

SPOTLIGHT: Iona Rozeal Brown
Title of Piece: Untitled I (female) & Untitled II (male)



El Presenter: Elaine Pruett

Date: November 4, 2009

Title of Piece: Untitled I & Untitled II

Year created: 2003

Artist: Iona Rozeal Brown

Five points of interest about this artist:

1. African American artist Iona Brown based these silkscreens on the Japanese fad, Ganguro, literally “blackface,” in Tokyo in the 1990s. Ganguro took its inspiration from African American hip hop. This fad has peaked in Japan, but remnant of it can still be found in parts of Tokyo. Typically, teenage girls (mostly) would peroxide their hair, weave it into cornrows or dreadlocks, put on tanning makeup, use black ink for eyeliner, and white concealer for lipstick and eyeshadow. Platform shoes, sarongs, miniskirts and plastic jewelry completed their look. This look was seen by older Japanese as extreme and was widely criticized.
2. Brown went to Japan to study this fad. “I discovered they knew nothing of the history only the images” she reported later. When she returned to US, she produced this work, which she calls “Afro-Asiatic Allegories.” Basing her silkscreens on the ukiyo-e tradition of Japanese woodblocks of geishas, samurai, and Kabuki actors, brown has produced what one critic calls “Shinto Hip-Hop.”
3. Brown finds parallels between the traditions of ukiyo-e and hip-hop: “the amorous, fashionable clothes and decadent excess portrayed in ukiyo-e and the high fashion, celebration of material success and love of bling-bling you get in hip-hop.”

4. In the two pieces at the JSMA, the woman appears in peroxide-tipped dreadlocks, wearing both an Afro comb and a traditional Japanese jairpin. Her kimono is open revealing a bikini top. Most importantly, she is in blackface. The actor print is also in blackface, a kimono, cornrows and a logo t-shirt, holding a brand-name drink.

Possible questions to use when discussing this piece with museum visitors:

1. What do you notice about these two pieces?
2. Do these pieces remind you of other works you have seen today?
3. Have you ever been influenced by a fad in dress or hairstyle?

Tour Type: Learning to Look; People, Portraits, and Places

JSMA Collection:

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