

# Face *Lyle Ashton Harris*

Broadway Window The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York January 15–April 11, 1993



Doorknob, Venice, Italy Photograph by Lyle Ashton Harris, 1992

“Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!”—Franz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*

Excerpt from  
*The Secret Life of a Snow Queen*

I long for the relationship we used to have. Isn't it funny and paradoxical the relationship I have with myself now? All this investigating, all this theory, all this investment in how often others will perceive my work. At what point will I be able to produce work for me? At what point will I get over the fear of acknowledging my own needs? How long will I continue to play the games of mastery of the false self? When will the performance end? I long for that. They accused me of narcissism, solipsism, exhibitionism. One told me he could not understand my work because he did not grow up in a Black community. Well fuck, neither did I. Another, an instructor, frankly asked what could I expect of him since he was just a middle-class straight white guy from Santa Monica. I am the “multi-cultural” character personified. I guess what I fear will be exposed is that I hurt. It is not easy being one of a few “people of color” in a program with those who know very little about your culture, and do not care to know more. When they made the references to “primitive” people, “other” cultures, was it me they were referring to? Of course not. I played the game quite well. For me, it is a very fine line between falling apart and maintaining the mask, thinking any second you'll be found out. You'll be called out. To be the representative: nigger personified. In the flesh to absorb their projections, their needs, their lacks, their clandestine pleasures, their fears. Not I, for I am the quintessential Black faggot. I have learned the game all too well. I went to the right schools (that is, institutions that would validate my right to speak). Traveled to exotic lands. Wore the right clothing for the appropriate occasions. Rolled my big brown eyes while fluidly oscillating between fem/butch positions, my version. Do I leave once again, performing the once rehearsed, now perfected, performance? One more time. And smile. You're beautiful. Has all this been my imagination?

Lyle Ashton Harris