

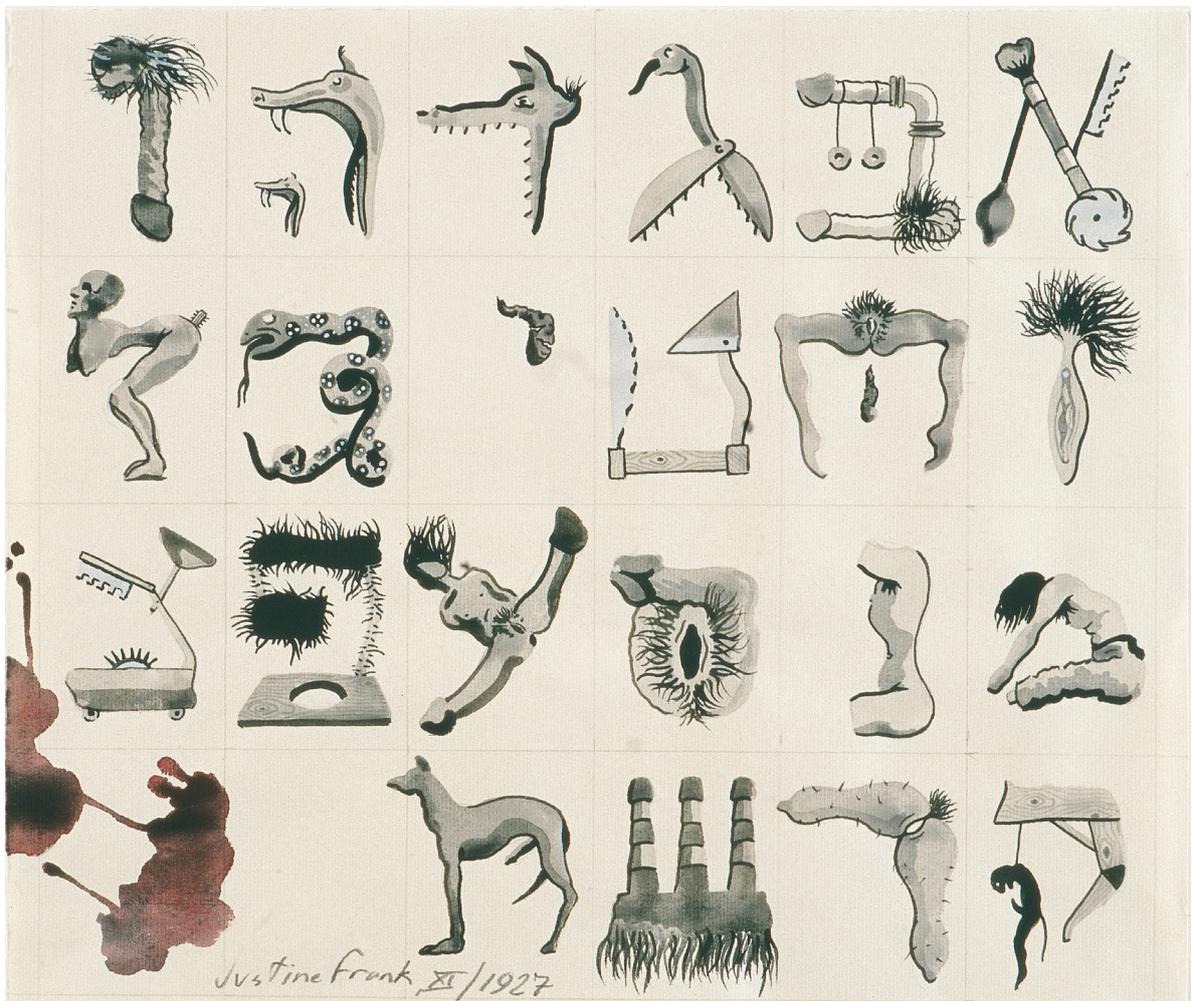
De-Colonizing Art Institutions

Maria Thereza Alves
Song-Ming Ang
Priscila Arantes
Stefan Baltensperger + David Siepert
Fabiana de Barros
Mabe Bethônico
Flavio Cury
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Gabriel Flückiger and Vera Leisibach
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Taloi Havini and Gabriella Hirst
Balz Isler
Daniel Jablonski
San Keller
Astrid S. Klein
Michael Leung / Kai Fong Pai Dong
Marinka Limat
Nkule Mabaso
Filippo Minelli
Lisl Ponger
Raghavendra Rao K.V.

