



# The New York Times

*Black Images Stir Up Strong Emotions*

Lynda Richardson

December 12, 1994

Appraising the exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the students from Walt Whitman Junior High School in Brooklyn tried to extract lessons from gold sneakers in a police lineup, a 9-millimeter handgun, photographs of homeless men and other art on view in "Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art."

The students gazed at the black man in a blond wig and tutu in Lyle Ashton Harris's photographs and filed past the phallic images represented by Robert Mapplethorpe. Their teachers encouraged them to think of Roman marble sculptures or even Adam and Eve, just in a different color. Some students giggled, while others squirmed and looked away.

For many of the teachers at Whitman, the show was a must-see for their students, most of whom are black. "There are all these negative stereotypes of black folks in this society and on the other hand, there is the truth of what we have contributed," said Tony Lynch, a language-arts teacher. He was fascinated by the Robert Colescott painting "George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware," in which the subject stands in a Napoleonic pose surrounded by stereotypical characters including Aunt Jemima and the Cream of Wheat man.

But Nakia Powell, 13, was in a huff about much of what she saw. "I think they degraded blacks," she said. "The exhibit makes it seem as if we can't go further than we are now. But I can go to any point I want to be. I can be as high as Mr. Clinton."

If the exhibition has done nothing else since it opened on Nov. 10, it has churned up strong reactions from those who have seen it. Museum officials say the show has drawn large crowds, and blacks viewers in particular, proving once again that a broader audience will come if there is something relevant to see. The museum does not keep demographic breakdowns on exhibit attendance, but some museum guards said they had not seen such a large number of black museumgoers since the Whitney's 1992 exhibition of work by Jean-Michel Basquiat, the black artist whose frenzied, graffiti-like images made him a Neo-Expressionist superstar of the 1980's.

Thelma Golden, the curator of the exhibition, said her vision for the show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There also are advertisements on subways.

Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut. "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

The exhibition left Adger Cowans, a Manhattan painter and photographer, dispirited. He said it was not the kind of art he would want his 7-year-old daughter to see. "This is a show about white people's fears," he said. "It's about sex, violence and sports. There's no picture of a black man with a child, his daughter or his son. Think of all the great black men. There are none in this show."



Mr. Cowans questioned why art by Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence and other prominent black painters was not included. "You can show negative images of black people, but first you have to show enough positive images about them," he said.

He also had some questions for the curator. "What do her mother and father feel about this show?" he asked. "About what their daughter has done? If they feel positive, we have a problem in America because we don't have a positive image of ourselves. I can understand taking all the ghosts out of the closet and hanging them on the wall. There's all the negative we can think about. But if that's her idea, I think she's been duped and played like Chinese checkers. The people who own this establishment played her."

Ms. Golden, cool and collected as she sipped pineapple juice in a Whitney office last week, is accustomed to such criticism. She was among the curators who put on last year's Whitney Biennial, a show that was heavily criticized for its political art. "There is very little that people can say that can shock me," she said, adding that her parents were enthusiastic about the exhibit, which was two and a half years in the making.

Regarding the works on view by 29 artists from the late 1960's to the present, Ms. Golden writes in her catalogue essay that "media fascination around black masculinity is almost always concentrated in three areas: sex, crime and sports."

For Ms. Golden, a 29-year-old Smith College graduate who grew up in Queens and became interested in art history in elementary school, the exhibition was never intended to be a sociological survey of black men. "This was not going to be a show of positive and negative images," she said. "That whole dialogue is a little bankrupt. There is this fixed notion of what is a good image and what is a bad image that doesn't allow for all the complexities that are attached to all images."

"Certainly there is a much easier exhibit of images of black men: the greatest hits," she continued. "There is an easy thing that could have happened, but that wasn't intellectually challenging. It didn't provide the opportunity to investigate contemporary art practice."

The work elicited a muted response from L'Chaim Bullock, a lanky 15-year-old and aspiring percussionist. He visited the Whitney with seven classmates from the Institute of Arts and Technology, a new public school in the city that includes museum trips as part of its curriculum.

The teen-ager and his friends were immediately drawn to the large Nike poster of the basketball star Moses Malone, which had been framed by the artist Jeff Koons. They considered it silently before ducking into a small information room to look at a photograph about another sports idol, Michael Jordan. They weaved their way to a Mel Chin installation of a first-aid kit concealed in a 9-millimeter handgun, called "HOMEYSEW '9:"

"You know what that is, Anthony? It's a 9," said L'Chaim. "I know that from the streets, the clip."

"What do you think this means?" whispered his friend Anthony Asser, 16. The two boys shrugged and moved on.

L'Chaim later expressed ambivalence about the show. "I've been to other museums and it's all the same," he said. "It's all sending out the same message. You have a room showing famous black people and compare them to the people who can't do nothing. It's like comparing suffering or greatness."

