houses and geometric beadwork had long attracted both South African and international tourists, which in turn boosted the nation’s cultural capital. Here, these women reclaim some of their power by directing their gaze right back at their voyeurs. As the figures in People Watching squared off, you became cognizant of your own form of intense looking as you dissected the scene. You realized that these artworks exist for your viewership, an idea that cemented itself as you turned around to look at Vographic Vistas (2012), which depicts a storefront displaying a mash-up of mannequins advertising African and Western-style fashions. As you exited this space, you found yourself asking, aren’t you—like the tourists in People Watching and the guests of Robo Entertainers—also here to find some form of entertainment through the act of looking?

Coming full circle through the exhibition spaces brought you back to the introductory wall text. Here, at the crux between the domesticity, observation, and entertainment sections, was the installation Deep Blue Wells (2019). Commissioned by the Davis, Deep Blue Wells perched on a uniformly gray staircase toward the Davis’s reception area, you could hover the device above these circular images, which you could engage with through augmented reality (AR). Once you either downloaded the free Fatimah Tuggar: Home’s Horizons app (which can also be used to activate certain images in the catalogue) on your phone or borrowed a museum-provided iPad, you could hover the device above these “modules” and activate their AR components. Once activated, the modules displayed a variety of content, from interviews with weavers and dyers, to images that reference the history of indigo textiles in Kano, to delightfully undulating design elements. In her catalogue essay, Gilvin insightfully refers to Tuggar’s use of AR as a new kind of collage, which layers “virtual images over the ‘real’” (2019: 25). Through technology, Tuggar explores the expansive possibilities of collage aesthetics.

By layering technology over handmade fabrics, Tuggar also further interrogates the tension between handmade and electronic/digital media that appears in such works as Fan. The textiles’ smallest design unit, a circle (also the shape of the AR modules), often symbolizes the life cycle in Nigerian textiles. This idea resonates with the nods to technological obsolescence in Tuggar’s works, from the rotary phone of Working Woman to the outdated visage of Robo. The life cycle motif also poignantly refers to the existential threat faced by handmade tie-dye textiles in Kano, as they are increasingly replaced by imports with digitally printed designs (Bajorek 2019: 68).

However paradoxical it may seem to highlight the history and knowledge behind the creation of indigo textiles through the engagement with digital technology, here the handmade and the digital were not in conflict. Rather, Tuggar positions artisanal knowledge as the impetus for her use of cutting-edge technology.

Importantly, students generated much of the AR. By inviting Wellesley undergraduates to become cocreators of the piece, Tuggar and Gilvin ensured that a university art museum functioned as it should: through active student engagement and participation. At the same time, the AR component introduced you to the men and women who created these textiles through their sophisticated knowledge of dying and weaving processes, which positions each cloth as a nexus of labor. The students’ contributions to Deep Blue Wells point to the expansion of this network. Extending beyond the men and women who produce the textiles, it encompasses Tuggar’s own labor towards the conceptualization and creation of this multimedia work, and the student assistants who helped her realize the project.

From here, it did not take much for you to begin to think about an even wider network of labor that circulates around Deep Blue Wells in its museum context: from Gilvin’s curatorial labor, to the art handlers who helped her install the exhibition, to the museum guards who watched over the works, to the visitor’s services associate who greeted you at the front desk and perhaps lent you an iPad. You could even start to extend the labor surrounding the exhibition to the scholars who contributed to the publication and the museum staff who likely spent hours fundraising and applying to grants for the means to stage the exhibition in the first place. Ultimately, when displayed insightfully the way that Gilvin and the Home’s Horizons team accomplished, the interconnected themes percolating throughout Tuggar’s body of work point to the microcosms of labor and technologies that inform all forms of artistic and knowledge production. As you ascended the staircase toward the Davis’s reception area, you left realizing that Tuggar’s world has incisive applications to our own.

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book review

Bloodflowers: Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Photography, and the 1980s by W. Ian Bourland
Durham: Duke University Press, 2019; 336 pp., 92 b/w ill. $27.95 paper

reviewed by Alexandra M. Thomas

Rotimi Fani-Kayode, the Yoruba photographer of Black queer lifeworlds, is coming home. Nigerian curator Bisi Silva imagined this homecoming as a solo exhibition. It would take place in 2039 as part of a queer-friendly future in the Lagos art scene. In the epilogue of his 2019 book, Bloodflowers: Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Photography, and the 1980s, W. Ian Bourland reflects on Silva’s speculative proposal. Bourland marks the ways in which Fani-Kayode’s creative practice—bringing together homoerotic photography, Western art historical iconography, and African aesthetics—was far ahead of its time. One might read this hypothetical return as a call for historians of African art to take seriously the ongoing project of situating Rotimi Fani-Kayode’s work as “in some crucial way, Yoruban” (p. 250).

