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A peek at the landmark exhibition 'In the Black Fantastic'

The show, at London's Hayward Gallery, has gotten rave reviews. Now there's a companion book by curator Ekow Eshun.

By Stephanie Merry

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In June, London's Hayward Gallery opened "In the Black Fantastic" to immediate acclaim. Vogue hailed it the "[must-see exhibition of the summer](#)," and the Guardian raved "[spectacular from first to last](#)." If you can't make it to the show, which features 11 artists of the African diaspora, before it closes Sept. 18, you might consider picking up curator Ekow Eshun's companion book. The book includes images of art, in the exhibition, by the likes of Kara Walker and Nick Cave, as well as other works that explore similar worldviews. Eshun also offers a primer on what the "Black Fantastic" encompasses: works of art that incorporate myth, fantasy and science fiction to reimagine Black culture and identity.

"The Black fantastic begins from an understanding of race as a socially constructed fiction rather than a scientific truth, albeit one that maintains a determining sway over popular perceptions of the world," Eshun writes in his introduction. "It also operates with a skepticism about Western narratives of progress and modernity, predicated as they are on the historical subjugation of people of color."

While "In the Black Fantastic" has attributes in common with Afrofuturism, Eshun writes, the ideas expressed in the exhibition are farther-reaching, because it's "less a genre or a movement," he writes, "than a way of seeing."

Following are images of works of art from the book.



"Barack and Nefertiti in the Vela Supernova Remnant," by William Villalongo, 2009. (Courtesy Villalongo Studio LLC and Susan Inglett Gallery, New York and MIT Press)