# No Strangers to Beauty: Contemporary Black Female Artists, Saartje Baartman and the Hottentot Venus Body

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# NO STRANGERS TO BEAUTY: CONTEMPORARY BLACK FEMALE ARTISTS, SAARTJE BAARTMAN AND THE HOTTENTOT VENUS BODY

Saartje Baartman was a South African woman who signed a contract in 1810 that effectively made her the property of two white men wishing to exhibit her in Europe because of the shape and color of her body. In this text I examine two very different categories of representations of Baartman. First, I discuss images that were produced during Baartman's lifetime that discursively transformed her from a black woman with an identity into a pathologized body known as the Hottentot Venus, and second, I discuss the contemporary black female artists who are producing art inspired by Baartman in order to problematize the racist and sexist assumptions that have been inscribed on the black female body. My research encompasses important scholarship done by white feminist art historians, as well as that by black feminist theorists, and my thoughts on this subject have also been informed tremendously by work that has been done on the visual culture of slavery and on racist stereotypes by post-colonial scholars.

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# "QU'ELLE ÉTRANGE BEAUTÉ!": LES ARTISTES CONTEMPORAINES, FEMELLES ET NOIRES, SAARTJE BAARTMAN ET LE CORPS DE "HOTTENTOT VENUS"

Saartje Baartman était une femme d'Afrique du Sud qui a engagé en contrat avec deux hommes blancs pour l'exhibition de son corps à cause que sa couleur et sa forme. En ce texte ici je vais examiner deux catégories trés différentes des representations de Baartman. En premier, je vais discuter des images produisent durant la vie de Baartman que se transformait discursivement d'une femme noire avec une identité en un corps pathologizait avec le nom "Hottentot Venus." Deuxièmement, je vais discuter les artistes contemporaines, noires, et femelles qui ont produit l'art inspirait par Baartman afin de fair problematizes les suppositions racistes et sexists que sont écrire sur le corps feminine. Ma recherché inclut l'érudition importante par des écrivains blanches et féministes de l'histoire d'art, et ce par des theorists noires et féministes. Mes pensées sont aussi informent par l'oeuvre des érudites poste-coloniale.

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Since my years as an undergraduate student at Queen's University, I have been captivated by the passion voiced by feminist art historians. To those women who I will likely never meet, Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock, and especially Rosemary Betterton, I wish to acknowledge the extent to which their work has inspired me and guided my own writing. And to the late Carolyn Heilbrun, a literary theorist whose work I return to whenever I feel the need for a dose of feminist courage, I am grateful for producing the wonderful *Writing a Woman's Life*.

Great thanks must also go to those women who have taught me, motivated me, and given me the confidence to not only write critically, but to think critically as well. Janice Helland, professor of art history and women's studies at Queen's, has continually reminded me that feminism is worth pursuing; Charmaine Nelson, professor in the Art History and Communications department at McGill, introduced me to Saartje Baartman, and was a supportive and enthusiastic supervisor, and Carrie Rentschler, professor of Communications, read some of my earliest work on the Hottentot Venus and encouraged me to pursue the topic.

And to my mother, Carol Rose, who also did her Master's at McGill. She has truly taught me to live to the point of tears.

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PLATE LIST



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# INTRODUCTION: THE HOTTENTOT VENUS AS NAMED BODY

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Jean Rhys re-envisions Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) by retelling the story from the perspective of Rochester's wife, who, in Brontë's novel was a nameless and faceless madwoman in the attic whose only purpose was to function as a foil to Jane.[1] In Rhys's version the wife is finally given a name, Antoinette Cosway, as well as a voice, and the major underlying theme that surfaces repeatedly throughout the text is the idea that "Names matter."[2] Significantly for my own text, the nameless wife in *Jane Eyre* is a black woman, who is nothing more than an effigy "sacrificed to the success story of the famous [white] English heroine."[3] Rhys, unlike Brontë, provides Antoinette with a personality and a history, giving the reader an image of her life in the Caribbean before she married Rochester and was dis-located – a post-colonial term that Rosemary Betterton associates with the dual loss of language and home[4] – to England. Saartje Baartman, a black South African woman who became known as the "Hottentot Venus," was also dis-located to England in the early nineteenth century.[5] Baartman too was effectively rendered nameless once she arrived on European soil, as she was transformed from a woman with a name and identity to a body put on

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[1] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998). The novel's plot revolves around Jane, a young woman who is hired by Rochester, a wealthy and mysterious Englishman, as governess for his young daughter. Rochester and Jane slowly realize that they are in love with each other, but on the day of their wedding a stranger arrives to inform the minister that Rochester is still married to a Creole woman, who - because of her alleged madness - has been locked in the attic of the very house that Jane has been living in. Jane flees the wedding, but when she learns that Rochester has been blinded in a fire set by his first wife, she returns to be his nursemaid, and they marry. Nothing more is said of the Creole wife, beyond the fact that she has died in the fire.

[2] Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 147. See also Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998).

[3] Andrea Ashworth, "Introduction" in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), viii.

[4] Rosemary Betterton, *Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 6.

[5] I have chosen to employ the spelling of "Saartje" that appears in Sander Gilman's text "The Hottentot and the Prostitute: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality" in *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, ed. Kimberly N. Pinder (New York: Routledge, 2002), 119-138.

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display because of her protruding buttocks, which were regarded by nineteenth-century naturalists as not only "abnormal," but as reflective of a "primitive" and "deviant" nature. In my text I will position Baartman as a flesh and blood woman who was much more than the moniker of "Hottentot Venus," and I will look critically at the derogatory visual representations that were produced in response to the intermingled fear and arousal experienced by Europeans who went to view her body. My primary focus here, however, are the twentieth-century black female artists who have produced art inspired by Baartman. I will argue that through their artwork these artists are successfully giving Baartman back her name and providing her with a voice, a project that is comparable to that of Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. And lest we forget, in the racist and sexist drama played out upon Baartman's body, names did, and always will, matter.

A number of the scholars whose work I reference in my discussion of Baartman and the contemporary black female artists who are inspired by her also emphasize the importance of names and naming in a woman's life. Art historian and critic Jo Anna Isaak, for instance, has argued that "The desire to scrutinize, inscribe, and control the female body and the colonial control of other lands through mapping and naming" is fundamental to the western patriarchal drive.[6] In this statement Isaak links the desire to control the female body and to colonize other lands, thus alluding to a point often made by post-colonial feminist theorists. Throughout my text my primary methodologies will be the intersecting theories of feminism and post-colonialism - although I also use linguistic theory and psychoanalysis - which I employ in my critique of nineteenth-century visual representations of Baartman. Significantly, the contemporary black female

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[6] Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 167.

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artists I discuss are themselves working with a critical mindset informed by both post-colonial philosophy and by black feminism. I should pause here in order to clarify why I refer to both "feminism" and "black feminism" in the same breath. Since Linda Nochlin's now-canonical essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" was published in the early 1970s, feminist art history has been widely accepted by scholars and absorbed into most art history curricula.[7] As part of the so-called new art history, it is considered to be an extremely productive methodology that activates the deconstruction of western art by white male artists, especially canonical representations of women.[8] However, many black feminists have observed that while this is an important change in the discourse of art history, "feminist art history" ignores the black female subject, as "feminist" is inevitably read as "white feminist," thus erasing personal and political concerns experienced exclusively by black women and other racially marginalized women. This is comparable to the way that "artist" has traditionally been, and still is to a great extent, inexorably identified as referring to a white, male artist, and anyone who does not occupy that subject position must be labeled, for example, as a "woman artist" or a "black artist," thus locating the individual as "other."[9] In my text I grapple with problematic historical images as well as contemporary critical artworks with

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[7] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*, ed. Carolyn Korsmeyer (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 314-323. Although Nochlin's article appears under the title "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" in the *Aesthetics* text, I have used the title that the article was originally published under when it appeared in ARTnews in January 1971.

[8] See Vernon Hyde Minor on the "new art history and visual culture" in *Art History's History*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Upper Saddle River, 2001), 150-156.

[9] There is always the problem, of course, of *what* to call a group of artists that is made up of non-white, non-male individuals. Adrian Piper writes that she prefers the term "colored woman artist" or CWA, as "The term 'colored' seems both aetiologically and metaphorically apt." She does not like the term "people of colour" because it is "syntactically cumbersome" and because it "has a genteel and euphemistic ring to it, as though there were some ugly fact about a person we need to simultaneously denote and avoid, by performing elaborate grammatical circumlocutions." Adrian Piper, "The Triple Negation of Colored Woman Artists" in *Feminism, Art, Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 57. Although I appreciate Piper's barbed humour, I will not be using "colored woman artist," instead choosing to employ the more comfortable, for me, "black female artist."

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an eye to both white feminist scholarship, including the work of Nochlin, Griselda Pollock - who, though white herself, has contributed valuable post-colonial work to the discipline of feminist art history - and Betterton, and black feminist criticism as articulated by bell hooks, Michele Wallace and others, thus making an intervention into so-called traditional art history by focusing on and employing the theoretical methodologies that have been created to deal with issues such as intersectionality, which refers to the fact that every person is the product of a plurality of identity markers including, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality and class.

Lisa McLaughlin has recognized the fact that feminism as a methodology is not without its flaws. In an article on feminism and the public sphere she writes that "Feminist discourse, its alternative status aside, may also be embedded in hegemonic discourses of appropriateness in sexual, social and cultural practices, marginalizing its others."[10] In other words, although feminism is ostensibly about the empowerment of *all* women, by erasing differences such as race, class and sexual orientation, a plethora of women are actually ignored and therefore *disempowered* by feminist interventions.[11] Black feminist scholar Freida High has written that "Without a discourse of their own, black women artists remain fixed in the trajectory of displacement, hardly moving beyond the defensive posture of merely responding to their objectification and

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[10] Lisa McLaughlin, "Feminism, the Public Sphere, Media and Democracy" in *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. 15 (SAGE, London, Newbury Park and New Delhi, 1993), 609.

[11] I believe that Belinda Edmondson's point is a good one when she writes: "White feminists often link feminist oppositional practices to black oppositional practices; significantly, the reverse is not true." Belinda Edmondson, "Black Aesthetics, Feminist Aesthetics, and the Problems of Oppositional Discourse" in *Feminism, Art, Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 330. To be clear, I am not attempting to align women's experiences of oppression with those of black people. Rather, like Michael Harris, I believe that it is potentially productive to consider the "intersection of feminist thought and African American women artists addressing (through art) their unique difficulties as black women." Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 141.

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misrepresentation by others."[12] High is adamant that "The act of claiming a particular discourse...asserts a claim for visibility and registers a theoretical position," and she calls for black women to create their own discourse(s) that are founded on collective histories and shared memories.[13] Michael Harris concurs, writing in his text *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (2003), "Connections to ancestral presences and memories by its very nature links the artists to larger aspects of his or her identity without threatening diversity or individuality."[14]

As a white female who had never questioned (white) feminist theory - especially within the context of visual culture - before encountering self-consciously black feminist scholarship, I find Patricia Hill Collins's discussion of black feminism particularly valuable, as it opens a space for a white woman to engage with black feminist theory, while still appreciating the (white) feminist scholarship that resonates for her. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) Collins writes that although she believes that the experiences of black women are fundamental to black feminist thought, she is wary of definitions of black feminism that are exclusionary, and she therefore rejects definitions that restrict someone from being considered a black feminist because of race or gender.[15] However, she does believe that black feminist thought "consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women."[16] In the chapters that follow my intention is not to presume to empathize with black women's struggles, nor to

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[12] Freida High, "In Search of a Discourse and Critique(s) that Center the Art of Black Women Artists" in *Feminism, Art, Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 216.
[13] Ibid, 217.
[14] Harris, 250.
[15] Patricia Hill Collins, "Defining Black Feminist Thought" in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 19-40.
[16] Ibid, 22.

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attempt to identify with a black woman's standpoint, but rather to review the literature that has formed a discourse reflecting something, if only a fragment, of black women's experiences with, and within, visual culture in order to illuminate the racist and sexist ideologies being activated by problematic representations of the black female body. I regard this self-reflexivity as integral to any project that deals with gender, race, representation and the politics of the body.[17]

To return to the dilemma of naming in the context of women's identities, which I think is absolutely fundamental to understand if we are to grasp Baartman's lived experience as the Hottentot Venus, I quote feminist literary theorist Carolyn Heilbrun who speaks to the problematics of women and naming. She writes:

> Women have long been nameless. They have not been persons. Handed by a father to another man, the husband, they have been objects of circulation, exchanging one name for another. That is why the story of Persephone and Demeter is the story of all women who marry: why death and marriage, as Nancy Miller pointed out in *The Heroine's Text*, were the only two possible ends for women in novels, and were, frequently, the same end. For the young woman died as a subject, ceased as an entity.[18]

Baartman's history is one that is full of namelessness, or at least one that is full of new names that were projected upon Baartman by white men within a patriarchal colonial context. Baartman was born in Kaffraria, the interior of the Cape Colony of South Africa, in approximately 1788.[19] Her actual name at birth, which was possibly Saat-je, is still contested by scholars, but we know from archival evidence that she was re-named

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[17] For the rest of my text I will refrain from using the rather awkward term "(white) feminist." I will use "feminism" as a signifier of a particular methodology that intersects, but is fundamentally different from, "black feminism". Although, as I have attempted to indicate, "feminist" is problematic as it is automatically read as "white," and therefore normative because no race is identified, the terms "feminist" and "black feminist" will be used in my text as indicators of the methodologies being employed, as opposed to signifiers of the scholar's racial subject position.

[18] Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 121.

[19] T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fear, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 17.

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Saartjie Baartman when the Cape region came under Dutch colonial rule in the late eighteenth century. Documents that exist from this period have her name spelled as both "Saartjie" and "Saartje," the latter of which I have rather arbitrarily chosen to use throughout my own text. When Baartman was 21 or 22 she entered into a contractual agreement with Alexander Dunlop of St. James, Middlesex, England and Hendrick Cezar, the brother of Peter Cezar, a Boer farmer at Cape of Good Hope, who Baartman had done domestic work for. The contract stipulated that she was to be exhibited in Ireland and England, and that she would be paid a portion of the profits from the exhibition. It also stated that she would be repatriated after five years.[20] The contract was written up on October 29, 1810, and on December 7th, 1811 Baartman's name was again changed, this time to the anglo-sized Sarah Bartmann.[21] This name change came into being on a dual marriage and "birth" certificate,[22] thus discursively bringing into being Sarah Bartmann, who would eventually undergo yet another metamorphosis, this time into the body known as the "Hottentot Venus."

Once "Saat-je Baartman" had been eclipsed by the "Hottentot Venus," the former no longer truly existed, at least according to the legions of Europeans who went to view her because of her "abnormally" large buttocks, or steatopygia. No documents exist to indicate who actually invented Baartman's stage name, but post-colonial scholars have been quick to point out how racist and sexually charged the name deliberately was. Like her birth name, Baartman's racial affiliation has not been solidly established. Most scholars agree that she was part of the Khoi-San (Khoikhoi and San) peoples, but those

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[20] Sharpley-Whiting, 18.
[21] Ibid.
[22] In my research I have not once come across the name of the man who Baartman married at that time. Similarly, no scholar has provided the name of Baartman's first husband, who she married while still living in Kaffraria.

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responsible for her performance name likely chose "Hottentot" because of its status as the derogatory, generalized term used to signify a socially-coded type of blackness in nineteenth-century Europe. The Hottentots were regarded as the lowest group on the socio-racial hierarchy within western colonial and scientific discourses at the time.[23] The latter part of Baartman's new linguistic signifier is significant for what it says about shifts in the meaning of words over time. For twenty-first century westerners, "Venus" signifies the classical goddess of love and beauty, evoking canonical images such as the *Venus de Milo* (Plate 1), or paintings of white nude women such as Alessandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (Plate 2). But in the nineteenth century "Venus" had become embedded in discourses revolving around prostitution, fallen women, and venereal disease, particularly syphilis. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting observes in her text *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fear, and Primitive Narratives in French* (1999) that while in classical Roman mythology Venus was the goddess of natural productivity, she was later absorbed into narratives of threatening sexuality, which were subsequently written onto the bodies of prostitutes.[24] Sharpley-Whiting identifies religious scholar Peter Abelard as responsible for beginning to project these narratives of danger and hyper-sexuality onto black women's bodies.[25] In her text Sharpley-Whiting is preoccupied with the investigation of French nineteenth-century writers who were apparently fixated by the idea of the "Black Venus," the lugubrious black woman who seduced white men. She writes: "The projection of the Venus image, of prostitute proclivities onto black female bodies, allows the French writer to maintain a position of

[23] Sharpley-Whiting, 17.
[24] Ibid, 1.
[25] Ibid.

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moral, sexual, and racial superiority."[26] This is one explanation, or at least a partial explanation, for the Hottentot Venus label. Art historian Michael Harris, writing with similar post-colonial concerns to those of Sharpley-Whiting, argues that the "Venus" in Hottentot Venus "did serve to connect the sexual primitive to the sexual discourse already present in art," that is to say, art valued within the western visual imagination.[27] Charmaine Nelson makes a crucial point about the deliberate malice implicit in the Hottentot Venus name when she writes: "Since Venus, which has most frequently in western art been represented as white female subjects, has widely been read as an idealization of female beauty, to affix the term 'Hottentot' is an ironic or cruelly 'humorous' gesture that substitutes a racially 'othered' body – the grotesque – for the expected beautiful white female body."[28]

Interestingly, Joshua Reynolds, founder of the British Royal Academy, wrote the following in his essay "The True Idea of Beauty": "It is custom alone determines our [white viewers] preference of the colour of the Europeans to the Aethopians, and they, for the same reason, prefer their own colour to ours." He continues: "I suppose no body will doubt, if one of their Painters was to paint the Goddess of Beauty, but that he would represent her black, with thick lips, flat nose, and woolly hair; and, it seems to me, he would act very unnaturally if he did not."[29] The problem here, of course, is that in western societies black women have been taught to value, and even seek to attain, white women's bodies and features. The fact that so-called beauty products such as

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[26] Sharpley-Whiting, 7.
[27] Harris, 128.
[28] Charmaine Nelson, "The 'Hottentot Venus' in Canada: Modernism, Censorship and the Racial Limits of Female Sexuality" in *Racism, Eh? A Critical Inter-Disciplinary Anthology of Race and Racism in Canada*, eds. Camille A. Nelson and Charmaine A. Nelson (Concord, Ontario: Captus Press, 2004), 370.
[29] Joshua Reynolds, "The True Idea of Beauty" (10 November 1759) in *The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. Henry William Beechey, Vol. 2 (London: 1852), 131.

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straighteners exist is testament to the desire of some black women to fit the white ideal of beauty, that is, light-colored skin and smooth hair.[30] In the nineteenth century those who succumbed to the cultural idealization of white skin - those who could afford it - purchased skin "lighteners." Kathy Peiss has written that for black women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century "beauty culture was explicitly a political issue...Skin whiteners and hair straighteners were the tokens in a heated debate: Against charges of white emulation and self-loathing, many black women invoked their rights to social participation and cultural legitimacy precisely through their use of beauty aids."[31] Moreover, white skin, in both men and women, was coded as superior both economically and morally. Peiss points out that the white face "purged of the exertions of labor, simultaneously asserted bourgeois refinement and racial privilege."[32] In the nineteenth century black bodies were still inextricably linked with Trans-Atlantic slavery, even if those bodies had never been slave bodies, and thus not only was black skin read as signifying powerlessness, but black women were often described in white social circles as ugly *because* of their skin color. To complicate matters, of course, there were always white individuals, both male and female, who were attracted to black women, and Baartman was no exception.[33] Of course, the fact that white men had been having sex with black women - most often without the woman's consent, meaning that most of the

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[30] See Kobena Mercer on the problematics and politics of black people's hair in "Black Hair/Style Politics" in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Min-ha, Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 247-264.

[31] Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1998), 7. See also Janell Hobson, *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[32] Ibid, 41.

[33] Although it is very possible that there were white European women who were aroused by Baartman's body in the nineteenth century, while there are documents indicating that white men's responses to Baartman ranged from arousal to disgust, existing records of white women's reactions are always, without exception, characterized by either repulsion or humorous curiosity, but never sexual attraction.

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inter-racial intercourse was in fact rape - during slavery was well known, if not spoken openly about, and following abolition, the fear of miscegenation - a term invented to refer to sexual intercourse between different races - increased exponentially. This anxiety resulted in the production of derogatory and degrading visual representations of black people, both male and female. Baartman herself was the subject of many such images, and in Chapter 1 I discuss the caricatures that were produced in response to the paradoxical feelings of allurement and repulsion experienced by white spectators of her body, such as the ironically titled *Love and Beauty* (Plate 3), which portrays Baartman with exaggerated physiognomy bordering on the grotesque, a term that is woven throughout my text. The concept of the grotesque surfaces in my examination of visual representations of Baartman in Chapter 1, but I also propose "grotesque-ing" as a verb in Chapter 2 to describe one of the radical aesthetic practices that female and feminist artists of various races have employed in order to illuminate the violence of patriarchal culture.

Baartman died on either December 29th, 1815 according to the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, or on January 1st, 1816,[34] according to Georges Cuvier, who "studied" Baartman's body for three days in March 1815 at the Jardin du Roi, and wrote about her in his text *Discours sur la Révolutions de la Surface du Globe* (1826).[35] Cuvier concluded that Baartman was the embodiment of primitive female sexuality based on her

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[34] According to Sharpley-Whiting, at the time of her death, Baartman was being treated for a catarrh, a pleurisy, and dropsy of the breast (27). However, she died of smallpox, *aggravated by alcohol poisoning*. This apparent smorgasbord of diagnoses, and questionable treatments, combined with a possible alcohol poisoning raises a red flag for me, and evokes troubling questions regarding a woman's control over her own body once she has entered a medical or "scientific" context. Georges Cuvier officially ascribed Baartman's death to "an excess of drink to which she gave herself up during her last illness" (quoted in Wiss, 26), and Rosemary Wiss has pointed out that this blame-the-victim discourse is typical of the Euro-centric study of the "Other." She writes that Baartman was perceived as "naturally degenerating the way 'savages' customarily do when corrupted .... *her own body destroyed her life*, not contagion from those around her, or her [lack of] medical care" (28, Italics mine).

[35] Georges Cuvier, *Discours sur la Révolutions de la Surface du Globe* (Paris: Chez G. Dufour et E.d'Ocagne, 1826). See also Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire naturelle des mammifères: avec des figures originales, coloriées, dessinées, d'après des animaux vivans* (Paris : [s.n.], 1824).

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buttocks and sexual organs, and identified her as the "missing link" between primates and (white) human beings.[36] Sander Gilman has written about the scientific racism that led to Baartman being pathologized. Regarding the French "naturalist" Buffon, Gilman writes:

> Buffon's view [on Baartman's 'primitive' sexuality] was based on a confusion of two applications of the 'great chain of being' to the nature of the black. In this view, the black's position on the scale of humanity was antithetical to the white's. Such a scale was employed to indicate innate differences between the races. This polygenetic view was applied to all human characteristics, including sexuality and beauty.[37]

Although I find Gilman's text useful as a survey of the pseudo-scientific discourses within which Baartman was transformed into a specimen, I take Sharpley-Whiting's point that Gilman's discussion is flawed in that it is ultimately a reading of white sexuality - specifically that of white prostitutes - through the lens of black female sexuality.[38] Furthermore, Gilman's account of Baartman's life seems almost idealized in comparison to Jean Young's heated critique of Suzan-Lori Parks's play inspired by Baartman's experience as the Hottentot Venus, in which Young viscerally describes the extent to which Baartman was victimized during her time in Europe.[39]

After her death Baartman's genitals were dissected at the Musée de l'Homme. The scientists who performed the dissection were ostensibly looking for "hidden secrets" that would explain her corporeal and sexual "abnormality."[40] They made a plaster molding of her body, and this, along with a molding of her genitalia were put on display at the Musée de l'Homme. Sharpley-Whiting alerts us to the fact that "The discipline of

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[36] Gilman, 121-122.
[37] Ibid, 121.
[38] Sharpley-Whiting, 2-3
[39] Jean Young, "The Re-Objectification and the Re-Commodification of Saartjie Baartman in Suzan-Lori Parks's *Venus*" in *African American Review* (Winter 1997), http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_n4_v31/ai_20425715/pg_2.
[40] Sharpley-Whiting, 27.

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natural history is a combination of scientific writing, history and ethnography that allows the objects under the gaze to be ordered into a totalizing system of representation, that allows the seen body to become the known body."[41] On display both alive and dead, Baartman's body was regarded as public property: to see her was to know her intimately, even carnally. Even more disturbing is the fact that the myth revolving around Baartman's alleged primitive and lascivious sexuality was not only maintained, but perpetuated after her death. There were rumors that male visitors to the Musée de l'Homme were caught masturbating near the case that contained the molding of Baartman's sexual organs,[42] and according to one time director André Langancy it was because of these "masturbatory liaisons" that the exhibition was discontinued, thus mythologizing even further the supposed dangerous hyper-sexuality of black women that threatened to disturb the conservative and moral white western ethos embodied by the Musée de l'Homme.[43]

It is this paradoxical myth of black women's dangerous sexuality and their concurrent powerlessness that contemporary black female artists wish to problematize

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[41] Sharpley-Whiting, 22.

