**Exhibiting Blackness: A Book Review**  
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In *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum*, Bridget R. Cooks takes a close examination at the earliest history of inclusion of African American art and artists in mainstream museums, as well as the beginnings of all-Black exhibitions. In the process, she lends a critical eye to exhibition strategies that were employed and presents an analysis of how these strategies have impacted African American artists.

The introduction to the book begins with a brief analysis of the first museum exhibition of art by African Americans, *The Negro in Art Week*, which took place at the Chicago Art Institute in 1927. Cooks asserts that this exhibition is “emblematic of the fraught situation of African American art in museums throughout the twentieth century.” So sets the tone for the remainder of the book in which Cooks looks at subsequent exhibitions and how each was problematic in its own way. She asserts that the state of African American art in museums today is essentially the legacy of past exhibitions such as *An Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by American Negro Artists* funded by the Harmon Foundation in 1929, *Exhibition of Sculpture by William Edmondson* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1937, and the *Contemporary Negro Art* exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1939, to name a few.

The crux of Cooks’ argument is that historically, art museums exhibiting African American art have used an interpretive lens that has painted Black people, and their art by association, as inferior. Additionally, early exhibitions also lacked self-representation by the artists themselves. These factors combined have created a racial hierarchy of difference and a standard of racial exclusion that still currently exists, according to the author. But she concludes that in order to overcome this obstacle, there should be continued Black resistance to the perpetuation of racial hierarchy (often via all-Black exhibitions), and that there must also be a consistent inclusion of Black artists in group exhibitions. Cooks is thorough in her analysis of the early history of exhibitions of African American artists, chronicling the development of Black art in the museum world. This book is by no means meant to be a comprehensive treatment of all exhibitions of African American art; rather, its contribution is in the recognition of key exhibitions that have continued to frame how African American art and artists are treated in modern mainstream art museums of the 21st century. She provides a great introduction for those who have no prior experience with African American art, making the book indispensable as an historical overview. Particularly valuable is Cooks’ individual assessment of prime exhibitions and why each proved to be problematic for African American artists then and now.

*Exhibiting Blackness* provides a perspective that has not been explored in other similar books such as *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums* or *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement*. Cooks’ offering is a fresh take on Black art and artists as they relate to the mainstream art world.

**REFERENCES**