



Untitled, from the series "Zwarte Piet"

Date

1997, printed 2000

Primary Maker

Anna Fox

Medium

Chromogenic print

Description

Each winter, children in The Netherlands eagerly await the arrival of Sinterklaas, who brings candy and presents to those who have been good. This white-bearded saint rides into town surrounded by his black-faced servants, the so-called Zwarte Piet. Usually portrayed by white teenagers in elaborate clown-like costumes, the Zwarte Piet throw candy to the crowds of children and shake branches at the naughty. In her portraits of the Zwarte Piet, British photographer Anna Fox explores this Dutch tradition, which raises issues of race, class, and gender – ultimately questioning what it

means in the advent of growing racial diversity to hold onto a tradition that demonizes and mystifies the foreign. Visually, Fox's portraits recall the formal presentation of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings (SOURCE: Museum of Contemporary Photography, <http://www.mocp.org/detail.php?t=objects&type=browse&f=maker&s=Fox%2C+Anna&record=2>) The artist writes, "I was looking for a particular expression in the eyes of my Zwarte Piets," says photographer Anna Fox. "It is a confrontational look, confronting all of us with a question that is relevant to Europe, namely, what do we think about racism? Racism isn't unique to the Dutch. I'm not trying to say that. It is part of all our histories and we can't simply sweep away the past by getting rid of local and often potentially embarrassing reminders like Zwarte Piet. They still have a role and that, I think, is to make us look and think and talk about them, and, through them, about racism. They mean that we can't pretend that it doesn't exist."

Dimensions

Image: 8 1/8 × 7 7/8 in. (20.6 × 20 cm) Sheet: 12 × 10 in. (30.5 × 25.4 cm)