Roe Rosen

Untitled (Self-Portrait as A Black Woman), 1938

Sally Schonfeldt
Katrin Stroebel and Simo Laouli
Túlio Tavares
Navid Tschopp
Lucie Tuma
Maíra Vaz Valente
Katie West
Claire Wintle
Casa da Xiclet
Zou Zhao





Justine Frank 1938

Justine Frank, 1900—1943

The art of Jewish Belgian painter Justine Frank has long been neglected, suppressed and forgotten. Frank first worked among the Parisian Surrealists and later in Zionist Palestine. Her work combined erotic motifs and Jewish imagery—a disturbing, hallucinatory combination, quite unlike anything else either in the Surrealist or the Zionist context. Following are museum wall text that accompanied the museum retrospectives of the artist.

Utamaro et l'hystérique (Utamaro and the Hysteric)

Gouache on Paper, 37X56 cm, 1936

The sexual encounter conjoins two figures from far-removed cultural fields. The urinating woman is based on an erotic print by the Eighteenth century Japanese artist Utamaro from his *Kiku no Tsuyu* (in the original, a man masturbates while peeping at the women who urinates in the open air). The figure of the hysteric is based on Paul Richer's illustrations, commissioned and compiled by the celebrated psychiatrist Charcot (This figure renders the second stage of the fit, the Clown Stage). The conversion and sex change of the hysteric—so common in Frank's work—have a special significance here, not only because Hysteria was perceived as a woman's disease, and not only because the Surrealists championed feminine hysteria as an incarnation of desirable feminine sexuality, but also because it underscores the Nineteenth century psychiatric perception of the Jewish man as effeminate and prone to Hysteria.

A page from Le portfolio taché (The Stained Portfolio)

Approximately 100 drawings and gouaches on paper, 33X38 cm each, 1927-1928

This drawing presents the entire obscene alphabet Frank designed, and many of its other sheets exploit the infinite lexicon of perverse postures bred by the various letter-combinations. Considered in the Surrealist context Frank's life-swarmer words are a visual realization of Belgian-Surrealist poet Camille Goemans' suggestion that "...words are not mere signs but, in a certain sense, organic bodies."

Executed two years before her emigration to Palestine, the Boards foretell Frank's antagonism towards the nationalistic implication of the revival of Hebrew as the language of the future Zionist State. Frank "revives" her Hebrew quite literally and obscenely.

Untitled (Self-Portrait as A Black Woman)

Oil on Canvas, 65X50 cm, 1938

The darkened complexion along with the skullcap and the side-locks, surprisingly connote a religious Jew of North African descent rather than a woman. Thus, this odd work shares some peculiarities with seminal attempts by early Zionist artists to forge authentic, indigenous "Hebraic" art. Typical of this early search, ensued with the first Hebrew art academy, Bezalel, were renditions of biblical characters and themes clad in orientalist garbs (numerous period photographs attest the pleasure early Zionist pioneers took in having their picture taken in Arab costumes—a fashion statement both exotic and local, real and fantasized). In this sense, the painting is intently outmoded, since in the late thirties, local artists were heading in a different, less simplistic, direction in their search for authentic local art.

And yet a Second glance at Frank's "black woman" reveals her to be even less "authentic" and indigenous, and here again, clothes are key: the dress is clearly modeled after those favored by Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, the gifted court painter of Marie Antoinette (to whom Frank pays the rather dubious homage, in her novel, of naming a vagina after her). Thus the "Hebrew" fantasy of a black woman who is also a young Yemenite man turns out to be a hybrid rooted in pre-revolutionary feminine vision of the natural and empowered woman. And perhaps this portrait, revealed as a multitude of superimposed masks, is, in the end, the most realistic of Frank's self-portraits, given that she herself is a fictive persona.