[42] Based on the written descriptions of such incidents I have read the race of these men as white, in part because their race is never named, but also because in the nineteenth century access to cultural spaces such as museums was highly restricted to specific races and classes, namely wealthy white men (and some wealthy white women). Furthermore, if white men were being aroused by viewing the fetishes of Baartman's body, the act of removing the display in order to eliminate lewd public acts would fit into the tradition of placing the sexual onus on the black women (here reduced to a molding of her genitalia), rather than on the white men. This narrative of the display of Baartman's body parts and their subsequent removal recalls how during the years of Trans-Atlantic slavery white men who raped female slaves would blame the women for seducing them, saying that they - the white men - had been rendered powerless by the black woman's sexual wiles, thus projecting the blame onto the female slaves.

[43] Sharpley-Whiting, 31. After years of negotiations, the Musée de l'Homme finally agreed in 2002 to return Baartman's bodily remains to the South African government. According to the original contract, Baartman was to have returned to South Africa five years after leaving for Europe. That would have been 1815 or 1816, meaning that Baartman was repatriated nearly 200 years after her contract stipulated. But as I have indicated, Baartman was dead by 1816. At least one source has contended that by the time she was in Paris Baartman had been forced into prostitution in order to survive when her "keepers" abandoned her. See "'Hottentot Venus' Goes Home," *BBC News* (29 April 2002), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1957240.stm.

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and dispel with artwork inspired by Baartman. It is a myth that has a long history, however, and is therefore well entrenched in the western collective consciousness. In Chapter 1 I discuss images of black female slaves that circulate within a visual culture that locates the black female body as silent, submissive, and sexually available. I argue that these images and the visual representations of Baartman are related in that they make up the fabric of a colonialist visual tradition against which all images of black women are inevitably viewed and judged. In other words, even today, representations of black women are automatically inserted into a visual matrix that has been read as reflective of hyper-sexuality and the availability of the black female body to the masculine gaze and phallus. In Chapter 2 I discuss three American black female artists who are producing artwork despite, or perhaps because of, that visual matrix. Renee Cox, Renee Green and Joyce Scott have all created artworks inspired by Baartman, which invoke important questions about how the black female body is still viewed in western culture today. Cox and Scott even go so far as to re-inhabit the Hottentot Venus body, and I explore the risks, as well as the possibilities, of black female artists using their own bodies in art. Contra the notion that black women cannot be considered beautiful, their work speaks to the fact that these women are no strangers to beauty.[44]

In Chapter 3 I attempt to illuminate the productive potential of reading artwork inspired by Baartman through Jungian goddess feminism. I employ linguistic theory and psychoanalysis to outline how archetypal theory can function in this context, and this chapter represents my greatest departure from the work that has already been done on the visual representations of Baartman and on contemporary art by black female artists. It is

[44] For a discussion of how the notion of beauty has changed over time see Wendy Steiner, *The Trouble with Beauty* (London: William Heinemann, 2001).

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perhaps the most innovative, and therefore tentative, of any intervention I have made to date into the discourse of art history and visual culture. This methodological approach to visual art and women's psychology will not appeal to every reader, but like with any methodology or theory, it is only one of many possible ways to read visual images. In my Conclusion I return briefly to the contemporary art that I discuss in Chapter 2, exploring what Jo Anna Isaak has identified as the revolutionary power of women's laughter in feminist art.[45] I save this discussion for the end of my text rather than including it in Chapter 2 because I consciously decided to conclude on a hopeful note, and the idea of women's humour and laughter provided me with a wonderful image with which to tie up all my loose ends. My ultimate goal is to separate the mythical "Hottentot Venus" from the black woman named Saartje Baartman, who had a voice and a personality, both of which were subsumed under the performative guise of the Hottentot Venus. The dilemma that scholars face in reviving any historical figure is that there is often the temptation to make assumptions about identity without the support of empirical evidence. I have done my best to be responsible in my speculation about Baartman's life and subjectivity, working as I am with a very limited number of traces left by Baartman herself. Saartje was reduced to an iconic body, but I suggest that she is iconic for another reason: her experience offers a productive entry point into black feminist scholarship and art history because issues of gender, race, sexuality and corporeality were written onto her body. My project here is to read her represented body as though it were a palimpsest, while never losing sight of Baartman the person, whose identity transcended that much looked-upon body.

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[45] Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

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# CHAPTER 1

## THE HOTTENTOT VENUS AS OBJECT: THE PROBLEM OF THE BLACK FEMALE BODY IN VISUAL CULTURE

At the same time that Saartje Baartman was being exhibited as the Hottentot Venus in early nineteenth-century France and England, heated debates about abolition were taking place across Europe and North America.[1] In the midst of these dialogues, a few concerned (white) citizens raised a cry about the possibility that Baartman was not only being mistreated, but that she was being treated as a slave.[2] As Charmaine Nelson has observed, it is difficult to determine from our position in the twenty-first century whether Baartman, who was theoretically a "free black," although she was under contract to be exhibited for a specific amount of time, would have been regarded as a slave by the people who came to view her. It is undeniable, however, that her relationships with white Europeans would have been "inequitable and exploitative" at the very least.[3] An investigation, during which she apparently told her interviewers that she was happy to be in England, though she was often cold, concluded that she should not be removed from

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[1] The Abolition of the Slave Trade bill was carried in the British House of Commons and House of Lords in 1807, but slavery continued to a certain extent. British parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, which was intended to give all slaves in the British empire their freedom. France temporarily abolished slavery during the French Revolution (1794-1802), but it was restored in 1802 under Napoléon Bonaparte. Slavery was re-abolished in France and all colonies in the French empire following the proclamation of the Second Republic in 1848.

[2] Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, Vol. 4, Pt. 2 (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 52. Jean Young observes that, according to the November 24, 1810 edition of The London Times, a Mr. M'Cartney, member of the African Association, petitioned the court for Baartman's "release," and to ascertain whether or not her keeper, Cezar, had sexual access to her. Young does not record whether there was ever any proof indicating that Cezar ever "took advantage" of his charge; she does note that Baartman allegedly told Cuvier that her "owners" only entered her room after she was dressed. Jean Young, "The Re-Objectification and the Re-Commodification of Saartjie Baartman in Suzan-Lori Parks's *Venus*" in *African American Review* (Winter 1997), http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_n4_v31/ai_20425715/pg_2.

[3] Charmaine Nelson, "The 'Hottentot Venus' in Canada: Modernism, Censorship and the Racial Limits of Female Sexuality" in *Racism, Eh? A Critical Inter-Disciplinary Anthology of Race and Racism in Canada*, eds. Camille A. Nelson and Charmaine A. Nelson (Concord, Ontario: Captus Press, 2004), 371.

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the custody of her "owners," and Baartman was therefore not repatriated to her home in South Africa.[4]

Regardless of the investigators' conclusion, it is my objective in this chapter to draw a connection between images of slave women and the many visual representations of Baartman, arguing that the former exist as a direct antecedent to the latter, in that both are founded on dehumanizing the black female and framing the black female body as a sexualized commodity to be consumed visually by the (white male) viewer. That is not to say that I am arguing that Baartman was treated, or even thought of, as a slave. Rather, I am establishing an historical background of visually commodified black women against which contemporary black female artists, such as Rene Valerie Cox, Joyce Scott and Renee Green, are producing art that is preoccupied with the black female body in general, and the Hottentot Venus body in particular.

In this chapter I will attempt to illuminate the visual matrix within which all images of black women circulate. There is a visual tradition in the west of exploiting black women, which is inextricably linked with the sexual and economic exploitation that took place within the institution of Trans-Atlantic slavery, and the economic, cultural, and *possible* sexual exploitation of Baartman. Admittedly, the way that Baartman was exhibited, and the reasons for which she was exhibited, indicate motivations based on scopophilic desire, thus suggesting a form of sexual exploitation that was enacted through the act of looking, an act that was dependant on unequal power relations.[5] Although

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[4] Honour, 52.

[5] Laura Mulvey, among others, has discussed the "gaze" as a term that encapsulates this kind of looking. The "gaze" implies a viewer with power, and an object of surveillance who has less power. (This does not mean, however, that the person being looked at is necessarily powerless.) The term is therefore highly important for the study of individuals such as Baartman who were brought to Europe for anthropological and ethnographical reasons. Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

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there is no evidence that Baartman experienced other forms of sexual exploitation - rape, for instance - it is not impossible that such acts took place. Gen Doy writes that "[W]e face a huge problem in researching the history of black people and, in particular, the history of black women in France."[6] This, of course, is due to the lack of personal records - letters and diary entries - left by black women, and this lacuna is a major dilemma for the study of black women in nineteenth-century England and other countries as well. Baartman's sexual history will probably always remain hazy due to a lack of documents written by Baartman herself. Pamela Scully, who is currently compiling historical documents about Baartman's life before and after she left South Africa, has discovered archival evidence that indicates that Baartman was married at least once while still living in Cape Town, and that she had at least one child who probably died shortly after birth. According to Scully, Baartman also had a lover - a German - before she departed for Europe, and based on a baptismal certificate that also served as a marriage certificate, Baartman was apparently married a second time shortly after her arrival in Manchester in 1811.[7] It may seem irrelevant, even exploitative to ask questions about Baartman's sex life, but I do so in order to address the very real possibility that Baartman was not only exploited in the financial sense by being exhibited as a freak of nature for money, but also in the most degrading sexual sense. Rape is only one form of sexual exploitation; prostitution is another, but it unites sex and economics in a way that rape does not. It has been argued by at least one source that Baartman had to "supplement her

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[6] Gen Doy, *Women and Visual Culture in 19th Century France 1800-1852* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1998), 210.

[7] Pamela Scully, Public Lecture, "Borderlands, Feminist Ethnography and the Histories of Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus" (McGill University, 15 September 2005).

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meager income as a prostitute,"[8] but no archival evidence has been provided to support this claim. Yet, the suggestion seems alarmingly possible.

The history of framing the black female body as an object to be purchased and consumed - as both female slaves and Baartman were to varying degrees - must be illuminated if we are to fully understand the loaded nature of all images of black women produced after Baartman's lifetime, including those by black female artists. In this chapter I will look critically at images that operate as primary evidence of the racist and colonial ideologies that facilitated the exploitation and commodification of black women. The images that I will discuss include engravings from John Gabriel Stedman's ostensibly anti-slavery text *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), which Marcus Wood argues is more pornographic than abolitionist;[9] the ethnographic drawings and photographs that first appeared in texts like Georges Cuvier's *Discours sur la Révolutions de la surface du Globe Globe* (1826),[10] which are discussed with varying degrees of critical insight by Hugh Honour and Gen Doy, and the caricatures of Baartman produced in response to her exhibition in England and France, which functioned as a coping mechanism for the latent fear of the dangerous, "venal" sexuality of black women that was inextricably linked with the European anxiety about miscegenation.[11]

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[8] Quoted in Carmen Mitchell, "Hottentot Venus Revisited: Multiple Expressivities of the Black Female Body in Visual Art and Music Performance" (2003). http://www.divadelight.freeservers.com/diva_delight_expressions.htm.

[9] Marcus Wood, "John Gabriel Stedman, William Blake, Francesco Bartolozzi and Empathetic Pornography in the *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*" in *An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture and the Atlantic World, 1660-1830*, eds. Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 129-149.

[10] Georges Cuvier, *Discours sur la Révolutions de la surface du Globe* (Paris: Chez G. Dufour et E.d'Ocagne, 1826).

[11] See Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century*

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*Group of Negros, as Imported to be Sold as Slaves* (Plate 4) by William Blake is important because it explicitly reveals one of the final steps of the de-humanizing commodification process that African peoples endured before being sold into slavery. The image depicts ten black women and one black man being herded - probably from a holding cell or the slave ship itself - by a white man with a long stick in the direction of something unseen on our left. Although there is no indication of where they are heading, the viewer assumes that it is the auction block, or a space related to the selling of slaves. What is particularly striking about this image are the women's expressions, which are not fearful or exhausted, but rather curious, even peaceful. The artist's decision to portray the women as serene comes into focus if we read the image in terms of possible allusions to religious iconography. The woman in the foreground looks directly at the viewer, and with her right hand points gracefully towards where we assume the auction block is. The gesture recalls Renaissance paintings identified as *sacra conversazione*, literally translated as "sacred conversations," in which Saints or patrons point to the Virgin and Christ child, indicating those central figures as the saviors of humanity. One example is Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin of the Rocks* (Plate 5) in which an angel indicates with an elegantly bent finger to the triad of Mary, baby Jesus and an infant John the Baptist. Christine Ross has shown that this pointing figure in Renaissance art was identified as the "commentator" by Leon Battista Alberti in his *De pictura* (1435-36). The commentator's role "is to solicit the beholder to interpret the image,"[12] and Alberti writes that the figure "admonishes and points out to us what is happening there [in the *istoria*]; or beckons with

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(Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fear, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

[12] Christine Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression"* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 24.

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his hand to see; ...or shows some danger or marvelous thing there; or invites us to weep or to laugh together with them."[13] Before I proceed with this argument, I should contextualize the slave image further. The copper engraving was produced by Blake in 1796 for John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, in which Stedman describes the atrocities of slavery. According to Wood, the *Narrative* is primarily a sensationalist text, and very much concerned with exhibiting the author's powers of empathy and sensibility.[14] In looking at the implicit Christian iconography in this image - which, admittedly, would be perceived only by an educated viewer with knowledge of artistic traditions - I would argue that this scene could have been read as a reflection of the concept of the "white man's burden," which refers to the rationalization of slavery by framing it as a mission to save blacks from savagery and assimilate them into "civilization." On the other hand, however, according to Alberti's definition of the commentator, the figure is indicating something "dangerous or marvelous," and that the viewer is being invited to either "weep or laugh." Therefore I am not necessarily arguing that Blake's intention was to produce an image that ultimately justified slavery, especially as it was created specifically for Stedman's ostensibly anti-slavery text.[15] Rather, I am suggesting that there was the possibility that nineteenth-century viewers who were aware of the Christian iconography of Saints pointing to the Virgin and Christ child in *sacra conversazione* images, even those who were unconsciously aware of the visual precedent, might have read Blake's

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[13] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (1435-36), trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 78.
[14] Wood: 2003, 136.
[15] Intentionality, interpretation, and meaning are always loaded issues in art history. Cynthia Freeland has observed that "A good interpretation must be grounded in reasons and evidence, and should provide a rich, complex, and illuminating way to comprehend a work of art." I have attempted to support all of my interpretations in this chapter with appropriate visual and textual evidence. Cynthia Freeland, *But is it Art?* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 150.

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etching in a non-abolitionist light. However, for those readers sympathetic to the abolitionist cause, the female commentator in Blake's etching is indeed gesturing to something horrific, not marvelous, and although her expression is not that of a miserable woman, the specific rhetoric of Stedman's text would indeed suggest that the reader is invited to weep, rather than laugh.

Wood discusses Blake's *A Group of Negros* in his article on "Empathetic Pornography" (2003), in which he addresses the problematics of Stedman's *Narrative* and the images produced for that text. Wood observes that images of the slave body being tortured treat said body as "punishment object or fetish in directly exploitative and eroticized ways, which are blatantly pornographic,"[16] and he is not the only post-colonial scholar that links the representation of the black (female) body with pornography. In her discussion of Hottentot Venus anatomy in modern art, Nelson argues that "signs of corporeal excess became fundamentally connected not only with blackness but also with the pornographic."[17] In a similar vein, the oft-quoted black feminist scholar bell hooks has observed that "The black female body gains attention only when it is synonymous with accessibility, availability, when it is sexually deviant."[18] Visual representations of the black female body are inevitably trapped within what hooks calls "the traditional black pornographic imagination."[19]

Wood discusses two representations of slave women, both from 1796, *A Female Negro Slave, with a Weight chained to her Ancle* by Francesco Bartolozzi (Plate 6), and *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave* by William Blake (Plate 7), that explicitly locate

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[16] Wood: 2003, 130.
[17] Nelson: 2004, 371.
[18] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992), 66.
[19] Ibid, 63.

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female slaves as accessible and available, if not sexually deviant. However, the idea of deviance *is* significant here because these two images are representations of female slaves who are being punished for *allegedly deviant behavior*. Ironically, according Stedman himself, one of the female slaves he observed during his travels was being punished for rejecting a white slave master's sexual advances, thus making her a sexual innocent, rather than a sexual deviant.[20] Not insignificantly, both Bartolozzi and Blake employ traditional aesthetic strategies in order to make the women's bodies more visually available to the viewer. Bartolozzi, for instance, ensures that the viewer has a sexualized vision of the female slave with a weight chained to her ankle by representing her at the moment that she has, oddly, placed the weight on top of her head, thus making her arms strained and muscular, much like those of classical sculptures. Moreover, she is represented with her other hand covering her eyes, thus erasing any confrontational gaze that may trouble the viewer, which is also part of a long tradition in western art. Another technique that male artists have long used when visually exploiting the female body is the splaying of that body in unnatural positions so that it may be more easily consumed by the eye. With *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave*, Blake has the perfect opportunity to reveal the slave body in an explicit fashion, while having "justification" to do so. The woman's hands are raised above her head, lifting her breasts; the tattered material around her genitals is tantalizing in that it hints more than it hides, and her whole body is represented in a pleasing, if implausible, position, not unlike to the Renaissance *contra posto*. Both images function as valuable primary visual texts that speak volumes about the exploitation and scopophilic consumption of black women by white males within the context of slavery, and inextricably linked with this kind of representation was the actual

[20] Wood: 2003, 140.

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sexual exploitation of female slaves at the hands of white slave masters that Stedman alludes to in his *Narrative.*

Thomas Clarkson, a nineteenth-century abolitionist writer, also makes reference to the torture of slaves in his polemical text *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (1822). He writes: "Another abuse, which shews, like the rest, the extreme degredation of the Negro race...is the cruel, and, at least in the case of the female sex, highly indecent punishements inflicted in public."[21] The other abuses that Clarkson discusses include the sexual abuse of female slaves. He observes that female slaves are raped - although he never uses this term - by the drivers, "usually the strongest and stoutest of the Negroes,"[22]and he does not shy away from explicitly addressing the sexual abuse acted out by white males:

> It must be observed, that licentiousness thus produced is not confined to the Negroes...Instead of hiring married manager and overseers, single young men are hired, hence it too naturally follows, from their being the depositories of the master's authority, ought to be the protectors of the purity of the young females, too often become their corruptors.[23]

I would note, however, that Clarkson does remain reticent on the matter of the white slave masters themselves engaging in sexual relations with the female slaves, although we know this form of social transgression occurred frequently.[24]

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[21] Thomas Clarkson, An Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies (London: Harvey and Dartass, 1822), 13.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Clarkson: 1822, 16.
[24] See, for example, Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). He writes that according to the racist and sexist ideologies of the time, "the persistent, widespread sexual abuse of slave women was the consequence of their own libidinous nature" (33). Harris's text is extremely useful for my purposes as not only does he examine representations of black people, and art *by* black people, he also provides an eloquent and critical history of Trans-Atlantic slavery, as well as addressing the history of racism itself. He observes that in the

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Although there is no archival evidence that indicates that the French-Canadian artist Malépart de Beaucourt ever engaged in sexual relations with his female slave, his painting *Portrait of an Unnamed Female Slave* of 1786 (Plate 8), which was painted exactly ten years before Stedman's *Narrative* was published, is significant for my discussion because of how the sitter is represented, and because of what this says about the supposed availability of the female slave's body as an exotic commodity. De Beaucourt went to Europe to study art, and this "portrait" indicates just how much he was influenced by eighteenth-century French style. I enclose portrait in quotation marks in order to highlight the problematics of the term. Although we now know that the woman was a slave belonging to de Beaucourt's wife,[25] there is no name attached to the image except de Beaucourt's own. More alarming is the nonchalant way in which the woman's bare breast is placed strategically above a plate of exotic fruit. Therefore, like the fruit that was taken from a far off colonized land, so too was this woman's body taken, likely against her will. And like the land, her body may well have been "colonized" by white men for their sexual enjoyment. Although the trope of the colonized black female body has already been used extensively elsewhere, I still regard it as useful because it evokes the violence of the sexual exploitation of black women by white western males.

Miscegenation was a major issue during Baartman's lifetime, but as we have seen, the actual act and its consequent labeling as a taboo activity has its roots in slavery. Michael D. Harris points out that laws against interracial relationships were passed in

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first half of the nineteenth century pseudo-science replaced the Bible as the primary source of justification for racial hierarchies and the enslavement of Africans (24).

[25] See Marcel Trudel's discussion of "des propriétaires francophones" in *Deux siècles d'esclavage au Québec* (Montréal: Hurtubise HMH, 2004), 123-141.

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France and England, in1691 and 1705 respectively,[26] but the concept was still a source of anxiety in the nineteenth century, and it is extremely important to understand the fear revolving around miscegenation for any investigation of Baartman's experiences in Europe. The verbal and visual responses to her are characterized by a tension between desire and repulsion, and the general anxiety about white men being attracted to black women resulted in a plethora of negative (mis)representations of black females, including Baartman. But within the social context of slavery, the power relations were such that white slave masters could ritually rape female slaves, and not only enjoy physical pleasure, but enjoy the economic benefits of the act: if the slave became pregnant, the child be deemed a slave upon birth, and thus another material possession for the slave master. Significantly, black women were usually blamed if miscegenation took place, as if white men could not control themselves when faced with black women's allegedly libidinous sexuality. Even female slaves, who were in many ways completely powerless to refuse the sexual advances of their owners - though some did resist - were held accountable, and the tendency to place the sexual onus on the black woman is reflected in Stedman's *Narrative*. Wood has pointed out that when the author observes that the tortured body of a female slave fascinated him to such an extent that he was rendered powerless to look away, Stedman is unconsciously locating the black woman as the active agent of seduction.[27]

Elsewhere, Wood has discussed how cartoons and caricatures in the nineteenth century representing women with the Hottentot Venus body were produced as a response to anxiety about miscegenation. These images, like those representing female slaves,

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[26] Harris, 15.
[27] Wood: 2003, 140.

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usually alluded to the supposed availability of the black female body to be consumed visually and violated sexually. In his discussion of caricatures Wood refers to a few images with Hottentot Venus iconography - that is, women with protruding buttocks - including George Cruikshank's *Puzzled Which to Choose!! Or the King of Timbuctoo Offering one of his Daughters* (1818), which portrays African women with faces exaggerated according to white Euro-centric standards, and therefore unappealing to the European eye, and *The Court at Brighton* (1819), which depicts a naked black woman with a ridiculously rectangular bottom and exaggerated lips standing in profile on a pedestal among white Europeans running amuck in an Orientalist setting. In the final cartoon that Wood discusses, William Heath's *A Pair of Broad Bottoms* (1810), a Hottentot Venus's body is juxtaposed with that of a white man meant to represent Lord Grenville or another political "Broad Bottom."[28] As Homi Bhaba and Albert Boime, among others, have pointed out, racist stereotypes and visualizations are all about exaggeration, repetition, and "overreaction,"[29] and this argument is effectively substantiated by caricatures of women with the Hottentot Venus body that emphasize their buttocks to the point of visual absurdity, such as the ones discussed above. Wood observes that when the black female body is represented in this cruelly humorous fashion - as ridiculous and docile, as well as ready and willing to be ogled - the intention is

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[28] Wood: 2000, 164-165. Wood writes: "[Saartje] rapidly became a standard symbol within comparative anatomy, a branch of scientific racism which ascribed over-developed and primitive sexual organs to the black woman. In this print [*The Court at Brighton*, 1819] she is shown in profile balanced against a figure of George [Prince Regent] who has similarly accentuated buttocks. The joke had been exhaustively developed in 1810 when the widely predicted parliamentary coalition which was to be led by Lord Grenville had been dubbed 'The Broad Bottoms.' This had in turn caused a number of caricaturists to use Saartje as the basis for a racist visual pun."

[29] "As an agent of ideological practice, visual expression often participates in the *overreaction* (those in power exaggerating the threat of those who are powerless) and thus discloses the fragile character of the very system it seeks to reinforce." Boime, xiv. Italics mine. See also Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*_ (Suffolk: St. Edmundsbury Press Ltd., 1994), 66.

