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Black Women Artists in Canada: A Documentation and Analysis of
the 1989 Exhibition *Black Wimmin—When and Where We Enter*

Alice Ming Wai Jim

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master in Arts at
Concordia University
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March 1996

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ABSTRACT

Black Women Artists in Canada: A Documentation and Analysis of
the 1989 Exhibition *Black Wimmin—When and Where We Enter*

Alice Ming Wai Jim.

This thesis examines the entry of Black women artists into the Canadian art scene during the late eighties by focusing on the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* which was the first in Canada to feature exclusively the work of Black women artists. It will discuss the social and cultural contexts from which the project originated providing a literature review of Black Canadian art history and an examination of anti-racist activism in the arts and Black feminist thought in Canada. Using post-colonial theory to analyze the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* as a "creative" text attempting to effect agency for Black women artists in Canada, this study ultimately functions as critical analysis and art historical documentation of the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, its artists and their work.

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Finally, I wish to extend my thanks to all of the artists featured in this documentary. Without them, *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* and, of course, this thesis would not have been possible.

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PREFATORY REMARKS

[P]eople as historical subjects or agents make their own history—though not under conditions of their own choosing—and... they need names or a specified agency to make this history.¹

Drawing from Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire, Himani Bannerji writes that the naming process, in its ability to produce cultural-political identity, is central to the articulation of historical subjectivity. It is not surprising, then, that the control and power over the strategic use of naming and named agency is one of the most controversial sites of contestation in Western culture. Certainly, in the contexts of post-colonial art and theory, naming or identity politics has generated substantial cultural production in the areas of re-/presentation and resistance. Post-colonialism, for the purposes of this discussion, is a historically-located set of cultural strategies which continuously engages itself in ways to effect agency for the post-colonial subject in a society that has been unable thus far to disengage its current practices from the exclusionary hegemonic systems of its colonial past. The politics of representation embodied by post-colonial projects take into consideration the specificity of history, place, language, and ethnicity in addition to other configurations of difference such as gender and class.

¹ Himani Bannerji, Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism, (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995) 19.

This study, an inquiry into the implications of articulating named agency in art historical contexts, examines re-/presentations of cultural identity in post-colonial art productions as they concern African diasporic subjects who live in Canadian metropolitan areas.² The African diaspora in Canada has resulted largely from three main phases of migration: 1) the importation of slaves into Upper and Lower Canada during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the escape of Blacks from slavery in the United States; 2) the pre-confederation Black settlement in the Maritimes and, to a lesser extent, in Southern Ontario; and 3) in the last twenty to thirty years, from the immigration of people of African descent from various places of origin including Britain, the Caribbean, and the African continent.³ In particular, this thesis focuses on the 1989 exhibition *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*. Although not the first exhibition of Black artists in Canada, it represents the first instance of a large group of African Canadian women taking the initiative to exhibit their own art. The

² The technical designation of "diaspora" to indicate a geographic relocation in this study takes into consideration the current problematics surrounding the use of the word "postcolonial" as a theoretical concept. For further elaboration on this subject, see Carole Boyce Davies, Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject (New York: Routledge, 1994) 80-112. Similarly, Black (Canadian) art is used to refer to art by Black people rather than to art with a Black theme and the euphemism "people of colour" is used to refer to all people of the diaspora in Canada who are not considered of white European origin.

Finally, in the interest of fluidity in the text, the word "Black" is used synonymously with African, i.e. Black Canadian, African Canadian.

³ Robert W. Winks, The Blacks in Canada: A History (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971); James W. St. G. Walker, A History of Blacks in Canada: A Study Guide for Teachers and Students (Ottawa: Minister of State, Multiculturalism, 1980).

account of this exhibition and the historical and cultural climate of the eighties from which it was conceived form the core of this thesis

In the past decade, discussion and activism in the arts around identity politics have brought on a steady stream of publications, festivals and exhibitions focusing on the work of African Canadian artists. Although differing in theme, purpose and dimensions, all have contributed to the larger aim of affirming the presence of Black artists in Canada. The group exhibition *Black Wimmmin: When and Where We Enter*, which presented works by eleven women artists of the African diaspora in Canada (Buseje Bailey, Grace Channer, Claire Carew, Winsom Darrell, Dzian Lacharte, Khadejha McCall, Kim McNeilly, Foluke Olubayo, Chloe Onari, Barbara Prezeau, and Suli Williams), was one such production.

Organized by the Diasporic African Women's Art Collective (hereafter referred to as DAWA), *Black Wimmmin: When and Where We Enter* opened at A Space Gallery in Toronto on January 28, 1989, and travelled to Houseworks Gallery and Café in Ottawa, XChanges Gallery in Victoria, Galerie Article in Montreal, and Eye Level Gallery in Halifax where it closed on September 23, 1989. The exhibition set two precedents each of which mark it as a significant example of anti racist work in the arts as well as an important cultural development in Canadian art history: it was the first exhibition in Canada to feature only the work of Black women artists and it was the first of this kind to be coordinated by Black women curators.

Several historical and cultural factors which had been developing in Canada since the late seventies and early eighties facilitated and/or influenced the actualization

of this Toronto-based project. These included programming changes in certain alternative spaces in Canada such as A Space Gallery which gave more exposure to art dealing with identity politics. Also a factor was the motivation provided by ongoing anti-racist activism in the arts informed by strategies such as those outlined in the writings of Black Canadian cultural critic Marlene Nourbese Philip.⁴ A final consideration was the influence of Black feminist theory on the work of many Black Canadian women activists. Conceived from within these historical, cultural, and theoretical contexts, the DAWA project operated as a form of political intervention into the current hegemonic discourses surrounding Black Canadian women artists and their productions on several levels. Two important ones involved the politicization of its curatorial agenda and the problematization of stereotypes in several of the individual works featured. These different strategies brought forward issues that were central to the lived experience of Black women artists in Canada such as difficulties in obtaining funding and negotiating multiple configurations of "difference" such as race, gender, and class.

Despite the seven years that have passed since the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, the affirmation of the presence of Black artists and other artists of colour in Canadian art history through interventions such as this one is still an ongoing and much needed enterprise. Compared to the large scholarship devoted to

⁴ For example, see Marlene Nourbese Philip, "Gut Issues In Babylon: Racism and Anti-Racism in the Arts," *Fuse* (April/May 1989) 12-26. Since then, these writings have been republished in her compilation, Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture (Stratford, Ontario: The Mercury Press, 1992).

the history of Black artists in the United States and Britain, the study of visual artists of African descent has only begun to be addressed in Canadian academic forums. To date, no major text on the art of African Canadians has been published and the conspicuous omission of their contribution in major historical narratives on contemporary Canadian art remains an area of concern.⁵

There are then two main objectives to this study. The first objective is to examine, using post-colonial strategies, the different levels in which the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* dealt with the politics of representation for Black women within the historical context of anti-racist activism in the arts in the late eighties. Although Marlene Nourbese Philip and Daiva Stasiulis, among others examined the relationship between anti-racist activism in the arts and women writers of colour in Canada,⁶ there is little literature on connections between anti-racist activism and the cultural production of African Canadian women artists. An examination of the dual role of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* as both an artistic and political project in the context of anti-racist activism in the arts provides a

⁵ There is no mention of African Canadian artists, for example, in *Contemporary Canadian Art* (1983) and *Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada* (1983). Existing survey texts on artists of African descent in the United States and Britain include *A History of African-American Artists* (1993) and *The Artpack: A History of Black Artists in Britain* (1988).

⁶ See Nourbese Philip, *Frontiers* 211-248; Daiva Stasiulis, "'Authentic Voice' Anti-Racist Politics in Canadian Feminist Publishing and Literary Production," *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, ed. Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1993) 35-60; and Sue Findlay, "Problematizing Privilege: Another Look at Representation," *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada*, ed. Linda Carty (Toronto: Women's Press, 1993) 207-224.

case study of the impact of Black women artists on Canadian cultural production in the late eighties.⁷

The second, equally important, objective of this study is to provide comprehensive first-time documentation of the DAWA project—and possibly the first detailed examination of a group exhibition of Black women's art in Canada. This addresses the paucity of published documentation, both interpretive and empirical, in the area of Black Canadian art and art history. As such a document appears never to have existed before, the following material is intended to provide a historical framework in which to view the growing emergence of work by Black Canadian women artists.

In order to address the two-fold nature of this thesis—critiquing and documenting *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, one must acknowledge the indeterminacy of contexts in which African diasporic women artists operate in the Western world. Sites of articulation and struggle range anywhere from being historically-located to being situated in the ordinary performances of every-day life. Accordingly, this study's methodology is post-colonial and interdisciplinary in approach: post-colonial because in documenting a project such as *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* which critiques the re-/presentation of Black women in society, it in turn critiques the surrounding issues and debates which motivated such an enterprise in the first place; and, interdisciplinary because it is informed by post-

⁷ This would also refute conservative notions of African Canadians as being apolitical by nature in comparison to their U.S. counterparts. See David Sealy, "Talking B(l)ack." *Border/Lines* 36 (1995) 15.

colonial and feminist theories put forth by writers in fields such as cultural studies, literature studies, anthropology, communications, sociology, history, and political science. Black feminist theory plays a central role in this study not only because of its influence on the production of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* but also because its advocacy for an accountability of race as integral to Black women's experiences of patriarchy is useful in addressing the many social constructions to which this project was responding.

The research for this thesis draws from a combination of traditional and alternative sources. For information on anti-racist activism in the arts, especially in relation to multiculturalism and African Canadian women's organizations, I relied on Marlene Nourbese Philip's Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture (1992) and And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada (1993) edited by Linda Carty. Publications by Dionne Brand and Peggy Bristow provided background on Black women's experiences and histories in Canada.⁸ Anthologies of cultural criticism such as Bannerji's Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics (1993) supplied additional material. However, since these compilations, some of which raise questions about tokenism with respect to writers of colour in editorial practices, tend to focus on specific cultural and social issues, they offered minimal information on Black Canadian visual artists *per se* and often no critical analysis of their work. They did, nonetheless, provide useful

⁸ See Dionne Brand, No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s (1991) and "We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up": Essays on African Canadian Women's History (1992) coordinated by Peggy Bristow.

theoretical bases from an interdisciplinary pool of resources for understanding the post-colonial art practice involved in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*. By contrast, alternative magazines and programme schedules of artist-run spaces provided useful indicators of anti-racist activism in the arts as well as empirical data on group exhibitions by African Canadian artists. The above sources contained the bulk of published material on the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the exhibition and its participants. Except for occasional coverage in the form of brief exhibition reviews, the mainstream press in Canada was not useful to this study as it generally did not report on anti-racist activities in the arts and largely ignored the political significance of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*.⁹ The absence of material in the press is a reflection of the disinterest the media has for the cultural production of people of colour in general unless it is related to popular interest events such as Toronto's carnival-style 'Caribana' celebration. Information on the individual artists was extracted, for the most part, from the few exhibition catalogues and articles that have been published about them since *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* took place.

As the study was done in retrospect of the event and as there were no official holdings for this show *per se*, the reconstruction of the exhibition and its dynamics relied mainly on whatever archival sources that could be located. Archival material on

⁹ In my search for press coverage on *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, I consulted daily and weekly newspapers from the cities in which the exhibition was shown (Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Victoria, and Halifax), as well as art magazines such as C-Magazine, Canadian Art, and Parachute among others. Reviews of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* are listed in a separate section of the bibliography.

Black Wimmin. When and Where We Enter is made up of unpublished curatorial notes and artists' statements, minutes of DAWA meetings, newspaper clippings and videotapes and photographic documentation of the exhibition.¹⁰

In addition to these conventional sources, this thesis also draws on oral evidence gathered from conversations and interviews with the artists concerning the political significance and organizational details of the exhibition.¹¹ This information further assisted in the reconstruction of the event as well as provided insights on the project in retrospect. Since the 1960s, oral accounts have been accepted in history as legitimate records of the past especially in situations where written documentation does not exist.¹² According to Black Canadian feminist Makeda Silvera, "oral documentation fills the gap in Canadian herstory and attempts to satisfy the need for a reference text" that relates, in this case, to the Black feminist politics engaged by *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*.¹³ The use of oral history as a method not only was indispensable to this study because of the dearth of documentation on the exhibition and the individual artists but also helped to "bring into the forefront the

¹⁰ The curatorial notes are actually a preliminary draft of the manuscript for the exhibition catalogue planned for publication in spring 1989 to go along with the tour. However, this was never seen to completion because of complications with funding.

¹¹ I was fortunate to be able to speak with almost all of the artists except for Barbara Prézeau who was out of the country at the time of writing.

¹² Peter Stamadianos. Afro-Canadian Activism in the 1960s, M.A. thesis, history (Montreal: Concordia University, 1994) 9.

¹³ Makeda Silvera, "Speaking of Women's Lives and Imperialist Economics: Two Introductions for Silenced." Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics. ed. Himani Bannerji (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1993) 264.

lived experiences of the voiceless"¹⁴—a practice commensurate with the activist programme of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*.

The scarcity of scholarship on the subject of Black Canadian artists can be explained by factors which relate to the specificity of the Black experience in Canada. Relevant to this discussion is how the relatively small population of the African diaspora living in Canada as compared to the United States or Britain coupled with this country's own historical patterns of racial discrimination directed at people of African descent has made their presence and experience seem insignificant for comprehensive study.¹⁵ According to Peter Stamadianos,

Canada has never had a wealth of Black studies programs which would encourage schools of thought on the African presence in the country nor has there been a substantial Black population out of which a rank of relatively affluent and educated Afro-Canadians could emerge to pursue this scholarship in departments.¹⁶

The lack of academic interest in Black Canadian artists is further exacerbated by either a refusal to acknowledge or a general ignorance of the long historical presence of Blacks in Canada. African American art historian Nkiru Nzegwu writes:

The identity of Blacks in Canada is based on an exclusionary Otherness that casts even seventh-generation Blacks as 'Johnny-come-latelys' or recent newcomers to Canada.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For historical background on racism against Blacks in Canada, see James W. St. G. Walker, Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience, booklet no.4 (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1985).

¹⁶ Stamadianos, Afro-Canadian Activism in the 1960s 24.

¹⁷ Nkiru Nzegwu, "The Creation... of the African Canadian Odyssey," African American Art 10:1 (1992) 35.

Within this context and the fact that most of the documentation on Black Canadian artists has been produced only since the mid-eighties, it may seem that African Canadians only became interested in making art at around the same time. However, such as in the case of the artists who participated in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, some of whose artistic careers had begun before the mid eighties, it should be noted that the Western world's habitual partiality to homogeneous representation in historical narratives in addition to the material effects of institutional racism and patriarchy may have contributed to the overall invisibility and under-documentation of Black women artists in Canada.¹⁸ In light of this, the task at hand is to challenge the hegemony of current historical representations of Canadian art and engage in a re-/inscription whereby post-colonial articulations such as the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* are "named," so (as) to speak.

Despite the shortage of published materials on African Canadian artists, information on this topic currently exists, albeit in various kinds of sources. As it stands, the two most important forms of documentation on the work of Black Canadian artists are in exhibition catalogues and review articles in periodical literature. Two significant catalogues, The Creation... of the African-Canadian Odyssey and Rites of Passage, both of exhibitions coordinated by Nkiru Nzegwu for

¹⁸ Lack of historical documentation has often been interpreted as an indication of absence or nonexistence in Western thought. As a result, my investigation into the work of Black Canadian artists which began four years ago was hampered initially by the general lack of recognition given to their work by academia and scepticism about whether such a production really existed.

CAN:BAIA's 1992 *CELAFI* event, provide information about several of the artists who participated in *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*.¹⁹ Publications such as these, however, are not numerous. In fact, documentation accompanying earlier smaller exhibitions was usually far less substantial, if it existed at all. This is not surprising, however, as small exhibitions in small venues often mean small or non-existent budgets for advertising and catalogue publication.²⁰ Yet there are other important catalogues which, operating within a thematic curatorial agenda, feature individual Black Canadian artists alongside of other participating artists. For example, Suzan Dionne Balz's *The Constitution of A Nation* (1993) includes Khadejha McCall

¹⁹ CAN:BAIA is the acronym for "Canadian Artists' Network: Black Artists in Action." Founded in fall 1988, this Toronto-based group, "committed to the development and promotion of African Canadian artists and their works throughout Canada and the world," is now a national multi-disciplinary organization of artists, cultural workers, curators and art historians. CAN:BAIA, "Report of 1995 Annual General Meeting," Toronto, Ontario, 17 June 1995.

CELAFI (Celebrating African Identity: Strategies of Discovery, Affirmation and Empowerment) was a major international conference/festival of arts that was held by CAN:BAIA in Toronto the summer of 1992 and resulted in many exhibitions which were firsts in African Canadian art history. Some of these are listed in Appendix I. The next CAN:BAIA *CELAFI* celebration, scheduled for 1997, is currently underway.

Interestingly, that Nzegwu is an African American art historian and that her catalogue *The Creation... of the African-Canadian Odyssey*, a significant text on Black Canadian artists, was republished in *The International Review of African American Art* 10:1 (1992) 16-37, suggest the interest of African American scholars in contemporary art by Black Canadians has been significantly responsible for initiating art historical discourse on this subject. This relation parallels the historiography of African Canadian history during the sixties where the literature was produced mainly by American scholars whose experiences were, by comparison, amply documented. Stamadianos, *Afro-Canadian Activism in the 1960s* 12.

²⁰ Claire Prieto, *Black on Screen: Images of Black Canadians 1950's-1990's*, ed. Claire Prieto et al (Quebec: National Film Board of Canada, 1992) 3.

whose work is discussed in this study.²¹ Although informative, these catalogues do not necessarily address the specificity of the Black experience for the artist in the creative process.

Sources on Black Canadian artists in periodical literature are found mainly in grassroots periodicals as well as alternative art and culture magazines such as Border/Lines, Fuse, and Mix (formerly known as Parallélogramme) which now regularly include contributions covering events and debates pertaining to work in the visual arts by Black artists and other artists of colour.²² In addition, feminist art journals such as Fireweed, Canadian Woman Studies, and Matriart feature occasional "theme issues" on contemporary Black women artists. Periodical sources, however, are varied in analytical methods and are often times more biographical. At the Crossroads: A Journal for Women Artists of African Descent exemplifies the type of grassroots publications that is gaining wider readership, especially in the metropolitan, more ethnically diverse areas of Canada. In circulation since 1993, this magazine is the only existing periodical that focuses on the arts (visual, dance, literature, and so on) of African diasporic women in Canada and presents both analytical and biographical material on the subject.

The increasing number of informative catalogues and articles on the subject of Black Canadian visual artists in the past decade can be attributed to certain

²¹ See also Women On Site (1987) and Sight Specific: Lesbians and Representation (1988).

²² See also Diaspora and Harbour: Magazine of Art and Everyday Life 2:3 (Spring 1993), and Tiger Lily.

developments in the publishing world as well as to the remarkable output of cultural workers in all disciplines.²³ For instance, since the establishment of anti-racist policies in feminist publishing houses such as Women's Press (Toronto) and the founding of so-called alternative feminist publishing houses in the late eighties such as Sister Vision (Black Women and Women of Colour) Press (Toronto), more literature in all areas of study about Black women and by Black women has been published.²⁴ Along with the few full-length publications in progress such as Eyes On This: African Canadian Perspectives on Art, Media, Politics, and Culture coordinated by Karen/Miranda Augustine due to come out later this year, ongoing activities in the arts addressing post-colonial issues suggest more production in the field of African Canadian art can be anticipated in the near future.

In my attempt to highlight not only the apparent fixity of Eurocentric belief systems when it comes to the work of Canadian diasporic artists but also the permeability and changeability of the parameters of these systems through named agency, this thesis represents an example of my developing post-colonial art history practice. Because of the privileging of theory in metropolitan centres and the publishing networks which perpetuate this process, named agency is associated to a

²³ Examples in art history were lectures given at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa during African History Month in February 1995 which included talks by Nkiru Nzegwu ("Representing African Art and Aesthetics: From the Inside Out"), Maureen Flynn-Burhoe ("The Positive Presence of Absence: A History of African Canadians through Works in the Permanent Collection of the National Gallery of Canada"), and Rosalie Smith McCrea ("British Painters and the Image of the Black, 1760-1840"). CAN:BAIA, Word Up 4:1 (February 1995) 4.

