



64/100. Floppla vi lever!

John Savio

# Blackness at the Edge of the World

## Making Race in the Colonial Arctic

John Savio's print *Hoppla, We're Alive!* is an uncomfortable image [1]. In a lush black-and-white tropical landscape of palm trees and rolling hills, jubilant figures dance, jump, kiss, and flail their arms. Their sharp black profiles evoke silhouettes. Closer inspection reveals insidious forms that are all too familiar. Drawing our attention is the figure on the bottom right corner of the image, the only human given any facial detail. Savio carefully carved the negative space in order to accentuate two features: the lips and the whites of the figure's eyes. By making visible these two specific details, Savio recalls the pictorial modes of exaggeration specific to blackface imagery: the juxtaposition of bright eyes and teeth with inflated lips and dark skin. Contorting their bodies into jagged, angular poses, these tropical dancers are racist caricatures of Black performance.

When I shared this print with a fellow art historian, he openly sighed. For my colleague, this particular vision of anti-Black racism proved disappointing because its maker was Sámi. John Savio was the first Sámi person to receive an art education and strive to become a professional artist. His legacy is a point of pride for communities in Sápmi, where it is the focus of a dedicated museum in Girkonjárga (Kirkenes). Outside of Sápmi, the works of John Savio constitute rare examples of historical Sámi art in the collections of Nordic museums (Grini 2014). The longstanding erasure of Sámi as artists and subjects from Nordic art histories compounds the delicate nature of critically considering what is at stake in the racialized imagery of *Hoppla, We're Alive!*

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[1] John Savio, *Hoppla, We're Alive!*, ca. 1930-1938, woodcut, SavioMusea, Kirkenes. The artwork belongs to Saviomusea/Saviomuseum, Kirkenes, Norway.

Produced in Sápmi, *Hoppla, We're Alive!* brings Black and (non-African) Indigenous relationality beyond the spatial confines of the Americas, engaging instead the transcultural geographies of the Circumpolar North. Paying critical attention to this distinct geography can help locate the print within what Noelle Belanger and Anna Westerståhl Stenport (2016, 10) have called “the constitution of a history of Arctic color, which includes blackness at the center of polar representations”. They rightly conclude that the Arctic’s “long history of metaphorical ‘whiteness’” has obscured the relationships between Arctic resource extraction and the ships of enslavers (2016, 22-23). Elsewhere, Helga Hlaðgerður Lúthersdóttir (2015, 330) has demonstrated how the works of Black British directors John Akomfrah and Isaac Julien “creolize the notion of whiteness in Arctic imagery” in the twenty-first century. A pivotal, but lesser known contribution to this “creolization” of the Arctic is the legacy of William Henry Johnson, a United States artist who traveled in and painted Sápmi at the same time that John Savio created his vision of Blackness in the 1930s. Often affiliated with the Harlem Renaissance, Johnson lived in Scandinavia for some eight years, primarily in Denmark, but also traveling extensively across Norway and Sweden.

Scholars working at the intersection of Black and Native Studies have long sought to complicate and transcend such presumptions of solidarity, comparison, antagonism, and incommensurability between these groups. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith (2020, 21) have recently advocated for taking an “otherwise stance on Black and Indigenous relationality,” one that is processual and full of “growing pains” as it strives towards a relationality that is “joyfully unbound” rather than fixed. This future-oriented focus provides an opportunity to break from the stable coordinates that may otherwise map the work of Sámi anti-Blackness or Black engagement in Sápmi. In other words, such an approach investigates the complexities of racial thought at work in Savio’s print or Johnson’s paintings without that critique being the sole end of the inquiry.

In what follows, I juxtapose John Savio’s woodcut with William H. Johnson’s Sápmi imagery in the hope of contributing to Tiffany Lethabo King’s (2019, 13) call for “configuring and enflashing the spaces and cracks where Black and Indigenous life caress each other”. In putting these two artists into conversation, I am less concerned with their potential influence on each other than with what their careful comparison may reveal about the relationship between Indigeneity and Blackness in the colonial Arctic. Doing so centers Sápmi as a site of what Katherine McKittrick (2016, 3) calls “Black Atlantic Livingness”, offering a mode of art historical practice that circumvents the enduring structures of Nordic settler

colonialism. In order to do so, however, one must first consider where Blackness and Indigeneity have historically collided in the Circumpolar North.

