

**International Congress of Aesthetics 2007  
“Aesthetics Bridging Cultures”**

**“Performing Olympia-The Performative Body  
as a Tool in Becoming the Other”**

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I have always thought of Titian’s “Venus of Urbino” (1538) as an enigmatic image despite its overt exhibitionism, perhaps because we shall never really know who the model was, nor what exactly the two maids in the background are rummaging for. They are probably in search of some clothes, thus serving to draw attention to the naked body all the more so, almost to the point of erotic fantasy. No wonder Mark Twain said of this painting, jokingly, that “it is a trifle too strong for any place but a public art gallery.”<sup>1</sup> Although intended for the decoration of a traditional Italian wedding chest (*cassone*), the “Venus of Urbino” has indeed been one of the cornerstones of not only a public art gallery (the Uffizi) but the whole notion of Western art history itself. It crops up in every art history book as the model of female beauty, and her contribution to the history of art does not end there: The “Venus of Urbino” is also the model for Manet’s “Olympia” (1863), which is arguably the turning point for Western art and its history. This proto-postmodernist gesture of parody becomes all the more forceful as we catch a glimpse of the Renaissance aesthetic ideal, as embodied in Titian’s painting, behind all the Salon nudes Manet is mocking. This is obviously the artist’s word against the art of the past and the immediate present. Manet is not participating in the visual language of his time, but subverting it, changing its consequences in what we can call, in reference to Judith Butler, an alternative performative act. In this sense, “Olympia” is as much a kind of *performance* as a painting against the established norms of the art and aesthetics of its time, and perhaps this is why it has itself been endlessly appropriated by other artists. This paper is an exploration into a specific aspect we come across in some of those appropriations.

I am curious about why and how Manet’s “Olympia” remains such a powerful image to be scrutinized, especially by artists who locate themselves outside the Euro-centric hegemony of expression. Permeating through time with its influence, Manet’s “Olympia” –today- seems to serve as a signifier for counter-attacking accepted notions of representation. These counter-attacks are framed by issues of race, sexuality and gender, and serve to include, what has generally been excluded or marginalized, by the systems of a Western, yet globally-reaching visual culture. The artists I will be talking about transform the “Olympia” through fantasy role-playing; they use their own bodies to self-referentially perform and re-represent what has customarily been signalled out as “the other”. This by now very popular term stems, as the Dictionary of Critical Theory tells us, from the dialectic between the master and the slave, in which the subject strives after an object that is always in the possession of the other.<sup>2</sup> In our case, that object seems to be, albeit indirectly, “Art History” –in quotation marks, and capital letters. The subjects, on the other hand, are not stable; and this instability is revealed through

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<sup>1</sup> Twain, Mark, *A Tramp Abroad*, quoted in [http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/arth213/Titian\\_Venus\\_urbino.html](http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/arth213/Titian_Venus_urbino.html)

<sup>2</sup> Macey, David, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*, London: Penguin Books, 2000, 285.

the use of the body. Seeing artists 'performing Olympia' by exhibiting their own body-image, we are reminded of Foucault's reference to the body as an historically and culturally constructed specific entity.<sup>3</sup>

The rejection of "Olympia" by 19<sup>th</sup> century critics and the public as an inappropriate painting largely depended on the body-image of Manet's young model (Victorine Meurent). She was seen to be ugly, dirty, strange, 'working-class', masculine.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting how critics talked of her as if she was a real person; Olympia was a strong image that certainly represented an Other of its time. According to Stephen F. Eisenman, "The body of the lower-class prostitute and the body of the Afro-Caribbean woman, according to Manet's interlocutors, were linked by their common *dégénérescence*, that is, by their combined intellectual, physical, and moral depravity, morbidity, and inferiority. Each was judged more grotesque than the other and harbingers of the feared degeneracy, which, according to the respected doctor Benedict Augustin Morel –author of the *Treatise on Degeneracy* (1857) - was infecting French society as a whole."<sup>5</sup> So, "Olympia" was/and is undoubtedly a symbol of the changing attitudes in art's history, and a shift in the perception of aesthetic quality, but it must surely be this 'other' quality that ties it to more recent interrogations of race, sexuality and gender in Western society.