²⁴ For brief history, see Stasiulis, "'Authentic Voice,'" Gunew and Yeatman 35-60.

large extent with textual signification. This allegiance to the power of the written word discounts post-colonial thought extant in more "creative" or "performative" texts which are neither in the formal guise of theoretical ("written") texts nor supported by them. In this respect, my approach to *Black Wimin: When and Where We Enter* deviates from conventional views in its consideration of the project as a viable example of alternative manifestations of post-colonial thought in Canadian art production.

Rey Chow's democratic exercise of writing outside of one's assigned ethnicity encapsulated in the following citation is useful in the ensuing discussion on my positionality with respect to "writing diaspora" as a method of political intervention

Part of the goal of "writing diaspora" is... to *unlearn* that submission to one's ethnicity such as "Chineseness" as the ultimate signified even as one continues to support movements for democracy and human rights in China, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. Such support must be given regardless of one's ethnic "roots."²⁵

The term "positionality" in this discussion refers to a location that is necessarily dependent on the particular context or position that the subject is in at a given time and place rather than that which has been forced upon it and is fixed and unchangeable (or, to use Chow's terms, that which is "the ultimate signified"). The contingency of location for the subject under these terms counters the Western discursive production of its 'Others' based on a colonial notion of the colonized subject as 'Other' from the fixed standpoint of the white colonizer as 'Self.' As a

²⁵ Rey Chow, Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) 25

binary operation, the racialized Self/Other dichotomy refuses to account for the multiplicity inherent to each of the two opposing constructions.

Writing about *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter* has been an integral part of my ongoing investigation into the work of diasporic women's art in Canada. I have pursued this project with the conviction that, at this historical juncture, (diaspora) writing (on) diaspora is an activity of crucial importance to the articulation and representation of diasporic Canadian identity. Moreover, as women of colour play a critical role in racial self-representations, by looking at their artistic production, a larger more complex territory than what is conventionally mapped out in Canadian art history can be brought forward. This inquiry is also an attempt to address and cease the construction and perpetuation of negative historical and cultural representations of Canadians of colour in popular media, academic theory, and literature that have obfuscated "us" as integral to Canadian cultural subjectivity and production.

However, "us" does not refer to a homogeneous identity. Although I, as a first-generation Chinese Canadian, fall under the Other rubric of "people of colour," I am still caught in between the space of insider/outsider in the recognizance of my own difference *vis à vis* a person of African descent. While writing about *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*, I found this position not only problematic for its paradoxicality to the white Other, but also for its tendency to lean towards a hierarchal relationship between different positionalities. For instance, my experience as Other in relation to a white Other may be considered more significant in comparison to a relationship between the same white Other with another person who

is a member of a different marginalized group. For Judith Butler, these relational positionalities make possible a space for negotiation, while for Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who also refutes essentialist definitions, negotiation of a personal ethnic positioning is impossible since the subaltern identity is ever-changing or "translating."²⁶ Trinh articulates a similar approach to Spivak's conceptualization of identity positioning. She writes,

whether we choose to concentrate on another culture, or on our own, our work will always be cross-cultural... because of the heterogeneous reality we all live today... that involves the crossing of an indeterminate number of borderlines.²⁷

Faced with these dialectics, I want to make clear that my enterprise here is to write *about* the history of Black women's art in Canada and that this "coverage" can only further the political agency of post-colonial articulations especially within the Canadian context. Moreover, my approach in every aspect has applied the practices of respect and accountability that Richard Fung speaks of in order to ensure the "shift of the nebulas of cultural appropriation to that of representation."²⁸ For instance, while

²⁶ Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex" (New York: Routledge, 1993); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: MacMillan, 1988) 271-313, and "The Politics of Translation," Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates, ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992) 177-200.

²⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics (New York: Routledge, 1991) 107.

²⁸ Richard Fung, "Working Through Cultural Appropriation," Fuse 16:5/6 (Summer 1993) 22. While researching *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*, I found the issue of cultural appropriation to be a highly sensitive and volatile one for the artists involved. This would account for my lengthy address of the issue here.

the post-colonial analysis of the exhibition as text and the interpretations of the works examined in this thesis are based on my own thoughts and research. I make no claims to speak *for* the artist protagonists in the historical narrative that I present. Rather, I have made every attempt to initiate dialogues with each of the artists who participated in *Black Wommin: When and Where We Enter* to hear their voices on the exhibition. In this respect, it can be said that the use of oral histories in this study allowed the artists to speak for themselves. The ideas and opinions they expressed have been incorporated throughout the text of this thesis. Nevertheless, at the same time, I acknowledge that my account of the exhibition is unavoidably susceptible to the politics of cultural translation (in Homi Bhabha's sense) and is therefore undeniably subjective in its formulation and readability albeit nonetheless just as valid a cogent post colonial text in itself as the project it examines.²⁹

This study is organized in four major parts. In order to historically, culturally, and theoretically contextualize the exhibition within its Canadian milieu, Part I begins with a brief overview of the climate of anti-racist activism in the arts during the DAWA project's inception and follows with discussions on the development of artist-run centres, funding of the arts in a multicultural society, and aspects of Black feminist theory which influenced the production of *Black Wommin: When and Where We Enter*.

²⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) 207-221. According to Bhabha, cultural translation—the perpetual inter- and cross-cultural exchanging of signs, occurs in all forms of cultural articulation.

A comprehensive documentation of the exhibition, its artists and their work follows in Part II. The main body of this section considers the project as a post colonial text engaged in an activist art practice and looks at the various ways in which the individual works were also disruptive texts in their autonomous explorations of identity construction for the Black female diasporic subject. As this study specifically focuses on the politics of representation which informed the project *Black Wimmn: When and Where We Enter*, its individual works are being evaluated in this section on their degree of engagement with post-colonial issues rather than on their artistic form *per se*. As Bannerji writes, "the politics of images is the same as any other politics, it is about being the subjects, not the objects of the world we live in."³⁰ This is, however, by no means a devaluation of the style or the formal visual vocabulary that co-existed in these works.

Part III deals closely with stereotypes and the politics of representation as they concern visual images of Black women. The two principle artists discussed in this section are Buseje Bailey and Khadejha McCall whose works address, although to different extents, the stereotypes of the Black "mammy" figure and the female "Buppie" (Black urban professional). The artists' works are dealt with separately to respect the differing forms of address as well as to enable different interpretive models to be simultaneously operant in the same space of articulation.

Part IV briefly examines responses to the exhibition *Black Wimmn: When and Where We Enter* by the media and community at large as a way to further evaluate

³⁰ Bannerji, "Popular Images of South Asian Women," Returning the Gaze 186

the implications of the exhibition's politics of representation for Black women's art in Canada

Finally, this study closes with a discussion on the issue of pedagogical responsibility as a possible answer to the question of how to proceed in the negotiation of identity for post-colonial subjects as we head into a new millennium.

As Sutapa Biswas, a British artist of Indian-descent, once remarked, writing about Black women artists is "one hell of a big subject."³¹ Owing to the enormity of this task, this study is not meant to be a survey or history of Black artistic production in Canada. Rather, it is an investigation into a particular time and place in history when and where eleven Black Canadian women artists entered the Canadian art scene en masse

³¹ Sutapa Biswas, Synapse (London: Leeds City Art Gallery and Photographers' Gallery, 1991) 24. "One Hell of a Big Subject" was the title of Biswas' thesis on Black British women artists.

PART I
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Interestingly, art history was one domain in which the challenges of hybridity came most sharply in view. Issues of institutional expediency have punctuated the limits of demarginalizations as have patterns of market-led commodification.

-Kobena Mercer, Welcome to the Jungle, 26.

The 1980s witnessed an increase in Canadian cultural production which addressed issues of colonialism and post-colonialism. Discourses within Canada became increasingly more racialized and race emerged as a contending trope alongside gender and class.¹ From within this activity, three main developments in Toronto help set the stage for the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*. These were the emergence of anti-racist activism in the arts, the maturation of artist-run centres since the seventies to include more programming addressing "difference/s," and the widening dissemination of Black feminist theory filtering through the U.S. and Britain which influenced many Black Canadian women activist artists. As will be shown, although the DAWA project was undeniably a product of

¹ Vic Satzewich, ed., Deconstructing A Nation: Immigration, Multiculturalism and Racism in '90s Canada (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing; Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1992) 13.

historical and cultural changes occurring in the eighties—it was also a political and artistic response to the reality of racism in Canadian society.

Working *In* the Margins

Anti-racist activism in the arts began in the early eighties with isolated efforts by individuals and groups within the various art disciplines but particularly in the domain of writing by Black women and other women of colour.² Artists' networks and support groups subsequently formed to meet the need for solidarity as well as for pro-active political strategies which would confront institutional racism in the arts. For visual artists of colour, the main areas of concern had to do with the accessibility of official funding sources and exhibition venues, both of which play vital roles in the careers of artists.

The de-marginalization or centering of artists of colour in relation to mainstream Canadian art is a crucial site of struggle for anti-racist activism in the arts. Judith Wilson has called the art world "one of the last bastions of white supremacy-by-exclusion" because of its common practice of marginalizing artists of colour.³ In order to destabilize the art world as "a site of Western European

² See Nourbese Philip, Frontiers 155-159, 168-180; Findlay, "Problematizing Privilege," Carty 207-224; Philanda Masters, "Women, Culture and Communications," Canadian Women's Issues, ed. Ruth Roach Pierson, Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Paula Bourne, and Philinda Masters, vol.1, (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1993) 398-410.

³ Judith Wilson, quoted in Maurice Berger, "Issues and Commentary I: Are Art Museums Racist?" Art In America (September 1990) 71.

whiteness."⁴ then, anti-racist activities in the arts must begin from where so-called Otherness is located—in the margin.

According to Black British cultural critic Kobena Mercer, working *in the margins* or the "re-configuration of once-marginalized groups toward the centre is essential" as a means of survival for "the emerging cultures of hybridity that have been forged among the overlapping African, Asian and Caribbean diasporas."⁵ Put another way, Bannerji writes,

the point is to shift the centre itself from the mainstream to the so-called margin. By understanding 'representation' to mean re-presentation of our realities there can emerge the possibility of making our very marginality itself the epicentre for change.⁶

Nourbese Philip stresses further that one must not discount the potentiality of working outside the centre and from the margin because of the interdependency of these two sites.⁷ She proposes working with the margin in the sense of it being a frontier. In this way, the space made for articulation is not confined within the parameters of a master narrative but is able to alternate between both centre and margin.⁸ For instance, by consciously locating themselves outside the margin, diasporic artist

⁴ Sealy, "Talking B(l)ack," 15.

⁵ Kobena Mercer, Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies (New York: Routledge, 1994) 5.

⁶ Bannerji, Returning the Gaze xix.

⁷ Nourbese Philip, Frontiers 174.

⁸ *Ibid.*

subjects empower themselves to disrupt homogeneous art world representations and pave the way for revisionist art history.

In the eighties, anti-racist activism in the Black Canadian artistic community in Toronto culminated in the formation of several grassroots organizations such as DAWA (1984), Black Perspectives (1985), and CAN:BAIA (1988), among others.⁹ Although each served the needs of a particular artistic community and differed in size and scope, they all served the purpose of affirming the presence of Black artists in Canada. Toronto, as well as Montreal and Halifax, having the majority of Canada's Black population, were and still are geographical and organizational centres of anti-racist activism in the arts involving African Canadians. Moreover, and not coincidentally, they are also reputable sites for developments in the Canadian alternative art scene. In the case of DAWA, Toronto's history of Black Canadian activism which had began in the sixties and came of age in the seventies provided them with a solid foundation for organizing an activist project such as *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*.¹⁰

As anti-racist activism in the arts gained momentum from the mid-eighties on, more and more activist-artists concentrated their efforts on addressing discriminatory practices of official funding bodies when it came to the production of artists of colour. Considering that financial subvention for both artists and artist-run centres in

⁹ For details on CAN:BAIA, see page 12, footnote 19.

¹⁰ Stamadianos, Afro-Canadian Activism in the 1960s 7; Silvera, "Speaking of Women's Lives and Imperialist Economics." Bannerji, Returning the Gaze 242.

this country comes primarily from institutions such as the Canada Council which have multicultural policies in place,¹¹ the notion of multiculturalism needs to be addressed even if only briefly in this discussion of arts funding in Canada in relation to artists of African descent.

The Multiculturalism Act was introduced in Canada as official federal policy in 1971 to ensure the establishment of guidelines on how to taken into account the diverse ethnic composition of Canadian society. However, according to Nourbese Philip, multiculturalism "is a bureaucratic construction and fails to address the power differential that exists among the many cultures."¹² Rather, as Smaro Kamboureli points out, it firmly reinstates Otherness by "fram[ing] Otherness inside the two official languages and so-called heritage groups."¹³ While the introduction of multicultural policy may have disclosed the master narrative of Canadian identity to be myth, the "decentering of Canadian subjectivity did not eliminate the marginal position of what was thought to be foreign to Canadian identity."¹⁴ By segmenting into tidy niches parts of society which do not conform to the status-quo profile of the white Anglo-Canadian, multicultural thought in Canada has maintained a cultural elitism of white privilege. For this reason, Nourbese Philip writes that "unless it is

¹¹ Diana Nemiroff, A History of Artist-Run Centres with Particular Reference to Vehicule, A Space and the Western Front, M.A. thesis, art history (Montreal: Concordia University, 1985) 11.

¹² Nourbese Philip, Frontiers 222.

¹³ Smaro Kamboureli, "Of Black Angels and Melancholy Lovers: Ethnicity and Writing in Canada," *Gunew and Yeatman* 145.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

combined with a clearly articulated policy of anti-racism, directed at rooting out the effects of racist and white supremacist thinking," multiculturalism remains inadequate to address ethnic and race relations in Canada.¹⁵

Moreover, the liberal pluralism advocated by multiculturalism has helped perpetuate the myth that racism does not exist in Canada—"that we live in a peaceful, tolerant and accepting society free of prejudice and discrimination."¹⁶ However, as Brand suggests, "the abolition of slavery did not eradicate racism as an organizing principle within the social, economical, political life of Canada."¹⁷ According to Stanley Barrett and many others, "racism in Canada has been institutionalized."¹⁸ It is not only overtly present in what appears to be the regular shooting by police of Black youths in Canada's major cities,¹⁹ but is also entrenched in the bureaucratic practices of this country's cultural institutions such as the implementation of multicultural policies regardless of the power differentials that exist in Canadian society.

¹⁵ Nourbese Philip, Frontiers 185.

¹⁶ Satzewich, Deconstructing A Nation 13. There is a profusion of recent literature that debunks this myth. For example, see Cecil Foster, Distorted Mirror: Canada's Racist Face (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1991).

¹⁷ Dionne Brand, No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991) 14.

¹⁸ For further discussion, see Stanley R. Barrett, Is God A Racist? The Right Wing in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) 297-326. An account specific to the Black experience is Adrienne Shadd's "Institutionalized Racism and Canadian History: Notes of a Black Canadian," Racism in Canada, ed. Ormond Knight McKague (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Fifth House Publishers, 1993) 1-5.

¹⁹ For numerous journal references of incidents involving racist activity in this country, see Margaret Cannon, The Invisible Empire: Racism in Canada (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1995).

With this hegemonic praxis c/overtly prevailing in Canadian politics, it is not surprising that the approach of Canada's cultural institutions, traditionally represented by arts councils and related organizations, towards African-based aesthetics and African Canadian artists is, according to Nourbese Philip, "inextricably linked to racist thinking of Blacks as inferior."²⁰ Eurocentric notions of what art and culture are supposed to be, such as the notion of Quality, have accounted for the tendency of funding bodies to associate the cultural production of artists of colour with so called low art and label it as "folk" or "multicultural" while that of the status quo white male artist is aligned with so-called high art.²¹ According to Lucy Lippard,

Ethnocentrism in the arts is balanced on a notion of Quality that 'transcends boundaries'—and is identifiable only by those in power. According to this lofty view, racism has nothing to do with art: Quality will prevail; so-called minorities just haven't got it yet.²²

This negation of the artistic ability of people of African descent through the dichotomy of high/low art and culture has reduced the image of the Black artist to that of an eternal immigrant seen only in connection with folk dances, colourful clothes and food.²³

²⁰ Nourbese Philip, Frontiers 12, 16.

²¹ Ibid., 112. For further discussion on how the "fine" artist is canonically white and male and the implications of this construction for women artists, see Griselda Pollock, "Painting, Feminism, History," Barrett and Phillips 138-176.

²² Lucy R. Lippard, Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America (New York: Pantheon, 1990) 7.

²³ Jane Kouka-Ganga, "Femmes noires au Canada," Canadian Woman Studies 4:2 (Winter 1982) 30.

This situation is exacerbated by the presence of members on funding committees who have no familiarity with non-European aesthetics of Other cultures which co-exist in Canada's multicultural society. Several Eurocentric misconceptions of the role of Africans and the African diaspora in Western art history have resulted in further marginalization of contemporary art produced by African Canadians. One such fallacy is how the Ancient Egyptians, only recently acknowledged to be Black, have been regarded as the cultural ancestors of their (white) Greek counterparts with no "originating" civilization of their own.²⁴ Another false conception is that African aesthetics had no place in the development of the modernist art movement. Given this context of negation, it is ironic that Black artists are often automatically designated as experts either on traditional African arts or in so-called naïve (or "primitive") art.

With the tendency for funding bodies to categorize artists of colour in terms of their ethnicity, many Black artists wish to avoid being typecast on the basis of a historical notion of community or acting as representative of a certain ethnic background. This is especially the case where the artist's oeuvre does not deal with race and/or gender politics *per se*. The naming, or labelling, of oneself, while to a certain extent helps construct a viable subjectivity, also works to fixate an identity onto a given subject that is often times harder to shake after the applicable moment in time has passed.²⁵

²⁴ Nourbese Philip, Frontiers 94-95, 218.

²⁵ For a discussion of the limits of naming, see Trinh, When the Moon Waxes Red 47-48.

In the discussion of arts funding for people of colour, class difference is also a significant factor as it contributes to the identity construction of artists in general. According to Black British artist Chila Kumari Burman, "working-class Black women are generally quicker to reject the ideology of the art establishment and therefore find it difficult to accept any kind of token status or to produce work of a more acceptable nature" (i.e. in the current European style or in the use of more technologically advanced mediums).²⁶ As Audre Lorde writes, one cannot disregard "the effect of class and economic differences [in addition to race and gender differences] on the supplies available [to the Black woman artist] for producing art."²⁷ Frequently said to be "last hired, first fired," Black women often encounter the threat of having their artistic careers end prematurely for financial reasons.²⁸ Interestingly, Nourbese Philip has noted that funding from official sources actually plays a very minimal role if any in the lives of many Black artists.²⁹ They have persevered in their creative enterprises despite the shortage of financial resources.

The lack of funding in the arts, for whatever reasons, has led to dire consequences in some cases. One such repercussion, for instance, is the lack of supporting documents on 'alternative' exhibitions making it difficult to trace

²⁶ Chila Kumari Burman, "There Have Always Been Great Black Women Artists," Charting the Journey: Writing by Black and Third World Women, ed. Audre Lorde, Pratibha Parmar, and Jackie Kay (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1988) 295

²⁷ Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1984) 16

²⁸ Barrett, Is God A Racist? 312.

