

CAROLINA A. MIRANDA

After Ferguson: U.S. museums need to show a work by Natalie Bookchin



By CAROLINA A. MIRANDA AUG 15, 2014 | 10:00 AM



A still from Natalie Bookchin's exhibition "Now he's out in public and everyone can see," which was shown at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions in 2012. (Natalie Bookchin)



Bookchin's piece is remarkable for a number of reasons. There's the simple yet hallucinatory presentation, which makes it appear as if the walls are talking. But, more significantly, there's the content. It is a profoundly nuanced exploration of the spaces African American men are expected to occupy in our society.

Except those spaces are all over the map, with some vloggers opining at length on where black men should and shouldn't live, and others going on about the right time to "show your blackness." The piece is a stunning reflection of a society that is grappling with the notion of African American men as threats; that there might be places where they *should* and *shouldn't* be.

The fact that it went up at LACE roughly 10 days after the shooting of unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida made Bookchin's work feel eerily prescient. The shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. — and other unarmed black men since — gives it ever more urgency.

Yet beyond LACE's gallery installation, Bookchin's video piece has only ever been featured once in a museum — and that museum was in ... Australia.

This is a shame. "Now he's out in public..." has a lot to say about the moment in which we are living. And it is the rare piece of art about race that is not only smart, it avoids being preachy or melodramatic, allowing viewers to draw their own conclusions.

There are numerous institutions that have the space for this type of work. Certainly, there is the Museum of Contemporary Art here in Los Angeles (which currently has a lot of gallery space to fill). And in New York, it would draw the attention of the greater art media. The lobby galleries at the New Museum and the Whitney Museum would be a great place to start.

Right now, however, there is one place that should definitely be putting Bookchin on the speed dial. And that'd be the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis.

Find me on Twitter @cmonstah. But, better yet, follow my colleague @mattdpearce, who has been doing some stunning reporting out of Missouri.