The work of Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura, Jamaica born African-American artist Renée Cox, Nigerian artist Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Polish artist Katarzyna Kozyra all reflect, in different cultural contexts, how we can think and rethink the fundamental premises of image making in the Western tradition, and what kind of value judgments have shaped that tradition. They use their own self-image to engage in actions of fantasy role-playing in order to reflect the cultural framework in Euro-centric modes of thought and imagination, and how these modes can be reconsidered through a reversal of roles. This questioning places them firmly within the framework of post-modern aesthetics, whereby relocated and deconstructed images often signify new meanings. Thus they share a mutual attitude towards the deconstruction of Western art and its history, reflecting themselves not only as 'other' within that history, but as the somewhat desperate pursuers of that history. Donald Preziosi's assertion that history and aesthetic philosophy are "brilliant modern European inventions"<sup>6</sup> is quite relevant in this context; according to Preziosi, "there is no 'artistic tradition' anywhere in the world which today is not fabricated through the historicisms and essentialisms of European museology and museography."<sup>7</sup>

Preziosi goes on to say that art historical practice is a genre of imaginative fiction, and that it uses prefabricated materials and vocabularies, and also techniques of stagecraft and dramaturgy.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting at this point to consider how for all four artists mentioned are involved in stage-setting and dramatization: In their works, "Olympia" is turned into a stage where certain issues of race, sexuality, gender and body politics are acted out by self-performative activity. Preziosi's claim –with a reference to Judith Butler- that "all art is drag"<sup>9</sup> is even more fitting. For Butler, subjectivity is performed through forms of masquerade

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<sup>3</sup> Mills, Sara, *Michel Foucault*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 83.

<sup>4</sup> Fer, Briony, in *Modernity and Modernism-French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, 21-28.

<sup>5</sup> Eisenman, Stephen F., *Nineteenth Century Art-A Critical History*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002, 287.

<sup>6</sup> Preziosi, Donald, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 512.

<sup>7</sup> Work cited, 514.

<sup>8</sup> Work cited, 512.

<sup>9</sup> Work cited, 515.

and repetition of styles; these attributes are performative rather than fixed or natural.<sup>10</sup> What we see in the images that we encounter in museums is that “both hegemonic and marginalized sexualities are themselves continual and repeated imitations and reiterations of their own idealizations.”<sup>11</sup> Thus there is a kind of ‘dramatic irony’<sup>12</sup> at play as we move from the sexually charged image of the “Venus of Urbino” to the sexually discharged image of “Olympia” to the identity politics in the re-invented images of Olympia we see today. From the idealized to the modernized through to the post-modernized, the image of “Olympia” bridges different aesthetic notions and cultural situations in history.

We actually come across the first re-readings of “Olympia” with a reference to its connotation on the racial difference of the two figures quite early on; in fact there’s a sketch by Picasso from 1901. In the 1960’s, examples like Mel Ramos’ “Olympia” (1973) or Larry Rivers’ “I Like Olympia in Black Face” (1970) reproduce the painting in ways that draw attention on the painting’s two figures; one black, the other white. Mel Ramos’ painting transforms the image into a cliché of popular culture in which the stereotypical “blond bombshell” and “Afro-haired black beauty” come together in a pin-up scene which replaces Titian’s symbol of fidelity (the dog) and Manet’s symbol of intrusion (the cat) with the symbol of sinfulness and female sexuality (the monkey). Commissioned for an exhibition entitled “Some American History”, “I Like Olympia Black Face” by Larry Rivers changes the colours, and thus draws attention to the racial connotations in each of the figures. According to Richard J. Powell, this work marked a historical phase in black cultural representations in American art, since it dealt specifically with the peripheral and negative place of blacks in Western art history.<sup>13</sup> These works belong to the “first horizon” of a wave of appropriation, so called by John C. Welchman to describe the work of the neo-Dadaists and the Pop artists of the fifties and sixties.<sup>14</sup> The ‘second horizon’, that brought artists such as Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman to the fore are more relevant in the framework of this paper since their work constitutes a questioning of how ideologies reach the public through images. In “Art after Appropriation”, Welchman considers the shifts from citation to critique, from quote to questioning in the work of artists concerned with the deconstruction of images.<sup>15</sup> These considerations deserve special attention in the case of artists such as Morimura, Cox, Fani-Kayode and Kozyra because their self-performative being within the images makes critique and questioning an inherent part of their work. They are performing “the other”; but they are who they perform. Thus their borrowed, projective presence is an ironical critique of processes of social differentiation, discrimination and marginalization.

