



# HISTORICAL PRESENCE IN VISUAL CULTURE Contemporaneity

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## **Presenting Race** Institutional Contexts and Critiques

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### **About the Author**

*Marina Tyquiengco studies contemporary Indigenous art at the University of Pittsburgh with Professor Terry Smith. She received her M.A. in Art History in 2016 from the University of Pittsburgh. Her M.A. topic was contemporary reuse of ethnographic photographs by Aboriginal Australian artists. Her dissertation will focus on Indigenous artists' use of their bodies in artwork from the 1990s to today in Australia, Canada, and the United States. She was chosen as the History of Art and Architecture participant for the Race-ing the Museum, the inaugural Collecting Knowledge Pittsburgh Workshop supported by the A.W. Mellon Foundation. She served as the inaugural graduate representative for the History of Art and Architecture's Diversity Committee in 2016–2017.*

# Presenting Race

## Institutional Contexts and Critiques

Marina Tyquiengco

Depending on one's perspective and sense of history, race is either nowhere or everywhere in museums and cultural institutions—ignored and absent, or lurking always just beneath the surface. This issue of *Contemporaneity* brings race to the forefront across a wide range of spaces including art museums, historical sites, university archives, classrooms, and community centers.

*Presenting Race: Institutional Context and Critiques* was inspired by the University of Pittsburgh's inaugural Collecting Knowledge

Pittsburgh Workshop, *Race-ing the Museum*, supported by a grant from the A. W. Mellon Foundation. In May 2016, Kirk Savage and Shirin Fozi led a group of twelve faculty and graduate students from different schools within the university through a week-long dive into collecting institutions around Pittsburgh, asking questions about inclusion and access, racial storylines and institutional structures. The workshop challenged participants not just to critique but also to contribute through work of their own. Several projects grew out of the workshop including *Teaching Slavery*, a collaboration between the School of Education and the Center for American Music at the University of Pittsburgh, led by Dr. Ashley Woodson, and the *Ojo Latino Photovoice Project*, initiated by Pitt scholars in the departments of anthropology, history of art and architecture, and public health.

To open the issue, Savage and Fozi reflect on the experience of *Race-ing the Museum* over two years later, in the midst of the Trump presidency. While racial injustice and white grievance have only heightened throughout the United States, the intensely local experience of the workshop set off cross-disciplinary conversations and public engagements that continue to generate small but important rays of hope.

Articles by Caitlin Frances Bruce, Nik Cristobal, and a five-scholar team led by Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez, outline nontraditional forms of learning and partnering through theoretical and practical lenses. Caitlin Frances Bruce examines the potential of public art to reignite community through her co-organization of the *Hemispheric Conversations: Urban Art Project* (HCUAP), which culminated in a collaborative mural by nine artists from Chicago, Leon Guanajuato, Mexico, and Pittsburgh at the Carrie Furnaces site in Pittsburgh. Prior public events preceded this mural, giving students ages seven to seventeen opportunities to learn graffiti techniques, graffiti history, and local history from HCUAP collaborators. Bruce reflects on the impact of HCUAP on Pittsburgh and the larger community, using this collaboration as a potential roadmap for future projects involving scholars, artists, organizations, and communities. Working more theoretically, Nik Cristobal provides an overview of educational history in Hawaii and puts forward a new epistemological model for conceptualizing society, Kanaka 'ŌiwiCrit, Kanaka 'Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian) Critical Race Theory. Cristobal proposes how using a Kanaka 'ŌiwiCrit framework in education, through Kanaka 'Ōiwi language and principles, can lead to better outcomes for Kanaka 'Ōiwi students. Finally, Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez, Paulina Pardo Gaviria, Rosa De Ferrari, Kirk Savage, and Patricia Documet reflect on their project *Ojo Latino*, a collaborative Photovoice project meant to presence Pittsburgh's growing Latino community in order to counter its absence from many archives in Pittsburgh. The photographs that came from this piece are stored in a digital repository to show the daily lives of several Latinos living in Pittsburgh in 2016–2017. Through these contributions, models of engaging in community and education through nonacademic means emerge.

