

Afrofuturism And Its Impact On Art

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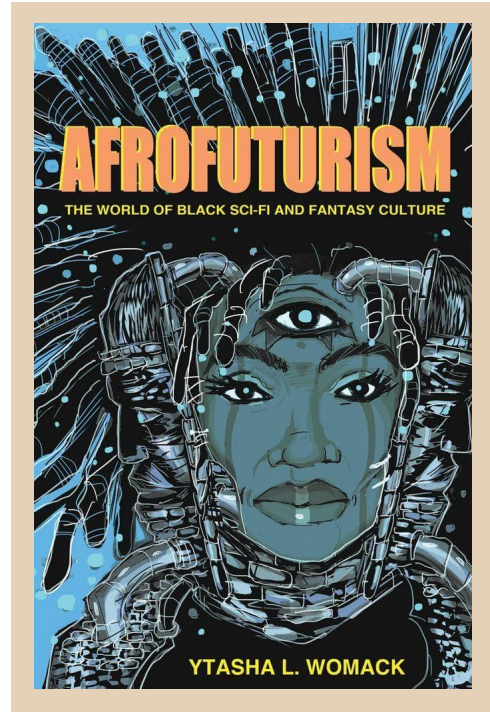


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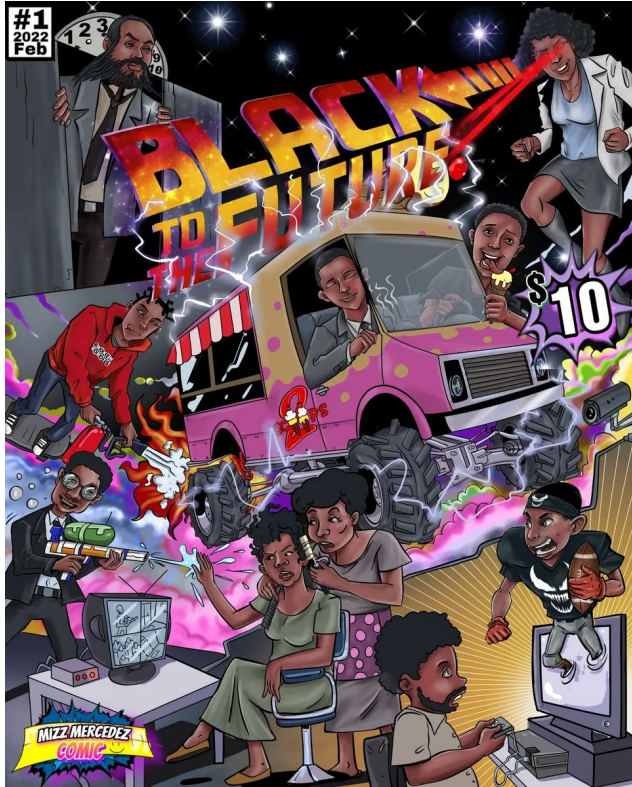
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What is Afrofuturism?



“Black to the Future”

- The term “afrofuturism” was first coined by Mark Dery in his essay titled “Black to the Future” published in 1994 which he defined as:

“speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of the twentieth century technoculture—and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future”



Vox

"Afrofuturism is a way of looking at the future and alternate realities through a Black cultural lens...It is an artistic aesthetic, but also a kind of method of self-liberation or self-healing. It can be part of critical race theory and in other respects it's an epistemology as well. It intersects the imagination, technology, Black culture, liberation, and mysticism. ...Imagining oneself in the future creates agency and it's significant because historically people of African descent were not always incorporated into many of the storylines about the future." - Ytasha Womack

"Afrofuturism focuses on works that examine the past, question the present, or imagine an optimistic future, and are meant to inspire a sense of pride in their audience" - Angela Washington

