



**RIGHTS  
RADICALS +  
REVOLUTIONS**

BLACK GOSSAMER  
November 22, 2011, 4-6:00pm  
Glass Curtain Gallery  
1104 South Wabash

[www.colum.edu/criticalencounters](http://www.colum.edu/criticalencounters)

**Welcome to the Café Society meeting for the Black Gossamer exhibition. Please find an excerpt from the curator's statement below:**

"Clothing and textiles have long transformed from a basic need to an expression of self, tacitly signifying deep-set beliefs, pulling from memory (both tactile and cognitive), cementing our perceived social status, and declaring anything from gender to mood. Black Gossamer showcases eight black contemporary artists who use and draw inspiration from fashion to explore and uncover recent revolutions in black identity – even challenging the very concept of the 'black artist.'

...Through a variety of artistic mediums, the works bridge motifs between varying areas of the industry from home furnishing and apparel textiles to fashion magazines, branding and imagined retail consumption scenarios. In this framework layers of meaning inform ideas on class and power, economics, beauty dysmorphia, and gender envy. Overall, there is a sense that the socially-constructed parameters of black identity are expanding and evolving."

In preparation for the discussion we invite you to reflect on the following questions as you view the exhibit and explore the readings:

**Café Society Q&A**

- 1). What aspect of this exhibit do you find radical or revolutionary?
- 2). Who do you consider a "radical" of fashion (historically and today) and why do/did they seek out change?
- 3). Why is fashion a component of identity? Does the linking of fashion and black identity position African Americans as tools for consumption (i.e. we are what we consume)?
- 4). Does clothing designed by one's own race provide the wearer with a sense of empowerment? Why or why not?
- 5). What are some ways to reclaim our identity from the companies that market to us? How can we become more than tools for consumption?

**What is Café Society?**

The Critical Encounters Café Society consists of a series of conversations where we come together and discuss important social issues relating to our chosen focus. This year's focus is **Rights, Radicals + Revolutions**. What sets the Café Society apart from other events is that our goal is not create group consensus. Instead the object of these discussions is to provoke critical thought on the topic at hand so that participants can enjoy in a meaningful exchange of ideas and perspectives.

**Café Society Ground Rules**

- 1). Listen actively. Listening is not simply waiting for your turn to speak.
- 2). Respect the facilitator and stay focused on the theme.
- 3). Be responsible but refrain from using harsh or offensive language even if the discussion gets heated. You can disagree with out being disagreeable.



"Revolution is not a one time event." -Audre Lorde

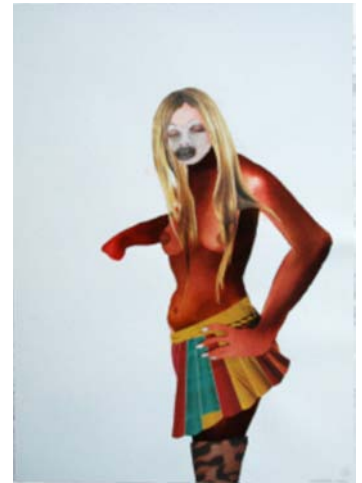




Marion Griffith-Louis  
*Powder Box to School Girl*  
Series, 2009



Myra Greene  
*Hairy Pillow Series*, 2001



Wangechi Mutu  
*Untitled Pin Up*, 2001

### For further consideration...

From "Stylin' Out," in *Slaves to Fashion* by Monica L Miller:

Miller, Monica L. *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2009. Print.