"It's showing that these are things that the black male goes through, that this is how it is," he continued. "We all know you see black men carrying on the way they do on the streets. It's nothing new to us."

But some of the very pieces that the teen-ager found tiresome intrigued another visitor, Jeffrey Tate, an engineering professor at Florida A & M University in Tallahassee, a predominately black school. Mr. Tate said he admired the exhibition



for the way it delved into the lives of black men. He said he was not offended by the emphasis on what others have called stereotypical depictions of black men.

"It mirrors society," he said. "There are many other images of black men that are not portrayed, but that's pretty much the way that society tends to go. I could allow it to bother me and, at some level, it does. But I'm not insulted in any way because I didn't come at it that way, hoping they would express a well-rounded image of black men. We haven't reached a point where that is a reality yet."

Mr. Tate said he was touched by Gary Simmons's "Lineup," a police station house platform with pairs of gold sneakers in place of suspects.

"The motivation of the artist is to show to some people that running shoes would be enough to identify one as being criminal, and in most instances that means young black male," he said. "And while the concept of young black men being criminals is nothing new, the idea that something as insignificant as running shoes as the indicator is very powerful."

Yvette Malciolo, a Peace Corps trainer from Washington, also left feeling excited by what she had seen. She said that she found the art "far from perfect," but that she was delighted it was there for the world to see.

"It's a step in the right direction," she added. "I feel that most museums, like the Whitney, the Met and Moma, tend to disproportionately represent Europeans and white artists, which is partly why a lot of African-Americans don't go, since they don't see images that look like them."



# The Arts

The New York Times

C13  
MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1994

## A Life on the Set, And That Says It All

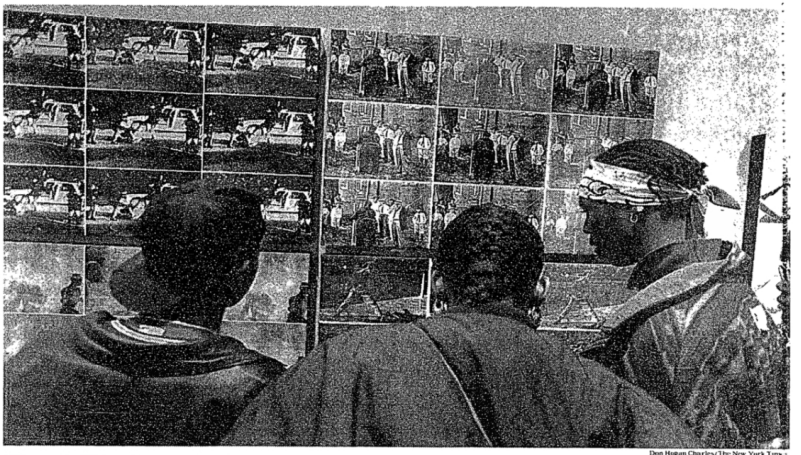
By BERNARD WEINRAUB  
Special to The New York Times  
HOLLYWOOD, Dec. 11 — Jodie Foster's office on Sunset Boulevard is crammed with budding flowers, gifts from friends and colleagues for her birthday. She just turned 32. "I can't say, 'Where did all those years go?' because I know exactly where they went," she said with a laugh. "Making movies. That's what I've done my entire life."  
Ms. Foster has made 32 films in her 32 years. She has won two Academy Awards, for her portrayal of a gang-raped victim in "The Accused" and as the Federal Bureau of Investigation agent Clarice Starling in "The Silence of the Lambs." Her new film, "Nell," doesn't open until Wednesday, but there is already talk about her performance as a mysterious young woman raised in a remote cabin in the North Carolina backwoods who speaks a language of her own. It's one of those roles, like the title roles in "Forrest Gump" and "Rain Man," that has Oscar nomination written all over it. (The odds for an Oscar victory may have decreased a bit on Saturday, when the Los Angeles Film Critics Association named Jessica Lange best actress for her performance in "Blue Sky," directed by Tony Richardson. The best-picture award went to Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction," and John Travolta was named best actor for his performance in that movie.)  
The role was brought to Ms. Foster's attention five years ago by a producer, Renée Missel, who had seen a short-lived play called "Idioglossia" by Mark Handley at a theater in Los Angeles. "I had never seen

Jodie Foster is not so leery of vulnerability anymore.

