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"...and pungent as Hot roasted Coffee beans..."

Trauma, Mediality und Skin Colour in Kara Walker's Safety Curtain in the Vienna State Opera House

The traumatic memories of slavery remain in effect and become visible, for example, in the shaping of skin colour in visual culture. The Afro-American woman artist Kara Walker tackled with these contexts pointing to the denied memory and history in Austria. With her large-scale picture covering the safety curtain in the Vienna State Opera House in 1998 she raised new questions about the connection of slavery, racism and fascism. Walker's silhouettes are defined as a specific design to overcome traumatic experiences with history that are enclosed in the figuration of racial stereotypes. The crucial factor is the effect of the medium: The blank space of the silhouettes is a sublime sign and has the power to break up the traumatic patterns of denial which are inherent in European visual representations of black and white body images. As effectively charged signs touching the spectators' senses, their mental and emotional states, they are able to change thinking or rather cause changes of awareness through perception. This thought refers to Gilles Deleuze's concept of the "encountered signs", to Sigmund Freud's "Erinnerungsspuren (traces of memory)" and Aby Warburg's "Pathosformeln / mnemische Energien". Finally, the (art)historical creation of meaning is stimulated by the artwork and then entrusted to the spectators.