Shadows in the Garden
The Dark Madonna Project by Suzanne Lacy

ABSTRACT Drawing on archival sources and interviews with participants and organizers, this article uses scholarship from cultural geography and critical whiteness, gender, and performance studies to assess The Dark Madonna (1986), a large-scale performance project by the artist Suzanne Lacy. This evening performance took place in the Franklin Murphy Sculpture Garden at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and included two living tableaux with sound. Focusing on different aspects of The Dark Madonna, this analysis offers several interpretations of this temporary, large-scale project by the artist Suzanne Lacy.

KEYWORDS Sculpture garden, feminist art, pageants, racism

The Dark Madonna by artist Suzanne Lacy was a performance art work primarily about race set in an important modernist landscape, the sculpture garden at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in May of 1986. Lacy’s issue-based project provides the opportunity to study a convergence of racism, sexism, and colonialism in ways that complicate all three terms, and points toward approaches for designers to consider in their interactions with others in and through landscapes. Landscape is no more fixed an idea than race, but, despite their ambiguities, both terms are powerful constructs. Using ideas drawn from critical whiteness, gender, and performance studies, this analysis offers several interpretations of this temporary, large-scale art work because, as Catherine Nash noted, “it is more useful to think of a multiplicity of shifting viewing positions, gazes or ways of seeing” (Nash 1996, 154).

Stephen Daniels has written about the oppositional meanings generated by landscape—subjective individual experiences of landscape coexisting with the representations of power in the appropriations of land and private property (Daniels 1989, 206–7). If we analyze a landscape design—or an artwork within that design—without at least acknowledging its conflicting meanings, we not only misunderstand that design, but we erase or obscure factors that hold the possibility of new directions and diverse interpretations. Using Beth Ritchie’s suggestion that “we constantly shift the center of analysis to multiple perspectives to ensure that we are developing a holistic strategy . . . ” (Smith 2005, 153), we can aim for approaches that center different people’s experiences in the landscape. The goal in landscape design as in other arts is to understand various levels of meanings for ourselves and others that also recognize past and current constructions based on colonization, structural racism, and sexism. Philosopher María Lugones posited:

Being unaware of one’s own ethnicity and racialization commits the inquirer to adopt a disengaged stance . . . Such a disengaged inquirer is committed either to dishonest study or to ignore deep meanings and connections to which she has access only as a self-conscious member of the racial state and as a sophisticated practitioner of the culture. . . . (Lugones 2003, 44–45)

This essay thus argues for increased awareness on the part of the majority of practitioners (categorized as white) to consider and question their own racialization and its implications.¹

In the introduction to his influential edited volume, Landscape and Power, W. J. T. Mitchell proposed using landscape as a verb in order to stress the agency, the action, that landscape has had and continues to have in human cultures (Mitchell 1994, 1). Michael Keith and Steve Pile reiterated that idea more broadly: “[S]pace cannot be dealt with as if it were merely a passive, abstract arena on which things happen” (1993, 2). Andrea Smith linked Western conceptions and treatment of land to gender violence and genocide, in a sense making concrete Mitchell’s theorization of landscape-as-verb, as an active agent in human structures of power (Smith 2005, 55, 66).

Produced over twenty years ago, The Dark Madonna was peculiar to its time and place; its rich complexity provides the opportunity to apply lessons from still-evolving race and gender studies, while appreciating its contributions to feminism and multicultural-
ism. Although it may be understood through a range of analytical lenses, my analysis of The Dark Madonna is based primarily on theories derived from the critical studies of whiteness. Intended to foster multiracial dialogues through art, and possibly to affect public policy in Los Angeles, Lacy’s project was hampered by some assumptions held by people classified as white, but it also utilized many effective organizing strategies and was aesthetically beautiful.

Description of this performance contributes to an understanding of the ramifications of Carl Gustav Jung’s archetype of the shadow that partly inspired The Dark Madonna. Further, Lacy’s piece provided a contrast to the implicit assumptions of the modernist design of the UCLA sculpture garden. Additionally, Marilyn Frye’s important analysis of “whiteliness” offers ways that performance can inform landscape design (Frye 1992, 151).

THE LIGHT AND DARK TABLEAUX OF THE DARK MADONNA

Suzanne Lacy, a well-known white feminist performance artist, was commissioned in 1985 by the UCLA Wight Art Gallery to create a piece celebrating the establishment of the UCLA Center for the Study of Women. Lacy chose the adjacent Franklin Murphy Sculpture Garden as the venue for a performance. “In the UCLA piece, I wanted to do a theatrical work that tackled the relationship between women of different races. At first, it was to be about black and white women” (Lacy 1990b, 42–43). In the various proposals to collaborators and funders, a broader range of intended participants developed to include women of Asian, Latin, and Native American descents, as well as African and European ancestries, “to bring issues that affect women, specifically women of color, into the public sector, so that they may begin to affect public policy discussions” (Bray Archives). The Dark Madonna addressed a number of themes simultaneously: race relations in Los Angeles; the Jungian concept of shadow; the figure of the dark Madonna in Europe, Latin America, and the United States; other goddess figures; women’s roles in civic life; and the canonization of art. That The Dark Madonna tackled such a wide range of issues makes its title something of a misnomer and complicates a critical analysis of the entire project.

