

société a empêché les critiques et les érudits et les érudites d'y voir un rapport profond entre l'esthétique rococo et l'art néoclassique de la fin du siècle. Depuis le début de son étude, Caviglia tisse des liens entre le développement des personnages dans la peinture rococo et la conception de la figure possédant des qualités historiques intrinsèques. La virilité et la passivité des corps sont présentes dans l'art rococo bien avant l'arrivée du néoclassicisme. Caviglia ajoute que, tout comme les peintres de Louis XV ont figé leurs personnages dans un présent idéalisé capturant un modèle universel de repos paisible, Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), parangon de ce courant artistique, fixera lui aussi ses figures dans un présent historique, modèle de vertu pour lequel on doit se battre et mourir. Le plaisir d'observer des personnages amoureux représentés dans des postures passives est remplacé par celui de regarder des corps actifs, non pas dans le sens d'un mouvement externe, mais plutôt orienté vers une tension interne.

À travers l'étude de la période rococo, Caviglia démontre que les bases d'un discours moderne sur la sexualité, le féminisme, les classes sociales, le militarisme, la poursuite du bien-être ainsi que l'élitisme intellectuel et politique sont fondamentalement inscrites dans l'art rococo. En revendiquant le caractère « sérieux » du genre rococo comme un point sociétal commun prépondérant au bonheur collectif, l'ouvrage de Caviglia s'établit tel un apport important quant à la position de la peinture d'histoire rococo au sein du grand XVIII^e siècle. En réinscrivant la production des premières

décennies des années 1700 dans la culture académique et sociétale du début de cette période, l'autrice réussit à réinterpréter ce courant artistique trop longtemps et injustement rejeté comme frivole et érotique. En filiation avec les nouvelles études produites sur cette période, Susanna Caviglia réitère l'importance de la relecture du grand genre rococo. Ainsi, tout comme les travaux des historiens et historiennes de l'art Mary D. Sheriff, Melissa Hyde et Mark Ledbury, construits autour du sexe et du genre dans les différents milieux artistiques du XVIII^e siècle (*Moved by Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France*, 2004, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Enlightenment: French Art from the Horvitz Collection*, 2017, *Rethinking Boucher et Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics*, 2006), Caviglia procure une relecture nécessaire des activités artistiques pendant le siècle des Lumières permettant ainsi de réhabiliter ce grand siècle de la peinture d'histoire au sein de la grande histoire de l'art.

Marjorie Charbonneau est actuellement étudiante à la maîtrise en histoire de l'art à l'Université du Québec à Montréal.
— charbonneau.marjorie@courrier.uqam.ca

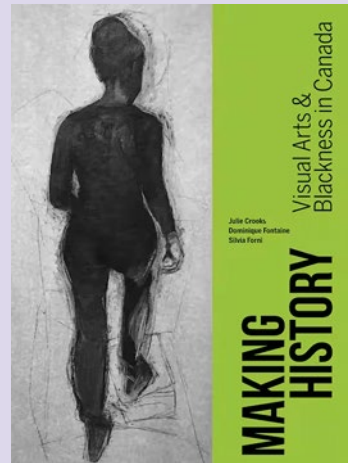
Julie Crooks, Dominique Fontaine, Silvia Forni, eds.

Making History: Visual Arts & Blackness in Canada

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Madeline Collins



In what Chantal Gibson calls “the noisy discomfort of this decolonial moment,” (122) we are witnessing more museums and galleries debuting diverse programming that aims to disturb settler-colonial mythologies, as well as redress dominant narratives that they themselves have helped construct. Yet institutional attempts at reinvention can be unsustainably performative, especially when they occur during pivotal political moments such as the 2020 George Floyd protests. In such cases, we have often seen that art gallery or museum programming remains unaccompanied by tangible policy or structural reform. Against this backdrop, *Making History: Visual Arts and Blackness in Canada* is a much-needed anthology that triumphantly asserts itself within the changing institutional landscape. Edited by Julie Crooks, Dominique Fontaine, and Silvia Forni, *Making History* consists of essays, poetry, and artist statements that elaborate on the lingering tension between Blackness and its “absented presence” in Canadian institutions, especially museums (22). The book seeks to

