

James Haile, Dickinson College

"Black Male, Revisited: An Existential-Aesthetic"

Abstract:

This essay is an introductory remark about the 'black male', specifically, it is a revisiting of the 'black male' through aesthetic representation. This essay, though, unlike its inspirational curatorial shadow, Thelma Golden's 1994 Whitney exhibition, "Black Male," is not about 'art' in the traditional sense. Nor is it centrally concerned with 'aesthetics' in any conventional way. Rather than establishing norms to understand or judge a work of art, this curatorial practice, as essay, is the expansion of our traditional understandings of 'art' and the art-object, utilizing the lived-experiences of the subjects themselves as art and art-object. That is, this essay is an attempt to reveal the lived-experience of the subjects themselves as the canvas, the white walls, the curatorial space for us to encounter art, the aesthetic. I am interested in the body—in all of its forms—as narrative space, as narrative think-tank upon which to construct living, moving bios as the truth of an existence, not through representational form, but through presentational aesthetic display: or, what I will be calling, art of the everyday; or, the existential-aesthetic. In such analysis, the distance between artist and art-object fades, and what is left is art as a living expression. The 'black male', then, becomes, not something about which to think and curate, but that which thinks and curates itself onto the stage of everyday life. That is, my aim is to explain what MC Dice Raw (of The Roots) means when he rhymes, "walkin' through the Guggenheim Raw, Live, Black Ink"