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essentially comical, but the subtext is that these black women are ultimately threatening to white European society.[30] These caricatures were produced in order to allay fear about black female sexuality, and therein lies the fundamental differences between the representations of female slaves, like Blake and Bartolozzi's engravings, and nineteenth-century caricatures of Baartman and other black women. In the visual depictions of female slaves - and in Stedman's descriptions - black women are portrayed as alluring and beautiful, although vulnerable and in agony. This is significant, in that the women represented by Blake and Bartolozzi were slaves, and therefore under white male control. Conversely, black women like Baartman were "free blacks," and it is not a coincidence that they were portrayed as ugly and repulsive, as opposed to physically appealing. Just as lynching increased exponentially in the United States following abolition, so too did the representations of black women as laughable and grotesque. The fear of the free black female body resulted in an elevated fear of miscegenation, and visual representations reflect this shift.

I have chosen to begin my analysis of images representing Baartman with a discussion of caricatures, perhaps surprisingly, rather than starting with the ethnographic drawings that were produced while Cuvier "studied" her body for his texts about different racialized physiologies. Although it might seem logical to begin with the "realistic" representations, and then move on to the caricatures or the deliberate "mis-representations," the point I wish to make here is that no representations of Baartman can be justifiably identified as "realistic." Doy reminds us that

> We have to be careful to interrogate other methods of understanding the historical significance of Realist works…In understanding particular artworks we have to take into account (often) very contradictory visual embodiments of class, gender,

[30] Wood: 2000, 159.

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> culture and economics, all of which are both consciously and unconsciously constructed by a particular individual existing in that given historical situation.[31]

Although Doy is referring specifically to "Realist" paintings by artists such as Eugene Delacroix, her statement is relevant for a discussion of the ethnographic images that were produced in the context of "recording" Baartman's body for scientific purposes. In the nineteenth century few forms of representation were regarded as more "realistic" than those that fell under the category of ethnography. But, as Doy points out, even ethnographic images are composed by a human agent who is ostensibly motivated by the desire for knowledge.[32] No representation is objective. In Hugh Honour's wide-ranging tome *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (1976) the author includes two ethnographic drawings of Baartman: one by Nicolas Huet le Jeune (Plate 9), and the other by Léon de Wailly (Plate 10), both of which were done during the three days that Cuvier examined Baartman's body at the Jardin du Roi and asked her questions.[33] Significantly, both of these artists chose to represent Baartman using watercolor paints. Whereas engravings (such as Blake's and Bartolozzi's) and caricatures could be disseminated widely, making them the kind of image most often seen by the lower classes, watercolors had connotations of intellectual and academic importance and value. The upper classes were the consumers, both visually and economically, of watercolors, and so these representations of Baartman would have been perceived as meant for the social and intellectual elite. In the nineteenth century that elite group of cultural consumers regarded ethnographic images as mirror-like reflections of nature, but read critically, there are a number of indications that these drawings are far from innocuous illustrations

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[31] Doy, 193.
[32] Ibid, 194.
[33] Honour, 52-53.

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of reality. For instance, Huet depicted Baartman in profile, which was not an arbitrary decision. Cuvier wrote that the drawings in his text present each "animal" in profile because it is from this angle that the most visual information - the form and the physiognomy - can be taken in by the reader.[34] This artistic strategy was not limited to ethnographic drawings, but played a role in photography as well. In the early nineteenth century photography was still regarded as a new and exciting technology, and it quickly became linked with "natural science" because of its apparent ability to accurately record the material world. As Doy observes: "Photography at this time was seen as both artistic and scientific, as factual documentation of the real material world through the physical link between the objects photographed and the finished image."[35] Doy discusses one such photograph, taken by Louis Rousseau, of a female with the large buttocks associated with Hottentot women (Plate 11). The photograph was first published in the nineteenth-century photography magazine *Lumière*, and Doy observes that readers of the magazine would have read the woman's body as that of a typical "savage" black woman. Furthermore, Europeans would have drawn a direct link between her physiognomy and her presumed lascivious sexuality because of the pseudo-scientific ideas that were being disseminated at the time.[36] Rousseau took three photographs of the unidentified, and thus nameless, black woman: front, profile and rear, revealing, as already noted, that photography shared artistic strategies with ethnographic illustrations.[37] This mode of "scientific" representation effectively framed the black woman as a type, not an

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[34] Sharpley-Whiting, 23.
[35] Doy, 193-94.
[36] Ibid, 196.
[37] "Only the rear view is presently available as a print, the other being stored in boxes in the form of fragile glass-plate negatives." Ibid.

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individual, a "physical body, not a personality."[38] The de-individualizing process that was a fundamental part of slavery, then, remained useful in the context of racist ethnography and natural science. The nameless woman was apparently brought to Paris in order to "accompany and care for" a hippopotamus sent as a gift from a member of the Egyptian ruling family to the French Emperor in 1855.[39] The fact that the woman was linked with the hippopotamus illustrates the way that black women were framed in a similar way as "exotic" animals: creatures to be studied, dissected, even feared. The association between black women and animals goes deeper than this, however. As I have already pointed out, Cuvier went so far as to identify Baartman as the "missing link" between (white) human beings and primates. He wrote that he had "never seen a human head more resembling a monkey's than hers," and that her movements also "recalled those of a monkey."[40] Even before Cuvier studied Baartman's body and made these observations, she was regarded as closer to an animal than a human.[41] According to Sharpley-Whiting, when Baartman arrived in Paris in September of 1814, her new guardian was a "showman of wild animals" named Réaux. Accordingly, she was exhibited at the price of three francs for each private viewing, the same price being charged for a five-year-old male rhinoceros.[42] The patronizing tone that many used to talk about her also located Baartman as a sub-human species, for instance the report in

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[38] Doy, 196.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Georges Cuvier, "Extrait d'observations faites sur le cadavre d'une femme connue à Paris et à Londres sous le nom de Vénus Hottentotte," *Memoires du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle* 3 (1817), 259-74. Quoted in Honour, 54.
[41] Michel Foucault examines Cuvier's theory of comparative anatomy in *The Order of Things*, first published in 1966 (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 287-304.
[42] Sharpley-Whiting, 19.

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the *Journal des Dames and Modes* that stated "Candies are given to her in order to entice her to leap about and sing."[43]

In *La Règne Animale* (1864) Cuvier writes that frontal drawings are also provided in some cases so that each animal may be better "judged."[44] De Wailly, the artist who produced the second representation of Baartman for Cuvier's original text, provides the viewer with a frontal view, placing her in an unspecified "exotic" setting - signified by the palm trees - with a smaller representation of Baartman in the background with her back to viewer, gazing off into the distance. In her discussion of a nineteenth-century "soft-pornographic" photograph by F.J.A. Moulin that depicts two semi-naked women, one white and one black (Plate 12), Doy argues that the black woman, who wears beads signifying Otherness, "has a more distant look on her face [than the white woman], supposedly detached from her surroundings and perhaps meant by the photographer to evoke her longing for some distant land."[45] I would argue that de Wailly is constructing a similar narrative, albeit within the framework of ethnography as opposed to pornography, although, clearly when it came to representing black women, there were some obvious overlaps.

Honour discusses a third ethnographic representation of Baartman, although he does not include a reproduction in his text. The image is by Jean-Baptiste Perré (Plate 13), and I mention it briefly because of the implications of Honour's own visual analysis. He writes that Perré

Depicted [Baartman] from four viewpoints in diminishing scale. But he disposed

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[43] Sharpley-Whiting, 18-19.
[44] Quoted in Ibid, 23.
[45] Doy, 195.

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> these figures in a barren landscape with such tact and sensibility that the painting has the effect – at least to modern eyes – of slightly veiling and diminishing her physical abnormalities and lends a certain poignancy to her lonely predicament.[46]

Honour's visual analysis is remarkable for a number of reasons. For one thing, he is reading the image as document that *expresses* Perré's personal feelings about Baartman, thus signaling that the image - though ostensibly ethnographic, and therefore an objective reflection of reality - is in fact a *subjective* document that reflects Perré's emotions. This is highlighted by Honour's use of words like "tact" and "sensibility," the latter recalling Stedman's account of his own responses to witnessing the horrors of slavery. Honour also calls attention to Baartman's "lonely predicament," which signals Honour's own opinion, despite the fact that, according to Cuvier, Baartman said that she was happy in Europe.[47] Finally, Honour describes Perre's image as "veiling and diminishing [Baartman's] physical abnormalities." This, again, is indicative of Honour's own opinions, which maintain the paradigm, established by Cuvier and others, that framed Baartman's body as "abnormal," because it differed from the "normal" white European body. Honour is therefore perpetuating the responses to Baartman's body that were articulated by nineteenth-century writers like Robert Chambers, who pronounced that Baartman was "an intensely ugly figure, distorted beyond all European notions of beauty."[48] Responses like this one, of course, make the moniker "Hottentot Venus" that much more maliciously ironic.

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[46] Honour, 54.
[47] Quoted in ibid, 52.
[48] Robert Chambers, *The Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities in Connection with the Calendar*, Vol. 2 (London and Edinburgh, 1864), 621-22.

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Honour has argued that French representations of Baartman's body were primarily about "accurate visual records,"[49] while English representations of Baartman, according to Honour, were mostly caricatured, exaggerating the size of her buttocks and giving her animal-like physiognomy. As we have seen, a number of English cartoons mocking Baartman's body do exist, but I would challenge the veracity of Honour's argument, as not only did derogatory French cartoons depicting Baartman exist, but, as I have already indicated, French visual representations - though ostensibly "realistic" and objective - were produced by human agents with biases and prejudices, and the images were ultimately more about the white artists producing them than about Baartman herself. One French cartoon that Honour seems to be unaware of was produced in 1814, and is entitled *Les Curieux en Extase* (Plate 14), which suggests sexual pleasure through the act of looking. The image depicts an apparently white-skinned Hottentot Venus being scrutinized by four French individuals. The Hottentot Venus has "war paint" on her face signifying her "Otherness," and sports the apron that appears in so many caricatures and which cartoonists may have meant to allude to the so-called "Hottentot apron," the hyper-extended labia that Europeans believed the Hottentot peoples found beautiful. According to Sharpley-Whiting, because of the derogatory visual representations of Baartman's body, the apron eventually evolved into a visual signifier of venal sexuality and prostitution.[50] What is significant in *Les Curieux* is not so much the Hottentot body - she is not nearly as caricatured and grotesque as in works by Cruikshanks and others - but, rather, the words spoken by the white onlookers in the cartoon. The soldier behind the Hottentot Venus - she is not identified specifically as Baartman; the cartoon could well

[49] Honour, 54.
[50] Sharpley-Whiting, 65.

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have been inspired by one of the other African women who were exhibited under that title - exclaims: "Oh, godem, quell rosbif!" (Oh, goddamn, what roast beef!), thus making a rather unambiguous correlation between the woman's body and a cut of meat that could be purchased at the butcher's.[51] The soldier looking at her front remarks: "Ah, que la nature est drôle!" (Ah, how amusing nature is!), suggesting that the Hottentot body is laughable, because of its "anomalies." The sole woman snorts: "A quelque chose malheureux est bon" (From some points of view misfortune can be good); this statement is a bit ambiguous, but Sharpley-Whiting has argued that the French woman is looking through the Hottentot Venus's legs and under the soldier's kilt, thus augmenting the sexual charge of the image.[52] This is one way to interpret the statement; I tend to think that the cartoonist is making an allusion to those white Europeans who did find Baartman's body sexually arousing, even while describing her as monkey-like and ugly. The tension between desire and repulsion is hinted at by the male civilian's words. Looking perplexed, he says: "Qu'elle étrange beauté!" (What strange beauty!). This last observation speaks directly to the paradoxical response to Baartman and other women who shared her physical traits.[53] Cuvier, for instance, describes Baartman's hands using erotic language such as "alluring," and then immediately draws back from the possibility of being attracted to her by remarking upon the "brutal appearance of her face."[54] This

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[51] In a less-than-subtle allusion to the phallus, the soldier's sword is strategically placed between his legs, possibly suggesting that he wishes to penetrate the Hottentot Venus with more than just his eyes. Charmaine Nelson has noted that the female viewer within the cartoon could theoretically read the phallic sword as either the soldier's penis or as the black woman's, thus opening up the potential for a transgression of hetero-normative desire that complicates even further the inter-racial sexual possibilities suggested by the cartoonist.

[52] Sharpley-Whiting, 21.

[53] These conflicting responses must all be acknowledged if we are to grasp the complexity of the discourses written onto the Hottentot Venus body. It is for this reason that I have referenced this particular quotation in the title of my text, although I have turned it on its head.

[54] Quoted in Sharpley-Whiting, 23.

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quick shift from attraction to disgust is common in descriptions of Baartman's body: she was framed as both a goddess and a monster.

Barbara Creed has written a valuable book entitled *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993) in which she argues that the violent way that men look at and represent the female body - whatever race - speaks more to men's fear of women than to female subjectivity.[55] As I have attempted to illustrate, this is very much the case for any and all of the representations of Baartman produced in the nineteenth-century. Creed also discusses the very act of looking at the "monstrous-feminine," observing that the viewing subject is put in crisis, because boundaries threaten to collapse and disintegrate.[56] Thus Creed would argue that the racist comments in the French cartoon serve to distance both the white viewers within the French cartoon, and the white viewers reading the cartoon, from the "monstrous-feminine" - the Hottentot Venus in this case. Creed's exploration of the monstrous-feminine parallels in very specific ways the "grotesque," a concept that I believe provides a useful theoretical framework with which to investigate Baartman's metamorphosis from a black woman into a pathologized body. According to Ralf Remshardt: "If there is a single place in and upon which the grotesque sensually manifests its contradictions and to which it returns even in its most sophisticated form, it is the body – not the body of mythical beasts, but the human body."[57] Significantly, Remshardt argues that the "monster" associated with the grotesque is not a monster in the traditional sense, but rather the human - and here I would suggest the *female* - body. Creed explicitly argues that the grotesque is

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[55] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 7.
[56] Ibid, 29.
[57] Ralf E. Remshardt, *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 31.

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inextricably linked with the female body, and her assertion that the monstrous-feminine is so threatening because it threatens the boundaries between the self and the Other. Her notion of the monstrous-feminine also recalls the threatening abject body that Julia Kristeva has theorized so eloquently, which is particularly relevant for an investigation of the grotesque in relation to Baartman's experience as the Hottentot Venus. Kristeva writes that the abject is "the place where meaning collapses...that which defines what is fully human from what is not."[58] Rosemary Betterton, in her excellent essay entitled "Body Horror? Food (and sex and death) in Women's Art" (1996), articulates a similar point when she states: "The most significant borderline is that which separates the inside from the outside of the body, self from Other."[59] Scholars such as Creed and Betterton are appropriating the grotesque for (white) feminist objectives, that is, they are illuminating the way that the female body is feared and reviled in patriarchal culture, and they argue that visual representations of women are often part of an ideological project that attempts to "maintain the symbolic order by expelling that which threatens to destabilize it."[60] I believe that this rhetoric is also valuable for black feminist objectives. For instance, we can regard Baartman's body as trapped in a web of desire and fear; she was placed on a pedestal by white Europeans - literally, when she was exhibited - but she was ultimately scorned by the very people who came to view her. The angry, fearful way that Baartman was described and depicted unveils the anxiety that her body evoked.

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[58] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.
[59] Rosemary Betterton, "Body Horror? Food (and sex and death) in women's art" in *Intimate Distance: Women Artists, and the Body* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 133.
[60] Ibid.

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Lynda Nead makes an argument that can be read productively against Creed's in her text *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (1992).[61] A valuable example of white feminist art history, Nead's text represents an attempt to re-examine the female nude as a means of analyzing a broader set of issues, including the living, breathing female body and how it is valued - or maligned, as the case may be - in our culture, representation, feminism, and finally, the regulation of the obscene, which she discusses in great detail in order to illuminate how control of the "obscene body" reflects a cultural fear of women and their bodies. Nead's theory revolves around the notion that art and its institutions have functioned as forms of control over the "unruly (female) body" by locating it within the "securing boundaries of aesthetic discourse."[62] Nead identifies the "obscene body" as "the body without borders or containment," and she defines obscenity as a "representation that moves and arouses the viewer rather than bringing about stillness and wholeness."[63] If we consider the responses to Baartman in relation to Nead's critical notion of the "obscene body," we encounter possible explanations for why Baartman was represented and described in the way that she was.

Keith Sandiford engages in a project similar to that of Creed, Betterton and Nead in his article "Envisioning the Colonial Body: The Fair, the Carnivalesque and the Grotesque" (2003).[64] Although Sandiford is interested in "discursive rather than pictorial visualization,"[65] his discussion still resonates here, as he is ultimately concerned with how visualizations function to produce ideological meaning, and how visual images are

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[61] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
[62] Ibid, 2.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Keith Sandiford, "Envisioning the Colonial Body: The Fair, the Carnivalesque and the Grotesque" in *An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture and the Atlantic World, 1660-1830*, eds. Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 15-30.
[65] Ibid, 16.

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therefore far from innocent. In other words, the ostensibly "realistic" ethnographic representations of Baartman say more about the racist ideologies circulating at the time, as well as the white artists producing the images, than about Baartman's body or her social identity. Sandiford argues that visualizations of female slaves were often colored by the grotesque, thus recalling my earlier discussion of Stedman, Bartalozzi and Blake. He observes that by representing the black female body as grotesque, that body is thereby rendered "multiple," and excessive, and ultimately threatening.[66] This may seem paradoxical - considering that the majority of images by white artists depicting black women were meant to *erase* the black female body as a threat - but that is the strange beauty of the grotesque: it is illogical, contradictory, twisted. Sandiford's discussion of the grotesque can be linked with texts by Kristeva, Nead, Betterton and others, including post-colonial feminist scholar Linda Boose, whose work also effectively illuminates the issues surrounding the representation of the Hottentot Venus. She writes: "Within Europe's symbolic order of dominance and desire, the black woman destroys the system, essentially swallowing it up within the signification of her body."[67] This observation is interesting in that Boose is locating the threat of the black woman not *in her body*, but rather, "within the *signification of her body*."[68] In other words, the black female body becomes a discursive form itself through the process of being visualized by (white)

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[66] Sandiford, 29. Bhaba articulates a similar argument when he writes "Black skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into signs of bestiality, genitalia, grotesquerie, which reveal the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body" (92).

[67] Linda Boose, "The Getting of a Lawful Race: Racial Discourse in Early Modern England and the Unrepresentable Black Woman" in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (eds.), *Women, 'Race', and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 47.

[68] The image of the consuming female is often invoked in discussions of the supposedly threatening female body in modern culture. See Betterton, 130.

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others. This idea is succinctly articulated by Sharpley-Whiting when she writes that the colonized black female body is "a body trapped in an image of itself."[69]

If there was ever a black woman trapped in an image of herself, it was Baartman. But any examination of the black female body as an object for colonialist scopophilic consumption would be remiss without a discussion of that cipher of "savage" sexuality, Josephine Baker. Many scholars have already aligned Baker with Baartman because of the way that their bodies were exhibited, and how both consequently became signifiers of lascivious black female sexuality.[70] In making this comparison, however, there is always the question of agency, as Baker created her own performances, deliberately fetishizing her own buttocks, and playing into, or off of, the stereotype of the black seductress Jezebel.[71] Baartman, on the other hand, has almost always been discussed as a passive victim, a naïve woman who walked ignorantly into her role as a spectacle of flesh. Pamela Scully, however, argues that we should consider the possibility that Baartman was not only older than most scholars believe she was, but less naïve, and more content with her "station in life," as the Victorians might have put it, than has previously been assumed.[72] Scully makes the innovative argument that, like Baker, Baartman was a performer of cultural identity, thus imbuing her with more agency than most scholars have in the past. Scully observes that colonial violence was rampant in Baartman's homeland in the early nineteenth-century, possibly making England a very appealing destination. Furthermore, Scully argues that because Baartman had possibly lost up to

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[69] Sharpley-Whiting, 9-10.
[70] Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 117; bell hooks. *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992).
[71] See Charmaine Nelson, *Through An-Other's Eyes: White Canadian Artists – Black Female Subjects* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1998), 11.
[72] Scully (McGill University, 15 September 2005).

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three children by the time she left for Europe, the opportunity to begin a new life elsewhere would have been relished.

Petrine Archer-Straw discusses Baker in a chapter significantly titled "L'Art Jazz and the Black Bottom" from her text *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (1992). She is primarily concerned with how Baker's body was fetishized, reduced to its sexual parts - her buttocks in particular - just as Baartman was reduced to her "abnormally" shaped buttocks while she was living in Europe, and to her "primitive" genitalia when she was dissected post-mortem and exhibited at the Musée de l'Homme.[73] This act was the ultimate violation and desecration of Baartman's body, and in her discussion of the "celebratory discourse of the [black female] butt," bell hooks implicitly alludes to Baartman's dissection when she observes that the focus on black women's butts "still mutilates black female bodies."[74] She is extremely critical of accepting the "celebratory" visualizations of black women's buttocks as innocuous, pointing out that the protruding butt is still read as a sign of heightened sexuality, which re-edifies the colonialist and racist paradigm revolving around the black female body. Archer-Straw draws attention to the visual culture that sprung up around Baker's performances, within which images highlighted her allegedly "primitive" sexuality, even though she was born in St. Louis, focusing on her physical contortions and "exotic" costumes, which often included nothing but a banana skirt. Baker herself encouraged this kind of reading of her body and identity, representing herself as a savage beauty, usually locating her buttocks as a central part of her performances. According to Archer-Straw: Baker's "willingness to pose naked for [Paul] Colin and to dance topless on stage...transformed her into a

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[73] Sharpley-Whiting, 27.
[74] hooks: 1992, 64.

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mythical 'black Venus.'"[75] The "black Venus" was a sexual archetype famously explored by Charles Baudelaire in his nineteenth-century poem of that name, which was inspired by his mistress Jeanne Duval.[76] Like Baker and Baartman, the "black Venus" was linked with exotic, even dangerous, sexuality - gender and race intersecting as threatening subject positions - and venal, savage sexuality. Sharpley-Whiting argues that black women have historically been regarded as the embodiment of racial and sexual alterity, thus invoking primal fear and desire in white European men. She concludes that the tension between repulsion and attraction "gave rise to the nineteenth-century collective French male imaginations of Black Venus."[77] According to Sharpley-Whiting, this fear is sublimated through a desire to master and "know" the black female subject; which resulted in poems, literature, scientific treatises and visual art "about" the black female subject. The moniker "black Venus" was adopted by Charles Cordier, for example, as the title for his sculpture *Vénus Africaine* (Plate 15), a bust of a nude black woman.[78] In the nineteenth century the female body was inextricably linked with the idea of Beauty, but the nude female body had to have a "reason" for being. In Alexandre Cabanel's celebrated *Birth of Venus* from 1863 (Plate 16), for instance, the idealized female can be nude because, first, she is "newly born," and the nudity is therefore supposedly as innocent as that of a newborn baby's. Secondly, and most importantly, she is a mythological figure, Venus, the goddess of Beauty, and she is therefore removed

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[75] Archer-Straw, 117.
[76] Rebecca Munford discusses Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs de Mal* (1857) in "Re-Presenting Charles Baudelaire/Re-Presenting Jeanne Duval: Transformations of the Muse in Angela Carter's 'Black Venus'" in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 2004 40 (1): 1-13; http://fmls.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/40/1/1.
[77] Sharpley-Whiting, 6.
[78] See Laure de Margerie and Édouard Papet, *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905), Ethnographic Sculptor*, trans. Lenora Ammon, Laurel Hirsch, and Clare Palmieri (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004).

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from the viewer's world and all its gritty reality. I choose this painting deliberately in order to establish a striking juxtaposition. If we compare Léon de Wailly's *Hottentot Venus* (Plate 10) with Cabanel's *Birth of Venus*, it is apparent that Baartman, or at least de Wailly's interpretation of her, is far removed from the idealized white beauty in Cabanel's work. Although Cordier was working as a sculptor at a time when the most highly valued style was neo-classicism, it is important to note that *Vénus Africaine* diverges significantly from the tradition of neo-classical sculpture in that he used bronze to evoke the sheen of sweaty black skin instead of the white marble that was regarded as the ideal material for neo-classical sculpture.[79] Cordier also signified race with references to specific racialized physiognomy - signifying blackness with the woman's broad nose and thick lips - as well as with the texture of the woman's hair. The bust-length sculpture appears to be an individual portrait, but like so many images of black women, there is no name attached to the work, only the title of *Vénus Africaine*, which nineteenth-century art connoisseurs would have linked with scientific ideas about "primitive" black female sexuality being disseminated at the time.

Archer-Straw draws a parallel between Baartman and Baker, noting that Colin's images of Baker became iconic of "savage" black female sexuality, just as Baartman was framed as the iconic African woman by Cuvier and others in the nineteenth-century.[80] In Colin's *Black Thunder* (Plate 17) Baker wears her infamous banana skirt, and her body is twisted into one of the dance moves that she invented for her sexually charged

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[79] White marble was so inextricably linked with neo-classical sculpture, and, correspondingly, with ideas of Beauty and purity, that artists such as Cordier who used polychrome (multiple materials of varied colors) were often harshly criticized by other artists, art critics, and even by common viewers who perceived neo-classical sculpture made with bronze and onyx as dirty and sexualized. See Charmaine Nelson, "White Marble, Black Bodies and the Fear of the Invisible Negro: Signifying Blackness in Mid-Nineteenth Century Neoclassical Sculpture" in *Revue d'art canadienne*, vol. XXVII, 1-2 (2000), 87-101.
[80] Archer-Straw, 122.