²⁹ Nourbese Philip, Frontiers 131.

exhibition histories.³⁰ Yet, one must acknowledge that strategic stop-gap measures to reduce the effects of institutional racism have been enforced by both Canada's cultural institutions and its artistic communities over the last decade. For example, Fay Cromwell-Tollenaar has reported on efforts made at the Canada Council "to defray the ghettoization of the Equity Office" and Lillian Allen has documented the formation of artists' groups to address racism in Canada's art networks.³¹ Nonetheless, there is still a very long struggle ahead for anti-racist activists in Canadian politics. Moreover, there is also the danger that a paradigm shift is taking place but by only so much so as to remain essentially the same. For this reason, one cannot stress enough the importance of ongoing demands by anti-racist coalitions for affirmative action programmes. These help to contain inadvertent discriminatory practices of the nation's cultural institutions and have worked to force at least a perfunctory re-examination of the so-called multicultural policy adopted two decades earlier. Unfortunately, unless institutional racism is further addressed by official funding bodies in the very near future, the serious budget cuts to art institutions now will only exacerbate problems of funding for artists of colour in need of support.

³⁰ By "alternative," I mean exhibitions which have taken place in artist-run centres or parallel galleries.

³¹ Fay Cromwell-Tollenaar, "Equity: Fact or Fiction," *Matriart* 5:1 (1994) 22; Lillian Allen, "Transforming the Cultural Fortress: Imagining Cultural Equity," *Parallélogramme* 19:3 (1993/94) 48-59. Allen's article as well as others in the same issue of *Parallélogramme* provide discussions of anti-racist strategies and directions in the artistic community since *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*.

Alternative Spaces

Prior to the establishment of the artist-run centres in the early seventies, Canada's art establishment, for the large part, was represented by museums and commercial galleries.³² However, according to Colin Campbell, by the eighties the artist-run system had become the main art venue in Canada, forcing commercial galleries and public institutions into the periphery of any art movement.³³ This development shifted the centre of the Canadian art scene by "opening up new ways of exhibiting new forms of art."³⁴ Moreover, the maturation of artist-run centres since the seventies to include more programmes addressing identity politics has provided new possibilities for artists of colour to exhibit their work. In Canada, artist-run centres continue to be more receptive to the work of artists of colour than museums or commercial galleries.³⁵

Traditionally, art institutions predominantly catered, as arts funding had, to an audience that was interested in Eurocentric conceptions of so-called high art and accordingly exhibited mostly work by white male artists who met this criteria. This elitism resulted in the systematic exclusion and negation by the art world of

³² For history on development of artist-run centres in Canada, see Nemiroff, A History of Artist-Run Centres.

³³ Colin Campbell, "Art Speaks in the 80's," Parallélogramme 14:1 (Summer 1988) 14.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ There are, of course, the rare exceptions such as the solo show of Vancouver based Black artist Stan Douglas at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in Spring 1996. See Appendix I for a list of some group exhibitions featuring Black Canadian artists that have taken place over the last decade in artist-run centres in Canada.

contemporary art productions made by people of non-European origins. In fact, the ongoing survey of publicly funded art galleries across Canada conducted by the Toronto-based Women's Art Resource Centre (WARC) reveals that the overall status of Canadian women artists and artists of colour in general "can claim little progress since the year 1970."³⁶

In light of this, it is not surprising that before the existence of artist-run centres, many Black visual artists had rare, if any, opportunities to exhibit their work. Occasions did arise during so-called cultural events that were organized under the canopies of multiculturalism and anti-racism campaigns. However, the tokenist inclusion of Black artists and/or other artists of colour in these promotional campaigns of Canada's multicultural paradise was often to the detriment of the artistic reputation of these artists as it reduced their production to commodified objects of popular culture or, worse, to artifacts of some dead or dying culture.³⁷ Other venues which relegate art objects connected to the African diaspora to the status of cultural artifacts and perpetuate the notion of the Black artist as only artisan or craftsman are

³⁶ Linda Abrahams, "Who Counts and Who's Counting?" *Matriart* 5:1 (1994) 6-19. Howardena Pindell published a similar study in 1989 which supplied a statistical overview of the percentage of artists of colour represented by major museums and galleries in New York. See Howardena Pindell, "Art World Racism: A Documentation," *New Art Examiner* 16:7 (March 1989) 32-36.

³⁷ It is important, however, to remember that many Black artists make their living by selling their "art" at these venues and capitalize on this perception of their work. Because of the values imposed on their creations as souvenirs or cultural artifacts, often times these are the only venues where people take interest in the production of Black artists and are willing to pay for it.

ethnological exhibitions. These venues focus on a collection of artifacts about Black history but do not inquire into the artistic abilities of the Black Canadian artist.³⁸

Although since the set up of anti-racist initiatives in artist-run, non-profit organizations more and more exhibitions dealing with identity and difference have begun to take place in Canada,³⁹ to date, CAN:BAIA's 1992 international conference/festival *CELAFI* in Toronto still stands as the project which featured the most number of Black artists in Canada.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, regardless of their scope and breadth, exhibitions which featured artists of African descent did make the Canadian

³⁸ The controversial exhibition *Into the Heart of Africa* (1989) at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and the touring exhibitions *Many Rivers to Cross: The African-Canadian Experience* (1992-1994) and *Africville: A Spirit Lives On* (1989-1992) both of which visited the Museum of Civilization in Hull are examples of ethnographic exhibitions that centred on historical artifacts related to the African diaspora in Canada. For discussions on the ROM exhibition before and after the controversy, see Hazel A. Da Breo, "Royal Spoils: The Museum Confronts its Colonial Past," *Fuse* (Winter 1989/90) 27-37, and Eva Mackey, "Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in a Multicultural Nation: Contests over Truth in the *Into the Heart of Africa* Controversy," *Public Culture* 7:2 (Winter 1995) 403-431.

³⁹ It should be noted that not all artist-run centres provided venues for work by artists involved in social activism. Campbell, "Art Speaks in the 80's," 16.

In addition, over time, established artist-run, non-profit galleries are also susceptible to becoming institutionalized as they grow complacent to the "fixed but limited audience with fixed and limited expectations." Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Redefining the Role," *Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada*, ed. Robert Bringham, Geoffrey James, Russell Keziere, and Doris Shadbolt (Vancouver and Toronto, Douglas and McIntyre, 1983) 149. For further discussion of the "closed shop syndrome" of artist-run centres, see Nemiroff, *A History of Artist-Run Centres* 70-73; Guy Durand "From 'Québec Libre' to 'Stop the Madness': New Stakes in Activist Art," *Parallélogramme* 13:4 (April/May 1988) 22.

On similar terms, Nina Felshin points out that activist art practice such as that embodied by the DAWA project "is becoming institutionalized in the 1990's" as well Nina Felshin, ed., *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 9.

⁴⁰ See page 12, footnote 19.

art community more aware of the involvement of Black Canadians in the social and cultural development of Canadian society. It also signalled the emergence of a new cultural politics of difference as an alternative artistic discourse to those of the mainstream.

The tendency to hierarchize differences by championing some Others over other Others, however, has inevitably left gaps in the politics of representation within this so-called alternative art network. As a response to the invisibility of Black women within this system, *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* appeared on the Canadian art scene as the first major all-Black women's exhibition to address specifically African diasporic women artists' experiences in Canada.

Black Feminist Thought in Contemporary Canadian Art

There have always been great Black women artists.

-Chila Kumari Burman, Charting the Journey, 292.

We are not reaffirming our presence or "actualizing" ourselves as if we have been absent, we know we never left.

-Abena P.A. Busia, "Words Whispered Over Voids," 1.

Black feminist theory had a significant impact on the anti-racist activities of Black Canadian women artists around the time of the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*. Since the historical activities of the Civil Rights movement and Women's Liberation movement of the '60s and '70s, strains of Black feminist thought in Canadian cultural production have been developing gradually within various

communities in Canada. African Canadian women have been exposed to Black feminist perspectives through the numerous publications that have filtered in from the United States and Britain in the past few decades as well as through the writings of Black Canadian women like Himani Bannerji and Makeda Silvera, among many others. The international prominence of Black feminist artists like Sutapa Biswas and Lubaina Himid from Britain and Faith Ringgold, Adrian Piper and Howardena Pindell from the United States as well as visits to Toronto's A Space Gallery by important figures in the Black art and Black feminist movements such as Rasheen Areeed, Barbara Smith, and Angela Davis, further informed and influenced the cultural production of Black women artists in Canada. The following is a brief discussion of major theoretical issues within Black feminist theory that likely influenced the political agenda of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* as well as informed the orientation of my analysis.

Black feminist theory, which places the Black woman at the centre of analysis, primarily emerged as a response by women of African descent to the tendency of mainstream feminist writings—especially those heavily informed by poststructuralist theory—to neglect and negate the experiences of Black women in their theoreticizations of gender constructions.⁴¹ As Spivak suggests, "what is a radically

⁴¹ For further discussion, see Barbara Omolade, "Black Women and Feminism," *The Future of Difference* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1980) 247-257.

liberating... politics in one arena can act as a colonizing agent in another."⁴² This exclusion of race in mainstream feminist writings as a determining factor in the experiences of women has been attributed by Rozena Maart to "an absence of white consciousness in white feminist ethics—that is, white feminists see the fight against racism as a separate issue to the struggle for equality of the sexes."⁴³ Maart argues that the construction of "woman" in Western culture has been predicated to a large extent on how race is perceived and what representations govern these assumptions.⁴⁴ The racial stereotypes of Black women and other women of colour culturally perpetuated in society are often measured against stereotypical constructions of white women when they are drawn upon. Thus, reticence in confronting issues dealing with race in so-called white, or mainstream feminist theory impedes the advancement of all women in the end.

Black feminist theory, by contrast, directly addresses how identities of gender, sexuality, and race are inseparable in the experiences of women of colour.⁴⁵ For

⁴² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., The Post-Colonial Studies Reader (New York: Routledge, 1995) 250, in reference to Spivak's article "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Critical Inquiry 12:1 (1985).

⁴³ Rozena Maart, "Cultural Appropriation, Historicizing, Individuality, Consciousness, and Actions," Fuse 16:5/6 (Summer 1993) 45. Compare with Ruth Frankenberg's discussion of the denial of white privilege in terms of a play between colour evasion and power evasion in White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 142-149.

⁴⁴ Maart, "Cultural Appropriation, Historicizing, Individuality, Consciousness, and Actions," 45.

⁴⁵ For writings addressing the conflation of sexual and racial differences, See Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (Watertown: Persephone Press, 1981).

instance, it addresses how Black women are doubly-burdened by the racial discrimination that comes from mainly whites and the sexual discrimination that comes from men both Black and white.⁴⁶ It is not only ironic but deplorable that, as Barbara Johnson writes, "Black women suffer from both sexism and racism within the very movements whose ostensible purpose is to set them free."⁴⁷ A manifestation of this "double burden" can be seen in how initial Black women's affiliation with women's liberation movements faced criticism from many Black men (and even a number of Black women) for creating dissention in the ranks and taking the spotlight away from the supposed larger struggle against racism.⁴⁸ Given the phallogentricity of Black pride movements, particularly in the sixties, Black women, in the words of Black feminist Abena P.A. Busia, "recognized the need to rewrite or to reclaim our own *herstories*, and to define ourselves."⁴⁹ African American artist Adrian Piper and

⁴⁶ For a perspective on relationships between Black men and women, see Michele Wallace. Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman (New York: Dial, 1979). Although highly controversial, Wallace's premise in this book is that over the past half century a relationship of mistrust and even hatred has developed between Black men and Black women and that this animosity has been further exacerbated by the Black macho construction and the myth of the Superwoman.

⁴⁷ Barbara Johnson, A World of Difference (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987) 168.

⁴⁸ See call to arms by Black Canadian women despite opposition from male counterparts in "Transcript of Speech by Rosemary Brown, MLA, Vancouver-Burrard on the Occasion of the National Congress for Black Women in Canada, Convened by the Canadian Negro Women's Association, Inc., Saturday, April 7, 1973," The Black Woman in Canada, ed. Rella Braithwaite, (Toronto: Self-published, 1976) 9-12.

⁴⁹ Abena P. A. Busia, "Words Whispered Over Voids: A Context for Black Women's Rebellious Voices in the Novel of the African Diaspora," Black Feminist Criticism and Critical Theory, ed. Joe Weixlmann and Houston A. Baker Jr. (Greenwood, Florida: Penkeville, 1988) 1.

Trinh T. Minh-ha further problematizes the double burden of Black women by highlighting the "triple negation" or "triple jeopardy" of Coloured Women Artists—CWAs.⁵⁰

Black feminist interventions in contemporary art involve legitimizing art practice as an activity for women of African descent. Burman elaborates on the circumstances affecting the careers of Black women artists that have necessitated this course of action:

[T]he bourgeois art establishment only acknowledges white men as truly creative and innovative artists, while recognizing art by white women only as a homogenous expression of femininity, and art by Black people (or, more accurately, within the terms of reference used, by Black men) as a static expression of the ritual experience of the daily lives of their communities, be they in the Third World or the imperialist hinterland. In this system of knowledge, Black women artists, quite simply do not exist.⁵¹

As a consequence, Black women artists' contribution to the interrogation and development of Canadian art has been neglected or assumed to be a subset of white women's art. This systematic marginalization is similar to how Black feminism (or "anti-racist feminism" to use Bannerji's terms) has been labelled as a peripheral subtheme of white women's feminism.⁵² One effect of this categorization practiced in Western feminist discourses has been to produce something homogeneously

⁵⁰ Adrian Piper, "The Triple Negation of Coloured Women Artists." At the Crossroads 3 (Summer/Fall 1994) 14-18; Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989) 28.

⁵¹ Burman, "There Have Always Been Great Black Women Artists," Lorde, Parmar, and Kay 293.

⁵² Bannerji, Returning the Gaze xi.

constructed as the "third world woman" who is treated as a "singular monolithic subject" rather than one whose location and experience is constantly in flux.⁵³

According to René Payant, the only way that current art practice can shape politics is to initiate an artistic discourse that concerns it.⁵⁴ Black feminist art-historical discourse/art criticism can be said to engage in this discursive activity. By expanding on the definitions of both "woman" and "woman artist," it not only destabilizes traditional Eurocentric methodologies used to approach women's art in general as well as art by people of colour but also further informs interpretations of art that addresses race and/or gender.

As my approach to *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* has been heavily influenced by Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis' model of Black feminist art criticism, I find it useful to quote at length the main points she makes. (Although the quote below refers to African American artists, it can equally be used as an interpretative system to give critical attention to the work of African Canadian artists)

According to Tesfagiorgis, Black feminist art criticism provides a framework

to: (1) assert the visibility and production of Black women artists . . . in [all] areas of the diaspora; (2) reject any question of universal truth or beauty since its basic assumption is that art is interactive with the specific cultural values of the context in which it originates and to which it contributes; (3) recognize the importance of both the African continuum and the European continuum in the development of African-American art, which in fact, is American art; (4) reject the established hierarchy of materials extant in conventional art

⁵³ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 51-2.

⁵⁴ René Payant, cited in Durand, "From 'Québec Libre' to 'Stop the Madness,'" 16

history...; (5) examine representation, particularly in regard to the history and politics of race, gender, class and sexuality; (6) speak across the boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, age and discipline...⁵⁵

This brings us to positioning the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* as a Black feminist intervention in the politics of representation in Canada.

Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter emerged from within a rich history of Black Canadian women's activism.⁵⁶ Much of this activity in the arts which began in the mid-eighties involved initiatives on the part of women artists' groups and collectives such as DAWA (visual—Toronto), Multicultural Women in Concert (performance—Toronto), Women in Focus (visual and video—Vancouver), Black Women's Collective (multi-media—Toronto), many of which reflected, "in their specificity, difference, multiplicity, and simultaneity."⁵⁷

Although Black women artists in Canada have been actively involved in exhibitions with white artists and Black male artists for several years, only recently has the political impetus behind more and more Black Canadian women's exhibitions

⁵⁵ Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis, "In Search of A Discourse and Critique/s That Center the Art of Black Women Artists," Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women, ed. Stanlie M. James and Abena P.A. Busia, (New York: Routledge, 1993) 248-9.

⁵⁶ See Carty, And Still We Rise: 'We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up': Essays in African Canadian Women's History, coordinated by Peggy Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); and Masters, "Women, Culture and Communications," Pierson, Cohen, Bourne, and Masters 398-410.

⁵⁷ Margot Leigh Butler, "To Be a Little Brave and Flexible," Locations: Feminism, Art, Racism, Region (Toronto: WARC, 1989) 9.

Anti-racist work in the arts by Black women has also extended to productions in video such as Sisters in Struggle and Long Time Comin' both directed by Dionne Brand and produced by the NFB. See Claire Prieto et al, Blacks on Screen 24.

represented a significant new direction. This course has been informed and influenced by a Black feminist consciousness which has motivated a reclamation of art for many African Canadian women artists.⁵⁸ From a global perspective, Black women artists in other parts of the African diaspora and in Africa have been actively engaged in similar articulations as that of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* since the late seventies/early eighties.⁵⁹ In her catalogue introduction to an exhibition by Black women artists in 1985, British painter Lubaina Himid writes: "We are claiming what is ours and making ourselves visible. We are eleven of the hundreds of creative Black women in Britain today. We are here to stay."⁶⁰

Black women's group exhibitions in Canada prior to 1989 which involved artists from *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* included the following: *Black Perspectives* (1985), *Visions of Black Women* (1985), *Women On Site* (1987), and *Weapons of Culture* (1988). The last two took place at A Space Gallery just before *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter's* inaugural exhibition at the same location.⁶¹ As hoped for, many more exhibitions focusing on Black women have

⁵⁸ I use the quantifier "many" since, as in the case of the artists in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, not all Black women claim Black feminist consciousness; in fact some disclaim it.

⁵⁹ For discussion of Black women artists in Britain, see Pratibha Parmar, "Black Feminism: The Politics of Articulation," Rutherford 101-126.

⁶⁰ Lubaina Himid, quoted in Tesfagiorgis, "In Search of A Discourse and Critique/s That Center the Art of Black Women Artists," James and Busia 230.

⁶¹ Actually, *Women On Site* featured other women artists of colour as well as white women artists and *Weapons of Culture*, curated by Buseje Bailey, featured male and female artists of African descent. See Appendix I for details on curatorial agendas.

taken place throughout Canada since 1989, although the majority of them have been in Toronto. These include, among others: *By Any Means Necessary* (1990) and *Black Women and Image* (1991).

From within this context of Black women's artistic production in Canada, the next section discusses the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* as a post-colonial text of Self-inscription that embodied much of the prevailing theoretical and socio-cultural developments at the time.

PART II

BLACK WIMMIN: WHEN AND WHERE WE ENTER

Only the BLACK WOMAN can say "when and where I enter, in the quiet undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me."¹

With these words, turn of the century Black activist Anna Julia Cooper articulated the intimate relationship between issues of gender and race involved when looking at diasporic experiences of Black women. Almost a century later, this statement, republished many times since its first appearance in *A Voice of the South* (1892), was engaged once more by the Diasporic African Women's Art Collective in the title of their 1989 exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* to boldly assert the project's political commitment to centering the Black woman in its artistic inquiry.

The idea for *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* was conceived by Buseje Bailey and Yvonne Channer, two Black women activist-artists who, along with other collaborators, subsequently founded the DAWA collective, a non-profit community network of African Canadian women artists formed in 1984 to promote Black women's culture in Canada. According to the curatorial notes for *Black*

¹ Anna Julia Cooper, epigraph, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* by Paula Giddings (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984).

Wimmin: When and Where We Enter, "Dawa" in Swahili means "medicine."² In light of this, perhaps this term was used as the group's acronym to suggest the role of DAWA as a healing body or apparatus that redressed not only the situation of Black women artists in Canada who were portrayed as absent from the art world but also that of people of African descent in general who continue to be subjected to racial discrimination despite the historical dismantling of colonial structures. DAWA activities ranged from conducting Black heritage workshops in schools, community centres and libraries to organizing exhibitions such as *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*.³

As summarized in Housework Gallery and Café's March 1989 programme, the exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* had three goals: 1) "to expand and publicly vocalize the concerns of Black women as a cultural group" so as to "move from invisibility to visibility, from the margin to the centre"; 2) "to offer an opportunity to the public to view a body of art by people of African descent within the context [for which] it was created"; and 3) "to empower the participating artists [as well as future African Canadian women artists] by validating the artistic experiences of Black women in Canada."⁴ The commissioning of work from Black

² Buseje Bailey and Grace Channer, "*Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*." Unpublished curatorial notes, 1989. n.pag.