Born in 1955 to an elite Yoruba family, Fani-Kayode spent the earliest years of his life in Lagos before moving to Brighton, England, in 1966, to escape the Nigerian-Biafran civil war. He earned his BA and MFA in Washington DC and New York City, respectively, before returning to England in 1983. Fani-Kayode produced an expansive archive of stunning photographs that blend West African spirituality and European art historical influences with the iconography of queer life in London during the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. He classified his practice as “contemporary Yoruban art” and his medium as “Black, gay photography” (p. 7). Fani-Kayode was a founding member of Autograph: Association of Black Photographers in 1988 in London, which still exists as a photographic arts agency with exhibitions and archives. Since his death in London in 1989, Fani-Kayode’s work has been shown in an Okwui Enwezor’s 1996 exhibition In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present, a 2014 touring solo exhibition that reached the South African National Gallery, and numerous other solo and group exhibitions. Although
Bourland is not the first to write about Fani-Kayode. *Bloodflowers* is the first monograph to truly engage with the diverse range of influences in Fani-Kayode’s oeuvre, including the various social and political scenes with which Fani-Kayode was involved. Bourland invites readers to consider Fani-Kayode as “the Atlantic errant, the queer visionary, the formalist synthesizer, and the art-rock rebel” (p. 5). This is captured in the book’s evocative title, *Bloodflowers*, which is drawn from lyrics by British rock band The Cure:

> never fade never die you give me flowers of love always fade always die I let fall flowers of blood (p. 6).

The title alludes to the postpunk scene in 1980s London, the concurrent HIV/AIDS crisis, as well as the floral accoutrements that appear in many of Fani-Kayode’s photographs. *Bloodflowers* is a poetic synecdoche, encompassing themes of death, beauty, and decay. It is exemplary of the complex range of concerns that Fani-Kayode brought to his art, as well as the creativity with which Bourland treats Fani-Kayode’s work.

*Bloodflowers* is organized into six “exposures,” named both for the technical language of photography and the various communities to which Fani-Kayode was exposed. In the first three exposures, Bourland charts a cultural studies reading of Fani-Kayode’s oeuvre and its significance to the 1980s and beyond. The first half of the book is particularly useful in presenting Fani-Kayode’s role in the Black British art scene, sonic forces (punk rock, Afro-Caribbean, urban dance clubs) influential to avant-garde visual culture, and queer politics. The second half of *Bloodflowers* explores the aesthetic signifiers and formal qualities of the photographs, with a primary focus on romanticism and surrealism, Yoruba spiritualities, and theatricality. Powerfully, Bourland historicizes Fani-Kayode’s aesthetic, political, and social affinities with other Black queer figures such as Essex Hemphill, Marlon Riggs, George Platt Lynes, and Isaac Julien. Bourland’s formal and cultural analyses are rigorous—he insightfully recognizes both the Baroque performance of the photographs and their invocations of African cosmologies stemming from Yoruba and Kongo traditions. Two striking examples include Bourland’s readings of *Bronze Head* (1987) and *Ebo Òrìṣà* (1987). In *Bronze Head*, the buttocks and legs of a muscular Black figure are squattting on top of a bronze life mask. *Ebo Òrìṣà* includes a Yoruba mask facing the camera, while two Black muscular arms hold it in place. Since the figure is bent over, all spectators can see are the arms, faint legs, dreadlocks, and the upside-down mask. Bourland reads the staging of objects in Fani-Kayode’s photographs as holding affinities with Western surrealism, like Man Ray, as well as his own cultural heritage of Yoruba spiritual practice and possession. Bourland emphasizes that his semiotic readings of Fani-Kayode’s photographs also take seriously the fact that Fani-Kayode considered his creative practice to be an enactment of “techniques of ecstasy” (p. 21). Fani-Kayode described his creative method as contemporary practice of Yoruban spiritual invocation (p. 21). Moreover, the queer desire represented in Fani-Kayode’s homoerotic iconography coexists with both Yoruba “techniques of ecstasy” and the lineage of the Black body in queer photography vis-à-vis Robert Mapplethorpe.

