

Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body / Edited by Barbara Thompson.--Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, in association with University of Washington Press, April 2008--376 p.: ill.--ISBN: 978-0-295-98771-2 (pa., alk. paper): \$50.00.



Black Womanhood is the catalog for an exhibit held from April to August, 2008 at Dartmouth College's Hood Museum of Art. The exhibition featured art and ephemera from major American museums, a number of private collections, and the Hood Museum, which has collected African art since 1885.

Curator and editor Barbara Thompson set out to exhibit historic and contemporary images of the black female body in traditional, colonial, and global contexts. Despite the scale of such a project, she assembled a focused collection of art works, artists' statements and critical essays. This is not a survey of African art, but a dialogue about the impact of iconic images of the black female body on living artists.

African and African-American female artists and models are the primary focus of the nine essays. The discussion of their relationship to African male artists and viewers and to other African and African-descended women—in addition to European colonial viewers—gives this catalog a more comprehensive perspective than other books on the topic. Photography and, to a lesser extent, three-dimensional art from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries form the bulk of the catalog's

visual content. Large color plates of colonial postcards, African sculpture, and performance documentation are interspersed with statements of contemporary African and African-descended artists. This intermixture is a conscious editorial and curatorial decision to prevent the denigrating colonial imagery—particularly colonial postcards of nude black females—from reinforcing destructive racial stereotypes. Of special interest to museum libraries, archives and museum studies programs is Christraud Geary's essay, which discusses the complexity of exhibiting such images, even in a critical context.

The nine essays, 128 large color plates, and many additional color images are followed by biographies of both the artists and contributors. A bibliography supplements the notes found at the end of each essay, and a comprehensive subject and name index makes this beautiful volume a straightforward, captivating browse.

This catalog is recommended for academic libraries, art schools, and large public libraries, especially those serving minority and immigrant populations. It is an essential purchase for collections that support African studies programs and should be considered for more general art history, gender studies, and anthropology collections.

Megan Macken, Assistant Director, Visual Resources Collection, Department of Art History, University of Chicago, mmacken@uchicago.edu

Copyright © 2008 ARLIS/NA