a character like Nell before, a primitive woman untouched by civilization," Ms. Missel said in an interview. "I thought my goodness, what a tour de force by an actress."  
The title of the play means a language created in isolation. Ms. Missel said that over the years numerous drafts of the screenplay were developed, at first by Mr. Handley and then by William Nicholson, the British playwright who wrote "Shadowlands." It was Mr. Nicholson who devised the odd language spoken by Ms. Foster. Some words in the screenplay are decipherable to audiences, but most are not.  
"It was totally in his head," Ms. Missel said. The language is a mixture of the way small children speak and the speech patterns of stroke victims.  
Ms. Foster expressed interest in the project immediately after reading it, but it took eight drafts before the screenplay, written by Mr. Handley and Mr. Nicholson, met her full approval.  
"I loved this idea of a woman who defies categorization, a creature who is labeled and categorized by people based on their own problems and their own prejudices and what



Jodie Foster plays a mystery woman in her new film, "Nell."  
Steve Gribben for The New York Times



Visitors to the Whitney Museum of American Art examining "20th Century Black Men," a work by Danny Tisdale in the "Black Male" exhibition.  
Dana Hudson Ochs for The New York Times

## Black Images Stir Up Strong Emotions

By LYNDIA RICHARDSON  
Appraising the exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the students from Walt Whitman Junior High School in Brooklyn tried to extract lessons from gold sneakers in a police lineup, a 9-millimeter handgun, photographs of homeless men and other art on view in "Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art."  
The students gazed at the black man in a blind wig and tuts in Lyle Ashton Harris's photographs and filed past the phallic images represented by Robert Mapplethorpe. Their teachers encouraged them to think of Roman marble sculptures or even Adam and Eve, just in a different color. Some students giggled, while others squirmed and looked away.

But Nakia Powell, 13, was in a huff about much of what she saw. "I think they degraded blacks," she said. "The exhibit makes it seem as if we can't go further than we are now. But I can go to any point I want to be. I can be as high as Mr. Clinton."  
If the exhibition has done nothing else since it opened on Nov. 10, it has churned up strong reactions from those who have seen it. Museum officials say the show has drawn large crowds, and blacks viewers in

particular, proving once again that a broader audience will come if there is something relevant to see. The museum does not keep demographic breakdowns on exhibit attendance, but some museum guards said they had not seen such a large number of black museumgoers since the Whitney's 1992 exhibition of work by Jean-Michel Basquiat, the black artist whose frenzied, graffiti-like images made him a Neo-Expressionist superstar of the 1980's.  
Thema Golden, the curator of the exhibition, said her vision for the

show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There are advertisements on subways.  
Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut: "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There are advertisements on subways.  
Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut: "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There are advertisements on subways.  
Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut: "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There are advertisements on subways.  
Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut: "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There are advertisements on subways.  
Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut: "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There are advertisements on subways.  
Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut: "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There are advertisements on subways.  
Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut: "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There are advertisements on subways.  
Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut: "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

show emerged from patterns she saw in the work of contemporary artists; it was not a calculated attempt to attract black people. But in promoting the show, the Whitney has made an all-out effort to draw a broader black audience. The museum mailed program information to more than 100 black organizations and advertised in black magazines and in local black newspapers. There are advertisements on subways.  
Not surprisingly, the reaction from many of the black people who have seen the show has run the gamut: "Negative," "horror show" and "unbalanced" are among the words that cropped up in dozens of conversations recently. But many visitors said they were stimulated by the images and heartened to see art on a black theme in a prestigious museum. For some viewers, who know that Ms. Golden is black, the exhibition represented much more than a collection of artwork.

## On Both Sides of Urban Violence: Dehumanized and Interchangeable

By BEN BRANTLEY  
The murderous teen-ager who is the title character of Charles Fuller's "Zooman and the Sign" is, in his own harrowingly skewed terms, a thorough egalitarian. In the stunning monologue that begins the 1989 play, which has been revived at the Second Stage Theater, this inner-city Philadelphia youth seems to cast an eye of combustible contempt over anyone who crosses his line of vision.  
He knifed an "ole jive West Indian" at a subway stop, he tells us, because the man was swinging his arms as if he owned the platform. He is glad, he says, that his aged aunt's Social Security check was stolen by junkies. Old people in general, "all bent over and twisted up, skin hang-

ing off their faces" make him sick. As for the girl he accidentally killed that day in a shooting that is the main spring of the play's plot, it was entirely her fault. The "little bitch," as he puts it, had no business sitting on her front steps in the middle of what everyone knows is "a war zone."  
As portrayed by Larry Gilliard Jr., in a smart, bravura performance that makes no apologies for his character, Zooman is a marvel of disaffection. He punctuates his frightening pronouncements with a mechanical, joyless whinny of a laugh, and his eyes rove the audience with a dead, ever-defensive gaze. He's a morally anesthetized punk, a spiritual cousin of the futuristic hoodlums of "A Clockwork Orange" who nonetheless belongs, all too familiarly, to the America of today.

