

About appropriating and consuming

Ditte Ejlerskov

Decolonisation was an ongoing motivation in my studio for about 10 years. Eventually however, my motivation manifested as a fear of stepping over boundaries of and othering the feminism and driving force of the women that I portrayed and admired. In the end if people of colour are offended, then my initial admirable intention doesn't matter.

Still, a point that I stick with now, a long time after these works were made, is that the Afro-American protagonists of my work belong to western pop culture - and their material is therefore mine too. In their work, these women all talk about the issues of their Black bodies being consumed by a White male gaze. My gaze.

I found it necessary to take this gaze and whiteness seriously. I needed to unpack my own privilege and understand what these pop stars were projecting at this whiteness. They had a target. I was trying to embody that target. To consume their points.

I was not appropriating. I was consuming. Consuming for me always goes through my art practice.

I could simply have deleted these works from my webpage and Instagram. However, I think it is important to face all nuances of racism, presumed racism, ignorance and privilege..

About my works concerning Nicki Minaj

In her lyrics, Nicki Minaj discusses misogyny and power structures—however in her visual language she seemingly exploits stereotyped images of Black women's sexuality—tracing all the way back to the inception of American slavery. My claim is that there is a well planned agenda behind that.

Through these works, I wanted to see if it was possible to produce a poetic alliance with Minaj's imagery. Therefore, I took Minaj's images and re-used her method of challenging race-stereotypical images as a means of assisting her in the mission to spell out, enhance, superimpose and, perhaps, even discharge these loaded images.

However, being a privileged White Scandinavian woman, I was not really allowed to do so. I was potentially enforcing structures I do not support..—simply by painting these images while living in a White body.

The Minaj Castle is built in a house of cards structure, where the canvases of my work are balancing on top of each other. The piece portrays the fragility of any power position. Also, the

piece talks about the fact that if a pattern or structure is copied enough times it might in the end seem like a strong position. Even if it might not be.

About my works concerning Beyoncé

At the center of these works is the American pop star Beyoncé. I was interested in her go-getter-like feminism and the ways she employs politics in her work. She somewhat fulfills what is demanded of the Black woman as a 'survivor' and uses elements of the fantastic to redefine historic constructions of America.

Long before Beyoncé herself spelled it out in her material, I read her overall work as a revolutionary postmodern slave narrative. I am sure she did too, even though she never said so until much later. I saw how Beyoncé strategically challenged her viewers to accept personal responsibility for his/her gaze of racism, misogyny, sexism and the conditions which allow them to persist. Therefore, found images from her material ended up in my studio.

About my works concerning Rihanna

These works (and partly also works under the frame of The Muse) revolve around the American pop star Rihanna. I find her interesting because she practices a very different, almost anachronistic type of feminism. Initially, I was interested in flirting with "the contemporary image" - the superficial pleasingly correct image. I started out disapproving of both Rihanna and modern painting, but as the ironic flirt turned into real emotions, I had to admit that I was truly interested in both subjects. I was won over by "the contemporary image" - my rationale was converted into unsophisticated, unproblematic passion. Should I not have given in? For years I have exploited the tools of painting, in order to deal with dense cognitive content. Where (and why) is painting today? In order to respectively pay my dues to the medium, I involved myself in "the contemporary". It was sweet to give in; to be exploited and to be charmed by color and form.

In short, the patterns and compositions of these paintings are conversions of Rihanna's wardrobe - a portrait of a commercialized, contemporary person - based on paparazzi pictures. The content then lies in that deceptive logic of sweetish consumption - the charming (or manipulating, if you like). Only after this consumption, can you conclude what type of sensitivity is appropriate for you in that moment; delight (you have carelessly enjoyed the flirt) or disgust (you feel plundered by the flirt). And no matter what line you stand in, the painting is still a charming painting. Do I accept the cult of the contemporary? I do not know. I am still bewitched. But in this final analysis I think my answer is: Yes I do. And I enjoy it.