

Aesthetics of Resistance in 'Practicing Beauty: Self-assertion and Collective Power'

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Abstract

This work traces the historical and ongoing production of beauty practices among Black women, especially Afro-Caribbean and West African women, in Britain since 1948. By combining archival material with contemporary audio-visual data, the paper presents the curatorial content explored as part of the exhibition entitled *Practicing Beauty: Self-assertion and Collective Power*, planned to be hosted at Lambeth Archives, Brixton, in November and December 2026. The exhibition maps out the many ways Black women have used beauty practices to establish their own aesthetic agency, conveying political messages, and creating entrepreneurship opportunities. The analysis demonstrates how Black beauty spaces combine elements of both conformity and subversion, being inevitably entangled with racialised set of European beauty ideals, while also standing against normative whiteness in modern Britain. *Practicing Beauty* is therefore interpreted as a living archive aimed to document and celebrate the untold global histories of Black women in advancing the debate on beauty diversity and inclusivity among their communities and in mainstream representation. In so doing, the display becomes a site of celebration and resistance which publicly decolonises the ways we think about appearance, moving away from colonial hierarchies and towards a more inclusive understanding of what beauty really is.

Keywords: Black British Feminism; Black Women's History; Afro-Caribbean History; Black Beauty; Black Afro Hair; Material Culture; Curatorial Practices; Post-war Britain