³ This exhibition was one of the last major events of the group; DAWA was defunct a year later.

⁴ Houseworks Gallery and Café: March 1989 (Ottawa: Houseworks, 1989) 1; Bailey and Channer, "*Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*."

women artists, it was hoped, would provide a new critical space in which to initiate dialogues about Black women's art in Canada.

To promote interest for the *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* exhibition, DAWA extended a nation-wide call for women artists of African descent. According to co-curators Bailey and Channer,

[the] artists were chosen by the following criteria: 1) First and foremost, they are known for their commitment to the development of their skills, and the output of cultural images. 2) These artists are interested in developing a Black aesthetic in terms of women's experience. 3) The artists represent Black women's experiences from a number of cities in Canada.⁵

Interpretation of the exhibition's theme, "Black women's art in Canada" and choice of medium were left up to the individual artists. This freedom was intended to allow the submissions to be either overtly political or more aesthetically focused and resulted in a diverse selection of subject matter and media in the exhibition.

After two years of coordination, *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* began its tour with an inaugural exhibition at Toronto's A Space Gallery. Not coincidentally, the dates of this first venue coincided with Black History Month in February.⁶ Eleven artists from Toronto, Ottawa, Kingston, Montreal and Edmonton participated in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* which visited four other artist-run galleries in Canada after its Toronto venue.⁷ Financial support came from

⁵ DAWA, Grant application for *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, 1988.

⁶ The touring itinerary of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* is tabulated in Appendix II.

⁷ There was also confirmed artist participation from Marie-Avrile Jordon who was Montreal-based at the time. Unfortunately, she was unable to forward work in time to

the Canada Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, and Alexandria Park Community Center.

To further contextualize this body of work within the Canadian art scene and to increase audience participation,⁸ the curators aimed to have workshops conducted in as many of the hosting cities as possible. Complementary workshops were realized in the Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa venues. In Toronto, there were two workshops co-sponsored by DAWA and the Women's Art Resource Centre. *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, with artist Suli Williams as facilitator, was opened to only Black women and provided information, support and networking. *Building Bridges*, opened to all, featured a discussion facilitated by Carol James at A Space Gallery on racism, culture, and feminism. At Galerie Articule in Montreal, artist Khadejha McCall led a panel discussion entitled "Is There Art after 35?" and artist Barbara Prézeau conducted a "hands-on" workshop on the drawing of Haitian symbols. In Ottawa, three workshops were organized at Houseworks Gallery and

be included in the tour.

Although the exhibition was lauded as representing Black artists across Canada, the artists who participated in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* noticeably represented a limited segment of the Black Canadian community; except for Barbara Prézeau and Dzian LaCharité who are French-speaking and Ottawa- and Montreal-based, respectively, and Suli Williams from Edmonton who was the only representative from the Prairie provinces, the others are anglophone and were living in or near the Toronto area at the time of the exhibition.

⁸ According to Felshin, these are two typical formal strategies used in activist art practice. In light of this and the presence of other strategies such as the use of space and media, I suggest here that the DAWA project can be not only construed as political but also as embodying an activist cultural practice in Felshin's sense. For a discussion of several defining parameters of activist cultural practice, see Felshin, *But Is It Art?* 8-29.

Café: Art and Politics, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Art, Art as a Political Tool, and Creating Visibility. Funded in part by the Ontario Arts Council, these were all facilitated by co-curator/artist Buseje Bailey who was Houseworks' resident artist at the time and voiced most openly the political intent of the DAWA project.

As Post-colonial Text: Issues of Historicity and 'Home'

The exhibition would be set out in our own terms, it would highlight the art and aesthetics, the essence of that which is African, that which survived in and amongst us, even 500 years after we were taken from the motherland.

-Bailey and Channer, "*Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* "

The exhibition *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* challenged traditional Western art world politics of aesthetics and representation by providing a space where there was none in which Black women's experiences could be articulated. At the same time, it also demanded recognition for the contributions of Black women to the shaping of Canadian cultural identity. In doing so, it brought forward two important issues connected to the identity construction and artistic expression of African diasporic women: historicity and location. Location, in this case, refers to the situating of "home" and the making of spaces for identity articulation. The following discusses the two issues in relation to the political agenda of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*.

The historicity of the DAWA project was posited by the curatorial team as the point of entry for Black women artists into the Canadian art scene which had largely

ignored their previous artistic contributions and hence denied their existence altogether. Through a process of self-authorization involving, as Trinh explains, "authorized voices authorizing themselves to be heard," the women who participated in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* challenged the dominant politics of representation in Canada by "naming" themselves as agents of their own cultural production.⁹

Following this, it could be said that the exhibition represents a creative post-colonial text which embodied, within its production, post-colonial strategies that worked to effect agency for women artists of African descent. As a visual text, *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* recorded the historical collective and personal memories of the Black women who were involved in its creation. This reading is suggested further by Bailey and Channer in their proposal for the exhibition:

The work will be organized into several discrete areas, reflecting the communal compounds of traditional African society. Within these spaces, sculpture, constructions, music, poetry, fabric, painting and movement will comprise a *creative document* of diasporic, African imagery.[my emphasis]¹⁰

In a very pragmatic way, "naming" the exhibition as a text within its historical context as well as in this discussion has enabled it to be a valuable source of information on Black women's experiences in a spectrum that has very little on them.

Interpreting *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* as a post-colonial text also allows a reading of the project's dynamics as echoing and reinforcing the states

⁹ Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red* 188.

¹⁰ DAWA, Grant application for *Black Wimmin: When and Where I Enter*.

of migrancy (or "migratory subjectivities," to use Carol Boyce Davies' terms) experienced by many of its artist participants who were not always present at each of the venues.¹¹ For instance, in negotiating a space of named agency for participants and viewers, the project was forced to adapt to the specificity of each locale and re-create itself from venue to venue just as members of the African diaspora have learnt to survive as migrant subjects in the Americas. Variables involved in *Black Wimmin When and Where We Enter* included the differing dimensions of the galleries, the way the exhibition was displayed, quality of lighting, and the absence/presence of artists and their works. Bailey and Channer describe this continuous transformation throughout the tour in this way:

The energy the exhibition created before, during, and in the future has been powerful. At each location, each gallery space, each city, another tone, a new shape, an enlightened expanding of the exhibition's personality bloomed. Its vision was warm, firm and inclusive.¹²

This description lends to *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* a sense of autonomy which empowers it as a living exhibition, one which continually expanded and contracted, adapted and evolved, and, most importantly, made itself at home wherever it went. By understanding the DAWA project as a living text of Black women's experiences balances the physical absence of its artists. The exhibition's historicity affirms their immaterial presence through a visual embodiment of their struggles as Black women artists in the art world.

¹¹ Boyce, Black Women, Writing and Identity 1.

¹² Bailey and Channer, "*Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*."

The issue of location, or situating the "where" of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter's* interrogation, is equally central to the understanding of the political impetus behind the project. The historical displacement of diasporic subjects and their subsequent migratory subjectivity has not only contributed to their invisibility but has also problematized the development of a politics of location for members of the diaspora. As a consequence, the notion of "home" for many diasporic subjects often involves a metaphor of migration, or journey, rather than a fixed geographical point. The journey involved bears a non-linear configuration that is shaped by a multifold of foreign and floating signs which continually locate and dislocate subjects as they attempt to situate a "homeplace" for themselves. "Homeplace," in Black feminist bell hooks' sense, refers to "the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination."¹³

For Black women, whose diasporic experiences have historically forced them to work outside of their home, the notion of "home" becomes a particularly crucial site of resistance.¹⁴ According to Brand, "from the institution of slavery in the Americas to current exploitative work structures," Black women, along with other women of colour and immigrant women have worked in homes other than those of

¹³ bell hooks, Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990) 42.

¹⁴ Ibid., 47. This view would differ from the politics of white feminism which located home as a crucial site of oppression for (white) women while work outside the home was considered liberating. Brand, "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto: Gender, Race and Class," Bannerji, Returning the Gaze 272.

their own.¹⁵ For members of DAWA involved in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, in tandem with this reclamation of a "homeplace" as a site of resistance was the activity of making other spaces of Black women's experience such as the Canadian art scene feel like home. As will be shown, the DAWA project managed to create a spatial site of resistance within the art world as well as individual pockets of "homes," or sub- exts of resistance, within each of the artist's projects.

In their creation of a space for the work of Black women artists, the DAWA collective subverted traditional Eurocentric politics of aesthetics which often automatically categorized the production of all artists of colour as political art and therefore not considered as "fine" art, or "high" art. While Western art has been re interpreted in terms of its political and social significance for some time now, it seems that the labelling of work as "political art," or "activist art," distinct from "fine art" persists particularly in the case of artists of colour.¹⁶ This distinction, however, was blurred in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* as both contemporary and traditional styles were used to render many of the works that could be considered as political thereby destabilizing the high/low art, activist/fine art dichotomies imposed onto Western definitions of art.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For further elaboration of the association of "political art," or "activist art," with so-called "victim art," see Buseje Bailey, Cameron Bailey, Lorna Boschman, Richard Fung, Jane Ash Poitras and Jeanne Randolph, "Dispositions: Undressing 'Victim Art,'" *Mix* (Fall 1995) 41-49. In this discussion, political art, or activist art, is conflated with "low" art, or craft in the sense that they are all not considered mainstream.

While not all the works in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* were overtly political, I suggest that the mere participation of the artists in the project can be construed as being political as well as activist. Nina Felshin writes:

Participation [in activist art] is... an act of self-expression or self-representation by the entire community. Individuals are empowered through such creative expression, as they acquire a voice, visibility, and an awareness that they are part of a greater whole. The personal thus becomes political, and change, even if initially only of community or public consciousness, becomes possible.¹⁷

The collaborative nature of the *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* project on the part of both its artists and its audience clearly indicated an activist cultural practice in effect.¹⁸ As discussed earlier, the politicization of audience participation in the *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* project was done by ensuring community involvement through the organization of workshops in the venue cities.

The politicization of artist participation could be seen in how the fabrics by several of the artists—which essentially demonstrated different technical skills learnt from workshop sessions and travels to Africa, were presented in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*. The various pieces were not only displays of aesthetically-pleasing objects but also represented important milestones, economic or otherwise, for the artists who had to scrimp and save in order to get the necessary training to create them. As in the case of the participants in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, many Black women artists are also "heads of households, generally the primary

¹⁷ Felshin, *But Is It Art?* 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

income earner, poor, and working class" and have to negotiate forces in their surroundings that discourage them from making art in the first place.¹⁹ Exploring an artistic forum in which to express personal, political and/or racial concerns is therefore often considered only afterhours when everything else is taken care of. For this reason, many Black women artists see their artistic experiences which often explore the convergence of their public and private realities as integral to the struggles of Black women and Black people in general. According to Bailey, for Black artists who have "been historically excluded from power in society, sometimes just creating oneself into existence, by creating art, is revolutionary."²⁰ Certainly, from this perspective of a history of oppression, artistic expressions of personal yet culturally-specific experiences such as the ones found in this exhibition can be construed as political as well.

The political subversivity of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* is most apparent in its different uses of physical and theoretical space. For example, the DAWA production physically contrasted itself to the museum institution as a statement of resistance towards colonizing apparatuses in society. According to Nourbese Philip, for Africans and the African diaspora, the "white box" museum setting "has always been a significant site of their racial oppression."²¹ Artworks by

¹⁹ Brand, "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto," Bannerji, Returning the Gaze 272.

²⁰ Buseje Bailey, quoted in Lillian Allen, "Revolutionary Acts: Creating Ourselves in Existence," Parallélogramme 13:4 (April/May 1988) 36.

²¹ Nourbese Philip, Frontiers 104.

people of African descent, far removed from their original cultural contexts, have been traditionally displayed as untouchable formal art objects void of the cultural significance given to them by their creators. *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* not only displayed art that was created specifically for that context but it also subverted Eurocentric definitions of art viewing environments through the use of music, incense, and candles. This created a warm and inviting atmosphere where, as one critic wrote, "the first impression [was] not predominantly visual. It [was] aural and olfactory, appealing to touch, taste and ear."²² According to the curators, "children were encouraged to touch, feel, be with the materials in the pieces in their own ways which encouraged adults to be involved in the 'art' in a way that breaks the established rituals of the art gallery institution."²³

The conscious use by the artists of materials associated with craft such as dyed cloth and things gathered from nature rather than limiting themselves to the more canonical mediums of painting or sculpture further subverted "the separation between so-called 'low' and 'high' art that is paramount in dominant discourses on art."²⁴ The media in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* which ranged from textiles to wooden boxes to tree branches to vèvès was an important site of resistance for

²² Susan Crean, "Women's Bodies, Women's Selves: Reclaiming An Artistic Identity," *Canadian Art* 6:2 (Summer 1989) 22.

²³ Bailey and Channer, "*Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter.*"

²⁴ Tesfagiorgis, "In Search of A Discourse and Critique/s That Center the Art of Black Women Artists," James and Busia 231.

many of the artists. In describing the materiality of the exhibition, Bailey and Channer write,

the exhibition shared that part of our lives as Black women via cloth, sand, wood, candles, stones, earth, corn, hair, button beads, gourds, incense... everyday materials placing Black women's lives somewhere in this universe and each observer in some relationship to that position.²⁵

For the curators, central to the art produced in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* was how "art was not separated from craft nor pleasure from necessity."²⁶ The relationship between the artist's economic status and the medium explored was a significant aspect when considering the predominance of fibres, found objects, and materials collected from nature featured in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*. Not only did these materials provide unconventional means of expression, they also proved to be the more economical choice of art supplies. This reminds us once more of the economic realities faced by many Black women artists.

On a more theoretical note, *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* challenged the dominant art establishment most forcefully through the political act of taking possession of a space to articulate marginalized voices. The importance of the space used and/or the context of the show was as important as the works exhibited because the space reflected, to a certain extent, the external social realities outside the art world. For instance, just as Black women continued to struggle in whatever context they find themselves in, *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* continued

²⁵ Bailey and Channer, "*Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*."

²⁶ Ibid.

to boldly assert its Black feminist agenda whether it was in a predominantly white-populated venue (such as Victoria) or in a predominantly Black one (such as Halifax). This is yet another instance in which the exhibition favoured a reading as text, or a collection of sub-texts, that extended beyond the walls of the gallery space in which it was physically confined. This brings us to a discussion of space in relation to the arrangement of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* and the politics of representation addressed in the individual works..

"When I Breathe There is a Space"²⁷

The system of representation in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* with its satellite sub-texts can be likened to a "mattering map" where each body of work marked a site of resistance and a juncture point (or "synapse" in Sutapas Biswas' sense) in which issues of significance to African-Canadians were raised.²⁸ For Biswas,

the notion of synapse [is] a metaphor for the human condition with particular reference to the experience of memory. Synapse here [in reference to her installation by the same name] is symbolic of an undefined territory or space. Memory is itself of a shifting nature, vivid in places, with blind spots.²⁹

²⁷ This sub-title comes from Buseje Bailey's feeling that if there isn't a space, you just have to make it yourself. Susan Douglas, "When I Breathe There is a Space: An Interview with Buseje Bailey," Canadian Woman Studies 11:1 (1989) 40-42.

²⁸ The idea of "mattering maps" is drawn from Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media, ed. Lisa A. Lewis, (New York: Routledge, 1993) 50-65. Grossberg discusses mattering maps as a construction that one forms in order to politically locate oneself in a space.

²⁹ Biswas, Synapse 13.

Similarly, *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* referred to Black women's experiences of memory in its attempt to map out a terrain for Black women's art in Canada. The act of remembering constituted the link between the many different individual pieces and further historicized the exhibition as a site of resistance. As Elena Featherston writes, "for women of color re/membering ourselves is a daily act of courage, a ritual of survival... Re/membering is a form of resistance; it is a life-affirming and self-defining act."³⁰

bel hooks elaborates further on the usefulness of memory for Black people in the following:

Thinking again about space and location, I heard the statement "our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting"; a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate the present.³¹

In other words, memory "can be a practice which 'transforms history from judgement on the past in the name of a present truth to a <<counter-memory>> that combats out current modes of truth and justice.'³² As Renée Baert writes, "remembering is not a passive recollection or reminiscence but the active transformation of the fragments of memory itself."³³ For the diasporic subject, the subversive potential for

³⁰ Elena Featherston, *Skin Deep: Women Writing on Color, Culture and Identity* (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1995) Preface.

³¹ hooks, *Yearning* 147.

³² Jonathan Arac, quoted in bel hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992) 343.

³³ Renée Baert, *Margins of Memory* (Windsor: Art Gallery of Windsor, 1994) 6

a counter-memory to transform history is of particular relevance in light of how hegemonic discourses have represented the diaspora and its experiences of exile, slavery, and migration solely in terms of Otherness.

To summarize, the personal and collective memories brought forward in *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter* worked together with the reading of the exhibition as a mattering map that addressed the historicity and location of Black women in Canada. The instability and changeability of the memories and spaces of articulation created by the project matched the shifting nature of identity construction for the diasporic subject. Following this, I turn now to a brief look at the various works exhibited each of which presented aspects of Black women's experiences in society through different sites of resistance whether it be the medium, the politicization of memory, or the politicization of artist participation.

Winsom Darrell's textile installation *Kukubuka* (Swahili for "memories") placed the act of remembering as central to the exhibition site (plate 1). This creative text reconstructed from the artist's memories documented how her "people were taken from Africa in chains across the ocean to be slaves in Jamaica."³⁴ Appliqué images of Black women washing clothes by the sea were visible through a thin grey-white fabric which was meant to suggest an ephemeral layer of mist. Beneath this lantern-like set-up of cloth, chains were strewn menacingly over the papier-mâché

³⁴ In discussing the various works, I have drawn freely from conversations with the artists and from their artist statements. I am grateful to them for discussing their work with me but it does not necessarily follow, of course, that they would agree with all aspects of my account. The artists' statements are cited only when needed for clarification.

reconstruction of the African continent on the floor to represent the threat of slavery. The gravity of the subject matter notwithstanding, the bright colours of the women's clothing suggested that *Kukubuka* celebrated, at the same time, the strides African women have made in spite of herstories of oppression.³⁵

Black women's experiences of slavery also formed the resonant tone of **Suli William's** *Happy Birthday Daisy, through her hands* (plates 2 & 3). This textile installation, a homage to the artist's grandmother Daisy, was comprised of a delicate octagonal tent made of ten-foot high muslin held up by thin wooden rods from which hung paintings that could only be viewed from the interior of the structure.³⁶ The paintings featured a mother and daughter, oversized hands, and dancing figures. According to Williams, this piece "represented the determination of Black women to survive down through the generations" and entertained the presence of past memories by constantly alluding to the physical absence of the remembered through the strategic placement of extra material either on the floor or draped across the entire work.

³⁵ Winsom Darrell, "My Voice, My Art," *Canadian Woman Studies* 14:2 (Spring 1994) 39.

³⁶ Unfortunately, because of its delicate nature, this piece did not survive the tour and was only shown in the inaugural exhibition at A Space Gallery. **Foluké Olubayo's** air-dried clay work of a pyramidal structure decorated with sets of hands and symbols suffered similar misfortune. The preliminary drawing for William's piece, however, was used to illustrate one of the exhibition poster used for A Space Gallery as well as the documentation released by Houseworks Gallery and Café for the venue in Ottawa.

Most of the works discussed and reproduced in this study were "transitory creations" (as in the cases of Williams and Olubayo) and no longer "exist" save in photographic records and in the memories of their creators and audiences.

Guyana-born **Claire Carew's** *Here I Stand*, a "tribute to [the artist's] Aboriginal, African, and European ancestors," was a political affirmation of the artist's diasporic female presence amongst other Others (plate 4). Depicting images of several women of colour, this painting also bore textual graffiti which read, "Work like a mule" and "I had no alternative." These aggressive statements referred to the struggles of women of colour in a post-colonial society.

