

Looking Back Half A Century, Almost

Sur Rodney (Sur) on Black representation in *Art AIDS America*

<p>1969 Protesting <i>Harlem On My Mind,</i> 1900-1968 at the Metropolitan Museum</p>	<p>At the end of the Civil Rights Movement, the Metropolitan Museum of Art organized Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968. The exhibition was meant to explore the history and value of the predominantly Black community in Harlem. Organizing what was to be one of the most controversial exhibitions in United States history, the Metropolitan decided to exclude Harlemites from participating in the exhibition planning and exclude artwork by Harlem’s mushrooming artist community from the exhibition.</p>
<p>1981 Mlle Bourgeoise Noire invades <i>Persona</i> at the New Museum</p>	<p>A little more than a decade later Lorraine O’Grady in her Mlle Bourgeoise Noire persona would invade the opening of “Persona,” a 1981 exhibition at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. The exhibit featured nine artists using personas in their work. Mlle Bourgeoise Noire called it “The Nine White Personae Show.”</p> <p>•</p> <p>When invited to give the outreach lectures to school-children for the show, she’d replied, “Let’s talk after the opening.” Following the opening, she was dis-invited from any outreach activity.</p>
<p>1995 Michael Kimmelman’s Review <i>Culture and Race:</i> <i>Still on America’s Mind</i> in the New York Times</p>	<p>Wherein he reports: <i>“Three weeks ago, the Schomburg Center in Harlem organized a symposium to coincide with the new edition of the Harlem on My Mind catalogue. The symposium only underscored the sense that the issues raised a quarter of a century ago by that ill-starred show are still alive today. A look back on the exhibition reveals this country’s deep-seated and seemingly intractable racial problems. But it is also a reminder that cultural institutions are, and have always been, crucibles for the shaping of our national identity.”</i></p> <p>•</p> <p><i>“Clearly, too little has changed since 1969.”</i></p> <p>Mr. Schoener admits in his new introduction. <i>“I honestly believed that I could identify with the American black culture I was depicting. For a very short period in my life, I believed that I could see things from a black perspective and believed that I was tuned in to values that were important to blacks.”</i></p> <p>•</p> <p>Kimmelman responds: <i>“Many white Americans like to think that they are more enlightened, more savvy, that they would not make the same fatal presumptions.”</i></p>
<p>2007 Bridget R. Cooks research in <i>Black Artists and Activism:</i> <i>Harlem on My Mind (1969)</i> published in the University of Kansas, American Studies Journal</p>	<p><i>“In the following decade that details the struggles of Harlem-based artists to confront and challenge the unethical machinations of the institutional epicenter of the postwar international art world. This discussion addresses the critical appropriations of the event forged by black visual artists. The Harlem on My Mind controversy eventually pushed mainstream art institutions to feature black art exhibitions and launch community-based initiatives in support of black talents. The response of Black visual artists to the exhibition was an important part of the nascent Black Arts Movement’s development of an institutional infrastructure necessary to nourish Black art production and exhibition, and to redefine the political and aesthetic dynamics of the moment.”</i></p>
<p>2015 Protesting <i>Art, AIDS, America</i> at the Tacoma Art Museum</p>	<p>Better now than never.</p> <p>•</p> <p>Where AIDS matters, BLACK LIVES MATTER</p>