To depict race relations among women visually—complex, painful, fitful, rich, and ongoing—The Dark Madonna was staged at nightfall in the sculpture garden. In this setting for the display of sculpture by modern artists, Lacy juxtaposed living “statues” with the permanent sculpture throughout the garden in two tableaux with sound (Figure 1). As a performance space, the garden provided shape, texture, and color to The Dark Madonna.

The Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden at UCLA was designed between 1963 and 1965 by Ralph D. Cornell, the principal landscape architect at the Westwood campus from 1937 until his death. The sculpture garden displays the commitment of then-Chancellor Franklin D. Murphy to provide a landscaped, art-filled outdoor setting that students could experience informally. Dedicated in 1967, the garden covers nearly five acres on the north campus (Figure 2). Abstract and figurative works were carefully arranged within ample open space in a three-part scheme: a raised terrace paved in brick abutted the Art Center and Macgowan Hall; a long axis on the west originally linked the central campus to the garden; and a rolling grassy area was intersected by curving, salt-finished concrete paths and planted with evergreens, eucalyptus, jacaranda, and sycamore trees. An allée of South African coral trees further defined the terrace. A rectangular fountain on the east end of the garden flanked by stairs provides a transition from the terrace down to the grassy lawns (Brenson 1993; Cogburn and Baldonado 1993; Cornell 1990).

Dusk seemed the right time to stage a performance about race: it is hard to see in the gloaming, when details are obscured. At 7:45 that May evening, with the jacaranda trees in full bloom, a sound score began playing from forty speakers placed in the trees and at the edges of the garden. Recorded voices of women laugh-
ing and talking about their involvement in the project, as well as telling stories of pain and confusion about racism, contrasted with the tranquil beauty of the garden. Lacy collaborator Willow Young recalled how the junipers took on an indigo hue as dusk washed over the garden (Young 2005). The first tableau—called the Light Tableau—consisted of about forty women of various ages, races, and ethnicities, dressed completely in white, standing or sitting on white pedestals, set off from the blue-green landscape. Breath moved in and out of warm bodies near static metal and stone sculptures. At the same time, the sculptures received closer scrutiny as observers noticed congruities between living forms and sculpted ones (Figure 3). The soundtrack changed at 8:00 when bird and insect sounds and songs were interwoven with women talking about the challenges and benefits of living in a racially diverse city. Meanwhile, the audience of over one thousand gathered around the perimeter of the garden, watching the immobile female forms as the day receded.5

Then, during five minutes of silence at 8:30, ten "shadows"—women dressed in black—ran from the edges and through the sculpture garden, throwing black cloaks over some of the women in white (Figure 4). Lacy recalled: “Within about thirty seconds, everything went black. The light quality was such that the white clothing held the last rays of light, and then it went black all at once” (Lacy 1990b, 45). This was the start of the second half, called the Dark Tableau. By 8:35 the soundtrack began again with night sounds of insects as well as more voices reflecting on their communities, heritage, interconnections, hopes for the

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Figure 1. Living statues in The Dark Madonna. The stainless steel sculpture, Cubi XX, (1964) is by David Smith. (All photos of the performance by Susan Mogul, courtesy of Suzanne Lacy)
future, and the dark Madonna as a literal or figurative source of strength for them. As this portion of the tape played, over one hundred and twenty women dressed in black, in groups of six to eight, rose from low plantings, turned on flashlights, and walked closely together to designated spots (Figure 5). The remaining women in white changed their clothing to black and slowly stepped off the pedestals, and joined those in black who were seated. Fifteen or so groups began to talk among themselves, using prearranged questions about race and racism to structure their discussions. They lit each other’s faces with flashlights as if around a campfire as they talked, although the audience could not hear their discussions because the soundtrack was still playing. By 9:00, the tape ended, the dark purple ribbons separating the audience from the performers were dropped, and audience members were handed flashlights to move into the garden and watch or join the discussions. Lacy recalled: “When I went home a couple of hours later, after we’d had a reception and cleaned up, there was still one group sitting and going at it in the garden” (Lacy 1990b, 46).

THE JUNGIAN SHADOW

Lacy and her collaborators drew from Jungian archetypes in conceptualizing The Dark Madonna. In choosing Jung as a source, she joined many others, including landscape architects such as Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe and Lawrence Halprin, who were strongly influenced by Jungian theories. Lacy, having studied modern dance in the 1970s, moved in many of the same circles as Halprin and his wife, the dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin. The “happenings” of Allan Kaprow, Lacy’s graduate school mentor at CalArts in the early seventies, were included in Lawrence Halprin’s book RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment (1969). That volume documented how Anna Halprin extended “the happening . . . into the ritualistic basis of art and life.” Lacy can be said to have shared that inclination (Halprin 1969, 30). Halprin’s book also indicated the durability and appeal of Jungian ideas about universal rituals and symbols: “The intention of audience participation . . . has a universal implication. In theatre it is to energize and reveal meaningful and archetypal experi-
ences” (Halprin 1969, 185). Lacy also found a Jungian framework useful for energizing archetypes to confront interior terrors and yearnings.

By definition, archetypes identify patterns and symbols allegedly common to all human beings or that may be at least shared by members of a culture in a “collective unconscious.” Lacy used an archetypal construct of the feminine with two aspects—creative and destructive, womb and tomb, light and dark—often symbolically contained within a single entity, such as the goddesses Isis and Hecate. For Jungians, the “black” or “dark” Madonna is one of those archetypes that represent the “dark feminine.” Jungian Fred Gustafson noted: “[I]n many cultures the dark side of the feminine is incarnated in some venerated form which then assists the people in containing the energy surrounding her, helping them maintain a respectful attitude toward this power” (Gustafson 1990, 118). One black Madonna of Einsiedeln, Switzerland, is located at a Benedictine abbey near Jung’s home in Zurich. Like many pilgrimage sites, the object of worship (in this case the black Madonna of Einsiedeln) is tied to a particular landscape, often a place of pre-Christian worship as well.

