

# Outrageous Black Pop



REJECTED IDEA FOR A DROSTE'S CHOCOLATE ADVERTISEMENT

Robert Colescott's "Rejected Idea for A Droste's Chocolate Advertisement"

JOHN PERREAULT

Robert Colescott (Razor Gallery, 464 West Broadway): Colescott's new paintings are salacious, racist, outrageous; I like them. He is a black artist or so the man behind the desk at Razor assures me. When you see the paintings you'll know why I had to ask, although as soon as I saw them I assumed such. Normally these things are no concern of mine. I should have known better. The paintings both appalled and delighted me. They cut like a razor.

Colescott's paintings could be called Black Pop. They could also be opportunistic. I vote for the former, although Colescotts are owned by Morris Graves, Reed College, American Research Center, Standard Insurance, and the Hilton Hotel Collection, whatever that is, and he teaches somewhere within the University of California.

The satire is certainly there. In fact, it hits you over the head. How else can you explain an Aunt Jamima Vermeer, Van Gogh's "Potato Eaters" in black-face ("Eat dem Taters"), "Princess Urana... Half Girl Half Ape/Her Mother was British Her Father a Bull Ape," or "Afro-American Spaghetti." Now you know why I had to ask.

I saw them. I asked. I laughed. Then poised above my Smith-Corona I was forced to think. Why had I laughed? The only humor worth considering is vicious. The only humor worth considering breaks taboos. My selected illustration is "Rejected Idea for A Droste's Chocolate Advertisement," a Hans Brinker scene that makes visible and makes ludicrous a pornographic cliché and also a well-known fact of 'merican History. Black women, as Thomas Jefferson, we have finally found out, knew, were game. They didn't have any choice.

The Razor man, behind his desk, was dropping names like crazy.

Why are these new Colescotts being scooped up? A famous art historian—one of the few I happen to respect—was debating what his black cleaning lady would think when confronted by the Colescott "Potato Eaters" since the woman on the right in the painting is her spitting image. I should have such problems. Perched upon my hand-me-down Thonet chair in front of my Smith-Corona (also a hand-me-down), I can't even afford a dog. I am too pure. And I really love dogs.

Perhaps it is all just Black Camp. No. The ideas are too sophisticated for camp, although camp is apparently there. Being "free," "White" and 37, I suspect I've been had. What we have is a minstrel turn. Superior gamesmanship. Or superior gamesmanship.

What we have here are political paintings.

But my idea of politics might be different from yours. I think of "politics" as a way of surviving without getting your head bashed in, but also doing it with honor and dignity, but also as a way of maintaining your own personal freedom in such a way that you re-affirm the freedom of all those other persons whom you may or may not detest.

Taste is just too classy.

Beyond the initial giggle, see and savor. My only criticism is that perhaps these paintings are a little too smart-ass. Each one makes a point. Black Humor lives. And I am referring to Surrealism as well as to sociology. Dada is the evil mother of us all.

**SHIRLEY GORELIK (Soho 20, 99 Spring):** I like Gorelik's paintings too, but my liking is on a different level, here. I have no idea at all if she's black, but her subjects are. There is a classical humanism going on here. For her subjects live. They puncture the "picture plane" with their eyes and their lives. She

has invented the palette for black skin, sorely needed.

In "Libby and Boris," Libby is bare-chested, but Boris is not. It is a telling conjunction. "Family" is one of my favorites. But "Double Libby", handsome as it is, with that orange wall, is a path that has already been explored. Realist painters must stop trying to be formal. The press release is a give-away and a cop-out.

... transforms the intimate visual experience into an intense and impactful presence... Art history is recalled through the use of motif, composition, and spatial concept... etc."

Come off it!

On the other hand, if you really look at the paintings and the painting, you'll like them and like it.

I see, for instance, "Willy, Billy Joe, and Leroy" as a major painting. The human content is overwhelming. Willy is no Samurai, but neither am I. Off-canvas, there are the beer-cans that get him through work. Billy Joe is a punk. I like him. Leroy is so serious in an off-handed way. You can't fool around with him. I can almost hear our imaginary conversation.

## Art Reviews

Gruen: Downey Schueler, Resika, Lekberg, Wallace

Perreault: Colescott, Gorelik, Lobel

DaVinci: Flavin, Kounellis, Carson