

The background of the entire page is a rich, textured oil painting. It depicts an elderly man with a weathered face, wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, a dark grey jacket over a brown vest, and light-colored trousers. He is seated in a wooden chair with a reddish-brown leather backrest. The wall behind him is covered in intricate, golden-brown carvings of floral and scrollwork patterns. To the right, a framed picture hangs on the wall, showing a scene with several figures in a landscape. Above the picture, a brass chandelier with a single candle is visible. The overall atmosphere is one of historical depth and artistic detail.

# REVIVAL

MEMORIES, IDENTITIES, UTOPIAS

EDITED BY  
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**Revival. Memories, Identities, Utopias**

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Designed by Jack Hartnell

**Cover Image:**  
Henri De Braekeleer, *The Man in the Chair*, 1876 (detail).  
Oil on canvas, 79 x 63 cm, Koninklijk Museum voor  
Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.

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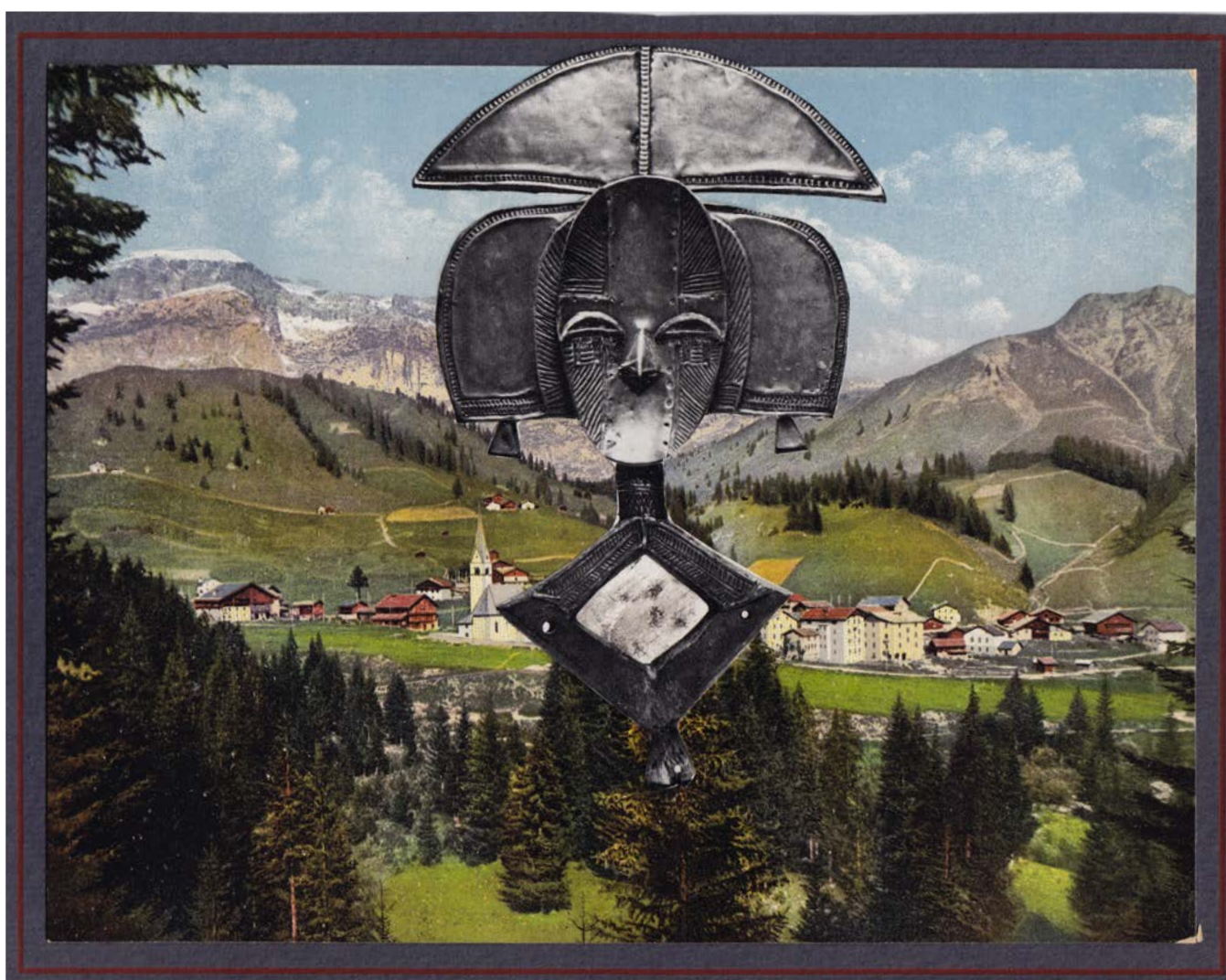
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## CHAPTER 1

# THE GHOST BEGINS BY COMING BACK. REVENANTS AND RETURNS IN MAUD SULTER'S PHOTOMONTAGES

DEBORAH CHERRY



Revival has many meanings, possibilities and strategies. It can encompass the return to a style, the re-appearance of a specific form or medium, the survival of an object, the political investment of a form of production such as craft, passionately advocated to initiate social change in Britain by William Morris, and by Mahatma Gandhi in the long campaigns for the independence of India. This chapter departs from definitions of revival as living again or bringing to life to consider revenants, figures who return from the past. My thinking draws on Jacques Derrida's proposals that revenants are recalled to the present 'in the name of *justice*', and whose return has an ethical purpose.<sup>1</sup> I focus on Maud Sulter

1.1  
Maud Sulter, *Noir et Blanc: Deux* [Black and White: Two], from *Syrca*, 1993. Colour photographic print, 101.6 x 152.4 cm, The Estate of Maud Sulter.

(1960–2008), an award-winning artist of Scottish and Ghanaian heritage best known for photographs which, with their sensual splendour and inventive image-construction, dramatically reinvented the visual imagery of Black women.