### **The Black Arctic and Sámi Explorers**

Although white settler colonialism legally criminalized Black and Indigenous exchange, the Circumpolar North had long been a site of Blackness. In 1776, for instance, Copenhagen officials detained Isaac Hossama, a Black sailor traveling in the Davis Strait on the United States ship the *Windsor*, because of four sealskins he had in his possession. Hossama claimed that the sealskins were necessary provisions to survive the harsh Arctic climes for which he was unprepared, but the sealskins indicated an exchange with Inuit that operated outside of Danish colonial law. Hossama smartly explained he was born a “heathen” (*vild*), hoping that Danish racial prejudice could paradoxically exonerate him. Instead, it reinforced that his Christian profession framed his “transgressions” as conscious ones. As Karen Oslund (2016, 86) has demonstrated, Danish law treated such incursions—Hossama’s possession of just four sealskins—as illegal smuggling, aggressively persecuting “criminals” in order to shore up tenuous imperial sovereignty over Kalaallit Nunaat. Elsewhere, Kristin Loftsdóttir and Gísli Pálsson (2013) have charted the journey of Hans Jonatan, born the son of a white Danish man and enslaved Black woman on the Caribbean island of St. Croix, whose escape to Iceland circa 1805 demonstrates how Black fugitivity could set the North Atlantic as a site of liberation.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, white settler discourse imagined the Arctic through a frontier mentality, casting the region as a notoriously impenetrable landscape that resisted easy traverse. Polar explorations gained increasing currency with the establishment of the International Polar Year in 1882, fomenting international collaboration in Arctic and Antarctic research that continues to this day. Anti-Blackness featured prominently on these explorations, as blackface minstrelsy was a popular mode of entertainment on these explorer vessels (Blum 2019, 122-123). In 1909, a pivotal breakthrough would profoundly shape discourse about the relationship between race and polar exploration when parka-clad Matthew Henson planted the United States flag into the frozen earth of the North Pole. With the pivotal assistance of Inughuit guides Ooqueh, Ootah, Egingwah and Seeglo, the United States explorers Matthew Henson and Robert Peary described their “discovery” of the North Pole—they were actually still in Kalaallit Nunaat—as a triumph of American ingenuity and civilization. In 1912, Henson capitalized on his newfound fame and published a memoir titled *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole*. With an introduction penned

by Booker T. Washington, Henson's memoir adopted settler discourse to promote US Progressive-era ideals of racial uplift, casting himself as "a lowly member of my race, who had been chosen by fate to represent it, at this, almost the last of the world's great *work*" (quoted in Foy 2012, 20). As explored below, Henson's legacy as a Black explorer would come to bear implicitly and explicitly on William H. Johnson and his visual production.

In the decades between the establishment of the International Polar Year and the 1909 "discovery" of the North Pole, Sámi men would also play pivotal roles in Nordic desires to claim primacy over these struggles for discovery. Samuel Balto and Ole Nilsen Ravna accompanied Fridtjof Nansen on his 1888 "Greenland Expedition," the first successful European attempt to chart the interior of Kalaallit Nunaat. Given this success, Balto would later participate in the circumpolar trek that brought hundreds of reindeer and numerous Sámi families to Alaska in the 1890s. This history of Sámi exploration and polar travel—what Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2018, 7) has called the first generation of Sámi "going global"—directly affected the life of John Savio. His father, Per Savio, had joined the Southern Cross Expedition of 1898-1900, where he became the first person recorded to overnight on Antarctica, together with fellow Sámi Ole Must. One year after Per Savio returned to Sápmi, John Savio was born.

### **Carving Blackness in Sápmi: Approaching Savio's Satire**

With the imprecise dating of most of the artist's oeuvre and little extant writing, it is difficult to make concrete conclusions about John Savio's imagery. Exacerbating the issue is the fact that this particular print exists at the intersections of two already marginalized histories: visual representations of Blackness in Nordic art and art histories that prioritize Sámi makers and their works. Perhaps in reaction to these lacunae, art historian Tuija Hautola-Hirvioja (2019, 251) has made a brief suggestion that the image under question could be "a satirical or ironic response" to the interwar prevalence of racial biology and eugenics, those pseudo-scientific practices that pathologized Sámi bodies, uprooted families, and fomented longstanding trauma. Such political and social contexts are crucial, but they do not address the issue that Savio's print brings to the fore: the collision of Blackness and Indigeneity.