Father of Africa, Mother of the Jews, Black Woman by **Kim McNeilly** continues the reclamation of Black women's identity in her exploration of her Canadian/African/Jewish heritage as vibrant with custom and tradition (plate 5). This mixed-media installation was comprised of "three long box constructions overlaid with magazine clippings, maps, fabric designs, and family photos."³⁷ A Menorah holding seven lit candles, a religious object connected with the Jewish faith, was strategically placed on an horizontal box so as to suggest a sacred altar space within the installation. For the artist, "these represent[ed] a visualization of childhood (the mother's home), the male world of book learning and geography (her father's domain) and herself, cultural offspring of a Jewish, Rumanian, African and Granadian mix."³⁸ McNeilly's work "articulates a feminist Afro-centric politic" in her attempt to give "voice to the silenced 'two-thirds of the world's' people."³⁹

³⁷ Crean, "Women's Bodies, Women's Selves," 22.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hazel Da Breo, *Inter+depend*, (Toronto: A Space, 1995); Artist's statement.

The art of Chloë Onari and Barbara Prézeau are examples of what is perceived to be typical of art by people of African descent, that is, commodified art objects which cater to a tourist audience and paintings and designs in the so-called "primitive" style. Regardless, both artists continue to create work in their medium of expression in styles that demonstrate a persistent personal interest in exploring their cultural background and artistic self-expression.

Chloë Onari, who calls herself a "surface design artist in textiles," explored the uses of colour, materials and media in her piece entitled *Betha De Kool Sony "Me No Pinko Me Red,"* a mixed-media floor installation consisting of carefully displayed doll and fabrics (plate 6). Onari describes her creative exploration in terms of an intimate relationship between herself and her materials which range from natural dyes (such as onion skins) to all the chemical dyes on the market and from wool, silk, cashmere goat hair, and linen to bast fibres such as banana leaves.

In a different vein, the works of Haitian-born **Barbara Prézeau** which directly referenced traditional ritual symbols from Haitian culture were aesthetic explorations of how Haitian people combined Christian icons with their ancient beliefs.⁴⁰ *Vêvê* consisted of religious imagery drawn in a cross formation on the gallery floor using different kinds of grain flour (plate 7). Illuminated with candles, the signs represented "the protector of the woods, the god of agriculture, the cycles of life, the two snakes of androgyny and, at the centre, a heart with a knife in it."⁴¹ *St. Soleil*, "about

⁴⁰ Crean, "Women's Bodies, Women's Selves," 22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

meetings across time and cultural space." was one of the several bright, rough-surface paintings on thick hand-made paper that Prézeau included in the exhibition.⁴² As the artist states: "Ma peinture doit être saisie comme l'expression brut et primale d'un sentiment écologique... 'un credo' animiste et contemporain!"

Dzian Lacharité, another Haitian-born artist, entered her exploration of the exhibition's theme through a much more spiritual avenue. *Right Time, Right Place*, a traditional dwelling made of bamboo branches, light immaterial fabric for its ceiling, and a brown cloth door, was an exploration of time and space (plate 9). This inquiry echoed that of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* by addressing the historicity (when) and location (where) of Black women. Viewers were invited to take off their shoes and walk barefoot on the cool bed of sand inside this shelter which suggested both a holy refuge and a place of domesticity, or even "home." Inside a wooden bowl was placed by the entrance with a piece of ginger in it. According to the artist, with no walls to suggest confinement, *Right Time, Right Place*, attempted to evoke a sense of a "parallel reality, where time doesn't exist... and time travel is possible." Like William's tent, space in Lacharité's piece was an important aspect that underscored the presence of generations past who were physically absent from the scene. *Right Time, Right Place* provided a space in which "time [was] suspended [and] life and death contemplated."⁴³

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

The works of Grace Channer, Khadejha McCall, and Buseje Bailey included in *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter* can all be said to have dealt specifically with images of Black women in society: how they view themselves, how they are viewed, and how they want to be viewed. Usually the focal point of the exhibition space, Grace Channer's *Ba Thari* (a South African phrase meaning "women from whom generations come") is a mixed-media floor sculpture made of twigs, branches, shredded cloth, and a piece of driftwood (plate 10). Unlike the prevailing stereotypical prototypes of Black women—ritualized fertility goddesses, versions of the mammy figure—Channer's representation of the Black female subject "effectively evoked character, power, and action."⁴⁴ According to the artist, *Ba Thari* "represented the centuries old strength and power of women who have caused generations of culture, history, knowledge, humanity, to have survived through the adverse oppressions beset on women's lives. The resilience of Black women was echoed by that of the driftwood which had passed through many eras... and touched many shores [but] still survived to tell its stories [sic]."⁴⁵ The use of natural materials was an additional critique on the destruction of the earth caused by the irresponsible use of technology by Western capitalist societies.

Finally, *Ba Thari* also addressed the self-images Black women. According to African American artist Adrian Piper.

⁴⁴ This is drawn from Tesfagiorgis' reading of works by Ringgold, Mosoke and Camp in Tesfagiorgis, "In Search of A Discourse and Critique/s That Center the Art of Black Women Artists," James and Busia 234.

⁴⁵ Grace Channer, letter to the author, 1996.

When cultural racism succeeds in making its victims suppress, denigrate, or reject these means of cultural self-affirmation [the solace people find in entertainment, self-expression, intimacy, mutual support, and cultural solidarity], it makes its victims hate themselves.⁴⁶

Ba Thari addressed this self-hate by suggesting, by way of the shredded pieces of cloth—one of which read "Sometimes we just hate ourselves"—being expunged from the figure's stomach, that Black women have to continue to refute and throw out the stereotypes imposed on them by both white and Black society.

In contrast to Channer's approach, **Khadejha McCall** used elaborately screen-printed and batiked textiles to depict different perceptions of Black women. *Strong Black Woman*, depicting a Black "working mom," challenged the male role in the commercial world while the visual dynamics in *One Day Soon* interrogated the historical and current status of Black women in North American society (plates 11-13). *Mother Williams* explored Black women's role as spiritual healer and nurturer. Also focusing on the Black female subject was **Buseje Bailey's** mixed-media work on panel board entitled *The Black Box* which addressed the image of Black motherhood through her tribute to Black female family members and provided a visual document of Black women's history (plate 14).

As we have seen, and as the next section's more in-depth discussion of Bailey's *Black Box* and McCall's *Strong Black Woman* demonstrate, some of the works in *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter* overtly challenged the politics of representation surrounding Black women.

⁴⁶ Adrian Piper, quoted in Lippard, *Mixed Blessings* 7.

PART III
BUSEJE BAILEY AND KHADEJHA McCALL: REPRESENTATIONS
OF BLACK WOMEN

Buseje Bailey's *Black Box* and Khadejha McCall's *Strong Black Woman* are two examples of how representation and resistance worked together in *Black Woman: When and Where We Enter*. From abolitionist politics to contemporary Black feminist theory, the Black female body has been an important site of resistance for people of African descent. "Slavery made control of the Black body a central issue in the relationship between whites and blacks."¹ According to Diane Roberts, "[r]epresentations of whites and blacks fuel a war over the body: the black body, the white body, the female body. The body is defined and circumscribed according to gender, race, and class."² Through their different artistic explorations of the image of the Black mother, both Bailey's and McCall's works challenge racial and gender stereotypes of Black women that have been constructed by colonial and neo-colonial discourses and re-/define the parameters of representation for the Black female body.

¹ Michael D. Harris, "Ritual Bodies—Sexual Bodies: The Role and Presentation of the Body in African-American Art," *Third Text* 12 (Autumn 1990) 92.

² Diane Roberts, *The Myth of Aunt Jemima: Representations of Race and Region* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 2.

In doing so, they re-affirm, at the same time, the presence of Black female subjects in contemporary society as multifarious, complex, and always changing.

The Black Box and Strong Black Woman can be described as what Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis has called "Afrofemcentric art" (for her, this is equivalent to the designation "Black feminist art") where "the unique focus on and presentation of black females is [its] most distinguishing feature."³ The term "Afrofemcentric," first introduced by Tesfagiorgis in 1984 in relation to the ideology and art of African-American artist Faith Ringgold, was meant to "to designate an Afro-female centered worldview and its artistic manifestations."⁴ Afrofemcentric art history thus would entail discussion of "the black woman subject as depicted by the black woman artist, exploring the distinct manner in which the latter envisions and presents black women's realities."⁵ The ensuing interpretations of *The Black Box* and *Strong Black Woman* follow this approach in their location of these visual texts within the lived experiences of its artists

³ Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis, "Afrofemcentricism and its Fruition in the Art of Elizabeth Catlett and Faith Ringgold," Sage: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women 4:1 (Spring 1987), 27. This term has been introduced only now as it is fairly obvious that not all the works exhibited in *Black Woman: When and Where We Enter* displayed or strictly adhered to the aesthetics as defined in Tesfagiorgis' concept of "Afrofemcentricity."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Stereotypes: Read Texts

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a *false* representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an *arrested, fixated form* of representation.

-Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question," 163

A stereotype is an already read text.

-Barbara Johnson, A World of Difference.

Not only are visual stereotypes strongly influenced by other images but they are also reinforced by the myriad of fixed referencing contained in textual sources (words) and actions in society. Not concerned with diversity or individualism on the part of the subjects in question, they serve to "depersonalize individuals and thereby deny them the rights and dignity which our society professes to accord everyone."⁶ As Black feminist Alice Walker writes, stereotypes are intended as "prisons of image. Inside each desperately grinning 'Sambo' and each placid 'mammy'... there is imprisoned a real person, someone we know."⁷ Whether positive or negative, stereotypes, as Bhabha suggests, are simplifications, reductive devices, meant to contain and control subjects according to universalizing notions of race and gender.⁸

⁶ Robbin Legere Henderson, "Prisons of Image," Prisons of Image: Ethnic and Gender Stereotypes, ed. Robbin Legere Henderson and Geno Rodriguez (New York: Alternative Museum, 1989) 6.

⁷ Alice Walker, epigraph, Prisons of Image: Ethnic and Gender Stereotypes, ed. Henderson and Rodriguez.

⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (New York: New

Affecting the image of Black people in particular are the kinds of stereotypical representations—by and large American—of Black people propagated by popular culture. For example, media reports of shootings and violence committed by Blacks on prime time "real" news continue to reinforce negative images of the Black male. This has the effect of extending negativity to all Blacks. Even though television programming has introduced more positive representations of Black people to the masses since the eighties, it has not for the most part destabilized any of the social structures that control the media.⁹

The other domain where visual stereotypes of people of African descent are in abundance is in Western art. The proliferation of stereotypical images of Blacks in art history has been documented by Hugh Honour, Guy C. McElroy, and Albert Boime, among others.¹⁰ In these works, the Black woman is observed to be portrayed for the most part as exoticized/eroticized and/or silent servient subjects, that is, either as sex slaves or as servants. She is "both invisible and ubiquitous: never seen in her own

Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990) 163.

⁹ For a discussion of major Black figures in pop culture, see K. Sue Jewell, From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁰ See Hugh Honour, The Image of the Blacks in Western Art, vol.1-4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Guy C. McElroy, Facing History: The Black Image in American Art (1710-1940) (Washington: Corcoran Gallery of Art; San Francisco: Bedford Arts, Publishing, 1990); Albert Boime, The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990); and Ellwood Parry, The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art: 1500-1900 (New York: Braziller, 1974). For representations of the Black female nude in Canadian Art of the 1930s, see Charmaine Nelson's M.A. thesis in art history, "Coloured Nude": Fetishization, Disguise, Dichotomy (Montreal: Concordia University, 1995).

right but forever appropriated by... others for their own ends."¹¹ Given this cultural context, as bel hooks writes, "creating counter-hegemonic images of blackness that resist the stereotype and challenge the artistic imagination is not a simple task."¹² The following section discusses how the images of Bailey's *Black Box* and McCall's *Strong Black Woman* counter two common stereotypes in contemporary North American society, the "mammy" figure and the female "Buppie" (Black urban professional) by re-presenting images of Black women.

Black Motherhood

She lived in a box on a ship—a concentration camp named Jesus, named Justice, named Integrity. The box contained her blood. It contained her body
 -Barbara Omolade, The Rising Song of African American Women, 39.

Buseje Bailey's *The Black Box* triptych is a multi-media site made up of three panels that fold accordion-style into a shallow box. When the box is fully opened, a Black mother and daughter can be seen on each of the panels (plate 14). They autobiographically record three mother-daughter relationships in the artist's life which loosely translate into future, past, and present memories.¹³ The figures from left to

¹¹ Barbara Johnson, A World of Difference (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 168-169.

¹² bel hooks, Art On My Mind: Visual Politics (New York: The New Press, 1995) 96.

¹³ Douglas, "When I Breathe There is a Space," 40.

right represent the artist and her daughter, the artist's grandmother and mother as an infant, and, finally, the artist's mother and herself as a young girl.

In the more complex central panel, "two candles affixed to the inside rims" introduce the artist's personal mnemonic ritual to the public sphere by embodying a sense of ceremony that is at once celebratory and commemorative.¹⁴ They also serve the practical purpose of lighting up the central panel to reveal "a shackled foot," a shoe, and "an inscription that begins 'I'm painting heaven in Black / Black Woman in focus / nursing hearts unknown.'" ¹⁵

This merging together of references to the history of slavery and Christian beliefs such as the text's mention of heaven as well as the work's adaptation of the medieval triptych model point to how culture and cultural identity are not entities unto themselves existing devoid of outside influences. Rather, they are subject to constant re-visioning and re-definition in the articulation of hybrid subjectivity. In this respect, the signs of Western religious practice in *The Black Box* are not so much indicative of an assimilation of European belief systems as they are a re-definition of a Western, Christian understanding of motherhood.¹⁶

¹⁴ Crean, "Women's Bodies, Women's Selves," 22.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ This reading is drawn from Bailey's use of the Madonna and Child imagery in an earlier 1985 piece, *Third World Madonnas* (also a representation of "Black mothers who are struggling to raise their kids") which was interpreted as "a response to the art-school notion of classic European madonnas." "A Note On Our Cover Artist," Canadian Woman Studies 9:3/4 (Fall/Winter 1988) 112.

Central to *The Black Box*'s artistic inquiry is its rigorous critique of the dearth of historical documentation on the lives of Black women and people of African descent in general. This critique is brought about by merging collective memories of the history of slavery together with the artist's own contemporary memories of family members. Through the viewing experience, the memories of the work's audiences are also drawn upon. The result of this amalgamation of memories is a visual document that serves as a living history in its portrayal of the continuity of Black lived experience. The Black Box constantly shifts from visually documenting the artist's female family members to representing the generations of women who have contributed to the history of the Black experience.

The more immediate associations to Black people's history of slavery are suggested by the physical structure of *The Black Box* itself. For example, the wooden structure serves as an "archaeological reminder"¹⁷ of the deplorable conditions in slave ships which Africans were forced to endure during their transportation across the Atlantic. Treated as subhumans, both men and women were chained up in small cramped compartments with little or no food during the entire journey. In the ruthless, capitalistic exploitation of Africans during the slave trade, concern for the health and sanitation of prospective slaves was limited only to keeping as many of them alive as possible until they arrived on land and were sold as property to the highest bidder.

¹⁷ Mark A. Cheetham and Linda Hutcheon, Remembering Postmodernism: Trends in Recent Canadian Art (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991) 7.

Another reference to history made by *The Black Box's* structure is how it alludes to the story of Pandora's Box.¹⁸ In the Greek tragedy, the curious Pandora unknowingly releases evil spirits when she opens a forbidden box. Similarly, artist Buseje Bailey has opened up a buried chest containing—as its title would imply—Black history. And, like the spirits of the Pandora story, the historical contents or memories, both negative and positive, found in *The Black Box* attempt to resist total reconfinement by resorting thereafter to change each time they are referred to or recollected. However, the references to history are not limited to only the physicality of *The Black Box*. They are also signified through its visual dynamics.

According to Mark Cheetham, from a postmodern perspective, fragmentation and damage are two culturally-specific signs of history.¹⁹ Both these are manifested in *The Black Box* in several ways. Fragmentation is shown through the bodily dismemberment of the women and the compartmentalization of the box into past, present, and future through the different generations of women, while damage is most apparent in the broken chain. The old shoe and dismembered foot protruding from the central panel (the shoe having been cast off in the run for freedom and the injured foot—"having just broken free," according to the artist) illustrate both fragmentation and damage—"fragmentation" in the separation of the shoe from the foot and the foot from the body of the grandmother—the only member of the triptych to have lived through slavery; and "damage," in the ankle injury sustained from the abuses of the

¹⁸ Douglas, "When I Breathe There is a Space," 41.

¹⁹ Cheetham and Hutcheon, Remembering Postmodernism 4.

past.²⁰ According to one critic, "[n]o attempt is made to soften the bitter edges of history or to sidestep the brutality of survival" in *The Black Box*.²¹

With this fragmented and antiquated presentation of the images and sculptural forms in the central panel as well as how the box can be read as buried treasure, the artist of *The Black Box* invites viewers to participate in an archaeology of memory. In this branch of archaeology, cultural data is gathered from the different unstable sites of individual and collective memories instead of from material remains conventionally excavated from physical sites. Both past and present memories remembered in the here and now are manifested in *The Black Box* as historical allusions to slavery are merged with recollections from the present. Signs of this contemporaneity, for example, are suggested in the text and the way the mother figure in the left panel looks directly to the viewer. According to the artist, the mother in the image looks to the future but also at the viewer. This implicates the viewer's participation in the making of this collective history. This left panel is also the more confrontational as it is positioned closer to the viewer than the two other panels.

As viewers weave through time and through these different sites of memory and historical references, one thing becomes apparent—multiple readings of *The Black Box* as a historical document occur because of the numerous applicable sources of memory. In addition to those of the artist, the memories of viewers are also brought

²⁰ All citations of the artist hereafter are taken from personal interview with Buseje Bailey, Montreal, Quebec, 22 August 1995.

²¹ Crean, "Women's Bodies, Women's Selves," 22.

into the reading of the work, neither of which remain unchanged through the passage of time. This cyclical and constant regeneration of memories, most obviously suggested by the repeating images of mother and daughter, allows for different histories to be articulated and remembered while at the same time avoids presenting the history of Black women as static and frozen in time. This instability underscores the subjective nature of historical records. How true to life, or accurate, they are depends on the people who make or remember history as well as those who interpret it wherein perhaps the former and latter are one and the same. As Cheetham suggests, "history cannot exist apart from its viewers and their specific and ever-changing perspectives,"²² or in this case, memories.

From this, it can be said that *The Black Box* initiates a politicization of memory by re-presenting history through memories that have been transformed into visual images. In doing this, it destabilizes stereotypical representations of Black women in society. This can be seen in the way *The Black Box* addresses the mythical construction of Black women as "mammy" figures.

Of the different negative stereotypes of Black women persisting all over North America through literature, art, media and popular culture, one of the most pervasive is the image of the Black woman as the desexualized "mammy" of the Aunt Jemima type. Usually a jolly older woman with a red polka-dotted headscarf, the mammy is always portrayed in positions of domestic servitude where she excels as primary care-

²² Cheetham and Hutcheon. Remembering Postmodernism, preface.

giver to her white employers's children.²³

Although the mother figure may represent in almost every culture the archetypal care-giver, the stereotype of Black women as mammies, that is, as "sexless archmothers" who "seem to have no children themselves"²⁴ but have plenty of time to care for others distorts the historical and social realities of Black mothers, especially when used in reference to the history of slavery. According to sociologist La Frances Rodgers-Rose, African women who arrived in America via the slave trade, came from "an environment that stressed the importance of motherhood."²⁵ That is, they came with the attitudes and beliefs that "the survival of children was paramount in the culture."²⁶ This survival was ensured by Black women through the act of mothering. As Bailey and Channer write,

the women in our history are a very important aspect of our survival. As the keepers of the traditions and the culture, they are the ones who teach and pass them onto the next generation through the act of mothering [sic].²⁷

However, as Jane Braxton's discussion of the archetype of the "outraged mother" in slave narratives illustrates, under slavery, motherhood was unavoidable because of the

²³ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White On Black: images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) 155.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁵ La Frances Rodgers-Rose, "The Black Woman: A Historical Overview," The Black Woman, ed. La Frances Rodgers-Rose (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980) 17-18.

