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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

valdez, kkk, painting, ivanova, lynchings, black, white, blanton, art, latino, audiences, voices, open casket, curators, exhibition, work, artist, explains, erasing, reveals

SPEAKERS

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Hidden behind a series of white walls in the Blanton Museum of Art sits a cautionary sign. "This painting may elicit strong emotions." The July 16, 2018 New York Times explains the content warning guards a painting called "The City" a haunting 30 foot panoramic painting
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of a modern day KKK gathering.
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Each one of the clan members engages with the viewer one waves, the baby points, the women talk about you and the rest just watch you in an interview with the artist, ArtNet News on July 23, 2018 explains Vincent Valdez argues the painting is set in modern times to serve as a reminder that racism is alive and well.
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So Hyperallergic and Art News source of July 23, 2018 notes.

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The painting was set for immediate display after its 2016 purchase.

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After consulting over 100 different scholars and nonprofits to avoid offending audiences. Only one individual still voiced concerns, but their qualms weren't with the art., but the artist. The July 18, 2018, Guardian reveals an online petition was created demanding the art be removed, because as a Latino American artist Valdez didn't have the agency to depict the KKK. Valdez consistently cites the 547 Latino lynchings in American history as the justification for his painting. But compared to the 3446 Black lynchings that occurred during that same time period, these numbers are not the same, and neither were their experiences. So we ask, can "The City" exhibit shed light on Latino lynchings without erasing Black History? To answer we'll turn to Veronika Ivanova's thesis "Poetics of Transgression" presented to OCAD University in March 2018. Ivanova's chapter on Dana Schutz's "Open Casket" examines how the artist, a white woman offends black audiences through her painting of Emmett Till, a 14 year old black boy lynched at the orders of a white couple. This model allows us to examine how Valdez, a Latino man offends some black audiences. So first we will analyze Ivanova's model then apply it to Valdez's work, before finally developing implications to a painting that one anonymous online user demanded be burned, just like the KKK burnt their ancestors. Dana Schutz's "Open Casket" is an artistic interpretation of a photograph from Emmet Till's funeral. Through her analysis of the art Veronika Ivanova examines the intersection of art and race relations, she discusses three choices that may offend marginalized audiences: identification, representation, and exhibition.

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First identification Schutz justifies her place in the story by falsely identifying with the Till family's grief.

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Ivanova explains: Schutz blatantly acknowledged, "I don't know what it's like to be black in America, but I do know what it's like to be a mother." In attempting to grab an agency when she has none Schutz fails to acknowledge the historical context of the KKK, maintains her position of power and silences black voices. Second, representation: black audiences were uncomfortable with the artistic representation of Till's death because it erases an important piece of black history.

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While the original photograph highlights the gruesome details of Till's death, the painting features random rush strokes that abstract his scars.
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Ivanova explains: By exploiting black pain without depicting it honestly, Dana Schutz romanticizes the violence of Till's oppressor.
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Third, exhibition: the curators created an irresponsible exhibition of "Open Casket." Ivanova reveals, the curators have received complaints from the black community calling for censorship of the painting, and they did nothing. Instead, they allowed the painting to stand alone with no explanation or justification. So Ivanova argues, by listening to white narratives instead of supporting black voices, the curators are ignorant at best, and race baiting opportunists at worst.
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In an August 2018 interview with Tribes magazine,
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Veronica Roberts, a curator at the Blanton museum revealed her biggest fear was Vincent Valdez's work being compared to Dana Schutz's open casket.
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So with that in mind, let's do just that. (Laughter)
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And apply Ivanova's tenets. First, identification: To justify his place in the story, Valdez tells the Texas Monthly in September, 2018. "I view these testimonies as my stories and my experiences."
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While his statements attempt to grab at agency. Valdez seemingly failed to acknowledge the historical context of the KKK. A context the 2018 American Behavioral Sciences Journal reminds us "puts light skinned white passing people in privileged positions of power."

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and as a light skinned white passing man, Valdez maintains this power.

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Second, representation: black audiences were uncomfortable with the artistic representation of the KKK because it ignored the important piece of black history. Them. The petitioners against Valdez's work argue the painting is intentionally gigantic in scale and hyper realistic to shock viewers. So by highlighting the villain, instead of the victim, Vincent Valdez romanticizes the violence of their oppressor.

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Third, exhibition: the curators created an irresponsible exhibition of Valdez's work. To avoid the mistakes made during the "Open Casket" exhibition. The Blanton's website reveals they created events and symposiums to talk about art and race.

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Conveniently, most of the scholars they brought in were white.

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In supporting white narratives over listening to the artists and critics of color. The Blanton's oversight could be a sign of curatorial obliviousness.

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The most popular words written in public responses to Valdez's work were: Thank you. I am also thankful but recognize the rift his art creates between my community and the black community. So when returning to the research question, can "The City" exhibit shed light on Latino lynchings without erasing black history? Valdez's work can bring visibility to forgotten Latino lynchings but not without the inclusion of black bodies and black voices. Latinos have a long standing history with anti-blackness and racism.

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And Valdez's silence on this reality, yields two implications.

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Initially, the white base,

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colonizes black and brown canvases.

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In discussing Valdez's work in the black community we've completely forgotten who started this conflict in the first place, white institutions. It was the white author of a New York Times article, the white author of a Guardian article and the white curators the Blanton Museum of Art that first insinuated Valdez was erasing black voices. The petitions came later. But where was this concern when the Blanton inquired about Valdez's other famous artwork, "The Strangest Fruit." This painting featuring solely Latino lynching victims was not deemed controversial, nor was it called a regime. Perhaps it's because unlike the KKK mural, which forced white people to look in the mirror, "The Strangest Fruit" served its purpose, to make the pain of people of color arousing to white spectators, and isn't that what lynchings were all about?

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Finally, artistic interpretation depends on the audience's identity. British scholar Gillian Rose writes in her book Visual Methodologies, "artwork stays silent." The voices around it change, Valdez's work impacted many individuals in different ways because to review, the KKK also terrorized Mexican Americans, Catholics, Jews, communists, but they are an especially profound cultural memory for the black community. Valdez never claimed to portray or even understand the black experience. He painted the KKK from the lens of Mexican Americans, for Mexican Americans, a reinsertion of our identity into historical narrative discrimination we're often excluded from but racial identity plays a huge role in how we see our world and makes me wonder whether we are even looking at the same painting. Throughout the year, I've asked individuals to point out what they notice in the painting. Some notice the dog in the background, others the baby, one individual said they saw the KKK a death threat. So after examining Ivanova's model, applying it to "The

City" and developing implications I ask you



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what do you see?