Maud Sulter's *Syrkas* (1993) (figs 1.1–1.5, 1.7) is a major series of images that addresses the presence of people of African descent in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s and highlights the missing histories of Black people during the Holocaust. It is a complex work that reflects on violence and genocide, on the disappeared and the unseen, on perceptions of minorities, on the longevity of the west African diaspora in northern Europe, and the intensity and complexity of cross-cultural contact between the global south and the global north. Its production is contemporaneous with Jacques Derrida's *Spectres de Marx: L'Etat de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* of 1993, lectures translated into English the following year. Both the artist and the philosopher contributed to the discussions of history, memory and trauma that dominated critical debates in the 1990s. This essay explores their shared interests in spectral figures who return from the past to haunt the present and challenge the future. For Derrida, the ghost is predicated on return and repetition, on coming back, on coming again to haunt places and people. It is he explains: 'A question of repetition: a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*'.<sup>2</sup> He emphasizes the necessity of a 'politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations' that impels the present to learn to 'live with' ghosts, and to live with them justly. Similar concerns were voiced by the artist who testified of *Syrkas*, the artwork at the centre of this essay: 'Echoes of genocide come down to us in the present, witnessing as we are another wave of ethnic cleansing flood across Europe'.<sup>3</sup> She explained: 'In a way it's a testimony to the black experience within the Holocaust and it's also hopefully functioning in the present as a reminder of individual responsibility'.<sup>4</sup>

The revenant poses a problem for representation: how can the disappeared re-cross the threshold of visibility and in what forms can spectral figures become perceptible? Maud Sulter spoke often of her enduring interest in disappearance and the disappeared:

This whole notion of the disappeared, I think, is something that runs through my work. I'm very interested in absence and presence in the way that particularly black women's experience and black women's contribution to culture is so often erased and marginalised. So that it's important for me as an individual, and obviously as a black woman artist, to put black women back in the centre of the frame — both literally within the photographic image, but also within the cultural institutions where our work operates.<sup>5</sup>

In *Zabat* (1989, Victoria and Albert Museum London), the series that brought her international renown, Sulter re-stages the muses taking as her models contemporary Black women writers, artists, musicians and strategists. These sumptuous, densely layered and strikingly beautiful images are presented in ornate gold frames, in a presentational format





1.2  
Maud Sulter, *Duval et Dumas: Duval*, from *Sycas*, 1993. Colour photographic print, 101.6 x 152.4 cm, The Estate of Maud Sulter.

1.3  
Maud Sulter, *Hélas l'héroïne: Quelques instants plus tard, Monique cherchait sa brosse à cheveux* [Alas the heroine: A little later Monique looked for her hairbrush], from *Sycas*, 1993. Colour photographic print, 152.4 x 101.6 cm, The Estate of Maud Sulter.

designed for museum display. *Hysteria* (1991) re-imagines the life and artistic circles of Edmonia Lewis. This installation of photographs, sculptures, sound, a film-script and a compact disk 'tells the tale of a nineteenth-century Blackwoman artist who sails from the Americas to Europe to seek fame and fortune as a sculptor. Having achieved a successful career she disappears ...'.<sup>6</sup> In *Zabat*, *Hysteria* and throughout her long-standing address to Jeanne Duval,<sup>7</sup> Sulter 'put black women back in the centre of the frame', while emphasizing the fragmentary and scattered remnants of Blackwomen's history. *Syrkas* is concerned with haunting, with conjuring three figures, none of whom are visually represented. They return from the past as invisible yet palpable revenants to demand an ethical responsibility by the present for the future.

*Syrkas* thus advances Sulter's investigations into the problematic of representation of the Black subject. The series deconstructs and reassembles the overlapping and contradictory images, histories, discourses and conditions in which Black subjects are constituted, and multiple and diverse uses of those representations. Maria Lind rightly pinpoints its 'forensic archaeology'.<sup>8</sup> Sixteen large-scale photographic prints were exhibited with Sulter's prose poem 'Blood Money'. The text tells the story of Monique, 'a woman of African and European descent' who was born in Cameroon, migrated to Europe, and became a circus performer in the 1930s and 1940s. Monique meets her partner Kwesi, and they have a daughter Helga. (see Appendix, 'Blood Money'). Sulter's protagonists are imagined as among the 'Other Germans' and African diaspora peoples persecuted and murdered during the Holocaust.<sup>9</sup> *Syrkas* addresses ethical questions prompted by Holocaust representation and the long-standing debates prompted by Theodor Adorno's concern that 'After Auschwitz it is barbaric to continue writing poetry',<sup>10</sup> by creating a scrap-book—its pages are the photomontages—that purportedly belonged to a Black child growing up in the Third Reich. *Syrkas* thus confronts the Holocaust, not through testimony, historical evidence, or direct representation, but through what Ernst van Alphen has identified as 'Holocaust effects', created by artistic practices that summon the Holocaust in their wider frames of reference. Writing of Christian Boltanski's *Inventories*, archival installations of clothing or objects, van Alphen explains: 'they simply show someone's belongings, not the person herself. And strangely enough, they seem to succeed in referring to the person to whom they allegedly belonged'.<sup>11</sup> Whereas *Zabat* and *Hysteria* decisively affirm the presence of Black women, in *Syrkas* Monique and her family elude visual representation, and what is presented is the trace of their presence, the scrap-book that points simultaneously to their existence and disappearance.

With *Syrkas* Sulter returns to photomontage, a visual form with avant-garde and modernist precedents and acknowledged political purpose, for a work through which she offers a powerful reflection on violence, persecution and genocide alongside an incisive dismantling of European modernity. The artist created small-scale photomontages which she stated comprise the pages of an album of diverse visual materials that might have been compiled by a young Black girl growing up in Germany in the 1930s. The artist explains:



I felt that the piece should resemble something more like a diary. I'd been to see Anne Frank's house and liked the diary idea, but I wanted something more direct, more visual, and, ultimately, more personal. Then I remembered sticking pictures into a scrap-book as a child, and I saw that this was the perfect way of juxtaposing images to present the historical problems surrounding the presence of black people in Germany.<sup>12</sup>

Sulter came across an album into which had been mounted large-format vintage postcards of Alpine scenery with views of lakes, forests, mountains, villages, chalets. She indicates:

The work uses a series of landscape postcards from sort of unspecified European Alpine-type scenes, montaged onto which are African masks, African objects. Essentially what it does is create a child's scrap-book of experience which echoes back to the present and forward to the past in many ways.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the postcards provided the ground for montage, notably in the set *Noir et Blanc* (fig. 1.1). On other occasions the postcards were removed, leaving the blue-grey card as the surface. Thus an album, assembled by someone from the past, perhaps to commemorate a journey or sojourn, is transformed by the artist into a series of photomontages which are, in turn, enlarged to exhibition-size prints.<sup>14</sup> *Syrkas* was commissioned by the curator Martin Barlow and first shown at the Wrexham Library Arts Centre; in the catalogue the series is divided into five sets. The whole series, as well as individual works, have been widely exhibited in Britain and Europe, and *Syrkas* was selected by the British Council to represent Britain at *Africus*, the Johannesburg biennale of 1995. Most reviewers commented favourably on the 'unpretentious form of an intimate, diary-like scrap-book'.<sup>15</sup>

*Syrkas* extracts and sutures images from European art and photography, modern print cultures, and publications on African art. Images of African masks and art objects, with a preference for those used for initiation, for fertility, and in funerary and ancestor rites, are laid onto and beside a range of European images selected in full or in part. These include vintage postcards of Alpine landscapes, paintings dating from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, photographic portraits, slips of twentieth-century travel imagery, excerpted hands, devices and decorative motifs (all snipped out of textbooks, catalogues, magazines). Four images of European art were excerpted from a catalogue of works for sale at the Heim Gallery in London (figs 1.3–1.5).<sup>16</sup> The catalogue's admission that the exhibition is 'an attempt to understand the casualness and fragility of artistic survival ... a step towards valuing the seemingly unimportant, the minor, everything except the conventional masterpiece'<sup>17</sup> has much in common with Sulter's preoccupation with historical precarity.

The size of the photomontages was determined by the vintage album and the excerpted print images. The artist's selection highlights the eclectic range of African masks and



1.4  
Maud Sulter,  
*Malheureusement: Malheureusement, parce que tu parlais d'anges* [Unfortunately: Unfortunately, because you spoke of angels], from *Syrças*, 1993. Colour photographic print, 101.6 x 152.4 cm, The Estate of Maud Sulter.



1.5  
Maud Sulter,  
*Malheureusement: Malheureusement, comme d'habitude je comparais la couleur de mon rouge à lèvres et celle de mon foulard...* [Unfortunately: Unfortunately, as usual I compared the colour of my lipstick to that of my scarf...], from *Syrças*, 1993. Colour photographic print, 101.6 x 152.4 cm, The Estate of Maud Sulter.



sculptures assembled in the major museum collections of Britain, continental Europe, west and central Africa.<sup>18</sup> The disjointedness of the assemblies draws attention to the dislocation of these artworks, forcibly removed by war, stealth and theft. Sulter's photomontages take up the common photographic idiom in which African art appears in scholarly and popular studies: each object is photographed close up, on a plain ground, extracted from its contexts to comprise a singular image. Throughout the African art images are roughly excised, sometimes removing internal spaces, sometimes not, occasionally trimming the image to fit its new purpose. Printed in greyscale, the images are readily identifiable as removed from publications, carrying in many cases the slight sheen of the print paper.<sup>19</sup>

In the first set, *Noir et Blanc* (fig. 1.1) African masks float over the landscapes, dominating, at times obscuring the Alpine scenes beneath.<sup>20</sup> There is a profound sense of disjunction, of colliding scales as well as colliding cultures. Sulter emphasizes the acute solitariness of the African artwork in Europe. The masks hover over, mask and conceal the vistas of the transnational mountain range at the heart of Europe. This sequence sets the scene in twentieth-century Europe. The vintage landscape postcards recall the significance of forests and rural scenery in Nazi ideologies of Volk, hygiene and racial purity and the resurgence of interest in Albrecht Altdorfer's landscapes during the Third Reich.<sup>21</sup> The re-purposing of the European vistas also announces a major theme of *Syrca* — Africa's cultural significance to European culture, alongside alternative histories and counter-narratives discernable in Helga's passionate interest in the visual cultures of her heritage.

The second set, *Duval et Dumas* (fig. 1.2), is a multi-layered diptych assembling the multiple African and European histories of two historical figures, Jeanne Duval and Alexander Dumas. Sparkling tourist views, taken from the vintage postcards, become the ground for the montage which in both cases includes photographs by Gaspard Félix Tournachon, invariably known by his adopted name of 'Nadar'. In *Dumas*, Nadar's photograph of the novelist is overlaid with an excised print image of the head and trunk of an African elephant. For *Duval*, Sulter selected another photograph by Nadar, now titled 'unknown woman' which she both tentatively identified and questioned as an image of Jeanne Duval:

Well, I don't agree that it is *the* photograph of Jeanne Duval. The problem of identifying a photograph of Jeanne Duval ... Well, how is it the *Unknown Woman*? Have you checked the archives? It is recorded as the *Unknown Woman* in one particular book, and then being recorded as the *Unknown Woman* repeatedly, it has become history itself. It is like Edmonia Lewis disappearing. The texts repeat themselves that Edmonia Lewis has disappeared'.<sup>22</sup>

The image of Duval and the postcard are overlaid with a colour photograph taken at a performance by Ishan men in Ibadan of a 'traditional acrobatic dance *Ikhien-ani-mhin*', where the dancers are accompanied by a figure wearing an Ibibio mask from the region of Ikot Ekpene in Nigeria.<sup>23</sup> This shows a mask worn by a dancer in active contempo-

rary use, by contrast to more frequent textbook images of isolated masks. The assemblies of this diptych emphasize the dual heritage of two active participants in the art world of nineteenth-century France, their African connections, and the long-standing reciprocities between Africa and Europe.