By working only with women and only within a Jungian psychoanalytic model, Lacy and her colleagues limited the appeal and communicative power of The Dark Madonna. Nevertheless, they provided an artistic structure through which to examine aspects of sexism and racism. Worshipped in various locales from Mexico to Bolivia, from Spain and Poland to North Africa, the dark or black Madonna was viewed by the organizers as a representation that would invite the participation of women from Catholic and/or indigenous traditions. Artist Linda Vallejo, who performed in The Dark Madonna, described her belief that the dark Madonna is the earth, the nurturing soil that gives life, and how connected she felt to that idea as she sat with her month-old baby in the sculpture garden, dressed in traditional Danza clothing. At the same time, Vallejo also recognized that The Dark Madonna appropriated a religious
figure that, while it had a deep, spiritual meaning for her, could be superficially grasped and easily misunderstood (Vallejo 2005).\footnote{8}

Willow Young promoted *The Dark Madonna* project throughout Los Angeles. She had extensively investigated goddess worship, including veneration in prehistoric times. Both Lacy and Young had studied Jungian psychology since the early 1970s. As a staff member at the Los Angeles Craft and Folk Art Museum, Young also had a strong background in world art history. The Lacy piece in the UCLA sculpture garden offered abundant possibilities to explore themes relevant to many women in a Jungian framework. However, Young also experienced the tension that came from mixing cultures in order to serve the vision of one artist, and one white artist at that. Added onto the potential misunderstandings of the dark Madonna was the very real possibility that Jung’s ideas would be misinterpreted, a problem that Young believes still exists (Young 2005).

From its inception, then, *The Dark Madonna* was about Lacy’s own shadow self and the ways in which the dominant culture displaced its shadow onto other cultures. As Lacy wrote in 1990: “The Dark Madonna in Jungian terminology represents the shadow—the unclaimed characteristics of the self needed to form the integrated self. Extending the metaphor, the projections of negative characteristics on another race, known as racism, is a collective rejection of the dominant society’s ‘shadow’” (Lacy 1990a, 69). Jung believed that by “making the darkness conscious,” the individual would achieve greater self-knowledge (Cederstrom 2002, 30). Lacy conflated her interest in non-white women with her need to understand her own psychological yearnings. For Lacy, according to an article in *La Opinion*, the Dark Madonna represented “the woman of color and also spirituality, that something ineffable that everyone carries inside, but the image can suggest different things to each woman, according to her culture, religion or sensibility” (Vidal 1986, 7).\footnote{9} Despite her recognition that the image would suggest different things to different people, Lacy reinforced the Jungian binary of light...
and dark, and grouped women into white and non-white.

Lacy’s adaptation in concept and form of the shadow (recall that ten women in black, as “shadows,” ran through the garden at dusk) invites a longer look at some critiques of this Jungian idea. Some critics have condemned what they perceive to be Jung’s racialization of archetypes, where darkness is equated with negative characteristics. Frantz Fanon wrote:

> European civilization is characterized by the presence, at the heart of what Jung calls the collective unconscious, of an archetype: an expression of the bad instincts, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilized savage, the Negro who slumbers in every white man. . . . Personally, I think that Jung has deceived himself . . . [T]he collective unconscious, without our having to fall back on the genes, is purely and simply the sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group (Fanon 1952, 187–8).

Although Jung may have deceived himself by locating instincts judged “bad” in darkness and in the collective unconscious, Lacy used the Jungian archetype of the shadow as a tool to analyze racial hatred in two ways. First, individuals can refuse to come to terms with their own shadows, displacing their own hateful or disagreeable aspects onto someone of another race or ethnicity, thus avoiding confrontation of those feelings and beliefs within the self. Second, on a cultural level, the fear of the metaphorical shadow can instigate violent conflicts in order to deflect examination of the systemic racism of a society. This idea of a cultural shadow takes the form of “large social groups project[ing] all the negative qualities they are unwilling to see in themselves onto cultures, societies or nations they wish to dominate” (Cederstrom 2002, 66).

The dark Madonna or the dark feminine can represent our shadow selves, aspects of ourselves to explore and integrate, but the cultural shadow of racism and racist practices of the white majority makes any personal insight seem miniscule. While racism is a shifting and complex phenomenon, it infuses society at all levels, affecting people daily and significantly. Impacts range in scale and severity, of course, but conflating the
Jungian archetype of the dark feminine as Lacy did with revered images of dark Virgins like the Virgin of Guadalupe could be seen as being blinded by whiteness, so to speak, because the various and deep imbrications of racial meanings inherent in both were glossed over.

