an aesthetic almost textual in orientation; certain entities featured in the works are symbolic and loaded with meaning, thereby offering new interpretations of historical moments. These various objects play an incisive part in the development of the compositions as they possess a number of gendered, racial, cultural and socio-political references. Functionally, they parallel

Landaluze's use of hair accoutrements and flowers, among other objects, in *Muestras de Azúcar*. What differentiates them is the complex ways in which the symbolism of each object contributes to the redefinition of personhood and the dismantling of any powerful hold that slavery or colonialism may have on the subject. The narratives that are formed in Cox's *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* and Boyce's *From Tarzan to Rambo* encourage a modification of the reality established in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century representations of black Caribbean women.

The decision by the artists to use self-portraiture as a means of reclaiming the self-image of nineteenth-century black women is noteworthy. As a photographer who does performance-based works, Renee Cox often includes herself in her art. Sonia Boyce hardly ever does so. However, *Tarzan and Rambo* revolves around the representation of black people and its relation to how identity is formed. Although the two artists' reasons for including themselves in their artworks differ, the decision nonetheless illuminates the connection between historical representations of black women and an individual's identity construction and sense of self-worth.³⁴ Both artists appropriate ethnographic photography and imagery from racial visual culture to successfully refashion its parameters, thereby creating affirming representations of black Caribbean women.

On a number of levels, these works can be interpreted as spectacles, since the artists are appropriating a century-old visual language to tackle identity constructions and are including themselves in the works. At work here are configurations of the spectacle that 'constitute an appropriation perhaps more accurately a reappropriation of spectacle to the end of disrupting conventional discourses of gender and sexuality'.³⁵ The idea of the spectacular is lent further weight when one considers that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries social science fields such as ethnography were coded as masculine and thus objective. It was believed that this mode of scientific neutrality was inaccessible to women, who were thought to have knowledge typified by emotion and subjectivity.³⁶ By creating artworks that are aesthetically informed by ethnography, Cox and Boyce are not only critiquing the racist logic behind it but also parody the sexist philosophies of ethnography and its artistic counterpart. By usurping the field's racist and sexist discourse, the artists are effectively caricaturing it.

While the caricatured tone of the artworks gives them a light-hearted air, there is a clear element of performance to be gleaned from the works, and this implies a more serious context. Whether it is in the powerful posturing that Cox offers in her embodiment of Queen Nanny, or in the placement of the photo-booth portraits of Boyce that are reminiscent of a moving picture, movement is present, however apparitional it may seem. Such an implication of performance underscores the open-endedness of interpretation for the viewer, who may recognize this quality in both artworks. As a result, the act of interpreting the works ought to be seen as a process and not an act with a final goal. The performative gesture that involves the viewer and the art thereby overshadows any attempt to vilify non-European women, since meaning is constantly shifting and lacks fixity.³⁷ Ultimately, Renee Cox's *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* series and Sonia Boyce's *From Tarzan to Rambo* reach back through history to reclaim the self presentation of nineteenth-century Black women from the Caribbean, implying that if given the opportunity to participate in their image-making they would put on a bold-face.

34. Camp, *Image Matters*, op cit, p 12

35. Helene A Shugart and Catherine Egley Waggoner, 'A Bit Much: Spectacle as Discursive Resistance', *Feminist Media Studies*, vol 5, no 1, 2005, pp 65–81

36. Reina Lewis, 'Cross-Cultural Reiterations: Demetra Vaka Brown and the Performance of Racialized Female Beauty', in Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, eds, *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, Routledge, London, 1999, p 60

37. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, 'Introduction', in Jones and Stephenson, eds, *Performing the Body*, op cit, pp 1–8