"Black people are known for "stylin' out," dressing to the nines, showing their sartorial stuff, especially when the occasion calls for it and, more tellingly, often when the occasion does not. In contemporary culture, this "stylin' out" takes a number of forms and happens in multiple locations, from the high style seen at hip-hop fashion mogul Sean "Diddy" Coombs' famous "White Parties" in the Hamptons, to any black church on Easter Sunday, to the locker room after the Superbowl championship, when a winning player positions an oversize baseball cap 45 degrees off center on his head before the television camera turns to him. In all of these situations, different signals are being sent about how each dresser sees himself and how he wants to be seen by others. For Diddy, wearing an icy-white haute couture Valentino suit after a lifetime in track suits and sneakers signifies his success as a businessman and arrival on an exclusive social scene. Yet, in the black entertainment industry, some form of dandyism or play with costume and couture has always been de rigueur. For those attending church services, a smart three-piece suit, a hat, gloves, maybe even a pocket square communicates self-respect, community pride and an appreciation of the joyful solemnity of the occasion. The spiritual has always had a sartorial dimension for black people in America, as many slaves were allowed to dress in their finest clothes but once a week, on Sunday. For the football player, donning the outsized baseball hat modified out of its functionality to become a fashion accessory, at once establishes individuality within a larger group of teammates and belonging to a urban, edgy subgroup of black athletes who, along with hip-hop and rap musicians, have been instrumental in transforming sports clothing into a billion-dollar fashion industry. In each of these cases of celebrities and ordinary people, the dandyism practiced is both personal and political, about individual image and group regard, and begs to be read from both an intra-racial and inter-racial perspective. "Stylin' out," like any performative act, needs an actor and an audience; this audience can be anything from the self in a mirror to fellow strollers on Harlem's 125<sup>th</sup> Street to the international media. The messages sent out by the black well-dressed must be interpreted by their viewers; black dandyism takes on meaning as black style communicates moments of mobility and fixity, depending on who is looking."



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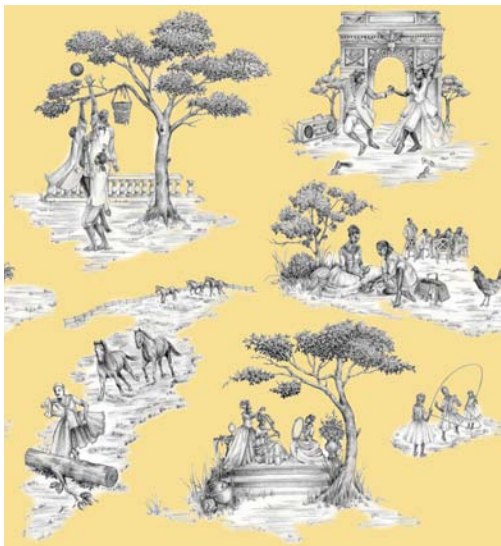


Excerpt from Michael Eric Dyson's "Be Like Mike? Michael Jordan and the Pedagogy of Desire":  
Dyson, Michael Eric, *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004

"Michael Jordan has helped seize upon the commercial consequences of black cultural preoccupation with style and the commodification of the black juvenile imagination at the site of the sneaker. At the juncture of the sneaker, a host of cultural, political, and economic forces and meanings meet, collide, shatter, and are reassembled to symbolize the situation of contemporary black culture.

The sneaker reflects at once the projection and stylization of black urban realities linked in our contemporary historical moment to rap culture and the underground political economy of crack, and reigns as the universal icon for the culture of consumption. The sneaker symbolizes the ingenious manner in which black cultural nuances of cool, hip, and chic have influenced the broader American cultural landscape. It was black street culture that influenced sneaker companies' aggressive invasion of the black juvenile market in taking advantage of the increasing amounts of disposable income of young black men as a result of legitimate and illegitimate forms of work.

Problematically, though, the sneaker also epitomizes the worst features of the social production of desire and represents the ways in which moral energies of social conscience about material values are drained by the messages of undisciplined acquisitiveness promoted by corporate dimensions of the culture of consumption. These messages, of rapacious consumerism supported by cultural and personal narcissism, are articulated on Wall Street and are related to the expanding inner-city juvenocracy, where young black men rule over black urban space in the culture of crack and illicit criminal activity, fed by desires to "live large" and to reproduce capitalism's excesses on their own terrain. Also, sneaker companies make significant sums of money from the illicit gains of drug dealers. Moreover, while sneaker companies have exploited black cultural expressions of cool, hip, chic, and style, they rarely benefit the people who both consume the largest quantity of products and whose culture redefined the sneaker companies' *raison d'être*. This situation is more severely compounded by the presence of spokespeople like Jordan, Spike Lee, and Bo Jackson, who are either ineffectual or defensive about or indifferent to the lethal consequences (especially in urban black-on-black violence over sneaker company products) of black juvenile acquisition of products that these figures have helped make culturally desirable and economically marketable."



Shelia Bridges  
*Harlem Toile de Jouy*, 2010



Krisanne Johnson  
*ATL Series*, 2008



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