Similar conflations have received incisive treatment by Andrea Smith (2005), but let it suffice to say that using imagery and ideas that are rooted in indigenous spiritual practices, like the Virgin of Guadalupe, and changing the context and audience for their reception reflects the colonizing mentality of the dominant white culture. Smith remarked: "It is particularly troubling when this colonial practice . . . is adopted by white feminists in their efforts to heal from patriarchal violence. . . . When white women appropriate Indian spirituality for their own benefit, they are participating in [a] pattern of abuse . . . " (Smith 2005, 125) because superficial adaptations of place-specific, deeply felt, and strongly held beliefs are tantamount to destruction by misapprehension.10

In her essay on the 1986 performance, Lacy reflected: “The Dark Madonna suggests simultaneously that personal healing will be found in the inversion of reality, in the darkness of the unconscious, in social healing, and, perhaps, in the words of women of color” (Lacy 1990a, 69). But Lacy wrote from her own social location as a white woman seeking healing. Her raw admission is both honest and oppressive. It simultaneously reaches out and repels, burdening women of color with unsought expectations. As bell hooks wrote: "It is a sign of white privilege to be able to ‘see’ blackness and black culture from a standpoint where only the rich culture of opposition black people have created in resistance marks and defines us” (hooks 1992, 158). Certainly The Dark Madonna performance foregrounded race and gender, but by layering so many possible meanings into the work—in its uncritical merger of a Jungian archetype with widely-worshipped figures of the Virgin—it actually continued oppressive practices and buffered direct encounters with racism and colonialism.

A Landscape of Contemplative Modernism

One of the layers of meaning in The Dark Madonna was located in the relationship between the performance and the garden setting. UCLA’s sculpture garden fits W.J.T. Mitchell’s definition of “contemplative” modernism: “the presentation of an image designed for transcendental consciousness,” with few narrative or historical cues in the setting (Mitchell 1994, 1). The rectangular fountain, curvilinear benches, and plantings are arranged in an open plan with many entry points. According to curator Cynthia Burlingham, UCLA administrator Franklin Murphy “wanted to create a sculpture garden as a transition zone on campus, as a place for reflection of the unforced, unmediated kind,” and indeed the garden itself has a kind of autonomy separate from the rest of the campus (Dundjerski 2002). Sculptures were positioned as if they were in a gallery, set apart from each other, but within view of each other as well. One can easily walk around each of them, and catch glimpses of many of them from a distance.

Within the intellectual frameworks of the last twenty-five years, scholars increasingly ask: “Who is meant to contemplate?” and “Is a sculpture garden really unmediated?” For example, some perceived the UCLA sculpture garden, along with the nearby botanical garden, as a dangerous place where rapes had occurred. Lacy’s approach to the landscape garden was embodied and intuitive, but also parodied what she perceived to be the distancing, objectifying view of the garden’s designers and many of the sculptors. To that extent, she “decenter[ed] the . . . pure formal visuality” of the sculpture garden, and the landscape became a site for her interpretation of feminist themes (Mitchell 1994, 1).

The Franklin Murphy Sculpture Garden is an expansive outdoor room, defined on all sides by buildings or plantings. Movement is directed in and through the space by walkways, stairs, seating, sculpture placement, and constructed hillocks and depressions. This open-air aspect involves senses beyond the visual
more than a museum gallery does: breezes and sunlight, ambient sounds, and an array of odors contribute to multi-sensory experiences. Of course there is no universal embodied experience, but bodies in space, diverse bodies in a constructed space, were the crucial materials with which Lacy created *The Dark Madonna*. Diverse bodies and constructed space were the figure and ground of Lacy’s project; their contiguity was critical. In a formal sense, Lacy’s work held the conflicting realities of our multiracial society in uneasy tension, keeping figure and ground in simultaneous focus, by juxtaposing living bodies with inanimate art and stories of pain with sweet-smelling, blossoming trees. The setting of the sculpture garden was a necessary context for these contrasts; the landscape was the performative space for a temporary spectacle (Daniels and Cosgrove, 1993, Jackson 1979).

Of the sixty-three sculptures on display in 1986, when Lacy’s *The Dark Madonna* was performed, about a quarter of them had women as their subject. Reflecting a 1980s version of post-modernism, Lacy commented to historian and critic Moira Roth:

*The Dark Madonna* was also conceived of as an ironic work. The Franklin Murphy Sculpture Garden is, above all else, a display case for European white male artists. . . . [S]o I thought, “Wouldn’t it be funny, in this high art setting, to do something that was both ironic and slightly kitsch? Putting women on pedestals, for example. Images of women done by themselves just by standing still in a kind of turn of the century tableau vivant.” (Lacy 1990b, 43)

The controlled nature of the garden and its carefully placed sculptures provided a manifold setting for participating women to represent themselves in a manner significant to them: mothers, sisters, professionals, elders. Technical coordinator Anne Bray praised the women who participated as “daring and sophisticated” (Bray 2005). While each woman—her gestures, facial expression, body, costume, hair, skin color, and props—chose to tell a particular story at that moment, Lacy hoped that the tableaux in light and dark would disrupt the distinctions among individuals and unify the performers and audience in a shared seeking for cross-cultural understanding. In that sense, *The Dark Madonna* was a parallel creation to the sculpture garden, which was composed of individual artworks in different styles and media in a constructed landscape. The sculptures of women—from Zuñiga’s solid, benchlike “Reclining Nude” (1970) to the young, taut body of Marck’s “Maya” (1942, visible in Figure 3)—display a diversity in body type and ethnicity upon which Lacy expanded.11

Lacy also took advantage of the outdoor setting by making metaphorical use of the evening. In 1990, she described how “dichotomy and opposition inform the shape of the performance. . . . Sound connects the whole, but even the sound is in two sections, expressions of pain during the daylight and reflections on healing during the dark” (Lacy 1990a, 65). Lacy further wrote:

Intentional inversion of the viewer’s presumed associations with light and dark is an aspect of the fundamental “language” of this performance. Day (white) is not “light,” but static, isolated, filled with painful revelations. Night (black) is not “dark,” but active, seeking, and filled with healing. . . . (Lacy 1990a, 65)

By exploring the social aspects of public art and the aesthetics of relationships, Lacy works in and with space. While social practices are spatial, they are also particular to one’s identity. Landscape design does direct movement, but each person moves into and through a place with a unique rhythm and posture, occupying space differently from the next person, and not always responding to the designed environment in ways the designer would have predicted. When Lacy explicitly introduced race and gender into the UCLA garden, the setting was a critical component in the performance precisely because of its predictable nature. Just as a set design provides the context and many of the cues for audience understanding of a theatrical piece, so did the
sculpture garden provide a counterpoint to Lacy’s tableaux. Stone and bronze were necessary ballast to flesh and hair, the latter refusing to be fixed in time and place. Shadows cast by the setting sun on the lawn were literal parallels to the metaphorical shadows explored in *The Dark Madonna*. Lavender jacaranda flowers contrasted with the black and white scheme of the performance. Bodies, of various races, ages, and sizes, were the means with which participants attempted to reappropriate their identities from the sculptures and perhaps to complicate the rigidities of racism and sexism. Observers peered through the dusk and performers groped in the dark; the movements and coalescing shapes represented embodied attempts to work through interpersonal challenges of racial identity and racism within a particular and necessary spatial context.

**PERFORMING WHITENESS**

Architect Thomas Fisher wrote in 2000:

> The performing arts offer a model of an inherently interdisciplinary, collaborative art form. Buildings or landscapes, as we know, never arise from the mind or hands of one person. In that sense, they are . . . rather more like putting on a play, involving designers, contractors, consultants, and clients . . . [T]he performing arts give us a model and a body of theory that show the multidisciplinary aspect of design need not deny “art.” In fact, collaboration is the art of design. (74–75, emphasis in original)

*The Dark Madonna* performance was certainly collaborative. Conceived of and directed by Lacy, it included Susan Stone as the sound composer and Anne Bray as the technical coordinator. Willow Young networked in the community and directed the tableaux, alongside dozens of volunteers during nearly two years of organizing in Los Angeles. But there are other ways besides teamwork that performance can be instructive to the design professions. Although the connections among theater, stage, and landscape design are centuries old, significant performance elements such as gesture, posture, conversation, and overall direction often go unexamined in group design efforts. And, although they acknowledged the importance of “words of women of color,” the creators of *The Dark Madonna* were women identified as white. What are the implications of race and performance, then, for landscape architects and educators concerned with building successful collaborations?

Philosopher Alison Bailey has linked racism not only to reactions to physical differences, but also to behaviors. Bailey notes that we expect particular “performances, attitudes, and behaviors” from particular people and in the process we often “reinforce and reinscribe unjust hierarchies.” She suggests that many of us follow “historically preestablished scripts” associated with our racial group which “have a strong corporeal element that emerges in gestures and reactions to persons who we think of as being unlike ourselves” (Bailey 2000, 289, 291). To describe dominant white culture, Bailey applies Marilyn Frye’s adverbial term “whitely” behavior.

“Whiteliness” is to white people as “masculinity” is to maleness, Frye explains (Frye 1992, 151). In other words, we can learn “whitely” behavior—according to those preestablished scripts that Bailey describes—but having white skin does not require that we perform in a “whitely” manner, any more than having a penis requires “masculine” behavior. Behaving “whitely,” defined as “a deeply ingrained way of being,” rooted in the exercise of race privilege, is rejected by anti-racists, albeit with mixed success because of its entrenchment (Frye 1992, 151). Bailey argues that by attending to “whitely” performance, our analyses can stress the process, such as the movement away or toward “whiteness” as we “reposition [our]selves with regard to privilege” (Bailey 2000, 294).

In terms of *The Dark Madonna*, Lacy hoped to choreograph these shifts, depicting people’s metaphorical movements away from prejudice, and mark-
ing white people’s coming to terms with “whiteliness.” She wrote:

The progression of images from 50 motionless women to 160 active women, and, finally, to 2000 participatory audience members represents an increase in movement (from static to dynamic), mass (numbers), and engagement (from theatrical to participatory) . . . Politically, such a movement reflects an attempt to educate and activate the audience . . . The masses of people attest not only to calculated political strategy but to the very strength of the desire to remember and recreate unity. (Lacy 1990a, 66, 69)

That Lacy described *Dark Madonna* as one of “the most painful pieces I’ve ever done” (Lacy 1990b, 44–45) can be attributed in part to its “whiteliness”: a preponderance of white women organized it, they expected “unity,” and they appropriated the image of a dark Madonna to orchestrate it. While the performance allowed for and even affirmed individual voices, gestures, and postures, white women predetermined the overall structure. By emphasizing women, the intersectionality of other oppressions—including race and class—was de-emphasized. “[T]he desire to remember and recreate unity” on the part of the organizers echoed Davol’s ideal: “The real pageant . . . dawns as stealthily as approaching day. During the strains of the overture a single figure, or chorus, or group of dancers, is discovered gradually approaching from some far-away entrance, allowing the imagination time to play about the figures with the lambent glow of heat-lightning upon the distant landscape on a summer’s evening . . .” (Davol 1915, 54–55). A 1918 pamphlet, *Pageant Building*, by Florence Magill Wallace stressed that “[t]he natural stage is as a rule superior to the artificial structure, and trees and water are materials never neglected by the knowing pageant maker” (Wallace 1918, 16). Wallace’s sentiment about the superiority of a “natural” setting echoed a 1912 comment by Percy Mackaye: “Under the sun and stars, as nowhere else, dramatic art becomes convincing to the people” (Mackaye 1912, 51).