According to Savio's friend and first biographer Hans Nerhus, the artist produced *Hoppla, We're Alive!* while living in Spållavuolle (Svolvær) in the early 1930s. Nerhus reproduced the image in his 1982 monograph on the artist, but refers to the image only briefly in relation to a hand-written caption. Savio's caption reveals that on one occasion, the image was a gift to Per Hiort, an old



middle school friend of the artist's from the area of Giehtavuotna (Kvæfjord), where they lived in 1919. Seen as an exchange between old schoolmates, the image as satire becomes more convincing. Yet, Savio's image was not a singular print, solely gifted to a friend in Oslo, but instead reproduced in multiple copies, now dispersed across multiple collections. The question at hand remains what, exactly, is the meaning of Savio's satire?

Recent scholarship on the primitivist modernism of the 1920s and 1930s often asserts the agency of racialized subjects by means of unpacking their conscious, calculated choices. Writing about Josephine Baker in *Second Skin*, Anne Anlin Cheng (2010, 52) reminds us that "the attribution of subversive intentionality on the part of Baker, as some critics are wont to give, does not get us away from the problem that, when it comes to the spectacle of the stereotype, execution and parody look uncomfortably similar". Art historian Mary Coffey's insights on a similar print by the Mexican artist José Clemente Orozco are striking in their relevance here. Analyzing Orozco's *Echate La Otra (Dancing Indians)* (1935), Coffey (2020, 237) argues that the artist used the worst stereotypes of indigenous Mexicans as impoverished alcoholics to create "an image of indigeneity that no consumer could find attractive." For Coffey (2020, 237), Orozco's "recourse to visual stereotype serves a critical purpose, in a sense driving home his point rather than tempering it to appeal to folkloric tastes".

Scholars know of one case when Savio voiced his opinion on such "folkloric tastes." When Savio exhibited some of his woodcuts in Paris in 1936, the journal *L'Illustration* asked the artist if tourists in Tromsø appreciated his images of Arctic life, he responded, "No. First and foremost, tourists want to have something primitive. Here if a German painter makes Negro art, it goes well for him. Tourists want to take home something that gives an impression that they have traveled to some unknown part of the earth" (quoted in Nerhus 1982, 81). Latent in Savio's commentary is a frustration that settler society renders his Indigeneity as never-modern, thus precluding his full participation as a professional artist. Given the fraught racial politics of *Hoppla, We're Alive!*, it is tempting to speculate on Savio's thoughts on the German appropriation of African art, but his connection between tourism and primitivism has more immediate relevance here.

In 1929, the Swedish artist-cum-adventurer Ossian Elgström characterized Sápmi as a place of "barracks and a Wild West life of card-playing, drinking, and frequent brawling," where "streets and water lines, electric lights and a movie theater" appeared as "the realm of the Sámi narrowed" (quoted in Dubois 2014, 45). For Elgström, whom Hanna Eglinger (2021) has rightly characterized as one



[2] John Savio, *Rivals*, before 1938, woodcut, Wikimedia Commons.

of the most powerful proponents of “Arctic primitivism,” Sápmi is the new Nordic frontier, where a discourse about “cowboys and Indians” frames a settler-Native relationality where Swedish “progress” obliterates Sámi life. Yet, Savio’s cultural production features many such scenes of an urban Sápmi, whether Tromsø’s bustling town square, the dangling electric wires between crowded snow-covered rooftops, or drunk

men brawling in the street [2]. Savio’s description of the tourist desire for souvenirs of the “unknown” reflects a biased preference for his images of reindeer and Sámi herders in lieu of a gritty, urban Sápmi.

Savio’s use of the woodcut also stakes a claim about racial embodiment. The artist always faced a settler relationship to his work that interpreted any visual choice as informed by his identity. Long entangled with notions of authenticity, the woodcut’s handcrafted manufacture realized a physical engagement with the image that disrupted streamlined machine printing. By embracing roughly hewn grooves and cuts as tools of aesthetic expression, early twentieth-century artists framed woodcuts as the primitivist medium par excellence. Moreover, through signifiers of tropicity—the palm trees, the grass skirts—he displaces himself as maker from the colonial Arctic.