The third and fifth sets shift the ground to the history of European art, forging connections between the global north and global south. Across set three, *Hélas l'héroïne*, African masks replace the heads of the figures in European paintings and photographs. Sulter selected Nadar's photograph of Georges Sand for *Mme Laura est chez elle*, concealing the sitter's head with an Ogbodo mask of the Igala.<sup>24</sup> In *Quelques instants plus tard, Monique cherchait sa brosse à cheveux*, a white-faced mask of the Punu region of Africa is superimposed onto a reproduction from the Heim Gallery catalogue of Angelica Kauffmann's 1789 *Portrait of Countess Catherine Skawronska* (fig. 1.3).<sup>25</sup> *Vous parliez de moi?* presents Sir Joshua Reynolds' 1756 portrait of Robert Shafto with the figure now holding a Fanti doll, while his head is overlaid with an image of one of several terracotta heads 'excavated by Dr Oliver Davis at Ahinsan, southern Ashanti ... [that] date from the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and appear to be ancestral in their artistic conventions'.<sup>26</sup> In this series, African masks are returned to the human head, though they are returned not to use.

*Malheureusement*, set five, contains the most complex assemblies, combining European figure paintings, snippets of photographs, complete and partially excerpted images of African art with varied levels of intervention and layering. *Malheureusement, pendant que nous discussions...* also includes terracotta heads, this time superimposed over those of the figures in *Concert instrumental en plein air*, an Italian concert group, c. 1500, depicting three women and a man making music together in the open air.<sup>27</sup> *Malheureusement parce que tu parlais d'anges* takes an eighteenth-century French painting, Jean-Baptiste-Marie Pierre's *Jupiter et Io*, its subject taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which tells of Jupiter's disguise as a cloud for his seduction of Io (fig. 1.4).<sup>28</sup> To this is added a slice of a black and white photograph, an image of an elephant's foot and a dung pile, and a wooden sculpture of a standing full-length wooden reliquary figure made by the Mangbetu peoples of central Africa.<sup>29</sup> Charles-Joseph Natoire's 1751 *An Allegory of the Fine Arts* forms the ground for *Malheureusement comme d'habitude je comparais la couleur de mon rouge à lèvres et celle de mon foulard...* (fig. 1.5). This depiction of the European arts of painting, sculpture and architecture is overlaid with multiple elements including a small study for Eduoard Manet's *Olympia*, and excised images of a Dan mask from west Africa, seen whole in its exterior view, its interior view divided in half, spanning the photomontage.<sup>30</sup> These are dizzyingly disruptive compilations, in which roughly excised scraps of images from Africa and Europe—archival photography, art reproductions, print images, each with its own spirals of reference—are scattered across the surface, abutting and colliding with one another in cascading themes of desire, remembrance, and inheritance, alongside interrogations of the purpose of the arts and the making of art, traditions and modernities.

Hands feature prominently in Sulter's photomontages, throughout *Hélas l'héroïne*, from *Malheureusement comme d'habitude...* (fig. 1.5) to *J'étais en train de choisir une cravate pour*

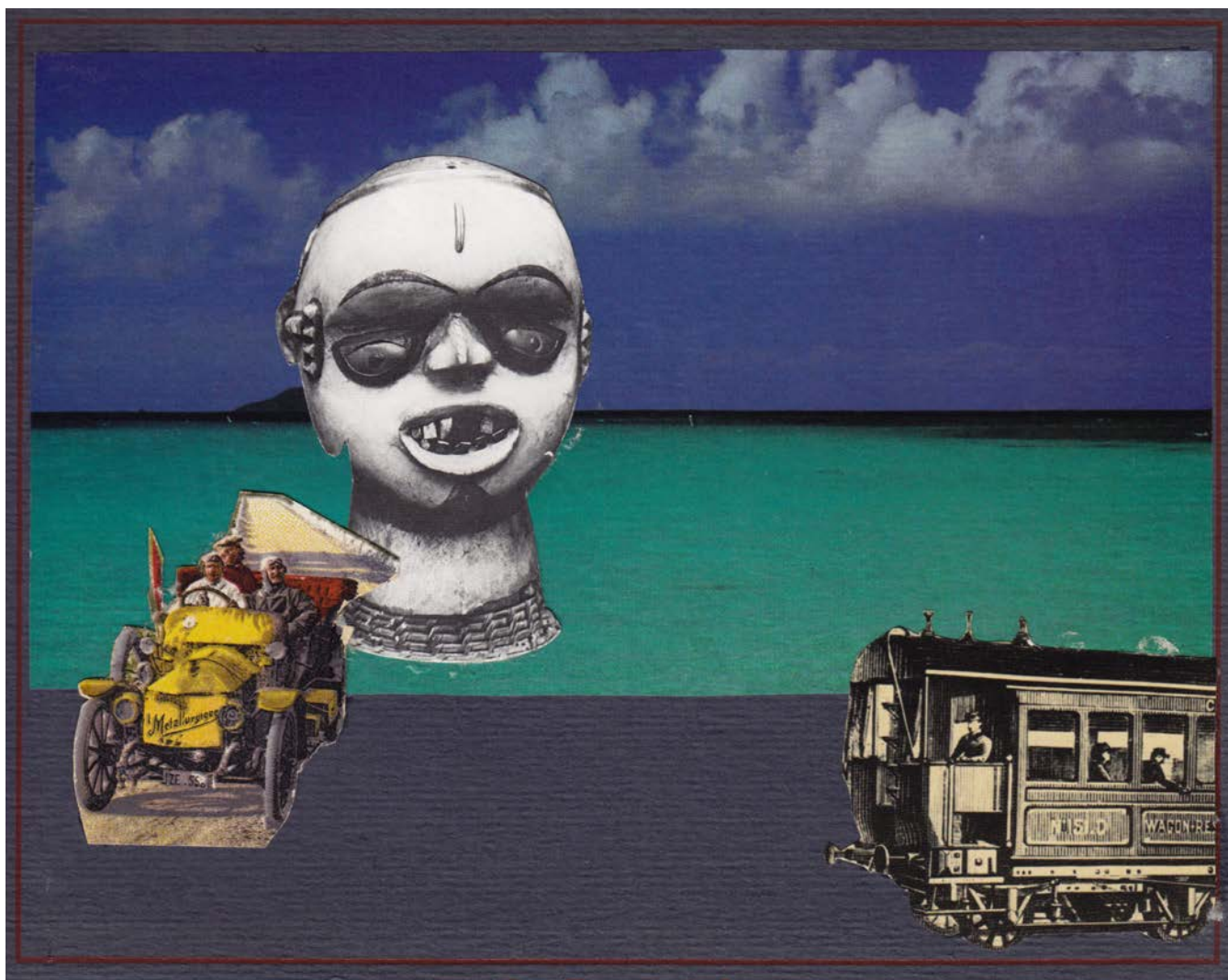




1.6.  
Maud Sulter, *Untitled*,  
1993. Photomontage on  
paper, 18.5 x 13.2 cm.  
Reproduced on the back  
cover of *Syracas: Maud  
Sulter*, 1994, The Estate  
of Maud Sulter.