“continue on a path towards more careful and thoughtful understanding of Black aesthetics,” which will contribute to dialogic programming that better showcases the breadth of Black history, art, and being (15). It interrogates the museum as a “problem space” (22) in which the volume’s central question is produced: “Where are we and why are we here?” (80)

The volume is the culmination of a thirty-four-year journey that began after the Royal Ontario Museum’s controversial 1989 exhibition, *Into the Heart of Africa* (hereafter *IHA*). In 2014, two years before the ROM’s official apology for the ways in which *IHA* contributed to anti-Black racism, Crooks, Fontaine, and Forni produced *Of Africa*, a multidisciplinary program which ran until 2018 at the ROM. It aimed to represent the diversity and creativity of Africa and its diasporas, as well as to center Black voices amid the cacophony of institutional turmoil and diversity measures. The 2018 exhibition *Here We Are Here: Black Canadian Contemporary Art* (hereafter *HWAH*) synthesized these ideas and expanded on the breadth of Black Canadian aesthetics and current concerns around museological representation, remembering, and forgetting.

Now, *Making History* arrives amid a burgeoning interest in Black Canadian art and art history, as evidenced by publications such as *Towards an African Canadian Art History* (2019), edited by Charmaine Nelson; institutional projects such as Andrea Fatona’s *The State of Blackness* (2014) and The Centre for the Study of Black Canadian Diaspora¹; collectives like Black Wimmin Artists (BWA); and

exhibitions including *New-Found-Lands* (2016), *Position As Desired: Exploring African Canadian Identity* (2017), and *Practice As Ritual/Ritual As Practice* (2022), to name only a few². The volume also brings together major scholarly voices in the field, such as Rinaldo Walcott, Andrea Fatona, and Joana Joachim. This expanding network encourages a far more comprehensive engagement with the vastness of Black Canadian identity—the existence of which has been historically obfuscated by Canada’s established narrative of Black absence, backed by colonialist archival practices and codes of representation—and its depictions, envisioning how space may be opened to truly liberate Black Canadian aesthetics from its institutional and cultural confines.

The book’s twenty-four chapters are divided into three sections. The first, “Residues of History and Ongoing Challenges,” expands on the *IHA* aftermath from those directly involved. Activating haunting as a framework for understanding how the past informs the present, Crooks and Fontaine begin by reflecting on the Black community’s substantiated mistrust of museums, caused by “past wounds” that continue to haunt curatorial activism (22). They outline some of the approaches used in curating *HWAH*, such as consulting Black communities, creating advisory committees, “conversational curatorial practices,” and commissioning works that “speak back” (23–24). Forni then openly and honestly meditates on *Of Africa*’s successes and failures. She emphasizes slowness as a critical attribute for arts workers, especially in dismantling norms

such as preservation, history, and authority, or building strong community relationships (36). She also notes that the success of initiatives like *Of Africa* and *HWAH* are but “temporary positive outcomes, not stable victories” (34) that must be repeatedly revisited, re-negotiated, and built upon for sustainable change.

Here, personal retellings of the *IHA* controversy are brought in, through accounts of the protests and their residual traumas (Afua Cooper), the experience of the exhibition itself (Rita Shelton Deverell), and the ROM’s continued inertia (M. NourbeSe Philip). In Philip’s chapter, “A Life in the Day of an Object,” she chronicles her request to perform her landmark piece *Zong!* within the ROM space in 2017. Here, the museum’s resistance to change made itself clear as Philip’s requests were frequently denied, controlled, and patronized by ROM staff and policies. Poetic passages intersperse her text, including poignant dialogues with the African art in the ROM’s collections, addressing the need for repatriation and countering the “gravitational pull” of dominant historiographies (80). It offers an affective conclusion to the section and reinscribes a sense of identity and humanity in the ROM space, where it had been previously leached out by the museum’s “spiritually violent” ownership and storage of African artworks (83), and, more broadly, its abusive behaviour following *IHA*.