²⁶ Janice Hale, "The Black Women and Child Rearing," Rodgers-Rose 80. The role of mother as surpassing that of wife in importance in African and African diasporic cultures has been heavily documented in African Studies and Black literature studies

²⁷ Bailey and Channer, "*Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter.*"

combined sexual and economic exploitation of Black female slaves by their white owners.²⁸ In addition to being physically abused, "Black women were raped, [and] separated from their children."²⁹ Braxton writes: "the twentieth-century Black women was outraged because of the intimacy of her oppression."³⁰

Thus, *The Black Box* can be said to function not only as a tribute to Black mothers for their strength and dedication to the continuation of Black history but also as a reclamation of the intimacy of motherhood to exclusively nurture one's own family as opposed to that of the master's. By presenting images that are both positive and re-created through the artist's act of remembering, this visual document of Black motherhood subverts the mammy stereotype of Black women through a politicization of memory. The Black mother is not remembered by the artist as a large, jovial, pancake expert, but rather as a long-memoried woman whose act of mothering Black children not only ensured the survival of Black people but also may represent a possible Black feminist link to social transformation in contemporary theoreticizations of race and gender.³¹

²⁸ Joanne M. Braxton, Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 19-20. As children born of Black women were automatically considered slaves, Black female slaves were often purchased as breeders to increase the slave holdings for their masters.

²⁹ Roberts, The Myth of Aunt Jemima 11.

³⁰ Braxton, Black Women Writing Autobiography 19.

³¹ Stanlie M. James, "Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation?" James and Busia 44-54.

The Female "Buppie": Challenging "Status-Discrepant" Attitudes

Khadejha McCall's *Strong Black Woman* is a large printed textile in different shades of brown that depicts the repeated form of a Black woman in a dress suit carrying, in one hand, a briefcase, and in the other, an infant in swaddling clothes (Plate 13). The Black woman represented here is obviously a "working mom."

Strong Black Woman addresses the construction of the female "Buppie" (Black urban professional) as it affects the image of Black women professionals and by extension their status in North American society. The female "Buppie" has been described by Cheryl Bernadette-Leggon as a "status-discrepant professional" because the ascribed status of this subject as a blue-collar worker is discrepant with that of her achieved status as a professional.³² For Black women, "the double-bind of race and gender and its effects are greater than the sum of its parts" as both minority-ascribed statuses of race and sex are operant.³³ Black women are employed but only in a place determined by others. The assumption of who is qualified for particular positions is often based on job-specific stereotypes which present some people as having expertise in a particular area over others. As a result, only a few Black women professionals occupy high visibility positions in private sector companies. According to Barbara Omolade, "the majority of Black women professionals are concentrated in the 'handmaiden' professions, predominantly female occupations such

³² Cheryl Bernadette-Leggon, "Black Female Professionals: Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status," Rodgers-Rose 190.

³³ Ibid.

as nursing, teaching (elementary, kindergarten, and nursery school, librarianship and social work)."³⁴ For Brand, Black women's socialization to become nurses and teachers "can be seen as a trajectory from maid/servant/domestic help"—both employ Black women as helping, caring subordinates.³⁵ In a sense, the problems encountered by Black women professionals in the corporate world lie in how the two dominant stereotypes of Black women, the mammy and the matriarch, continue to affect the lives of women of African descent in contemporary society.

The mammy figure, said to have originated during, and linked specifically to, the years of slavery in the United States,³⁶ is reinvented today in the "new mammy." Thus, not only is this "white fiction of Blackness"³⁷ still one of the most recognizable stereotypical images of our day thanks to the marketing experts at *Aunt Jemima's Pancake Mix*³⁸ (and—one might add, the classic cast from the film *Gone With The Wind*), the "new and improved mammy" figure exists in North American enculturation more than we realize. According to Omolade, "[i]rrespective of setting and job title, the mammy legacy continues to weave itself into the lives of

³⁴ Barbara Omolade, The Rising Song of African American Women (New York: Routledge, 1994) 54.

³⁵ Brand, "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto," Bannerji, Returning the Gaze 276.

³⁶ Jewell, From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond 37.

³⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. introduction, Facing History, ed. McElroy, xiii.

³⁸ See Marilyn Kern-Foxworth's Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994).

nearly all Black women workers."³⁹ For example, in the public sector where the so-called demammification of Black women, that is, the transition from Black women doing typical "mammy work" to clerical administrative and professional employment,⁴⁰ is most apparent, the old mammy figure is seen to have merely been modernized in the image of the "Buppie." In this way, the Black woman professional who has been successful in obtaining an administrative position is at risk of being viewed in terms of the "new mammy." Often she is the one expected to not only carry more than her normal load of administrative duties, but also to play a mother figure role for the other members of staff, regardless if she has children at home or not.⁴¹

The controlling image of the matriarch also influences how the Black woman professional is perceived by society. According to Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins,

While the mammy typifies the Black mother figure in white homes, the matriarch symbolizes the mother figure in Black homes. Just as the mammy represents the "good" Black mother, the matriarch symbolizes the "bad" Black mother... From an elite white male standpoint, the matriarch is essentially a failed mammy, a negative stigma applied to those African American women who dared to violate the image of the submissive, hard-working servant.⁴²

Thus the matriarch is a controlling image used to negate the agency of Black women

³⁹ Omolade, The Rising Song of African American Women 51

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Jewell, From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond 37-44; bell hooks, "Black Women Intellectuals." Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life, ed. bell hooks and Cornel West (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1991) 154.

⁴² Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (New York: Routledge, 1990) 73-74.

who have been able to disassociate themselves from the mammy stereotype by having successfully entered the racialized and gendered job market of North American society.

McCall's *Strong Black Woman* refutes the negative stereotypes of the mammy and the matriarch by presenting an image of the contemporary Black woman as being quite capable of raising children and maintaining the demanding itinerary of a professional career. In contrast to the "strong Black woman" in slavery times who was forced to carry the burden of raising her children only for the slave master's profit, the modern "strong Black woman" is shown to be managing her own family. Like Bailey's *Black Box*, it pays tribute to the strength and ingenuity of Black women to find ways of surviving down through the generations in whatever racist or sexist context they find themselves in.

Strong Black Woman also addresses how, according to hooks, "for fear of undermining the self-confidence of black men, many young college educated black women repress their own career aspirations."⁴³ The repetitivity, or "reiterative performative" (Judith Butler's terms) of the single image on the textile can be interpreted as a practice or strategy that challenges what is socially constructed as the universal "strong Black woman," that is, as a type A personality whose overly aggressive behaviour resulted in the so-called emasculation of Black men by taking

⁴³ bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981) 83.

from them whatever little jobs there were open to Black men in the workforce"⁴⁴ As the copy or duplication of the image can never be exactly as the original, each of the "failed copies" in McCall's textile design become alternative identities as they present other "versions" of the socially-constructed norm of the Black woman for the express purpose of challenging it.⁴⁵ "Repetition," as Trinh writes, "outplays itself as repetition, and each repetition is never the same as the former. In it, there is circulation, there is intensity, and there is innovation."⁴⁶ Thus, in its duplicity of forms, McCall's *Strong Black Woman* articulates a reality of Black women's experience that has not been entirely realized yet: the appearance of women of colour in the white male-dominated professional world. This situation is especially relevant in the Canadian context where the stereotypical construction of the female Buppie is less common than in the United States because of the differences in the labour conditions for Black women in Canada.

According to Omolade, "as a result of a complex weaving of Black Struggle to end segregation, an expanding service sector, and the determination of Black working women to move," by the 1960s in American history, Black women were no longer primarily employed as domestic workers in the private households of white families.⁴⁷ In Canada, however, the historical situation for Black women has been

⁴⁴ Butler, Bodies That Matter 95

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Trinh, When the Moon Waxes Red 190

⁴⁷ Omolade, The Rising Song of African American Women 50

very different. While demammification seems to be occurring in low profile positions, very rarely are Black Canadian women seen in positions of power. For example, Brand, writing in 1984, reported that "Black women in Toronto [were] to be found mainly in service jobs (domestic work, nursing, nursing aids), in factory work, in food and service work, and more recently, as telephone operators, hotel workers and clerks"—positions generally not conducive to upward mobility.⁴⁸ These jobs, racially constructed as "Black women's work," categorized and characterized the nature and type of Black women's work then and now.⁴⁹

According to Silvera, getting employment visas as live-in domestic workers was the main way that Black women (mainly from the West Indies) entered Canada since as early as 1955.⁵⁰ This immigration by the Canadian government of large numbers of Black Caribbean women solely to work as domestic workers which continues today has reinforced the colonial stereotype of Black women as servant in the contemporary Canadian context.⁵¹ Indeed, for the majority of Black women working under the several Canadian domestic-schemes, the exploitation of their labour

⁴⁸ Brand, "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto," Bannerji, Returning the Gaze 276.

⁴⁹ Brand, "Black Women and Work: The Impact of Racially-Constructed Gender Roles in the Sexual Division of Labour," Fireweed (Fall 1987) 35.

⁵⁰ Makeda Silvera, ed., "Immigrant Domestic Workers: Whose Dirty Laundry? Fireworks, The Best of "Fireweed" (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986) 39-46.

⁵¹ Brand, No Burden To Carry 28.

has been construed as another form of indentured slavery.⁵² In this context, McCall's *Strong Black Woman* is an especially useful and empowering image in its visualization of possibilities of Black women successful in other job markets other than that of the domestic realm.

To understand further the artistic conception of *Strong Black Woman*, the artist's own experiences of migration and professional status also claim influence. American-born McCall worked in the public sector as a college teacher since she migrated to Montreal from the United States almost two decades ago. Her career has been very satisfying and she considers herself to have been successful in her teaching profession. It has also allowed her to continue her art practice with textiles. Apart from her vocational responsibilities, McCall has also been a full time mother of three children. These hybridized facets of her lived experience has led to McCall's very positive self-image as a successful Black woman professional in North American society. It is this self-image, re-presented again and again in *Strong Black Woman*, that brings attention to the Buppie construction in the workplace as well as challenges the more common stereotype of Black women in Canada as being only "domestics."

McCall's exploration as a Black women artist on both sides of the border brings to *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* yet another textuality from which one can read the complexity of the African diasporic female subject.

⁵² See Makeda Silvera, *Silenced*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, Williams Wallace Publishers Inc., 1984); Rachel Epstein, "I Thought There was No More Slavery in Canada: West Indian Domestic Workers on Employment Visas," *Canadian Woman Studies* 11:1 (1980) 22-29

PART IV
IN RETROSPECT: RESPONSES TO *BLACK WIMMIN-
WHEN AND WHERE WE ENTER*

Aside from Susan Douglas' interview with Buseje Bailey which appeared in Canadian Woman Studies and a two-page exhibition review by Susan Crean which was published in Canadian Art, the media coverage of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* in newspapers and magazines was limited to short reviews and events columns.¹ The otherwise scarcity of printed material on the touring exhibition by the media would correspond to the general lack of attention paid by the mainstream art world to most group exhibitions of Black artists in Canada. This dismissal by many mainstream art critics through their cursory treatment of Black artists when they do write about them, or by their not writing about them at all, seems to be attributed to firmly rooted, largely Eurocentric, preconceptions of what art is. Several tendencies can be discerned from some of the reviews written on *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*.

First, for the few critics who did write about the exhibition in mainstream and alternative papers, the pervading notion was that Blackness somehow affected the

¹ See page 8, footnote 9, and the bibliography for details on which periodical were consulted. Douglas, "When I Breathe There is A Space"; Crean, "Women's Bodies, Women's Selves."

propensity for Black artists to produce lucid contemporary work worthy of artistic merit. As one critic writes:

Burdened by the effects of racism, sexism, and the resulting economic disadvantages, Black women have, sadly, lagged behind in the development of a cultural product that speaks for and about modern Black womanhood.²

This suggests that the work displayed in *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter* was not up to par and "retarditaire" in comparison to what is considered a fully developed cultural product, namely that of white male artists. Often judged on their readability within established Western precepts of art, works by artists of colour are viewed in terms of how closely they conform to what their art is expected to look like. For example, Barbara Prézeau's paintings were praised for being "particularly evocative of a sense of black heritage" because the artistic style in their rendering was immediately categorizable as being "primitive" (as distinct from "self taught").³ The attachment by art critics to the idea that this style comes more naturally to artists of African descent because of their proximity to uncivilized cultures untouched by modernization is a reflection of how racial biases continue to exist in the art world. Similarly, in a shorter review of *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter* in the Halifax Chronicle, the use of the terms "savage," "loud," and "angry"—words reminiscent of the derogatory vocabulary used to refer to people of African descent—to describe the body of work illustrated the persistent tendency of people to

² Brenda Newman, "One Day is Now," rev. of *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*, Article, Montreal Mirror 14 July-23 August 1989: 23

³ Nancy Baele, "Off the Walls," rev. of *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*, Houseworks, The Ottawa Citizen 16 March 1989: D22.

associate people of African descent with animal, bestial characteristics despite scientific studies proving to the contrary.⁴

Finally, more often than not, the political overtones and the precedents achieved by the DAWA project were brushed over in favour of an evaluation of hierarchies of mediums and connoisseurship quality of work. One critic compared their effort to the work of Faith Ringgold and Judy Chicago—the latter who ironically has been criticized for only relegating one seating to Black women at her *Dinner Table*, while another applauded the works which "were in impeccable taste and could be considered as historical and museum pieces"—no doubt an elitist evaluation which was quite the opposite of what the exhibition's curators had in mind for the exhibition.⁵

On the other side of the media coin, many writers decline reviewing exhibitions with Black artists and/or women artists because of the belief that all artistic expressions by Blacks and/or women are necessarily political and therefore are above reproach critically because of the sensitive issues at hand or dismissed as "victim art" which entreating to the viewer's sympathy and politics cannot be considered as art at all. For Black women artists this is a problem especially if they produce openly subversive art because they are effectively eradicated from media

⁴ Elissa Barnard, rev. of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, Eye Level Gallery, Halifax Chronicle-Herald 16 September 1989: E2.

⁵ Newman, "One Day is Now," rev. of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, Article, Montreal Mirror 14 July-23 August 1989: 23; Sophia Findlay, rev. of *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, A Space, Contrast 8 February 1989: 11.

coverage on this basis. This is a possible reason why *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, with its overtly political agenda, did not generate as much publicity as desired. In order to understand the exhibition from within the context in which it was conceived would have necessitated an undesirable shift in the prevailing paradigmatic art discourse of the late eighties.

The response from the audiences who visited *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, like that of the media, depended more on the location of the venue as well. For example, whether it was held in a city that had a large Black community, such as Toronto, or in a locale where the population is mainly white, such as Victoria, determined the levels of attendance and interest in the project. Judging by the comments visitors left in the DAWA guest book, public response was strong, supportive, and at times moving. Though none of the artists had the audience, the fame or the influence that other artists can claim, each had contributed to fostering a climate that asked viewers to think about the politics of representation for Black women. Thus, while the curators may "doubt that the general audience who saw it would recollect it now,"⁶ it can still be said that *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* made a strong impact on those who participated because it demonstrated an instance where a possibility for Black women became reality and would be remembered as a historical first for Black women artists in Canada.

In retrospect, a few of the artists involved in *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* have commented that had they the opportunity to do another exhibition like

⁶ Buseje Bailey, letter to the author, 1996.

this one, the parameters would have differed in that they would have probably addressed an even more diversified approach by including other women artists of colour. As Trinh writes, "the space of creativity is the space whose occupancy invites other occupancies."⁷ This takes into account recent scholarship that warns against engaging in a politics of location that creates rigid political categories, or, in the words of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, an "institutionalization of difference within feminist discourse."⁸ The subversive potentiality of diasporic art productions in Canada which have embraced all women (women of colour, white women, lesbians) remains an area of investigation.

⁷ Trinh, When the Moon Waxes Red 187.

⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience," Barrett and Phillips 74.

CLOSING DISCUSSION

Sought or denied, recognized or ignored, Black women's art continues for those who have eyes to see it.

-Burman, Charting the Journey, 298-299

The purpose of the study has been to document and critique an episode in the history of Black women artists in Canada embodied by *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Er.er*. This exhibition signalled an important turning point in the struggle for representation of Black women artists in Canadian art history by raising awareness of their presence and contribution to this area of study. It set two important precedents: 1) it was the first to attempt to address two specific experiences linked in the overall artistic narrative—being a woman and being Black, and 2) it was the first to be curated by African Canadian women. This event was also significant in the way it challenged stereotypical constructions of Black women, Black women artists, and their work. The persisting proliferation of stereotypes and racialized notions surrounding Black women and their art, some of which have been brought forward in this thesis, demonstrate that the social realities of racism and sexism are far from being eradicated from the art world and continue to infringe upon the daily lives of contemporary women artists of colour. Yet as this study has shown, despite the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism and classism, the development of a viable and dynamic "cultural product" that articulates the Black female experience has quickly taken shape

in Canada over the last decade. Finally, *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter* demonstrated that aesthetic activism in the context of the gallery or community centre space can constitute one form of intervention against racism in the arts and society in general. Notably, in September 1989, many of the pieces in *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter* were exhibited and/or included in the catalogue for the touring exhibition *Fear of Others/Art Against Racism* organized by the Arts in Action Society in Vancouver.

Racism, however, is not necessarily based on ignorance or lack of information or exposure. Its ideologies are rooted in the social, economical, political, and cultural structures of our society. Efforts to effect change, then, must concentrate on challenging, resisting, and re-viewing the hegemonic discourses upon which these structures are constructed. The naming process in it of itself as a form of intervention against racism is inadequate unless coupled with a continuous, critical evaluation of the very systems which control named agency. One way to negotiate systemic transformation is through pedagogical practice.

The dissemination of information within the education system in the Western world has traditionally been based on an authoritative, usually Eurocentric, approach. According to Mohanty, "the academy and the classroom itself are not mere sites of instruction. They are also political and cultural sites that represent accommodations and contestations over knowledges by differently empowered social constituencies"¹

¹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s," *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, ed Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren (New York: Routledge, 1994) 147.

Given this context, to make disruptions in these paradigmatic structures that would counter the effects of institutional racism would entail subversive activity that constantly questions and evaluates current hegemonic narratives such as those being used to control how people of colour are represented. This means to initiate not a mere recognition of difference, through courses on race issues, for example, which has led to "the current commodification and domestication of Third World people in the academy," but to create what Mohanty has referred to as a "culture of dissent" where the academy is held accountable for the politics of experience in the interest of people rather than the institution.² This culture can only come about upon the realization that while we must all speak from a particular place, history, and experience, we are not contained by that position.

Notwithstanding the current strategies and directions in scholarship and academic practice in addressing racism and sexism as well as the impact of projects such as *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* on the politics of representation for women artists of colour, it is necessary that we continue to confront all forms of discrimination and stereotypes, as well as the social conditions that allow them to endure, in the day-to-day practices in which we all engage. For it is only by continuous identification, constant re-naming, and challenging ubiquitous misconceptions and indeed all stereotypes that we can liberate ourselves from the neo-colonial processes that threaten to dehumanize us all.

² Ibid., 162.

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APPENDIX I

GROUP EXHIBITIONS FEATURING BLACK CANADIAN ARTISTS*

Pelekeana (CAN:BAIA-Creative Forms National Exchange Series)
(29 July - July 30, 1995) Metro Hall, Toronto
(12 August - 13 August, 1995) Vancouver Central Library, Vancouver
Artists: Jim Adams, Kim McNeilly, Khadejha McCall, among others.
Comments: Creative exchange between Black artists from Toronto and Vancouver.

