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Why, in 1973, a 'Black Art' Show?

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ALMOST five years have passed since black artists raised their voices and picket signs in protest against the Whitney Museum of American Art for excluding them in its 1968 survey of art created in the nineteen-thirties, a period when black artists began to emerge in impressive numbers. Since then, however, not only did the Whitney stage a mammoth "black" group show in 1970 (as well as seven subsequent one-man exhibitions in its small, ground-floor gallery), virtually every other major museum in the country followed suit (the Metropolitan opted for the inglorious spectacle, "Harlem on My Mind." The latest to join the roster is the New York Cultural Center, where "Blacks: USA: 1973" is being presented through Oct. 28.

Normally, one would be extremely proud of these strides, perhaps even grateful, if these gestures of professional exposure (albeit involuntary) had produced the hoped for results: that

'Capable black artists deserve to be evaluated in an entirely different artistic complex'

quality black artists could enjoy participating in a kind of cultural democracy in the plastic arts, could be exhibited alongside their white counterparts without the slightest consideration for ethnicity. However, with far too few exceptions, the "black" shows that have inundated us in recent years can only be described as mere token actions

taken by the art establishment to relieve itself of the mounting criticism from the black artistic community.

These shows did not, in the main, represent the art powers' discriminating concern for individual excellence. If the

highly gifted black artists continue to be lumped with those of dubious merit, they will surely decline to the point of losing their creative drive to compete as American artists, and will ultimately acquiesce to the dictates of those fellow



Detail from Benjamin Jones's "Face and Arm Unit, 1972," in the exhibition, "Blacks: USA: 1973," at the New York Cultural Center. "It maintains its esthetic priorities without sacrificing an equal concern for Negritude."

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