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performances. Her back is to the viewer, and her lean naked body is explicitly presented in order to fulfill the scopophilic desire of those who gaze upon her. Although Baker's life was far removed from those of the female slaves depicted in the prints by Blake and Bartolozzi, representations such as *Black Thunder* perpetuate the same myth of availability that was conveyed so vividly by images of female slaves.

The issues addressed in this chapter, particularly the fetishization of black women's buttocks and the fear invoked by interracial relationships, are still relevant today, and artists like Renee Cox, Joyce Scott and Renee Green are going head to head with them. In the next chapter I will discuss how contemporary black female artists are actively engaging with issues revolving around the black female body by reviving and sometimes even re-embodying Baartman. As I will point out, there are risks in producing corporeal art that directly references the female body of any race. But despite this, a number of black feminist scholars call for black feminist art that represents the black female body in a brave and radical way. They speak of the importance of black female artists actively choosing visibility on their own terms, and not on the terms of white Europeans or white North Americans, as was the case for Baartman and millions of black women before her whose bodies were looked at and exploited both economically and sexually.

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# CHAPTER 2

## THE HOTTENTOT VENUS AS INSPIRATION: HOW CONTEMPORARY BLACK FEMALE ARTISTS ARE REVIVING BAARTMAN

As I write this chapter in early January of 2006 there is a commercial for Amp'd Mobile phones running on American TV channels that evokes a problematic vision of how the black female body is perceived in contemporary western culture. The commercial's premise revolves around a white male in his mid-twenties directing people on a bus to perform various acts, apparently for his entertainment. He tells two white men to fight, which they do, and he instructs a white homeless man with a ghetto blaster to "turn it up." Finally, he looks at a young black woman who is seated in the back and commands her to "shake your junk"; she immediately grabs the pole intended for stability during bumpy rides, but in this context obviously signifying a stripper's pole, and, looking over her shoulder at the white male with wide eyes as though seeking approval, begins to shake her "junk," which, not insignificantly, is much larger than the western ideal of small sculpted (white) buttocks that are omnipresent in contemporary popular media.[1] The slogan for the mobile phone being advertised is "Be able to entertain yourself," and the commercial raises troubling questions about the assumptions that persist about white men's ownership of the black female body, and about black women as a source of erotic "entertainment" for the white western male.

Questions about the representation of black women and about the assumed accessibility to their bodies are currently of great relevance in the world of hip-hop

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[1] This scenario – a black female following the instructions of a white male on a bus – recalls the racist status quo that Rosa Parks so famously rejected when she refused to move from her seat near the front of an Alabama bus on December 1st, 1955. See Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks* (New York: Viking, 2000), and Michelle Fine, ed., *Off White: Readings on Power, Privilege, and Resistance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

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music, which, interestingly, is the source of the term "junk," a relatively new verbal signifier attached specifically to black women's buttocks. In hip-hop videos the black female body is often represented as hyper-sexualized and available for both visual and sexual pleasure, much like Saartje Baartman's body was imag(in)ed in the nineteenth century.[2] But black women have recently begun to vocalize their displeasure with how their bodies are being represented within the context of hip-hop music. Cori Murray, Arts and Entertainment editor of Essence, an American "lifestyle magazine" for black women, has observed that misogyny is rampant in hip-hop, but asserts that "If we (black women) start telling them 'Stop calling us that' or 'Stop showing us that way,' think about what could happen...We have so much power."[3]

I have begun this chapter with a brief discussion of the problematics of the black female body in hip-hop music in order to show that the issues that I discussed in Chapter 1 are still prevalent today.[4] In this chapter I will focus primarily on three African American women artists who are actively dealing with the problematics of the black female body in their art. Renee Cox, Joyce Scott and Renee Green are all attempting to destabilize stereotypes about black female sexuality in artwork that is inspired by

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[2] The most infamous example of this kind of music video in the recent past is Nelly's video for the song Tip Drill (from his 2004 album *Sweat*), in which he swipes a credit card down the backside of a black woman. Spelman College, a historically black college for women in Atlanta, "made headlines last year when it banned Nelly from performing at the school unless he engaged in a dialogue about Tip Drill." Not surprisingly, he declined. See Jenee Osterheldt, "Fighting for Female-Friendly Hip-Hop." *The Gazette* 20 Aug. 2005: D4. Nelly is also responsible, in collaboration with someone who has creatively re-named himself Ooh Papi, for the so-called "Official Nelly Apple Bottom Model Contest." An image entitled *Sara Baartman: Nelly's Apple Bottom of the Century*, which I have chosen not to include in my text so as to avoid actively disseminating it, is apparently the advertisement for the 2004 contest. The image can be viewed at www.playahata.com/ pages/papi/applebottom.htm. Apple Bottoms is the name of Nelly's fashion line for women.

[3] Quoted in Osterheldt, D4.

[4] For discussions about women in hip hop from a black feminist perspective, see Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), especially her reference to the "black booty." See also Gwendolyn D. Pough, *Check it While I Wreck it: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004).

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Baartman; as black feminist scholars have pointed out, she is still largely regarded as the embodiment of the racist and sexist myths that are written onto the bodies of black women.[5] In the words of Michael Harris, these artists are "destabilizing a visual sign visually."[6] The Hottentot Venus body persists today as a sign of the availability of the black female body,[7] and this harmful myth is perpetuated by contemporary popular culture.[8]

White feminist scholars such as Susan Bordo have written extensively about how western visual culture has created an unattainable body ideal, which often negatively affects the body images of young women. Although Bordo has focused on white women in her diatribes on eating disorders, she does reference the Hottentot Venus in her

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[5] Like any artistic strategy, the re-appropriation of the Hottentot Venus body can be interpreted in different ways. My thanks to Charmaine Nelson for pointing out that by re-embodying Baartman's body artists like Renee Cox and Joyce Scott could be said to be attempting to problematize the racist stereotype of "primitive" and the threatening sexuality supposedly enacted by the Jezebel figure. This is the argument that I pursue in this chapter. But while this may indeed be part of Cox and Scott's black feminist project, Nelson believes that in their recuperation of Baartman's body and their deliberate act of placing themselves in that corporeal subject position there is the possibility that these black female artists are in fact proclaiming the beauty of the "Hottentot" buttocks. That is to say, they may be proposing an alternative to the white breast-centric beauty ideal (and perhaps even to the white anorexic body that results from the idealization of thinness in western culture). This rejection-via-reclamation functions to offer a new black body paradigm, one that revels in the very body that became, and remains to a certain extent, associated with supposedly deviant sexuality.

[6] Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 116.

[7] Charmaine Nelson has observed that Baartman was "one of several South African women who were displayed naked throughout Europe for the sexual titillation of white audiences." Charmaine Nelson, "The 'Hottentot Venus' in Canada: Modernism, Censorship and the Racial Limits of Female Sexuality" in *Racism, Eh? A Critical Inter-Disciplinary Anthology of Race and Racism in Canada*, eds. Camille A. Nelson and Charmaine A. Nelson (Concord, Ontario: Captus Press, 2004), 371. All of the names of the other women who were exhibited under the stage moniker "Hottentot Venus" seem to have been lost. Nelson does point out, however, that "other Hottentot women suffered fates similar to that of Saat-jee" (371). In other words, they probably never returned to South Africa, and spent the rest of their lives being displayed and jeered at.

[8] Black women have only recently begun to vocalize their thoughts on body image and eating disorders. For instance *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century* was published in 2004. One black woman who was interviewed for the text offered this moving statement: "After all, don't black people prize wide hips and fleshy bodies? Don't black women have very positive body images?...Anorexia and its kin supposedly strike only adolescent , middle- and upper-middle-class white girls...Women like me are winging it, seeking out other sisters with the same concerns, wondering if we are alone on this journey." Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century* (New York: Touchstone, 2005).

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discussion of her own dissatisfaction with her buttocks as a Jewish woman. Bordo writes that she "was at first surprised to find that some of my African-American female students felt marked as black by the same part of their bodies [as Jewish women]...The distribution of weight in our bodies made us low, closer to earth; this baseness was akin to sexual excess."[9] The notion of "excess," which I will discuss later in this chapter as a discursive construct that has been identified by both white and black feminists as an attribute of the grotesque, is an important issue that is inextricably linked with the way that Baartman was perceived by the spectators who went to view her body on display, and the way that she was depicted in visual representations. It is crucial to remind ourselves that Baartman was both ogled and spurned because she was regarded as the embodiment of a deviant, excessive, even "monstrous" sexuality, [10] which are all terms that can only exist because they are the opposite of what is apparently "normal" or "ideal," as established by those who regard *themselves* as normative.

With this history attached to the Hottentot Venus body, why would a number of contemporary black female artists not only derive inspiration from this iconic figure, but in fact *transform their own bodies* into that of the Hottentot Venus? I take as my departure point for this question the photographic work *Venus Hottentot 2000* by the black female artist Renee Valerie Cox in collaboration with black male artist Lyle Ashton Harris (Plate 18), but I will also discuss performance art (Joyce Scott) and installation art (Renee Green) as strategies that have been used by black female artists in order to revive Baartman, and in so doing radically re-envision their own bodies. My other concern, in

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[9] Bordo, 135.
[10] Ibid. Bordo writes that "Baartman was exhibited as a sexual monstrosity," a statement that recalls my discussion of the "monstrous-feminine" in Chapter 1. See Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

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addition to *why* these artists have chosen this subject matter, is this: what are the risks of not only reviving stereotypes revolving around the black female body, but also using one's own body to do so? These are loaded questions, and the art criticism in response to these works is indicative of the fact that there is a split between black feminist scholars who believe that it is essential that black female artists produce corporeal art, and those who believe it is fundamentally counter-productive to use the black female body in art, especially the kind of art that is dependant on the re-appropriation of stereotypes in order to disarm them.

In my Introduction I discussed what is known of Baartman's life as the Hottentot Venus in order to illuminate how the black female body has been transformed into a signifier of "primitive" sexuality. What is important to reiterate for my purposes in this chapter is the fact that European "scientists" linked black people, and especially black women, with a "lascivious, apelike sexual appetite," even stating that black women would copulate with apes if given the opportunity.[11] These conclusions were justified by black women's physical attributes, such as steatopygia and the so-called "Hottentot apron," which was the European term for the hypertrophy of the labia caused by manual manipulation of the female genitalia. Scientists and anthropologists who professed to study this physical trait described it as though it were biological, thus concluding that, just as black women were ostensibly born with an "abnormal" - by white European standards - vagina, so too were they born with a tendency toward deviant, "savage" sexuality. This conclusion had a paradoxical response: on the one hand, Baartman was regarded as disturbing and offensive because of her assumed deviant sexuality; conversely, she was considered titillating and exciting by white European males - and

[11] Gilman, 121.

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possibly females - who came to witness her on display. As Gilman has pointed out, "For most Europeans who viewed her, Sarah Baartman existed only as a collection of sexual parts."[12] Just as her body was fragmented, so too was Baartman's identity: she had been reduced to a highly visible body, which effectively rendered her personhood invisible.

Similar to the way that the scopophilic focus in contemporary hip-hop videos is black women's buttocks, so too did the nineteenth-century scientists who "studied" Baartman's body regard her buttocks, and not her vagina, as the main signifier of her supposedly deviant sexuality. Gilman addresses this when he asks: "How is it that both the genitalia, a primary sexual characteristic, and the buttocks, a secondary sexual characteristic, function as the semantic signs of 'primitive' sexual appetite and activity?"[13] He locates the rationale for the semiotic relationship between Baartman's body and her sexuality in Havelock Ellis's *Studies of the Psychology of Sex* (1905), in which the author argued that only those of the lower classes - and one would assume that he also means the "lower" races - enjoy looking at primary sexual characteristics, while it is more "acceptable" to find pleasure in looking at secondary sexual characteristics, and the first "ideal" secondary characteristic listed are the buttocks. As Gilman points out, "The nineteenth-century fascination with the buttocks as a displacement for the genitalia is thus reworked by Ellis into a higher regard for the beautiful."[14] In other words, by proposing that those higher on the class and race hierarchies - that is, white and wealthy individuals - found the buttocks more sexually alluring than the female genitalia, Ellis was providing a self-serving argument that justified white Europeans' fascination with

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[12] Gilman, 121.
[13] Ibid, 124.
[14] Ibid.

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Baartman's buttocks, stating in effect that *by being* aroused by her buttocks, it proved that they were higher on the hierarchy than Baartman herself.

Contemporaneous with the pseudo-scientific texts being published on physiognomy and the biological justifications for racism in the nineteenth century, the "scientific" discourse of photography was coming into being. Photography was regarded as providing a means of documenting the apparent differences between people in terms of class, gender and race. In *Women and Visual Culture in 19th-Century France: 1800-1852* (1998), Gen Doy refers to the photograph of a black woman that I discuss in Chapter 1 (Plate 11), noting that the photograph was seen as "confirming much older 'theories' and ideas of bodily forms of a quite unscientific nature."[15] According to Doy, the woman's large buttocks were linked with a lascivious sexual appetite, and like Baartman, there were paradoxical responses to the unnamed black women in the photograph. Doy writes: "The upper-class readers [of *La Lumière*] can all share the joke that in their civilized sexuality they can find her body grotesque, whereas for the male scientists who discussed and later dissected Baartman's body, her enlarged buttocks and genitals made her the epitome of primitive female sexuality."[16] I want to pause here and consider Doy's use of the term "grotesque" to describe Baartman's body. I have already discussed this term in Chapter 1 regarding its usage in the context of visual representations of Baartman. Later in this chapter I will examine the term more specifically as a visual tool that feminist artists of various races have used in order to illuminate racist and sexist ideologies. For now I will note that a number of scholars who have written about Baartman have used the term, but rarely do they cite Mikhail Bakhtin, who first used the word to examine the

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[15] Gen Doy, *Women and Visual Culture in 19th Century France 1800-1852* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1998), 196.
[16] Ibid, 199.

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Carnivalesque and social disorder in *Rabelais and his World* (1965).[17] Bakhtin was a Russian linguist and theorist of literature, but the term "grotesque" has been adopted by scholars from a plethora of disciplines, including semiotics and art history, among others, to describe that which causes discomfort because it threatens boundaries between an individual and others, or between the inside and the outside of the body.[18] According to Bakhtin there is in modern society a fear of the body that exceeds its own borders, thus transgressing into the space of another: this is fundamentally the fear of erasing the boundaries between the self and the "other." This type of corporeal transgression, which is internalized as a disclosure of the potentiality of an entirely different world, or of another order, is enacted by what Bakhtin called the "grotesque body." He writes that the grotesque body

> is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.[19]

Therefore, Baartman's backside, the part of her "through which the body itself goes out to meet the world," is the part that signals that she possesses the Bakhtinian grotesque body. But in keeping with Bakhtin's definition, as well as the perspective of feminist scholars such as Rosemary Betterton and Ralf Remshardt, the grotesque is not something

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[17] Keith Sandiford is an exception to this. See "Envisioning the Colonial Body: The Fair, the Carnivalesque and the Grotesque" in *An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture and the Atlantic World, 1660-1830*, eds. Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 15-30.
[18] Rosemary Betterton, "Body Horror? Food (and sex and death) in women's art" in *Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 133.
[19] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 26. He writes that this grotesque body "did not fit the framework of the 'aesthetics of the beautiful' as conceived by the Renaissance" (29). Nor, clearly, did the grotesque body fit the "aesthetics of the beautiful" as conceived in nineteenth-century Europe.

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to be feared or rejected.[20] Rather, it opens up a space for new readings of the world, and this is perhaps why nineteenth-century scientists and naturalists were so threatened by Baartman's body, and why they felt the need to frame her as an entity that was less than human. If we consider a certain body ideal as a "way of life" or an "order" of a particular kind, then Baartman's "anti-canonical body form"[21] certainly discloses the potentiality of a different normativity, and furthermore, if white men found that body sexually alluring, then they would have felt that their Euro-centric mentality was being threatened.

Remshardt observes that "Exposure to the grotesque creates an oscillation of acceptance and rejection; it consists of giving in to and repudiating the seduction of the grotesque object."[22] Although he does not reference Baartman in his text, Remshardt's observation can be productively considered in relation to the white spectators who went to view Baartman's body because of its status as a "grotesque object." As already noted, there was a thin line between attraction and repulsion for the viewers - Betterton identifies this liminality as "the close contiguity between disgust and desire"[23] - and ultimately the white spectators had to reject Baartman in order to avoid being seduced, while concomitantly, they were preserving the order that positioned their white bodies as normative and therefore desirable and morally superior. This rejection was part of the complex motivation for the derogatory caricatures of Baartman that I discuss in Chapter 1, which were produced in response to the fear of miscegenation that feelings of attraction to Baartman evoked. The Hottentot Venus body had to be regulated by being

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[20] Bakhtin writes that "The very material bodily lower stratum of the grotesque image (food, wine, the genital force, the organs of the body) bears a deeply positive character" (62).
[21] Ralf E. Remshardt, *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 48.
[22] Ibid, 86.
[23] Betterton, 141.

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by being visually represented as grotesque. Interestingly, a number of scholars have aligned the grotesque with that which cannot be represented, which recalls Marcus Wood's discussion of the difficulties of visually representing the horrors of slavery.[24] Remshardt, for instance, argues that the grotesque is a tool for that which is "beyond articulation," and therefore artists who deal with the grotesque can potentially experience catharsis through their art.[25] Similarly, Betterton acknowledges the power of the grotesque to breech the "boundaries of the unrepresentable."[26] Finally, white feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous has observed that "Men say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex...it's the jitters that gives them a hard-on! for themselves! They need to be afraid of us."[27] I will argue that black feminist artists who evoke the grotesque in their art are struggling with the paradox of visibility and invisibility experienced by Baartman, and which the colonial and patriarchal logic of the west has effectively inscribed on all black female bodies, resulting in a crisis of identity and corporeality.

One such black female artist is Renee Cox, who assumes Baartman's identity by transforming her own body into that of the Hottentot Venus in *Venus Hottentot 2000* (Plate 18), which she created in collaboration with Lyle Ashton Harris.[28] By posing

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[24] Marcus Wood, "The Irrevocable: Representing the 'Middle Passage'" in Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 14-77. Wood's examination of Trans-Atlantic slavery is driven by an activation of trauma theory, which addresses the tension between the desire to represent traumatic experiences and memories, and the fundamental difficulty, even impossibility, of doing so.

[25] Remshardt, 2.

[26] Betterton, 10.

[27] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in *Feminism/Art/Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 634.

[28] Cox and Ashton Harris have shown *Venus Hottentot 2000* at a number of separate exhibitions, including "Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire" (1995), "Darkness Visible: The BMA Exhibits the Sights of Blackness" (2002), and "Creating their Own Image" (2004), and in reviews of the shows their work is almost always singled out as the most powerful work, for example in Jane Harris, "A Surprising

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semi-nude and exposed to the viewer's gaze, Cox and Harris seem to be commenting on how Baartman's body was carved out by a pornographic visuality, or mode of viewing. As I point out in Chapter 1, Charmaine Nelson has indicted the relationship between corporeal excess, blackness and pornography as a form of representation.[29] This tendency to link the black female body with pornography comes into focus when we consider that historically, and still today, pornography is based on fetishization and metonymy: "the female genitals are made to stand in for the whole female body,"[30] which is exactly what transpired when Baartman was discursively transformed into the Hottentot Venus. Black feminist art critic Judith Wilson has written an article provocatively entitled "Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden's Use of Pornography and the Problem of the Black Female Body in Afro-US Art" (1992), in which she defines pornography as the "entire spectrum of representations that fetishized the body and objectify desire for public consumption,"[31] which is again disturbingly reflective of what occurred to Baartman when she was exhibited and represented as the Hottentot Venus.

So if Baartman's body is so loaded down by connotations of "primitive" sexuality, excess, and pornography, it is clear that there is much at stake for contemporary black female artists who are not only referencing her body in their art, but also placing their own bodies in the subject position once occupied by Baartman's body.

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Survey of African American Women's Art: 'Creating Their Own Image' at Parsons School of Design" (17 December 2004), http://www.villagevoice.com/art/0451,harris,59372,13.html.

[29] Charmaine Nelson, "The 'Hottentot Venus' in Canada: Modernism, Censorship and the Racial Limits of Female Sexuality" in *Racism, Eh? A Critical Inter-Disciplinary Anthology of Race and Racism in Canada*, eds. Camille A. Nelson and Charmaine A. Nelson (Concord, Ontario: Captus Press, 2004), 371.

[30] Betterton, 10.

[31] Judith Wilson, "Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden's Use of Pornography and the Problem of the Black Female Body in Afro-US Art" in *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michele Wallace*, ed. Dina Dent (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1992), 274.

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Lyle Ashton Harris's observations regarding *Venus Hottentot 2000* provide some insights into the motivations behind the work:

> This reclaiming of the image of the Hottentot Venus is a way of exploring my own psychic identification with the image at the level of spectacle. I am playing with what it means to be an African diasporic artist producing and selling work in a culture that is by and large narcissistically mired in the debasement and objectification of blackness. And yet, I see my work less as a didactic critique and more as an interrogation of the ambivalence around the body.[32]

Harris broaches a number of important issues in this statement. First, he uses the term "reclaiming," which reflects a popular trend in contemporary art by African Americans, and others who describe themselves as "black." Lubaina Himid has observed that black women's creativity reflects the importance of "gathering and re-using," which contributes to a "sense of history and most importantly a sense of future, a knowledge of survival."[33] This political artistic strategy is founded on the notion of re-appropriating stereotypes, deconstructing them, and thus emptying them of their racist histories. Ashton Harris and Cox's work destabilizes expectations about the black female body with their use of materials: the cold, hard, shiny metal prosthetic breasts and buttocks evoke a sense of unease in the viewer because they are so unlike the soft, warm, pliant flesh of women's bodies that are ostensibly so accessible in western culture. The viewer's uneasy response owes much to the uncanniness of the metal breasts and buttocks touching and transforming Cox's skin into something unexpected, even threatening;[34] this rupture in the viewer's vision of a black woman's body is what Cox and Ashton Harris are

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[32] Krista A. Thompson, "Post-Colonial Performance and Installation Art" (Spring 1998), http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/HottentotVenus.html.

[33] Quoted in Betterton, 1.

[34] Sigmund Freud identified the uncanny as existing within the field of aesthetics, "not merely the theory of beauty but the theory of the qualities of feeling." He notes that the uncanny is "undoubtedly related to what is frightening — to what arouses dread and horror" because of its inherent unexplainability, and gave as an example a dismembered hand in a fairytale. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1925) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XVII (London: Hogarth, 1953), 219-252.

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deliberately invoking in order to problematize assumptions about access to and power over the black female and her body. Furthermore, Cox's direct gaze activates what bell hooks has called an "oppositional gaze," which implies a degree of agency that (white) viewers might not expect.[35] However, there are always risks in creating art that re-enacts stereotypes in order to destabilize them, but before I pursue this point, it is crucial to note here that I am not locating Baartman herself as a stereotype, which would repeat the erasure of her personhood that took place when she was dis-located to Europe. Rather, I am suggesting that because of the pseudo-scientific discourse that transformed "Saartje Baartman" into the "Hottentot Venus," her body became the icon of the über-primitive black woman constructed by nineteenth-century naturalists. That is to say, Saartje Baartman was a black woman and a human being, while the "Hottentot Venus" was the stereotype that was written onto Baartman's body.

Art critic Edward Lucie-Smith has argued that for art that is based on reclaiming or re-appropriating stereotypes in order to deconstruct them, the audience must have *knowledge* of those stereotypes, or the artwork risks simply reifying them.[36] Art critics, especially African American art critics, seem to be split about the risks and the benefits of art that attempts to destabilize stereotypes. Michael Harris identifies the artistic strategies of inversion as "Turning a sign or a trope inside out, upside down, to disrupt its meaning and impact," and re-appropriation as "Taking a weapon used against you, making it your own, and thereby controlling it and preventing it from doing further harm."[37] He ultimately concludes that "Recycling, inverting, and deconstructing racist images have

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[35] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992).
[36] Edward Lucie-Smith, *Race, Sex, and Gender: In Contemporary Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 27.
[37] M. Harris, 191-192.