In addition to surrealism, desire, and spirituality, fetishism is an intriguing problem-space in Bourland’s analysis. This fetishism joins the classical African artworks staged in Fani-Kayode’s photographs with the homoerotic and phallic imagery that also appears in his photographs of Black male nudes and kink/leather culture. In Bourland’s reading, fetishism is the perfect vehicle through which to address Fani-Kayode’s dynamic work, as his takes critical inventory of the interconnected valences of the concept: William Pietz’s infamous essays on fetishism that integrate Hegelian views on early modern West African religious and economic practices, Marx’s commodity fetishism, and Freud’s psychoanalytic discourse on sexuality and the fetish. Art historically, fetishism places objects like Nkisi Nkondi figures from the Kongo and the racial fetishism of Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographs within the same critical frame. Notably, fetishism is the critical concept in *Bloodflowers* that best integrates the various iconographic and cultural valences presented in Fani-Kayode’s oeuvre. Thus, *Bloodflowers* joins an intellectual history of discourse on fetishism with works such as *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea* (De Brosses, Morris, and Leonard 2017) and *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Matory 2018). Be that as it may, *Bloodflowers* differs from these texts because of the way in which Bourland weaves together the themes of gender and sexuality, African power figures, psychoanalysis, and Marxist theory as opposed to focusing more on one than the others.

Moreover, the broad range of sources Bourland draws upon places *Bloodflowers* in a lineage of scholarship that explores African arts within the global contemporary. Bourland is in dialogue with several prominent scholars and curators: Mark Sealy, Okwui Enwezor, Kobena Mercer, Suzanne Blier, and Robert Farris Thompson. *Bloodflowers* is thus best understood as a text equally important to the fields of African art history and global contemporary art history. As such, *Bloodflowers* addresses a multitude of intellectual and aesthetic concerns that are pertinent to the field of African art history: globalization and periodization, gender and sexuality, and the commonplace separation of “traditional” and “contemporary.” In bringing these concerns together, Fani-Kayode’s photographs are Yoruba visual culture produced outside of the African continent—Yoruba iconography captured in London as opposed to Lagos. Bourland disrupts boundaries between area studies through a “cartographic exploration” that informs the “heterotopic and diasporic logics” that define Fani-Kayode’s photographs (p. 142). He bolsters his analysis with Black Atlantic and diasporic theorization, subsequently arguing that Black diasporic communities in Washington DC, New York City, and London were as formative to Fani-Kayode’s photography as communities in Lagos. Bourland guides a reading of Fani-Kayode’s oeuvre that engages the contemporary nature of African aesthetics, made global through migration and diaspora.

*Bloodflowers* is a welcome addition to the growing field of contemporary African art history. The mainstream contemporary art world has historically prioritized artists from the West over artists from the Global South; African art has oftentimes been conceptualized as existing outside the realm of the global contemporary. As the mainstream contemporary art world grows to be more inclusive of African artists, there are concurrent debates taking place in the field of African art history about the traditional versus contemporary binary. “Traditional” African art is imagined as that which is created on the African continent using Indigenous cosmologies—generally thought of as having a religious purpose. Modern and contemporary African art tends to be thought of as more formalized and transgeographic. However, modern and contemporary African art carries elements of the so-called traditional, as *Bloodflowers* powerfully demonstrates.

That Bisi Silva’s fantasy of Fani-Kayode’s homecoming is imagined as taking place in 2039 because of state-sanctioned homophobia in Nigeria does not mean that the project of queer African art history is not yet here. Fani-Kayode’s blending of homoerotic imagery and Yoruba aesthetics proves that queerness is not un-African, as colonial-era homophobic laws would suggest. *Bloodflowers* is a compelling account of the entanglement of gender and sexuality with contemporary African arts, highlighting Fani-Kayode’s queer identity along with the fundamentally Yoruban nature of his work. Bourland uplifts a Black queer framework as a political possibility, while identifying the racism in queer spaces and the queerphobia in African and Black diasporic spaces.

Bourland ends *Bloodflowers* with an excerpt from Fani-Kayode’s 1988 artist statement, “Traces of Ecstasy”:
Perhaps they would recognize my smallpox Gods, my transsexual priests, my images of desirable Black men in states of sexual frenzy, or the tranquility of communion with the spirit world. Perhaps they have less fear of encountering the darkest of Africa’s dark secrets by which some of us seek to gain access to the soul (p. 256).