The pageant of *The Dark Madonna* made effective use of Ralph Cornell’s landscape design; women posed on the terrace, the walkways, and throughout the grassy lawn. For one evening, the usually open area of the gar-

Landscape as Stage in Civic Pageants

Lacy also drew on an early twentieth-century popular tradition, the civic theater movement, as a source for *The Dark Madonna*. At the beginning of the 1980s, Lacy had come across the *Handbook of American Pageantry*, a 1915 book by Ralph Davol, full of photographs of civic pageants that had been staged from coast to coast. The chief elements of pageantry were a carefully-selected outdoor setting, special lighting, costumes, movement, music, smells, and ritual combined into a theatrical vi-

Civic pageants flourished among reformers at the turn of the twentieth century, framing images in a landscape or an architectural setting for civic uplift, literally meant to embody social, moral, religious or political values. Pageants were used as a means to actively shape the citizenry, bringing diverse people together, usually for some perceived patriotic or pedagogical end, frequently with unspoken assumptions about race and class. As Anglo-Saxon nativism developed in response to waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe, some hoped the pageants would help overcome the “racial and hereditary habits” of the recent arrivals (Glassberg 1990, Cosgrove 1995, 34–35).

While Lacy created visually harmonious tableaux, the content of *The Dark Madonna* was certainly unlike that of most earlier history pageants. Even so, the performance at the sculpture garden utilized the setting in a way that echoed Davol’s ideal: “The real pageant . . . dawns as stealthily as approaching day. During the strains of the overture a single figure, or chorus, or group of dancers, is discovered gradually approaching from some far-away entrance, allowing the imagination time to play about the figures with the lambent glow of heat-lightning upon the distant landscape on a summer’s evening . . .” (Davol 1915, 54–55). A 1918 pamphlet, *Pageant Building*, by Florence Magill Wallace stressed that “[t]he natural stage is as a rule superior to the artificial structure, and trees and water are materials never neglected by the knowing pageant maker” (Wallace 1918, 16). Wallace’s sentiment about the superiority of a “natural” setting echoed a 1912 comment by Percy Mackaye: “Under the sun and stars, as nowhere else, dramatic art becomes convincing to the people” (Mackaye 1912, 51).

The pageant of *The Dark Madonna* made effective use of Ralph Cornell’s landscape design; women posed on the terrace, the walkways, and throughout the grassy lawn. For one evening, the usually open area of the gar-
den was dotted with live women enacting their chosen roles, at once objects on pedestals and agents of their objectification. One of the discussion questions for the evening was “What in your heritage gives you strength and resources for endurance?” Holding their bodies as still as possible in a position of their choice was a physical manifestation of the endurance these women were asked to contemplate. Doing so out-of-doors and witnessed by an audience then inserted multiculturalism into a public space, making gesture and posture ways of performing hybrid identities and, perhaps, for some, resisting “whiteness.”

Lessons from the Suffragists

Early twentieth-century community pageants produced by mainstream organizers exhibited the same racism that characterized the rest of society. One image in Davol’s book on pageants was of an actress as “Peace,” framed by fluted Ionic columns, releasing a dove at the top of the Treasury Building steps during the now-famous 1913 suffrage march in Washington, D.C. A white woman in a silver and white costume liberated a white dove in a classicized architectural setting (Figure 6). Entitled “Allegory,” this pageant, launching the March 3, 1913 suffrage march in Washington, D.C., was a direct source for Lacy’s *The Dark Madonna*.

The pageant captured the crowds marching for suffrage, as well as those who had come to town for Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration, and this spectacle “heralded a new era in suffragist techniques for promoting their cause” (Blair 1990, 34). The white director, Hazel Mackaye (1880–1944), used techniques familiar in popular pageantry, including gestures and poses, to advance the controversial cause of women’s suffrage in front of an audience of unprecedented size (over 5,000 marchers and 100,000 spectators). Participants in “Allegory” then stood in the chilly March air as the parade, the second part of the spectacle, marched past (during which women were harassed and assaulted by bystanders). Floats, tableaux, and women’s organizations with banners were followed by state delegations.

That, however, is only part of the story. On that same day, Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931), having been told by national-level and Illinois white leaders to march at the back of the huge suffrage parade with other African American women, instead stepped in from the crowd and joined the white women in the Illinois delegation as they passed by. Wells-Barnett, the president of the black Alpha Suffrage Club of Chicago, inserted herself into the midst of that historic procession demanding the vote for women, stating: “If the Illinois women do not take a stand now in this great democratic parade then the colored women are lost” (Hendricks 1995, 269).

Since Suzanne Lacy was inspired by suffrage pageants, those pageants must be understood in their fullness both as innovative responses to patriarchy and as racist structures. The 1913 march was not the first or the last time that white women have demonstrated in support of their rights while continuing to oppress women of color; retelling its history must acknowledge Wells-Barnett’s courageous determination, media savvy, and creative reaction to exclusion. Wells-Barnett was a leader in thinking about the intersections of race, class, and gender and in devising strategies to resist multiple oppressions.