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some effect in dismantling that imagery, but those strategies visually root us in our oppression."[38] Harris is seeking art by black artists that pulls off "the delicate task of creating an image that [satirizes] a black stereotype in ways that implicate the creators of the stereotype without replicating it," thus indicating that he believes there is potential for empowerment in this artistic strategy.[39] Stuart Hall also recognizes the potential for increased social awareness and self-exploration when black individuals engage in acts of re-appropriation, which he points to as "part of the process by which we make ourselves."[40] Hall's statement suggests that Cox and other artists reclaiming Baartman in their artwork are in fact struggling with their own identities as they do so, which would illuminate Ashton Harris's declaration that *Venus Hottentot 2000* is "a way of exploring my own psychic identification with the image."[41]

Another important cue from Ashton Harris's thoughts about the work is his reference to "spectacle." Baartman, in the performative guise of the Hottentot Venus, was very much a human spectacle; she was displayed as an object for the entertainment of white European spectators. By locating her own body in this condition, does Cox not risk just perpetuating the "debasement and objectification of blackness," as Lyle Ashton Harris puts it? As white feminist art historian Janet Wolff has pointed out: "There are problems with using the female body for feminist ends. Its pre-existing meanings, as sex object, as object of the male gaze, can always prevail and reappropriate the body, despite

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[38] M. Harris, 222.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Quoted in bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 11.
[41] See Thompson, "Post-Colonial Performance and Installation Art" (Spring 1998). Although Lyle Ashton Harris is a black male artist, it is significant to note that he often plays with gender bending in his photographic artwork, for example the *Billie* series from 2002, in which he portrays himself in drag as the famous black female singer Billie Holiday. I believe his statement regarding *Venus Hottentot 2000* is relevant not only for Cox, whose body is used in the *Hottentot* photograph, but for all of the black female artists that I discuss in this chapter.

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the intentions of the woman herself."[42] Although Wolff does not identify the "feminist ends" that she is referring to, the risks to which she refers are relevant for artists of any race who use their own bodies in art that attempts to deconstruct stereotypes. However, there are those who are adamant that the use of black women artists' own bodies in their art is fundamental to the project of achieving what Betterton has called "embodied subjectivity," which refers to "how the body itself is experienced discursively and psychically."[43] Sharon Patton, a scholar of art history and African American history, has observed that Ashton Harris and Cox's use of the black female body is important because black women have not wanted to show their naked selves due to the connotations of deviant sexuality that have historically been attached to the black female body. She points out that "It's healthy to have this debate. Particularly in the African-American community, because for so long the image of the black body has had associations with sexual exploitation and slavery. We don't want to show our nude bodies. We want to keep it quiet."[44] Lorraine O'Grady, who calls for "the reclamation of the body as a site of black female subjectivity"[45] offers a similar observation about black women's psychic relationships with their own bodies. She writes: "Male-fantasy images in rap videos to the contrary, as a swimmer, in communal showers at public pools around the country, I have witnessed black girls and women of all classes showering and shampooing with their bathing suits *on*, while beside them their white sisters stand unabashedly stripped."[46] Her conclusion is that these black women have internalized the western ideology that

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[42] Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 121.
[43] Betterton, 3.
[44] Mary McHugh, "Senior Women Web Interviews: Sharon Patton, Part 2" (2000), http://www.seniorwomen.com/articles/mchugh/articlesMcHughIntPatton2.html. See also Sharon Patton, *African American Art* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[45] Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity" in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action* (New York: IconEditions, 1991), 155.
[46] Ibid, 153.

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non-white women are "not-to-be-seen," and as an artist, O'Grady is concerned with inverting that through her art: "To name ourselves rather than be named we must first see ourselves. For some of us this will not be easy. So long unmirrored in our true selves, we may have forgotten how we look,"[47] and this is exactly what Cox is doing: she is *seeing herself*, albeit in the guise of Baartman, in order to name herself as a black woman and a black female artist. In a statement that recalls my discussion of women and naming in the Introduction, hooks reminds us that "We [black women] have too often had no names, our history recorded without specificity, as though it's not important to know who we are."[48]

Of course, by using her own body Cox does have to deal with the risks of being objectified herself, and O'Grady - as an artist - is aware of this as well. She observes that the process of seeing and naming one's self "is slow and painful. For at the end of every path we take, we find a body that is always already colonized. A body that has been raped, maimed, murdered – that is what we must give a healthy present."[49] Cox's artwork is important because it gives Baartman a "healthy present." Ashton Harris observes: "I see my work less as a didactic critique and more as an interrogation of the ambivalence around the body," and O'Grady would seem to agree that this should be the objective of art by black female artists, as she believes that "Critiquing *them* does not show who *you* are; it cannot turn you from an object into a subject of history."[50] She goes on to argue that "Self-expression is not a stage that can be bypassed. It is a discrete

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[47] O'Grady, 154.
[48] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 116.
[49] O'Grady, 155.
[50] Ibid, 157.

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moment that must precede or occur simultaneously with the deconstructive act,"[51] which is exactly what black female artists appear to be doing with their recuperation of Baartman. O'Grady concludes her article with the awareness that black women as well as black female artists must struggle with the past in order to imbue black women with new agency: "The black female's body needs less to be rescued from the masculine 'gaze' than to be sprung from a historic script surrounding her with signification while at the same time, and not paradoxically, it erases her completely."[52] In other words, while these stereotypes were and are very much based on physicality and visibility, they effectively erased the individuality, agency and subjectivity of black women, and Cox and Ashton Harris are responding directly to this narrative. Black feminist art critic Michelle Cliff would also likely agree that *Venus Hottentot 2000* is an important work based on her observation that "It has been the task of black woman artists to transform...objectification: to become the *subject* commenting on the meaning of the object, or to become the subject rejecting the object and revealing the *real* experience of being."[53]

In a review of the exhibition *Darkness Visible*, which included *Venus Hottentot 2000*, Lee Gardner writes: "It seems there's only one thing more uncomfortable than dredging up several centuries worth of stereotypes, prejudices, distorted images, and misrepresentations directed at African-Americans by Europeans and European-Americans – and that's *letting them lie*."[54] The Hottentot Venus is not the only iconic

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[51] O'Grady, 157.
[52] Ibid, 160.
[53] Michelle Cliff, "Object into Subject: Some Thoughts on the Work of Black Women Artists" in *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*, ed. Frances Bonner, et al. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 142.
[54] Lee Gardner, "Darkness Visible: The BMA Exhibits the Sights of Blackness" (13 February 2002), http://www.citypaper.com/arts/story.asp?id=3865.

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body of racist and sexist ideologies that black female artists have attempted to reclaim in their art. The "Mammy" is another example of a stereotype often problematized by black female artists, and the icon of this stereotype is Aunt Jemima, who has long been the face of the happy black female slave in western commercial culture. Faith Ringgold, for instance, has reclaimed this figure (Plate 19), representing two "Jemimas" in a distorted, and, I would suggest, grotesque manner. I refer to Ringgold's quilt here because it exemplifies the activation of the grotesque as an aesthetic and critical tool that has been used by feminist artists and scholars of different races in order to "explain the misogyny of the culture and its deep hostility to the female."[55] Why Ringgold would choose to represent two black women in this way is not an easy one to answer, but Kate Chedgzoy, in an excellent article entitled "Frida Kahlo's 'Grotesque' Bodies" (1995), offers a thought-provoking possibility. She suggests that "Kahlo's paintings of birth, miscarriage, and the grotesque and suffering body actually represent the process by which the female body is socialized, rendered abject by the technological gaze of [white] patriarchal culture" (Plate 20).[56] In other words, female artists who represent the female body as grotesque are doing so in order to highlight the ways in which western society locates women as grotesque, not necessarily in the sense that they are physically repellant, but in so far as they are degraded as hysterical, irrational and emotionally vampiric. Although *Venus Hottentot 2000* cannot be described as grotesque in terms of Cox's face, as she is undeniably an attractive woman, she and Ashton Harris have "grotesqued" her body by

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[55] Betterton, 138.

[56] Kate Chedgzoy, "Frida Kahlo's 'Grotesque' Bodies" in *Feminist Subjects, Multi-Media: Cultural Methodolgies*, eds. P. Florence and D. Reynolds (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 48. I have added the "white" to further contextualize the term "patriarchal culture."

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adding the uncanny prosthetics,[57] and by employing a comparable aesthetic strategy, Ringgold has represented her Jemimas as "monstrous-females." As I note in Chapter 1, the monstrous-feminine is closely related to the grotesque within the discourse of (white) feminist visual theory as both concepts are often productively activated in order to unveil the fear of all that embodies "threatening" femininity according to western patriarchal ideology.[58] Bakhtin identified the fundamental attributes of the grotesque as degradation, protuberance and excessiveness, and as I have already attempted to show, Baartman's body was identified as the embodiment of all three of these problematic notions, problematic because they are all dependant on their opposites being accepted as normative. As I have illustrated with the concept of "excess," whether referring to corporeality or sexuality,[59] terms are invented in order to establish that which is the norm, and dichotomously, that which is not. Although "grotesque" is a term that has in the past often been accepted as the opposite of "beautiful" - except by those who follow Bakhtin's definition - that is not the way I am using the term here. Rather, I am suggesting that "grotesque" can be productively employed to reveal racist and sexist ideologies written onto the female body in visual and lived culture. Remshardt has defined the grotesque body as "a body in flux, a body of excess, constantly exploding into new orifices, ingesting, protruding, indecorously spilling into the environment with its unbounded

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[57] While I am arguing that Cox and Ashton Harris have grotesqued Cox's body through the addition of body parts that transform her body into that of Baartman, I wish to clarify that I am not locating Baartman's body as grotesque in and unto itself. Rather, her body was grotesqued by the scientists and naturalists who identified it as "abnormal." My thanks to Charmaine Nelson who has pointed out to me that just as Cox's body is grotesqued through the application of prostheses, Baartman's body was grotesqued through the application of the psycho-sexual projections of white spectators.

[58] See Betterton on the fear of the "threatening" female, 132-136.

[59] Bakhtin, 26. See also Remshardt, 23.

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mutability,"[60] a definition that is not intended to be degrading, but is meant to call to mind a fluid and changing body, which, in fact, describes every body.

If we accept Chedgzoy's interpretation of the grotesque as a revolutionary and productive feminist visual strategy, then the works by Cox and Ringgold may be said to reflect the ways that the (black) female body is conceived, objectified, and fetishized in western visual culture. Although Wolff has stated that "reinstating corporeality" is an "important but necessarily fraught and contradictory enterprise for women artists," she does allow that the grotesque female body and the monstrous-feminine can function as "potential sites of transgression and feminist intervention."[61] Ashton Harris, Cox and Ringgold reveal that the grotesque and the "monstrous-feminine" can function as artistic and political strategies for black female artists, as well as for white female artists, who are attempting to destabilize harmful stereotypes about women and their bodies. Interestingly, the Latin root of "monster" means "to show" or "to expose," and that is exactly what these artists are doing: exposing racist and sexist myths through their art.[62]

In her article entitled "Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture" (2001), Canadian art historian Ruth Phillips's discussion of Native Americans and their strategy of re-appropriating stereotypes in order to gain a degree of agency is useful for my examination of black female artists' recuperation of negative stereotypes of the body. She argues that Native Americans' use of performance was ironic and self-reflexive, and "offered the most favourable site for Native negotiations of the dominant culture's images of Indians as

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[60] Remshardt, 47.
[61] Betterton, 137. See also Wolff, 130.
[62] Remshardt, 62.

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pre-modern, degenerate, and vanishing."[63] I am suggesting that Cox and other black female artists' reference to the Hottentot Venus body is a negotiation of the dominant culture's images of black women as passive and available, yet paradoxically lascivious and deviant in their sexuality. In order to perform this negotiation, Cox and others must employ the very stereotypes that they are deconstructing. Homi Bhaba has observed that stereotypes are characterized by "ambivalence," that is, stereotypes produce meaning as a "form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that is anxiously repeated."[64] Significantly, Lyle Ashton Harris refers to the "ambivalence of the body" in his statement about *Venus Hottentot 2000.* Cue words such as "vacillation" and "anxiously repeated" signal the arbitrary and constructed nature of stereotypes, and Phillips argues that it is this arbitrariness that Native Americans were exploiting with their strategy of performance-as-resistance: "In choosing to play the fictive or negative roles pre-scripted for them, performers also subverted these roles by revealing their shallowness and the arbitrary nature of the signs of Indianness."[65]

African American performance artist Joyce Scott has also chosen to reference Baartman in her art, but because her art practice is performative, it is even more potentially problematic than Cox's re-embodiment of Baartman, as performance art necessarily locates the artist's body as the art object. But the medium is also temporal, vocal, and spatial, and Phillips argues that this provides the potential for a productive

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[63] Ruth Phillips, "Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture" in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 27.
[64] Ibid, 28.
[65] Ibid.

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intervention.[66] Performances that reference the Hottentot Venus body, like Native American performances, problematize the stereotypes that have been attached to the non-white body.[67] In 1986 Scott collaborated with actress and comedian Kay Lawal, forming the two-person performance troupe The Thunder Thigh Revue, which was primarily concerned with "issues surrounding the representation and perception of the body, and more specifically the black female body in American society."[68] Their first performance was entitled *Women of Substance*, and it revolved around the idea of the black female body as spectacle (Plate 21). At the moment of the performance that both reviewers and Scott described as the climax, Scott appeared on stage as Baartman, wearing sponge prosthetic buttocks. With only a sheer stocking covering the rest of her body, Scott began to speak in a mournful wail. She addressed the audience, lamenting the state of her life, being far away from her home in South Africa, and she spoke of the violation and humiliation of her body as an object of public display. Art Critic Krista Thompson states that "Through her song Scott gives Baartman a voice, imploring her audience to get past the spectacle of the body to perceive Baartman as a human being with feelings, desires, and subjectivity."[69] This recalls O'Grady's call for the reclamation of the body as a site of black female subjectivity, as well as Patton's observation that by showing the black female body the silence expected of that body is exploded. Of the *Women of Substance* performance Scott has said that it was her aim to "seize gross stereotypes and fuck with

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[66] Phillips, 26.
[67] Although I have not discussed her in my text, Coco Fusco's performance "Two Undiscovered Amerindians" is a perfect example of what I am discussing here. See Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance" in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 1998), 556-564.
[68] Thompson, "Post-Colonial Performance and Installation Art" (Spring 1998).
[69] Ibid.

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them. There's a cesspool of stereotypes about looks, and I'm trying to put a new spin on it."[70]

Betterton has observed that "The essentialism which characterized earlier feminist body art has been replaced by attempts to represent experiences of the feminine body that are psychically and culturally determined,"[71] and because of the risk of perpetuating stereotypes, some artists completely reject the use of their own body in art that is attempting to deconstruct corporeal stereotypes, choosing instead to employ alternative artistic strategies. Installation is one such strategy, and Renee Green has created an installation work inspired by Baartman that does not provide the audience with easy visual access to her body. With *Seen* (Plate 22), Green - like Cox, Ashton Harris and Scott - was concerned with the black female body as spectacle, and although she does not use her own body in the work, Green does include images of both Baartman and Baker. However, the title of the installation, *Seen*, is deceptive, as Green manipulated the images of Baartman and blurred the focus of the Baker photographs in order to disrupt the very act of looking. Furthermore, while the visual images are very small in scale, the texts, which provide historical and biographical background for both Baartman and Baker, are huge and cover the gallery walls, making them not only easy to read, but hard to ignore. But there is another dimension to the work that calls attention to the problematics of looking at the black female body as an object. As installed by Green, the images of Baartman and Baker were partially hidden behind a curtain, and the spectator had to climb onto a platform in order to see them. By going to such lengths in order to view the images of these women, the spectator was implicated in having given into the seductive

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[70] Quoted in Thompson, "Post-Colonial Performance and Installation Art" (Spring 1998).
[71] Betterton, 138.

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power of images of the black female body. Furthermore, in ascending the platform, the viewers' shadows were cast onto a screen, thus "putting them on display," much like Baartman and Baker were.[72] Green has stated: "I was trying to figure out the way in which a body could be visualized, especially a black female body, yet address the complexity of reading that presence without relinquishing pleasure and history."[73] This is, of course, the dilemma of dealing with stereotypes: history is always there, and if the stereotype is inscribed onto the black female body, there is always going to be certain connotations attached to that body. Green was highly conscientious in her project of problematizing the white patriarchal gaze that had formerly had access to Baartman and Baker's bodies, but O'Grady has criticized this very aspect of the work, pointing out that "From the perspective being discussed here - the establishment of subjectivity - because it [*Seen*] is addressed more to the other than to the self and seems to deconstruct the subject just before it expresses it, it may not unearth enough information."[74] For O'Grady, to unearth information through art is truly to struggle with the past, while being brave enough to do so - unapologetically - with the body.

Mara Verna is another female artist of colour who has referenced Baartman's experience as the Hottentot Venus in an artwork, but she deliberately does so *without* signifying the black female body. In 2003 Verna had an exhibition at La Centrale Gallery in Montreal called *Rien n'a été perdu*, which ran from February through March 2003. The installation incorporated video, drawings, collages, and prints, but Verna deliberately included no images of the Hottentot Venus, "in order to underscore her ultimate humanity and refrain from recapitulating caricatured images of Baartman

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[72] "Performance Anxiety: Renee Green" (1997).
[73] Quoted in Thompson, "Post-Colonial Performance and Installation Art" (Spring 1998).
[74] O'Grady, 156.

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produced during her lifetime."[75] Although Verna's approach to reclaiming the Hottentot Venus body differs greatly from that of Cox, Scott and even Green, all four artists are dealing with the same issues that are written onto every black female body.

The name of Verna's exhibition, *Rien n'a été perdu*, suggests the importance of remembering the past, and Betterton has observed, regarding the Lebanese artist Leslie Hakim-Dowek, that "The fear of forgetting was the fear of losing her own self."[76] hooks, similarly, calls for the "re-membering" of black women, which she identifies as the coming together of severed parts: fragments becoming whole.[77] This is particularly significant for Baartman, whose individuality was subsumed by her fetishized body parts. The black female artists who are creating art inspired by Baartman are remembering her, but it is impossible for them to truly *re-member* her: Baartman is no longer alive to be made whole again. However, by struggling with an inherited construction of black femaleness that is debased by fragmentation of body and identity, contemporary black women are looking towards *their own wholeness*, their own re-membering. In order to do so, black women are negotiating the stereotypes that Baartman came to embody. Bhabha has observed that

> The stereotypes that are the common coin of all [colonialist] discourses are characterized by a fixity and a clarity that are closely associated with the processes of visualization, the object of colonialist discourses is to produce the colonized as a social reality which is at once other and yet entirely knowable and visible.[78]

Some black artists, both male and female, believe that in order to create art that attempts to deconstruct stereotypes, the artist must first make them visible again, but this artistic

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[75] "Backup of Fieldworks: Dialogues Between Art and Anthropology" (Tate Modern: 2003), http://www.csudh.edu/dearhabermas/visualsocbk04.htm#venus.
[76] Betterton, 185.
[77] hooks: 1992, 64.
[78] Quoted in Phillips, 30.

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and political strategy has been vehemently critiqued because of the re-visualization of negative stereotypes. Kara Walker is one black female artist whose work is fundamentally based on the re-enactment of stereotypes about black people. Her installations involve pasting black life-size silhouettes on the white walls of galleries in order to create what she calls "landscapes" that represent scenes of sexual abuse, pedophilia, bestiality and other taboo subjects that are meant to invoke Trans-Atlantic slavery. Because of her deliberately offensive installations, Walker has been condemned - usually by black art critics - for reproducing stereotypes without destabilizing them, and for exploiting the horrors of slavery. In a review of her installation at the University of Chicago Hamza Walker writes:

> Kara Walker belongs to a number of African-American artists who work with the archives of racist imagery. She does not, however, liberate her black characters from the epic of the archetypes; she is not interested in deconstructing and rewriting history...*Walker does not control these specters as much as she wields them*. Walker's characters are violently racialized through her use of stereotypes.[79]

One of Walker's installations in particular is relevant for my purposes here because in it she references the stereotyped body of the Hottentot Venus. The detail from the installation entitled *Camptown Ladies* (Plate 23) is characterized by Walker's typical ambiguity, as well as a tension between sexuality and violence, and as is often the case with her "dreamscapes," there are more questions evoked than concrete narratives provided for easy consumption and absorption. For instance, why is there a white woman kneeling in front of the standing black woman with Hottentot Venus anatomy? And what is the substance coming out of the baby and apparently about to enter the white woman's (racialized by her bonnet, dress and dainty wrists) mouth? Is it urine? Blood? If we read

[79] Hamza Walker, "Blasphemous Images: The Ironic Masquerades of Kara Walker" (1997), www.renaissancesociety.org. Italics mine.

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the infant as black, and the liquid as blood, the resulting connotations are of white slave owners living off of black slaves' bodies. But if we read the baby as white, the Hottentot Venus figure might be interpreted as a domestic slave, recalling the tradition of female slaves acting as wet nurses for white babies while their own children went without food. These are only some of the questions that could be asked about this particular scene, but although Kara Walker has been praised for referencing difficult and painful subject matter, she has simultaneously been criticized for *how* she represents the history of Trans-Atlantic slavery. Hamza Walker points out that the artist's medium requires her to "violently racialize" her silhouettes in order for the audience to recognize who and what is being represented.[80] Indeed, the Hottentot Venus in *Camptown Ladies* is recognizable because of her exaggerated buttocks, which allow gallery visitors with sufficient historical knowledge of racist stereotypes to link the figure to Baartman. Although I acknowledge that this is a potentially problematic artistic strategy to take as a means to an end of viscerally critiquing racist histories, I ultimately agree with Lee Gardner, the art critic who observed that the only thing worse than "dredging up" distorting and racist stereotypes is letting them lie, and here I mean "lie" in both senses: Cox, Ashton Harris, Green, Scott and Walker actively engage with the stereotypes that were written onto the Hottentot Venus body, and which still persist today, and they refuse to let them insidiously pervade contemporary popular culture. They also actively attack the utter falseness, the *lie*, embodied by these stereotypes: that black female bodies are passive, deviantly sexual, and most of all, *silent*.

In the next chapter I will attempt to illuminate how a Jungian reading of artworks inspired by Baartman and the Hottentot Venus body can potentially open up a productive

[80] Walker, "Blasphemous Images: The Ironic Masquerades of Kara Walker" (1997).

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space for black female consumers of the art, black women who have had to struggle with damaging assumptions about their identities as well as with restrictive definitions of beauty. While I will argue that black female artists are "no strangers to beauty," my discussion of Jungian goddess feminism, a methodology that is regarded as somewhat old fashioned in the twenty-first century, is not about intentionality, but about reception. That is to say, I am not placing the onus on the artists, but on the black female viewers who are looking at artwork inspired by Baartman. I suggest that by embracing the "Venus" aspect of Baartman's persona black women can potentially engage with what feminist followers of Carl Jung, such as Jean Shinoda Bolen (who is Asian) and Susan Rowland (who is white), have identified as Jungian goddess feminism, a psychoanalytic field that encourages women to recognize and celebrate the goddess archetypes that resonate with them.

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# CHAPTER 3

## THE HOTTENTOT VENUS AS GODDESS: LOOKING AT BAARTMAN-INSPIRED ART THROUGH A JUNGIAN LENS

Feminism has had an uneasy relationship with psychoanalysis since white feminist scholars first merged the two methodologies in the 1970s. Judith Mitchell was one of the first to intersect the theories, writing in 1975: "[W]here Marxist theory explains the historical and economic situation, psychoanalysis, in conjunction with notions of ideology already gained in dialectical materialism, is the way of understanding ideology and sexuality."[1] As I have shown in previous chapters, examinations of Baartman's history and analysis of art by black female artists call not only for theories of gender and sexuality, but also of class, race and psychic positioning. Griselda Pollock speaks to the need for the acknowledgement of these intersecting identity markers in her more recent texts, particularly *Generations and Geographies: Feminist Readings* (1996), in which she writes:

> Every woman is the complex product of her specific historical and cultural framing: generations and geographies. There is neither Woman nor women. Everyone has a specific story, a particular experience of the configurations of class, race, gender, sexuality...Those stories are mediated by the forms of representation available in the culture.[2]

Three years later Pollock published *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (1999), in which she employed a self-consciously psychoanalytic approach to feminist art histories. Pollock argued that psychoanalysis provides a theoretical framework for questioning the intersecting issues of sexuality,

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[1] Judith Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), quoted in Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 12-13.

[2] Griselda Pollock, *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), xv.

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subjectivity and representation.[3] However, not every feminist art historian is convinced of the merits of psychoanalysis. The same year that Mitchell pronounced the usefulness of psychoanalysis within feminist discourses, Lise Vogel published an important essay entitled "Fine Arts and Feminism: The Awakening Consciousness" (first published in 1975) in which she observed: "From a feminist point of view, virtually all psychological theories are particularly distorting in that they simplistically reduce social phenomena to individual sexual ones and at the same time assume the human norm to be male."[4] Vogel is particularly concerned with the tendency of feminist art historians to adopt Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis for their own purposes.[5] These methodologies are problematic, in part, because both of them identify the female as lack, founding their psychoanalytic theories on the fact that women do not possess the phallus. Furthermore, not only did Freud and Lacan focus on the psychology of men, they were concerned almost exclusively with the psychology of white men.[6]

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[3] Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), xiv.