This powerful conclusion ignites a renewed attention to the unfinished project of grounding queer, contemporary, and diasporic work within the field of African art proper. Bourland names a series of powerful actors in the contemporary African and African diasporic art world. He narrates the international prominence of other contemporary African artists: Chris Ofili, Steve McQueen, and Yinka Shonibare. For art world scholars, Bourland cites Huey Copeland, Julian Stallabrass, and Olu Oguibe’s weariness about the way in which racial capitalism and its reproduction of power imbalances persist, despite radical work by artists and curators to enact what Copeland calls the “longue durée of struggle for greater equity in the world and in the gallery” (p. 253). Perhaps this is the most cogent intervention in Bloodflowers. Fani-Kayode’s unapologetic queerness does not exclude him from being a contemporary Yoruban artist, just as his Africanness does not preclude him from having one of the most dynamic oeuvres in global contemporary art of the 1980s. Overall, Bourland offers a compelling reading of Fani-Kayode’s vast oeuvre through a commitment to interdisciplinarity. Bloodflowers ought to be read by scholars working within and across the fields of modern and contemporary art, gender and sexuality studies, African art history and Black cultural studies. A reader with a keen interest in considering sonic culture, urbanism, and art histories as interconnected phenomena is especially fitting. He takes seriously Fani-Kayode’s role as an African artist, along with his connections to Black diasporic art scenes, music of the 1980s, Western art histories, and the materiality and aesthetics of religion.

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book review

**Picasso’s Demoiselles: The Untold Origins of a Modern Masterpiece**

by Suzanne Preston Blier

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. 448 pages, 353 ill., 8-page color insert, chronology, references, index. $29.95/$24.99 paper, $109.95/$93.00 cloth

reviewed by Helena Cantone

Pablo Picasso’s painting *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* of 1907 is often used in the discipline of African art history to represent and debate the influence of African art in the development of European twentieth century modern art movements. It is used to analyze the aesthetics of Primitivism inspired by the arts of Africa and Oceania and to examine the complex historical relationship between Europe and Africa during the period marked by colonialism. But how much do we actually know about the painting in question and how much is shrouded by myths derived from the artwork’s iconic status within the European art canon? While there exists a large body of literature surrounding the artwork, the predominant historical narrative has not fully acknowledged the importance of African art in Picasso’s work and there still remain many unanswered questions linked to what the painting represents and what sources were used by the artist.

In *Picasso’s Demoiselles: The Untold Origins of a Modern Masterpiece*, the eminent African art professor Suzanne Preston Blier attempts to address the gaps in the literature by presenting new insights into the significance of African art in the painting. As stated in the introduction to the book, Blier proposes to move the analysis away from the dominant ideas about the work representing five prostitutes and instead suggests we consider *le bordel* to refer to the French expression for “a mess” or “a complex situation,” recalling the mess that the world itself represents, particularly vis-à-vis issues of race, evolution, migration, and generational identity (p. 5). With this assertion, the reader is promised a fresh critical analysis of the painting set within overlapping historical, sociopolitical contexts. Structured in seven chapters, the book traces the period in which Picasso worked on the idea for the large-scale canvas (roughly between October 1906 and March 1907), describing in detail the artist’s first encounter with African art objects owned by Henri Matisse (1869–1954), among them Vili figures from Congo. A large part of the book is dedicated to reinterpreting the painting in the light of new sources of evidence, such as the illustrated books by the German ethnologist and archaeologist Leo Frobenius (1873–1938) and the photographic medical books by Carl Heinrich Stratz (1858–1924), despite Blier repeating throughout the book that, “we have no direct evidence that Picasso saw or studied these books” (p. 16).

This would not have been an issue if Blier had shifted the focus from trying to convince the readers that Picasso used specific illustrations and photographs as references for his composition, providing us instead with greater analysis of the colonial history in which these constructed images of Africa were produced and circulated in Europe. Set in a wider context, she could have developed a stronger argument for interpreting Picasso’s painting in view of how he engaged or rejected dominant European ideas of Africa operating at that time in order to understanding what Africa represented to the artist. The overemphasis on matching and comparing *Les Demoiselles* with individual illustrations in Frobenius and Stratz’s books results in more of a detraction than an aid to understanding *le bordel*.

There is a further problem with the overall reading of the book which is connected to the author ascribing a racial and cultural identity to each of the demoiselles. Blier writes:

“Early on I accorded each of the demoiselles a name for easy identification purposes. From left to right these female subjects include the Egyptian/Asian; the half-standing Caucasian; the central Caucasian/central figure; the standing African; and the crouching African/crouching figure. The identities help inform our understanding of the canvas (p. xii).”

While this statement seems initially to be justified for practical reasons and provides the reader with a point of interest as to where this will take them next, what ensues is instead a dangerously uncritical analysis of the painting using racial categories that are not substantially analyzed from a sociohistorical perspective and therefore leave the reader unclear as to what the author is actually trying to say. Once again, too much detail is given to reading into the racial and cultural differences of the demoiselles and differentiating between their body shapes, poses, degree of nakedness, hair styles, facial features and skin color while providing no substantially persuasive evidence to back this up.

Not enough critical (i.e., historical and sociopolitical) analysis is given to the racial