Effective Community Cultural Development

While *The Dark Madonna* was directed by Lacy, it required community participation early in the process. An advisory group was formed in August of 1985 and met until October 1985 to decide upon the content and structure of community conversations involving women of different races in the Los Angeles area. Organizations that were involved included Women of Watts, the Hispanic Women’s Council, the American Indian Education Committee, and the Pacific Asian Women’s Network. About two hundred people participated in dialogues, which were held from November 1985 through January 1986. From these, participants volunteered to move to the next phase. Yolande Chambers Adelson, a UCLA staff member of mixed-race heritage, trained facilitators for the next round of discussions. Every effort was made to balance participation by geographic loca-
tion, profession, class, age, and race. Performers also had to be willing to speak in front of people, stand still in outfits that they would provide, and transport themselves.15

From January to March 1986, women gathered into groups of six to eight for a series of four dialogue sessions. The idea was to gather women together based first on similarities, and then hold inter-group discussions. The latter ran into considerable difficulty. Lacy reported: “[S]omething was very wrong with what I had thought was a healthy community organizing process . . . At that point in time it was hard to talk about an emotional bond that might exist between black and white women because the national consciousness of racism made our approaches as white women to women of color quite circumspect. We were often paralyzed by fears of our own racism and guilt about our built-in privilege” (Lacy 1990b, 43, 44).
Yet the white participants were paralyzed by more than their fear of and guilt about their racism. Lacy recalled:

One group of black women that was very enthused had met down in Watts, and then gone up to South Pasadena to meet with the white women there. The next move was that the white women were going to come down to Watts to meet with them, and guess what? They didn’t show up. They just had excuses, but weren’t addressing the real issue, that they were afraid to drive their fancy cars to Watts, as one black woman said. (Lacy 1990b, 44–45)

Organizing community dialogues around issues of race was more difficult, then, because of white women who were unaware of or unwilling to confront their own participation in racism. The demands of collaboration in Lacy’s approach were articulated by Lawrence Halprin in the late sixties, even though he was not directly addressing race: “If the audience wishes to become involved, there are consequences to this commitment . . . The audience-as-community has an increased opportunity to affect what happens. This can be tremendously exciting and dynamic and far-reaching; but within the excitement there can be many failures and errors along the way” (Halprin 1969, 182).

By choosing to challenge entrenched social behaviors and attitudes, from violence against women to racism, from teen-police relations to equal rights for women, Lacy intrepidly wades into troubled waters and invites others in. The power dynamics around race, class, and gender in the United States make it nearly inevitable that her large-scale public art is controversial and flawed (what in conversation, she has termed “imperfect art”). That she boldly engages with critical issues of our time is to her credit, and being an artist allows her more flexibility than if she were an elected official or a social scientist. Yet she runs the risk that her artistic ideas might interfere with grassroots organizing, or the reverse—her aesthetic vision might be diluted by the organizing. The line between life and art is a hard edge on which to balance. This tense equipoise resembles efforts by socially-engaged landscape designers to meet complex community needs and make visible their own artistic commitments.

Lacy’s long experience in various cities has distilled some approaches that may be helpful to others doing this messy but vital civic work. As with many of her other projects The Dark Madonna began with Lacy’s personal response to a critical social issue. Similarly, effective community cultural development usually begins with a concern that arises out of a given group. Rather than “we want a park,” for example, the focus might be “we need a safe recreational space for teens.” Following the crucial step of identifying an issue, an organizer may partner with the group to hone a vision, refine objectives, and locate resources for support and information. Lacy has used potluck dinners, as well as facilitated discussions, video workshops, media analysis and collaborative art-making to provide some means to communicate among shifting group members. The structure of The Dark Madonna—a series of conversations, interviews, a symposium, and the final two-part performance of tableaux with many women, all of which focused on racism and multiculturalism in Los Angeles—allowed participants varying levels of involvement. People could enter into dialogues from numerous vantage points. The “distributed responsibility” of Lacy’s projects reinterprets processes that Halprin described: “What happens is a mutual interdependence between artist-planner and audience in which each has his own role to play and both together form a work beyond the capacity of each individually” (Wettrich and Lacy 2002, 17; Halprin 1969, 182).

Lacy sought to amplify concerns about racism and sexism in Los Angeles by teaming with the staff from the Wight Art Gallery, UCLA’s Center for the Study of Women, the Watts Community Housing Corporation, and other citywide organizations that were important for networking and fundraising. For Lacy, “[t]he more responsibility assumed, the more central the participants’ role in the generation of the work” (Lacy 1995, 179). Even within a core group there are different understandings of the process and project that change the
meanings and outcome for each person. Collaboration, then, exists on a continuum, without a single meaning. Exchanging performances or creating projects that are reciprocal rather than collaborative are alternatives to projects like The Dark Madonna (Adams and Goldbard 2001).

