

ABSTRACT

The Exotic, the Erotic and the National: The Black Male Body in the Photographs of Archie Lindo

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This study examines how the black male body is imagined in the art of Jamaica around Independence. Its case study is the photography of Archie Lindo, who was also a poet, playwright and radio broadcaster.

While Lindo's photography captured various aspects of Jamaican life, he also produced black male nudes with homo-erotic overtones, most of which were never shown publicly. Lindo's transgressive eroticizing gaze, combined with the dynamics between his privileged position as a light-skinned middle-class Jamaican who identified with black culture and the social status of his subjects, most of whom were poor and working class young males, also sheds new light on the racial and sexual dynamics in the art of that period and complicates the critiques of its cultural nationalist agenda.

Lindo is compared with the white Harlem Renaissance photographer Carl Van Vechten, who is best known for his iconic portraits of artists, writers and other celebrities, but also produced a private archive of homo-erotica that mainly depict black subjects. The similarities between the life and work of Van Vechten and Lindo suggest that there have been hidden but active queer spaces within the Jamaican nationalist school and the Harlem Renaissance and also sheds further light on the interactions between the two.

Using a theoretical framework derived from postcolonial queer studies, visual studies, and art history, this study examines the socio-cultural significance of Lindo's exhibited and private work, with a focus on his best known photograph, *The Irish Moss Gatherers*. Lindo's work is also related to this author's own artistic practice as a contemporary black Jamaican photographer who uses the male body as his main symbolic vehicle, but from a more self-reflexive personal and political perspective.

Keywords: O'Neil Lawrence; Archie Lindo; Art history; Black bodies; Carl Van Vechten; Iconography; Masculinities; Nationalism; Nudes; Photography; Queer; Visual studies