

LOOKING  
CLOSELY



Hyacinthe Rigaud (Perpignan 1659–1743 Paris), *Young Man with a Bow*, ca. 1697, oil on canvas, 56.8 x 43.7 cm / 22.3 x 17.2 in. Courtesy of Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dunkerque.

## RACE MATTERS: Seeing the Black Figure in the European Tradition

*Curated by Adrienne L. Childs, Ph.D.*

Art historian, curator, and Associate of the W.E.B. DuBois Institute at Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University.

Black figures – individuals, types, and fantasies – have been a ubiquitous presence in Western art since antiquity. Often hidden in plain sight, they have been historically overlooked or their lives discounted as lost to history. Recent events in the struggle for racial equality and justice are inspiring renewed consideration of the history of black people on a global scale. Even the most cursory overview of the history of Western art will reveal the extent to which black people were part of European society in many different roles, informing the ways in which European artists and craftsmen imagined their world. Yet, images of black people often indexed their subservient status and affirmed a kind of exoticism that rendered them fundamentally different or “other.” With the rise of the slave trade, colonialism, abolition, and imperialism framing Europe’s dominating relationship to Africa and Africans from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, the fraught engagement of European art featuring black bodies became even more charged. *Race Matters* takes a broad overview of this dynamic, assembling works of European art from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries in which black people figured in various contexts such as biblical figures, historical personages, allegories, court servants, decorative types, and free blacks. Understanding how people of color have figured in the history of European art provides an opportunity to learn more about the lived experiences of people often overlooked in history and to face the ways in which art was complicit in upholding racial hierarchies.

LISTEN

*To curator Denise Murrell discuss changing modes of representation of Black women in nineteenth-century and modern art.*

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*From leading scholars about “The Court Moor” from a panel at Villa La Pietra, Florence.*

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*William Shakespeare’s “Othello: The Moor of Venice”.*

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*Dr. Adrienne L. Childs’ new online exhibition “Race Matters”.*

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*Black Artists, Black Models: A Selling Exhibition*