

## Reviews

### The Bodies That Were Not Ours Coco Fusco

by Christian Bumbarra Thompson (c) 2002



In *The Bodies That Were Not Ours*, Cuban American artist and writer Coco Fusco brings us a collection of essays and interviews spanning the early nineties till now.

It is rare that one will discover such a global thinker such as Coco Fusco whose vision manages to encompass issues within contemporary art such as racial identity, performance, the black body and public space with a conscience of history and power.

Fusco exposes the subtleties of prejudice within the art world and the political spaces our bodies occupy. In the essay 'Bodies That were Not Ours' Coco explores the historical possession of the black body through the works of African American artists Adrian Piper, Lorna Simpson, Kara Walker, Pat Ward Williams and Lyle Ashton Harris.

Fusco also brings us the complexities of Black/Blak art and the sociological possession of the black body

"Black people's entry into the symbolic order of Western culture hinged on the theft of their bodies, the severing of will from their bodies, the reduction of their bodies to things, and the transformation of their sexuality into an expression of otherness".

In *Mexarcane International* Fusco teams up with fellow artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena as they sell the desire of the black body. Fusco and Gomez-Pena pose as Amerindians in their collaborative performance work *Mexarcane International* in which they offer the service of exotic culture to the patrons of a shopping mall. Fusco navigates us through this performance locating the position of the black body as a commodity both in a historical and contemporary context.

Coco Fusco is a consummate performance artist whose work is a fusion of her own experience and an exploration into the morphing of the Black body/identity as an object of political and social disenfranchisement. In her performance piece *Votos (Vows)* Fusco returns to the tradition of performance art as the physical as she scrawls text across walls and allows the audience to cut off lengths of her own hair. Coco returns to a kind of performance art that once again highlights the significance of the artists and viewers bodies and reliance upon one another but also follows on with the tradition of mystics as social outlets.

What we learn from Coco Fusco's texts are moments in the process of responding to political, social or racial tensions and the way in which Fusco and her various collaborators develop an innate political sense of it. Coco places her subjects within an intricate web of histories of the social and political importance framing the issues in which she chooses to discuss.

I often find American art writings to be dense, attempting to discuss everything at once rather than exploring the central aspects of ones discussion. Fusco delivers within her texts a heavy research base and an intense understanding of her homelands political crisis, this is in no way a downfall- but be aware Fusco's writings are meaty and rich.

Fusco interviews and discusses the work of leading artists such as Chris Ofili winner of the Turner prize, American Artist David Hammons and our very own Ms Tracey Moffatt.

I found this particular interview to be a great source of entertainment as Tracey takes Coco into her world and partially into the realm of her work. I could not help but laugh out loud as Fusco describes her first encounter with a Comme Des Garcon clad Moffatt and wondered about her very misleading representation of Aboriginal Australia.

Tracey is hesitant to discuss in great detail the motivations and exact trajectory of her work and this in itself manages to engage the reader in a conceptual game of cat and mouse. The pair end up in an old pub somewhere in regional NSW eating dim sum drinking champagne and singing convict songs reminiscent of the groups respective places of birth.

Amidst this romp with Ms Tracey, Fusco brings with it a great analysis of series such as *Up In The Sky* and *Something More*. Coco places Tracey Moffatt within the context of great artists of colour and it is interesting to see Moffatt's work resisting the very establishment that oppresses artist of colour within an international and national contemporary art scene. Moffatt refuses to be submitted to the role of victim instead she seduces the viewer with a multi-layered narrative. Whether what Moffatt does within the context of her own work is right or wrong is a separate discussion but she does manage, in many ways to use the keys of her supposed oppression as an artist of colour to react against this process, this has to be an admirable quality.

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