Certainly The Dark Madonna was an event of its time and of its originators, not to be repeated. One fundamental challenge then, as now, was that individual social experiences, reinforced by dominant power structures, required constant vigilance against “whiteliness.” Similar difficulties exist today in professional practice, with often-unrecognized aspects of white privilege and domination holding sway. In Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her, writer Susan Griffin considered the intertwined relationships of life on earth. At one point she describes a snowstorm, in a passage that, read metaphorically, also beautifully captures the dilemma of “whitely” behavior and the rich possibilities of moving away from racism:

All around us, each way we look, we see only whiteness . . . And suddenly, through this shocking cold, we remember the beauty of the forest lying under this whiteness. And that we will survive this snow if we are aware, if we continue. And now we are shouting with all our strength to the other sleepers, now we are laboring in earnest, to waken them. (Griffin 1978, 202, italics in original)

The Dark Madonna, in its own way a call to awareness, can be instructive to the design fields by revealing ways to reclaim spaces and histories for broader inclusion, while reminding the still overwhelmingly white professions of architecture and landscape architecture to attend to “whitely” performance, to listen and to re-center analyses to include multiple, often ignored, perspectives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Research for this article was partially funded by the Research Board of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The author extends thanks to Dianne Harris for the opportunity to write this article as well as to other members of the UIUC Critical Studies of Whiteness, the Center on Democracy in a Multiracial Society, the Performance Studies Working Group, and Landscape at Lunch. Extended conversations with Anne Bray, Susan Gordon, Suzanne Lacy, Moira Roth, May Sun, Linda Vallejo, and Willow Young have been indispensable in formulating my thoughts, although they are not responsible for any misapprehensions on my part. Others to whom I am grateful for help with this topic include Alison Bailey, Copenhaver Cumpston, Amira Davis, Claudine Dixon, Marina Dundjerski, Tim Engles, Plinio Hernandez, Carol Inskeep, and Carol Spindel. Uncatalogued archival materials and photographs in the possession of Anne Bray, Suzanne Lacy, and Moira Roth were extensively used.

NOTES
1. While data are still accumulating about the biological dimensions of race, the ways in which we artificially define racial categories based on skin color have shifted, and continue to shift, as we confront just how illogical many of our social constructions are. Thus “categorized as white” is shorthand for those people whose lack of melanin combined with cultural factors has led them to experience being classified as “white.”
2. While publications in whiteness studies are numerous, these five are valuable starting points: Martin A. Berger’s Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) has an extensive and up-to-date bibliography; Richard Dyer’s White (New York: Routledge, 1997) examines how whites represent other whites, particularly in film; Ruth Frankenberg’s The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) is an accessible look at the attitudes about race of many white women in the late twentieth century; David Roediger’s edited volume, Black On White: Black Writers On What It Means To Be White, includes classic essays by James Baldwin and W.E.B. DuBois, and others (New York: Schocken Books, 1998); and Roediger’s Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) provides a good introduction to recent scholarship in critical whiteness studies in his introductory chapter.
4. The performance was dedicated to Margo Albert (1917–1985), the actress and Mexican American activist who had died the previous year.
5. Estimates of the crowd vary. Lacy said there were two thousand (1990a); Burnham said one thousand (8–9).

6. Other people with whom Lacy worked, Pauline Oliveros and Emmet Williams, were also included in RSVP Cycles (Halprin 1969, 26, 207). On Jellicoe’s 1988 diagram extending Jungian ideas into the landscape, see Geoffrey Jellicoe. 1993. Geoffrey Jellicoe: The Studies of a Landscape Designer over 80 Years. Volume One (Suffolk: Garden Art Press): 55. I am grateful to Dianne Harris for mentioning these connections.

7. Syncretic religious practices had fused the Madonna with earlier deities, at times blurring the specific meanings of the Madonna. Worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe (a dark Madonna) is very much alive and rich with associations for people of Mexican ancestry, for example. “For the Indians, [the Virgin of] Guadalupe represents a manifestation of the Indian deity Tonantzín. Guadalupe . . . is viewed as the chief indigenous instrument in the active resistance against Roman Catholicism and colonial violence. . . . Guadalupe has come to be regarded (within the oral tradition) as a popular symbol of resistance, hope, and survival—the chief Mexican spiritual and political symbol of the oppressed Mexican masses. . . . In the Aztec oral tradition Guadalupe’s entry into Catholicism is viewed as a great historical triumph for the indigenous population of the Americas.” Yolanda Bryce-González. 1994. El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement (Austin: University of Texas Press): 60, 63, 64.

8. For more on Vallejo’s art and activism, see www.lindavallejo.com

9. Translation by the author.

10. As indicated in note 7, the worship of the dark Madonna has been incorporated into some Indian religious practices. Smith’s critique of white feminist actions could be broadened to include other traditions that have been appropriated as well.

11. “Franklin Murphy Sculpture Garden Images,” 1997–98, by Ruth Wallach can be viewed at www.publicartlna.com/UCLA/art/Architectural1.html [accessed March 2, 2005]. Of the seventy-two sculptures listed as on display in 1978, five were by women, five were by non-white men, and sixty-two were by male sculptors classified as white.

12. Frye elaborated: “I think of whiteness as a way of being which extends across ethnic, cultural, and class varieties—varieties which may tend to blend toward a norm set by the elite groups within the race” (Frye, 1992, 159).

13. In response to the “silent if not contemptuous” efforts of the American Pageant Association toward black history, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote and directed his own pageant, “The Star of Ethiopia,” which was performed three times on the east coast between 1913 and 1916 (Glassberg, 1990, 132–3).


15. The goal in terms of numbers for the Light Tableau performers was: two disabled, four elderly, six African American, five Latina, five Asian or Asian American, five white, three Native American; for the Dark Tableau performers the numbers were: six disabled, sixteen elderly, twenty-four African American, twenty Latina, twenty Asian or Asian American, twenty white, and twelve Native American, for a total of about one hundred and fifty participants.


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