In an earlier attempt at grappling with this image, I suggested that Savio “revels in poking fun at the anthropological gaze of the state” (Pushaw 2021, 63). This reading was indebted to my interest in understanding Savio’s relationship with Nordic racial biology, but my view has now become more ambivalent. Building on Philip Deloria’s *Indians in Unexpected Places*, Sámi scholar Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2018, 8-9) has stressed the urgency of restoring modern subjecthood to Sámi in the early twentieth century. For Lehtola, key to realizing this modernity is honing one’s sensitivity towards the prevalence of “inter-ethnic politics” in evaluations of Sámi cultural production (2018, 11). In a 1974 speech, Alf Isak Keskitalo (1994, 17) espoused a similar idea, making clear how the “tendency [towards] politics on behalf of Sámi people [is] the most serious asymmetric blindness that can occur with ethno-scientists”. By reading Savio solely in line within Sámi cultural politics in the age of racial hygiene, one risks re-inscribing his Indigeneity in a way that obscures the worldview that made his invocation of Blackness possible in the first place.

In *Mapping Modernisms*, Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips (2019) rightly emphasize how Indigenous artists have always already been “inside modernity,” a notion that Savio made clear in the clever title of *Hoppla, We’re Alive!* It has escaped the attention of scholars that this title is the name of a popular 1927 play by the German playwright Ernst Toller. Imprisoned for his role in a Soviet-backed rebellion in Germany, Toller penned many anarchist plays during his five-year incarceration. Partly autobiographical, the play *Hoppla, wir Leben!* mirrored Toller’s dismay at the complacency of his former revolutionary comrades in the Weimar Republic. As a headline in *The New York Times* declared, producer Erwin Piscator’s “startling modern stage technique” defined the play’s significance (Trask 1927, 4). Piscator had replaced static painted backdrops with dynamic film clips of World War I, newsweeklies, and official archives. The critic writing for *The New York Times* predicted that this use of film in modern theatre “will leave an indelible impression on the stage direction of the future” (Trask 1927, 4). In Norway, the paper *Arbeiderbladet* devoted a full front-page spread to the “revolutionary” play, stating, “With *Hoppla, wir leben!* Piscator broke a new path, swirling the spectators in a round dance [...] neither theatre, cinema, review nor newspaper, it was a combination of them all” (Olden 1927).

By invoking Toller’s anarchist avant-garde play in his title, Savio invites his viewers to grapple with the modernity of his tropical dancers, and by extension, himself as an artist. Through its title and subject matter, the image juxtaposes two different kinds of performance, avant-garde theatre and joyous dance. Through the dances of such luminaries as Josephine Baker, Féral Benga, and Prince Tito,



Black performative primitivism of the 1920s and 1930s epitomized modernism. Does Savio satirize this phenomenon? Conversely, could the print's title be a provocative gesture towards seeing Black performance as equally cutting-edge as Piscator's innovative staging? Enticingly ambivalent, the print refuses definitive interpretation.

### **Johnson as Painter-Explorer in Sápmi**

By the time William H. Johnson first crossed the Arctic Circle in 1937, the geographies of Blackness had become radically unbound. As Jim Crow violence fomented the vast Northward migration of African Americans, the cultural production of the Harlem Renaissance espoused a vision of Blackness that was global and cosmopolitan. Pivotal to this new spatial imagination was the achievement of Matthew Henson, whose success at the North Pole in 1909 contradicted tenets of racial thought that intertwined climate and civilization. As Anthony S. Foy (2012, 22) has aptly explained, Henson's success despite "the extreme physical demands of the Arctic frontier" would come to embody "the race's mobility as it excelled despite the political, economic, and social limitations placed on it at home".

Johnson would have been acutely aware of Henson's legacy, partly because Black America routinely feted Henson as their own celebrity. Having moved to New York in 1918, Johnson enrolled as a student in the prestigious National Academy of Design, where he studied until 1926. During his tenure as an art student, he might have seen Matthew Henson, who delivered a speech at the popular America's Making Exposition of 1921 while "dressed in furs that he wore at discovery of the poles." (Chicago Defender 1921, 3). Chicago's premiere Black newspaper *The Chicago Defender* described Henson's appearance as a "special feature" of a day that included pageants and performances in a "program by Americans of Negro lineage" (1921). Those Arctic pelts that had once criminalized Black travelers in the eighteenth century had transformed into signifiers of Black achievement by the early twentieth century. Before Johnson ever left the United States, Henson's performative Arctic indigeneity had already modeled Black success on the global stage.