[4] Lise Vogel, "Fine Arts and Feminism: The Awakening Consciousness" in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, eds. Arlene Raven, Cassandra L. Langer, and Joanna Freuh (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 46.

[5] Ibid, 29.

[6] The most well known, and still extremely valuable, examples of the intersection of psychoanalytic writing and the experience of blackness are W.E.B DuBois's theory of "double consciousness" as articulated in *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), and Frantz Fanon's stream of consciousness prose in *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Fanon is especially interesting to re-read in light of the Hottentot Venus discourse. For example, Fanon writes that as a result of the racist gaze he "burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self" (109). Although I would never contest the value of Fanon's text, my arguments in this chapter differ significantly from his ideas about embodiment and the body. He writes that "Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness" (110). Using Jungian goddess feminism, I argue, contra Fanon, that women of all races can experience joy in and through the body. Julia Kristeva, among others, has identified this positive experience of embodiment as *jouissance*, a psychoanalytic term that is associated with enjoyment and pleasure (sexual and otherwise) through and from the female body; it means, literally, "the body rejoicing." See Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (New York & London: Routledge, 1996), 3, and Rosemary Betterton, *Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 33.

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Black feminist scholar Michele Wallace has criticized the psychoanalytic approach to spectatorship in a post-colonial context because, she argues, it results in color-blindness.[7] However, she does acknoweldge that "The way feminist cultural analysis uses psychoanalysis could provide ways of reading cultural stereotypes of black women more fully, or against the grain."[8] I will argue that Jungian goddess feminism provides opportunities for reading images of Baartman "against the grain,"[9] and in this chapter I am primarily concerned with black women as *consumers* of visual images.[10]

Jungian goddess feminism is an amplification, to use the term employed by Susan Rowland in her text *Jung: A Feminist Revision* (2002),[11] of Jungian psychoanalysis that proposes that in every women, regardless of class, race, or sexuality, there are powerful forces that can be harnessed once a woman recognizes which goddess archetype(s) is/are "activated" within her.[12] I believe that this feminist archetypal theory offers a potentially

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[7] Michele Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture* (USA: Duke University Press, 2004), 475.
[8] Ibid, 280-81.
[9] Lynne Pearce has pointed out that the phrase "against the grain" was first articulated by Walter Benjamin in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in the following context: "A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He [sic] regards it as his task to brush history against the grain." Quoted in Lynne Pearce, Woman/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 28, footnote #8.
[10] Alice Ming Wai Jim has observed that black female artists have also critiqued the attention paid to goddesses through their art. In an article about two exhibitions of art by black women in Canada she writes: "In [the artists'] attempt to redefine the parameters of representation for the Black female body, they challenged racial and gender stereotypes of women of African descent – ritualized fertility goddesses, versions of the mammy figure – that have been constructed by colonial and neo-colonial discourses" (356). While I agree completely with Jim that there is a discourse of black-woman-as-African-goddess that is limiting because of its colonialist undertones, what I am proposing in this chapter is not to perpetuate the negative black goddess *stereotype*, but rather to read artworks inspired by the Hottentot Venus as reflecting a black goddess *archetype*, which potentially allows the woman/viewer or the artist to insert herself into a mythological narrative that is potentially empowering and enlightening. Alice Ming Wai Jim, "Articulating Spaces of Representation: Contemporary Black Women Artists in Canada" in *Racism, Eh? A Critical Inter-Disciplinary Anthology of Race and Racism in Canada*, eds. Camille A. Nelson and Charmaine A. Nelson (Concord, Ontario: Captus Press, 2004), 353-365.
[11] Susan Rowland, *Jung: A Feminist Revision* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002).
[12] Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* (New York: Harper Colophen Books, 1984), 1. Other than Venus, Bolen discusses goddess archetypes such as Artemis (the virgin goddess and huntress), Athena (goddess of wisdom and crafts), Hestia (goddess of the hearth and temple). Bolen identifies Hera, Demeter and Persephone as "vulnerable goddesses" in

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empowering perspective on Baartman's experience as the Hottentot Venus and for black women who endure the same sexist and racist ideologies that were inscribed on Baartman's body. I first began to consider the possibilities of this connection because of the very name that I discussed as so problematic in my Introduction: that is, *Hottentot Venus*. Despite the obvious derogatory origins of the name, I wish to point out that not only can black female artists re-appropriate the Hottentot Venus body, as I argue in Chapter 2, but they can also re-appropriate the name, or rather - one aspect of the name - itself. Linguist Mikhail Bakhtin has observed that words are never neutral, as they are always loaded down with connotations of its previous usage:

> The linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments – that is, precisely that background that, as we see, complicates the path of any word towards its object.[13]

I quote Bakhtin here in order to argue that despite the intentions of the colonialist white males who re-named Baartman as the Hottentot Venus, the original meaning of the name "Venus" remained intact, and it is this meaning that black women can bring with them when they look at art inspired by Baartman, and *if* they identify with some of Baartman's experiences, such as not fitting into a white-normative definition of beauty. Bakhtin observes that "All socially significant world views have the capacity to exploit the intentional possibilities of language through the medium of their specific concrete instancing."[14] The positive associations that "Venus" can potentially have for black

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opposition to Venus, Artemis and Athena, who are identified as active goddesses who carve out their own destinies.

[13] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2001), 1205.

[14] Ibid, 1212.

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women is revealed when we consider the fact that words are fluid, and "Hottentot Venus" can potentially lose its derogatory connotations, while keeping the empowering subtext. Bakhtin writes:

> Not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to...appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien...Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions...Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.[15]

In this context, however, "appropriation" refers to the act attempted by the white men who maliciously re-named Baartman, thinking that they could insert "Venus" not as a signifier of love and beauty, but as an ironic, and thus contradictory, term that was intended to signify repulsiveness. Black female viewers who place themselves in Baartman's subject position when they look at Cox's photograph, for example, are therefore *re-appropriating* the name of Venus in relation to "Hottentot."

Although the goddess feminism of the 1970s tended to essentialize women, thus displacing women of color, advocates of Jungian goddess feminism argue that it in fact opens a space for women of all classes, races - as I note earlier in my text, Jungian psychoanalyst Jean Shinoda Bolen is Asian - and sexualities to find goddess archetypes that resonate with them. As Lauter and Rupprecht have argued: "In the case of feminist theory, if we regard the archetype not as an image whose content is frozen...but as a tendency to form and reform images in relation to certain kinds of repeated experience, then the concept could serve to clarify distinctively female concerns that have persisted throughout human history."[16] Although "distinctively female concerns that have persisted throughout human history" may raise red flags for black women who recognize

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[15] Bakhtin, 1215.
[16] Quoted in Rowland, 85.

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that their concerns differ greatly from those of white women, I would rather focus on their alertness to "repeated experience" as a foundation for archetypal theory. Many black scholars, including Michael Harris and Michelle Cliff, identify shared experience, or a collective unconscious, as a source of empowerment for black women.[17] Rowland writes: "Jungian goddess feminism regards mythological narratives of goddesses as the only satisfactory means of expression and empowerment for the long subordinated female psyche."[18] She defines the psyche as "all mental contents and operations,"[19] but there is more to it than that. The psyche encompasses not just all mental contents and operations, but also all the wounds that society and culture can inflict upon a person's unconscious.[20] Black women's psychic wounds often revolve around the body, because so many of their bodies have been treated violently, both in lived and visual culture. Unlike Freudian theory, Jungian psychoanalytic theory seeks to honour both the unconscious and the body, rather than fearing them.[21] Rowland observes that "For Jung, the body is both a phenomenon with its own needs and indissolubly bonded to the psyche. Archetypes are psychosomatic, meaning that they are also of the body."[22] She also argues that psychic needs are often manifested in and on the body. This facet of Jungian theory is indispensable if we are concerned with the corporeal subjectivity of black women, whether material bodies in lived culture or represented bodies in art. This

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[17] See Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 141, and Michelle Cliff, "I Found God in Myself and I Loved Her/I Loved Her Fiercely" in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, Raven, Arlene, Cassandra L. Langer, Joanna Freuh, eds. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 597-625.
[18] Rowland, 69-70.
[19] Ibid, 29.
[20] See Marcus Wood, "Representing Pain and Describing Torture: Slavery, Punishment and Martyrology" in *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 215-291.
[21] Rowland, 29.
[22] Ibid, 35.

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is also relevant for questions of sexuality, as Jung believed that sexuality was a particular kind of corporeal instinct that can be examined as both physical and archetypal.[23] Jung identified the body that is experienced both physically and psychically as the "subtle body," which is a term that evokes the image of a body that is inscribed both from within and without. Rowland has argued that "Words cannot ever completely describe nor evoke the subtle body, for they are the creatures of the conscious ego."[24] According to Jung, the unconscious is "other" to the rational conscious that is privileged in patriarchal culture and Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The usage of the term "other" is interesting, if problematic, when considered in light of the critical strides made with post-colonial theory.

While not advocating literal goddess worship, there is still the danger with goddess feminism that women are essentialized as "Woman" and feminism as "Feminism" if certain archetypal narratives are taken to be timeless truths. Rowland acknowledges this, observing that Jung's ideas about "personal myths" open up a space for Jungian "feminisms," because the notion of "myths" indicates a wide array of personal experiences, depending on different subject positions of gender, race, class and sexuality. Myth is of utmost importance in Jungian archetypal theory, because it reveals the repeated experiences that have been recuperated in order to identify archetypal images. By "personal myth" Jung was referring to the interior narrative that a man or a woman possesses based on lived experience, which can parallel past myth, from which an individual can learn about their governing archetype(s), that is to say, the individual can better understand how he or she thinks, feels and behaves. As Rowland observes:

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[23] Rowland, 35.
[24] Ibid, 135.

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"Mythology is a characteristic means of connecting individual psychic experience of gender to Jung's works and to the wider culture."[25] Ultimately, Jungian goddess feminism is meant to empower the "insecure female psyche,"[26] which could be wounded from any number of ideological or physical attacks from without. Jungian goddess feminism is concerned with counter-acting the effects of cultural pressure on women's psyches, and with seeking wholeness.[27]

As psychoanalyst Nancy Qualls-Corbett has observed: "We find that myths are not just delightful yet idle stories of gods and goddesses...they speak of living psychological material and arts as a repository of truths appropriate to an individual's inner life."[28] This statement offers one suggestion of why some women artists have referenced mythology in their artwork, but there is also the question of why some *art critics*, myself included, are drawn to such an out-of-fashion - some might say obsolete - theoretical framework as Jungian goddess feminism. Rowland offers a glimmer of an explanation for this when she writes that feminist archetypal theory is "Devoted to uncovering the traces of women's unconscious in art and across cultural boundaries."[29] I have been preoccupied in previous chapters with seeking out traces of Baartman in history: her birth and marriage certificate in the city of Manchester archives; representations of her produced in the nineteenth century; her very few words recorded by Cuvier. I, like Cox, Scott and Green, have a limited amount of primary documentation with which to speculate about her life, her personality and her identity. The intervention being proposed in this chapter is not about re-creating Baartman as an

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[25] Rowland, 69.
[26] Ibid, 49.
[27] Ibid, 68.
[28] Quoted in ibid, 47.
[29] Ibid, 86.

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effigy, but rather to refocus on black women living in the present who are assaulted daily with intensely and embarrassingly sexual hip-hop music videos, advertisements and films. I have been tracing Baartman's history, as well as the contemporary artwork that intersects and adds onto that history, and now, in this chapter, I am turning to the black female viewers who have come after Baartman, and after Cox et al., and I am proposing a possible way of looking.

In *Goddesses in Every Woman* (1984) Jungian psychoanalyst Jean Shinoda Bolen defines and describes a number of different goddess archetypes, and she establishes Venus as an alchemical goddess who possesses powers of creativity and transformation.[30] Bolen believes that women are influenced by inner archetypes that can be "personified" by goddesses, and once a woman becomes aware of her personal archetype(s), she acquires the power to understand herself better, thus accepting herself and all her eccentricities.[31] According to Bolen, Jungian goddess feminism provides a source of needed strengths that pre-exist within women before they are socialized, racialized and basically taught "how to be." The powers of creativity and transformation are not insignificant for black women who are also artists, as the power of production and creativity are desired by any artist, male or female, white or black, and the power of transformation has been identified as fundamental by black scholars and individuals who desire social and political change. bell hooks has written extensively about how and why black women must work for the transformation of themselves and of the world. In *Art on My Mind* (1995) hooks addresses the difficulties encountered by black artists, as well as the importance of art in the lives of black people. She writes that "Art constitutes one of

[30] Bolen, 224.
[31] Ibid, 4-5.

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the rare locations where acts of transcendence can take place and have a wide-ranging transformative impact."[32] hooks's statement is important because she aligns art and social change, but also interesting, if only semantically, is the fact that she uses the term "transformative," which evokes the Venus archetype as defined by Bolen. In a similar vein, art critic Susan Crane has written that "Art is not simply the discreet, delectable, beautiful object, but the transcendental power of creativity, the alchemical potential of materials."[33] Crane's observation is the kind that would take pages to unpack in its entirety, but the crux of her argument - that art is not just an aesthetic object, but ultimately an instrument loaded with potential for explosive change – is significant because of *my* argument that black women viewers of *Venus Hottentot 2000* and *Seen* and Scott's performance are looking at images rife with problematic history as well as with powerful forces that can activate change *within* the viewers.

Beginning in the 1970s certain (white) feminist art historians and (white) feminist artists called attention to the empowering potential of goddess myths as source material for art. Gloria Feman Orenstein, for example, wrote an article in 1978 entitled "The Re-emergence of the Archetype of the Great Goddess in Art by Contemporary Women" in which she argues that the artistic strategy of evoking goddesses in art by women "brings to light" powerful psychic forces, symbols, images, artifacts and rituals that can provide psychological strengths in times of need.[34] This is strikingly similar to Jungian goddess feminism as outlined by Rowland, particularly the focus on psychic needs and empowerment via goddess archetypes. June Singer writes that "When a psychological

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[32] bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 8.
[33] Quoted in ibid, 8.
[34] Gloria Feman Orenstein, "The Reemergence of the Archetype of the Great Goddess in Art by Contemporary Women" in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, Raven, Arlene, Cassandra L. Langer, Joanna Freuh, eds. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 71.

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need arises it seems inevitably the deeper layers of the collective unconscious are activated and sooner or later the memory of a myth or an event or an earlier psychic state emerges into consciousness."[35] Singer is concerned with women finding their way toward a new, more satisfying sexuality, and hooks has also written of a vision of new, healthy sexualities for black women. In *Black Looks* (1992) she writes: "When black women relate to our bodies, our sexuality, in ways that place erotic recognition, desire, pleasure, and fulfillment at the center of our efforts to create radical black female subjectivity, we can make new and different representations of ourselves as sexual objects."[36]

Feman Orenstein reminds us that "The artist is the avatar of the new age, the alchemist whose great Art is the transformation of consciousness and being."[37] The "new goddess consciousness" that she envisions is one of a holistic mind-body totality and of wholeness, a term that is particularly significant for Baartman who, as already noted in earlier chapters, was regarded by scientists as metonymic fragments rather than a whole woman. Feman Orenstein observes that black female artist Betye Saar "probes the collective unconscious for those images of female power specific to black women."[38] With Jungian goddess feminism, black women can look within themselves for the goddess archetypes that resonate for them, as opposed to accepting external stereotypes

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[35] June Singer, *Androgyny: Towards a New Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Anchor, 1976), 71.
[36] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992), 76.
[37] Feman Orenstein, 71.
[38] Ibid, 83. Like Cox, Scott and Green, Betye Saar has often revived iconic and stereotyped black female personas, such as the "Mammy" figure in *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972). This mixed-media work has an Aunt Jemima doll - with her traditional wide and unthreatening grin - holding a broom in one hand and a shotgun in the other, suggesting that the always-benevolent Jemima has a newfound potential for violence. Michael Harris has written the following about the re-appropriation of Aunt Jemima by black artists in the 1960s and 1970s: "They [black artists] interceded to manipulate them [the original images] for effect, deconstructing the visual sign, questioning Aunt Jemima's role as a popular trademark, and giving voice and humanity to all the black women aggrieved by the stereotypical representation of Aunt Jemima and the Mammy image" (107).

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that white patriarchal culture continue to project upon them. Jung wrote that "To carry a god around in yourself is a guarantee of happiness, of power, and even of omnipotence in so far as these are attributes."[39] This idea has been adopted by some black feminists, even those who do not self-consciously identify themselves as Jungian in any way. Michelle Cliff wrote an article entitled "I Found God in Myself and I Loved Her/I Loved Her Fiercely" (1988), the title taken from a poem, of which she explains: "If a Black woman is able to recognize God in herself, by herself, and is able to love this God, then she can love herself also. She will love herself, believe in her worth, hold on to her dignity."[40] Unlike Feman Orenstein, Cliff maintains the traditional God moniker with a capital "G," which is still, for the most part, read as male. However, she does go on to challenge the gender assumptions, stating: "The *her* – God as *her* – thrills and startles because we live in a culture which teaches above all that God is masculine."[41] So, like Rowland and Feman Orenstein, Cliff is concerned with the potential of looking for a goddess within. Moreover, she names three female African deities, identifying them as sources of black female empowerment because they are part of a collective memory shared by black women.[42] One of the deities, Yemaya, the "Prime Mother of all things" is even linked to both the Virgin Mary and to Venus because of her powers of creativity and (re)production.[43] Significantly, Caroline Arscott and Katie Scott, editors of *Manifestations of Venus: Art and Sexuality* (2000), have pointed out that according to certain ancient myths, Aphrodite - the Greek version of Venus - was originally conceived

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[39] Quoted in Jolande Jacobi, *Complex, Archetype, Symbol in the Psychology of C.G. Jung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 101.
[40] Michelle Cliff, "I Found God in Myself and I Loved Her/I Loved Her Fiercely" in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, Raven, Arlene, Cassandra L. Langer, Joanna Freuh, eds. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 601.
[41] Ibid, 601.
[42] Cliff, 602.
[43] Ibid, 598.

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of as black.[44] They argue that the goddess's skin color was "erased" over time by white Christians who re-wrote the myth, effectively writing the black female body out of history. Their assertion that Aphrodite/Venus was originally thought of as black echoes the argument made in Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987). As indicated by his title, Bernal re-envisions the mythological goddess as black as part of a project to identify the role that Africans played in the formation of what has been traditionally recognized as an overwhelmingly white history of so-called civilization.[45]

Mythology, according to Jungian goddess feminism, is the source of the archetypal images that can offer women a source of enlightenment about themselves founded on shared experience and collective unconscious. In *Goddesses in Everywoman* Bolen discusses a number of myths that function to locate Venus as an archetype that "motivates women to value the creative process," as well as a figure who was confident in her own sexual body.[46] Bolen points out that in classical myths Venus entered relationships of her own choosing, was never victimized, and generated love and beauty, erotic attraction, sensuality, sexuality and new life.[47] As noted in Chapter 1, the problematics of choosing their own sexual partners and enduring sexual abuses were often part of a female slave's life, and black women today are acting out against that history of victimization by being vocal about their rights, especially about control over their own bodies. Bolen examines myths that offer empowering narratives to female

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[44] Caroline Arscott and Katie Scott, eds, *Manifestations of Venus: Art and Sexuality* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3.
[45] Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Free Association Books, 1987). Bernal documents the influence of the Egyptians on the societal practices of classical Greece, and the dismissal of such evidence by European scholars such as John Locke and Benjamin Franklin.
[46] Bolen, 17.
[47] Ibid.

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readers of all races. One of the most famous myths about Venus's powers of creativity is that of Pygmalion, king of Cyprus, in which the king created a sculpture of a beautiful woman, and fell in love with it. He prayed to Venus to ease the suffering triggered by unrequited love, and in response Venus transformed the sculpture into a flesh and blood woman named Galatea. However, in the nineteenth century Venus's role as a force for change and transformation was often ignored, and Pygmalion was identified as the embodiment of creativity. According to art historian Stephen Kern, the myth of Pygmalion is "the most explicit literary source for a gazing male artist as subject and a sightless naked woman as object,"[48] and Linda Nochlin has argued that the myth "embodies the notion of the artist as sexually dominant creator: man - the artist - fashioning from inert matter an ideal erotic object for himself. A woman cut to the very pattern of his desires."[49] Many nineteenth-century male painters "explored the relationship between female model and male creator, occasionally in Pygmalionesque terms, [and] invariably in these the power of the artist and his control over the sitter is conveyed in a deeply felt moment of creation."[50] Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones even went so far as to produce a series of images depicting the Pygmalion myth between 1869 and 1879 (Plate 24). Significantly, in *Manifestations of Venus: Art and Sexuality*, Arscott and Scott identify the "Venus effect" as referring specifically to artistic creativity, thus bestowing the powers of art and transformation on the (female) goddess,

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[48] Stephen Kern, *Eyes of Love: The Gaze in English and French Paintings and Novels 1840-1900* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), 108.
[49] Linda Nochlin, "Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Art" in *Woman as Sex Object*, eds. Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin (United States: Newsweek, 1972), 15.
[50] Susan P. Casteras, "The Necessity of a Name: Portrayals and Betrayals of Victorian Women Artists" in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, eds. Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor. (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 210.

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rather than the (male) king.[51] As I have already pointed out, in the classical myth it is not Pygmalion who brings his statue to life. As recounted by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, it is in fact Venus who imbues Galatea with vision and consciousness, just as contemporary black female artists are re-imbuing Baartman with subjectivity by activating their powers of creativity.

Returning to the importance of memory and art in the context of a collective unconscious that produces archetypal images based on lived experience, Homi Bhaba offers an important insight when he writes that "When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, the displacement of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival."[52] The intersection of Jungian goddess feminism and art by black female artists offers a source of empowerment that can potentially activate psychic healing for black women. Although I do not claim to have any empirical evidence that the artists whom I discuss in Chapter 2 had Jungian archetypes in mind when they produced their Baartman-inspired art, I believe that it is worthwhile to look at how black feminist art critic Lowery Stokes Sims discusses one of the works, and how her reading of it is a valuable entry point for considering how Jungian goddess feminism intersects with visual culture studies. In an analysis of Joyce Scott's *Women of Substance* performance (Plate 21) Stokes Sims evokes the "goddess within" trope without ever alluding directly to archetypal theory. In her performance, Scott transformed her body into that of the Hottentot Venus, as well as that of Sandro Botticelli's idealized white goddess from *The Birth of Venus* (Plate 2). Scott's objective was not, however, to perpetuate the ideology that locates Baartman's

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[51] Arscott and Scott, 5.
[52] Homi Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (Suffolk: St. Edmundsbury Press Ltd., 1994), 18.

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body as repulsive and the Botticelli Venus's body as ideal. Stokes Sims observes that "Scott has brilliantly illuminated the shadowy self that gets lost in the flurry of consensus by which we justify and judge our lives and those about us."[53] The most significant thing that Stokes Sims writes for my purposes here, never identifying which body - that of the Hottentot Venus or the Botticelli Venus (see Plate 2) - to which she is referring, is this: "*That goddess is clearly to be found in herself*...she has extensively explored the pain and passion of being 'other,' an overweight black woman in this society."[54] According to Stokes Sims, Scott has found the goddess in herself, has activated the Venus within her, while discarding the sting of judgment about possessing a body that takes up more space than is usually allowed to a woman in our culture. Furthermore, Stokes Sims's reference to a "shadowy self" recalls what Rowland writes about Jungian goddess feminism and its celebration of, rather than fear of, the so-called "darkness" of women of all races: "The goddess myth provides an alternative to viewing dark, repressed feminine pain as an abyss of inferiority. A culture whose religious images provide only the impossible lightness and bliss of the Virgin Mary or evil, sinful Eve is rethought in terms of a positive feminine darkness."[55] In *Manifestations of Venus* Arscott observes that "Venus oscillates between the reassuring and the alarming,"[56] and I believe that it is this instability of Venus, her "darkness," as well as her disruptive potential that makes her such an appropriate archetype for black women to harness for their own empowerment.

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[53] Lowery Stokes Sims, "Aspects of Performance in the Work of Black American Women Artists" in Raven, Arlene, Cassandra L. Langer, Joanna Freuh, eds. *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 219.
[54] Ibid, 219. Italics mine.
[55] Rowland, 63.
[56] Arscott and Scott, 142.

