CALL FOR PROPOSALS
“Black Arts United States: Institutions and Interventions”
June 4 - 6, 2015
Northwestern University

Black expressive culture in the United States has a long and contested history whose boundaries are almost impossible to qualify and whose animating forces continue to evolve. Yet the African American arts—whether film, theater, dance, visual art, music, literature, or performance—necessarily tack between the pull of tradition and the push toward innovation, a dynamic often reflected in the processes through which artistic practices are codified as either conventional or transgressive at any given moment. Such designations both illuminate the historical conditions in which black art is produced and determine what practices come to be circulated, canonized, denigrated, or forgotten.

Bringing together artists, scholars, activists, administrators, and representatives of arts organizations, this cross-disciplinary conference aims to reconsider how we understand what constitutes an intervention within the black arts, and how such interventions come into contact with mainstream and culturally specific institutional frames. Given the vexed conditions in which black aesthetic practice now unfolds—thanks to a shrinking public sphere increasingly shaped by market forces rather than cultural expertise—these concerns seem particularly pressing today, but they are part and parcel of that much longer history of black subjects’ coming to voice within American culture.

Accordingly, the conference organizing committee welcomes proposals on the following themes:

• The relationship between tradition and innovation in the black arts
• The role of “mainstream” institutions in shaping black artistic histories
• The history of black arts institutions in the United States and the challenges facing them today
• The politics of institutionally funded artists versus independent artists
• The relationship between academic institutions and communities relative to black artistic production
• New understandings of cross-institutional collaborations
• Alternative networks for institutionalizing the black arts
• Interventions into, critiques of, and/or resistance to institutions
• The impact of criticism on the valuation of black art
• The impact of audience expectation on black artistic production in an age of new media
• Governmentality versus marketability of the black arts
• Spatial and temporal assumptions about black arts
• Non-urban spaces for black art production
• Black arts and the environment
• Black arts and/or activism
• Black arts as commodity
• Black arts and political economy
• Black arts as a site of resistance
• Black arts and the public sphere

Please submit a proposal (250 words or less) for individual papers of 15 – 20 minutes (approx. 8 – 10 double spaced pages in length) or visual presentations (short films, performances, videos), along with audio/video needs and a 2-page CV highlighting research and experience germane to the proposed presentation to bai@northwestern.edu (insert email address) by December 5, 2014. Please include “BAI Conference Proposal” in the subject line. Participants will be notified of acceptance or rejection of the proposal by January 16, 2015.

The Black Arts Initiative (BAI) at Northwestern University cultivates an interdisciplinary approach to black arts. Launched in 2012, BAI seeks to engage myriad perspectives, strengthen Northwestern's involvement in black arts, and connect with a broader community of scholars, practitioners and community members through research, pedagogy, practice, and civic & community engagement. You can learn more about us at our website: www.bai.northwestern.edu

Photo Credit: Wally Gobetz image of Rhapsody, by John Yancey in Charles E. Urdy Plaza, East Austin