The performative act toys with the concepts of subject and object. As we look at Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura’s (b. ) “Olympia”, we interpret him as both the subject and the object of the image he presents before us: Unlike the real “Olympia”, he is not represented by someone else - he ‘presents’ himself. He is both the subject and the object of the work; and as Lea Vergine points out, as in all performance, “the work is the artist, and the artist’s narcissism is no longer invested in an art object but allowed to explode within his own body.”<sup>16</sup> Morimura’s work echoes the work of female performance artists in that he uses his own body to convey a message; and his use of photography to set the image (and the

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<sup>10</sup> Perry, Gil, in *Frameworks for Modern Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, 171.

<sup>11</sup> Preziosi, 515.

<sup>12</sup> A ‘dramatic irony’ is a situation in a play when a character’s words carry an extra meaning to the audience because they know more than the character.

<sup>13</sup> Powell, Richard J., *Black Art-A Cultural History*, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 146,

<sup>14</sup> Welchman, John C., *Art After Appropriation, Essays on Art in the 1990s*, G+B Arts International, 2001, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Work cited, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Vergine, Lea, *Body Art and Performance-The Body as Language*, Milan: Skira Editore, 2000, 25.

meaning) certainly calls to mind the self-performative photographic work of artists such as Cindy Sherman, Laura Aguilar, Lyle Ashton-Harris and Hannah Wilke. But above all, there is an element of traditional Japanese kabuki theatre in Morimura's work which actually grounds his art firmly in his own cultural background. The stage design, the performance, the play structure and the trans-gendering are all aspects of kabuki theatre that have entered Morimura's work. Kabuki theatre is the 'popular culture' of its time, while the images Morimura recreates today are the images that have become very popular over time. Donald Kuspit points to the way Morimura objectifies himself, but always through images that have themselves lost their subjective meaning and become over-objectified.<sup>17</sup> Morimura deliberately places himself in very well-known scenes of Western art history; these scenes that are so close, yet so distant from artists of non-Western cultures. So close, because they are known to the artist through his upbringing as an artist; yet so distant, since he has seldom been subject or object of that history. Morimura's work actually sets off from that 'fixation with Western art history':

"From childhood I have enjoyed drawing pictures. In my mid-teens, I joined the high school art club and began making oil paintings. One would think I'd have been more interested in traditional Japanese nihonga than in oil painting, being born and raised in Japan. But the famous artists I knew as a child were neither the ukiyo-e printmaker Hokusai nor the suibokuga ink-painter Sesshu; the names that first came to mind were Van Gogh and Picasso, and real art, for me, meant oil painting. Art education in school was almost exclusively a Western curriculum –starting from the image of Venus de Milo, up through classicism's re-appreciation in the Renaissance with Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, then on via the curves of the Baroque, toward the Impressionists –and that was "art history". This is not my own isolated experience. (...) This picture of things gone amiss, imbalanced, distorted, disturbing and strange serves as a psychological portrait of myself having been strongly influenced by Western culture, despite having been born and raised as a Japanese man. Rather than pretend not to see this imbalance, I accept it as characteristic of my psychological make-up and have tried to express it as such."<sup>18</sup>

The tension between traditional Japanese art and Western-style modern art started to be felt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, creating a cultural dilemma for artists while creating a polarity in the Japanese art scene. Modernization through Westernization was national cultural policy, and Western-style painting was accepted as an official medium to be taught at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1896. Public museums of modern art in Japan were built in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but, according to Midori Yoshimoto, neither these museums nor Japanese art history covered 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese art until recently.<sup>19</sup> In an atmosphere where curators and critics of modern art studied mainly Western art history, and collectors seldom purchased anything other than Western art, it is not surprising that a Japanese artist should come up with the idea of placing himself within that history. Donald Kuspit argues that Yasumasa Morimura hasn't the secure identity as some of the artists he's identified himself with<sup>20</sup> –such as Rembrandt, for example- but then this is exactly the point of his work. There is no fixed identity in Yasumasa Morimura's work; no 'universal' individual; no creative genius –

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<sup>17</sup> Kuspit, Donald, *Daughter of Art History-Photographs by Yasumasa Morimura*, Hong Kong: Aperture, 2003, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Work cited, 113-114.