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Whereas in Chapter 2 I discuss black women as producers of art, in this chapter I have been primarily concerned with black women as consumers of visual images. For instance, my discussion of Stokes Sims's reading of Joyce Scott's *Women of Substance* is not so much about Scott's objectives as it is about how Stokes Sims reads goddess feminism into the performance. Jungian goddess feminism is only one potentially empowering way to read images of Baartman as visual texts that speak to the problematics of black female subjectivities and sexualities. I am suggesting that black female viewers can productively extrapolate the *Venus* aspect of Baartman's identity, discarding the derogatory signification of the performative name "Hottentot Venus," without - and this is key - erasing Baartman's status as a black woman. In other words, in activating the Venus archetype, black female viewers need not degrade or render invisible Baartman's blackness. Even in artworks in which Baartman's body is not visually represented, as in Green's installation (Plate 22), Baartman's subjectivity is signified and present, because her personhood transcends her corporeal self, a fact overlooked by Cuvier and others in the nineteenth century when they focused exclusively on her body, its color, and its so-called anomalies.

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# CONCLUSION: THE HOTTENTOT VENUS AS LAUGHING BLACK WOMAN

I begin my conclusion with a quotation from Carolyn G. Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life* (first published in 1988), a valuable example of feminist literary criticism. Heilbrun writes: "In the end, the changed life for women will be marked, I feel certain, by laughter. It is the unfailing key to a new kind of life. In film, novels, plays, stories, it is the laughter of women...that is the revealing sign, the spontaneous recognition of insight and love and freedom."[1] Heilbrun was a professor of modern English literature at Columbia University before she took her own life in 2003, but while she was concerned with both re-reading canonical literature by men and with reviving interest in female authors such as George Eliot and Virginia Woolf, *Writing a Woman's Life* was ultimately a call for twentieth-century women to have the courage to live in ways that do not necessarily fit the traditional "plots" of marriage and child-rearing allowed to women. Her statement signals that she was aware of the power of women's laughter, and in my conclusion I will explore how humour and laughter can function as potent tools when employed by contemporary female artists of different races. Freud wrote that "Humour is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies not only the triumph of the ego, but also the pleasure principle, which is able here to assert itself against the unkindness of real circumstance."[2] Although in the previous chapter I eschew Freudian theory because of its limiting view of women as little more than bodies lacking the phallus, Freud's ideas about humour are significant here because they open a space for humour, and thus for laughter, to be revolutionary, destabilizing acts. Therefore, humour in art by black

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[1] Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 129.
[2] Quoted in Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 14.

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women, as well as in discourse by black feminist scholars, is a political act, not of resignation, but rather of rebellion and resilience. I have consciously chosen to leave my exploration of humour in feminist art and the disruptive power of women's laughter until my Conclusion, because I have found discussions of women's humour and laughter to be some of the most hopeful that I have encountered in feminist literature about the arts. Although I could have embedded the subject in my analysis of contemporary art by black feminist artists in Chapter 2, I decided not only to keep it distinct from the issues that I discuss in that chapter, but also to make it the primary focus with which to conclude my text. While we have no visual representations showing Saartje Baartman laughing, I believe that it is empowering to remember that Baartman's actions were not restricted to standing mute and on display, as historical images might suggest. Rather, as a black woman and human being, she had the physical and emotional capacity to laugh. Perhaps she did a lot less laughing after arriving in Europe, but we will never know for certain, because the trail is scarce, and there are only a limited number of traces left of Baartman's life (Plate 25). Nonetheless, she lived, therefore she most certainly laughed.

Jo Anna Isaak, author of the excellent book *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (1996), shares my faith in the importance of humour and laughter in women's art and women's lives. In her text Isaak discusses a number of feminist artists who use humour in their artwork in order to deal with the oppression and anger that women feel as a result of western culture's sexist (and racist) ideologies. Isaak identifies the strategy of humour in feminist art as often reflecting a "sense of play," which she characterizes as "linguistic excess, the joy of disrupting or going beyond established or fixed meaning into the realm of non-sense." She notes that

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"Since, as Barthes...put it, 'a code cannot be destroyed, only played off,' play may well be the most revolutionary strategy available" for feminist artists.[3] For Isaak, the use of humour, and the resulting laughter, whether of the artist herself or the female viewer, is revolutionary. The act of laughing is an act of asserting a woman's existence, of her corporeal presence, and her willingness to take up space both physically and vocally. Isaak's reference to "linguistic excess" is particularly significant in light of the fact that Baartman was reduced to a state of relative voicelessness, a state that Joyce Scott attempts to rectify in her performance piece *Women of Substance* (Plate 21), while paradoxically being regarded as the embodiment of corporeal excess. As I show in Chapter 2, there has historically been a fear of women's excess in western culture: whether corporeal excess or vocal excess, which has effectively made a woman who speaks up for herself an aberration, because - to use an adage traditionally used to describe children - women are meant to be seen and not heard. Of course, as I have already pointed out, the term "excess," like "abnormal" and "primitive," is relative; that is, its existence is dependant on its dichotomous relationship with that which is the norm. Therefore, nothing and nobody is inherently excessive: the term was invented in order to clarify what is *not* excessive. The fear of woman's vocal "excess" explains in part why men were so fearful of feminist scholars in the late 1960s, a fear that is still apparent to a certain degree today. Heilbrun reminds us that feminists were labeled as loud, ugly, and lesbian, because of the fact that their articulation of their desires as well as their anger made them a threat to the patriarchal status quo. She observes that "[A]bove all other prohibitions, what has been forbidden to women is anger, together with the open

[3] Isaak, 3.

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admission of the desire for power and control over one's life."[4] I would argue that in feminist art there is often a thin line between anger and laughter, which results in a tension exemplified by Renee Cox and Lyle Ashton Harris's *Venus Hottentot 2000* (Plate 18). As I point out in Chapter 2, the uncanniness - a psychoanalytic term coined by Freud to signify that which is familiar, yet unexpected, and consequently unnerving[5] - of the prosthetic metal breasts and buttocks in relation to Cox's own pliant flesh can be read initially as humorous, but once the viewer meets her eyes, the response becomes what Ralf Remshardt identifies as "serious laughter," which signals the intersection of humour and troubling issues within a work of art.[6] By embodying the Hottentot Venus, Cox is playing with viewers' expectations about the availability of the black female body, and like in Renee Green's *Seen* (Plate 22), the viewer is not only in on the joke, but effectively becomes the butt of the joke.[7]

Lowery Stokes Sims's observation that in *Women of Substance* Scott is "alternating the cathartic power of slapstick with gut-gripping pathos,"[8] would seem to suggest that Scott is engaging in a game of angry humour similar to that of Cox. Remshardt argues that humour and catharsis are often inextricably linked, noting that

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[4] Heilbrun: 2002, 13.
[5] See Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1925) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XVII (London: Hogarth, 1953), 219-252.
[6] Ralf E. Remshardt, *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 81.
[7] Significantly for my discussion here, black scholar Frantz Fanon evokes laughter as a sign of power, and the lack of laughter as a sign of powerlessness, in his famous text *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967). In his affecting description of how it feels to be the object of racism Fanon quotes a white child who at the sight of him cries "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Fanon, in response, writes: "Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter was impossible" (112). Yet there are glimmers of empowerment in Fanon's text, signaled by his ability to laugh. He states at one point, "I put the white man back into his place; growing bolder, I jostled him and told him point-blank, 'Get used to me, I am not getting used to anyone.' I shouted my laughter to the stars" (131).
[8] Lowery Stokes Sims, "Aspects of Performance in the Work of Black American Women Artists" in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, eds. Arlene Raven, Cassandra L. Langer, Joanna Freuh (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 219.

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catharsis is "self-enjoyment through the enjoyment of what is other."[9] I have interpreted this statement in two ways: first, it may provide one possible reason why nineteenth-century viewers enjoyed going to view Baartman exhibited as the Hottentot Venus; they experienced a thrill of looking at the "other," thus re-establishing their own bodies as the norm, and therefore enjoying a sense of relief or catharsis in their own corporeal selves. My second interpretation offers an explanation of how producing art inspired by the Hottentot Venus body could be cathartic, even therapeutic for the black female artists: Cox, Scott and Green are embracing what is simultaneously "other," according to western standards, and what is in fact similar to their own bodies, thus experiencing the "self-enjoyment" that Remshardt speaks of.

Isaak writes that in her text laughter "is meant to be thought of as a metaphor for transformation, for thinking about cultural change."[10] We recall that Bolen identified Venus as the alchemical goddess, who was responsible for creative and productive transformation. I would argue that this act of transformation is fundamental to the project that artists such as Cox, Renee and Scott are engaged in. The "disruptive laughter," to use a phrase used by Isaak,[11] that they are evoking is directed at a specific dilemma. That is to say, Cox, Green and Scott are inviting their audience to laugh not at Baartman's body, but rather at the racist and sexist discourses that were the motivating factors behind the derogatory images of the Hottentot Venus. This kind of laughter is what occurs, according to Bakhtin, in times of Carnival.[12] In this very specific spatial and temporal context, the laughter provoked "defeats the fears of the unknown. What was powerful or

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[9] Remshardt, 83.
[10] Isaak, 5.
[11] Ibid, 27.
[12] Mikahail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6.

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taboo or frightening in ordinary life is turned into amusing or ludicrous monstrosities."[13] Bakhtin wrote that "Fear is the extreme expression of narrow-minded and stupid seriousness, which is defeated by laughter...Complete liberty is possible only in the completely fearless world."[14] I want to make it clear that I am not arguing that black female artists inspired by Baartman are locating her as a "ludicrous monstrosity," as that is what nineteenth-century pseudo-science attempted and succeeded in doing. Rather, I wish to align artworks like *Venus Hottentot 2000* with Bakhtin's notion of the Carnivalesque. Both turn the status quo upside down, thus effectively transforming that which was jeered at into something valuable and respected. In Bakhtin's vision of Carnival, everything was done *roi pour rire*, which has been translated as "for laughter's sake."[15] He wrote that "The Renaissance conception of laughter can be roughly described as follows: Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint."[16] Finally, Bakhtin is adamant that in the Renaissance model, "the characteristic trait of laughter was precisely the recognition of its positive, regenerating, creative meaning."[17] Isaak takes a similar stance, arguing that laughter liberates that which has been feared, and works such as *Seen* and *Venus Hottentot 2000* are effectively liberating Baartman from her performative persona of the Hottentot Venus.

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[13] Isaak, 26.
[14] Bakhtin, 41. He also writes that "laughter [during carnival] presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts" (92).
[15] Ibid, 6.
[16] Ibid, 66.
[17] Ibid, 71.

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Hélène Cixous's important feminist essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) is indispensable for my discussion of the power of laughter in both women's art and women's lives. For Cixous, the Medusa is not the hideous monster that she has been portrayed as in patriarchal myth. Rather, she is a powerful entity whose laughter conquers the fear that revolves around the female body: "She is not deadly. She is beautiful, and she is laughing."[18] It is worth noting that Heilbrun also calls attention to the gulf between the two contradictory versions of Medusa's identity. She quotes Jane Harrison as stating that Medusa was originally a "potent goddess," but in later patriarchal myths she evolved into a monster to be slain by male heroes.[19] Medusa is an excellent example of the "monstrous-feminine" that I discuss in Chapter 2, a category that I believe Baartman fits into because of the way her body was represented and perceived in the nineteenth century.[20] As I point out in that chapter, the monstrous-feminine is closely related to notions of the grotesque, which interestingly has been linked with humour and laughter by a number of the scholars whose work I have discussed here. Even ancient writers saw a connection; Horace, for example, defined the grotesque as a "laughable incongruity," and according to Baudelaire, the one proof of the grotesque is laughter.[21] As I argue in Chapters 1 and 2, the grotesque is double-sided in the Hottentot Venus discourse. On the one hand, nineteenth-century cartoonists made Baartman appear grotesque in order to make her less sexually appealing to white European males, thus assuaging fears of miscegenation. On the other hand, feminist artists have used the

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[18] Quoted in Isaak, 26.
[19] Quoted in Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Women's Lives: The View from the Threshold* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 19-20.
[20] See Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
[21] Quoted in Remshardt, 18 and 79.

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grotesque as an artistic strategy to reveal the problematic of the female body in western visual culture, while simultaneously challenging the tendency to view the "grotesque" as fundamentally threatening and degrading. Parallel activity in feminist scholarship has located the concept of the grotesque as a theoretical tool that has the potential to unveil the misogynistic undercurrents of western society. Remshardt writes that "Intimately connected with the etiology of laughter in Bakhtin's theory is the body to which it finds recourse as a physical affect and in which it is finally grounded. The grotesque body is the comic body – laughable and racked by laughter alike, laughing its guts out."[22] Indeed, while Baartman's body was *laughed at*, black female artists, by re-embodying and re-imagining that iconic body, are imbuing her with the ability to laugh; they - Cox and Scott especially - are effectively filling her with *their own* laughter.

As German dramatist Bertolt Brecht once observed, "One can arouse a sense of outrage at inhuman conditions by many methods – by direct description (emotional or objective), by narrative and parable, [and] by jokes."[23] When Saartje Baartman was discursively transformed into the Hottentot Venus she went from existing as a flesh and blood black woman with a name and a voice into a caricature of herself who was effectively rendered nameless and voiceless. When she died her identity was reduced, even further than during her lifetime, to nothing but her sexual organs, which were fetishized because of their alleged "scientific" value. Although Cixous is primarily concerned with women's writing, she offers an important observation that is deeply significant when considered in relation to the dissection of Baartman's body: "To write. An act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her

[22] Remshardt, 47.
[23] Quoted in David M. Lubin, "Reconstructing Duncanson" in *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 192-194.

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sexuality...it will give her back her goods, her pleasure, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal."[24] This last phrase evokes the tragic display of Baartman's genitals at the Musée de l'Homme, her last humiliation. But in re-embodying her, in reclaiming her as a fellow black woman, artists such as Renee Cox, Renee Green and Joyce Scott are attempting to give back Baartman's body, name and voice. They are living, as Albert Camus once put it, to the point of tears, but also to the point of laughter, a powerful force in the lives of women. When we hear a woman laughing, we are hearing the sound of survival and liberation. Moreover, we are not *seeing* or *looking* for once. Many feminist scholars have already called for a paradigm shift towards privileging hearing, as opposed to sight. Regardless, despite her whiteness and her tendency towards essentialism, I conclude with Cixous's declaration that "Women must write through their bodies...including the one that laughs at the very idea of 'silence'."[25] Because of art by Cox, Green and Joyce, we can now more easily imagine Baartman as a living black woman who laughed.[26]

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[24] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in *Feminism/Art/Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 630.
[25] Ibid, 633.
[26] A recent film re-affirms my confidence in women's laughter as a signal of women's power and resilience. In *Sisters in Law*, a documentary about female lawyers in Kumba, Cameroon prosecuting crimes against girls and women that have long gone ignored by Cameroon's patriarchal society, there are scenes of both heartbreak and of hope. The case that is given primary focus revolves around Amina, who has finally left her elderly husband because he regularly beat and raped her. She wants a divorce, which the male members of the community scoff at; they tell her that if she goes back to her husband all will be forgotten, as if it were *she* who had committed the offence. Amina is afraid that the court will force her to return to her husband, but her lawyer, state prosecutor Vera Ngassa – who is also from Cameroon – tells Amina that she will never again have to go back, and that she has the right to a divorce. The courtroom scenes are both frustrating and heart wrenching, but the (male) judge ultimately decides in her favour. During the film Amina does not smile once; she wipes tears off her face without ever allowing herself to really cry. But after the trial, when she returns to a house where there are four other women waiting for her, she tells them her good news, and they all begin to laugh: at the men who think that they can beat and rape them, and at the absurdity of life; yet their laughter also signals their relief and their hope for the future. This is the last scene in the movie, and it is full of women's laughter. Dirs. Florence Ayisi and Kim Longinotto, *Sisters in Law* (Cameroon/UK, 2005), 104 min.

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Plate 1: Unknown (Greek), *Venus de Milo*, 2nd Century BC (Discovered in 1820), Marble, Louvre, Paris, France.

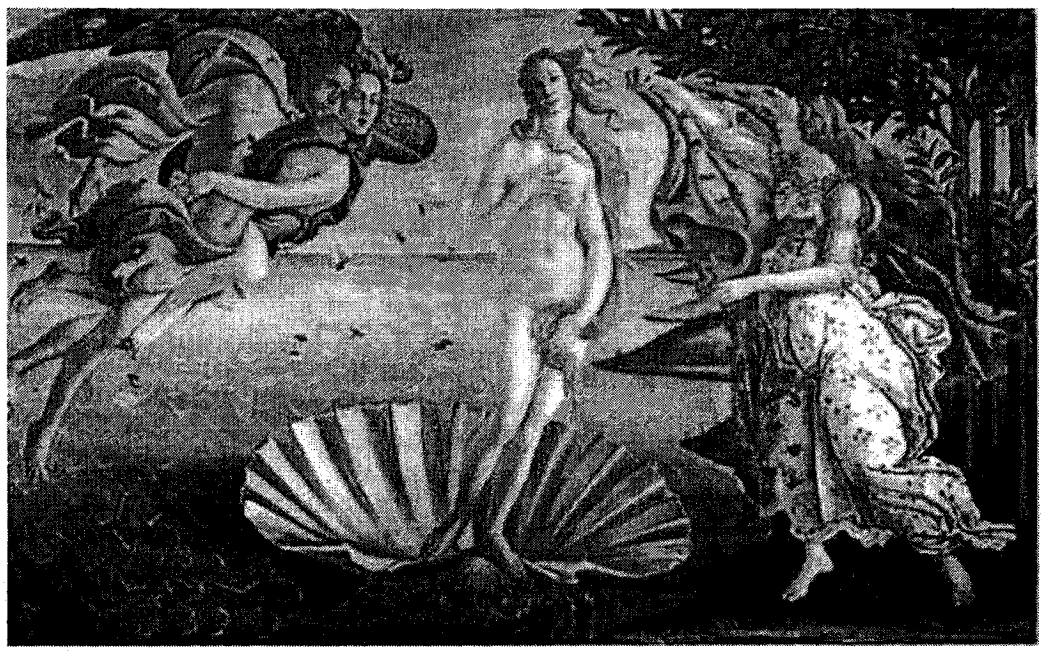

Plate 2: Alessandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, c.1485, Tempera on Canvas, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

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Plate 3: Unknown (British), *Love and Beauty…Sartjee the Hottentot Venus*, Early Nineteenth Century, Colored ink on paper.

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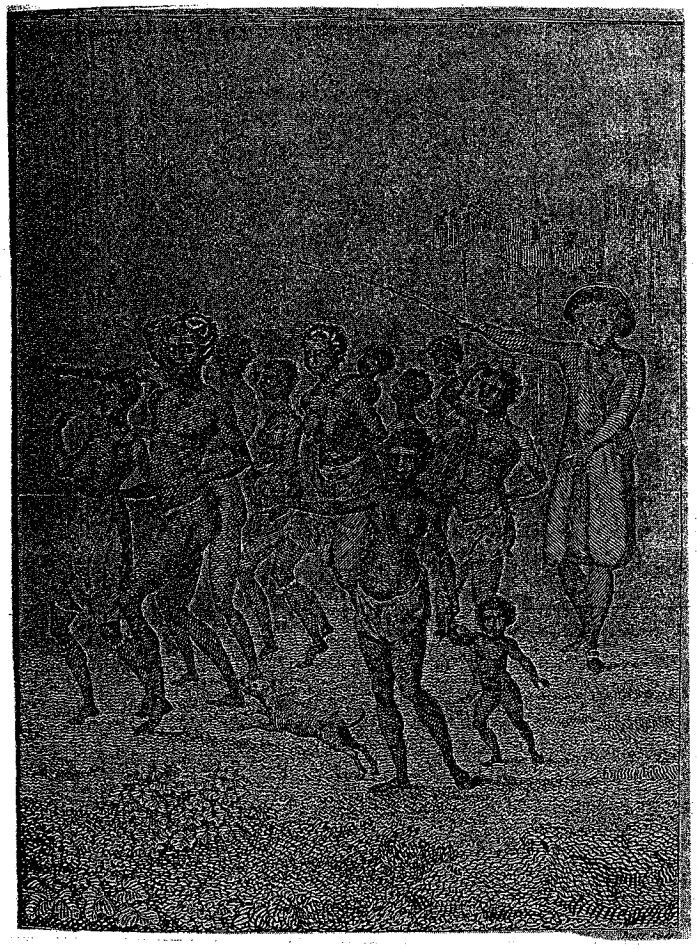

Plate 4: William Blake, *Group of Negros, as Imported to be Sold for Slaves*, 1796, Copper engraving, from John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1796).

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Plate 5: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, 1482-1486, Oil on wood, Louvre, Paris.

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Plate 6: Francesco Bartolozzi, *A Female Negro Slave, with a Weight chained to her Ancle*, Stipple engraving, from John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1796).

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Plate 7: William Blake, *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave*, 1796, Copper engraving, from John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1796).

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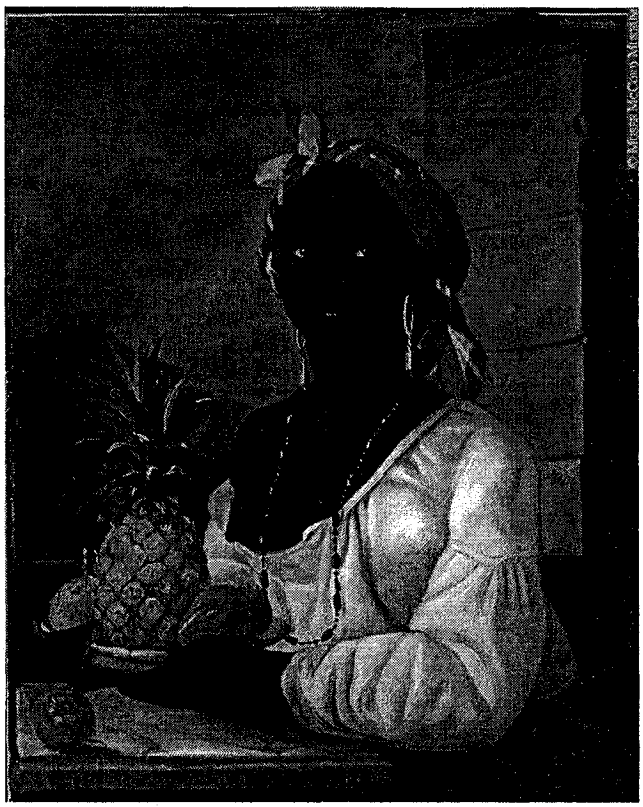

Plate 8: François Malépart de Beaucourt, *Portrait of an Unnamed Female Slave*, 1786, Oil on canvas, McCord Museum, Montreal, Quebec.

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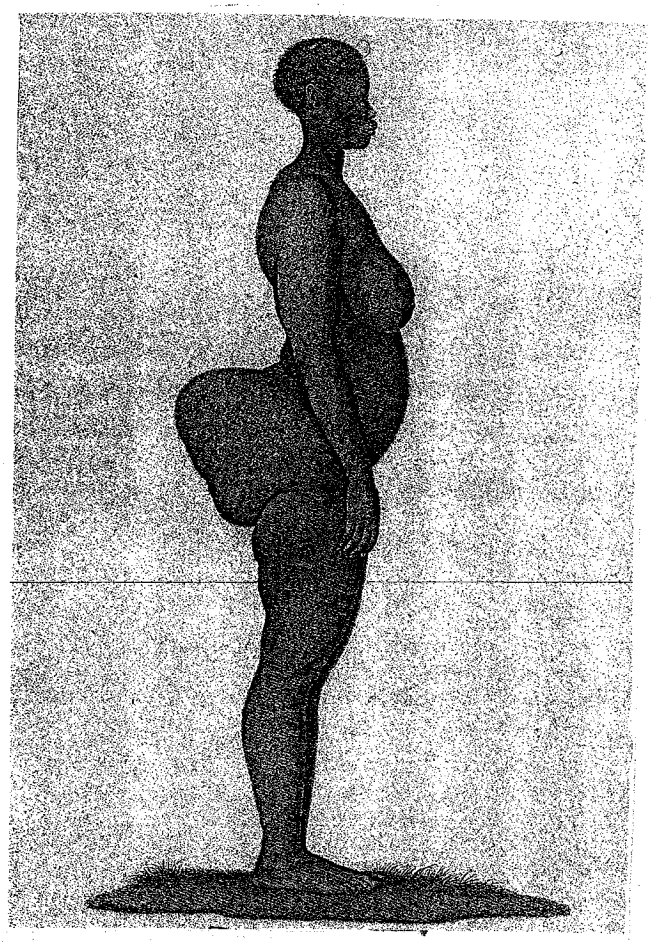

Plate 9: Nicolas Huet le Jeune, *Profile View of Saartje Baartman, The Hottentot Venus*, 1815, Watercolour on vellum, 440 x 307 mm, Paris, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Bibliothèque Centrale.

