
Kimberly Cleveland explores the relationship between race and art as it applies to both the Brazilian culture and that of general Latin America. She addresses the various manifestations in Brazilian art compared to other black art found in other cultures and describes how the black aesthetic is different for Brazilian works. Five Brazilian artists are featured—Abdias Nascimento, Ronaldo Rego, Eustáquio Neves, Ayrson Heráclito, and Rosana Paulino—who each add an important portion to the overall Brazilian art canon as well as Brazilian black art. Each artist is given an entire chapter dedicated to their unique philosophy and art style to portray the black culture found in their art. Experienced researchers of Brazilian art should recognize these artists in the general sense, and this book adds an interesting viewpoint of their work by focusing upon the specific black aspects of their art.

The author deliberately uses the term “black art” rather than “Afro-Brazilian art.” The latter, rather than simply referring to Brazilian art associated with African artistic concepts, styles, and themes, has more complicated connotations. In Brazil, as in other countries in Latin America, racial inequality still exists. The term “Afro-Brazilian” is more associated with foreign socio-political developments rather than with Brazil’s art. As seen as the cover art of the book, Abdias Nascimento’s painting, Oxunmaré (no. 5), the artist shows the intersect and morphing a Brazilian of African descent feels between two cultures. It should be no surprise that the central figure is a metamorphic creature immersed in both water and sky with blue eyes that connect back to the water. As a result of the contention associated with “Afro-Brazilian,” the author used the term “black” art to refer to the same concept but in a neutral manner.

Overall, this book does a fine job covering the true aspect of racism in Latin America, especially Brazil, in a respectful manner. It is apparent that Cleveland wrote this book for a non-Brazilian audience since she covers the racism issue in detail with the intention to make the concept accessible to her readers. This book is recommended for scholars who are interested in the art of black Brazilian artists, or who are researching any of the featured artists. However, it does not serve as a survey for black art since there are only a few samples of artwork for each artist included in the center of the book which are printed in lower quality. However the text provides plenty of artworks that could be searched elsewhere.

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