*sortir avec ma femme* from the *Voyager* set, where a long black arm and hand reach out to grasp a white marble (neo-)classical bust. A hand and arm and arrows cut across and into the photomontage reproduced on the back cover of the catalogue, its inserted images juxtaposing the courtly beauties of European art with a roughly-drawn head laid onto a photograph by August Sander, which was the prompt for the whole series (fig. 1.6). Hands are indicative: they signal direction, highlight connection. They mimic the hands of popular modern graphics, often accompanied by a text 'Enquire within', acting perhaps as a prompt to an investigative gaze by the viewer, an alertness to the 'clues' and traces presented in the works. Hands in *Syracas*, as in the series *Jeanne: A Melodrama* (1994, private collection), draw attention to the corporeality of photomontage, pointing to the hand of the artist who cuts, excises, assembles, glues in place.

The titles for individual works are in French, apparently taken from a set of Lingua-phone recordings for learning French and perhaps referring to one of the imperial lan-



guages of Cameroon. Some, such as 'Mme Laura est chez elle', are short sentences in the present tense of the kind readily found at a preliminary level of language teaching, also marked by the numbers 1 to 5. Others are more intricate constructions: *J'étais en train de choisir une cravate pour sortir avec ma femme*. Or *Malheureusement, comme d'habitude je comparais la couleur de mon rouge à lèvres et celle de mon foulard...* The titles become longer, more arbitrary, estranging images equally estranged by their enlargement. Some titles were undoubtedly written by the artist herself, as for instance, *Je me rappelle que tu brossais ta perruque un peu avant le coup de téléphone de M. Fasciste* (fig. 1.7). Neither historical art nor vintage postcards fill the ground of the grey-blue card of the found album. Beneath a cloudy sky are two bands of colour, perhaps sea and shore, on which are three print images: a modern motor car, a railway restaurant car, and a 'Skin-covered headpiece, with metal teeth, collected by Governor Beecroft before 1854 at Old Calabar'.<sup>31</sup> In this terrifying image the African art object and the title repurpose the car and train. The set's title *Voyager* points less to carefree European travel between the wars, summoned in the vintage postcards, than to the enforced movement of the Holocaust. *Je lui parlais du film que nous allons voir lorsque le téléphone sonne* includes both a face indicative of the black soldiers who liberated the death camps, and a cut-out of a modern laced shoe, by this date a recognisable and well circulated sign in Holocaust representation. *Je lui parlais...* precedes *Je me rappelle...* and together they hint at a narrative of trauma and potential survival, recounting perhaps a shared experience in which one figure remembers chatting about a film when the telephone rang, while the other, perhaps an orthodox Jewish woman, was brushing her wig. Across the series, the titles move from the impersonal numerical sequence of *Noir et Blanc*,

1.7.  
Maud Sulter, *Je me rappelle que tu brossais ta perruque un peu avant le coup de téléphone de M. Fasciste* [I remember that you brushed your wig a little before the phone call from Mr. Fascist], from Syrcas, 1993, Colour photographic print, 101.6 x 152.4 cm, The Estate of Maud Sulter.



to the intimacies of exchange suggested in 'nous' and 'tu', reversing the brutal deprivation of individual humanity in the Holocaust.

*Syrkas* slips through languages, weaving connections between *Syrkas* and *Zircus*, the Welsh and German words for circus. As a writer Sulter was intrigued by language and words, and her poetry shows a keen interest in dialect, Scottish vernacular and local usage.<sup>32</sup> The exhibition publication for *Syrkas* is bilingual in Welsh and English. The set titles are opaquely allusive: *Noir et Blanc* also points to the almost universal monochrome imagery of African art in print. *Duval et Dumas* identifies two key figures. *Hélas l'héroïne* (Alas the heroine) at once conjures the protagonist and marks her disappearance: one of the titles, *Quelques instants plus tard, Monique cherchait sa brosse à cheveux*, uniquely names her. *Voyager* hints at spatial and temporal disjunction. *Malheureusement* (unfortunately, unhappily) underlines the series' engagement with trauma, grief, and loss.

Lubaina Himid affirms that: 'The inspiration for SYRCAS has haunted Maud Sulter for many years. Politically the power of fascism in the 20th century, spiritually the remembrance of the holocaust of slavery for the African diaspora, and personally the Holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s...'.<sup>33</sup> One starting point was Sulter's discovery of people of African descent in photographs by Sander in his *Zircus* or circus series included in *The City*, the penultimate volume in his extensive visual mapping of *People of the Twentieth Century (Menschen des 20. Jahrhundert)*.<sup>34</sup> From Sander too, came the proposal of the circus, to highlight lives lived, as Maria Lind puts it, 'in the Margin of Margins'.<sup>35</sup> One photograph, taken at Barum's circus American Caravan Menagerie (*Amerikanische Karawanen-Menagerie*), between 1926 and 1932, was certainly known to Sulter, who used it in her photomontage for the back cover of the *Syrkas* catalogue (fig. 1.6). Outside the circus tent, a Black man and a white woman are seated beside a table laid with a cloth.<sup>36</sup> Sulter had written often of photography's tainted histories, its uses in 'categorising "the other"'.<sup>37</sup> Works by Sander and by Hannah Höch registered the presence of and conflicts over Black people in Germany.<sup>38</sup> Insistent hands, arrows and decorative motifs embellish and slice through Sander's photograph to problematize documentary as potentially insufficient, unreadable, undecidable. Does this photograph capture a shared inter-cultural moment? Does it register racial difference, and/or anxieties over inter-racial contact post 1918 when, with the occupation of the Rhineland, the numbers of Black people in Germany increased and colonial campaigns accompanied national concerns over the loss of empire?