Representing
80 Spadina St., Toronto
(8 February - 25 February 1995)
Curated by Leslie Beckett
Artists: Hollis Baptiste (Awalay), Karen Bell, Stephen Fakiyes (Faki), Owen Gorden, Shawn Skeir, and Ras Ston.

Inside Out
Art Starts, Toronto
(30 October - 1 December 1994)
Artists: Awalay, Faki, Shawn Skeir

The Creation... of the African-Canadian Odyssey (CAN:BAIA-CELAFI)
Power Plant, Toronto
(26 June - 7 September 1992)
Curated by Nkiru Nzegwu
Artists: Roland Bastien, June Clark-Greenberg, Stan Douglas, Grace Channer, Khadejha McCall, among others.
Comments. Featured exclusively African Canadian artists. Catalogue.

* This appendix is not an exhaustive or comprehensive list, rather it is meant to give an overview of group exhibitions featuring Black Canadian artists that have taken place in artist-run spaces over the last decade. See commentaries for details on curatorial agendas. Unless otherwise indicated, artists who participated in the exhibitions listed were all Black. More exhibitions are listed in the artists' resumes in Appendix III.

Politics and Icons of Representation (CAN:BAIA-CELAFI)

A Space Gallery, Toronto

(27 June - 1 August 1992)

Curated by Nkiru Nzegwu

Artists: Winsom, Jim Adams, Ademola Olugebefola, Dennis Awang, Chinwe Uwatse, Houston Conwill, Evangeline J. Montgomery, Napoleon Jones Henderson and Moyo Okediji, among others.

Comments: Featured international and local Black artists. Catalogue.

Telling Our Own Stories and The Films of Ousmane Sembene, A Retrospective (CAN:BAIA-CELAFI)

Studio Theatre, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto

(7 July - 12 July 1992)

Comments: First exhibition in Canada of a body of work produced or directed by Black filmmakers.

Our Views of Struggle (CAN:BAIA-CELAFI)

Gallery 44 Center for Contemporary Photography, Toronto

(4 July - 25 July, 1992)

Curated by David Sapporali

Artists: Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Michael Chambers, Mikki Ferrill, Reginald Jackson, Donna James, Carl Saunders, Kamau Tojo and Gene Young.

Comments: First international exhibition of photographic artists of African descent shown in Canada.

Ethos (CAN:BAIA-CELAFI)

York Quay Gallery, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto

(26 June - 26 July 1992)

Curated by Alana Mcknight with the assistance of June Clark-Greenberg

Artists: Floyd Sandiford, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, June Clark-Greenberg

The Black Line (CAN:BAIA-CELAFI)

Community Gallery, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto

(26 June - 12 July 1992)

Curated by Roxana Farrell and Bushra Junaid

Comments: First exhibition of contemporary African Canadian architects.

Black Women and Image (CAN:BAIA)

A Space Gallery, Toronto

(15 February - 9 March 1991)

Curated by Grace Channer and Karen Augustine

Artists: Grace Channer, Karen Augustine, Roland Jean

Comments: Featured Black male and female artists.

Weapons of Culture

A Space Gallery, Toronto
(2 August - 3 September 1988)

Curated by Buseje Bailey

Artists: Lana Lovall, Franklyn George, Grace Channer, Kim McNeilly, Claire Carew, Roland Jean, Winsom, Christine Brown, Bryan Manchew, Buseje Bailey and Norbet Watson.

Comments: Featured eleven male and female artists of West Indies origin.

Women On Site

A Space Gallery, Toronto
(1 September - 30 September 1987)

Curated by Sarah Denison

Artists: Buseje Bailey, Grace Channer, Margaret Chen, Sarah Denison, Banakonda Kennedy-Kish and Megan Yun Wong.

Comments: Featured six Toronto women artists of different cultural backgrounds. Catalogue.

Art and Community

(7 September - 28 September 1985)

A Space Gallery, Toronto

Curated by Connie Eckhart and Jane Northey.

Artists: Black Perspectives (Marcia McCurdy, Jackie Ward, David Michaelides), among others. Catalogue.

APPENDIX II

TOURING ITINERARY FOR *BLACK WIMMIN: WHEN AND WHERE WE ENTER*

Gallery	City	Dates
A Space	Toronto, Ontario	January 28 - February 25, 1989
Houseworks	Ottawa, Ontario	March 2 - March 29, 1989
XChanges	Victoria, British Columbia	May 11 - May 27, 1989
Articule	Montreal, Quebec	June 24 - July 23, 1989
Eye Level	Halifax, Nova Scotia	September 6 - September 23, 1989

APPENDIX III

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES: ARTISTS

Unless otherwise indicated by *, resumes has been up-dated by artists since *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*. Lengthier resumes have been limited to one page.

BUSEJE BAILEY

(Jamaica) Resident in Toronto

EDUCATION.

Master of Fine Arts, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1991

Bachelor of Fine Arts, York University, York, ON, 1981

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 1995 *Body Politics*, McGill University, Montreal
- 1994 *Making Connections Across Art Forms*, Eye Level Gallery, Halifax
- 1992 *Anna Leonawen Gallery*, Halifax
- 1989 *Black Heritage*, Cedarbrae Public Library, Scarborough, ON
- 1989 *Richview Public Library*, Scarborough, ON
- 1988 *North York Board of Education*, North York, ON

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 1993 *Tradition and Desire: Recent Videos*, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax
- 1991 *Memorial to the Montreal Massacre*, Eye Level Gallery, Halifax
- 1990 *Women and Culture*, Agnes Etherinton Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston
- 1989 *There's No Place Like Home*, SAW Gallery, Ottawa
- 1989 *Fear of Others/Art Against Racism*, Vancouver, Sacramento (USA), Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal, Toronto
- 1989 *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
- 1988 *Weapons of Culture*, A Space, Toronto
- 1988 *Freedomfest*, Harbourfront Community Gallery, Toronto
- 1987 *Women On Site*, A Space and Parkdale Library, Toronto
- 1987 *Visions of Black Women*, Gallery 940, Toronto
- 1986 *Black Perspectives: A Group Exhibition*, Toronto

VIDEOS:

- 1996 *Quest for History Colour*, 26 minutes
- 1995 *Identity in Isolation*, Colour, 26 minutes
- 1992 *Blood*, Colour, 7 minutes
- 1992 *Women of Strength, Women of Beauty*, 17 minutes
- 1991 *The Cost of Beauty*

CLAIRE CAREW

Resident in Toronto

EDUCATION:

Bachelor of Fine Arts, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, 1984

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 1995 *I Remember You*, Women's Art Resource Centre, Toronto
- 1992 *Transition*, Partisan Art Gallery, Toronto
- 1988 *Restless Carriers*, Gallery 203, Toronto
- 1987 *Celebration*, Fraser-Hickson Library, Montreal

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 1995 *Expressions of Our Art*, Burke's Art Gallery, Toronto
- 1993 *Juried Group Show*, Gallery 306, Toronto
- 1993 8th and 9th International Exhibition of Miniature Art, Del Bello Gallery, Toronto
- 1993 *Circa 200 Leaves*, Partisan Art Gallery, Toronto
- 1990 *Oka at the Barricades*, Partisan Art Gallery, Toronto
- 1990 *By Any Means Necessary*, Harbourfront, Toronto
- 1989 *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
- 1989 4th International Exhibition of Miniature Art, Del Bello Gallery, Toronto
- 1988 *Weapons of Culture*, A Space, Toronto
- 1985 *Fem Fest*, Gallery 940, Toronto
- 1981 *Festival of the Arts*, Malton Centre, Toronto

GRACE CHANNER

(Derbyshire, England) Resident in Toronto

EDUCATION.

Bachelor of Arts Education, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, 1978

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 1990 *Siting Resistance*, Embassy Cultural House and the Cross Cultural Learning Centre, London, Ontario
- 1988 *Resourcing Our Energy, A Space*, Toronto
- 1987 Gallery 204, Toronto
- 1985 *Black Perspectives*, Toronto
- 1979 *Relationships*, Park Royal Library, Clarkson

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 1995 *Barriers*, Metro Hall, Toronto
- 1994 Black Liberation Month, North York Board of Education, Toronto
- 1993 *Racey, Sexv*, Chinese Cultural Centre, Vancouver
- 1993 Harrison Festival of the Arts, Harrison Hot Springs, BC
- 1992 *The African Canadian Odyssey* (CELAFI), Power Plant, Toronto
- 1992 Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts, Pages Bookstore, Toronto
- 1991 *Blood Ties*, The 198 Gallery, London, England
- 1991 *Power of Perception*, Lewisham Festival of Black Photographers, Laurence House, London, England
- 1990 *Fear of Others/Art Against Racism*, Vancouver, Sacramento (USA), Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal, Toronto
- 1989 *No Place Like Home*, Gallery 101, Ottawa
- 1989 *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
- 1988 *Weapons of Culture, A Space*, Toronto
- 1987 *Mayworks, A Space*, Toronto
- 1987 *Women On Site*, Parkdale Library, Toronto
- 1987 *Site Specific, A Space*, Toronto, Gallery 101, Ottawa
- 1985 *Visions of Black Women*, Gallery 940, Toronto
- 1985 *Black Perspectives: A Group Exhibition*, Toronto
- 1982 *Small and Precious Objects*, Gallery Quan, Toronto

VIDEOS:

- 1993 *Long Time Comin'*, Director Dionne Brand, NFB Canada
- 1990 *Sisters in the Struggle*, Director Dionne Brand, NFB Canada

WINSOM DARRELL

Resident in Toronto

EDUCATION:

Jamaica School of Art, 1968

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS.

- 1995 Gallery Connexion, Fredericton, NB
- 1994 *"O Canada"*, Women's Art Resource Centre, Toronto
- 1993 Multimedia Installation, YYZ Gallery, Toronto
- 1985 *Afro-Jamaican Fabrics*, KAAI Gallery, Kingston, Ontario
- 1985 Jamaican Consulate, Toronto

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 1996 *"This is not a Poem. This is a Summer Quilt."* Textile Museum, Toronto
- 1993 Harrison Festival of the Arts, Harrison Hot Springs, BC
- 1993 African Heritage Educators Network, North York, ON
- 1993 *This Ain't Vogue ! Heads Above the Waters*, SAW Gallery, Ottawa
- 1992 *Feathers of the Phoenix*, A Space, Toronto
- 1992 *The Passage*, Harrison Hot Springs, BC
- 1992 *Rites of Passage: Politics and Icons of Representation (CELA-I)*, A Space, Toronto
- 1992 National Black Arts Festival, Atlanta, Georgia (USA)
- 1991 *Blood and Power*, Nightwood Theatre, Toronto
- 1990 *WOMAD*, Toronto
- 1990 *Black Cloth*, Harrison Festival of the Arts, Harrison Hot Springs, BC
- 1990 Textile Show: Belleville Afro-Caribbean Club, Belleville, Ontario
- 1990 Works on paper, KAAI Gallery, Kingston, Ontario
- 1989 Festival of Nations, International Institute of Minnesota (USA)
- 1989 *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
- 1988 *Weapons of Culture*, A Space, Toronto
- 1988 *Freedomfest*, Harbourfront Community Gallery, Toronto
- 1988 *Domination, Resistance, Liberation*, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario
- 1987 International Women's Week, Ottawa, Ontario
- 1986 Folklife Pavillion, EXPO '86, Vancouver
- 1986 Texas Bicentennial Celebrations, Dallas, Texas (USA)
- 1986 One of a Kind Show, Toronto, Ontario
- 1984 Women's Art Festival, Kingston, Ontario
- 1982 Kingston Artists Association Inc., Kingston, Ontario
- 1973 Festival of Fine Arts, Jamaica

DZIAN LACHARITE

Resident in Montreal

EDUCATION:

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Concordia University, Montreal, 1988

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 1995 Black History Month, Artkore, Montreal
- 1994 *Heavy Metal*, Jewellery Exhibition, Maison de la culture, Plateau Mont-Royal, Montreal
- 1994 *D'art et d'argent*, Jewellery Exhibition, Galerie Simon Blais, Montreal
- 1994 *Towards a Black Canadian Art*, Café Kaloum, Montreal
- 1993 *Metalmorphose*, CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal, Montreal
- 1993 *An Exhibition of Black Artists in Montreal*, McGill University, Montreal
- 1992 *Gathering: The Memorial Project*, A Space, Toronto
- 1992 *Black? Untitled #1*, Pitt Gallery, Vancouver
- 1992 *Birthtales*, A Space, Toronto
- 1991 Harrison Festival of the Arts, Harrison Hot Springs, BC
- 1991 Hornby Hall Gallery, Vancouver
- 1990 *A Woman Show*, Hornby Hall Gallery, Vancouver
- 1989 *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
- 1987 Concordia University, Montreal
- 1986 Michigan Festival, Michigan (USA)
- 1985 New England Festival, Connecticut (USA)
- 1984 *Open Studio*, Studio Wellington, Montreal
- 1983 Student Exhibition, Visual Arts Department, Concordia University, Montreal
- 1982 *Night on the Town*, Anderson Gallery, Montreal
- 1981 Student Exhibition, Sculpture Department, Concordia University, Montreal
- 1980 Student Exhibition, Ceramics Department, Concordia University, Montreal
- 1979 *Batik*, Vieux-Montréal, Montreal

KHADEJHA (IRVA MAE) MCCALL
 (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA) Resident in Vancouver

EDUCATION:

Master of Education, Teaching of Art, McGill University, Montreal, 1988
 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Concordia University, Montreal, 1988
 Diploma in Art Therapy, Concordia University, Montreal, 1983
 Master of Art Education, Sir George Williams University, Montreal

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

1993 *And Miles To Go Before I Sleep*, Maison de la culture (NDG), Montreal
 1992 *Boston Public Library*, Roxbury Branch, Boston, MA (USA)
 1991 *Installation*, Strand Theatre
 1988 *Indigo Treasures*, Toronto
 1988 *Cultures Canadian*, National Capital Commission, Ottawa
 1980 *Sans Nom*, Power House Gallery, Montreal

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

1993 *An Exhibition of Black Artists in Montreal*, McGill University, Montreal
 1992 *The African Canadian Odyssey* (CELAFI), Powerplant, Toronto
 1992 *Beyond 1992, A Space*, Toronto
 1991 *Metro Art*, Montreal
 1991 *Affirmation, Art in the Workplace*, Offices of the Minister of Immigration and Culture, Province of Ontario
 1990 *Fear of Others/Art Against Racism*, Vancouver, Sacramento (USA), Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal, Toronto
 1990 *Design Montreal*, Montreal
 1989 Faculty Exhibition, Dawson College, Humanities Department, Montreal
 1989 Student Exhibition, Ceramics Department, Concordia University, Montreal
 1989 *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
 1989 *Fear of Others*, Group Nova Scotia, Vancouver
 1989 *Liberte Yogurt*, Montreal
 1988 Student Exhibition, Ceramics Department, Concordia University, Montreal
 1988 Faculty Exhibition, Dawson College, Humanities Department, Montreal
 1988 *Women of Color*, Concordia University, Montreal
 1987 Student Exhibition, Ceramics Department, Concordia University, Montreal
 1987 *Women's Work*, Concordia VAV Gallery, Montreal
 1986 Student Exhibition, Printmaking Department, Concordia University, Montreal
 1984 *Artists painted T-Shirts*, Yahouda Meir Gallery, Montreal
 1982 *Fiberous*, Powerhouse Gallery, Montreal
 1975 *Black Students Association*, Concordia University, Montreal

KIM (MOSA) MCNEILLY*
(Toronto) Resident in Toronto

EDUCATION:

Ontario College of Art, 1988

EXHIBITIONS:

- 1995 *Inter+depend*, A Space, Toronto
 1989 *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
 1988 *Weapons of Culture*, A Space, Toronto
 1988 *Caribana*, Metro Convention Centre, Toronto
 1988 *Freedomfest*, Harbourfront, Toronto
 1987 *Ba Thari*, Regent Park Community Centre, Toronto

FOLUKE OLUBAYO*
(London, Ontario) Resident in London, Ontario

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 1989 *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
 1985 *Visions of Black Women*, Gallery 940, Toronto
 1985 *Black Perspectives: A Group Exhibition*, Toronto

CHLOE ONARI*
(Barbados) Resident in Toronto

EDUCATION:

Ontario College of Art, Brenda Le Poidevin School of Weaving, 1976

EXHIBITIONS:

- 1989 *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
 1988 *Freedomfest*, Harbourfront, Toronto

BARBARA PREZEAU*

(Port-au-Prince, Haïti) Resident in Haïti

EDUCATION:

Bachelors of Fine Arts, University of Ottawa, 1988

Ecole Nationale des Arts (Histoire de l'art), Haïti

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

1987 *Exhibitions and Sale of New Works by Barbara Prezeau*, Houseworks, Ottawa

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

1994 *An Encounter Between Two Worlds as Seen by Haïti's Artists, 1492-1992*, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull

1994 *Deux peintres haïtiens du Canada: Barbara Prézeau-Stephenson et Ronald Mevs*, Galerie Calligrammes, Ottawa

1989 *Black Wimmen: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax

1988 *6e coup d'éclat*, Galerie Michel Tétréault, Montreal

1988 Black History Month, Houseworks, Ottawa

- *Art et Bricolage*, Galerie Difussion 3, Montreal

- Semaine internationale de la femme, Galerie 115, Hotel de Ville d'Ottawa, Ottawa

SULIH WILLIAMS**(Barbados) Resident in Toronto****EDUCATION:**

University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, 1989
 Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, 1983
 Grant MacEwan College, Edmonton, AB, 1981
 University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, 1979

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

1996 Paintings and Drawings, INI Dubwise Gallery and Capuccino Bar, Vancouver
 1992 Paintings, Book Mantel Women's Bookstore, Vancouver
 1992 *New Cycle*, La Quena, Vancouver
 1987 Edmonton Women's Centre Offices, Edmonton, AB

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

1995 *Kuumba*, University of British Columbia, Vancouver
 1995 *Half-bred, Cross-race, Culture, Sexual Identity*, Grunt Gallery and Pitt Gallery, Vancouver
 1994 Black History Month Exhibition, University of British Columbia, Vancouver
 1993 *Telling Relations: Sexuality and the Family*, Grunt Gallery, Vancouver
 1992 *The Billboard Art Series Public Art Exhibition*, Active Artifacts Cultural Association, Vancouver
 1992 *¿Black? Untitled #1*, Pitt Gallery, Vancouver
 1989 *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter*, Toronto, Ottawa, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax
 1987 Figurative Clay Sculpture Student Exhibition, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
 1987 Black History Month Exhibition, Canadian Black Coalition, Scotia Place, Edmonton, AB
 1986 Black History Month Exhibition, Canadian Black Coalition, Scotia Place, Edmonton, AB
 1982 Faculty of Fine Art Students' Association, Concordia University, Montreal

PLATES

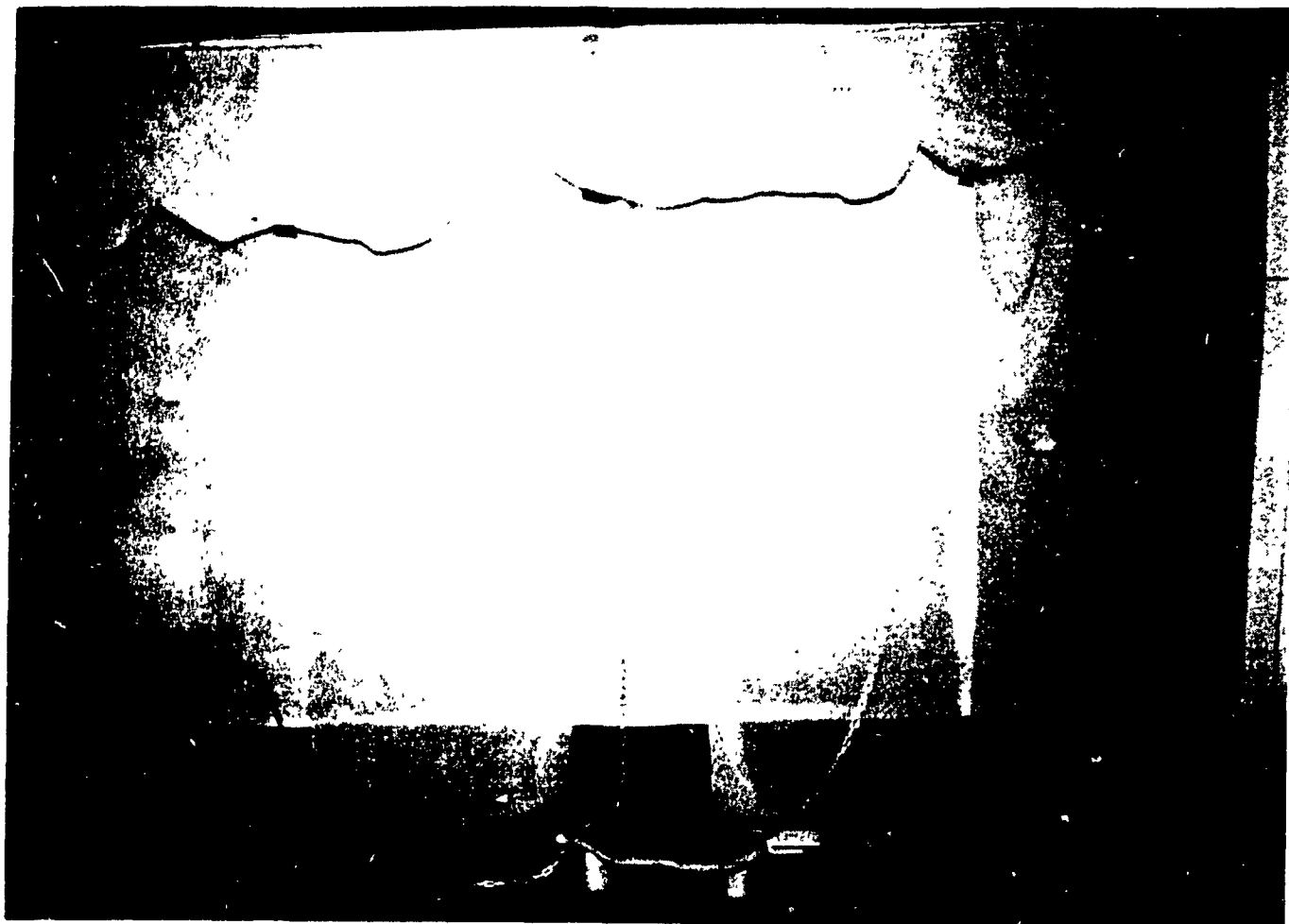


Plate 1

Winsom Darrell
Kukubuka, 1989.

