

Rebecca VanDiver, *Designing a New Tradition: Loïs Mailou Jones and the Aesthetics of Blackness*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020, 214 pp. 51 colour, 37 b/w illus., \$ 59.95 (hardcover) ISBN 9780271086040

Adrienne L. Childs

Volume 46, Number 2, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1085433ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1085433ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Childs, A. L. (2021). Review of [Rebecca VanDiver, *Designing a New Tradition: Loïs Mailou Jones and the Aesthetics of Blackness*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020, 214 pp. 51 colour, 37 b/w illus., \$ 59.95 (hardcover) ISBN 9780271086040]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 46(2), 140–142. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1085433ar>

Lonzi dans le travail d'une nouvelle génération d'artistes contemporains, dont Cabello|Carceller, Chiara Fumai, Valentina Morandi, Claire Fontaine et Sylvia Giambrone. Examinant les implications de ce «retour» de Lonzi» au sein des arts visuels, Zapperi y voit un «énigme paradoxale» (p. 265), duquel



se dégagent les potentialités expressives et formatrices qu'offre encore aujourd'hui sa pensée, lorsque l'on cesse de l'approcher dans les termes, qu'elle avait elle-même établis, d'une coupure nette entre la sphère artistique et le féminisme. En cela, *Carla Lonzi: un art de la vie* démontre avec force la nécessité, pour les études historiographiques, d'interroger les récits autorisés afin d'en produire un savoir critique qui ne soit pas figé dans un mythe et qui puisse, dès lors, traverser les frontières, disciplinaires aussi bien que géographiques. ¶

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1. À titre d'exemples, les anthologies *Feminist Art Criticism* et *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, toutes deux dirigées par Joanna Frueh, Arlene Raven et Cassandra L. Langer, ont été publiées en 1988 et 1994 chez Icon Editions (New York).

2. Les écrits féministes les plus célèbres de Lonzi sont regroupés dans *Sputiamo su Hegel, La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale e altri scritti* (1974).

3. Plus précisément: Carla Accardi, Getulio Alviani, Enrico Castellani, Pietro Consagra, Luciano Fabro, Lucio Fontana, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Nigro, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali,

Mimmo Rotella, Salvatore Scarpitta, Giulio Turcato et Cy Twombly.

4. Carla Lonzi, *Autoportrait*, sous la dir. de Giovanna Zapperi, trad. de l'italien par Marie-Ange Maire-Vigueur, Zurich, JRP|Ringier (coll. Lectures Maison Rouge), 2012. Zapperi a fait paraître deux autres ouvrages la même année: *L'artiste est une femme. La modernité de Marcel Duchamp*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France (coll. «Lignes d'art»), 2012 et (avec Alessandra Gribaldo) *Lo schermo del potere. Femminismo e regime della visibilità*, Vérone, ombre corte, 2012.

Rebecca VanDiver
***Designing a New Tradition:
Lois Mailou Jones and the Aesthetics
of Blackness***

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Designing a New Tradition: Lois Mailou Jones and the Aesthetics of Blackness by Rebecca VanDiver is a substantive contribution to the literature on one of America's most significant Black artists of the twentieth century. Well-illustrated and copiously documented, *Designing a New Tradition* features an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion as well as notes and an extensive bibliography. Although Jones is a canonical figure in the history of art by African Americans, our understandings of her have been limited by the tendency to mythologize the founders of the field and to recycle their narratives unquestioningly. VanDiver's reexamination of a beloved artist who we thought that we knew reveals a much more complex story. VanDiver's monograph synthesizes biography and critical assessments of Jones' art in relation to its social and cultural context and offers a compelling narrative about art, Blackness, and identity in the twentieth century.

VanDiver's introduction subtitled "Claiming Middle Ground" introduces Jones' 1939 watercolor *Under the Influence of the Masters*, in which a black artist who more than resembles Jones stakes a claim to the tradition of Western art that includes "masters" ranging from European artists Velazquez and Cezanne to African Americans Henry O. Tanner and William H. Johnson. Alluding to European, African American, and African art traditions as important influences, the watercolor positions Jones in the lineage of canonical Western artists—a centrist who straddled traditional and avant-garde practices, finding her voice in a middle ground. VanDiver charts Jones' career trajectory as she negotiated the headwinds of race prejudice and gender discrimination as well as an art world fraught with identity politics. Theorizing the multiple positions that Jones' work occupies, VanDiver proposes that Jones' work reflects what she calls "Blackness in triplicate," or the idea that there are a triad of influences in her work that speak to the complexities of Black identities that goes beyond the binary of black and white. She also introduces the concept of diasporic grammar as a way of understanding Jones' compositional innovations that call upon different visual languages of Afro-diasporic communities.