Johnson would deploy a similar performative Indigeneity when he lived in Denmark. He had met the Danish textile artist Holcha Krake in France in 1928, where Johnson cultivated a painterly style that Richard Powell (2011, 27) has evocatively described as "textured, energetic brushstrokes in tandem with a quaking, topsy-turvy perspective". The couple married in Kerteminde in 1930. In numerous interviews throughout the decade, Nordic newspapers

would routinely call him *Chinosmaleren*, the Chino painter, because Johnson told journalists that his father was Black and his mother was Native American (Powell 1991, 79-80). Originating from caste classifications in colonial Mexico, *chino* signified the offspring of a Black father and Native American mother, precisely the genealogy that Johnson touted. Art historian Richard Powell (1991, 5), Johnson's most thorough biographer and dedicated champion, has explained that Johnson was notably lighter skinned than the rest of his younger siblings, perhaps because "interracial connections—covert or overt, forced or free—had a far longer and broader history in South Carolina [where Johnson was born] than



**[3]** William H. Johnson, *Fisherman*, ca. 1930-1935, Hand-colored woodcut, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

residents cared to acknowledge”. Powell neither confirms nor denies Johnson’s Indigenous roots, but what makes this heritage so fascinating is that Johnson seemed to discuss it only while he was living in the Nordic countries. By evoking a combined Native American and African heritage, Johnson recalls the trajectory of Edmonia Lewis, a nineteenth-century US sculptor of mixed Ojibwe and Black ancestry, who, like Johnson, advanced her professional career to a large degree in Europe. Whereas Lewis racialized her Neoclassical figures as white in order to distance her authorship from her multi-racialized self (Nelson 2007; Buick 2010), Johnson purposefully cultivated a mixed-race persona as a promotional strategy to lend credence to his use of a primitivist pictorial language. Both attained critical success for doing so.

Long before Johnson arrived in Sápmi, he had already espoused that “primitives can be found all over the world” (quoted in Powell 1991, 78). Much of his artwork in the early 1930s revealed that this primitivism pulsed throughout rural Denmark. He described the fishermen of coastal Katerminde as “wonderful, primitive people [...] who have preserved that which is characteristic in their nature; people in whom there is an element of tradition” (quoted in Powell 1991, 78). In his portraiture, Johnson distorted and exaggerated facial features, reversing modernism’s obsession with the primitive from the Black body onto white Danes [3]. Though scholars contend that Expressionism had lost its relevance in Danish art circles around 1923, their appraisals have not included

[4] Postcards assembled from Sápmi, ca. 1937, William H. Johnson Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.



Johnson (Jelsbak 2019). American art historian Jacqueline Francis has argued that Expressionism's distorted aesthetics "resonated with an audience's internalized ideas about ineffable racial essences" in the interwar period (Francis 2012, 78). In this reading, the "ineffable racial essences" of Johnson's white Danes oozed from the thick, coagulated paints coating the surface of the canvas and the sharp angles of woodcuts.

In January 1935, Johnson and Krake traveled from Copenhagen to Oslo. After Krake had helped arranged an exhibition for Johnson at the Blomqvist Gallery, Johnson revealed that their plans were "to experience the *real* Norway" (Powell 1991, 93). They had planned to stay with Krake's family in Volda, arriving in the summer later that year. Powell's description of Johnson's two-year stay in the Volda region warrants some investigation. He writes, "Johnson's journey into the Scandinavian hinterland offered the artist a chance to celebrate his primitivist affinities for the north via his paintings of regional views and folk types [...] He tackled the primordial forms of western Norway not as an aggressive conqueror, but rather as an attuned spirit" (Powell 1991, 96-101). Powell's reading of Johnson's engagement of the Nordic landscape is indebted to a discourse of primitivism that influenced Anglophone writing on Nordic modern painting in the 1980s and 1990s. As I have argued elsewhere, this art historiographical tradition has reproduced an elevation of the "primitive North" that paradoxically conceals Sámi presence despite its centrality to settler colonial discourse (Pushaw 2019). Although the Volda region that Powell analyzes is not part of Sápmi, one must be aware of the pitfalls of understanding Johnson's Sápmi images through this analytical lens, since recent scholarship on the artist has devoted little attention to his Sápmi landscapes (Stokes-Sims 2011).

