Amber Jamilla Musser

Riddles of the Sphinx: Kara Walker, Masochism, and the Trappings of History

What is so dangerous about black female sexuality? Through an examination of the figure of the black female masochist, this talk probes the particular historical feelings that act as a barrier to considerations of black female sexual agency. Beyond this diagnostic moment, the talk also asks how Kara Walker’s controversial sugar sphinx deepens our understanding of these affective connections and how might it open new paths toward queerness.

Amber Jamilla Musser is an assistant professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies at Washington University in St. Louis. Her research focuses on queer theory, critical race theory, and embodiment. She is the author of Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism and has articles published or forthcoming in Social Text, Women and Performance, GLQ, WSQ, and Feminist Theory. She is currently at work on a project tentatively titled Beyond the Feminine Mystique: Femininity and Its Others.