<sup>19</sup> Yoshimoto, Midori, *Into Performance-Japanese Women Artists in New York*, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005, 10-13.

<sup>20</sup> These artists are Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Frida Kahlo.

everything is acted out as its opposite: Western is presented as Eastern, woman is presented through man, and artistic creativity is undermined through an act of mere re-creating. In this sense, there is a bridge between different cultural standpoints through the means of art, but the unresolved tension within the image reflects the difficulty, the impossibility even, of that endeavour. This rendering is very different when compared with the cover image of the special issue of Time magazine, where we see a perfect harmony of different racial features brought together by computer generated imaging.<sup>21</sup> The face on Time magazine erases difference through assimilation where as Morimura's image presents us with identity politics. Needless to say that overlooking difference in real life is much harder than overseeing it in virtual reality.

Another artist who has staged the "Olympia" is the Jamaican-born African-American Renée Cox (b. 1960). Here again we are re-introduced to the famous painting by way of self-performative photography, and again the context is founded on certain prejudices as reflected in Western art history. Stephen F. Eisenman underlines the fact that Manet provoked critics and the bourgeois public not only by his subversion of the tradition of the nude, but through his rejection of the period's received ideas of sex and race. Many of Manet's critics commented on Olympia's 'blackness' by likening her to a 'female gorilla' or a 'monkey' as a kind of metaphor to her 'dirtiness', and, as Eisenman points out, these repeated references suggest that a critical elision occurred between the nude and the West Indian maid. At the time the "Olympia" was painted, black women and prostitutes were understood to possess congenitally deformed genitals that preconditioned them to hypersexuality, while the presence of black women in art was generally viewed within the framework of illicit or animal-like sexuality.<sup>22</sup> The same was true for photography: According to William A. Ewing, we can clearly see from examples of early photography that "in the minds of many European photographers and their male clients, African women were primarily objects of desire, deeply carnal creatures, amoral and yielding to the superior power of the white, like the Dark Continent itself."<sup>23</sup>

Renée Cox's "Olympia's Boyz" (2001) reflects this preconceived image of the "black woman" in an in-your-face attitude as she also reflects her own self-image as her (albeit naked) everyday self and mother. Cox is definitely naked in this reference to the 'nude', just as the depiction of other races by Western photographers were always naked, instead of in the 'nude'. William A. Ewing states that in the late 1860's, just around the time that the "Olympia" was painted, there were standard procedures for ethnological photography in which "the naked subject" was photographed as a key to understanding race and culture.<sup>24</sup> Cox seems to be enacting the role of this "naked subject", very naturally, with her children, just like in those photographs of black peoples in which the naked body doesn't seem to pose a threat to anyone else but the scrutinizing gaze outside. Renée Cox's images are also a direct confrontation with what Richard J. Powell has called the "forbidden territory of black erotica". According to Powell, very few artists in the USA dared to enter this territory, and there were virtually no images depicting black nudes prior to the 1970's. This was a kind of self-censorship emanated from both black and white artists, fearing that sexually provocative images could be perceived as racist or pornographic.<sup>25</sup> There are thirty years between Larry

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<sup>21</sup> Sturken, Marita-Cartwright, Lisa, *Practices of Looking-An Introduction to Visual Culture*; New York: Oxford 2001, 304-305.

<sup>22</sup> Eisenman, 287.

<sup>23</sup> Ewing, William A., *The Body-Photoworks of the Human Form*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, 247-249.

<sup>24</sup> Work cited, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Powell, 146-147.

Rivers' "I Like Olympia Black Face" (1970) and Renée Cox's "Olympia's Boyz" (2001), and a comparison of the two works seems to show the resonance, the power of the subject's right to speak for him or herself.