The artist was certainly familiar with Maud Lavin's absorbing study of Höch, published in 1993 and she owned several books on this artist.<sup>39</sup> Some of the hybrid figures of *Syrkas* come close to those in Höch's *In an Ethnographic Museum* (c. 1924-34) and, like Höch, Sulter returned to a particular image several times. Recent scholarship has debated Höch's approach to the rich collections of African art in Europe.<sup>40</sup> Sulter insists on western modernity's indebtedness to African art, culture and peoples. Her photomontages are contact zones for staging proximities and exchange. *Syrkas* offers a radical deconstruction of western modernist perspectives on African art: its decontextualization and aestheticization in museums, modernist displays and print media; modernist juxtapositions of white bodies

and African masks; the formative and foundational presence of African art and culture in the making of western modernism. By the early 1990s there was a substantial literature on the African art in collections of modernist artists such as Maurice Vlaminck, André Derain, and Pablo Picasso. At least one of the objects included in *Syracas*, a reliquary figure in the British Museum (fig. 1.1), was copied in cardboard by Juan Gris.<sup>41</sup>

For Sulter, 'the actual practices of cutting and pasting pieces together, it has west African roots to it'. She adopted the cut and paste method of photomontage at a 'time of contemplation, rest, being in one place that made the "working around the kitchen table" an interesting thing to do'.<sup>42</sup> Her 'kitchen table' reference points to Black women's activism and publishing, to Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, started in 1980 by writer Barbara Smith,<sup>43</sup> as well as to Carrie Mae Weems' renowned *Kitchen Table* series of photographs (1990).

Some of Sulter's earliest art works, shown in exhibitions of Black art in the 1980s, were photomontages and collages. *Poetry In Motion* (1985/6, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery), a series of three paper collages, was included in the landmark exhibition, *The Thin Black Line* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1986. *State of Emergency*, another triptych, was selected for *Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers*, also curated by Lubaina Himid (fig. 1.8).<sup>44</sup> In the catalogue Sulter wrote: '*State of Emergency* identifies child abuse, police/institutional racism, sexism, violence, and the exploitation of images of women. The final panel identifies the solution. Pan-africanism'.<sup>45</sup> The central panel re-situates a poster for a missing black child, Barry Lewis, who disappeared in September 1986. Picking up on the police description of Barry Lewis as 'half-caste' Sulter extends the range of racist terms countering them with the response 'We name ourself Black'. Dealing with immediate political and social concerns, these early works are characterized by a raw urgency, a fierce riposte to racism. *Syracas* offers awkward tensions, unpredictable collisions, incommensurate confrontations. The images become enigmatic puzzles as Sulter gathered and reused objects, images, fragments and c(l)ues which had migrated and mutated across times and spaces, alert to what Jane Beckett has called, the 'precariousness of historical survival, as well as the pluralities and insecurities entailed in the processes of historical interpretation'.<sup>46</sup> The artist often quoted Alice Walker's statement: 'As a black person and a woman I don't read history for facts, I read it for clues'.<sup>47</sup> Concluding an outstanding analysis of the multiple referentialities of *Syracas*, Sujanne Choi-Park sums up the elusiveness of Sulter's project: 'The scattered clues embark on the mysterious search for Monique in the tracks of history'.<sup>48</sup>

In photomontage images are cut out of books or journals, ripped from one frame and forcibly reset into another. The scissors and knife cut and separate, excise and remove; images cannot be returned; books and magazines are forever despoiled. Maud Lavin has drawn attention to 'the formal violence of cutting and superimposing images implicit in all photomontage'.<sup>49</sup> If there is a level of violence in extraction, there is equally in the assembly where displaced fragments, disjointed images and incomplete slivers abut each other. This is most conspicuous in the *Malheuresement* series; the very proximity of the



figural elements in *Malheureusement, parce que tu parlais d'anges* (fig. 1.4) conjures a ruthless and brutal force that has invaded, pillaged, stolen, murdered, traduced. Throughout, the constituent images jostle for position and attention, overlay and underlay, submerge and superimpose one another in a manner akin to Derrida's logic of the supplement. Alluding to the double meaning in French of *supplément* as addition and replacement, in a passage full of references to breaking and entering, stealth and robbery Derrida proposes supplementarity to be disruptive and dangerous: 'Its sliding [or slipperiness, slithering] slips it out of the simple alternative of presence and absence. That is the danger'.<sup>50</sup> This dangerous supplement, he contends, 'breaks into the very thing that it would have liked to do without it, and which allows itself to be simultaneously cut into, violated, filled and replaced, completed by the very trace through which the present augments itself in the act of disappearing into it'.<sup>51</sup> In Sulter's hands the artistic practice of photomontage signals a destructive ferocity that is at the heart of *Syrkas*, a violence that casts a long shadow from past to present into the future. The artist testified to *Syrkas*' contemporary relevance: 'In the light of the current and increasing racial attacks and the horror of 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia and Rwanda, I felt compelled to look back to Germany's hidden history—the 'ethnic cleansing' of the Holocaust'.<sup>52</sup> Monique returns as a revenant to warn of contemporary and continuing persecution.

For Sulter as for Derrida, the revenant disjoints time, disassembles temporal continuity, retraces inheritance and indebtedness. *Syrkas* reconfigures the cultural genealogies of western modernity, investigating the state of the debt by dissecting the indebtedness of western modernity to the creativity of African peoples and objects.

