



Exposing Hidden Realities: How Visual Art Reclaims Black Women's Bodies from Medical Abuse

Key Concepts: The white gaze, systemic racism, Black feminism, medical exploitation.



KEY SECTIONS

1. The White Gaze and Objectification
 - Visual and medical representations historically objectified Black women's bodies, portraying them as inferior and subject to exploitation (Yancy, 2016).
 - Example: Louis Agassiz's ethnographic photography, which dehumanised Black bodies as physical specimens (Wallis, 1995).
2. Black Feminism and Critical Race Theory
 - CRT and Black Feminism provide frameworks for understanding how race and gender intersect to oppress Black women, particularly in medical contexts (hooks, 1992; Crenshaw, 1989).
 - Black feminist artists reclaim Black women's identities through visual counter-narratives that challenge historical exploitation (Collins, 2000).

CASE STUDIES

Case Studies:

Wangechi Mutu: Fragmentation and Reclamation

- Work: *Histology of the Different Classes of Uterine Tumours* (2004-2005) (Figure 1).
- Analysis: Mutu uses collage to reflect how Black women's bodies have been fragmented and objectified, reassembling these pieces to reclaim agency and critique the medicalisation of Black women (Adamowicz, 1998).

Doreen Garner: Confronting Medical Trauma

- Work: *A Fifteen Year Old Girl Who Would Never Dance Again* (2017) (Figure 3).
- Analysis: Garner's visceral sculptures render the trauma of medical experimentation visible, using abject materials to critique the historical exploitation of Black women (Kristeva, 1982).



INTRODUCTION

This research poster explores how contemporary visual art by Black women artists like Wangechi Mutu and Doreen Garner exposes the hidden realities of medical exploitation inflicted on Black bodies, particularly Black women, throughout history. The medical field, deeply entrenched in systemic racism, has often reduced Black women's bodies to objects of study, stripping them of their humanity and agency. Drawing from Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory, this poster demonstrates how visual art reclaims Black identity, challenging historical narratives of dehumanisation while offering new frameworks for healing and empowerment.

ANALYSIS

Art as a Tool of Resistance

Art enables a unique form of resistance against institutionalised racism, especially in medical and visual cultures. Through subversive visual techniques like fragmentation, Mutu reclaims the narratives that have historically dehumanised Black women. Garner's work, through the use of abject materials, forces viewers to acknowledge the painful realities of medical violence, challenging the viewer to rethink historical narratives that often erase or marginalise the suffering of Black individuals.

Theoretical Frameworks in Art

The combination of Black Feminism and Critical Race Theory informs how artists like Mutu and Garner frame their work. These frameworks offer tools for analysing the intersectional nature of race, gender, and medical violence. For example, Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is key in understanding how both race and gender play integral roles in the historical exploitation of Black women in medical practices.

Impact of Visual Culture

Visual culture, especially art that reclaims and reframes Black bodies, offers a powerful avenue for healing and activism. The works of Mutu and Garner are not merely representations of trauma but are active interventions in how we understand the body, history, and identity. Through their art, they offer a way to heal from the trauma of medical exploitation by asserting control over the representation of the Black female body.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights how contemporary visual art reveals the hidden medical abuse inflicted on Black women, reclaiming their bodies from dehumanising narratives. Wangechi Mutu and Doreen Garner use techniques such as fragmentation and abject materials to challenge the systemic racism embedded in both medical and visual representations. Engaging with Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism, their work reframes Black women's bodies as sites of agency and resilience, exposing the trauma while reclaiming their stories. Ultimately, visual art serves as a powerful tool for reclaiming Black identity, healing historical wounds, and advancing the goals of Black feminist discourse.

