

Erase-ing Art History

Paintings By Titus Kaphar

March 19 - May 30, 2004

Titus Kaphar's "Visual Quotations" series is comprised of meticulously crafted paintings deriving from the portrayal of black people in 18th and 19th century Western painting. The original paintings, by artists such as Copley, Delacroix, Blake, and Eakins, were selected for their relevance within the "canon" of Western art history, and for the compositional theme of black and white people portrayed in close proximity. In each painting Kaphar has removed from the composition all white figures and all remnants of the original painted environment. What remains is the black figure on a white ground, in compositional isolation.

Each large painting is accompanied by a smaller reproduction of the original that depicts everything except the black figure. The empty space left by the figures makes visible their role in the original composition while commenting on the marginalized nature of black figures in the western canon. Through isolating the black figures in a separate, larger painting, Kaphar suggests that these marginalized figures are worth our attention, that visual representations have a cultural and political significance.

"Much of black history recorded in Western art is summarized visually by three roles: enslaved, in servitude or impoverished. But beyond this limiting social order lies a people of dignity and strength, whose survival is nothing less than miraculous"
-Titus Kaphar