Sulter's art and writings shared an awareness that Europe in the early 1990s was at a key moment of change. Analysts of the discourses of the 'new Europe' have written of the forces of exclusion that shaped legislation and policies on migration and asylum while attempting to deal with ethnic, religious and national differences in Europe. By turn of the millennium exclusionary strategies had strengthened into what has become known as 'fortress Europe', a state of affairs very much in play in the new century. Writing in the early 1990s, Derrida conceptualizes the revenant at the outset of *Spectres* as those who 'begin by coming back'. By the end of his text, he has reconsidered, proposing 'revenants who would no longer be *revenants* but as other *arrivants* to whom a hospitable memory or promise must offer welcome—... out of a concern for *justice*'.<sup>53</sup> In *Syrkas*, Monique, Kwesi and Helga are nowhere to be seen, yet they are palpably present, close by. As 'Blood Money' reminds us, 'Monique may be near you right now'. These revenants are summoned to remind the present of its ethical responsibilities for the past and the future. In Sulter's hauntology, the revenant is not a revival, in the sense of reanimation or revivification; nor is spectral invocation attended by melancholic nostalgia, ghostly frisson, or utopian longing. *Syrkas* conjures ghosts who demand attention. As Derrida puts it: '*one must reckon with them. One cannot not have to, one must not not be able to reckon with them*'.<sup>54</sup> These artistic and philosophical reflections shape a broader call for European and global societies to co-exist hospitably, to welcome arrivants, and to 'live with' difference.

## BLOOD MONEY

Maud Sulter, from *Syrcaas*, exhibition catalogue, Wrexham Library Arts Centre, 1994.

Monique ran away to join the circus in 1926. She was twelve years old. In Cameroon where she was born there lived a sailor by the name of Stephan-ja. He captained a boat by the name of Cristale on which Monique stowed away and sailed to France. On arrival she joined the circus of Monsieur Perot.

Monique walked the tightrope and swung high on the trapeze.

In Hamburg she met a man that she loved. Kwesi. He was an African too, but German. They had a daughter called Helga, who dreamt one day of being a healer of wounds. She was good with things metal, like scalpels and scissors and made pretty pictures to hang on the walls of their pretty home.

Close your eyes and imagine a German.

When the war came Kwesi was made to wear a red star for being a Communist and an inverted black triangle—the signifier of a race-biology categorisation. Monique could have escaped to France and back to Cameroon but she would have had to leave her husband and child. Would you? For the child of the circus there would be no reparation for a sterilized womb, family torn apart. Incarcerated, Enforced labour. Concentration camp internment leading for Kwesi to death with the gypsies and jews and gays and the others. Close your eyes and imagine a German.

The negro soldiers from the U.S. who cleaned up the camps (and have since become African-Americans) don't often speak of what they saw. They tend to talk of the passion of Paris. I've heard them. The cafes, the bars, the art and the parties. But then, would you? Dachau for instance was no picnic. Helga lost her mother a year after the liberation. So now as an orphan she had to make herself over. With no help from the state who used the research from the thirties and forties to problematize the race mixed (*sic*) strangers (*sic*) in their midst. Close your eyes and imagine a German.

Of course if you do not recognise the constant black presence in Germany since the 15th century then you owe them no debt. Even when their family members have been murdered and sterilised and raped and worked to death. A 20th century Holocaust, one of many in history. Think of the witchcraze, the programs, the slave trade. And what of the fate of the war babies? (Remember the Vietnamese boxer on T.V. who only wanted to meet his father. Had dreams of America. There are thousands of them, Black Vietnamese (they have them in Ireland too).) There's no way I can make this poem rhyme. Would you?

Monique may be near you right now. She haunts me. Now, close your eyes and imagine a German. Close your eyes and imagine, a Belgian, a Muslim, a Protestant, a Croat, a Celt, a Bosnian, a Jew, a Slave, a Pole, a Canadian, a Catholic, don't stop, the list is as endless as the human race ...



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1. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning & the New International*, (trans.) Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. xix, Derrida's italics. Sulter's art differs from works considered in T.J. Demos, *Return to the Post-Colony: Spectres of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013) which offers insightful readings of colonial hauntings in contemporary art.
2. Derrida, *Specters*, p. 11, Derrida's italics. Gayatri C. Spivak's 'Ghostwriting', *Diacritics* 25:2 (1995): p. 70, warns against indiscriminate conjuring of ghosts, emphasising 'the ethical relation with history as such, ancestors real and imagined'.
3. Sulter quoted in Press release, Wrexham Library Arts Centre, 1994.
4. Artist's statement, text adapted from spoken dialogue, accessed 27 July, 2009, no longer online. Captured February, 2007: <https://web.archive.org/web/20070630030950/http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/photography/story.php?storyid=ph052&row=7>.
5. Artist's statement, text adapted from spoken dialogue, [www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/photography](http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/photography), accessed 27 July, 2009, no longer online. Captured February, 2007: <https://web.archive.org/web/20070630030950/http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/photography/story.php?storyid=ph052&row=7>.
6. *Maud Sulter: Photoworks* (London: Royal Festival Hall, 1992), n.p.
7. Maud Sulter, *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama* (Edinburgh: Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 2003). Deborah Cherry, 'Image-Making with Jeanne Duval in Mind: Photoworks by Maud Sulter, 1989–2002', in Marsha Meskimon and Dorothy C. Rowe (eds), *Women, the Arts and Globalization: Eccentric Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 145–68.
8. Maria Lind, 'In The Margin of Margins: *Syracas* By Maud Sulter', *Portfolio* 19 (1994): pp. 42–3.
9. Tina Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004). Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of*

*European Blacks, Africans and African Americans During the Nazi Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