Nigerian artist Rotimi Fani-Kayode's (1955-1989) re-working of "Olympia" also involves self-performativity, and again, the artist's own body becomes a tool for the construction of visual meaning in the context of identity politics. There are two male figures in Fani-Kayode's interpretation of "Olympia"; one is white, the other is black as in the original image, but the bouquet of flowers are white, and they are being given to the black man, hence the title "White Bouquet" (1987). The two figures in the photograph are the artist and his partner Alex Hirst, who worked in collaboration to explore issues of race, gender and sexuality. We are reminded of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of black men and homo-erotic desire, but the references to "Olympia" in Fani-Kayode's work adds layers of different meanings on to it. As Kobena Mercer and Steve Nelson have already pointed out, Rotimi Fani-Kayode's "White Bouquet" reverses the gendered and racialized codes of Manet's picture; "the power relations of mistress and servant are liquidated by homosexual sameness."<sup>26</sup> This is a silent and still image, and very subtle in its association to depictions of homosexuality in both art and popular culture. From the 'accepted' scenes of homosexuality in ancient Greek vases to early photographs unacceptable for all but a private clientele, Fani-Kayode's work explores the thin line between accepted norms of sexuality and the thin line in culture of what is seen as art or pornography. "White Bouquet" is a "black, African, homosexual" version of the "Olympia", because it is generally only through such a reversal of roles that the 'other' appears – I might even say, becomes 'seen'. Rotimi Fani-Kayode has a very clearly sense of his otherness when he says, "My identity has been constructed from my own sense of otherness, whether cultural, racial or sexual."<sup>27</sup>

It is not only race, gender and sexuality that have been the grounds for exclusion in visual representation – physical conditions and age have also been factors in 'othering' individuals or certain groups. Polish artist Katarzyna Kozyra's photography and video installation "The Olympia" (1996) seeks to reflect such 'othering' processes by what she has called "conscious exhibitionism."<sup>28</sup> Kozyra is completely herself as she performs the Olympia for the camera, but what seems like a simple show of fantasy role-playing turns into bitter voyeurism as the viewer comprehends her condition. As Arthur Zmijewski has stated, "The Olympia" is Kozyra's "life project" because it was performed during real chemotherapy treatments for Hodgkin's Disease.<sup>29</sup> Publicizing her privacy at her own will, the work, which seems to be a cathartic experience for Kozyra, was completed over a course of four years. In the video, Kozyra is seen taking her injection, with a reference to "Olympia" by the black choker she is wearing on her neck. This item is again the direct reference to "Olympia" in her photographs in which we see Kozyra posing as Olympia in two different shots. The third photograph shows an old woman wearing the same black choker. These are photographs of old age, sickness and death; but they are also statements on the endless promotion of youth and beauty in Western art and its history. Kozyra subverts the tradition of the nude by playing around the concepts of lust and death, which as we can remember, were also the grounds for the

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<sup>26</sup> Nelson, Steven, "Transgressive transcendence in the photographs of Rotimi Fani-Kayode", *Art Journal*, 2005: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0425/is\\_1\\_64/ai\\_n13807669](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0425/is_1_64/ai_n13807669)

<sup>27</sup> Parsons, Sara-Jane, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*, Routledge. Look in: <http://www.routledge-ny.com/ref/20Cphoto/fani.html>

<sup>28</sup> Katarzyna Kozyra homepage: [http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/olimpia\\_txt.html](http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/olimpia_txt.html)

<sup>29</sup> Zmijewski, Artur, "Morbus Hodgkin: A Deadly Disease", translated by Tadeusz Z. Wolanski, *Magazyn Sztuki* no. 10 (2/1996); full article at [http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/olimpia\\_txt.html](http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/olimpia_txt.html)

marginalization of “Olympia” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kozyra seems to be directly referencing the criticism thrown at Olympia by one critic who called her a “corpse”.<sup>30</sup>

In “The Hidden Order of Art”, Anton Ehrenzweig states that the work of art functions as a ‘womb’ to receive and nurture projective identifications, and he compares this with the ‘womb’ of society. According to Ehrenzweig, you can measure the power of social cohesion within society by the strength of its resistance against fragmentation and expulsion of marginal members; rich internal differentiation in a society indicate great strength of social cohesion, while intolerance of social differentiation points to weak social health. He goes on to talk about the phenomenon of the “displaced person”, which he sees as a sinister symptom of social illness. The lack of the power of containment and the excessive need for sameness in modern society creates the ‘displaced’: Minorities, criminals, lunatics, old and dead people, according to Ehrenzweig, are fragmented from society as ‘possible alien elements’.<sup>31</sup>