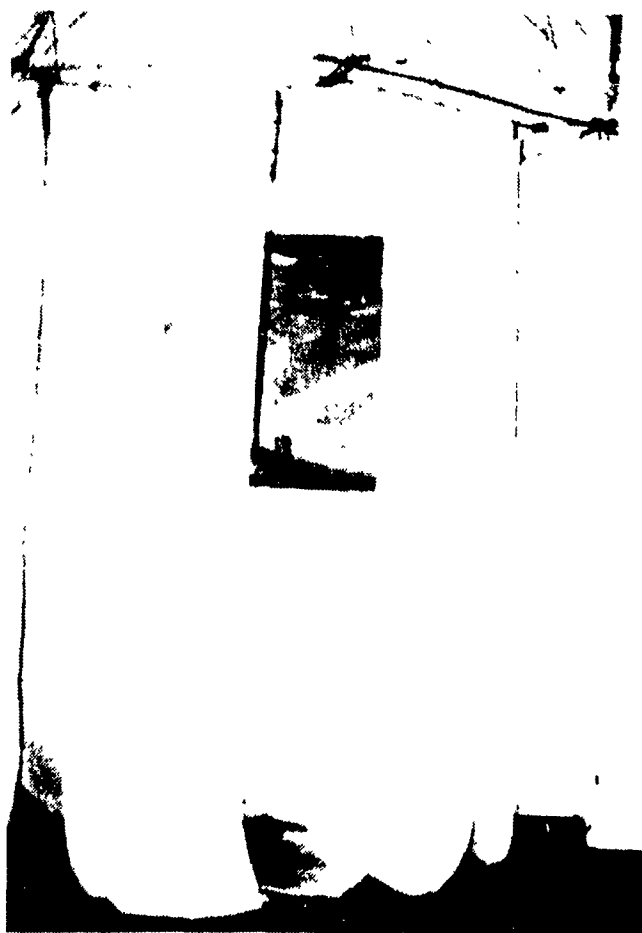



Plate 2

Suli Williams

Happy Birthday Daisy, through her hands, 1989.



**DIASPORIC AFRICAN
WOMEN'S ART**

**BLACK
WIMMIN
WHEN
AND
WHERE
WE
ENTER**

BUSEJÉ BAILEY
CLAIR CAREW
GRACE CHANNER
DZIAN
FOLUKÉ DLUBAYO
CHLOE ONAIRI
KHADEJA
KIM McNEILLY
BARBARA PRÉZÉAU
SULI WILLIAMS
WINSOM

JANUARY 28 - SEPTEMBER 28, 1989

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September 6-23, 1989
Opening reception, September 5 at 8 pm
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We gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of community members and the Ontario Arts Council
Art by Suli Williams •
Poster Design: Stephanie Martin Type: Type A

Plate 3

Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter Poster
featuring Preliminary Drawing of Suli Williams'
Happy Birthday Daisy, through her hands, 1989.



Plate 4

Claire Carew

Here I Stand, 1989. Detail.



Plate 5

Kim McNeilly

Father of Africa, Mother of the Jews, Black Woman, 1989.

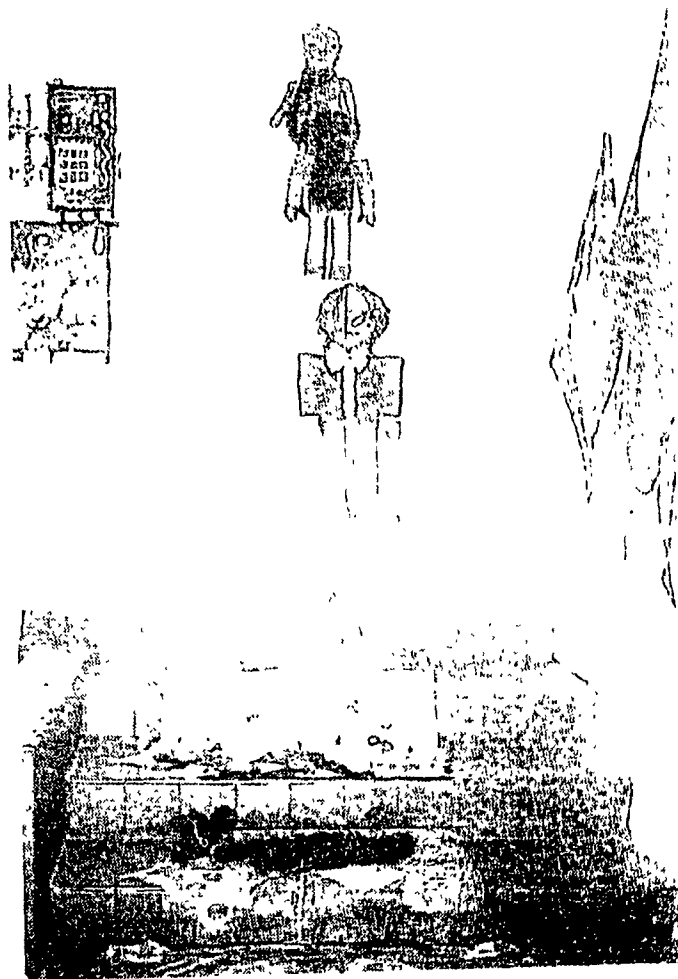


Plate 6

Chloë Onari

Betha De Kool Sony "Me No Pinko Me Red", 1989.



Plate 7

Barbara Prézeau
St. Soleil, 1989.



Plate 8

Barbara Prézeau
Vêve, 1989.



Plate 9

Dzian Lacharité
Right Time, Right Place, 1989.

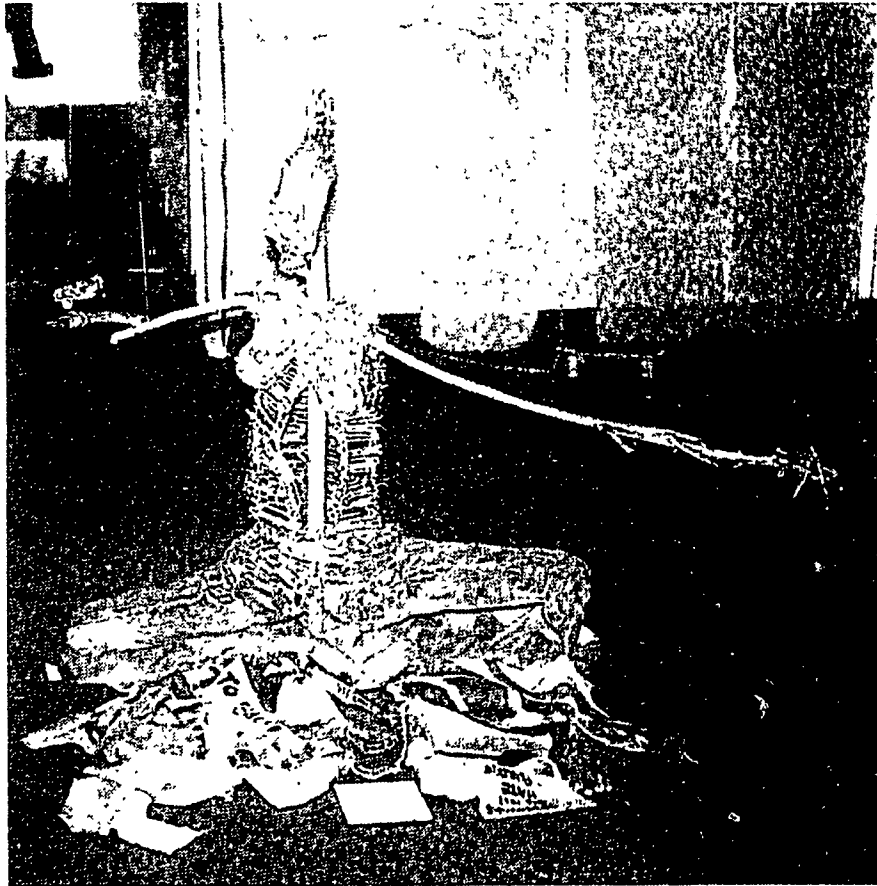


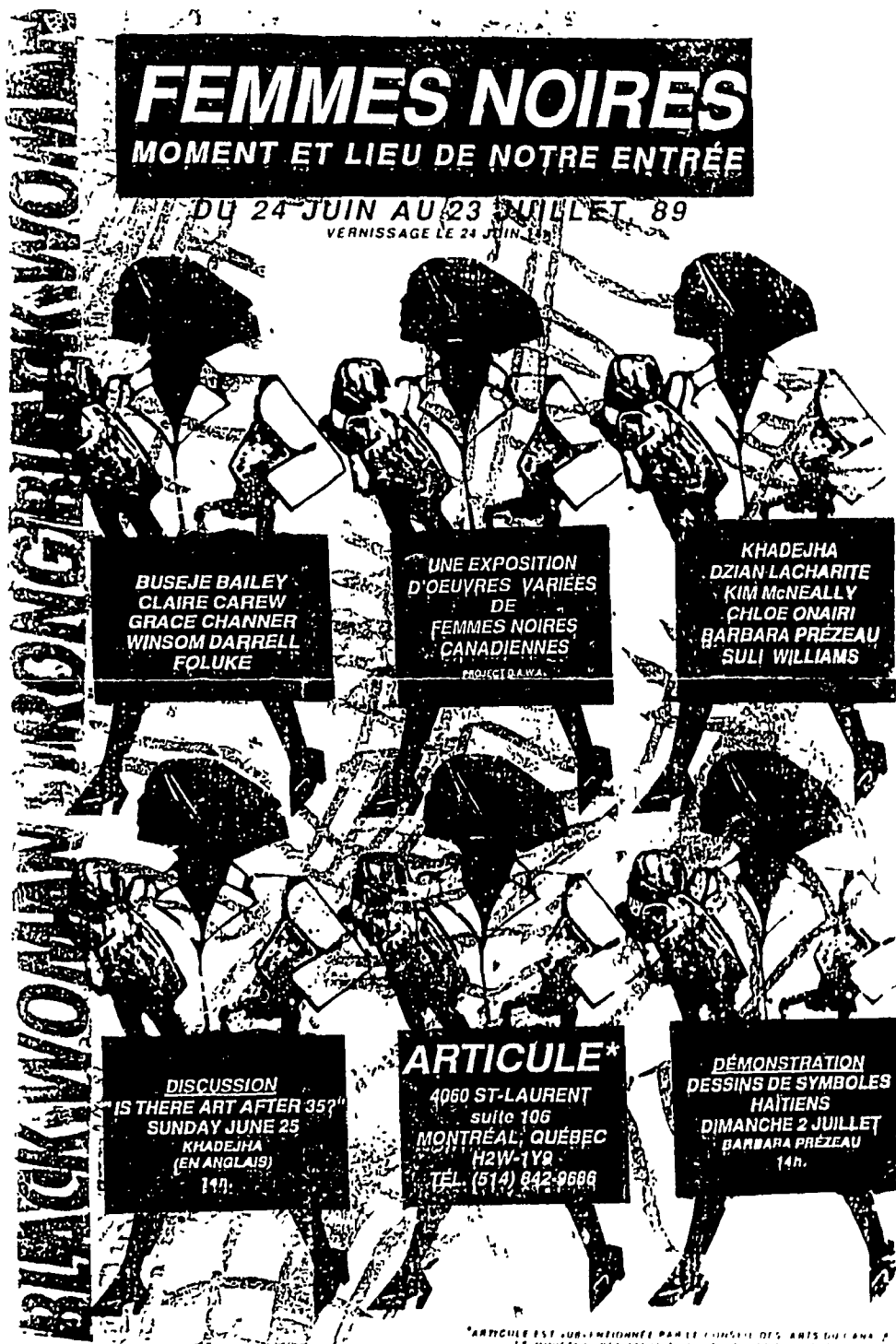
Plate 10

Grace Channer
Ba Thari, 1989.



Plate 11

Khadejha McCall
One Day Soon, 1989.



FEMMES NOIRES
 MOMENT ET LIEU DE NOTRE ENTRÉE

DU 24 JUIN AU 23 JUILLET 89
 VERNISSAGE LE 24 JUIN 1989

BUSEJE BAILEY
 CLAIRE CAREW
 GRACE CHANNER
 WINSOM DARRELL
 FOLUKE

UNE EXPOSITION
 D'OEUVRES VARIÉES
 DE
 FEMMES NOIRES
 CANADIENNES
 PROJECT Q.A.W.A.

KHADEJHA
 DZIAN LACHARITE
 KIM McNEALLY
 CHLOE ONAIRI
 BARBARA PRÉZEAU
 SULI WILLIAMS

DISCUSSION
 "IS THERE ART AFTER 35?"
 SUNDAY JUNE 25
 KHADEJHA
 (EN ANGLAIS)
 14h.

ARTICULE*
 4060 ST-LAURENT
 suite 106
 MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC
 H2W-1Y9
 TÉL. (514) 842-9688

DÉMONSTRATION
 DESSINS DE SYMBOLES
 HAÏTIENS
 DIMANCHE 2 JUILLET
 BARBARA PRÉZEAU
 14h.

*ARTICULE EST SUB-VENCIONNÉE PAR LE CONSEIL DES ARTS DU QUÉBEC / LE MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES CULTURELLES ET DES LOISIRS / LE CONSEIL DES ARTS DE LA C. O. M.

Plate 12

Femmes noires: moment et lieu de notre entrée Poster featuring
 Reproduction of Khadejha McCall's *Strong Black Woman*, 1989.

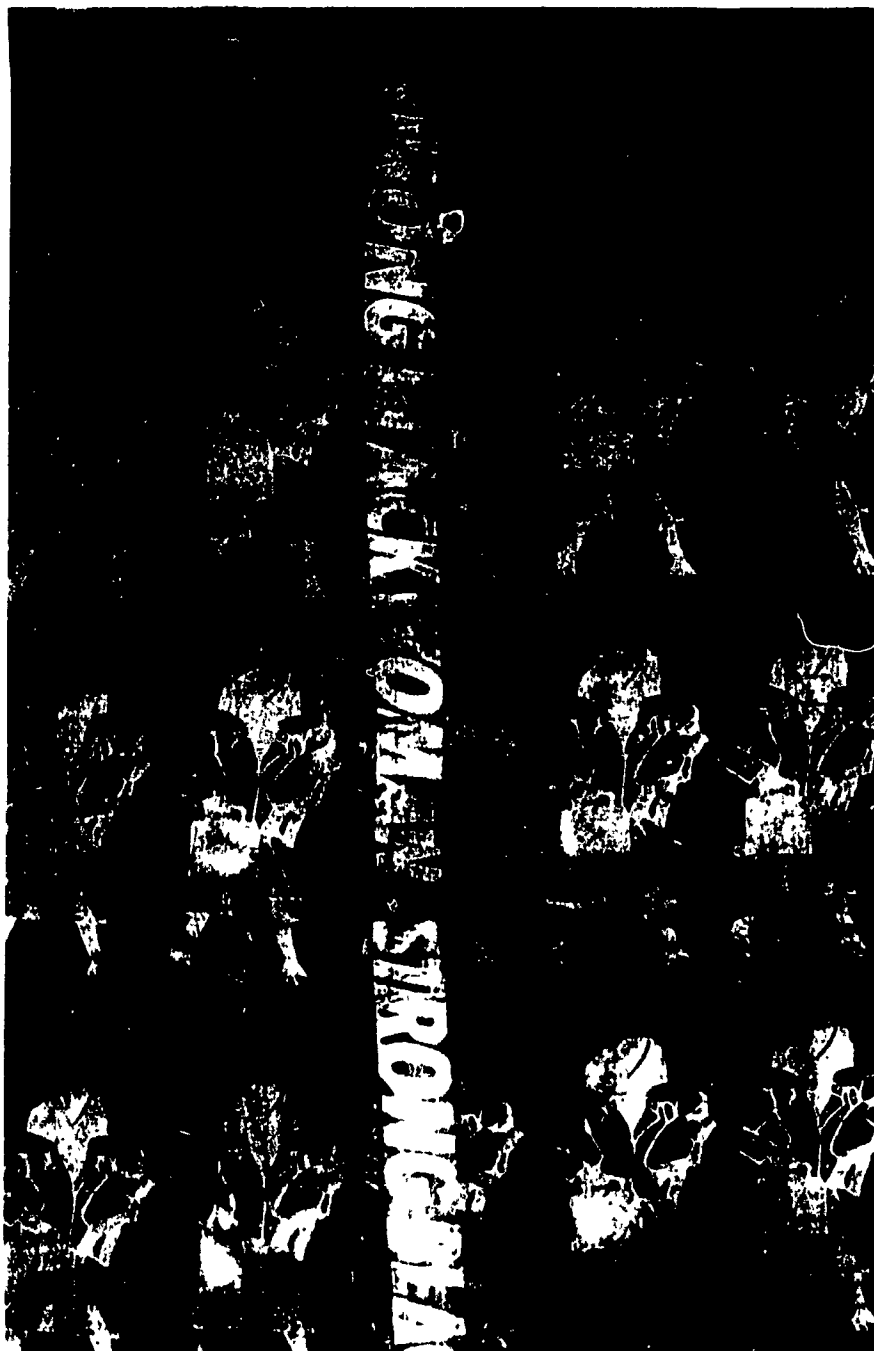


Plate 13

Khadejha McCall
Strong Black Woman, 1989



Plate 14 Buseje Bailey
The Black Box, 1989