In chapter one, "Seeking Success: School, Society, and Career Aspirations," VanDiver takes a close look at Jones' upper-middle-class upbringing in Boston and her fairly traditional art education. As the first "coloured" person to graduate from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, it becomes apparent how groundbreaking Jones' career was from the very beginning. However, VanDiver is careful to flesh out the very supportive family and social circles that nurtured Jones early on. Black upper-middle-class communities in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts and in Boston were very important to Jones' sense of self. In

chapter one VanDiver also begins to map out the contact zones in which African American artists would encounter African art, in this case the New Negro Movement of the 1920s. The way that Jones as an artist encounters blackness in different forms and spaces and absorbs it into her increasingly Afrodiasporic practice is the through line of the book.

“Routes to roots: From Black Washington to Black Paris,” chapter two, is the longest chapter in the book, chronicling Jones early career at Howard University beginning in 1930 and her travels to Europe. VanDiver provides an important and thorough recounting of the burgeoning art department at Howard, an institution that was foundational to the development of Black artists in the twentieth century. While it was Jones’ professional home for nearly 50 years, there were tensions that Jones had to contend with. Through the use of archival materials and correspondence we gain a picture of what it was like for Jones, a woman, to operate in an all-male department. She was paid less and had to fight for promotions as well as recognition for her artistry. In many ways, her outward-reaching travel would bring her the validation and support that she did not receive at Howard. While at Howard, Jones experimented with African subject matter, creating one of her most noted paintings, *The Ascent of Ethiopia* (1932). This work put her in dialogue with contemporary Black artists who were developing a visual language that drew upon their links to African heritage, establishing ancestral links to African American life. VanDiver does a particularly astute job in interpreting and contextualizing this important work.

Jones’s abiding and sustained connection to Paris and its art world is legendary and was part of her profile that Jones actively promoted. Her first trip to Paris to work and study in 1937 would change the trajectory of her career. VanDiver makes the salient point that in Paris

Jones began to develop meaningful engagements with African art as well as Black people of the African diaspora. Many Black artists who traveled to Paris in the early twentieth century spoke of the freedom they felt as an artist in that context. VanDiver locates Jones as a player in the dialogue between modernism and African art and suggests that her painting *Les Fétiches* (1938) marks a transformation in her work. Because of the exposure to new forms of blackness that emanated from Africa or the Caribbean, Jones began to understand and absorb the global nature of Black identity. Breaking from the notion that the struggle of Black people was a uniquely American problem, she gained new understandings through the Négritude movement that was driven by Black colonial subjects in the diaspora. Alternative Black identities outside of modernist primitivist frameworks emerge in her portraits of Black Caribbean friends in Paris.

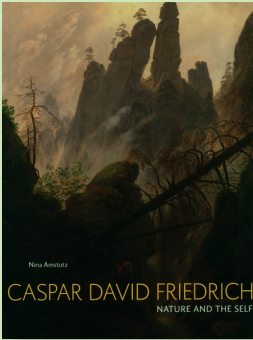
Van Diver’s last two chapters, “Diasporic Directions: Haiti, Collage and Composite Aesthetics,” chapter three, and “In and Out: Africa and the Academy,” chapter four, explore how Jones moved in Afrodiasporic spaces developing and shifting her artistry as she folded in new understandings and appreciations for the rich and varied cultures and experiences of Black people in Africa and the Diaspora. In these chapters we see VanDiver’s conceptions of Blackness in triplicate and diasporic grammar playing out in Jones’ work. Chapter three primarily focuses on Jones’ experiences in Haiti, the francophone Caribbean country that introduced alternative cultures of blackness from those she found in Black Paris. VanDiver makes the point that Jones’ understandings of blackness became triangulated between the United States, Europe, and the Caribbean. First invited to the country in 1954 by the Haitian president, Jones produced fairly traditional genre scenes of the colorful and picturesque Black culture

on the island. However, when she encounters Haitian Vodou practices her work begins to measurably evolve as she sharpens her diasporic literacy chops. Jones’ increasingly abstract and conceptual Vèvè works of the early 1960s incorporate collage and synthetic cubism into her work. VanDiver theorizes that Jones’s turn to collage is linked to her incorporation of the language of Vodou in her work and is a particularly diasporic practice. Here VanDiver enhances the critical import of Jones’ work by bringing her collage practice into dialogue with that of Romare Bearden, the Black American collage artist most often associated with the medium. VanDiver states that Bearden and Jones simultaneously advanced a black collage aesthetic that exemplified diasporic grammar.

