



Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance (Sexual Cultures)

Uri McMillan

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Tracing a dynamic genealogy of performance from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, Uri McMillan contends that black women artists practiced a purposeful self-objectification, transforming themselves into art objects. In doing so, these artists raised new ways to ponder the intersections of art, performance, and black female embodiment.

McMillan reframes the concept of the avatar in the service of black performance art, describing black women performers' skillful manipulation of synthetic selves and adroit projection of their performances into other representational mediums. A bold rethinking of performance art, *Embodied Avatars* analyzes daring performances of alterity staged by "ancient negress" Joice Heth and fugitive slave Ellen Craft, seminal artists Adrian Piper and Howardena Pindell, and contemporary visual and music artists Simone Leigh and Nicki Minaj. Fusing performance studies with literary analysis and visual culture studies, McMillan offers astute readings of performances staged in theatrical and quotidian locales, from freak shows to the streets of 1970s New York; in literary texts, from artists' writings to slave narratives; and in visual and digital mediums, including engravings, photography, and video art. Throughout, McMillan reveals how these performers manipulated the dimensions of objecthood, black performance art, and avatars in a powerful re-scripting of their bodies while enacting artful forms of social misbehavior.

The Critical Lede interviews Uri McMillan

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