

Paper abstract, Queer Visualities: African Perspectives, Other Perspectives

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*Stars Are Not Always White: Queering Race, Temporality, and Iranian Identity in Rah's Supernova*

Subversion through engagement: this describes the parodic-critical tactics seen in the work of Canadian-Iranian artist Rah (Raheleh Saneie) in the racialized queerness of three fictional characters she has created and performs: *Fatimeh*, a self-exoticizing neo-traditionalist who teaches audiences how to enjoy Iranian tea, Persian dancing, and “ethnic” modes of dress; *Oreo*, a white supremacist narcissist who uses social media and video tutorials to guide women of colour towards normative white femininity in order to “pass”; and *Coco*, an non-binary ethno-futurist character who refuses to engage in colonial language and expresses herself through subaltern dance forms such as “waacking” (which emerged in the 1970s in Los Angeles among queer and diasporic communities). The development of Rah’s performative characters from 2012 to now seems to unfold chronologically: from the nostalgic-exilic clinging to tradition and essentializing stereotypes seen with *Fatimeh*, to the contemporaneity of *Oreo*’s use of media platforms (Instagram, Tinder, and YouTube) for critical racial drag with global reach and interactivity, to *Coco*’s wordless, utopic, agency, dancing as a resilient other in a mock reality talent show called *SuperNova* (2018, video). Rah’s career trajectory may be perceived in these characters’ developments, as if signifying historical stages, or suggesting multiple, simultaneous modernities (two of which are clearly not Western): focused on past, present, and future. However, avoiding linear or chronological temporal interpretations may lead to better understanding of Rah’s art, involving intersectional identities and shifts across mediums. Theories involving: queer visual cultures (Horne & Lewis); race-conscious drag (Swaar; Rhyne); queer temporality (Halberstam); diasporic temporality (Bhabha); parodic gender performativity (Butler); critical race theory (hooks); studies of Iranian “abuses of Aryan discourse” (Zia-Ebrahimi), decolonizing visual, theoretical, or art-historical strategies (Enwezor; Ogbечи; Shohat; Dorlin) will be investigated as frameworks for Rah’s artwork. Every opportunity will be taken to make connections with the work of South African queer artists (Athi Patra-Ruga; Steven Cohen) and African diaspora artists (Iké Udé; Rotimi Fani-Kayode). This study, and other selected performative artworks by Rah, are part of a larger research project developing methodologies for interpreting the contemporary art of the Global South, involving temporality, intermediality, and performativity.