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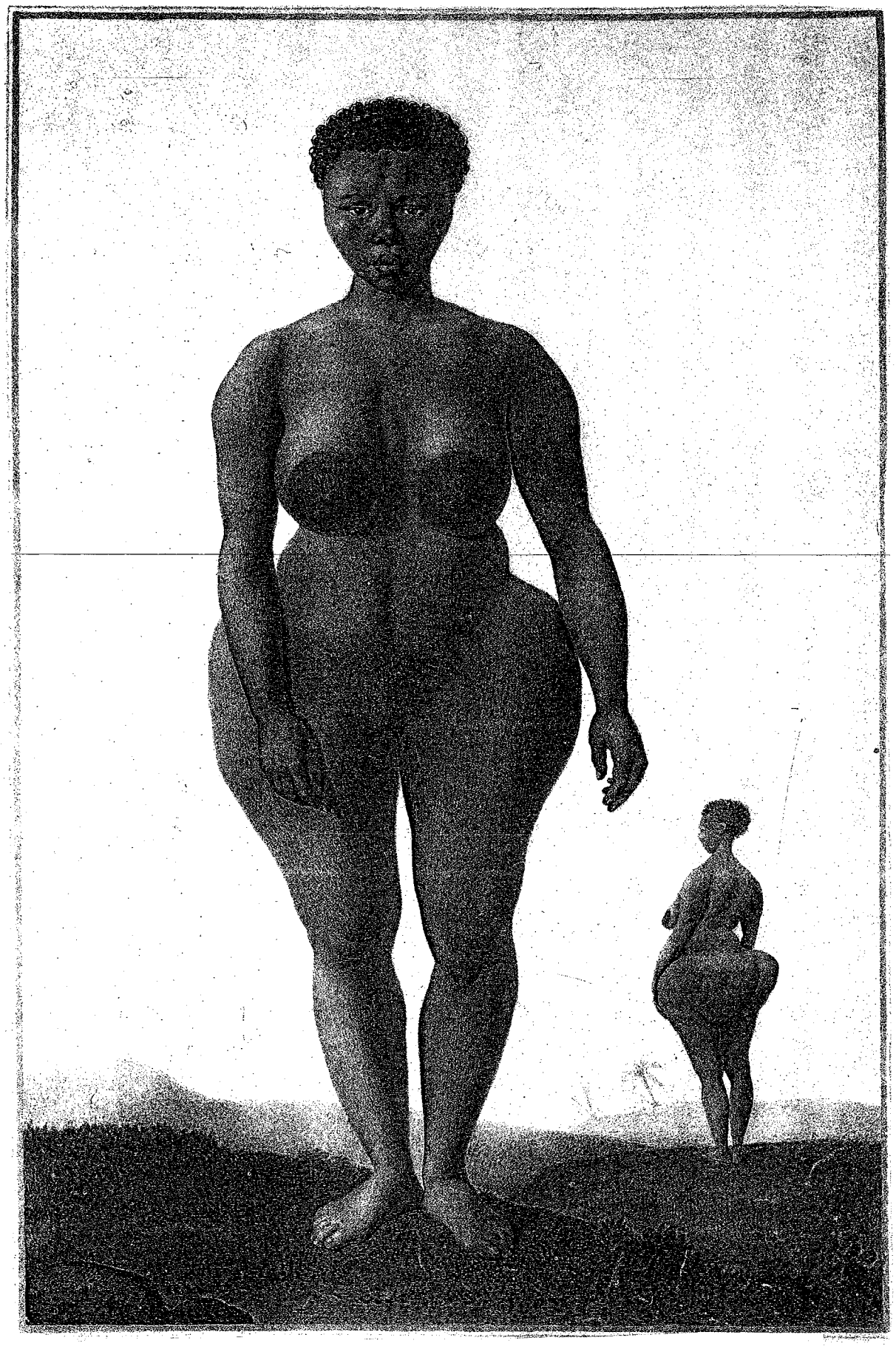

Plate 10: Léon de Wailly, *Views of Saartje Baartman, The Hottentot Venus*, 1815, Watercolour on vellum, 483 x 335 mm, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Bibliothèque Centrale, Paris, France.

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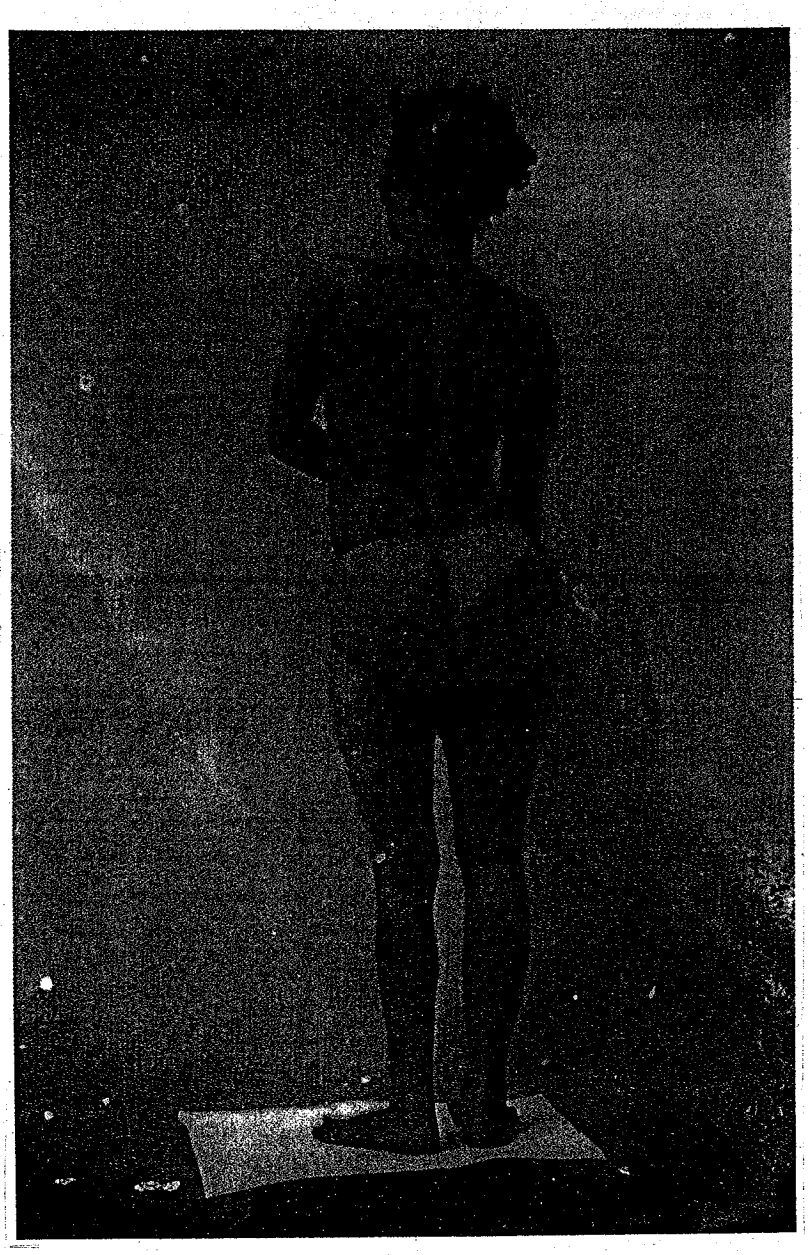

Plate 11: Louis Rousseau, *Hottentot Woman (Stinée)*, 1855, Paper print from glass negative, Phototèque, Musée de l'Homme, Paris, France.

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Plate 12: F.J.A. Moulin, *Black Woman and White Woman in Orientalist Interior* (photograph from *Photographic Studies*), 1853, Cabinet des Estampes et de la Photographie, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France.

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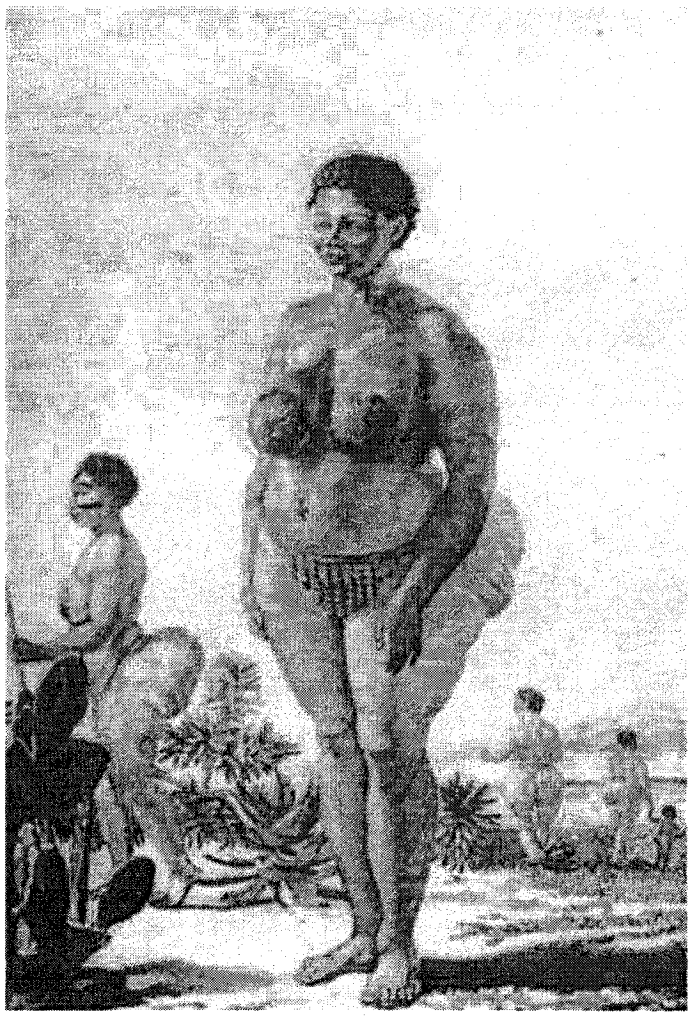

Plate 13: Jean-Baptiste Perré, *Saartje Baartman, The Hottentot Venus, from Four Different Perspectives*, 1815, Watercolour on vellum, 483 x 335 mm, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Bibliothèque Centrale, Paris, France.

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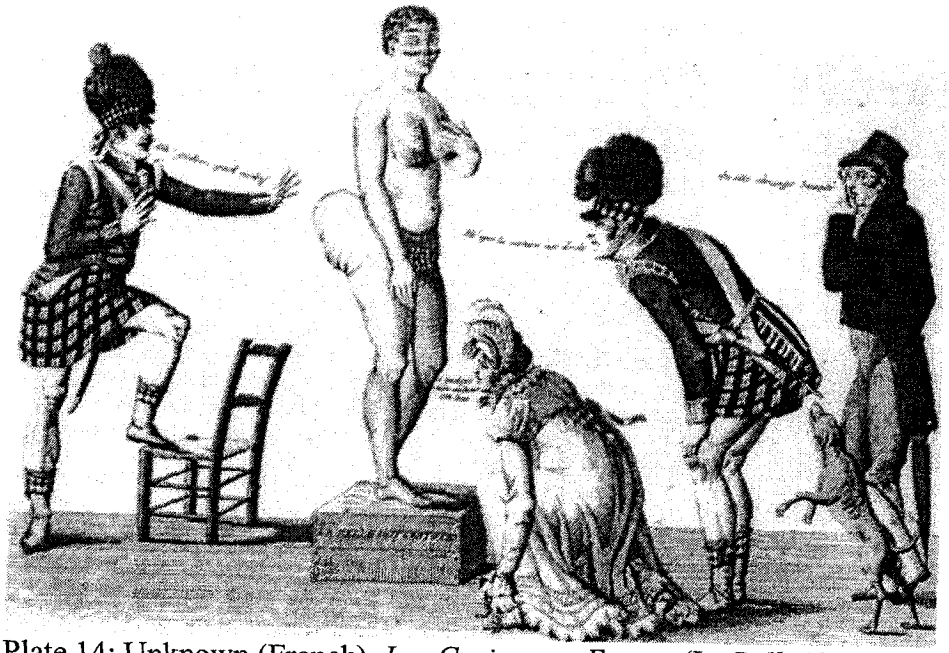

Plate 14: Unknown (French), *Les Curieux en Extase (La Belle Hottentot)*, c.1814, Ink on paper.

Plate 15: Charles Joseph Cordier, *Vénus Africaine*, later entitled *Négresse des Côtes d'Afrique*, 1851, Bronze, H: 82 cm, Musée de l'Homme, Paris, France.

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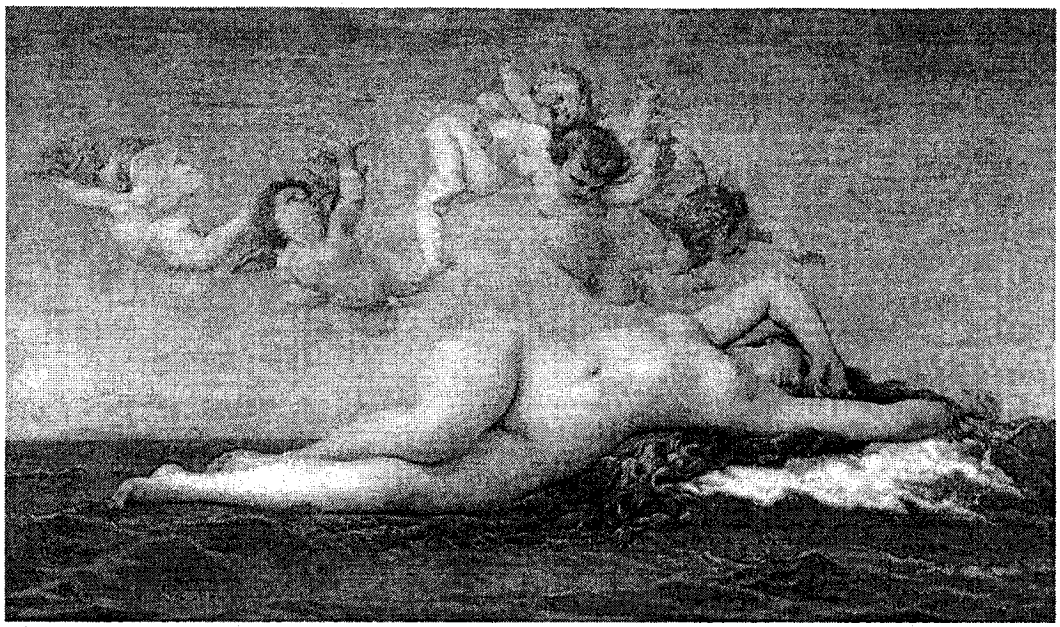

Plate 16: Alexandre Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus*, 1863, Oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France.

Plate 17: Paul Colin, *Black Thunder*, Ink on paper, 1925.

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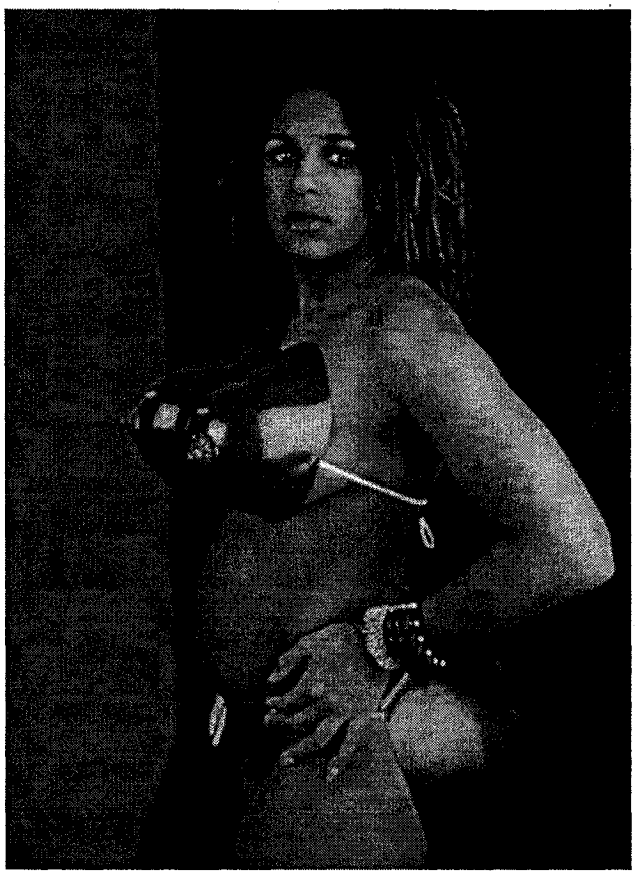

Plate 18: Renee Cox and Lyle Ashton Harris, *Venus Hottentot 2000*, 1994, Photograph, Collection of the artists.

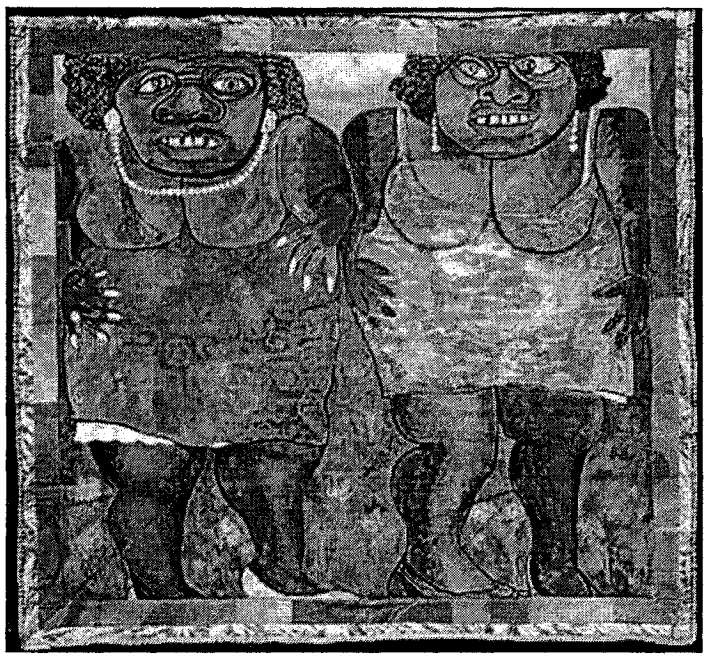

Plate 19: Faith Ringgold, *The Two Jemima's*, #9 in *The American Collection*,1997, Acrylic on canvas; painted and pieced border, 77 x 81", ACA Galleries, New York.

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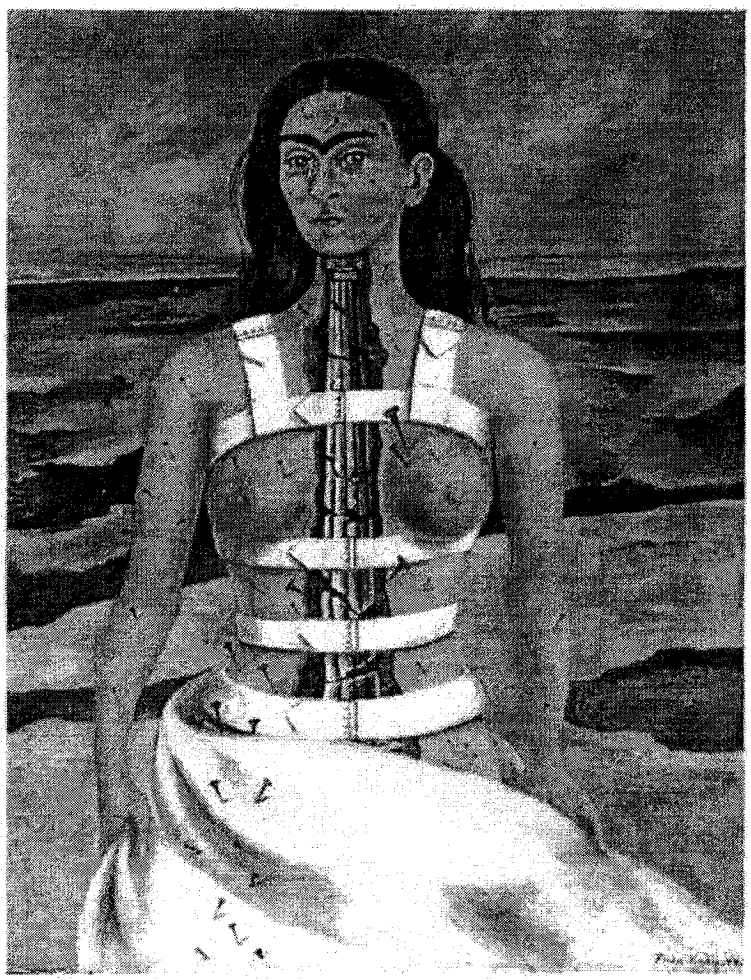

Plate 20: Frida Kahlo, *The Broken Column*, 1944, Oil on canvas, Private collection.

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Plate 21: Joyce Scott, Pictured here in a performance entitled *Genetic Engineering*, c.1986.

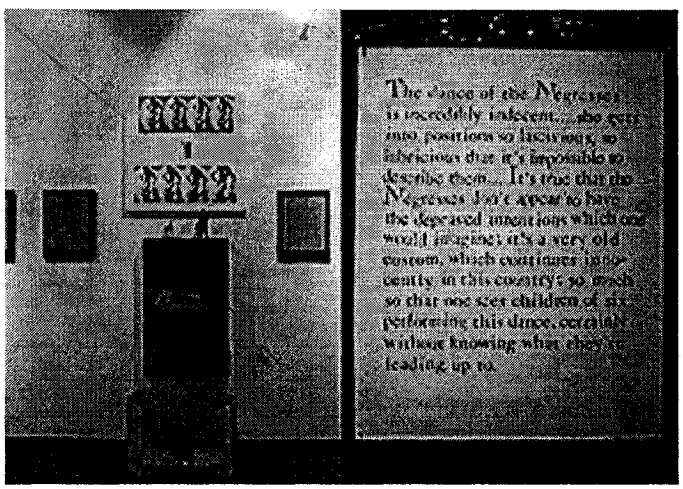

Plate 22: Renee Green, *Seen* (Detail of installation), 1990, Mixed media.

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Plate 23: Kara Walker, *Camptown Ladies* (detail), 1998, Cut paper and adhesive on wall, Installation 9 x 67 ft, Rubell Family Collection, Miami, USA.

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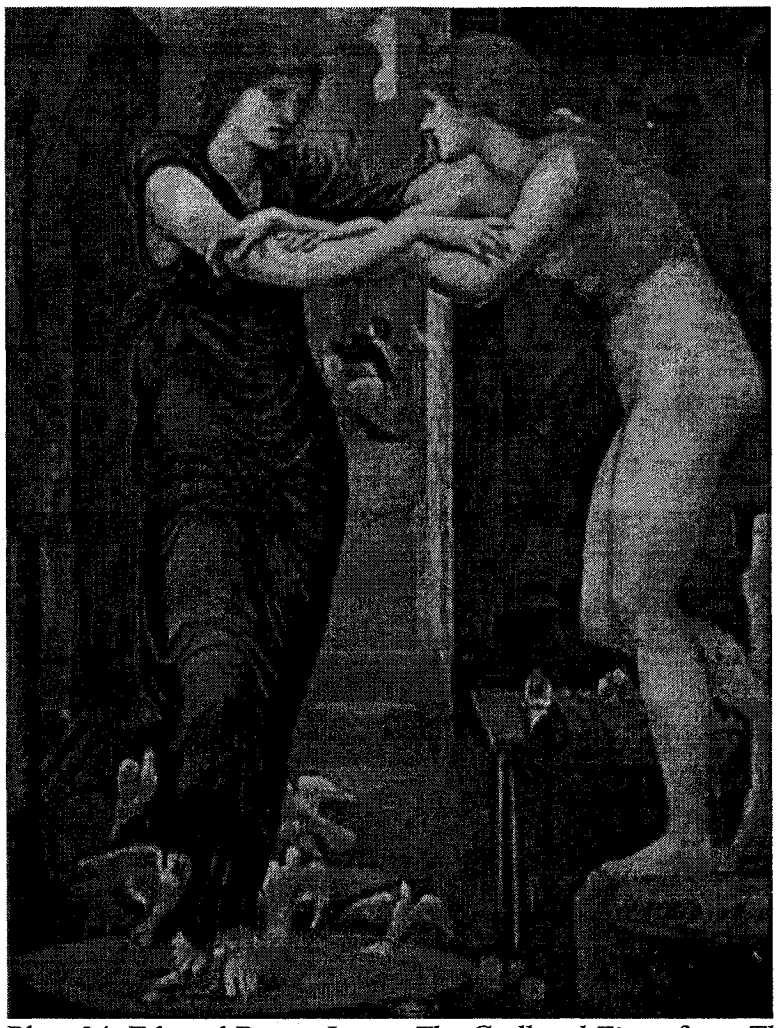

Plate 24: Edward Burne-Jones, *The Godhead Fires*, from *The Pygmalion Series*, 1868-70, Oil on canvas, Joseph Setton Collection, Paris, France.

Plate 25: Unknown (British?), *Portrait of Saartje Baartman*, c.1812, Ink on paper.

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