

"Holy Land: Diaspora and the Desert" exhibit  
Co-Curator  
Heard Museum for Native American Art,  
Phoenix, Arizona  
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Catalogue Essay

**"Breaking Ground: Diaspora's Current Shifts from the  
Body to Geography"**

"I live today in neither in this world nor the  
last, neither in America nor Astrakhan. Also I  
would add neither in this world nor the next. A  
woman like me, she lives someplace in between.  
Between the memories and the daily stuff.<sup>1</sup>

The "Other" is the subject borne from nineteenth  
century colonialism who today continues to play a  
vital role within society as the subject who possesses  
no membership within it. Falling into the cracks  
between nations, ideas, economies and citizenship, his  
identity survives because his questionable status of  
citizenship is indispensable to the self-realization  
of Eurocentrism and dominant ruling forces. Over the  
last fifty years, as the world has become smaller  
through transnationalism and globalization, the  
"Other" has not died but has been reinforced as  
economic systems have strengthened throughout the  
world whether in the far East or on United States  
soil.

The twenty-first century is the first moment that  
the identity of the "Other" has been able to take  
steps beyond the grips of capitalism, colonialism and  
Modernism. "At the conclusion of the Cold War, human  
rights have become linked to world trade and to the  
diversity of capitalism."<sup>2</sup> Methodologies have become  
\*interdisciplinary while national borders have gained  
in flexibility due to technology. Where subjugation

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<sup>1</sup> Rushdie, Salman. Shalimar the Clown. Random House, New  
York, New York. 2005. page 9.

<sup>2</sup> Breckenridge, Carol, A. Pollock, Sheldon, Bhabha, Homi, K.  
and Charkrabarty, Dipesh, eds. Cosmopolitanism. Mignolo,  
Walter, D. "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking  
and Critical Cosmopolitanism." Duke University Press,  
Durham & London. 2002. page 174.

always broadens in an expanding world, so do ideas and opportunities. As alternative modes of thinking and living become more widely visible, there is a possibility for ideas to extend beyond Modernist tropes.

Fredric Jameson in his recent book "Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions" re-examines the history of Utopia as understood throughout Modernity. For the sake of brevity here, Utopia is the idealistic alternative construct to Western dominant powers for the last two hundred years. Jameson sheds light on the dark economic corners of globalization and how crucial aspects of Modernism and its descendent ideas and methodologies are weak from the ground up because of unstable ideological structures integral to Utopian philosophies. Like the "Other," Utopia was a concept that came to life as an equal and necessary alternative to the dominant forms of governments in the west.

Jameson asserts that globalization is "...the consolidation of the world market..." and that culture, a given insertion into any global economic transaction, is fraught with ideological blind spots for which "...Utopian politics (or of any political Utopianism)..." is responsible for supplying the foundations of its belief systems.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Jameson re-examines ideas of the identity of the "Other," to make both a critique of the influential Utopia in critical cultural thinking as well as to point out that an alternative to the social imaginary of Utopia has already been at work in popular culture through the imaginary of science fiction.

Resting on the popular assumption that fantasy and imagination are merely notions of the whimsy or flighty, imaginative daydreaming maintains strict boundaries that are hyper- or hypo-flexible. It is always gauged by the needs and desires of he who is dreaming. Desire is a natural force that never requires a disciplinarian to fully realize itself.

"...humans remain the prisoners of an anthropomorphic philosophical system...in imagining

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<sup>3</sup> Jameson, Frederic. Archeaologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions. Verso, New York & London, 2005. page xii.

ourselves to be attempting contact with the radical Other, we are in reality merely looking in a mirror and searching for an ideal image of our own world." <sup>4</sup>

Within the different "Other," Jameson asserts, is not an entity separate from the person looking at him but a reflection of that person. A man can only relate to other man-like things whether in the physical universe or here, more simply, on planet Earth where human beings are also stamped and relegated as Aliens and/or other worldly within social parameters. The ideal and usefulness of the "Other" is typically relegated to celebratory, performative or an aesthetically revolutionary cultural discourse that is typically disregarded as having any kind of agency other than its value as entertainment.

In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois was one of the first to link the subject of the "Other" to a unified global body under the rubric of the Black Diaspora. In his seminal book "The Souls of Black Folk," DuBois links Black peoples throughout the world under the single physical characteristic of skin color. This facet of identity becomes the signifier that communicates across national and economic borders to connect people and their cultural similarities through simple visual recognition. DuBois' proposition of the Black Diaspora is still a template referred to today by compromised peoples throughout the world to peoples of various race and color. In the eighties and nineties, Diaspora and identity theory rigorously use the human body as the site of harm and healing in society. The early twenty first century, however, has shifted Diaspora and identity studies overwhelmingly to view the geography of actual land masses as sites in which to discuss identity politics and Diaspora.

The "Holy Land" exhibit uses the metaphorical desert to present the wilderness as a site that remains permanently untouched by human hands due to its tough environment, but also as a place where, when resourcefulness is used, life can exist. Shifting the Diaspora discussion of identity from the site of the body to landscape makes room for the flexibility of fantasy in a landscapes setting where personal desires are the starting point. Ideas become fluid moving from

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. page 111.

anywhere into anything guided by individual will. Boundaries begin to flex with a single desire.

The artists of this exhibit and many others like them, culture workers and theorists (like Jameson) show, there is a frustration with the lack of methodologies that seek options outside of Eurocentric thinking. People have begun to explore in the wildernesses, using metaphors, physical boundaries and fantasy to exist beyond civilization.

Metaphors "...as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the domain of home and belonging across the middle passage; or the central European steppes, across these distances and cultural differences that span the imagined community of the nation-people."<sup>5</sup> Metaphor and fantasy become the engine in the mind of the artist, the culture worker and/or the person physically moving between or through nations. Physical characteristics and their cultural givens are no longer the only invisible passports of recognition between migrant, displaced peoples. Those subjects who fall outside of a cultural mainstream recognize shared circumstantial experiences, ideas and dreams at all levels of society.

"...the language of modernity reveals a politics without duration, as (theorist)Louis Althusser once wrote: 'Spaces without places, time without duration'" aptly expresses the movement of diaspora through today's imaginary.<sup>6</sup> Thus, today's diaspora is a worldwide recognition that has expanded its prime focus from physical characteristics to ideas borne of circumstance and experience.

Land and space, whether imagined or real, indicates the agency that comes with ownership whether it be of sanity or property. What is holy has become personal space and time that may be discovered and explored in a safe realm. Every artist in this exhibit approaches Diaspora with an open ended tool of fantasy whether it be through abstraction or memory or both. They are breaking ground with an urgency that accompanies the search for relief.

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<sup>5</sup> Bhabha, Homi.ed. Nation and Narration. "DissemiNation: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation." Routledge, London & New York. Page 291.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,page 294.