The themes of the workshop have clear resonance in the art world. Christiana Harkulich and Nicole Scalissi delve into artworks that respond to timely and connected issues, institutional representation of Native Americans, and the potential expansion of a United States–Mexico Border Wall. In considering these pieces together, I am reminded of the “No

Ban on Stolen Land” signs after President Trump’s travel ban on mostly Muslim-majority countries. The continued dominance of white American culture in the United States presents many opportunities for intersectional and cross-community solidarity. Christiana Harkulich details a performance by the Native American artist Gregg Deal (Pyramid Lake Paiute) at the Denver Art Museum. Harkulich argues that performances by living Indigenous artists are a potential and mostly untapped source of decolonization, a way for museums to allow Indigenous peoples to represent themselves. Nicole Scalissi explores an artistic response to President Trump’s proposed border wall by the Pittsburgh artist Jenn Meridan and others. Working as J. M. Studios, Meridan and a collective of artists solicited alternative border walls with the language of Trump’s Call for Proposals for the actual border wall. Scalissi suggests that these “other border walls” can help to clarify our current moment by elucidating its simultaneous absurdity and seriousness.

Annika Johnson considers the legacy of an exceptional First Nations artist, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, in her review of the catalogue *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories*. Though the exhibition took place in 2016, the catalogue is prescient as several areas of the United States and Canada remain unceded territory and sovereignty continues to be of paramount importance to indigenous peoples globally. Similarly, Lily Brewer discusses the new conception of the Greater West, incorporating North America and Australia, in relation to the exhibition *Unsettled*, a three-venue exhibition first on view at the Nevada Museum of Art. She is particularly interested in how the concepts of landscape and settlement are demonstrated by a diverse slate of artists.

Jacqueline Lombard and Golnar Yamohammad Touski review two recent books that explore distinct dimensions of race and ethnicity over time. Lombard considers an ambitious new book, *The Invention of Race in the Middle Ages*, by Geraldine Heng, which traces understanding of race in the medieval world through a variety of sources. Lombard argues that this is a necessary addition to the canon of texts on the medieval world for Heng’s multidimensional approach to race and difference. Golnar Yamohammad Touski reviews a recent Museum of Modern (MoMA) art publication, *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents*, edited by Aneka Lenssen, Sarah A. Rogers, and Nada M. Shabout. Touski considers how the editors frame texts from around the Arab world in a hundred-year period within the existing chronological format of MoMA’s Primary Documents series, situating translated works in useful conceptual frames.

Rebecca Giordano and Benjamin Ogrodnik consider two important exhibitions highlighting the work of black artists on view in Pittsburgh in 2017. Giordano explores the exhibition *20/20*, a collaboration between the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Carnegie Museum of Art. Between these two distinct institutions, a question of what black art is, or has been, remains. Ben Ogrodnik reviews two exhibitions of the work of Ruby LaToya Frazier, a Pittsburgh native and winner of a MacArthur award for her groundbreaking photography. Ogrodnik explores the labor dimension of Frazier’s work and her collaborations with a former steelworker. Finally, Paulina Pardo Gaviria’s review explores the work of Brazilian contemporary artist Letícia Parente across three exhibitions of the major *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA (Los Angeles/Latin America)* on view last fall in over seventy Southern Californian institutions. Homing in on Parente’s work, Pardo considers how each exhibition presents an aspect of her practice in distinct though overlapping narratives.

The art submissions of Aaron Henderson, Meghan Kozal, Jezebeth Roca-Gonzales, Nick Simko, Hazel Batrezchavez, and Cecelia Price offer varied conceptualizations of race, identity, absence and presence. Batrezchavez, Gonzalez, Kozal, and Price’s distinctive works are particularly personal and inward looking. They ask us to consider how the raced, sexed, and gendered body moves through the world. Aaron Henderson conceptualizes absence as literal rather than figurative, exploring blank or empty spaces. Nick Simko’s contributions consider whiteness not only as raced and masculinity as gendered in a series of portraits.

Now in its seventh edition, *Contemporaneity* is itself an institution. This manifestation of the journal challenges both authors and readers to think expansively and creatively about one of the most persistent and difficult issues of our time.

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