



The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume II: From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery", Part 1: From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood: New Edition

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In the 1960s, art patron Dominique de Menil founded an image archive showing the ways that people of African descent have been represented in Western art. Highlights from her collection appeared in three large-format volumes that quickly became collector's items. A half-century later, Harvard University Press and the Du Bois Institute are proud to publish a complete set of ten sumptuous books, including new editions of the original volumes and two additional ones.

From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood, written largely by noted French scholar Jean Devisse, has established itself as a classic in the field of medieval art. It surveys as never before the presence of black people, mainly mythical, in art from the early Christian era to the fourteenth century. The extraordinary transformation of Saint Maurice into a black African saint, the subject of many noble and deeply touching images, is a highlight of this volume. The new introduction by Paul Kaplan provides a fresh perspective on the image of the black in medieval European art and contextualizes the classic essays on the subject.

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Editorial Review

Review

A fascinating story of the changing image of Africa's people in Western art. The images are simply extraordinary and the scholarship inspiring. Anyone who cares about Western art or about Africa and her diaspora ought to know these magnificent volumes. (Kwame Anthony Appiah)

Review of the previous editions:

One concludes from these pioneering volumes that artistic representations were historical "events" that eventually helped to shape a mentality that justified the enslavement of millions of Africans as well as later attempts to Christianize and liberate their descendants. (David Brion Davis *New York Review of Books* 1981-11-05)

In addition to being an indispensable guide to the evolving meanings of racial difference, these dazzling volumes filled with extraordinary images and rich arguments contribute to an alternative history of the Western world. An invaluable gift for both specialists and general readers. (Paul Gilroy, author of *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*)

One of the most thorough collections depicting the African-American in works of art...The books build on the research and photo project started by art patron Dominique de Menil in the 1960s, which grew out of a frustration with segregation. The collection was then transferred and continued to grow at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University. De Menil's original volumes have been updated by David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr. and now include more detailed descriptions and provide a larger context of the artwork that spans more than 5,000 years, including the Roman Empire to present-day pieces, filling in tremendous gaps in de Menil's collection, according to some art historians. The images, printed in full-color on high-quality pages, are available for the masses to see and understand how African-Americans not only fit into the various societies of the Western world, but how those relationships evolved throughout the ages. (*Kirkus Reviews* 2010-09-15)

The volumes so far are a treasury of paintings and sculptures of people down the ages, taking in many strands of ritual, classicism, artlessness and humanity. (William Feaver *Spectator* 2010-12-18)

A sumptuous new edition with much additional material and copious color pictures....The books are a wonderful resource: a glitteringly decorated window into the Du Bois Institute's unrivalled archive of relevant images. The accompanying essays, which are models of erudition, are inescapable reading for anyone interested in the subject. (Felipe Fernández-Armesto *The Art Newspaper* 2011-04-17)

The joy of this series lies in the illustration and discussion of imagery found not only in paintings and woodcuts, but also in mosaics, illuminated manuscripts, and murals. (K. Mason *Choice* 2011-10-01)

Monumental and groundbreaking volumes...[with] beautifully reproduced and thought-provoking images...A vast array of different "Images of the Black" appear in these volumes, from statues of black saints such as St. Maurice or St. Benedict the Moor, to portraits of notable African ambassadors and kings, poets and musicians, or drawings of literary characters such as Shakespeare's Othello, Aphra Behn's Oroonoko, or Yarico from George Colman's *Inkle and Yarico*...Africans have been painted and sculpted by some of the most eminent artists in the Western tradition, including Titian, Tiepolo, Rubens, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Reynolds, Hogarth, Watteau and Gainsborough. More importantly, they have not been caricatured, but

sensitively portrayed by these masters, their humanity captured on canvas for all to see...In placing such a vast variety of different images together, both positive and negative, these volumes show that the "Image of the Black" was not at all homogenous but rather reflected the wide range of the Western response to the "other."...Seen through the prism of "Western Art," these "Images of the Black" often tell us more about the Europeans and their agendas than the Africans they portray. Nonetheless, the cumulative effect of the images is to demonstrate a continuous black presence in the Western imagination and experience...This series will pose new questions to scholars of art, history and literature and provoke us all to reconsider the role of "the Black" in Western civilization. (Miranda Kaufmann *Times Literary Supplement* 2012-03-23)

About the Author

David Bindman is Emeritus Professor of the History of Art at University College London.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., is Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and the Director of the W. E. B. Du Bois Research Institute at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, Harvard University.

Users Review

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