The artists I’ve mentioned in this paper have no doubt all felt what it is to be such an ‘alien’ element. That is why their presence, within the confines of a famous Western painting, seems so ‘displaced’. They use the ‘otherness’ of “Olympia” as the symbol of their own otherness; and they use their own body image as the tool that silently ‘speaks’ that otherness. Besides performance, the use of photography is another common trait that we have observed in all four artists; the choice of this medium certainly contributes to the meaning their works are trying to convey. If we go back to the time of “Olympia”: When it was painted, prostitution, mental illness and certain other behaviours and differences were thought to be visible on the bodily exterior; and the creation of images of the ‘other’ was enabled by the use of the camera in the name of scientific inquiry.<sup>32</sup> As Nicholas Mirzoeff has pointed out, photography was used by anthropologists from its earliest days in an attempt to establish a visual classification of racial, class and sexual difference.<sup>33</sup> Needless to say such images ripped the subject of his/her subjectivity; turning him/her into an object of scrutiny.<sup>34</sup> It should come as no surprise then, when Rotimi Fani-Kayode considers photography to be his weapon: “Photography is the tool by which I feel most confident in expressing myself” he says. “It is photography –Black, African, homosexual photography- which I must use not just as an instrument, but as a weapon if I am to resist attacks on my integrity and, indeed, my existence on my own terms.”<sup>35</sup>

In “Gender Trouble”, Judith Butler questions the way “the body” is shaped by political forces, and states, in reference to gender issues, that the seemingly ‘original identity’ after which imitation fashions itself is actually itself an imitation without an origin. Perhaps this is why “Olympia”, itself an imitation, attracts artists in search of subverting the idea of ‘projected’ identities. Such projected identities are generally grounded on prejudiced viewpoints that are either black or white. Yasumasa Morimura talks about the need for ‘grey areas’:

“People in their real lives always belong or do not belong to one thing or another. Men are men, women are women, fathers are fathers, mothers are mothers, Japanese are Japanese, Americans are Americans –the

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<sup>30</sup> Eisenman, 287.

<sup>31</sup> Ehrenzweig, Anton, *The Hidden Order of Art-A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, 222-224.

<sup>32</sup> Sturken-Cartwright, 283.

<sup>33</sup> Mirzoeff, Nicolas, *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure*, London and New York.; Routledge, 1995, 139.

<sup>34</sup> Sturken-Cartwright, 285.

<sup>35</sup> Parsons: <http://www.routledge-ny.com/ref/20Cphoto/fani.html>

categories into which people fit are consistently enforced by the world at large. Even so, everyone surely possesses elements in mind and body that far overstep the bounds of name, function, and position granted by society. That is what I mean by grey areas. And that which gives shape to these ambiguous realms that do not usually surface in everyday life is art.”<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps it is this search for a ‘grey area’, especially with the rising tide of global culture, which still attracts contemporary artists to the image of “Olympia”. She is a very famous Western painting; yet she is also the painting that turned Western art on its head. She wears tradition on her sleeve, but she is modern; and post-modern. The use of “Olympia” in artistic acts of identity politics shows us how aesthetics bridges cultures today, when not only objects or ideas, but images themselves are transported to and fro in an endless journey of cultural mixing. In this sense, a post-modern re-reading and re-presenting of well-known images such as the “Olympia” serves to envisage and develop alternative histories.<sup>37</sup> These appropriated images cannot undo the prejudices of history, but they can help to reshape new multi-cultural approaches by holding a mirror on history. In this sense, what looks like reproach can actually be the key to rapprochement/reconciliation. Needless to say that cultural globalism actually thrives on such images; since positions of dominance or subordination are seemingly erased in an amalgam, or rather a ‘grey area’ of endless inter-cultural quotation.

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<sup>36</sup> Kuspit, , 120-121.

<sup>37</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chatravorti, “Who Claims Alterity?” in *Art in Theory*, ed. Harrison-Wood, Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1994,1093.