When Johnson painted *Midnight Sun, Lofoten* in 1937, he knew he was on Sámi land. A folder in the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. contains a striking group of postcards that proves as much [4]. One postcard, labeled "På Fondalsbræen, Svartisen, Nordland," captures pointy peaks of glaciers, and black ice that has enveloped dark-colored stones. Adjacent to these angular mountains of ice is another photograph of three Sámi men standing in front of a boat at a harbor. This coastal area of Sápmi witnessed a longer legacy of integration between Sámi and Norwegian populations, working side by side as fishermen. Given Johnson's earlier interest in primitive fisherfolk, one might presume Johnson would have created similar images of Sámi fisherfolk in and around Lofoten, but his production in Sápmi was mostly devoid of people, focusing instead on angular landscapes bursting with color.





**[5]** William H. Johnson,  
*Midnight Sun, Lofoten*, 1937, oil  
on burlap, Smithsonian American  
Art Museum, Washington, D.C.  
© 2021. Photo Smithsonian  
American Art Museum/  
Art Resource/Scala, Florence.



In Johnson's 1937 canvas *Midnight Sun, Lofoten* [5], mountains spiral upwards in a rhythmic dance from frigid coastal waters into blazing fiery skies. These geological giants crest like waves that have petrified—each daub of pink, orange, and lilac a striation of the history of the earth—before crashing into the shore. While the topos of the unpopulated landscape often suggests Indigenous erasure, contemporary Sámi writing about these particular landscapes reveals a different narrative. In his defining 1910 *Muitalus sámiiid birra (An Account of the Sámi)*, available in English translation as early as 1919, Johan Turi (2011, 4) specifically writes about “the dangers of the coastal mountains.”

And these days the Sámi must keep their reindeer confined high up in the mountains or beneath summits where there are many perils for the reindeer. And it is perilous for people too, for the slopes and peaks are so high and between them ice sheets and crevasses since the very beginning of the world. Some of those [crevasses] are so deep that no one can find their bottom. [...] When it gets hot, the reindeer head up onto high glaciers where people cannot follow, and because of the mosquitoes and the heat they head even higher up the slopes and the reindeer who are highest kick loose some stones. And when one stone comes loose, many stones begin to roll and many reindeer are killed in this manner as well. And if a person is down below, it is the same danger for him as well”. (Turi 2011, 14)

Turi describes the landscape as a space traversable almost exclusively for other-than-human beings. Understanding such a perilous place, where Johnson “worked like a madman” and “climbed up and down every day to paint that view at night” (Powell 1991, 107), suggests an environmental danger wherein Johnson's act of Arctic painting reconstitutes Matthew Henson's Arctic exploration and “discovery.” Though Henson deployed settler discourse to demonstrate his supremacy over Inuit (Totten 2015, 63-65), Johnson's bravado painting in the color-bursting Arctic materialized a more lateral relationality. When a Norwegian paper ran the headline “A Man of Sioux Heritage with Blonde Wife at the Art Society Exhibition,” it reproduced a large photograph of Johnson standing before *Midnight Sun, Lofoten* (Adresseavisen 1937). Through his public assertion of Sioux ancestry, this African American painter of Sápmi created a critical framework for understanding his oeuvre as the very materials of Black and Indigenous relationality in the colonial Arctic: one as unbound as the radiant colors and expressive lines of his own painterly practice.

## Abstract

This essay juxtaposes the anti-Black imagery of the Sámi printmaker John Savio (1902-1938) with images of Sápmi by the US artist William H. Johnson (1901-1970). Their critical comparison contributes to an approach that Tiffany Lethabo King calls “configuring and enfleshing the spaces and cracks where Black and Indigenous life caress each other.” By framing the production of both artists within a global history of Blackness in the colonial Arctic, I explore their mediations of a primitivist pictorial language as racialized subjects from distinct, yet intertwined positionalities.

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