Mr. Fuller's take on the phenomenon this character represents still seems remarkable in its nonjudgmental clearheadedness and intelligence. "Zooman" remains a play with problems, and Sara Scott's straightforward production, while admirable in its nonsensationalist restraint, doesn't succeed in dignifying them. The drama lacks the taut narrative drive and full-bodied characterization of "A Soldier's Story," the 1981 work for which the author won a Pulitzer Prize.  
But its searing presentation of the logic of a world in which people on both sides of the law become dehu-



Oni Faida Lampley, left, Tony Todd and Sandra McClain play members of a bereaved family.  
Simon Cook for The New York Times

**Experience the Extraordinary This Week at the 92nd Street Y**

<p>Mon, Dec 12 at 8 pm <b>TONIGHT!</b> Pulitzer Prize winning playwright <b>Edward Albee</b> with <b>Mel Gussow</b> \$12</p> <p>Wed, Dec 14 at 4 pm The Future of Major League Sports: Commissioners <b>Gary Bettman</b>, NHL <b>David Stern</b>, NBA <b>Paul Tagliabue</b>, NFL <b>David Halberstam</b> \$16</p>	<p>Tue, Dec 13 at 8 pm Keyboard Conversations <b>Jeffrey Siegel</b> "The Music of Mendelssohn" \$15</p> <p>Wed/Thu, Dec 14/15 and Sat/Sun, Dec 17/18 at 8 pm Sun, Dec 18 at 3 pm Harkness Dance Project <b>Doug Varone</b> and <b>Dancers</b> \$15 Performances at the Planchette 91, 116 East 91 Street</p>	<p>Sun, Dec 18 at 2 pm <b>Family Musik</b> Stravinsky's <i>Soldier's Tale</i> \$25 Family (1 adult and 1 child) \$10 Adults (incl. Seats) <i>The Cool Streets of Manhattan</i> W. U. and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs <i>Cultural Challenge Initiative</i> In support of Family Musik</p>	<p>For Tickets &amp; Information Call Y-Charge! <b>(212) 996-1100</b> 92nd Street Y Lexington Avenue at 92nd Street An agency of the YUSA Federation</p>
---	--	---	--



C14

'THE ACTION MOVIE OF THE YEAR!' Wesley Snipes soars to new heights. An awesome mix of action and thrills. 'The best high-tech adventure of the year... spinning excitement and riveting action.'

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1994

COMEDY'S NEW NAME IS 'SHAME!' 'Keenen Ivory Wayans is terrific... it would be a shame to miss 'A Low Down Dirty Shame'.'

Images of Black Men Stir Strong Emotions

Carrying on the way they do on the streets. It's nothing new to us. But some of the very pieces that the teen-ager found tiresome intrigued another visitor, Jeffrey Tate, an engineering professor at Florida A & M University in Tallahassee, a predominantly black school.

It's nothing new to us, says a black teen-ager visiting the Whitney. society tends to go I could allow it to bother me and, at some level, it does. But I'm not incensed in any way because I didn't come at it that way, hoping they would eventually all be rounded image of black men we haven't reached a point where that is really yet.

THE NEW YORK TIMES Presents: 'BRILLIANT, A MIRACLE, TERRIFICALLY FUNNY, OFTEN HILARIOUS. 'COBB' IS A WONDERFUL MOVIE.'

EXCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT NOW PLAYING. Members of the Academy, MPA, DCA, WGA and Producers Guild.

'A WARM HEARTED BLEND OF SENTIMENT AND SILLINESS.' Trapped in PARADISE. CAGE LOVITZ CARVEY.

MAKES 'SPEED' LOOK LIKE A SLOW RIDE TO GRANDMA'S HOUSE! ONE AWESOME ACTION MOVIE! THE PROFESSIONAL.

SONY THEATRES. Into The Deep 12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 7:00, 9:00, 10:00. Disclosure 12:00, 2:00, 7:00, 9:00, 11:00.

'A MUST SEE!' HOOP DREAMS. Lincoln Plaza Cinema - EASTSIDE PLAZA.

'A TRIUMPH OF HOPE!' THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION. CHATEAU [R] COLUMBIA PICTURES.

ANGELIKA FILM CENTER. Mrs. Parker 12:25, 4:45, 7:25, 9:45. To Live 12:25, 4:45, 7:25, 9:45.

'A TRIUMPH OF HOPE!' THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION. CHATEAU [R] COLUMBIA PICTURES.

WORLDWIDE. Any Seat, Any Show \$200. Lincoln Plaza Cinema.

'AN EXPERT DIRECTOR'S TOUCH!' Federal Hill. Lincoln Plaza Cinema.

ANGELIKA FILM CENTER. Mrs. Parker 12:25, 4:45, 7:25, 9:45. To Live 12:25, 4:45, 7:25, 9:45.

'A MASTERPIECE!' RED. Lincoln Plaza Cinema.