The section “Black Art/Black Canada” gathers fourteen essays and artist statements, wide-ranging in their critiques and dialogues, to reflect on the many facets of Black

Canadian artistic production via the works featured across the *Of Africa* program. Texts by Michèle Pearson Clarke, Joana Joachim (on the portraits of Gordon Shadrach), Sally Frater (on Dawit L. Petros' *Sign*), Karin Jones, and Kelsey Adams (on Esmaa Mohamoud's sculptures) address issues and themes that contribute to public (mis)conceptions of Canadian Blackness. Demonstrative of our archival turn,³ other chapters engage the "interventionist dimension" of Black Canadian contemporary art, in which the past becomes a tool to interrogate and perhaps even enact change in the future.⁴ This is done through the use of archival documents and curated personal collections (Sylvia D. Hamilton), the reinscription of Black presence in eastern Canada through storytelling (Bushra Junaid), and wrenching poems that give voice to Black Canadian women, real and fictional (Chantal Gibson). This use of the past offers a redress of the very representations that have constructed Black present experience and speaks to the importance of creative methodologies that can fill gaps in institutional and national memory.

The most striking contributions in the anthology reinvent how we understand Black Canadian creativity entirely. Pamela Edmonds engages Sandra Brewster's paintings as intimate everyday portrayals that "[shift] the colonizing gaze through deliberate self-resignification" (135). Eddy Firmin (interviewed by Fontaine) describes his *bossale* method as a means of initiating a new visual practice outside of Western cultural logic. Of particular

note in this section is Katherine McKittrick's analysis of the art of Charmaine Lurch. In thoughtful dialogue with Sylvia Wynter and Andrea Fatona, McKittrick encourages us to view Black Canadian art beyond excavation and absence. She contends that Lurch "visualiz[es] race otherwise" through peaceful Black bodies but also insects, shadows, wheels, and wires, and she wonders, "How might we notice the work of Black Canadian creatives as composed of affective and material energies? And what ideas and meanings emerge when Black Canadian art is and feels?" (180) In this sense, she engages Justin A. Coles' notion of Black desire, which moves away from damage-centered narratives towards Black joy, affect, and an embodied understanding of the particular "wholeness [and] humanness" of Canadian Blackness.⁵ Similarly, Stéphane Martelly reads Manuel Mathieu's *Self-portrait* (2017), which depicts his Haitian grandmother in her garden, as an ouroboros-like symbol that obliterates the limits of representation and "draws its life force from...some intimate elsewhere," where the body has agency and its own individual history (204). And for Honor-Ford Smith, "belonging" as a concept is complicated; using Junaid's collages and Glen Coulthard's work on recognition, she interprets what it means to "belong" to a settler-colonial state and invites us to "dare to leave behind a desire for easy acceptance in a world that is unacceptable" (197). Taken together, the essays trace Black Canadian art's multiplicity, whether concerned with the genesis of the diasporic subject or

the imagining of new futures. Further, the latter chapters demonstrate how alternative lenses are integral to the study and consumption of Black Canadian art and seek to change the very ground from which Black Canadian aesthetics are understood.

The final section, entitled "Towards a History of Black Art in Canadian Institutions: Here We Are Here?," considers broader contexts of *HWAH*. The first and last chapters focus on a coinciding Pablo Picasso exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, which, though it showcased African contemporary art, muddied the extent of primitivism's colonial ideals by forcing an "anti-colonial gaze" that brushed over Picasso's racist foundations (240). At first these chapters seem like a departure; however, they acknowledge a common pitfall of well-meaning exhibitions situated within "the deeply revisionist mood of our moment" (240), which stumble when they "[talk] past and often over critical histories" of Black creative production (243).

