

EBONY

Picasso Who? AfroPop + Afropunk Blow Up Black Modern Art

‘AfroPop: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange’ shines light on Barron Claiborne, Sanford Biggers and Wangechi Mutu in ‘Afropunk Presents: The Triptych’

By Suede, February 5, 2015

AfroPop: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange—the innovative series about contemporary Black life, art and culture currently airing on public television stations across the country—continues with *Afropunk Presents: The Triptych*. The film, produced by Matthew Morgan and Jocelyn Cooper of Afropunk, will air as the fourth episode of the series, which actress Yaya DaCosta hosts this year.

A triptych is a series of three connected works (whether artistic, literary or musical), and the film, directed by Terence Nance and Barron Claiborne, is an artful portrayal of a trio of today’s most celebrated visual artists: Sanford Biggers, Wangechi Mutu and Barron Claiborne. The Sanford Biggers and Wangechi Mutu segments will air as a one-hour episode. The third, highlighting Claiborne, will be available online for 30 days beginning February 10 at WORLDChannel.org, local public station websites and blackpublicmedia.org.

“AfroPoP strives to showcase Black artists from around the world, and with *Afropunk Presents: The Triptych*, we are fortunate to have not one but three artists we can help expose to new audiences,” says NBPC executive director Leslie Fields-Cruz. “Together they demonstrate the wonderful diversity of people of African descent internationally.”

“Sanford, Wangechi and Barron are among our most important contemporary artists, each fully embodying the rebellious spirit of Afropunk,” says director Terrance Nance. “As such, they are perfect subjects for what we hope will be the first of many *Triptych* films celebrating our visual artists and engaging young people in this wonderful artform.”

In 2003, the *Afropunk* documentary (directed by James Spooner) took film festivals by storm in its honest depiction of the integral role played by African-Americans in the modern punk scene. The Afropunk Festival, an offshoot of the film and the banner of the movement, is now in its ninth year. In light of the Eric Garner case and nationwide protests, the essence of Afropunk has expanded in its relevance to African-Americans to assert their contributions to mainstream culture.

“We found that while the art made by Black artists was featured at certain cultural institutions, and there were resources that talked about their work, there was less about who they were separate from their work,” says Jocelyn Cooper. “The film evolved from a longing to know who these people were, particularly as individuals that shift culture and address culture in a political way.”

A music industry veteran, Cooper has insight to bringing the periphery into full focus with foresight and dedication. She first signed D’Angelo, handles his publishing, and through Afropunk has been integral to the shaping of his latest *Black Messiah* album’s marketing. Steeped in a multidisciplinary

approach to creative concepts, Afropunk has provided a much-needed hue in the pigment of the high art consortium.

Afropunk created a counterculture structure for African-American sensibilities, an antithesis to the capitalist culture vultures. It acts as a force field that allows artists to remain comfortable in their otherness, regardless of the reaction from the larger imposing culture. Afropunk takes the left of center thinking endemic to popular culture and places it at the center, allowing contemporary artists the space to intimately share their personal stories as it informs their art.

Ideally, a series like *AfroPoP* will spread awareness, and pockets of the community may understand the value of developing an African-American art collector economy for more than cultural impact. Look out for more Triptychs to make their mark. I anticipate (fingers crossed) features from artists like David Hammons, Carrie Mae Weems, Nick Cave, Mary Sibande, Mark Bradford, Rashid Johnson, Nicola Thomas, Hank Williams and more. Because after all, cultural impact doesn't pay the bills... or does it?