10. Quoted in Ernst van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 17. See also, Berel Lang, *Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
11. Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, p. 115.
12. Maud Sulter quoted in Jane Richards, 'Photography: A Cut Above The Rest: For All Its Colour, Maud Sulter's Scrapbook-Style 'Syracas' Recalls Dark Days of Persecution', *Independent*, 23 August, 1994.
13. Artist's statement, text adapted from spoken dialogue, accessed 27 July, 2009, no longer online, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/photography/story.php?storyid=ph052&row=6>.
14. The photographs were available in two sizes: 762 x 1016 mm (30 x 40 in) or 1016 x 1524 mm (40 x 60 in), framed in raw oak.
15. Maria Lind, 'In the Margin', pp. 42–3.
16. This is noted by Sujanne Choi-Park, who may have been so informed by the artist, Choi-Park, 'Maud Sulter's *Syracas*: The Space of Archives' (MA diss., University of Sussex, 1999), pp. 35–7, 42–4. Michael Bellamy (ed.), *Towards a New Taste: Summer Exhibition of Old Master Paintings* (London: Heim Gallery/Trefoil Publications, 1989).
17. Richard Herner, 'Towards a New Taste', in Bellamy, *Towards a New Taste*, n.p.
18. Sulter's concern with reproduction contrasts to artists such as Fred Wilson who have restaged ethnographic collections. See Jennifer A. González, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).
19. Sulter mostly excised images from Frank Willett, *African Art: An Introduction*, rev. edn (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993).
20. *Noir et Blanc: Un* deploys a wooden Afo 'ngorongoro' seated female figure suckling a child, made by the Yoruba people, Nigeria, now in the Horniman Museum, London, 31.42, with thanks to the Horniman Museum; Willett, *African Art*, plate 131, p. 142. *Deux* takes a Kota reliquary figure covered in decorative metal work, Willett plate 183, p. 183. *Trois* excises a Soweï mask made for the Sande Society in Sierra Leone, donated in 1952 by Ethel and Jane Less to the Manchester Museum, 0.8284, with thanks Dr Campbell Price of the Manchester Museum; Willett, *African Art*, plate 54, p. 81. *Quatre* features an Ikpelikpa mask of the Igala, National Museum Lagos; Willett, *African Art*, plate 79, p.97. *Cinq* employs a Suku mask, now in the Rietberg Museum Zürich, RAF 506, collection Eduard von der Heydt, Willett, *African Art*, plate 146.

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21. Choi-Park, 'Maud Sulter's *Syrca's*', pp. 30–1. Jenifer Chao, *Sensible Interventions: Cultural Resistance Post-9/11* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam), 2013 discusses the global circulation of scenes of Swiss landscapes and chalets.
22. Maud Sulter in conversation with Sujanne Choi-Park, in 'Maud Sulter's *Syrca's*', p. 53.
23. Willett, *African Art*, plate 191, p. 203, photograph by Willett.
24. Willett, *African Art*, plate 78, p. 97, National Museum, Lagos.
25. Willett, *African Art*, plate 182, p. 189, Rietberg Museum, Zürich, RAF 901, collection Eduard von der Heydt, with thanks to Dr Michaela Oberhofer, Curator, African and Oceanic Art, Museum Rietberg. See also Valentine Plisnier, *Le Primitivisme dans la photographie: l'impact des arts extra-européens sur la modernité photographique de 1918 à nos jours* (Paris: Trocadéro, 2012), pp. 44–5. Kauffmann portrait, now Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg; Heim, *Towards A New Taste*, no. 11, pp. 32–3.
26. Willett, *African Art*, plate 103, p. 102, Linden Museum, Stuttgart; plate 102, p. 113, University of Ghana. Bellamy, *Towards A New Taste*, no. 31, pp. 72–73.
27. Willett, *African Art*, plate 102, p. 113. The composite plate shows six heads; four are used here, the top three and one bottom left. The painting (Bourges, Musée de l'hôtel Lallemand) is cropped to fit the available space.
28. Bellamy, *Towards A New Taste*, no. 17, pp. 44–5, identifies it as a small painting shown at the Salon in 1745, one of a pair for the French royal collection.
29. Willett, *African Art*, plate 181, p. 187, British Museum, London; Bellamy, *Towards A New Taste*, no. 2, pp. 14–15.
30. Willett, *African Art*, plates 174 (exterior) and 175 (interior), p. 185; Bellamy, *Towards A New Taste*, pp. 14–15.
31. Willett, *African Art*, plate 66, p. 88, National Museum, Lagos.
32. Jim Mabon, 'Europe's African Heritage in the Creative Work of Maud Sulter', *Research in African Literatures*, 29:4 (1998): pp. 147–54.
33. Lubaina Himid, 'The Magical World of Maud Sulter', *Syrca's: Maud Sulter* (Wrexham: Wrexham Library Arts Centre, 1994), p. 33.
34. Himid, 'The Magical World', p. 33.
35. Lind, 'In the Margin', p. 42.
36. At [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=52298](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=52298), the man is identified as Indian. The bibliography to *Syrca's* lists John von Hartz, *August Sander* (New York: Aperture/London: Gordon Fraser, London, 1977), Gunther Sander (ed.), *August Sander: Citizens of the Twentieth Century: Portrait Photographs, 1892–1952* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), and Dawn Ades, *Photomontage* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).
37. Maud Sulter, 'The Nature of Photography: Black Notes from the Underground', *Feminist Arts News* 3.2 (1989): p. 14.
38. Maria Makela, 'By Design: The Early Work of Hannah Höch in Context', in Maria Makele and Peter Boswell (eds), *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 1997), pp. 44–79.
39. Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (London and New Haven: Yale, 1993); Camp, *Other Germans*.
40. Dawn Ades, Emily Butler and Daniel F. Hermann (eds), *Hannah Höch: Works on Paper* (London: Prestel, 2014).
41. Willett, *African Art*, caption to plate 183, p. 183, used for *Noir et Blanc Deux*.
42. Maud Sulter in conversation with Sujanne Choi-Park, in 'Maud Sulter's *Syrca's*', pp. 57, 54–5.
43. Barbara Smith, 'A Press of Our Own. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 10:3 (1989): pp. 11–13.
44. *Testimony*, Pavilion Leeds, 1986 and Camerawork, London, 1987.
45. Maud Sulter, *Testimony*, 1986, p. 10.
46. J. Beckett, 'History (Maybe)', in *History: The MAG Collection. Image-Based Art in Britain in the Late Twentieth Century* (Hull: Ferens Art Gallery, 1997), pp. 139–41.
47. Maud Sulter, 'Clio', *Zabat: Narratives* (Hebden Bridge: Urban Fox Press, 1989), n.p.
48. Choi-Park, 'Maud Sulter's *Syrca's*', p. 45.
49. Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, p. 6.
50. Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), p.124, author's translation.
51. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, (trans.) Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 126.
52. Maud Sulter quoted in Richards, 'Photography: A cut above the rest'.
53. Derrida, *Specters*, p. 175.
54. Derrida, *Specters*, p. xx.