

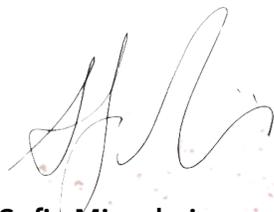
Friday, July 6th, 2018

In line with our mission to highlight un(der)represented voices of cultural significance in Montreal, the editorial team of *Articulation* cannot stay silent about the recent controversy surrounding *SLĀV*, referred to by Ex Machina as “a theatrical odyssey based on slave songs,” most of which stem from the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade.

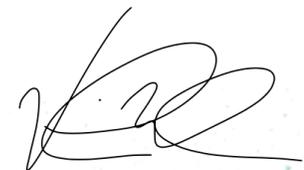
These songs are of significant cultural importance, both to Black communities across Turtle Island (North America) and to members of the Black diaspora worldwide. The artists—claiming that they “don’t see colour” and that “[a]ll cultures and ethnicities suffer the same”—have consciously chosen to ignore the reality of the transatlantic slave trade and the ways that its ongoing legacy affect Black people around the world. Some of the more egregious parts of this piece, including having white artists play the role of Black slaves and having Betty Bonifassi play the role of Harriet Tubman, amount to nothing less than modern-day minstrelsy, which could only have been made worse by putting the artists in blackface. This is an egregious misuse of a platform that could have been provided to Black artists to tell their story, and we condemn it in the strongest possible terms.

We would like to make it clear that we fully understand the intentions of Betty Bonifassi, Robert Lepage, and Ex Machina. These are beautiful songs with a strong message and a story that years to be told. They are a testament of the resiliency of Black communities and, more largely, of the human spirit. However, the telling of the story of transatlantic chattel slavery—an inherently racialized aspect of our collective histories—cannot come at the expense of those who continue to live the ramifications of anti-Black racism. This is an integral part of the ongoing realities of Black communities, and no amount of research on the history of slavery can compensate for refusing to listen to the lived experiences of Black communities. If we wish to engage in real cultural sharing on this sensitive topic, it is imperative that we instead empower Black artists to tell their own stories.

We reiterate our unconditional solidarity with members of Montreal’s Black communities who have expressed their severe discomfort around this reckless act of cultural “representation,” and we will continue to use our platforms to encourage and enable them to tell their stories.



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