Between these chapters, Rinaldo Walcott eloquently reviews *HWAH* through a critique of the equity, diversity, and inclusion frameworks that, he argues, led it astray. According to Walcott, the exhibition fell into the redundant cycle of announcing that Black Canadians do in fact exist, a curatorial "dead end" (237) that reinforces exclusion and non-belonging as the only possible conditions of existence for Black Canadian art and artists. Ultimately, he requests a steep expansion of literature on the subject to deepen the field and public understandings of Black Canadian aesthetics, as well

as a significant increase in the value given to critique. “Our next project then is to produce the rigorous and robust scholarship that will give Black Canadian art the life it gives us,” he writes (238). The chapter does not fully discredit those before it, but it does ask for more, from institutions, curators (including the editors of this book), critics, and audiences alike. It is a very welcome addition to the volume and, paired with Forni’s earlier honesty, does well to flesh out potential models for responding to Black Canadian art with the intellectual work it deserves. Attentive to issues that are becoming increasingly common in contemporary exhibitions, the section speaks to the need to pause and resituate ourselves, lest we endlessly repeat our mistakes and reinforce the very margins we are trying to abandon.

As such, *Making History* constitutes not only a critical document but an essential guide for future museological work. Through a chorus of compelling voices, the volume contextualizes the complicated relationship between Black Canadian art and institutions, with essays that work to renew the terms upon which Black representation has been dictated. The most exciting part of the book is the sincere openness about the active, long-term work required for more intellectually engaged, laterally related, and actively counter-hegemonic curatorship, as well as ongoing care for art and for each other. As McKittrick acknowledges, it is necessary to begin “thinking about Black art as aesthetic possibility” and “consider how creative representations of Black life

offer a politic, and demand a reading practice, that is not beholden to prevailing negative descriptions of Blackness” (180). An energizing first step in this reading practice, *Making History* serves as a new beginning, and provides an important resource for arts workers looking for new models, as well as anyone looking to learn about Black Canada, its art, and the pathways it makes to the future.

Madeline Collins is a research assistant and graduate student at OCAD University, currently pursuing an MA in Contemporary Art, New Media, and Design Histories.
—mcollins@ocadu.ca

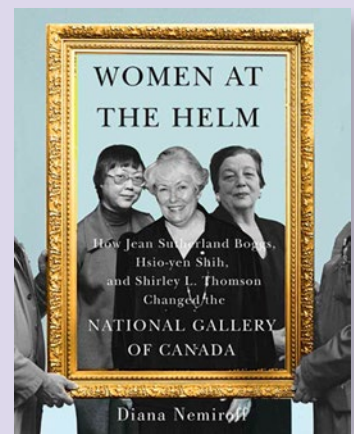
1. See www.blackcanadiandiasporacentre.com.
2. *New-Found-Lands*, curated by Pamela Edmonds and Bushra Junaid, Eastern Edge Gallery, St. John’s, NL (September 9 – October 18, 2016); *Position As Desired: Exploring African Canadian Identity / Photographs from the Wedge Collection*, curated by Kenneth Montague, Art Gallery of Windsor, ON (February 11 – May 7, 2017); and *Practice As Ritual/Ritual As Practice*, curated by Andrea Fatona, A Space Gallery, Toronto, ON (November 24 – February 23, 2022).
3. Sara Callahan, *Art + Archive: Understanding the Archival Turn in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 1–2.
4. Winfried Siemerling, “From Site to Sound and Film: Critical Black Canadian Memory Culture and Sylvia D. Hamilton’s *The Little Black School House*,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 44, no. 1 (2019): 30.
5. Justin A. Coles, “Black Desire: Black-centric Youthtopias as Critical Race Educational Praxis,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 36, no. 6 (2023): 983–84.

Diana Nemirow
Women at the Helm: How Jean Sutherland Boggs, Hsio-yen Shih, and Shirley L. Thomson Changed the National Gallery of Canada
Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2021

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Anne Dymond

After initiating significant shifts towards more diverse representation, the Director of the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) resigned before the end of her term, significant questions arose about the length of time taken to appoint a new director lead to questions about the Board, there were public enquiries into the problematic governing legislation of the national museums, and national polemics erupted over the display of controversial art: the 1970s and 80s were volatile at the NGC.



That these issues could as easily describe the last few years at the NGC indicates just how topical *Women at the Helm* is. Diana Nemirow, a curator at the Gallery for more than twenty years before becoming Director of the Carleton University Art Gallery, has gifted us with essential reading for anyone interested in how large museums actually work. Her focus on the Gallery’s three female directors from 1966 through 1997 explores why the NGC was such a notable exception to the general exclusion of women from the top rungs of power in the art museum