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Media and Metaphors of black-and-white. History, Gender and Visual Politics in the Work of Kara Walker, Cindy Sherman and Zwelethu Mthethwa

Artistic techniques of black-and-white are loaded with cultural meaning. Partly referring to colour and contrast, black-and-white also always connotes racial difference. The article explores this intertwined relation of certain artistic strategies and their cultural effects. Concentrating on the work of the US-American artist Kara Walker who uses silhouettes in her work, the aim is to show how this and other related techniques are used to thwart prevailing notions of gender and race. Having created a fiercely debated body of work that was called sexist and racist by a number of critics, Kara Walker is an example of the ambiguous effects of invoking pertinent stereotypes.

Another focal point are the possible consequences for analyzing artwork that is not overtly dealing with race but is nevertheless – e.g. by using black-and-white techniques – to be read in this context. Cindy Sherman is a case in point as her work deals with representations of *white* femininity but was merely received as comment to postmodern debates of gender.