The final chapter offers a frank and revealing discussion of Jones’ experiences at Howard University in the 1970s as the Black Power and Black Arts movements impacted the culture. In spite of Jones’ diasporic interests, her work was seen as conservative and not serving the needs of an increasingly radical student body looking for a more assertive black aesthetic. Jones was forced to retire in 1977. Here VanDiver reveals an unpleasant, but important chapter in Jones’ life, breaking with the tendency to focus on narratives of uplift rather than conflict in the history of African American art. This chapter also chronicles Jones’ trips to Africa during the 1970s, experiences that expanded her view of Black diasporic identities immeasurably. The bold and vibrant works from the 1970s and 80s incorporate African themes and the symbolism of the mask that show an evolution from her 1930s *Les Fétiches* and a continued effort to synthesize diasporic visual languages.

VanDiver makes the salient point in her conclusion that the single-artist monograph, if considered outmoded, remains particularly important in the field of African American art. *Designing a New Tradition* is only

the second monograph dedicated to the artist since the 1994 publication of *The Life and Art of Lois Mailou Jones* by Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, a publication that does not offer in-depth biographical information nor critical analysis of the works. There remains a paucity of research-based literature about pioneering



Black artists of the twentieth century like Jones. Recent publications on African American artists have been weighted toward contemporary art and/or emanate from exhibitions that are necessarily limited. Important historical figures like Jones whose work is not considered vanguard have not had the benefit of recent critical advancements in the theorizing of contemporary Black diasporan art practice. VanDiver employs many of these analytical tools in her fresh reconsideration of Jones' life and work while also sourcing the abundant archival materials Jones left behind. Archival material about African American art and artists available to researchers at repositories such as Howard University's Moorland Spingarn Research Center and The David C. Driskell Center Archives hold treasure troves of material about twentieth century African American artists in need of exploration. VanDiver's use of the archive is a model for further research. In the end, *Designing a New Tradition* achieves VanDiver's goal of teasing out the international,

multi-dimensional, and complex project that representing blackness was and remains for artists of the African diaspora. ¶

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Nina Amstutz
**Caspar David Friedrich: Nature
and the Self**

New Haven: Yale University Press,
2020

280 pp. 82 color and 36 b/w illustrations
\$ 65 US (hardcover) ISBN 9780300246162

Mitchell B. Frank

The critical fortunes of Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) rose dramatically at the turn of the twentieth century. During the nineteenth, he was known mostly as a local landscape painter from Dresden, where he settled in 1798. In his *History of Modern German Art (Geschichte der Neueren deutschen Kunst, 1884)*, Franz von Reber, in the few lines devoted to Friedrich's work, described him as the founder of *Stimmungslandschaft*. In using this term, Reber stressed the atmospheric effects of Friedrich's landscapes, which provoked moods or feelings in the viewer, what Reber called "the spiritual rapport between nature and the observer." The German term *Stimmung* is, as linguist and literary critic Leo Spitzer observed, untranslatable. When it comes to Friedrich's paintings, art historians have reflected on how to use language to capture meaning, especially when his landscapes are considered in the light of *Erlebniskunst*, what Joseph Leo Koerner (*Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape, 1990*), described as "art that comes from, and is an

expression of, experience." Nina Amstutz's new book addresses the challenges of translating Friedrich's visual language into words in her treatment of his late landscapes in the context of Romantic science and search for self.

In reading Friedrich's paintings as laying the groundwork for an artistic lineage concerned with "vitalism in the life sciences" (209), Amstutz addresses current ecological concerns, which she discusses in her conclusion. Many earlier writers similarly related contemporary issues to Friedrich's paintings. At the turn of the twentieth century, champions of modernism praised his landscapes for their luminous effects and their affinities with Impressionism. Nazi art historians, like Kurt Karl Eberlein, considered his art as part of "the historical, spiritual elevation of the new clan of northern Germany." In the 1970s, when formalist narratives were being questioned, Robert Rosenblum (*Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition, 1975*) read Friedrich's landscapes along spiritual lines, as playing a seminal role in the northern Romantic tradition. Helmut Börsch-Supan, meanwhile, proposed religious-iconographical readings of Friedrich's paintings in the 1973 catalogue raisonnée of the artist's work, a project which had been started by Wilhelm Jähnig. With postmodern questioning of both the stability of meaning and the possibility of metanarratives, new questions were raised. If a fundamental principal of the Romantic (and postmodern) understanding of symbolism is that it "can never be reduced to words," as Henri Zerner and Charles Rosen (*Romanticism and Realism, 1984*) argued, then Börsch-Supan's attempt to treat Friedrich "as an enemy whose code must be cracked" was foolhardy. In his study of Friedrich, Koerner similarly took into account the Romantic inseparability of meaning and its symbolic representation. In his text, Koerner's own voice, his self-conscious use of