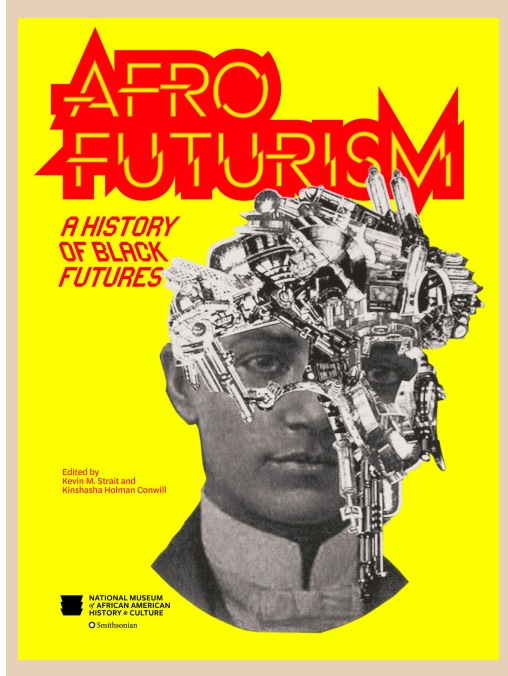
"... an aesthetic strategy for addressing the experience of race, displacement, and difference using recognizable visual symbols." - Zoé Whitley

Afrofuturism, despite what its name may suggest, is not only about the future; it relies heavily on the unique black experience of the past and present across the diaspora.

Afrofuturism in an Artistic Lens

- Afrofuturism is most commonly expressed and recognized through art
- Afrofuturism is most commonly advertised in science fiction, but can be used across many different art forms, styles, and genres
- Afrofuturist art often serves an escapism or speculative purpose
- It works to create an imaginative future for black people, but can also examine the past





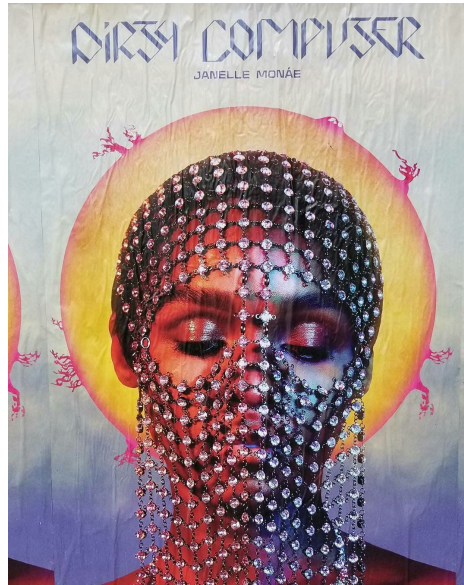
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Afrofuturist Art

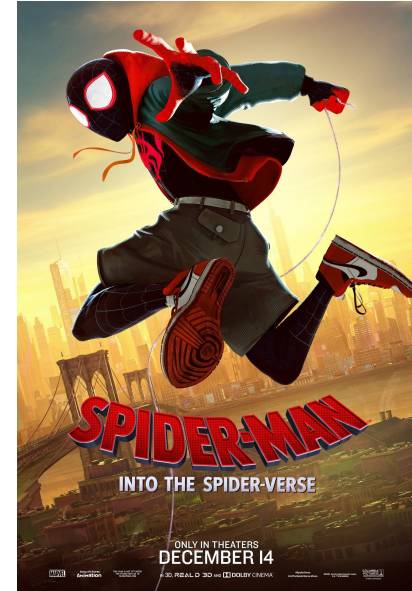
Afrofuturist Art



Black Panther



Dirty Computer



Spiderman: Into the Spider-Verse

Kehinde Wiley

- Kehinde Wiley is Los Angeles born and New York-based artist
- He is most well known for his paintings of black people that reference Old-Master paintings
- Wiley's paintings combine the past with the present in order to create a hopeful view of the future





**Kehinde Wiley, Triple
Portrait of Charles I (2007)**

**Sir Anthony van Dyck,
Charles I in Three
Positions (1635-1636)**



Analysis

My personal interpretations of van Dyck's work are the idea of the father, son, and holy spirit from christianity, essentially painting Charles I as God or as holy, which is on par due to the idea that the royal family was divinely appointed to the throne. It could also represent Sigmund Freud's breakdown of the self into the id, ego, and superego. Either way, for either interpretation, simply focusing a black man is something that is often never done. Usually holy paintings only ever include white angels, a white God, and a white Jesus, as well as all of his followers. Putting a black man as the pinnacle of good and holy is revolutionary, and also makes us question why christianity and religion in general was racialized in the first place. In a Freudian analysis, many black people aren't able to fully explore the many aspects of themselves due to the lack of individuality. We are plagued by stereotypes that have become so normal we even enforce them upon each other, and it doesn't allow for true growth or exploration of ourselves as individuals and the facets of the self. I think that the reason why each person is isolated is because we aren't given the chance to fully explore ourselves.



