

BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



MAILINGLIST

ArtSeen

Everyone Wants to be Subaltern

by Simone Leigh

Everyone in the art world does. And I'm okay with that. What I see, as more people crowd the space, is that the absurd category of subaltern disintegrates. This is a good thing. The process through which this is happening is more and more inward-gazing. More *this is me*. And that is a good thing, too. As long as everyone is welcome to investigate his or her story with the same vigor and support and respect. All work is about identity.

In Bristol, England, Suzanne Lacy created an entity called the the University of Local Knowledge, where volunteers documented their knowledge of Bristol's inhabitants. Examples of these forms of knowledge included how to feed a family of six on \$400 a month, rabbit hunting, and how to maintain classic cars. This information was organized into "texts" and categorized after "extensive discourse with community residents."

I have been obsessed with this idea because it is one of the first viable antidotes to colonial anthropology I have heard of. I imagine a future where auto-ethnographic initiatives documenting "local forms" of craft and vernacular knowledge would exist across the world. This archive would be accessible to artists.

I would accelerate the mechanisms and support the structures that are allowing the art world to become interdisciplinary. I am not talking about new genres, but the interdisciplinarity that comes from combining and reconsidering older genres like opera, "ring shouts," or forms of choreography with more traditional visual art genres. To me, the most important artists and curators working right now—for example, Ralph Lemon and Rashida Bumbray—are trained in multiple disciplines. And let's not forget Alicia Hall Moran.

I foresee an end to the "paper bag" test for contemporary black artists. We will also be able to gaze inwardly. Soon, I will never hear anyone say "his (black) artist's work is great because it's not about race." Or "You need to do something to show that you can make work that's not about blackness." Many people who have mistakenly uttered those words can be forgiven. But enough is enough. I foresee a time when black artists will be encouraged to dive deep into their work with the same vigor

as Paul McCarthy and Lisa Yuskavage—without this strange, accompanying commentary and gatekeeping.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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