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Abstractionist Aesthetics: Artistic Form and Social Critique in African American Culture

By Phillip Harper

New York University Press. Paperback / softback. Book Condition: new. BRAND NEW, Abstractionist Aesthetics: Artistic Form and Social Critique in African American Culture, Phillip Harper, In a major reassessment of African American culture, Phillip Brian Harper intervenes in the ongoing debate about the proper depiction of black people. He advocates for African American aesthetic abstractionism a representational mode whereby an artwork, rather than striving for realist verisimilitude, vigorously asserts its essentially artificial character. Maintaining that realist representation reaffirms the very social facts that it might have been understood to challenge, Harper contends that abstractionism shows up the actual constructedness of those facts, thereby subjecting them to critical scrutiny and making them amenable to transformation. Arguing against the need for positive representations, Abstractionist Aesthetics displaces realism as the primary mode of African American representational aesthetics, re-centers literature as a principal site of African American cultural politics, and elevates experimental prose within the domain of African American literature. Drawing on examples across a variety of artistic production, including the visual work of Fred Wilson and Kara Walker, the music of Billie Holiday and Cecil Taylor, and the prose and verse writings of Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, and John Keene, this book poses urgent...

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