Kehinde Wiley, Head of a Young Girl Veiled and Crowned with Flowers (2008)

Pierre Julien, Bust of a Girl Veiled and Crowned with Flowers (1779)



Analysis

This painting works to get the audience to reevaluate our conceptions of gender, femininity, and innocence, and who is graced with it. Arts like Julien's as well as others depicting veiled women, like *The Veiled Virgin*, often depict young, white, attractive women who are veiled or covered in some aspect to preserve their dignity and are crowned with flowers. Depicting a masculine-presenting black person as a "young girl veiled and crowned" completely flips this previous perception of who can be feminine or innocent. These are often traits only afforded to white women, and when afforded to other groups it never allows for any deviance from a strict portrayal of these traits. Men, masculine, or androgynous-presenting individuals never are awarded the chance to explore their own and other genders. Black people are also never seen as innocent.



*Édouard Manet, Le Déjeuner sur
l'herbe (1863)*

*Kehinde Wiley, Luncheon
on the Grass (2022)*



Analysis

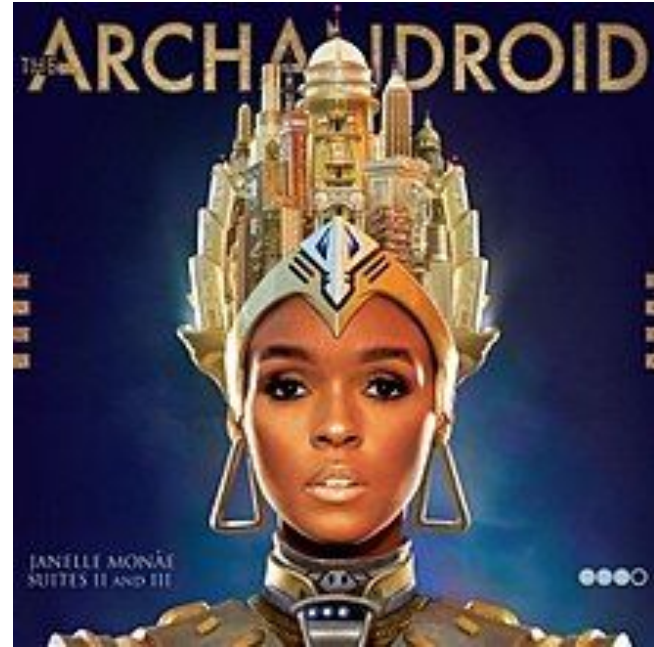
Édouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) is regularly cited as the first modern painting. It continues to shock to this day by portraying a nude woman comfortable in her own body and with herself. Her body isn't posed in what would be considered an "attractive" manner but there is such assertiveness and confidence in her gaze. This makes Wiley's rendition all the more powerful, because so often black women are not allowed to find comfort in their sensuality. Black women's bodies are so heavily policed and debated, and this painting shows black women of varying body types looking upon the viewer with the confidence of a person who is perfectly content with their bodies.



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**The Future of
Afrofuturism**

Criticisms and Potential

- There are many criticisms of afrofuturism surrounding its reliance on Western technology and marketable culture
- However, Afrofuturism is a great start to exploring more black stories through art and science fiction
- Afrofuturism has great potential if it strays from the systems that oppress



Thanks!

<https://newsroom.ucla.edu/magazine/afrofuturism>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/articles/2022/6/library-afrofuturism>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/afrofuturism#:~:text=Afrofuturism%20is%20a%20cultural%20aesthetic,with%20their%20forgotten%20African%20ancestry>

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/afrofuturism>

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<https://www.uvic.ca/victoria-colloquium/assets/docs/Black%20to%20the%20Future.pdf>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/01/arts/design/kehinde-wiley-puts-a-classical-spin-on-his-contemporary-subjects.html>

<https://kehindewiley.com/>

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